CHAPTER II

THE GENESIS OF THE JUSTICE PARTY

The Justice Party,\(^1\) otherwise known as the South Indian Liberal Federation, was formed at the flag end of 1916 to advance, safeguard and protect the interests of the non-Brahmin community. Any attempt to elevate the non-Brahmins meant challenging the dominance of the Brahmins in all walks of life, particularly in the spheres of education and government service. Essentially it was a movement for uplifting the non-Brahmins and a revolt against Brahmin ascendency. It claimed that it represented the aspirations of a wide range of non-Brahmin castes amounting to nearly 97 per cent of the total population of the presidency. Eventually, it carried on a struggle for communal justice. "Equal opportunities for all and injustice to none" were the watch-words of the party. It did not aim at bringing the Brahmins down to a lower level.\(^2\) Social justice was the basic principle of the party. In brief, it was started to fight against the political monopoly, social tyranny and the religious domination of the Brahmins and to liberate the mute millions of the non-Brahmin communities from the economic thraldom.\(^3\) In the hands of the Justice Party non-Brahminism acquired an ideology of mass mobilisation of non-Brahmins which unavoidably introduced caste conflict in the politics of South India, but the conflict, from the point of view of the non-Brahmins, was between

\(^1\) The party was called after its English organ, Justice by its opponents. Since the name Justice captured the spirit of the non-Brahmin movement the S.I.L.F. adopted the label as its unofficial name.


\(^3\) Justice, Commemoration Day Supplement, 26 Feb. 1931.
the 'forward' Brahmans and the 'backward' non-Brahmins. M.R. Barnett characterises it as a struggle between a land owning non-Brahmin elite with a history of rural dominance and a nascent urban Brahmin elite.

In her view "the non-Brahmin community" is "a cultural construct which united diverse castes within an encompassing political identity." S.N. Balasundaram holds the view that the non-Brahmin movement which the Justice Party represented was "the volcanic eruption of the long smouldering jealousy and fear felt by the educated non-Brahmins towards the Brahmans who had an early start in the competitive race for jobs under the British government." In the words of its founder, Dr. T.M. Nair, "the non-Brahmin movement which gave expression to the non-Brahmin feelings, long smouldering, is a protest against Brahmin leadership." S. Saraswathi describes it as 'a political party with moderate' political ambitions with 'realistic' views on socio-political questions and a party with a definite practical programme to carry on the government of the province in co-operation with the then British rulers. In the history of the progress of the Backward Classes, the Justice Party finds the foremost

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2 Ibid., p.17.

3 Ibid., p.315.


Similarly, in the political history of the Madras Presidency, its role as a ruling party from 1921 to 1926 and from 1930 to 1937 is not at all insignificant. The Montford reforms were implemented by it with exceptional success and it paved the way for constitutional advance to a very great extent. Social reform had been one of its planks. It created a spirit of intelligent inquiry in the minds of the people for testing old customs and old institutions which outlived their usefulness. In the sphere of religion, it strenuously advocated the eradication of abuses in the administration of the temples. In the economic field it stood for the cause of the teeming millions of the agriculturists. More than anything, the Justice Party pleaded for equal rights irrespective of creed, colour or caste distinctions. The concept of non-Brahminism which the Justice Party adumbrated was an outcome of the westernisation rather than the politicization of the communities other than the Brahmans. Before the emergence of the Justice Party "non-Brahmin" was not a relevant social, cultural or political category. The congeries of castes that later came to be designated as "non-Brahmin" identified themselves with specific castes. There were Vellalas, Reddies, Naidus, Nairs and so on. "Therefore, the very idea of a non-Brahmin movement represents a significant reorientation of perceptions about castes and communities." The protagonists of non-Brahminism gave a historical background to the movement


11 *Justice Commemoration Day Supplement, 26 Feb. 1931.*


by linking the non-Brahmins with the Dravidians of the hoary past. They looked down upon the Brahmins as descendants of the Aryan invaders and therefore aliens who had enslaved and divided the indigenous population by means of the caste system. In fact, the term Dravidian had acquired at the turn of the century not only a linguistic meaning but a racial connotation. Western scholars like Robert Caldwell used the word "Brahmins" as synonymous with "Aryans". The leaders of the Justice Party employed the term Dravidians to denote the non-Brahmins. However, the concept of Dravidianism is considered by M.N. Srinivas as a myth and by some others as bookish one. There is one school of thought which holds the view that the Dravidianism was only an invention of Western linguists. It is indeed a ticklish issue. The Dravidian ideology, as Marguerite Ross Barnett remarks, "is difficult to analyse because of its descriptive pretensions and its metaphoric content." However, she is of the view that the emergence of this concept of "non-Brahmin" was an ideological challenge to Brahmin orthodoxy. None the less, it is true that the leaders of the non-Brahmin movement strongly believed that the cleavage between Brahmins and non-Brahmins was solely due to ethnic difference. The non-Brahmin movement was not a phenomenon peculiar to Madras Presidency.

14 E.F. Irschick, Politics and Social Conflict in South India, p.275.

15 K. Nambi Arooran, Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism, 1905-1944, p.35.


17 Ibid., p.315.

18 M.N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India, p.104.
It found precedent in various provinces of cis-Vindyan region. During the days of British paramountcy any movement for social equality and against caste domination had to wear the anti-Brahmin garb since the Brahmin was the kingpin in the Varnashrama Dharma. The Hindu social set up, particularly in peninsular India, gave the Brahmins virtually a dominant position. However, their influence in Bengal was moderated by the trading and literary castes and similarly, in the North-Western provinces by the Rajputs and Muslims. But in Maharashtra and in Madras their power and prestige were absolute and the non-Brahmin castes were in a position of almost total subservience. It is appropriate here to give a brief summary of the non-Brahmin movements which erupted in various regions of South India in order to understand their inter-actions on each other.

Satya-Shodhak Samaj

The earliest non-Brahmin revolt against the tyranny of caste system was organised by Jotirao Phule, a leader of Kshatriya Mali caste, who founded the Satya-Shodhak Samaj in 1873 which literally meant 'Truth-Seeking Society'. It aimed at liberating the lower castes from thralldom. Phule was hailed as Mahatma by his followers perhaps due to the fact that he sought truth and insisted on equality of all people. This society was anti-Brahmin in its orientation. Its attack on Brahminism was vehement as the Hinduism of his day had deteriorated into Brahminism which bred social inequality. As a result, Brahmins became


boodevas (Gods on earth) and enjoyed power as a priestly class and as the head of the caste system. He thought that the caste system, a creation of Brahmans, was meant to exploit the lower classes. The Brahmans were condemned by him as the descendants of Aryans. His social ideas had the imprints of rationalism. Hence his revolt against priestcraft and caste system. He used the non-Aryan symbol of Raja Bali as opposed to the Brahmin symbol of Rama. He exhorted his followers not to engage the priests for conducting rituals. "The objects of the Samaj were to redeem the Shudras and Ati-shudras from the influence of Brahminical scriptures ... to make them conscious of their human rights, and to liberate them from mental and religious slavery."  

21 The programme of the society included women’s liberation, education and economic betterment.  

22 Thus in the words of Gail Omvedt, a well-known sociologist, it was "a rationalistic and equalitarian socio-religious reform organisation."  

23 Though the Samaj attained its greatest strength between 1911 and 1930, it never gained political power.  

24 Nevertheless, it richly deserves to be called the forerunner to a series of similar movements throughout penninsular India. His "non-Aryan theory" and the ideology of Cultural Revolt preceded the development of a similar emphasis on "Dravidian" identity in the Madras non-Brahmin movement. Therefore his Satya-Shodhak

21 Ibid., p.127.  


24 Ibid., p.136.
movement was the first of its kind in India to uplift the depressed castes and classes.  

The Non-Brahmin Movement in Kolhapur

Kolhapur, a princely state, was one of the centres of non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra. Its ruler Shahu Chhatrapathi, a scion of the great house of Shivaji, championed the cause of the non-Brahmins who were denied many of the opportunities which they were legitimately entitled to.

By the treaty of 1829, Kolhapur surrendered its sovereignty to the British. The Maratha army consisting of mainly Marathas and other non-Brahmins was disbanded. This closed the doors of a major avenue to employment for the Marathas. In the later half of the 19th century, the Brahmins who grabbed the earliest opportunities secured positions in administration in greater numbers. "Even a poor Maratha preferred to carry a sword or join any rank in army rather than become a clerk or plough a field." Since recruitment was based on educational qualification, the only department of the government which had a large number of Marathas on the staff was the police department. But no field was an exception to the Brahmins. They were lawyers, moneylenders, corporators, teachers and priests. The influence and authority of the Brahmins were felt in every sphere of life though they constituted only 3 per cent of the total population. At the end of the 19th century, the Kolhapur society stood sharply divided into two sections: the advanced and powerful

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26 Ibid., p. 4.
Brahmins and the backward and powerless non-Brahmins.

Shahu Maharaj who was proud of his birth as a descendant of the Maratha nation builder, Shivaji, was profoundly influenced by the ideology of the Satya-Shodak movement. Phule's literature particularly Gulangiri (slavery) had a greater impact on him. He, therefore, adopted a policy to uplift his own caste as well as other non-Brahmins. In this respect the movement that he engineered is justly called the spiritual heir of the Satya-Shodhak movement of Phule.\textsuperscript{27} However, it is not known why "the Maharaja himself held back from joining the Samaj or fully accepting its radical stands"\textsuperscript{28}, in spite of his fascination for its ideals.

The immediate cause which turned Shahu Maharaj into an enemy of the Brahmins was the Vedokta controversy. All palace functions and ceremonies were performed by the Rajopadhyya, the Royal Chaplain, in accordance with the puranic rites on the plea that Shahu Maharaj and others were Shudras. It was argued that the Vedic rites were meant for the twice-born castes such as Brahmins, Vaishyas and Kshatriyas. This kind of argument annoyed Shahu. He took it as an insult to his royal lineage. As a result, a decree was issued in 1901 which declared that all functions in the palace should be performed following the Vedic rites and if any one failed to carry out the order he would be suspended from service. When the hereditary high priest of the palace refused to obey the royal order his Inam lands were confiscated. Similarly the lands of the Jagadguru Sankaracharya were

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28} Gail Omvedt, Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society, The Non-Brahmin Movement in Western India, p.130.
forfeited when he supported the stand of the Rajopadhyya. But their attempts to seek the intervention of the Government of Bombay into this affair proved futile. The reason for taking such a hard line position by the hereditary priest was obviously the predominant position of the Brahmins not only in Kolhapur but elsewhere in Bombay province. Even Tilak, the so-called leader of the Extremists, argued that "Vedokta" rituals might be awarded to Shahu as the "Chhatrapati" or king but not as in his hereditary family right."29 It is interesting to note that both the Rajopadhyya and the Sankaracharya yielded to the royal authority just to get back their confiscated lands.

It was proved beyond doubt that the Brahminical arrogance could be subdued through non-Brahmin political power. The tenacity with which Shahu Maharaj settled the Vedokta controversy gave impetus to the non-Brahmin movement in Kolhapur which in fact entered upon a new phase. The Chatrapathi turned out to be a radical and issued an order in 1902 reserving 50 per cent of the vacancies in his administration for the members of the backward communities.30 The main aim in launching such a far-reaching measure was to secure adequate representation of the non-Brahmins in the public services and to encourage them to pursue higher education. The communal G.C. issued by Shahu was the first of its kind in India, to be followed by other Southern States. The Mysore Government adopted a similar measure in 1921,31 Madras in 1921 during the regime of the Justice

29 Ibid., p.126.
30 The order was issued from London where Shahu had gone to attend the coronation ceremony of Edward VII.
Party and the Bombay Government in 1925. Thus the communal S.O. of Kolhapur government acted as a trend-setter and produced radical results in the social set up of the peninsular India. Even the first amendment of the Indian Constitution was made in the year 1951 to uphold the egalitarian principle that this S.O. enshrined. Thus it was a well conceived measure far in advance of the time in which Shahu Maharaj lived. Another measure that he took was to weaken the priestly authority of the Brahmins in Kolhapur. Phule's principle of conducting marriages and other religious ceremonies without Brahmin priests captured his imagination. The logical outcome of it was the creation of the Maratha priest-hood in 1920 and the subsequent establishment of Kshatria Jagadguru. A royal order was promulgated by Shahu appointing Maratha priests and as a follow-up measure a Kshatriya Vedic School was founded to train Maratha priests. A more reformative step that Shahu took in the religious sphere was the constitution of the Devasthanam (Charitable) Inams Department and placing it under the control of the Revenue Officer. The Chhatrapathi further directed that the surplus accruing from the income of religious institutions should be used for educational purposes. The leaders of the Justice Party, like those of Kolhapur movement, undertook the study of the Vedas and chanting of mantras in order to dispense with the services of Brahmin priests at religious functions. It is worth mentioning here that a special training school was also started for the purpose at Kollur in Tenali Taluk. Likewise, the Devasthanam Inams department constituted by Shahu very well


served as a precursor to the Board of Commissioners created by the Justice Party in accordance with the Hindu Religious Endowments Act, 1925.

Initially the non-Brahmin movement in Kolhapur was merely a protest against the dominance of Brahmins in the administration. The Vedanta controversy polarised the castes in Kolhapur into Brahmin and non-Brahmin groups. This movement caused "a ferment at lower levels of society" and "pushed Shahu to the left." 34 "His hostility to Brahmin educational and cultural dominance led to a climate in which he sponsored the growth of a militancy and social radicalism among the educated non-Brahmans as well as among the poor in Kolhapur." 35

The Non-Brahmin Revolt in Travancore

The non-Brahmin Movement in Travancore was mainly a revolt against the monopoly that the Tamil Brahmins enjoyed in the administrative service of the state. The Tamil Brahmins who were famously known as Pattar Brahmins were regarded by the Malayali speaking natives of the state as "foreigners", though they were residents there for centuries. Their origin is obscure. Nothing is known as to when they came and settled in the southern part of Kerala. However, the 18th century witnessed an inflow of these Brahmins from Tanjore and Tinnevelly districts of Madras Presidency into Kerala. Their aim in crossing the border was only to avail themselves of positions of power and profit in the Travancore and Cochin administrative services. Since they had been exposed to English

34 Gail Cravd, Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society, P. 127.
35 Ibid.
education much earlier than the non-Brahmin castes in Kerala, they had the opportunity of securing government jobs when the administration of the Travancore was reoriented on western style. Originally these Pattar Brahmins were employed as tutors, temple managers, cooks and personal attendants to the members of the royal families of these states. The Maharajas who were enamoured of Brahminical way of life, appointed them as mirasudars, munshis (bench clerks) and accountants in the newly reorganized set up of the administration. A few of them acquired lands and became landlords. Those who settled in Palghat Taluk pursued professions like money-lending and cultivation despite the fact that a large number of them were employed as temple attendants.

The Nambudiris who were at the top of the social hierarchy claimed a higher status than the Pattar Brahmins. Yet there was actually no rivalry between them. Moreover, the Nambudiri Brahmin families who lived in Travancore and Cochin States were very few in number. The Pattar Brahmins who had acquired a knowledge of the Vedas occupied a very important position in the social set up of these states. They despised the Nairs and treated them as inferiors. They in turn, exercised a greater control over the Ezhavas, who, inspite of their numerical strength, were given a low position in the caste-ridden society of Kerala. "The caste system in all its severity and rigidity divided the Hindu society into innumerable exclusive groups mutually hating and co-operating only to degrade the


37 Ibid., p.50.
The rigidity of caste kept the lower castes in permanent bondage and ignorance. Throughout the 19th century the Ezhavas worked as landless labourers and as cultivating tenants. They were bereft of education. In fact they were prevented from entering the school lest their approach should pollute the atmosphere. "They were totally excluded from reaping the political or administrative benefits." They smarted under the social injustice and disabilities imposed on them by centuries of tradition. The social constraints imposed on the community had adverse effects. Mass conversion of the Ezhavas to Christianity was the logical outcome of the rigour of caste tyranny. The downtrodden section of the people joined the new religion since "the humanitarian activities of the Christian Missionaries assured them a modicum of rights and privileges enjoyed by the caste Hindus." With the introduction of western education and the spread of liberal and democratic ideas, the downtrodden underdogs broke the shackles of customs and tradition and became more and more conscious of their fundamental right. The Ezhavas were not the only one section discriminated by the Government of Travancore. The Nairs and Syrian Christians despite their English education, were also given unfair treatment. History reveals that there was "a distinguished line of Dewans who had sprung from the Nair class and they were renowned as much for their administrative


39 Ibid., p. L XXII.

40 Ibid., p. X.
capabilities as for their deep-seated devotion to the throne. During their heyday almost all higher appointments were also held by them. Though they had been slow to take advantage of English education, they were not lagging behind any community in the field of higher education. A good number of them had become graduates. But, in spite of their having kept themselves abreast of the times, they occupied only the lowest rungs of the official ladder. The reason was not far to seek. Travancore was ruled from 1817 to 1872 for about half a century by a number of foreign Dewans one after another who systematically introduced their relations, castemen and friends into the state service. They scrupulously avoided Nairs being appointed in any higher positions. Even efficient and well educated Malayali Sudras were denied the opportunities of entering the Huzur and Revenue Offices. The Judicial and revenue branches of the administration were mostly in the hands of foreign Brahmin graduates. A vast number of the Brahmins were not required to pay taxes. In fact they were the favoured children of the Government of Travancore. Their undue predominance and monopoly in the administration of the state created a feeling of animosity rather than jealousy among the non-Brahmin communities. Their hostility and protest were expressed through a weighty memorial, prepared by K.P. Sankara Menon, a Vakil of High Court of Madras in 1891, and signed by more than ten thousand people of different castes, creeds and calling. Even Nambudiris signed the memorial. The signatories included several officials of the State, leading members of the bar at


42 Ibid., p.91.
Trivandrum, Alleppey, Quilon and Parur and rich landlords of various communities. The memorial was printed both in English and Malayalam and submitted to His Highness the Maharajah of Travancore. "This was the first visible sign of social discontent in the State. It accused the administration of following a pernicious policy of denying admission to able and educated Malayalis to the various offices and of promoting carefully the interests of foreigners, especially the relatives and castemen of officials in power."\textsuperscript{43}

As a corollary, the Brahmins submitted a counter—memorial to the king which refuted the arguments and allegations of their antagonists. However, there was no perceptible improvement in the attitude of the Maharaja. Then came the revolt of the Ezhava against the caste tyranny. It too appeared in the form of a memorial which was submitted to the Maharaja of Travancore under the leadership of Dr. P. Palpu. It was signed by 13,176 members of the Ezhava community. They pleaded therein for ordinary civic rights. The reply of His Highness was whimsical. He asked them "why don't you change the religion?"\textsuperscript{44} These memorials reveal that the system of government in Travancore was distinctly feudal. It reduced most of the people to the "condition of hewers of wood and drawers of water to their lords."\textsuperscript{45}

The non-Brahmin protest in Kerala had a different behavioural pattern since it was not opposed to the native Nambudiri Brahmins even

\textsuperscript{43} T.K. Ravindran, Asam and Social Revolution in Kerala. A Study of his Assembly Speeches, p. LXXXIV.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. XC.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. V.
though their "predominance created a condition of general degradation."\(^{46}\)
The reason was obvious. They were not contenders for jobs in the administrative set up of Travancore. In fact, they were content with their traditional status. It was therefore a conflict between the "foreign" Brahmins and the native non-Brahmins. Nevertheless, the revolt of the non-Brahmins indicated that there was an intellectual awakening among the masses which challenged the dominance of the Brahmins.

The Non-Brahmin Awakening in Mysore

The preponderance of Brahmins in various spheres of public life in Mysore as elsewhere in Southern States of India created a feeling of frustration and resentment among the elite non-Brahmins. Political awareness which came hand in hand with Westernisation heightened not only the linguistic consciousness but gave impetus to casteism.\(^{47}\) As a result, the leading non-Brahmin castes such as Vokkaligas and Lingayats organised caste associations to further the interests of their own castes in the race for urban development.\(^{48}\) Even in the precincts of the palace of Mysore there were reverberations of resentment against the overwhelming position of the Brahmins in the Civil Service. The Maharaja's uncle and brother came out openly to oppose the monopoly of Brahmins in both administrative and educational services. The memorial which the non-Brahmins of Mysore submitted to the Public Service Commission in 1914 indicated how predominant the Brahmin element was in the Civil Service of Mysore and

\(^{46}\) Ibid., p. 1.

\(^{47}\) H.N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India, p.55.

\(^{48}\) James Manor, Political Change in an Indian State, Mysore 1917-1955, p.59.
argued for proportionate representation of non-Brahmins in proportion to their population in the administrative services. An impetus to the non-Brahmin cause came from an unexpected quarter. C.R. Reddy, a Cambridge Scholar noted for his erudition and scholarship, joined the Maharaja's College as Professor. Subsequently, he was elevated to the position of the Principal of the College. The popularity which he enjoyed as the Principal of the College got him the post of Inspector-General of Education for the whole state. The yeoman service that C.R. Reddy rendered to the cause of higher education attracted the leaders of the Vokkaliga and Lingayat communities who played a crucial role in bringing the leaders of the two communities together on the ground of anti-Brahminism. As the Inspector-General of Education C.R. Reddy took the radical and sensational step by throwing open all the schools to the Harijans.

The Founding of Praja Mithra Mandali

An organisation to voice forth the views of the non-Brahmins of Mysore was a long-felt need. The initial efforts of some of the non-Brahmin leaders went abortive. By 1917, Reddy ventured to give shape and form to the anti-Brahmin feelings with the help of two prominent citizens of Mysore namely M. Basavaiah and H. Channaiah and a few

49 Sadhvi, 20 Feb. 1914. (Madras NNR, 1914).
50 James Manor, Political Change in an Indian State, Mysore 1917-1955, p.59.
51 Ibid.
Muslim leaders. What Dr. Nair and P. Theagaraya chetty were to Madras, Basavaiah and Channaiah were to Mysore. Eventually an organisation called Praja Mithra Mandali was born with a new creed which advocated equal opportunities and adequate representation in public services for all communities. It urged for concessions to non-Brahmins in education, government employment and political representation. Since it was the first formal political association, it captured the imagination of the people quickly. Curiously enough it enjoyed the royal patronage by receiving secret financial help from the members of the Maharaja's family who were very much interested in pressing the claims of the non-Brahmins.

In 1917, C.R. Reddy organised a systematic campaign to win special treatment for non-Brahmins through the press and other national forums such as the legislature. "This campaign reached a high pitch on 18th November 1917 when the non-Brahmins organised what was probably the state's first mass political meeting in Bangalore, which synchronised with the presentation of a proposal to the Maharaja for major concessions for non-Brahmins."

As a follow-up measure, the Praja Mithra Mandali sent a delegation to the Maharaja in June 1918 to "present a formal plea" on behalf of the non-Brahmins. The response of the ruler of Mysore to the demands of the leaders of the Mandali was encouraging. In August 1918 a Committee was appointed under Sir Leslie Miller to enquire into communal representation in the state administration. The report of the Committee, submitted in August 1919, stressed the need for special provisions for non-Brahmins in granting scholarships and in giving educational facilities and also in offering

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54 M.S.A. Rao, Social Movements and Social Transformation, p.11.

appointments in the State Civil Service. The recommendations of the Miller Committee was accepted by the Maharaja who translated them into action by a royal order of May 1921. The appointment of Miller's Committee had an adverse reaction from the Brahmin communities. The Brahmin Dewan, M. Visvesvareya resigned. For the first time a non-Brahmin, the uncle of Maharaja, one Kantharaj Urs was appointed as the Dewan of Mysore under a very strong pressure from the royal family. 56 The leadership offered by C.R. Reddy was mainly responsible for the spectacular success that non-Brahmins won. But for C.R. Reddy the non-Brahmins of Mysore would have been in the doldrums.

The non-Brahmin movement fell on evil days, when the new Dewan succumbed to an "apoplectic fit" in March 1922. This, in fact, injured the interests of non-Brahmins. Yet another stumbling blow to the movement was the sudden resignation of C.R. Reddy from his post of Inspector-General of Education. With his exit, the Praja Mithra Mandali became inactive and the following years witnessed only its rapid decline. "Even in its period of greatest strength the Mandali was too ephemeral a force to be called a "movement" or a party. Its active membership probably never exceeded two dozen men . . . None of these men sought to develop a popular base among the rural elite." 57 It indeed lacked internal cohesion. Nevertheless it became a style in the politics of Mysore to talk of "the non-Brahmin community"; but in no sense the non-Brahmin communities such as Lingayats, Vakkaligas and Muslims formed themselves a community. The leaders who constituted C.R. Reddy's coterie were deeply anxious to further their own

56 Ibid., p.60.
57 Ibid., p.61.
interests rather than the interests of the non-Brahmins in general. The Miller Committee brought changes but they were not appreciable. However, it created a feeling of complacency among the leaders of the non-Brahmin communities which threw the fortune of the non-Brahmin movement to wilderness. Still its impact on the subsequent course of events in the politics of Mysore State was no less important.

It is evident from the foregoing analysis that anti-Brahminism which assumed different names in different places provided "a rallying point for a highly heterogeneous group which included a wide variety of castes from different linguistic areas even Muslims, Christians and Parsis." The philosophy that Phule advocated in the latter half of the 19th century provided the ideological framework for the programmes of the non-Brahmin parties of Bombay and Madras at the turn of this century. The city of Madras served as an ideological centre for this movement. The new ideas of non-Brahminism spread rapidly throughout South India because of the composite nature of the Madras Presidency. Since the city of Madras had attained pre-eminence in cultural and intellectual spheres, the elite groups everywhere in the South turned towards the city for leadership just as Western India looked to Bombay. Besides, the leaders of these non-Brahmin movements were constantly in touch with each other despite their independent nature and character. Yet another thing which

58 Ibid., p.60.
59 M.N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India, p.102.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
arrests our attention is that the non-Brahmin movements both in Bombay and in Madras Presidencies were opposed to Home Rule or self-government for it was feared that it would strengthen the Brahmin administration.

The Factors Contributing to the Birth of the Justice Party

The Superior Position of the Brahmins in Hindu Ritual Hierarchy

The Brahmins were considered "the guardians of Hindu tradition" and "the regulators of the religious life and social interaction" of the Hindus. Though they were numerically small, they had a decisive say in all aspects of life. Their dominant position was solely due to the order of precedence in the varna system which put the Brahmins at the top. The sacred literature of the Hindus which was largely a work of the Brahmins all through the ages lent support to the doctrine of their superiority. Their dominant position gave them an air of superiority and arrogance. As a result, they treated the non-Brahmins as their social inferiors. The social dominance of the Brahmins generated not only an ill-feeling but bred "social grievances" among the non-Brahmins.

The Preponderance of Brahmins in Civil Service

The population of Madras Presidency was approximately 42 millions and the Brahmins formed only 3 per cent thereof. Yet they monopolised more than 50 per cent of the places in Public Services. The non-Brahmins who

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63 E.F. Irshick, Politics and Social Conflict in South India, p.275.

64 M.N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India, p.24.

65 S. Sarawathi, Minorities in Madras State, p.36.
constituted nearly 86 per cent of the population, occupied only 17 per cent in the public services. The 86 per cent did not include the Muslims and Christians. The Government of Fort St. George furnished statistics about the proportion of appointments in the public services in the Madras Presidency held by the members of different castes and creeds to the Secretary to the Franchise Committee in the year 1919.

Statement showing the distribution of appointments in Public Works, Revenue, Judicial and Education Departments are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clases in Public Works Department (1919)</th>
<th>Brahmins</th>
<th>Non-Brahmins</th>
<th>Muhammadans</th>
<th>Christians</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Superintending Engineers</td>
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<td>2. Executive Engineers</td>
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<td>3. Assistant Engineers</td>
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<td>4. Sub-Engineers</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Supervisors</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Overseers</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Temporary

| 1. Sub-Engineers                      | 2        | --           | --          | --         | 2     |
| 2. Supervisors                        | 3        | --           | --          | --         | 3     |
| 3. Overseers                          | 132      | 66           | 1           | 6          | 205   |

Total: 398 125 3 9 535

66 Ibid.
### CLASSES IN REVENUE DEPARTMENT (1912)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brahmans</th>
<th>Non-Brahmans</th>
<th>Mahamadans</th>
<th>Indian Christians</th>
<th>Europeans &amp; Eurasians</th>
<th>Tot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Posts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy-Collectors, Tasildars, Deputy-Tasildars and Sub-Magistrates.</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue Inspectors.</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CLASSES IN JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT (1919)

| Senior Judges, Sub-Judges and District Munsiffs. | 143 | 56 | 6 | 7 | 4 | 216 |

### CLASSES IN EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENT (1912)

| Higher Posts in Educational Department. | 310 | 29 | 23 | 19 | 9 | 390 |

A scrutiny of the tables reveals the solid and strong domination of the Brahmans in several high level positions in the government services. In the Department of Public Works there were only two posts of Superintending Engineers which were solely occupied by the Brahmans. There were 14 posts of Executive Engineers of which 10 went to Brahmans. The percentage of posts held by the Brahmans at high level positions varied from 100 per cent to 70 per cent. The Brahmans maintained the same lead at the cadres of Deputy Collectors, Tahsildars, Deputy Tahsildars and Sub-Magistrates in the Revenue
Department also. The lead was much pronounced in the Education Department where the Brahmins held 310 higher posts out of 390. Justice, a contemporary newspaper, speaks of the preponderance of the Brahmins in education department as follows: "To say that the Brahmins have enjoyed a disproportionate share of government patronage in almost all departments of the Public Service open to Indians is but to state a truism. In the Education Department, something akin to a monopoly has been established, candidates other than Brahmins being seldom, if ever, preferred except under very exceptional circumstances." It cites an example. Out of 23 appointments of Personal Assistants to Inspectors of Schools made in 1917, 20 went to Brahmins and only 3 to non-Brahmins. Therefore, it made an appeal to His Excellency Lord Pentland to break the monopoly of the Brahmins. The preponderance of the Brahmins in government services was primarily due to their remarkably high rate of literacy especially in English and also due to their extraordinary skill in passing the examinations. They were the first to respond to Westernization. With their command of English, they entered the administration of the Government of Fort St. George and gained a new criterion of status, besides their old pre-eminent position in the Hindu ecclesiastical system. The Census Report of India, 1921, Madras, gives the following figures with regard to the literacy of the males.

---

68 Justice, 19 July 1917. (Madras NNR, 1917).

Male Literacy of Selected Castes, 1901-1921
(In per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Castes</th>
<th>1901</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Brahman</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>71.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telugu Brahman</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>59.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nair</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chetti</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Christian</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadar</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baliya Naidu, Kavarai</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vellala</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamma</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapu, Reddi</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Velama</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It indicates that the leading non-Brahmin castes such as Nairs, Chettis, Vellalas, Baliya Naidus and Nadars attained appreciable progress in education. Nevertheless in the matter of English literacy the lead that the Brahmans established was striking and conspicuous. However, it cannot be denied that those non-Brahmin castes made a gradual progress even with regard to English literacy.70

70 SOURCE: India, Census Commissioner, Census of India: Madras 1921, XIII Pt.1, 128-129. Also cited in E.F. Irshick 'Politics and Social Conflict in South India', p.17
Male Literacy in English of Selected Castes, 1901-1921
(In per cents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Cast</th>
<th>1901</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tamil Brahman</td>
<td>17.88</td>
<td>22.27</td>
<td>28.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Telugu Brahman</td>
<td>10.82</td>
<td>14.75</td>
<td>17.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Indian Christian</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>5.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nair</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Balija Naidu, Kavara</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Vellala</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Chetti</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>2.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Velama</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Nadar</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Kapu, Reddi</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Kamma</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Influence of the Mylapore Clique:

The city of Madras saw an active group politics at the commencement of this century owing to the administrative changes which the Reform Acts introduced. Politicians from district centres migrated to the city to explore new avenues to influence the bureaucratic machine. There were prominent groups in Madras which were ranged against each other.

---


One group, known as the Mylapore clique was led by V. Krishnaswami Iyer and the other group was called the Egmore group of which C. Sankaran Nair, T. Rangachari, Kasthuri Ranga Iyengar and T.M. Nair were noteworthy. Its nucleus consisted of some of the most successful lawyers and administrators of the province such as F.R. Sundaram Iyer, V.C. Desikachariar, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and Subramania Iyer and others. This group was not only affluent but highly educated. The knowledge and the wide range of contacts that these men had throughout the province made them vitally essential as "advisers and assistants to the bureaucracy." The career of V. Krishnaswami Iyer reveals how the Mylapore clique was powerful. Since he had intimate contact with the Governors and senior officials of the Government he enjoyed much power. "In the world of public politics he was the recognised dictator of the Madras Congress." At the turn of this century, the influence of this group of men though tiny and handful had become quite extraordinary. Some of them became judges in the Madras High Court; a few of them had tremendous voice in the Senate of the University of Madras. A certain number of them had even the privilege of sitting in the Legislative Council as honourable members. Often Government utilized their services by making them members of commissions. "From 1910 when the Governor included as Indian on his Executive Council, a Mylaporean consistently filled the place." This advantageous position helped them acquire important positions in the city of Madras without any difficulty. Their influence indeed grew.

73 V.K. Narasimhan, Kasturiranga Iyengar, (Delhi, 1963) p.23.
by leaps and bounds. They successfully replaced some of the local merchants and contractors who had formed themselves into an important bloc in the Madras Corporation. The Madras Port Trust was one of the areas penetrated by the Nylapore clique. The management of the Pachaiyappa's Trust, a charitable foundation, was also taken over by this group of men. Occasionally their influence was felt even at the mofussil centres. A society for temple reform called Dharmarekshana Sabha was constituted by them. This organisation influenced the courts to appoint the nominees of the Nylapore group in the management of some of the wealthiest temples of the province. 77

The Brahmins who got into the government service and the professions were a microscopic minority of the total Brahmin population; but this 'minority' appeared as a menacing majority. 78

The Brahmin Predominance in the Legislative Council

What was true of government service was equally true of local and other public bodies. The composition of the Madras Legislative Council from 1910 to 1920 discloses that the Brahmin element dominated the Council. Where the electorate consisted of large number of Brahmins, the non-Brahmin had no chance of getting himself elected. 79 Of the nine Indians who served as official members, eight were Brahmins. 80 Even in the 1916 elections to the Legislative Council their gains were immense. They captured eight out of 9 seats to be filled by the constituencies of Municipalities and Taluk

77 Ibid., p.24.

78 S. Saraswathi, Minorities in Madras State, p.38.

79 Non-Brahmin Manifesto.

80 S. Saraswathi, Minorities in Madras State, p.45.
and District Boards. Even the Corporation of Madras which elected a non-Brahmin candidate to the Legislative Council in 1909 and 1912 chose a Brahmin in 1916. The Madras University which had produced Brahmin graduates to a larger extent never returned a non-Brahmin to the local legislature unless the candidate had been sponsored by the European Fellows. Since 1907, 12 fellows were elected by the registered graduates and out of them with one exception, all were Brahmins. 81 Therefore the influence of Brahmins on the electorate was in fact not only solid but decisive. While the Legislative Council got filled up with more and more Brahmin elements "the subordinate posts in the public administration became almost a Brahmin monopoly by 1916." 82

The Nepotism of the Brahmins

The patronage of the Mylapore clique reached its climax in the second decade of this century. It monopolised all elective positions and appointive places. Its monopoly went hand in hand with nepotism. Every door of the office was closed against non-Brahmins and whenever a vacancy occurred a Brahmin official let in his wife's brother or his brother's son-in-law. 83 Fair play in his pamphlet, The Ways and Means for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Non-Brahmin Races cites an instance of nepotism. One D. Krishna Row, Huzur Sheristadar of Cuddapah District, had "managed to bring one hundred and eight of his actual relations into one district and into only one department of government." 84 The clanishness

81 Non-Brahmin Manifesto.
82 S. Saraswathi, Minorities in Madras State, p. 47.
of the Brahmin was proverbial. It was natural on the part of a Brahmin once he entered a public office to convert the whole office into a Brahmin establishment. A single-headed Brahmin thus would become hydra-headed.

The revenue officials of Nellore district gave appointments to by relatives and "connections" of G. Venkataramanayya, a Telugu Nayogi Brahmin, ignoring the standing order No.128 clause (2) of the Board of Revenue. The concept of patronage acquired a new connotation when it was limited to a small circle of family alone. In this respect a single family namely the Vembakkam Sri Vaishnava Brahmin family from Chingleput, deserves mention. Its members occupied important and powerful offices all over the Presidency, particularly in the Tamil districts and enjoyed the fruits and favours of the highest posts available to Indians in Madras city. Its influence dates back to 1820 when it managed to get one of its men appointed as the Madras city police chief. It produced the leading city lawyers for three generations and also the first Indian to be nominated to the Legislative Council in 1861. Two Dewans of Native States were also from this family. V. Baskyam Iyengar who was the leader of the native bar was the undoubted head of this family. Its influence came to be felt throughout the province when the higher posts of the government of Fort St. George were thrown open to Indians.

85 Justice, 2 Mar. 1917 (Madras NNR, 1917).

86 Fair Play, The Ways and Means for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Non-Brahmin Races, (Madras, 1893), p.73.

87 E.F. Weiss, Politics and Social Conflict in South India, p.220.

"By the early 1920s, it had produced another generation of legal giants, three High Court judges, two Attorney-Generals, the first Home Minister under the Montagu Chelmsford Reforms and countless minor judges, departmental under-secretaries and government servants."\(^{39}\) When the authority and the power of the community grew immensely, the whole political equilibrium of the Presidency was overturned. The Mylapore coterie became colossal and it would either make or mar men and matters. It could throw a person whose family might have ruled his territory for generations out of institutions of local self-government. "It could leave him bare and unprotected in the Legislative Council when his interests were being discussed and arrest him for sedition if he complained. Equally it could give him patronage, office and support and increase his local power."\(^{90}\)

In fact the collaborators of Mylapore exploited the opportunity afforded to them to such an outrageous extent that "it caused stirrs in the press and in the services generally."\(^{91}\) A.S. Balasubramania Iyer, a city advocate and cousin of C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, was elevated to a sub-judgeship over many who were waiting for years for promotion. Similarly C.V. Kumaraswami Sastrty was appointed in the High Court in 1913. This kind of favouritism not only provoked the wrath of the press but produced a spate of petitions and threatened resignations in the Judicial Department. The Hindu criticised such appointments as instances of unconcealed and open corruption of the government. The politicians of the city of Madras from different sections resented the growing influence of the Mylapore group in the administration

\(^{39}\) D.A. Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics*, p.236.

\(^{90}\) Ibid., p.258.

\(^{91}\) Ibid., p.236.
of the province. The non-Brahmin movement was the result of those sections coming together under a single banner.  

It is appropriate here to quote from the evidence given by K.V. Reddi Naidu before the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and Commons on the Government of India Bill, published in London Civil Service Gazette in September 1919.

It cannot be that 34 millions of people are not able to produce a few hundreds of competent men. On the other hand, we find that the non-Brahmins have been urging that not only are competent men available amongst them but they are being assiduously prevented from entering into Public Services and from having their legitimate share therein, by the clamourous and excessive influence of the Brahmins, who are described as the Magyars of Madras ... It looks as if the public services in that province and representation to the local Legislative Council are a matter of a family arrangement amongst the members of a single community.

Surely something is rotten in the Province of Madras, and it is high time that the authorities in India and in the White Hall look into matter and set things right.

The Madras Provincial Congress - a Sectarian Body

The Brahmin supremacy was quite perceptible even in the Madras Provincial Congress Committee - 1914-1915. The Report of the Executive Committee of 1915 discloses that the non-Brahmins were practically excluded from the All-India Congress Committee. The only one non-Brahmin who was given a place in the All India forum was A.P. Patro of Berhampur (later a minister in the Justice Party). This grabbing attitude of the Brahmin community provoked a good deal of adverse criticism in the press particularly,

## ROTTEN IN THE PROVINCE OF MADRAS.

K.V. Reddi, gave the following analysis of the latest Madras Civil Service list in a memorandum which he submitted, on the 12th of this month.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Departments</th>
<th>Brahmins</th>
<th>Non-Brahmins</th>
<th>Mohammedans</th>
<th>Europeans Anglo-Indians and Indian Christians</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>1,221,907</td>
<td>27,716,306</td>
<td>2,735,673</td>
<td>1,175,865</td>
<td>520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue Department, Superior</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ditto Inferior</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ditto Survey</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>300</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customs</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pahal and Telegraphs</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Veterinary</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-operative Credit</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judicial</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jail</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Works</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>105</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Fund</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industries</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,741</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>2214</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures speak for themselves. The population of the Madras Presidency being nearly 41 million, the Brahmins, it will be noticed, form only 3 per cent. thereof. Yet they monopolise more than 50 per cent. of the appointments in the public services, while the Non-Brahmins who form nearly 68 per cent. of the population, or nearly 83 per cent. if the Panches are included, have only 17 per cent. of the appointments. It cannot be that 34 millions of people are not able to produce a few hundreds of competent men. On the other hand, we find that the Non-Brahmins have been urging that not only are competent men available amongst them, but they are being assiduously prevented from entering public services and from having their legitimate share therein, by the clamours and excessive influence of the Brahmins, who are described as the Magyars of Madras.

No wonder that the Non-Brahmins have been demanding Communal Representation through communal electorates for returning members to the local Legislative Council, seeing that the Brahmins have captured 9 seats out of 10 in the general electorates, a result which the former attribute to the influence which the preponderance of the Brahmins in the public services gave them. It looks as if the public services in that province and representation to the local Legislative Council are a matter of a family arrangement amongst the members of a single community.

Surely something is rotten in the province of Madras, and it is high time that the authorities in India and in the White Hall look into the matter and set things right.

London Civil Service Gazette, Sept. 1919
the Madras Mail, the West Coast Spectator and the Non-Brahmin. Confirming the apprehension expressed in the columns of the Madras Mail, the West Coast Spectator repeated that the action of the Madras Provincial Congress Committee in excluding both Karunakara Menon and P. Kesava Pillai who were not in anyway inferior either to the Triplicane Clique or Mylapore Cabal, would strengthen the feeling that "Home Rule will but degenerate into Brahmin rule."\(^93\) It further sounded a note of caution that the Brahmin boss-alls and bang-alls of the Mahajana Sabha\(^94\) and the Congress Committee created a feeling of irritation among the non-Brahmins and unless this aggressive attitude was arrested and the spirit of toleration and compromise was allowed to dominate the political atmosphere, a sharp division in the political camp as between Brahmins and non-Brahmins would be inevitable. The Non-Brahmin, a political weekly edited by C. Singaravelu Mudaliar, came out with similar criticism. The sudden pushing up of Justice Seshagiri Ayyar to the Presidentship of the Madras Provincial Congress Committee over Karunakara Menon and Kesava Pillai by his Brahmin friends reveals the partial attitude and clannish mentality of that community. It further advised the non-Brahmins to learn from the example of the Muslims who were now one united body so far as their politics and social advancement were concerned and to form a separate association for themselves.\(^95\) The hostile relations between the Brahmin and the non-Brahmin political leaders which developed rather rapidly since the beginning of the century reached its apogee in 1916,\(^96\) when the historic Non-Brahmin

\(^93\) West Coast Spectator, 26 Nov. 1916. (Madras NNR, 1916).

\(^94\) A Pro-Nationalist Provincial Association.


\(^96\) S. Saraswathi, Minorities in Madras State, p.65.
Manifesto was issued by P. Thesgarayas Chetty as the Secretary of the South Indian People's Association, and the accredited leader of the non-Brahmin movement.

The Brahmin Monopoly of the Press

The press, a powerful mass medium, was effectively controlled by the Brahmins in the early decades of the century. The following table discloses how the popular medium of communication—news papers and periodicals—were operated by the Brahmins.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name of Publication</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Where Published</th>
<th>Edition</th>
<th>Name, caste and age of editor</th>
<th>Circulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Ananda Bodhini</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>6, Venkatesa Maistry St., Sowcarpet, Madras</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>N. Muruswani Mudaliyar, Vellala</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32 years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>47 years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The Hindu</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>National Press, Ellis Road, Madras</td>
<td>Daily, tri-weekly &amp; weekly</td>
<td>S. Kasturiranga Iyengar, Brahmin</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Indian Review</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>G.A. Natesan &amp; Co.'s Press, George Town, Madras</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>G.A. Natesa Ayyar, Brahmin</td>
<td>3,000</td>
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<td>58 years.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Madras Mail</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Madras Mail Press, 6, North Beach Road, George Town, Madras</td>
<td>Daily, tri-weekly &amp; weekly</td>
<td>T.E. Welby, European</td>
<td>4,968</td>
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<td>35 years.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Madras Times</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Madras Times Press, Mount Road, Madras.</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Glyn Barlow, European</td>
<td>3,000</td>
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<td>56 years.</td>
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</table>

8. New India English New India Printing Works, 13-14, Second Line Beach, Madras. Daily Mrs. Annie Besant, Irish 69 years. 8,500

9. Miguahikalasatyam or The Present Truth. Tamil Published at the South Indian Mission of the Seventh Day Adventists, Kilpauk printed at the Albinion Press, Vepery, Madras. Quarterly Rev. J.S. James, American 38 years. 3,000


Of the 11 newspapers and periodicals in the Madras Presidency which had a circulation of over 3000, Ananda Bodini was a non-political monthly magazine. Messenger of the Sacred Heart, a Tamil monthly, Miguahikalasatyam or the Present Truth, a Tamil quarterly and Satya Duta, a Telugu monthly, were religious periodicals which had no political overtones. Madras Mail, an English daily, triweekly and weekly which had 4,968 subscribers and edited by T.E. Welby, an European, articulated most vehemently the views of the English business group. Similarly Madras Times, an English daily owned by another European, Glyn Barlow, followed the lines of Madras Mail and did not care for Indian opinion. 97 These two European-owned papers

97 T.K. Narasimhan, Rasturiranga Tyengar, p.36.
were the staunch supporters of the government. Another popular English
daily was New India owned by Mrs. Besant. As per the statistics furnished
by the government of Fort St. George it was the only newspaper having the
largest circulation of 3,500 copies a day. It was started mainly to
propagate her Home Rule ideas. In order to pamper her Brahmin friends,
it took a pro-Brahmin stance. In fact it turned out to be an open enemy
of Justice, the daily of the Justice Party, thereby opposing the non-Brahmin
movement. Another popular paper, Andhra Patrika, the Telugu daily and
weekly edited by K. Nageswara Rao, a Brahmin, was voicing the claims of the
Andhras. Though it was biased towards Telugu language and people, its
attitude was nationalistic and pro-Congress. The leading popular news-
papers such as The Hindu and Swadeshamitran were owned and edited by
Brahmins. They had taken a pro-Congress but anti-Justice disposition.
From the beginning they were opposed to non-Brahmin movement which they
derided as anti-nationalistic and communal. Though they were vociferously
nationalistic they remained clannish. Indian Review, a monthly English
magazine edited by G.A. Natesan, published a number of articles condemning
the ideologies and policies of the Justice Party. Thus the press in the
Madras Presidency remained very much a tool in the hands of the Brahmins.

The Concept of Sudrahod - A Rallying Factor:

The non-Brahmin communities which formed the bulk of the popula-
tion of the Presidency were deemed to be Sudras in the Varna system. The
Laws of Manu enjoined the sudras to be the servants and menials of the
three higher orders namely (1) the Brahmins, the priestly and learned class;
(2) the Kshatriyas, the military and governing class; (3) the Vaisyas,

\[98\] S. Saraswathi, Minorities in Madras State, p.40.
traders and agriculturists.\textsuperscript{99} The Varna system as stated earlier was invented by the Brahmins to establish their supremacy in the Hindu ritualistic society. But their attempt to classify the people of South India as members of the four Varnas as they did in Northern India not only failed but "led to the confusion of caste and prevalence of social jealousies that have characterised the life of South India for a thousand five hundred years."\textsuperscript{100} As there were no clearly defined Varnas of Kshatriya and Vaisyas in this part of the country, the Hindu society gave the general impression as Andre Beteille puts it, that it was broadly divided into three groups viz., the Brahmins, the Sudras and the Adi-Dravidas.\textsuperscript{101} This grouping of castes had far-reaching impact on the politics of South India. It remains still a riddle how the term "Sudra" was applied to the non-Brahmin castes of Madras Presidency though they had honourable avocations and status of their own. But at the same time the application of a collective name "Sudra" for all non-Brahmin castes meant that the people of those castes were a homogeneous group.\textsuperscript{102} This became a truism as far as the politics of Madras was concerned when the non-Brahmins of various castes operated as a single political entity to challenge the Brahmins' dominance at the beginning of this century.

The wealthy and educated non-Brahmins took strong exception to the use of the appellation Sudras to denote them and considered it as


\textsuperscript{100} P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar, \textit{Pre-Aryan Tamil Culture}, (Madras, 1930), p.20 cited also in Hardgrave, \textit{The Dravidian Movement}, p.11.

\textsuperscript{101} A. Andre Beteille, "Caste and Political Group Formation in Tamilnad," in Rajini Kothari (ed) \textit{Caste in Indian Politics}, p.263.

\textsuperscript{102} S. Saraswathi, \textit{Minorities in Madras State}, p.20.
derogatory to their status and position in the society. They felt that Varnashrama Dharma as understood and practised in Madras Presidency accorded a position of superiority for the Brahmans in the Society. To them this meant nothing but "the quintessence of the ideas of privilege, of superiority and snobbishness." The Brahmans were noted for certain snobbish behaviour, which created a feeling of not only jealousy but contempt among non-Brahmins. Apart from living in separate places, they adopted certain peculiar habits which made them rigidly exclusive. Eating with the non-Brahmins at the same table was seldom found among the Brahmans. Perhaps they were conscious of some of the injunctions of Dharmasastas which "exhorted the higher castes not to take food and water polluted by the touch of the Sudras." The high caste arrogance of the Brahmans and snobbishness were reflected in every deed that they did. For instance, if a non-Brahmin was given water to drink, the empty cup or tumbler would subsequently be washed in his presence itself as a measure of purification. The very touch of the tumbler by a non-Brahmin would be deemed to have polluted the vessel. Hence the purification. This kind of open affront was taken by the non-Brahmins as a disgrace. The interpretation given by Rev. Robert Caldwell and J.H. Nelson to the term "Sudra" through their works would/had its own impact on the non-Brahmins. Further, ideas

103 *Dravidian*, 10 Sep. 1917. (Madras MNR, 1917).


107 In their view the term, "Sudra" had been forced upon the non-Brahmins by Brahmans from the North. R.F. Irachick, Politics and Social Conflict in South India, p.280.
such as social equality and justice captured the imagination of the elite non-Brahmins. When they suffered humiliation and insult at the hands of a small section of people, they did not hesitate to show their resentment. Even addressing the Brahmins as "Sami" was condemned by the non-Brahmin leaders. The Dravidian observed:

> Many are the non-entities that live by eating the bread and wearing the clothes we give them and yet call us Sudras without any difference . . . . All our sastras declare that there is but one Swami (God). But in our Dravida country all Brahman are samis (Gods). The man who, in hotels, cooks and serves our meal is a sami; the man who supplies drinking water on the railway platform is a sami; the man who sells sweets is a sami and the man who cringes for alms is also a sami . . . . There is no reason whatever to call an idiotic and obstinate Brahman a sami. Therefore let our students and other Tamilians give up from today the bad practice of greeting the Brahman as sami. *108*

The awakening of the non-Brahmins against the noxious tradition of caste superiority was very well visualised by poets like Bharathi who sang: "None are the days to call the Brahmins as Iyers." It is true that the concept of Sudrahood aroused social awareness among the non-Brahmins of Madras Presidency. In the early years of this century it became "highly emotional", and got "linked to the concepts of" Dravidian and "Non-Brahmin", all becoming symbolically synonymous. That is, a member of the Justice Party would at the same time be a Sudra . . . a Dravidian . . . and a non-Brahmin." *109* A relentless crusade was carried on against the term Sudra as well as against Varnashrama Dharma by the non-Brahmin leaders

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108 Dravidian, 12 July, 1917 (Madras NNR, 1917); Dharmu, Blasted Hopes, (Bangalore, 1951). p.98.

especially by E.V. Ramaswami Naicker. Therefore the virulent attacks and pungent criticisms of those leaders on Varnasrama Dharma at later stages formed the basis for the radical tenets of the Dravidian ideology.  

The Greatness of Tamil Language and Literature Rediscovered:

The publication of the book entitled, *A comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages* in 1856 by Rev. Robert Caldwell (1819-1891), a Scottish philologist and missionary, revolutionised the thoughts of both Tamil scholars and the "emerging elites". Though it was a grammar work analysing the linguistic affinities of the Dravidian languages, it spoke much about the character of Dravidian culture. The author had propounded certain theories about the origin and character of the Dravidian culture. The logical outcome of his theories was that Dravidian culture had a separate and independent existence before the Aryans invaded South India. He assigned a remote antiquity to the development of the Dravidian languages and regarded their structure as unaffected by contact with Sanskrit idioms. On the contrary he tried to explain that a considerable proportion of Sanskrit roots was of Dravidian origin. He further contended that Tamil was the "most highly cultivated ab intra of all Dravidian idioms" and could dispense with its

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110 Ibid., p.23.

111 Irshick uses this term to denote English knowing non-Brahmins in his article, "The Brahmin and Non-Brahmin Struggle for Power in Madras" p.1 (Mimeographed), p.1.

112 E.F. Irshick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India*, p.278.

113 Ibid., p.282.
Sanskrit if need be, and it could "not only stand alone but flourish without its aid." The scholar established by his comparative study that Tamil literature was noted for its "sophistication both in its manner of expression and in the ideas that it conveyed." The views of Caldwell came not only like thunder-bolt to the hitherto prevalent opinion that the cultivated Dravidian languages were descended from Sanskrit like the modern dialects of North India but also provided valuable facts for those who sought to establish "the antiquity and the purity of the Tamil language." It can be rightly said that Rev. Robert Caldwell's works on Dravidian philology thus stimulated the Dravidian consciousness which lay dormant for centuries.

G.U. Pope (1820-1907), a lecturer in Tamil in the Oxford University, was a renowned scholar in both English and Tamil. His translation of Tiruvasakam, which contained valuable notes on the South Indian system of philosophy and religion was a monumental work. It illustrated the greatness of Saiva Siddhanta religious system. His thoughts on it were cataclysmic. In the Note XI to the Appendix of his translation of Tiruvasakam he succinctly explained its unique and meritorious features.

The Caiva Siddhanta system is the most elaborate, influential and undoubtedly the most intrinsically valuable of all the religions of India. It is peculiarly the South Indian and Tamil religion; and must be studied by everyone who hopes to understand and influence the great South Indian peoples. . . . Caivism is the old prehistoric religion of South India, essentially existing from pre-Aryan times, and holds sway over the hearts of the Tamil people.

114 E.F. Irshick cites Robert Caldwell in Politica and Social Conflict in South India, p.278.
115 Ibid., p.279.
Further he observed that the Vedic religion was introduced into South India by the Aryan settlers. Consequently the inhabitants of South India adopted to a great extent their (Aryan) social institutions, myths and forms of worship. Harping upon the views of G.U. Pope, M.S. Puranalingam Pillai, in his book entitled *Tamil Literature* explained how Saiva Siddhanta system differed from Aryan pantheism. Its quintessence is as follows:

The Saiva Siddhanta system is the indigenous philosophy of South India and the choicest product of the Tamilian intellect. The system does not recognise the Aryan limitation of Siva as the destroyer, but considers Him (rather It) as the author of functions, creation, protection, destruction, grace and release ... This high and noble system based on the Agamas or Saiva Scriptures, was corrupted by the puranic writers, whose sole object was to reconcile the Vedas and the Agamas and, in so doing, to give the palm to the former. Hence the modern Saivism ... is full of the lovely creations of the puranic fancy and contains all the inconsistencies and improbabilities of the Aryan pantheism.  

The observations of these savants on the ancient religion of the Tamils had a significant influence on the non-Brahmin Tamil scholars who were stirred up to evince an active interest in knowing the glory of their own cultural and religious heritage. As a corollary, a good number of Tamil Sangams sprang up in various cities of the Tamil country with the avowed object of reviving Tamil language and literature. The most conspicuous was the one organised at Madurai in 1901 under the patronage of Pandithurai Thevar, the zamindar of Palavanatham. Its journal namely


Santamil did commendable service to the growth and development of the Tamil Literature. Another Tamil Sangam which also strove to promote the study of Tamil classics, was the one established by T. Ramakrishna Pillai and C.R. Namasivaya Mudaliyar at Madras in 1907. The services rendered by these forums for the revival of Tamil literature were remarkable.

Tamil Classics Moved from Palm Leaves to Printing

The Sangam classics were originally handed over from generation to generation by recitation. At a later stage palm leaf materials were used as writing materials. This practice continued till the introduction of the printing press. It is unfortunate that none, either scholars or local princes or zamindars, had taken any effort to collect those manuscripts and preserve them in libraries. They were in fact under the custody of private individuals who allowed them to be eaten away by moth. Because of this carelessness numerous volumes of literature perished. When the boons of printing press were made available the Tamil scholars felt the necessity of bringing the literary works written on palm leaves to print. In this respect the endeavours of Arumugha Navalar, Demodaram Pillai of Jafna and U.V. Swaminatha Ayyar are praiseworthy. A large number of books of ancient literature which had fallen into oblivion had been rediscovered due to the earnest endeavours of scholars, which revealed to the world the ancient glory, richness and splendour of the Tamil literature. It cannot be denied that it also brought about a great change in the outlook of Tamil scholars who "elaborated the picture of an early and once widespread Dravidian Civilization, separate and distinct from the Aryan and Sanskritic."\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{119} Spratt, DMK in Power, (Bombay, 1970), p.4.
Of the enthusiasts who worked out theories regarding the antiquity of the Dravidians, P. Sundaram Pillai, Professor of Philosophy in Maharaja College, Trivandrum, was the foremost. In a famous essay on "the Basic Element in Hindu Civilization" contributed to the Madras Standard, he expressed his view that "South India, and particularly the Tamil area, was culturally self-sufficient and could be independent of the arts and philosophy of Sanskrit and the north." In his celebrated work, Nanomaniyam, a modern drama, he spoke high of Tamil language. He contended that it was Tamil that ruled over the entire world before Sanskrit came to the South.

Another notable scholar who echoed the same sentiment was V. Kanakasabhai Pillai who, in his celebrated historical work, The Tamils 1800 Years Ago emunctated that the Tamils had attained a high degree of civilization before the advent of the Aryans. The theories, propounded by Rev. Robert Caldwell found explicit exposition in the writings of Tamil savants like Maraimalai Adigal and Somasundara Bharathi. They argued that the Dravidians were autochthons of South India and that they possessed a very rich civilization of their own before the advent of the Aryans. It "owed nothing to Aryan Culture but rather gave the Aryans a ready made civilization."

\[120\] E.F. Irshick, Politics and Social Conflict in South India, pp.282-283.

\[121\] "உலகின்ற முதலிய விசாராண்டை குறிப்பிட்டியன், மற்றும் நாத்ஸ் சக்கிர்கன் சிங்கன், புரோஸ் யார் கிளைந், வெர்ஷல் ரோட்.

\[122\] E.F. Irshick, Politics and Social Conflict in South India, p.285.
Among the Tamil Scholars C. Subramania Bharathi occupies a distinct place. Though he was a Smartha Brahmin, he was against the orthodoxy of his caste. He never hesitated to condemn their so called spiritual superiority. In a letter written to the editor of New India he pointed out the Brahmins of today did not deserve any claim for "spiritual superiority" and therefore they should "voluntarily relinquish all their old pretensions together with the silly and anti-national customs." Further Bharathi ridiculed in one of his poems the untruthful and greedy nature of Brahmins. Thus Bharathi, a revolutionary thinker and a poet who swam against the traditional current of the society, never hesitated to condemn the hypocrisy and snobbishness of the Brahmins even at the risk of social ostracism.

**The Golden Age Theory**

The comparative grammar of Dravidian languages of Rev. Robert Caldwell, the translated works of G.J. Pope, the editing and publishing of the Sangam classics due to the tireless endeavours of Arumugha Navalar, Damodara Pillai and U.V. Swaminatha Ayyar, the literary writings of P. Sundaram Pillai, the historical work of Kanagasabai Pillai and the lyrics of Bharathi—all collectively—contributed to the golden age theory in Tamil history. Emphasising the same theme several literary works in Tamil came into existence. They changed the opinion of the people both about their past and their future. There was a strong belief among the "emerging elite" that the Tamil society had lost all its past glory.

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124 The letter of E.F. Irshick to the scholar, 26 Jan, 1981.
and splendour because of the Brahmins. The availability of a large amount of literature of the Golden Age not only inculcated in them the Dravidian consciousness but also reinforced the doctrine of dual cultures (Aryan and Dravidian) in the Hindu civilization.\textsuperscript{125}

By the second decade of the 20th century the cultural hypothesis that Tamil culture was older than Aryan Sanskrit culture was widely accepted. The theories which became popular gave to the Tamil non-Brahmins both an identity and a sense of cultural self confidence. A crusade of hate was carried on against the Brahmins. They were blamed not only as strangers in the Tamil land but also as destroyers of the Dravidian civilization. Further they were also held responsible for the present degenerate condition of non-Brahmins.\textsuperscript{126} This dictum later became part of the programme of the Justice Party. In his welcome address at the First Non-Brahmin Confederation held at Madras on 25th December 1917, P. Theagaraya Chetty spoke as follows:

\begin{quote}
The genesis of Dravidian civilization does not recognise difference between man and man by birth. The leaders of Dravidian thought, Thiruvalluvar, Avvai and Cumar, do not claim to be born from the brain of the God head. Nayanars and Alwars do not claim greatness by virtue of birth. It is the Aryans who have introduced this birth distinction, which they have elaborated into the system of Varnashrama Dharma with its concomitant evils. It was that civilization which brought about illiteracy in the country, the pedestal on which is erected the exclusive oligarchy of the Brahmins. Its tyranny naturally provoked a protest, if not a revolt.\textsuperscript{127}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{125} Spratt, \textit{DMK in Power}, p.6.

\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Dravidian}, 26 July 1917, (Madras NMR, 1917).

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Justice, Commemoration Day Supplement}, 26 Feb. 1931.
Thus the Justice Party was in a sense the political manifestation of the Dravidianist sentiment.  

The Political Organisation for the Non-Brahmins - A Long-felt Need

The dichotomy of the South Indian society into Brahmin and non-Brahmin was the logical outcome of the cultural self-confidence gained by the non-Brahmin communities due to the articulation of the myth of Dravidian origin. Rev. Robert Caldwell in his works focused on the Brahmin and non-Brahmin - Aryan and Dravidian "divide". By the end of the 19th century a good number of young students from non-Brahmin castes evinced an increasing interest "in the pursuit of urban occupations, higher education, and urban politics." When they moved to urban areas particularly to the city of Madras, they found the educational institutions, the politics and the public services, preponderated by the Brahmins. A sense of disappointment and frustration naturally developed in them. They also found something else even more disconcerting; a loss of difference and social status. It was at this time the works of Rev. Robert Caldwell were taught in schools and colleges. It cannot be denied that his works had considerable impact on the "emerging elite". They also felt that the places and positions which legitimately belonged to non-Brahmins were usurped by the Brahmins and it was imperative on their part to make organised efforts to combat the dominance of the Brahmins.


The twin remarkable pamphlets entitled (1) The Non-Brahmin Races and Indian Public Service and (2) The Ways and Means for the Amelioration of the Non-Brahmin Races, written by an aggrieved non-Brahmin official with a pen-name "Fair Play" as early as 1895 were the earliest remonstrances against the Brahmin supremacy in public services. These works were in fact written in the form of open letters to His Excellency Lord Wenlock, Governor of Fort St. George.

The first pamphlet namely The Non-Brahmin Races and the Indian Public Service, came out with an open accusation that the Brahmin theocracy in a modified form still existed even a century and a half after the advent of British rule. It declared that despite the fact that the British were called the rulers of India it was only the Brahmins who ruled it and the Indian National Congress represented only the Brahmin interests. Besides, it made a lofty plea for reservations in the Indian Public Services for the non-Brahmins in proportion to their population.

The second pamphlet which bears the title The Ways and Means for the Amelioration of the Non-Brahmin Races is a weighty memorandum. It gave a scheme for the institution of a National Association to secure equalization in distribution of appointments in the Public Services among all classes of the people. Further it laid stress on the unity of the non-Brahmin races so as to enable them to emancipate themselves from the present

131 E.F. Irschick, Politics and Social Conflict in South India, pp. 20-21.

132 Ibid., p.222.
unhappy position. It also made a fervent appeal to the Princes, the Zamindars and the gentry in general for starting a journal with a view to infusing "continued exertion" into such an Association. ¹³³

These pamphlets were indeed the earliest manifestations of the long burning feeling of hatred, jealousy and fear felt by the educated non-Brahmins towards the Brahmins. The language in which these open letters are couched reveals that the author "Fair Play" should have been influenced by the Malayali or Travancore Memorial submitted to the Maharaja of Travancore a couple of years back (1891). The very fact that the signatory of the first non-Brahmin Manifesto, F. Theagaraya Chetty, used the tone of these pamphlets in advocating the cause of the non-Brahmins, bears testimony not only to their influence but also to the fact that the anti-Brahmin sentiment was neither a sudden eruption nor a new phenomenon of the early decades of the 20th century. Similarly Fair Play's appeal to the zamindars to start a journal to give guidance to the Association was really an anticipation of the role that the zamindars played in the activities of the Justice Party. But the very fact that the scheme given by Fair Play had not materialised till the early decades of this century shows that there was no ready response to the pamphlets of Fair Play. However the sonorous tune of the song of Fair Play was heard through the spate of letters which appeared in the columns of various news papers. In an editorial in 1913 the Malayali condemned the preponderate position of the Brahmins in political life and urged the non-Brahmins to organise an effective opposition to them. ¹³⁴ The Madras Mail which sympathised

¹³³ Fair Play (Pseud), The Ways and Means for the Amelioration of the Non-Brahmin Races, (Madras, 1893), Contents page.

¹³⁴ Malayali, 1 Aug. 1913 (Madras NNR, 1913).
with the cause of the non-Brahmins published through its columns many a letter written by the non-Brahmin enthusiasts impressing on the public the need for the creation of a association for the amelioration of the non-Brahmin communities.

It is worth mentioning here that an abortive attempt was made by two Madras city advocates namely P. Subramanyam and M. Purushotham Naidu to organise an Association under the nomenclature 'The Madras non-Brahmin Association' in 1909. These lawyers made an announcement that they desired to enlist thousand members initially and hoped to accomplish it before the end of October 1909. Since there was no definite response from the non-Brahmin public, their efforts ended in fiasco. The lack of leadership from the influential section of the non-Brahmin community may be adduced as one of the reasons for the failure in forming an organisation for the non-Brahmins by these lawyers.

Madras Dravida Association - The Precursor of Justice Party

The genesis of the Justice Party can be traced to the starting of a social organisation called 'the Madras United League'. A few aggrieved non-Brahmin officials of the Revenue Board and other government institutions who suffered from the partiality and unfair treatment of their Brahmin superiors formed this association solely for the purpose of ventilating their grievances in respect of their prospects in their official career. Among them, Saravana Pillai, (subsequently Deputy


136 Justice Party Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 1968, p.257. The year of its establishment is not known exactly. No documentary evidence is available.
Collector at Tanjore), G. Veerasami Naidu, Doraiswamy Mudaliar (of Engineering Department) and S. Narayanaswami Naidu (of Revenue Board Office) were prominent. Though the initiative was taken by a set of government officials to form an association for the cause of non-Brahmins, the leadership and guidance came from Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar, a non-official, service-minded and popular doctor of Triplicane.\textsuperscript{137} No sooner was it started than it captured the imagination of many prominent citizens of Madras including C. Karunakara Menon, the Editor of the Indian Patriot, a popular English Daily and P. Ramarayaringar (later the Rajah of Panagal and First Minister of the Madras State).\textsuperscript{138} In the beginning it had no constructive programme worth mentioning. Before this League blossomed into a full-fledged non-Brahmin organisation, its nomenclature was changed into Madras Dravidian Association at its first annual meeting, as its original name was not indicative of either its constituent elements or its purpose.

The association with the new name i.e. Madras Dravidian Association started functioning from 10th November 1912\textsuperscript{139} with new rules and regulations. In a short time, it became broad-based and many branches were started at various places in the city. Though its activities were confined only to the city of Madras, support to its aims and objects came from enthusiastic and influential non-Brahmin leaders from mofussil centres like Madura.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{137} Election pamphlet issued on behalf of Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar on 18th Feb. 1937.


\textsuperscript{139} The date is given as per the records collected from Mani, nephew of Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar.

\textsuperscript{140} Justice Party Golden Jubilee Souvenir 1968, p.259.
- வல்லார் வேறுபடுத்தி, உருசிய போர் முழுமையானது என்றால்?

- பொருள் வேறுபடுத்தி, 28 வேறுபடுத்தி முழுமையானது என்றால்?

- வரைபடக் குறிப்பிட்டு வேறுபடுத்தி என்றால்?

- வரைபடக் குறிப்பிட்டு வேறுபடுத்தி, உருசிய போர் முழுமையானது என்றால்?

- வரைபடக் குறிப்பிட்டு வேறுபடுத்தி, உருசிய போர் முழுமையானது என்றால்?

- வரைபடக் குறிப்பிட்டு வேறுபடுத்தி, உருசிய போர் முழுமையானது என்றால்?

- வரைபடக் குறிப்பிட்டு வேறுபடுத்தி, உருசிய போர் முழுமையானது என்றால்?

- வரைபடக் குறிப்பிட்டு வேறுபடுத்தி, உருசிய போர் முழுமையானது என்றால்?

- வரைபடக் குறிப்பிட்டு வேறுபடுத்தி, உருசிய போர் முழுமையானது என்றால்?
Proceedings of a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Madras Denim Association held on 24 June 1956, held at no. 141/18, Channangalam and Sele, Tiruchirapalli.

Present:—
Mr. Ranganayakam
C. Rajagopal
C. Ramaswamy
C. Narayanan
C. Nallak Iyer
A. Ramaswamy
A. Madavan

Resolved that in pursuance of the desire expressed by the President, the Honourable Mr. E. Ramaswamy, the balance of an amount now in the hands of Mr. and Shri Madavan, of Rs. 5,000/-, after deducting the advance of Rs. 2,500/- paid to them, be accepted as the same be used for the purchase of a building for the Association.

Resolved that the site in Chennamkuru, Madurai street, Tiruchirapalli, in premises No. 10, be purchased for the Association, and that the documents of title be sent to Messrs. M. Ramaswamy, for their opinion.

[Signatures]

Chairman
C. Ramaswamy
C. Nallak Iyer
A. Madavan
A. Ramaswamy
When the association grew popular, its membership swelled thereby necessitating the amendment of its rules at the general body meeting held on 5th April 1914 in order to give new orientation to its goal. Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar was made the Honorary Secretary and S.J. Rangaramanujam, a Barrister-at-Law, became the Assistant Secretary and Treasurer. It is not known who was designated as the President of the Association; perhaps the Honorary Secretary performed the role of president as well. It is seen from the proceedings of the Executive Committee that prominent Muslim citizens like Muhamed Ibrahim, a High Court Advocate, evinced interest in the activities of the Association.

The spectacular activity of this association was the annual "At Home" to the non-Brahmin graduates of the year. This was the occasion which brought "the capable and brilliant young men of the community on one platform and introduced them to the elite of the non-Brahmin communities. The first congratulatory meeting of the new graduates was held at the Hindu High School, Triplicane, under the presidency of Gooty P. Kesava Pillai, a veteran Parliamentarian. R. K. Shanmugham Chetty replied to the toast of the new graduates. This function attracted many eminent non-Brahmin leaders of the city including P. Theagaraya Chetty and the Rajah of Panagal.

Another significant task successfully carried out by this Association was the running of a hostel for the non-Brahmin students.

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141 The photo copy of the proceedings of the Executive Committee of the Madras Dravidian Association is appended.
143 Ibid.
at Akbar Sahib Street in Triplicane. This was a long-felt need of the
students who went over to the city from mofussil centres for the purpose
of pursuing higher studies in city colleges, as they were not permitted to
eat in Brahmin hotels. "The establishment of the Dravidian Association
hostel was the first practical step of a small but important group of
non-Brahmins in Madras to organise themselves."\textsuperscript{144} Since the hostel gave
shelter to helpless Dravidian (non-Brahmin) students of mofussil areas,
it was aptly called the "Dravidian Home". Among the students who stayed
in the hostel, the most notable were T.N. Narayanasami Pillai who later
became the Vice-Chancellor of the Annamalai University and Subramania
Nadar, who later rose to the position of a Judge of the Madras High
Court.\textsuperscript{145} Though this hostel did commendable service to the non-Brahmin
students, it was closed when the Brahmin hotels were thrown open to
non-Brahmins.

Besides, this association served as a forum not only for the
political leaders but also for literary figures. Under its auspices many
literary and political meetings were organised. On 15th May 1914
M. Singaravelu Chettiar spoke on "Our Present Social Needs". It is
interesting to mention here that Mrs. Besant, who later turned out to be
an arch-enemy of the non-Brahmin movement, was invited by the association
to deliver a lecture on "The Conditions of Progress" on 30th October 1914.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{144} According to E.F. Irschick that the hostel was started in
June 1916 but K. Nambi Arorcan gives the date as July 1916. But the records
collected by the scholar discloses that it was started in 1914.

\textsuperscript{145} Interview with Dr. S.G. Manavala Ramanujam, former
Vice-Chancellor of the Annamalai University.

\textsuperscript{146} K. Nambi Arorcan, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism*,
1905-1944, p.43.
The Publication of Non-Brahmin Letters

The most commendable work that the Dravidian Association did was the publication of two books in 1915 which had tremendous influence in awakening the non-Brahmins. The Dravidian Worthies was the one written by C. Sankaran Nair and the other was the non-Brahmin letters by an obscure author whose identity still remains a mystery. E.F. Irschick considers these two books as the publication of C. Karunakara Menon. The non-Brahmin letters is a set of 21 epistles, signed and addressed to different persons by name. The forms of address revealed the caste titles such as Reddy, Naidu and Mudaliar. Generally these letters portrayed not only "the current feelings of despair" of the non-Brahmin communities but also reflected "the growing consciousness among educated non-Brahmin youth of their lowly position in society."

They emphatically spoke out the disunity and the jealousy that prevailed among the non-Brahmins and condemned their foolishness in pursuing their traditional occupations without taking advantage of the Western education. They had to blame themselves for not having high ambitions to occupy powerful positions in the bureaucratic service of the Government of Fort St. George. They further disclosed how the non-Brahmins had become "the victims of their own sense of inferiority." These epistles urged the non-Brahmins to organise a movement for their unity and progress and even pleaded for the establishment of a "national" college making the Dravidian vernaculars as media of

147 K. Nambi Arorcan, Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism 1905-1911, p.44.

148 E.F. Irschick, Politics and Social Conflict in South India, pp.46-47.

149 Ibid., p.47.
Thus the publication of these letters symbolised the political awareness of the non-Brahmins that the establishment of an organisation to fight against Brahmin monopoly both in the field of education and in public services was the imperative need. The publication of those letters was timely. There is no doubt that their influence on the educated non-Brahmins during the process of organising themselves into a party should have been considerable. The Madras Dravidian Association had grown into a powerful and mature organisation of much importance. It was this organisation which prepared the ground for the emergence of the Justice Party. Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar, who had realised the dire necessity and usefulness of an organisation for the non-Brahmins, was instrumental in bringing about a reconciliation between P. Theagaraya Chetty and Dr. T.M. Nair who were at loggerheads in the Madras Corporation Council. These two irreconcilable leaders, burying their hatchet and forgetting their old rivalries, joined hands to launch a movement for the mute millions of non-Brahmin communities. The two leaders were described as Sakthi and Siva of the Justice Party. Perhaps that was the reason why it was devided by the opponents as Chetty - Nair movement. But for the endeavours of Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar, these two stalwarts, (Dr. T.M. Nair and P. Theagaraya Chetty) would not have come together and started the Justice Party. Therefore the part played by Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar in the establishment of the Justice Party is remarkable. He richly deserves to be called one of the founding fathers of the Justice Party.

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150 Ibid.

151 Interview with Dr. Washbrook on 28th Feb. 1981.

152 Justice, Commemoration Day Supplement, 26 Feb. 1931.
theory that the Justice Party was started by non-Tamils is not tenable. As stated already, the Madras Dravidian Association had offered a political platform to non-Brahmin leaders like Dr. T.M. Nair even before the Justice Party was started. In this respect the Madras Dravidian Association might be rightly called, the predecessor to the Justice Party. Thus "it was the intelligent anticipation of the Justice Party; it was the genesis of the latter in a true sense."\textsuperscript{153} This point gets reinforced from yet another fact that the men who came forward to join the South Indian Liberal Federation were the group of lawyers and bureaucrats who constituted the Madras Dravidian Association. It may therefore be concluded that the Madras Dravidian Association provided a ready-made organisation to the non-Brahmin leaders to work further towards their goals. Even though the organiser of the Association, Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar, gave heart and soul to the Justice Party, he had not allowed it to become defunct. It continued to function along with the Justice Party receiving enthusiastic support from its leaders. In pursuance of the announcement on 20th August 1917, Lord Chelmsford the Viceroy and Mr. Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, arrived in Madras on Friday the 14th December 1917 to receive the views and suggestions of representative bodies and others on the proposed reforms. Of the several deputations which waited on them, four represented the non-Brahmins of this Presidency. One of the said four was that of Madras Dravidian Association. P. Ramaswanyanagar read the address of the Madras Dravidian Association\textsuperscript{154} Its importance


grew by leaps and bounds when Arcot Ramaswami Mudaliar gave evidence before the Joint Parliamentary Committee in London as the representative of the Madras Dravidian Association. Its existence and active functioning were well demonstrated when Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar sent cables to several conservative newspapers in England emphasizing the importance of communal representation to non-Brahmins in the present political context. The cable stated as follows: "Reform without communal representation will end in Brahmin oligarchy and tyranny, leading to trouble and turmoil, strife and faction." The Times published the cable of Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar on 29th August 1919. Thus the Madras Dravidian Association remained indeed a parallel political organization and a force to be reckoned with as long as Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar was alive.

The Last Straw that Broke the Camel's Back

The "red-hot agitation" launched by Mrs. Besant for Home Rule created a ferment in the provincial politics of Madras Presidency and it "soon began to spread like wild fire from district to district." Her success was solely due to her ability to provide her Home Rule campaign with ready-made machinery. As the president of the Theosophical Society she had a huge organization with several thousand members at her command through which it was possible to link the Presidency Capital with a very large number of mossul towns. Much more as a theosophist than as a

158 D.A. Washbrook, The Emergence of Provincial Politics, p.290.
political agitator she was very intimately connected with many of the leading men of Mylapore clique and got herself involved along with them in many cultural, religious and educational schemes. She praised Indian religion and philosophy during the course of her lectures and speeches. "Hinduism was for her, an all-embracing faith, free from sectarianism, the real hope for the regeneration of India."\(^{159}\) Her interpretations of Indian culture and religion were based upon the laws of Manu, and the explanatory notes of Puranas and the Itihicasas whose value was questioned by the "emerging elite" since they had their misgiving about their bonafide.\(^{160}\) As she was exclusively in the company of Brahmins and believed whatever they said, she erred in understanding the structural pattern of South Indian society. "She was in part a victim of the personal associations she had built in her Theosophical work."\(^{161}\) Therefore she turned a blind eye to the disabilities under which non-Brahmins were suffering and taunted them with attempting to pull down the meritorious and forward people.\(^{162}\) On the contrary, "by exalting everything Brahminical, by giving an esoteric meaning or scientific explanation to every unjust and oppressive custom prevailing among the Hindus, Mrs. Besant made an attempt to give a new lease of life to Brahminical domination and oppression of other castes."\(^{163}\) As the bulk of her enthusiastic supporters and key

\(^{159}\) Rajkumar, Annie Besant’s Rise to Power in Indian Politics 1914-1917, (New Delhi, 1981), p.73

\(^{160}\) E.F. Irschick, Politics and Social Conflict in South India, p.44.

\(^{161}\) Ibid.

\(^{162}\) Interview with Dr. A. Krishnaswami, Ex. M.P., on 30 Oct. 1978.

\(^{163}\) An appeal to Labour K.Ps by K.V. Reddi Naidu and A. Ramaswami Mudaliar on 1 Sep. 1919.
advisers were only Brahmins, they felt that their interests would be sufficiently protected by the Home Rule League if it emerged successful in attaining self-government. When her movement gained momentum, the Mylapore clique gave her all out support. S. Subramania Aiyer shouldered the responsibility of the Presidentship of her league when Dadabhai Naoroji turned down her request. C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer was her counsel and G.A. Natesan and L.A. Govindaraghava Aiyer were her most trusted and loyal friends. Her close association with the Mylapore clique irritated the non-Brahmin leaders who nicknamed her as "Irish Brahman." 164 Her followers, mostly Brahmins, called her respectfully as Amma-mother- since they would not mention her name. They used to prostrate before her. 165 S. Subramania Aiyer and T. Sadasiva Aiyer were said to worship her almost as mother. 166 Having enjoyed the support of a well learned and powerful group of Brahmins, she indulged in seditious talk. "An American Missionary has written to the District Magistrate of Ramnad describing Mrs. Besant as "a growing menace to the peace of the country" and expressing the opinion that her agitation needs to be repressed or it is sure that there will be a big seditious movement again." 167 It is true that there had been systematic endeavours on her part to represent the government as "foreign despots" whose "favourite weapons" were the gag and the "letter de cachet" and to project the view that the rule of the British turned gardens into deserts. This kind of


165 Fortnightly Report, 17 July 1917.


167 Fortnightly Report, 1 Nov, 1915.
propaganda was bound to do grave injury to ill-instructed or partially instructed minds. "When the Madras Government tried to take steps to deal with what it saw to be the rising tide of sedition it found itself shackled by the agents of Mylapore, who were now part of it." It cannot be denied Mylapore was hand in glove with Mrs. Besant in all her deeds. S. Srinivasa Iyengar, the Attorney-General, averted the prosecutions for sedition by using his influence. Similarly T. Sadasiva Aiyer and T.V. Seshagiri Aiyar, the two famous High Court Judges, annulled the sentences given by the lower courts for sedition. By clever manoeuvres and manipulations the Brahmin officials made a large sum of government money find their way to the New India Press to pay for advertisements. As members of the Corporation of Madras in 1915 J.A. Natesan and C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer were able to extend patronage either by way of appointments or assigning contracts to men of their own group. In the same way, G.A. Natesan established his influence in the Senate of the Madras University by making the European Syndicate dance to his tunes.

It is seen from the forces that were at work in 1916 that the influence and authority of Mylapore were something unsurmountable and its support to Home Rule League posed as a threat to the tranquility of the country. It was therefore legitimately felt by many of the British civilians that "the enemy seemed to be already within the gates." Besides, a few zamindars like Kumara Maharaja of Vijayanagaram came


forward to support the cause of the Home Rule League. It is accidental that a large number of mirasidars of Tanjore who were opposed to emigration of labourers drew nearer to Home Rule League since it "picked up the issue of emigrant labour and called on the government to regulate more closely and, in some instances, stop completely the traffic."\textsuperscript{171} When Mrs. Besant was able to mobilize force after force, the British Government felt that her Home Rule League constituted "an extremely serious threat to the continued existence of the raj."

The British servants of Fort St. George perceived in the Home Rule agitation a potential danger not only to the Government for which they worked but also to themselves and their social position. The conciliatory attitude of Edwin Montagu towards Home Rule League made them feel that their superiors at London desired to sacrifice them to Indian political sentiment. It was obvious that they were against the principle of sharing their offices and status with the octerie of Mylapore.\textsuperscript{172} They thought that non-Brahminism which was already coming into shape would be "a countermovement of loyalty". Hence their encouragement and support to non-Brahmin cause. Instead of viewing it as their political strategy of divide and rule, it can very well be considered as a move to destroy the oligarchy of Mylapore.

\textbf{The Defeat of the Non-Brahmin Leaders at the Elections of 1916}

The elections to the Imperial Legislative Council took place in 1916. The Madras Legislative Council had to elect two members. There were

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., p.293.

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., p.294.
seven contestants. But the composition of the council revealed that a majority of them were Brahmans. The non-Brahmin leaders, relying very much on the false support of the Brahmans, had fielded Dr. T.M. Nair as a candidate against V.S. Srinivasa Sastry. The Brahmin members of the Council who were jealous of Dr. T.M. Nair’s popularity and influence voted in favour of V.S. Srinivasa Sastry contrary to their promise. In the fray V.S. Srinivasa Sastry for the Southern districts and B.N. Sharma for the northern districts emerged successful. Logically the defeat of Dr. T.M. Nair was considered as the defeat of non-Brahmins at the hands of the Brahmans. Similarly P. Ramarayanagar was defeated by K.V. Rangaswami Iyengar, a zamindar of Trichnopoly, in the election to the Imperial Legislative Council from the landlords constituency in 1916. Even K.V. Reddi Naik faced a similar defeat in a council election that was held in the same year. It is strange to note that the nascent leaders of non-Brahmin movement including P. Theagaraya Chetty were all defeated in various council elections held in 1916 by men with Home Rule and Nylapore connections. Even Brahmin leaders like Prakasam admitted that the selfishness of the Brahmans coupled with administrative authority was responsible for the defeat of the well known non-Brahmin leaders. Thus the elections of 1916 not only brought about disappointment to the non-Brahmin leaders but also aggravated the feeling of communal animosity between Brahmans and non-Brahmins. It was

173 S. Sarawathi, Minorities in Madras State, p.66. The contestants were: (i) C. Karunakara Menon, (ii) B.N. Sharma, (iii) Dr. T.M. Nair, (iv) V.S. Srinivasa Sastry, (v) C. Vijayaraghavachariar, (vi) N. Subba Rao Pantulu and (vii) Nawab Syed Mohamed.

174 Ibid.


widely felt that unless the political power of the Brahmins was broken there would be no opportunity for the resurgence of non-Brahmin communities.

The significance of the outcome of the elections of 1916 was immensely great. The defeat of the non-Brahmin stalwarts served as a catalyst to organise a non-Brahmin party and the cry of Home Rule raised by Mrs. Besant and Kylispoor hastened its formation. The non-Brahmin leaders had genuine apprehension that in the event of Home Rule the Brahmins who were predominant in every quarter would keep the non-Brahmins down-trodden and it would pave way for the revival of their supremacy of the days of Manu. In other words Home Rule would mean Brahmin Rule. Further they felt that the unrestrained sway of the Brahmins might hamper the progress of the Backward communities. More than the disappointment "the fear of a Brahmin take-over of political power" if Mrs. Besant succeeded in her Home Rule endeavours forced the non-Brahmin leaders to think in terms of a political association for the welfare of their community. It is apparently true that "the Brahmin leaders of the time failed to allay the growing apprehension in the minds of the non-Brahmins." It was clear that they did not expect the walls of Jerico to fall. Thus the Home Rule League of Mrs. Besant which was the nerve centre of the Nationalist movement in Madras Presidency triggered off the non-Brahmin movement.

The Birth of the Justice Party

The long smouldering fear and suspicion of the "emerging elite" towards the Brahmins became institutionalised when "non-Brahmin gentlemen

177 Swadeshabimani, 4 May 1917, (Madras NNR, 1917).
179 S. Saraswathi, Minorities in Madras State, p.66.
180 Interview with Dr. A. Krishnaswamy on 30 Oct. 1928.
of position and influence both in Madras and in the moifusil" met at a conference at the Victoria Public Hall in Madras city on 20th November 1916, and resolved to take measures to "start a company for publishing a newspaper advocating the cause of the non-Brahmin community" and also to form a political association in order "to advance, safeguard and protect the interests of the same community." Accordingly, a joint-stock company was started under the name of "South Indian People's Association" for conducting a daily newspaper in English, Tamil and Telugu respectively. A political association was also formed under the name of "The South Indian Liberal Federation", whose purpose was "to promote the political interests of non-Brahmin caste Hindus."

The Magnacarta of the Non-Brahmins

The South Indian People's Association - the joint-stock company - issued the historic document - the great charter of the non-Brahmins - "The Non-Brahmin Manifesto", addressed to the non-Brahmin gentlemen throughout the Presidency under the signature of its secretary P. Theagaraya Chetty at the end of December 1916. He was a great commercial magnate, the President of the South Indian Chamber of Commerce, the eldest member of the Corporation of Madras and an ex-member of the legislature. The publication of the manifesto marks the inception of the non-Brahmin movement. The reasons, objects and scope of the movement were clearly set out in the prospectus.

1. The primary purpose of the document was to define the attitude of the several important non-Brahmin Indian communities in the Presidency of Madras towards the Indian Home Rule movement, which the manifesto described

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187 The text of the Manifesto which has been appended was collected from C.R. Reddy papers, N.M.M.L. New Delhi.
"in trenchant language as an extravagant scheme, devised by the radical politicians of the Brahmin caste not content with having secured the practical monopoly of the political power."

2. The Manifesto laid emphasis that the non-Brahmins were not in favour of any measure which were designed to undermine the influence and authority of the British rulers who alone in the present circumstances of India were able to hold the scales even between creed and class and to develop that sense of unity and natural solidarity without which India would continue to be congeries of mutually exclusive and warring groups, without a common purpose and a common partisanship. 182

3. It argued with "convincing statistics" quoting the evidence of Sir Alexander Cardew, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras, before the Public Service Commission that the Brahmins were overwhelmingly predominant in the public services, in the University of Madras, in the High Court of Judicature and in all political appointments thrown open to Indians.

4. It asserted further that the non-Brahmins were "strongly in favour of progressive political development." It went on to point out that the Indian National Congress in its early days was a truly national institution. Unfortunately it had become a sectarian body and it represented only the views of the social reactionary and the impatient political idealist. Therefore it gave a clarion call to the non-Brahmins to organise themselves in associations under the responsible guidance of leading non-Brahmin gentlemen for the advancement of the education of the non-Brahmin classes.

182 The Non-Brahmin Manifesto, p.3.
5. It concluded with an appeal to the non-Brahmins who formed not less than 40 out of 41.5 millions of the population of this presidency "to do everything possible to ensure the general development of their community on a broad and enduring basis and to quit their attitude of silence and inaction and definitely assert and press their claims as against the virtual domination of the Brahmin Castes." 183

At the bottom of the manifesto there was a note which requested non-Brahmin gentlemen "desirous of joining the movement to correspond with R.P. Theagaraya Chetty, Tondiarpet, Madras or with T. Ethiraja Mudaliar, High Court Vakil, Poornamallee Road, Madras."

The Non-Brahmin Manifesto which bore the imprints of Fair Play's pamphlets was an eye-opener to many a non-Brahmin who remained silent over the caste tyranny to which the whole community of non-Brahmins was subjected to. It was the beginning of a long struggle which non-Brahmins waged against the reactionary forces for their uplift. It is unique in the sense that while the leaders of the non-Brahmin movement in other states of South India submitted memorials to their monarchs in Madras a manifesto was promulgated.

Journalistic Onslaught

Some of the journals of the time characterised it as "the still-born babe" and "the product of cynical and diseased mind." The Hindu which always carried a tirade against the Justice Party wrote on 20th December 1916 as follows:

It is with much pain and surprise that we have perused this document. It gives a manifestly distorted and unfair representation of many of the matters to which it makes reference. It can serve no good purpose but it is bound to create bad blood between persons belonging to the same great Indian Community. 184

183 Fortnightly Report, 1 Jan. 1917.
184 The Hindu, 20 Dec. 1916. (Madras NMR, 1916); It is also cited in S. Saraswathi, Minorities in Madras State. p.42.
The attitude of the Hindu towards non-Brahmin movement was extremely hostile. It wantonly refused to give publicity to any of the activities of this movement on the plea that it would lead to an acrimonious controversy. S. Saraswathi estimates that "this Canute-like attitude of non-recognition and the tactics of smothering a movement by blacking it out now appear politically immature and maladroit." The papers like Hindu Nesan did not question the propriety of the movement but its timing; it observed: "We see no reason why such a movement should be started at this juncture when the Hindus and the Muhammadans have united together to ask for self-government for India." New India, the organ of the Home Rule League, was the arch-enemy of the Justice Party. It described the non-Brahmin movement as "already a pent-up force" and expected its premature death.

The dynamic leadership of Dr. T.M. Nair and Theagaraya Chetty attracted not only "the members of the emerging elite" but also many large land owners, mirasdars and zamindars and made them extend a solid support to the newly organised movement. A good number of bureaucrats and a group of lawyers who were originally members of the Madras Dravidian Association joined this movement. To begin with, the Justice Party was thus composed of "a socially stable element of the urban population and a tightly-knit elite." Though the leadership of the party was vested in the well-to-do

185 S. Saraswathi, Minorities in Madras State, p.122.
187 New India, 6 Jan. 1917. (Madras NNR. 1917).
188 D.A. Washbrook, The Emergence of Provincial Politics, p.297.
189 R.L. Hardgrave JR. The Dravidian Movement, p.16.
section of the society it acted in the larger interests of the community as a whole.

The Journals of the Party

The chief purpose of the South Indian People's Association - the joint-stock company of the non-Brahmin movement - was to run a daily newspaper in English, Tamil and Telugu. The capital required for the undertaking was approximately a lakh of rupees. Till the end of the second week of February 1917 it was estimated that the promoters of the company had collected 640 shares (of Rs.100 each)\(^{190}\) and bought a press for about Rs.40,000/-.

Negotiations went on between the promoters and Karunakara Menon, the editor of the Indian Patriot for the purchase of the paper and for his employment on a monthly salary of Rs.350-400 as the editor of the newspaper. The name of the paper was to be changed to Justice, the policy of which was to be determined by the Directors.\(^{191}\) Six days before the date announced for the appearance of the journal Justice, the negotiations broke off. Karunakara Menon, who had agreed to edit the new paper receiving Rs.19,000/- for his press, withdrew from the bargain on nationalistic pretext. It was believed by leaders like Theagaraya Chetty that Mrs. Besant, C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer and P. Kesava Pillai were the people who brought about a break in the negotiations.\(^{192}\) The mantle fell on Dr. T.M. Nair who had volunteered to be the honorary editor. P.N. Raman Pillai, formerly the editor of the Madras Standard and M.S. Poornalingam Pillai formerly the Vice-Principal

\(^{190}\) *Fortnightly Report*, 16 Feb. 1917.

\(^{191}\) Ibid., 2 Feb. 1917.

of the Hindu College, Tinnelvelly, were appointed as sub-editors. Theagaraya Chetty, the printer and publisher issued a circular stating that the object of the paper, *Justice* would be "to assist the educational, social, economic, political and material progress of the people of the presidency in general and of the non-Brahmin Hindu community in particular." The first issue of the *Justice* was published on the 26th February 1917. It is quite interesting to note, that Dr. T.M. Nair, fascinated by the name of the journal *La Justice* that Clemencieu, an outstanding French radical, edited, gave the same title to the newspaper that his party started. *Dravida*ian, the Tamil newspaper of the Party, which was started in June 1917 was edited by Baktavatsalam Pillai assisted by an able staff, consisting of Swami Rudrajotiswara, Pandit Vilvapathy Chettier and a few others. Similarly, the party acquired a well-known Telugu paper, the *Andhra Prakesika* (started in 1885) for the benefit of Telugu readers. It was edited by A.C. Parthasarathi Naidu a veteran journalist who was ably assisted by Raghaviah Naidu and Narasimha Rao Naidu. These journals did quite a lot to open the eyes of the non-Brahmin community to the disabilities and injustices which they were forced to undergo. One remarkable feature of this movement was that a number of workers came forward to render steady and valuable services to the cause of the party in a most ungrudging and enthusiastic spirit voluntarily. Among them T. Singara Mudaliar, a retired government officer, and P. Narayanaswami Mudaliar a retired Municipal Officer, were notable. The former was devoted to the supervision of printing department and the latter to the secretarial work of the South Indian Liberal Federation.


subscriptions for the non-Brahmin news papers and funds for the activities of the party were sought and obtained from a number of moneyed people and though within a year of its inception the Justice Party had collected nearly one lakh of rupees, its financial position was not sound. Since the journals of the non-Brahmin movement suffered from acute financial distress Thesagaraya Chetty issued an appeal in 1919 to the subscribers to be regular and prompt in their payment so as to enable the Directors to tide over the financial difficulties. The cost of the paper which had gone up due to the war made financial position of these papers worse. Under these adverse circumstances it became painfully necessary to convert the Dravidan and the Andhra Prakasika into weekly papers. But for the timely help rendered by a few zamindars and land-lords these organs would have met an early extinction. The Directors appealed "with confidence to every non-Brahmin official and schoolmaster drawing a salary, say, of Rs.75 a month and more, and every non-Brahmin vakil, every merchant, tradesman and every landholder to subscribe for a copy of Justice and a copy of one of the two vernacular papers for the use of his family and thus ensure the continued existence and success of these newspapers and of the non-Brahmin movement." 195 Justice, the organ of non-Brahmin Party, became a formidable political force in Madras Presidency capable of meeting any challenge thrown by its adversaries within a short time.

The non-Brahminism was neither a new phenomenon in Madras Presidency at the time of the genesis of the Justice Party nor a product of government policy as visualised by D.A. Washbrook. There was a deep social cleavage between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins from time immemorial.

The Brahmins of the Madras Presidency had retained an exclusiveness of caste orthodoxy. As stated earlier, the diacritical differences that existed between these communities, contributed to "social jealousies" the manifestation of which came only in the beginning of this century. Besides, the Brahmins lived as distinct social group in a separate place called Agragaram. The non-Brahmins abstained from entering their houses. A Brahmin in South Indian society was considered to be a different cultural being. The gulf between Brahmins and non-Brahmins was widening day by day. This was noticed by religious reformers like Vivekananda. He advised the Brahmin that the day for "privileges and exclusive claims had gone and it was now his duty to work for social amity." Similarly the dominance of Brahmins in the public services was not a fact suddenly discovered at the dawn of this century. It was perceived as early as 1851 by the British bureaucracy which "suggested policies to check it and also took steps to arrest its pace." In the later half of the 19th century the administration of the districts due to rapid decline of the powers of the zamindars fell into the hands of Brahmins who as Huzurs "acquired the perquisites and dignities of power." In order to prevent the district administration from being overwhelmingly dominated by the Brahmins, the Board of Revenue in Madras proclaimed an Order in 1851 and it was famously known as Standing Order No.128, clause 2. This order aimed at controlling the number of

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196 R.L. Hardgrave, JR. The Dravidian Movement, p.11.
197 "साध्यता मानना राज्यम् अनेक विधाता"
198 S. Saraswathi, Minorities in Madras State, p.59.
199 Ibid., p.56.
201 E.F. Irshick, Politics and Social Conflict in South India, p.220.
Brahmins in the revenue service of the government on the grounds "nepotism was prejudicial to good administration". The Standing Order remained only on paper and it was not implemented till the end of the last century. In an attempt to enforce the Standing Order and to give effect to the recommendations of the Public Services Commission Report of 1886, the Government of Fort St. George resolved to fill up certain vacancies in the Provincial Civil Service by open competition. But this was also a failure. Therefore it deliberately appointed non-Brahmins in Government service from 1904 onwards only as a measure of social justice. Even then Brahmin preponderance in Provincial Civil Service remained unsurpassed. This had been well revealed by Alexander Cardew, the then Chief Secretary, in his evidence before Public Services Commission in 1913, which, Washbrook considers as something "loaded with vitriol against Brahman literati." 202 But it was a candid revelation by a senior officer of the nature of the Brahmin dominance in Provincial Civil Service. He remarked that the Brahmin had maintained his lead in the Provincial Civil Service for the past 30 years. There was no sign of his losing such a position. He attributed further a racial characteristic to the intellectual superiority of the Brahmin. It was unlikely that it would be shaken except after an indefinite lapse of time. 203 The very fact that Theagaraya Chetty quoted the witness of Alexander Cardew in the Non-Brahmin Manifesto shows that his views had created awareness among non-Brahmins. The contention of Washbrook that Alexander Cardew and his colleagues encouraged the non-Brahmins to start the Justice Party as a counter-movement to the Home Rule League is true.


203 E.F. Ireschick, Politics and Social Conflict in South India, p.223.
only to some extent. As stated already, the agitation for Home Rule acted as catalyst and triggered off the non-Brahmin movement. It was only the occasion but not the cause. But at the same time it is wrong to say that non-Brahminism became for a time synonymous with anti-nationalism. What the leaders of non-Brahmin movement advocated in the context of 1916 was an anti-congress and not an anti-national policy.

From the beginning the Justice Party took up the attitude that it was for freedom, but before that was achieved the non-Brahmin leaders should take steps to see that power was shared equitably in the services and in other walks of life under public control. It is worth to quote here a striking sentence from Dr. T.K. Nair's Spur Tank Road address: "I will not be a party to leave the large mass of my countrymen behind and join a flying column in advance and march on progress." In fact Justice Party wanted self-rule with proper safeguards for the Backward class people and also for the Adi-Dravidas. Perhaps the anti-Congress posture of the Justice Party was viewed by the British as anti-national. "It was only more moderate than the Congress Party and it sought to attain its goal of full responsible government through constitutional methods." Therefore the theory of Washbrook that the non-Brahminism was synonymous with anti-nationalism and a product of government policy is not sustainable.

204 D.A. Washbrook, The Emergence of Provincial Politics, p.294.
205 Ibid., p.285.
206 Interview with Dr. A. Krishnaswami on 30 Oct. 1978.
207 Justice, Commemoration Day Supplement, 26 Feb, 1931.
Further, Washbrook holds that the non-Brahmin movement from 1912 was a new political development, but at the same time he agrees that certainly there was status and cultural differences between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. This cultural cleavage was given a political implication when a fear of Brahmin take-over of political power was generated by the Home Rule agitation. Therefore non-Brahminism was not a new phenomenon at the genesis of Justice Party but it was realised as early as 1851 by the British administrators. It was only in 1916 that the feeling of non-Brahminism acquired organisational set up in the form of the Justice Party.

To substantiate his theory, Washbrook further states that "the language of the non-Brahmin movement was closely related to the language of Government." The Non-Brahmin Manifesto spoke in an unambiguous language that the non-Brahmins were not in favour of any measure which was designed to undermine the influence and authority of the British rulers. Therefore there was no reason or rhyme to expect the Justice Party to speak a language of sedition or treason but at the same time it did not mean that the Justice Party was prepared to approve blindly the policy of the British government. When the Home Rule deputation headed by Tilak was stopped from embarking at Colombo by the order of the Home Government transmitted through the Government of India and Government of Ceylon, Justice wrote a strongly worded editorial, condemning the action as an "instance of clumsy bungling". "To permit them to make all the preparations and to get through their demonstrations and shouting and then at the last movement to stop the deputation is undoubtedly more theatrical than reasonable . . . wobbling about is an undignified proceeding, particularly in a Government." 209

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209 Justice, 8 Apr. 1918. (Madras WNR, 1918) also cited in E.F. Irschick, Politics and Social Conflict in South India. pp. 85-86.
In another editorial column, Justice criticised the same action of the government as follows:

The whole incident was the result of the ignorance of the Home authorities as to how valuable the Indian Home Rulers are as partners in the creation of calm political atmosphere. Who knows that before long Mr. Lloyd George may not take Mr. Tilak into partnership and create a calm political atmosphere in England in the same way as the Chelmsford-Besant partnership created the calm political atmosphere in India which we find very soothing.210

On another occasion the Justice Party showed its resentment and emphatically protested against the action of the British government when it included two Brahmins - V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and Surendranath Banerjee - in the Franchise Committee and boycotted it as a mark of self-respect since there was none on the committee to represent the views of the non-Brahmin communities.211 Therefore Washbrook's argument that the language of the Justice Party was very much related to that of the government is not based upon sound reasoning or logic. Further he attempts to repudiate the views of earlier historians especially Hardgrave and Eugene F. Irschick with regard to the emergence of Justice Party. According to E.F. Irschick the growth of literacy among the higher non-Brahmin castes was one of the factors leading to "a growing resentment at the monopoly of government office and public life enjoyed by Brahmins." But this view is contradicted by Washbrook who attempts to establish that the spread of English education among the non-Brahmin groups was not great and that the

210 Justice, 11 Apr. 1918. (Madras NNR, 1918).

211 Public Department (ordinary series) letters Nos. 1019-20, 7 Nov. 1918.
proportion of Brahmin to non-Brahmin students had not varied in 1918 from what it was in 1890. However, he admits that the total number of students had increased. This is a clear instance of self-contradiction. The table in page 77 reveals that the leading non-Brahmin castes such as Nairs, Chettis, Balija Naidus and Madars attained appreciable progress in education. Even with regard to English literacy the non-Brahmin castes had made a gradual progress. This fact Washbrook tries to ignore by referring to the growth of literacy in terms of proportion. The following figures will indicate the tremendous growth of literacy that had taken place among the non-Brahmins during the period of 50 years 1870-1918. In 1870-71 only 36 non-Brahmins graduated from the Madras University whereas in 1918 the number of non-Brahmin students who entered the colleges swelled to 3,213 which was nearly 90 times more than what it was in 1870-81. To argue that "the spread of education among the non-Brahmin groups was not great" is nothing but a fallacy.

Another proposition of Washbrook is that "the Justice Party never argued for 'fair' competition to allow qualified non-Brahmins the chance to break up a Brahmin monopoly." It was vociferously made known both in the press and on the public platform by the non-Brahmin leaders that the Brahmins had developed a special skill in getting through the competitive examinations and therefore that they did not favour the idea of 'fair competition'. Justice had given a fitting reply anticipating the argument of Washbrook. "There is a class of men in this country (Brahmins) who, . . . to use Macaulay's expression, being obsequious toadies of British officials, consider that they are capable of administering this large country. These are the men who have followed no pursuit in life
except cramming to pass examination."\textsuperscript{212} In another editorial the same journal assails the so-called intellectual superiority of the Brahmins: "If in proportion to their numerical strength the non-Brahmins have not availed themselves of English education, the reason is not far to seek. They have been for centuries the real producers, the lords of the soil and traders, and they cannot all of them leave their ancient callings. But the Brahmin has practically nothing to do but to prepare for examinations, and so the percentage of English educated men among the Brahmins is larger."\textsuperscript{213} The leaders of the Justice Party wanted a fair share of government appointments for non-Brahmin communities as "they were the lords of the soil and inheritors of noble traditions." They claimed it not because that government appointments would transform the non-Brahmin communities into the most prosperous of mankind but because they carried with them political power.\textsuperscript{214} Yet another criticism levelled by Washbrook was that the Justice Party "demanded a dropping of educational standards and the building of closed social categories of recruitment to be filled by non-Brahmins whether they were qualified and competent or not."\textsuperscript{215} The Justice Party which advocated communal representation of non-Brahmins in public services pleaded for relaxation of qualifications for the appointment of non-Brahmins in government services. It considered it as a measure of egalitarian principle to uplift the downtrodden non-Brahmins.

\textsuperscript{212} \textit{Justice}, 16 Mar. 1917. (Madras NNR, 1917).

\textsuperscript{213} Ibid., 29 Mar. 1917. (Madras NNR, 1917).

\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 2 June 1917 (Madras NNR, 1917) also cited in E.F. Irshick "Brahmin and Non-Brahmin Struggle for Power in Madras" (Mimeoographed), p.4.

\textsuperscript{215} D.A. Washbrook, \textit{The Emergence of Provincial Politics}, p.276.
The foresightedness of the leaders of the Justice Party can very well be understood by the fact that the principle of communal representation has been enshrined in the Indian Constitution itself. Therefore the rational of their demand for relaxation of qualification is undoubtedly beyond the scope of argumentation. The views of Washbrook are nothing but the projection of what the Congress leaders especially Brahmin Congress leaders spoke and wrote against the Justice Party in those days. His ideas therefore are partisan and biased.

Next, Washbrook questions the validity of the theory of religious and cultural revivalism which produced Brahmin—non-Brahmin polarisation on the basis that "the cause of vernacular revivalism was aided at least as much by Brahmins as by non-Brahmins." It is true that Brahmin scholars like U.V. Swaminatha Aiyar contributed their own mite to the revival of Tamil literature. But Washbrook failed to study the impact of their revival on the non-Brahmin community. The discovery of Tamil classics not only exposed to the world the ancient glory and the richness and splendour of the Tamil literature but brought about a great change in the outlook of the non-Brahmins. They believed that they were the descendants of the Dravidians whose culture was more ancient than that of the Aryans and that their culture was destroyed by the Aryan Brahmins. They were condemned as usurpers and invaders. This kind of castigation was "a handy weapon for the non-Brahmins to beat the Brahmin with." However when the myth of their Dravidian origin was popularised it gave the non-Brahmin caste Hindus both "an identity" and "a sense of cultural self confidence." The content of cultural hypothesis was in fact not properly analysed by

216 E.F. Iraclick, "Brahmin and Non-Brahmin Struggle for Power in Madras" (Mimeographed), p.2.
the Cambridge scholar who failed to recognise that the Justice Party represented the social awareness and intellectual awakening of the non-Brahmin communities in the second decade of this century.

It becomes absolutely necessary here to clarify a glaring misconception formed by sociologists like M.N. Srinivas as to the genesis of non-Brahmin movement. He is of the view that the non-Brahmin movement developed a mythology of its own identifying the Brahmins with Aryans and the non-Brahmins with Dravidians, and it created a cleavage between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. E.F. Irschick, who has spoken elaborately about the cultural revivalism of the Tamils in his *Politics and Social Conflict in South India*, shatters the misconception of M.N. Srinivas by stating that the polarisation between Brahmins and non-Brahmins was born not out of a myth but out of belief. The people of non-Brahmin communities acted on the belief that they were the descendants of Dravidians and their interests were injured only because of Aryan Brahmins. "When the people are under stress the ideas become very clear and they are detached from the structural realities. This can occur in any movement." It cannot be however denied that some scholars such as Poornalingam Pillai attempted to see in the conflict of interests between Brahmins and non-Brahmins a racial basis. The fact that the Brahmins of South India who projected themselves as the protagonists of Sanskrit, the language of the Aryans, was cited as testimony to the Aryan descent of Brahmins. Now it is difficult to distinguish any section of people from others on ethnological

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217 M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, p.104.
218 Interview with E.F. Irschick on 22 Oct. 1980.
basis in any part of the world. In fact there is no such thing as a pure race. However, the theory that the non-Brahmins were of Dravidian stock caught with the general public and the term Dravidian became a catchword in the political vocabulary of the non-Brahmins at the turn of this century. Therefore the Dravidian concept, the non-Brahmin movement evolved was not a myth but a belief which became a reality. The castigation of M.N. Srinivas shows that he has no faith in reality of belief and the effect of belief on political action.

It may be concluded that the Justice Party which represents the first phase of non-Brahmin movement was organised at the end of 1916 to advance, safeguard and protect the interests of the non-Brahmin community. It was a movement for uplifting the non-Brahmins and a revolt against Brahmin ascendency.