CHAPTER VI

THE MONTFORD REFORMS

The Act of 1909 failed to satisfy the national aspirations of the people of the Madras Presidency. Even the Moderates got convinced of the hollowness of the act. Though the Act marked an important step forward in the introduction of Representative Government, it did not give Legislative Independence or Self-Government to the Presidency. As the Act of 1909 did not come up to the expectation of the people of the Madras Presidency, their discontent continued unabated and they renewed their claims with emphasis during the First World War (1914-1918).

It was in an atmosphere of discontentment that Lord Sinha, the Congress President of Bombay Session 1915, advised the British Government to make a declaration of their goal in India with a view to pacifying the Indian youth who were intoxicated with ideas of Freedom, Nationality and Self-Government. In response to that Lord Chelmsford, who succeeded Lord Hardinge in 1915 declared that the creation of British India as an integral part of the British Empire with Self-Government was the goal of British rule. To satisfy the wide spread demand of the people of the Madras Presidency for constitutional reforms, and in recognition of their loyalty to Great Britain during the War, Mr. Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, made the famous Announcement in the House of Commons on the 20th August 1917, that “the policy of His Majesty’s Government, with which
the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of Self-Governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible Government in India as an integral part of the British Empire.¹

In accordance with this momentous Announcement the Indian Councils Act of 1919 was passed. In consequence of the passing of the Act of 1919 significant constitutional changes took place in the Madras Presidency. For the first time the Governor of the Presidency nominated three elected members of the majority party as his ministers who were in charge of the transferred subjects. The Act also provided for reservation of seats in general non-Muhammadan Constituencies and for the non-Brahmins of the Presidency. It also required the contesting parties of both the Brahmin and non-Brahmin groups to come to an agreement regarding the seats to be reserved. Under the Pyarchical form of Government, the subjects to be dealt with by the Provincial Government were divided into two halves – Reserved Subjects and Transferred Subjects.² The Reserved Subjects were administered by the Governor with the help of the Executive Council and the Transferred Subjects were dealt with by the Governor with the help of the Indian ministers.³

¹ G.O.No.332, 7th June 1919, Public Department.
² The reserved subjects were: Justice, Police Irrigation, drainage and Embankments, Water Storage and Water Power, Land revenue, Agricultural Loan, Famine Relief, Control of press, prisons, Forest, Factory Inspection, Labour Disputes, Industrial Insurance and Housing and the transferred subjects were: Local self-government, Public Health, Sanitation, Medical Education, Public Works, Agriculture, fisheries, Excise, Co-operative Societies, Development of Industries and technical Education.
³ Manon, V.P., Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, Bombay, 1965, PP.11f.
The Governor was given the right to act on his own authority and responsibility in the case of measures which in his judgement affected the safety, tranquility and interests of the province or any part there of. The Madras Council now called executive council, held office for a period of five years. It was allotted its own sources of revenue of which land revenue, exercise and stamps formed the principal items. Among the heads of expenditure were police, general administration, education and public health.\textsuperscript{4}

The Government of India Act of 1919 was really an improvement over the Act of 1909. By the Minto-Morley reforms of 1909 the Madras Legislative Council, which was then the Executive Council, Supplemented by additional members for making laws, had been enlarged. The number of its additional members was raised from 20 to 42 of whom 19 were to be elected. The official majority in the council came to an end. The members of the council were given the right of moving resolutions on the budget as well as on matters of general public importance and of asking supplementary questions on reply to their interpellations. nevertheless, the Councils resolutions were not binding on the Executive nor had it any control over any department of the Government.\textsuperscript{5}

By the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, the Legislative Council ceased to be the Executive council supplemented by additional members appointed or selected for the purpose of making laws. It became a separate body of which the members of the Executive Council became ex-officio members. its members, including the proportion of elected members, also increased in number. There


were to be now 98 elected members and not more than 30 nominated members of whom 15 might be officials. The Governor no longer presided over it, though he had a right to address it. Its powers too were enlarged. It had the powers of discussing and voting the budget, of moving resolutions on matters of general public importance, of interpellation, putting supplementary questions and moving the adjournment of business to discuss a definite matter of urgent public importance.

Significance of the Act

The Government of India Act of 1919 was of importance, for it raised the Executive Council with some additional members to the position of a separate body with a distinct responsibility. Elections to the Legislative Council were based on property qualifications. The Governor appointed ministers from among the members of the Council, subject to the authority of parliament. Moreover the Governor could exercise discretionary powers in financial matters.

The Act prevented a split within the Congress between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins. Before the enactment of this Act there were differences between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins in the Congress. As the Government of India Act gave communal representations in the legislature, the non-Brahmin leaders of the Congress Party forgot their differences with the Brahmins.

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First General Election

As per the provisions of the Government of India Act of 1919 the Government announced elections to be held on 30th November 1920. The Indian National Congress abstained from contesting it.\textsuperscript{10} The Congress issued a manifesto demanding the people to boycott the election.\textsuperscript{11} Besides, as the Congress Party had a lot of volunteers apart from monetary power, they even took steps to refrain the voters from polling. But these attempts proved to be a failure. On the other hand, the non-contest of Congress men gave an opportunity to the Justice Party to check the Brahmin influence.\textsuperscript{12}

The results of the election were announced on 6th December 1920. The Justice Party won 63 seats out of 98 for the whole Presidency of Madras. In Tamil Nadu the non-Brahmins won five of the seven non-Muhammadan urban seats and nineteen of the twenty-six rural seats. In the Madras city, P. Theagaraya Chettiyar and O. Thanikachalam Chettiyar of the justice Party were elected for the reserved seats. P. Theagaraya Chettiyar got the highest votes of 4996 in the Madras city.\textsuperscript{13} Thus in the very first election held under the Government of India Act of 1919, the Justice Party won a signal victory and got majority of seats in the Madras Legislature. This helped the party to form the ministry.

\textsuperscript{12} David Arnold, Op.Cit., P.55.
\textsuperscript{13} Muthuswamy Pillai, S., \textit{History of Justice Party} (Tamil), Madras, 1985, P.62.
Formation of Justice Ministry

On the Victory of the Justicities in the first general election, on 8\textsuperscript{th} December 1920 Lord Willingdon, the Governor of Madurai invited P. Theagaraya Chettiyar,\textsuperscript{14} the leader of the party to from ministry ignoring the petty differences among the Justicites.\textsuperscript{15} He declined to form the ministry but advised the Governor to appoint three non-Brahmins as ministers. As such the Governor appointed A. Subrayalu Reddiar of South Arcot as the first minister and he was assigned the ministry of education from 17\textsuperscript{th} December 1920.\textsuperscript{16} With him P. ramaraya Iyengar and K. Vekata Reddi Naidu of Godavari were appointed as ministers in charge of local self-government and development respectively.\textsuperscript{17}

Lord Willingdon inaugurated the first session of the provincial Legislature on 12\textsuperscript{th} January 1921. On 14\textsuperscript{th} February 1921 the second session of the legislature was held under the chairmanship of P. rajagopalacharier (1922-23), the first President of the Council. At this session Lord Willingdon exhorted the members to be loyal to their duties, Kesava Pillai was elected as the Vice-President of the Council. Again in March 1921 Lord Willingdon appointed three council secretaries to act as ministerial whips and he urged the non-Brahmins to act as a single party in debates.\textsuperscript{18} The post of council secretary was given to R.K.

\textsuperscript{14} He was the first Chairman of the Madras Municipality in 1919 and served until 1923. He received titles of Rao Bahadur, Diwan Bahadur and Sir in 1909, 1919 and 1921 respectively for his public services. (Justice Party Golden Jubilee Souvenir, Madurai, 1968, P.184.

\textsuperscript{15} David Arnold, op.cit., P.56.

\textsuperscript{16} Washbrook, D.A., op.cit., P.322.

\textsuperscript{17} Krishna Aiyar, R.V., \textit{In the Legislative of these days}, Madras, 1956, P.11.

\textsuperscript{18} David Arnold, op.cit., P.59
Shanmugam Chettiyar, A. Ramaswamy Mudaliyar and Tha nkavelu Pillai. The Vice-President of the council was paid Rs.5,000 per year and the council secretaries were given Rs.500 per month.\textsuperscript{19}

Entangled with great hostilities against the non-Brahmins, the Brahmins showed their apathy towards Lord Willingdon, who supported the cause of non-Brahmins according to the British parliamentary traditions. The Brahmins alleged that Lord Willingdon was playing none community against the other. The non-Brahmins, on the other hand, blamed the Brahmins for their segregation of the non-Brahmins in the political, social and economic spheres in the past.\textsuperscript{20} To encourage the public awareness in the political administration, Governor Willingdon himself participated in all the cultural and social activities in the Madras Presidency to the possible level. Indeed he played a straight forward game of a constitutionalist.\textsuperscript{21}

**The Communal Order**

The Madras Legislative Council which met in February 1921 provided the first opportunity to the non-Brahmins to take part in the deliberations of the Legislative council. The ministry of the Justice Party was determined to get a greater proportion of government posts for the non-Brahmins.\textsuperscript{22} For this purpose the government issued the first communal Order on 16\textsuperscript{th} September 1921. It aimed at the distribution of appointments among various non-Brahmin castes and

\textsuperscript{19} Muthuswamy Pillai, S., op.cit., P.64.
\textsuperscript{20} David Arnold, op.cit., P.57.
\textsuperscript{21} Srinivasachari, C.S., op.cit., P.325.
\textsuperscript{22} Nambi Arooran, K., op.cit., P.141.
communities. This order ensured allotment of seats in the governmental service to all such communities. But it was so unfortunate that during 1922 and 1923 there were no qualified non-Brahmin candidates. Hence the Justice Party took immediate steps for extending educational facilities to the non-Brahmin sections.

Thus the Government of India Act of 1919 conferred upon the people substantial benefits and imposed the most serious responsibilities upon the people in connecting with the administration of the country. But the more significant aspect of the Act was that it brought the people of the Madras Presidency to the threshold of one of the during, political experiments undertaken in any age or country. Thus the Act of 1919, besides being an important landmark in the constitutional development in the Madras Presidency, paved the way for strengthening of communal politics.

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23 Srinivas, N.N., Social Change in Modern India, California, 1966, P.105.

24 Singarajan, op.cit., P.168.