Chapter - II

Socio-Political Background of Madras Province: 1909 - 1939

It was indeed an incontrovertible fact that "one of the most important effects of British Rule in India was to provide an environment in which nationalism could develop. The starting of schools and colleges, the recruitment of Indians into the lower ranks of the civil services, the provision of a communication network which allowed educated Indians from all parts of India to meet, and the establishment of printing presses with which western ideas of equality and freedom were disseminated... all these helped to make Indians more aware of their political and social rights." Even the most rabid anti-British nationalist of course cannot afford to deny the fact that one of the benefits of British rule was the political education of the people.

With the Government of India Act of 1858 which transferred the governance of India from the British East India Company to the British Crown, the process towards representative government can be said to have started. A 15-member Council of India was created to assist the Secretary of State for India in the exercise of the powers of the Crown. The passing of the Act of 1858 "closed one great period of Indian history and ushered in another great era, namely the direct rule of the Crown." The next piece of legislation which brought about the beginnings of representative institutions was the Indian Councils Act of 1861. Under this Act Indians were first associated with the work of legislation by the enlargement of the Council of the Governor, the Governor-General by the addition of not less than six and not more than twelve additional members, of whom half were to be non officials. Thus the Act associated the people of India with the work of legislation and vested legislative powers in the governments of Madras and Bombay Presidencies and laid the foundations for the policy of legislative devolution.

2. G.N. Singh: Landmarks in Indian Constitutional and National Development, p.73.
The National Movement

The period 1861 to 1892 saw the rise of the Indian National movement. The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 and at its first session passed a resolution demanding the expansion and reform of the central and local Legislative Councils on elective principle, and that budgets should be referred to these Councils for consideration and their members empowered to interpellate the executive in regard to all branches of the administration and so on. The next year it was urged that at least 50% of the members of these Councils should be elected, and the franchise limited to the educated and the propertied classes, and also that the educated members of the Central Council should be returned by the elected members of the several provincial councils.

With the forces of Indian nationalism intensifying the desire for political advance among the Indians,
certain constitutional changes embodied in what are called the Morely-Minto Reforms of 1909 were announced providing for the association of qualified Indians with the Government to a greater extent in the process of decision-making on public questions.

Under the Indian Councils Act of 1909, the number of members of the Council was increased, the size of the Central Legislative Council enlarged and the number of additional members was raised from 16 to a maximum of 60, of whom not more than 28 were to be non-officials. The powers of the Legislative Councils, both Central and Provincial, were enlarged so as to include "discussion of any matter, and asking questions and supplementaries".

According to the 1909 Act, passed on May 25, 1909, the Councils were redesignated for the purpose of making laws and regulations, as Legislative Councils, and while the provincial Councils were to have in each case a non-official majority of nominated and elected members, Minto reserved for the Central Legislative Council the predominant and absolute power in the form of a narrow official majority. Thus out of its 60 additional members, 28 were officials, nominated non-officials to represent special interests, two other nominated -
persons and 27 elected members. The narrow official majority was intended to prevent the executive from being voted out, and thus to prevent a change of Government in the event of an adverse vote.

The Act also provided for regulations as to the conditions under which and the manner in which persons resident in India may be nominated or elected as members of the Legislative Councils. These regulations were designed to secure the representation of classes, communities and interests, but not of territorial constituencies. Special provisions were included for the representation of professional classes consisting alike of Hindus, Mohammedans, or members of any other religion, of landholders including Hindus and Mohammedans; and of Mohammedans alone forming a separate electorate, and of Europeans and Indian Commerce. Landholders and Mohammedans were also to have direct election of their representatives on the basis of their special electorate.

Thus most of the elected members of the Imperial Legislative Council and the Provincial Councils, were to be elected indirectly, by the Provincial Councils in the case of the Imperial Council, and by the Municipal Committees and District Boards in the case
of the Provincial Councils. And what is more, the principle of reservation was introduced. The reforms in no way changed the basically undemocratic character of the British Rule or the fact of foreign economic exploitation of the country. Of course the reforms were not intended to democratise Indian administration. We have Morley going on record with the declaration: "if it could be said that this chapter of reforms led directly or necessarily to the establishment of a Parliamentary system in India, I for one would have nothing to do at all with it,"; and his successor as Secretary of State, Lord Crewe, further clarified the position in 1912 thus: "There is a certain section in India which looks forward to a measure of self-government approaching that which has been granted in the Dominions. I see no future for India on those lines." Thus the real purpose of the reforms of 1909 was to confuse the moderate nationalists, to divide the nationalist rank and to check the growth of unity among Indians.

The system of separate electorates was introduced for Muslims, said to be intended to protect the Muslim minority, but indeed it was part of the British policy

3. India Office Records.
of Divide and Rule designed to maintain their supremacy in India. Here was to be found the beginning of the foundations of the partition of India to come forty years later. The separate electorate was based on the notion that the political and economic interests of the Hindus and the Muslims of India were separate and mutually contradictory, and this, based entirely on religion was manifestly unscientific and irrational. It only served to retard the progress of India's unification which had been a continuous historical process and became subsequently a potent factor for the growth of communalism, both Muslim and Hindu, in India. Instead of removing the educational and economic backwardness of the middle class Muslims and helping to integrate them in the mainstream of Indian nationalism, the system of separate electorates tended only to perpetuate their isolation from the developing nationalist movement, encouraged separatist tendencies and also prevented the people from concentrating their attention on the economic and political problems which indeed were common to all Indians, Hindus and Muslims. Thus the authors of the Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms 1918 observed: "the Reforms of 1909 afforded no answer and could afford no answer, to the Indian political problems... Responsibility is the savour of popular government and
that savour the present councils wholly lack." Indirect elections and separate communal electorates had their obvious disadvantages, and needless therefore to say that the Morley-Minto Reforms did not measure up to the expectations of the Indian people, whose discontent therefore continued to grow unabated.

The Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, in order to satisfy the widespread demands of the Indians for constitutional reforms, and of course in recognition of their loyal services to Great Britain during the war, announced in the House of Commons on August 20, 1917 that "the policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration, and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to a progressive realisation of responsible Government in India as an integral part of the British Empire."4

Of course Montagu was not then planning the first step in a transfer of power. When he was using the term "self-governing" (which was included fortuitously

in this famous announcement) it was in the same sense that it was used in the term 'local self-government', and it implied the transfer of some administrative responsibilities of the provincial governments to "trusted Indians" so that they could shoulder many of the tasks of the provincial government, but not the executive power.

The first World War (1914-1919) in which India helped Britain and her allies with men, money and materials, and happenings outside India like the Russian Revolution, contributed to a further advance towards responsible Government in India. In the meantime in the Indian National Congress itself, the moderates were fast losing their hold; the Home Rule League of Mrs. Annie Besant in 1916 and the Congress League Pact of 1916 and their joint scheme of self-government were among the other notable developments during the period. The Indian situation was naturally influenced by the Russian Revolution which added considerably to the prevailing spirit of liberty. In a letter to the Viceroy, the Secretary of State himself described the Indian situation as naturally influenced by what happened all the world over being in a State of revolution. "The ferment of new ideas", he said "is working everywhere and in India
as much as anywhere. Opinions cannot but be excited by
the Russian Revolution, by the congratulations showered
upon the revolutionaries from England and elsewhere and
by the constant appeals to the spirit of liberty and
nationality which are the groundwork of most of the
public declarations of the time." \(^5\)

The war for its part conduced to the progress of
Indian nationalism. The anti-British Pan-Islamic group
in the All-India Muslim League, cooperated with Indian
nationalists. Sir James Meston's memorandum addressed
to the Viceroy on May 21, 1917 analysed the entire
political situation in India and suggested the expediency
of a "formal recognition" of the Congress-League Demand
for self-government and going out half way to meet them.

In these circumstances, the Viceroy wanted a
definite declaration of policy as to how to deal with
the Home Rule Movement. Without general franchise and
with no territorial representation, the Morley-Minto
Councils failed to enthuse the leaders. In a confiden-
tial memorandum by the Viceroy upon questions likely to

\(^5\) Austen Chamberlain's papers, Chamberlain to
Chelmsford, May 2, 1917, Ac. 22/91, p.9.
arise in India at the end of the war (October 1915)
Lord Hardinge invited the attention of the Home Govern­ment to the "surest and safest policy of recognising
the principle of "provincial self government" which he
had already indicated. He argued "British rule in
India "had been steadily losing in popularity for some
years past" and that its affairs had reached a stage
"when cession to Indian sentiment is necessary to
maintain the faith of the people in British justice.
Indian officials miserably failed to satisfy the
intellectual and spiritual side of human nature which
motivated the quest for liberty and freedom. He there­fore emphasised the need to encourage "political self-
government of the people on the basis of liberalism and
nationality the key stone to the British system by which
a people of ancient learning and culture, after suffering
centuries of conquest and oppression, may be uplifted and
gradually strengthened."6 His memorandum contained
detailed proposals for reform which however remained
only of archival interest. No action was taken.

After elaborate consultations between E.S. Montagu,
Sir Austen Chamberlain and Curzon, the Home Government
announced on August 20, 1917 the goal "of increasing

association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the general development of self-governing institutions with a view to a progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British empire," the time and manner of each successive advance being determined only by parliament. This declaration was made by Montagu himself during his visit to India (November 1917). He published the Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms commonly known as the Montagu-Chelmsford Report. Though the report bore the signatures of Montagu and Chelmsford, the Governor-General, we know from Montagu's Indian Diary, played a vacillating and insignificant part in the whole transaction. The Joint Report was published in July 1918. The Report did not recommend the introduction of dyarchy. The use of the term dyarchy was due to Lionel Curtis who had given a detailed account of the development of the idea. The plan as finally adopted however did not fully agree with what he had proposed.

This report formed the basis of the Government of India Act 1919 which came into operation early in 1921 with the creation of a bicameral legislature at the Centre, consisting of a Legislative Assembly and the Council of States, with elected and nominated members
for three and five years respectively. Against the demand for more autonomy by Provincial Governments, the Act of 1919 gave them more responsibilities and more autonomy in financial affairs. In fact the provincial Governments had been asking for greater autonomy with another devolution of power from the Centre to the Provinces so that they could have even more freedom to adjust their internal affairs to the special circumstances of their particular regions.

Dyarchy

The Act made a clear division of the functions of the Central and Provincial Governments. The spheres of the Central and Provincial Governments with regard to the sources of income, and the heads of revenue were also delimited. While the Act did not introduce dyarchy (or dual Government) in the Central Government, it introduced the system in the provincial executive. The

8. Ibid.
Governor with his executive council was invested with authority over what were called "the reserved subjects" for the administration of which he was responsible not to the legislature but to the Governor-General and his Council. And "the Transferred Subjects" were placed in the charge of the Governor acting with his Ministers to be appointed by him from among the elected members of the Provincial Legislative Council. The Provinces were given unicameral legislatures known as Legislative Councils with at least 70 percent of the members to be elected and of the nominated members not more than 20 percent were to be officials. The membership of the Provincial Legislative Councils was increased; for instance it was 127 in Madras, and was raised to 132.

The Governor retained in his hands the complete control over the finances, and he could over-rule the Ministers on any ground which he considered special. While at the Centre, the Legislature virtually had no control over the Governor-General and his Executive Council, the Central Government had unrestrained control over the Provincial Governments. Moreover the franchise was severely restricted. Diverse groups like landowners, Chambers of Commerce and Universities, and communities of Muhammadans, Europeans, Anglo-Indians, Indian Christians, and Sikhs in the Punjab
were given separate representation through their own electorates. Both in matters of law-making and finance, the Council’s authority over Reserved Subjects was strictly limited. The architects of the 1919 Act thus appear to have taken much care to see that in matters which affected Britain’s larger imperial interests, such as, foreign policy, trade and tariff, the military or the control over revenue and expenditure, police, and most of communications these were kept firmly under imperial control.

No wonder the Reforms of 1919 failed to satisfy the national aspirations of the Indians, and consequently they decided to intensify the national struggle for independence. Indian nationalists, however, had advanced far beyond such halting concessions and were no longer willing to let an alien Government decide their fitness for self-Government, nor would they be satisfied with the shadow of political power. The Indian National Congress which met at a special session in Bombay in August 1918 condemned the Reform proposals outlined as "disappointing and unsatisfactory".

For every Bill passed by the Provincial Legislature, it should have the assent of the Governor and
the Governor-General before it was to become law. The Governor also could stop the proceedings of any Bill in the Legislature at any time if he believed that it would affect the peace and tranquility of the land. It seemed that the Act of 1919 was designed to effect the prevailing dissatisfaction of the people in India due to the soaring commodity prices, higher taxes and Government controls, following the World War I. It aimed at bringing about stability in the country through securing greater co-operation and participation of the Indians in the affairs of the Government. The Indian people were not happy with the arrangement in which a dual rule was created by the Act, with powers concentrated in the Provincial Governors.

It may be mentioned in passing that the dyarchy rule was more successful in Madras than in other provinces, comparatively speaking.\(^9\) In the provinces

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9. The success of dyarchy in Madras may be attributed partly to the creed of the Justice Party which had won massive support; and some of the top Justicites were men of experience, administrative ability and those who command much local influence and identified the non-Brahmin castes with the voting community. Prof. R. Bhaskaran, *op.cit.*, p.45.
it has given rise to active politics between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins which in its turn led to the coming into being of the South Indian Liberal Federation which was later to be known as the Justice Party. With the growth of the Indian demand for political advance becoming more insistent, a statutory commission was appointed under the Chairmanship of Sir John Simon to report on the working of the reforms. But was boycotted by the Congressites, the liberals, and the important sections of the Muslim community when it landed in Bombay on February 3, 1928, for all the seven members on the commission were British, and it was considered that it ill accorded with the principle of self-determination to have constitutional changes effected on the recommendation of a Commission appointed by an outside authority. Indian leaders were therefore greatly agitated over the matter.11

A series of Round Table Conferences followed but with no tangible results. Of course the British Imperialism tried to meet the situation with repression


11. Even the Justice Party at its Coimbatore Conference joined with the Congress to non-cooperate with the Commission as it had no Indian member. But the Rajah of Panagal and Dr.P.Subbaroyan favoured the Commission.
which led to the growth of unrest. The Jallianwala Bagh atrocity at Amritsar infuriated the people. At its Madras session in 1927 presided over by Dr. Ansari, the Congress decided to boycott the Simon Commission "at every stage and at every turn and in every form." So also the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha opposed the Commission. As a gesture of solidarity with the nationalists, the League even agreed to the principle of joint electorates, provided seats were reserved for Muslims. Thus when the Commission arrived in India, it led to a powerful protest movement in which nationalist enthusiasm and unity attained new heights.

In the meantime important Indian leaders and parties decided to meet the British challenge by drawing up an agreed constitution for India. After an All-Parties Conference in Delhi and Poona, the Nehru Report in August 1928 recommended the attainment of Dominion Status as the next step; India should be a Federation based on linguistic provinces and provincial autonomy, and the executive should be fully responsible to the legislature, elections should be on the basis of joint electorates and adult suffrage, and
reservation of seats for religious minorities for a period of ten years. But the All-Party Convention at Calcutta in December 1928 failed to pass the Nehru Report. Objections were raised by some of the leaders belonging to the Muslim League, leading to a split in the League on communal and nationalist lines. Mohammed Ali Jinnah put forth his fourteen-point demand, claiming separate electorates, one third of the seats in the Central Legislature for Muslims, reservation of seats for Muslims in Bengal and the Punjab, in proportion to their population. The Hindu Mahasabha for its part denounced the Report as pro-Muslim. Thus a basic difference of approach between the nationalists and the communalists surfaced.

Gandhi ji returned to active politics, attended the Calcutta Congress, and Nehru became the President. The Lahore session the next year passed a resolution declaring Poorna Swaraj (Full Independence) as the Congress objective. On December 31, 1929 the tri-colour standard was adopted as the flag of freedom, and January 26, 1930 was fixed as the First Independence Day to be celebrated annually with the people taking pledge that it was a "crime against man and God to submit any longer to British Rule."
Gandhiji started the Second Civil Disobedience Movement on March 12, 1930 with the Dandi march to defy the salt law. As the movement spread, the Government replied with repression and declared the Congress illegal. South India experienced the impact of the repression in a more severe form.

On his return from the Second Round Table Conference in September 1931, Gandhi resumed Civil Disobedience Movement, and he and other Congress leaders were arrested. The movement was withdrawn in May, 1934.

After the Third Round Table Conference in November 1932 with Congress abstaining, the Government of India Act of 1935 based largely on the Simon Commission recommendations, was passed and the first General Elections under the Act were held in 1937.

The Government of India Act 1935 was a landmark in the evolution of provincial legislatures, Dyarchy was abolished and provincial Governments were vested in Councils of Ministers responsible to the legislatures. The Act established bicameral legislatures in the provinces of Madras, Bombay, Bengal, U.P., Bihar and Assam and single chamber in the other Provinces. The
Upper Chamber known as the Legislative Council was a permanent body, one-third of its members retiring triennially. The Lower Chamber known as the Legislative Assembly consisted of members elected for a five-year term. The new Legislative Assembly replaced the old Legislative Council, with the strength raised from the 98 elected members to 215, nominations were abolished and seats were reserved for the Depressed Classes and minorities. While finance and other matters of administration were added to the list of subjects transferred to provincial control, the Governor retained the powers of veto of a Bill and of transmitting it to the Governor-General for consideration. The Governor could also return a Bill passed by the legislature for consideration of amendments suggested by him. Thus most of the powers still remained in tact in the hands of the Governors in the provinces.

The Governor-General and the Governors were to be appointed by the British Government and were responsible to it. In the Central Legislature the princes were once again to be used to check and counter the nationalist elements, and defence and foreign affairs were kept outside the Central Legislature. The Governor-General retained 'special control' over the other subjects.
Franchise for the Assembly elections differed from Province to Province based on payment of taxes, property, and standards of education. There were general constituencies and special communal constituencies for Muslims, Sikhs, Anglo-Indians, Europeans and Indian Christians. Special constituencies also gave representation to Commerce, landholders, Universities, labour and women. The Council consisted of not less than 54 and not more than 56 members composed of 35 general seats, 7 Muslim reserved seats, one for European, 3 Indian Christians and not less than 8 and not more than 10 nominated by the Governor. (Refer Quinquennial Review 1967 Legislative Council Department, Madras, p.3).

Of the 215 members of the Assembly, 146 were elected from General constituencies of which 30 were reserved for scheduled castes, one for Backward areas and tribes, 28 for Muslims, 2 for Anglo-Indians, 3 for Europeans, 8 for Indian Christians, 6 for representatives of Commerce and Industry, 6 for Landholders, one for University, 6 for labour and 8 for women of whom 6 were General (Ibid).
Dr. C. R. Reddy observed: "In India everyone who asked for special representation generally got it. Perhaps it would not be too long before the country would be divided in between spectacled and non-spectacled interests and representation in proportion to their number would be claimed from them..." ¹²

Distribution of legislative powers between the Centre and the Provinces was made on the basis of three lists, one relating to the subjects on which the Centre had exclusive competence, the second relating to subjects allotted exclusively to the Provinces and the third to subjects over which the legislative power was concurrent.

The Governor, as the titular head of the Province, retained certain powers to safeguard the interests of the civil service and the rights of minorities and to maintain law and order.

It was but natural that the Act of 1935 could not satisfy the national aspirations as both the political and economic power continued to be concentrated in the hands of the British Government. The Congress condemned the Act as "totally disappointing". The

___¹² The Hindu., November 7 1935.
Federal part of the Act was never introduced but the provincial section was soon brought into operation. Though bitterly opposed to it, the Congress decided to contest the elections under the Act, with the declared intention of showing how unpopular the Act was. The Elections of 1937 conclusively demonstrated that a vast majority of the Indian people supported the Congress, which swept the polls in most of the provinces and Congress ministries were formed in July 1937 in seven of the eleven provinces.
Though Madras, in the early years of the East India Company rule, was considered an "administrative and cultural backwater far removed from the headquarters of the Company in Bengal and later from the Government of India in Calcutta and afterwards Delhi", a small but influential group of men with All-India perspective attempted to connect Madras public life with that of Bengal, Bombay and the rest of British India, and it was from this group that the founders of the Indian National Congress came and it was they who sought to counteract the feeling that Madras was gravely imposed upon by the rest of India.  

Fort St. George was in fact "an inferior outpost" of the empire responsible to at least three, and sometimes four layers of superior authority; it was a mere office-boy in the Grand Imperial Company. But in the context of the Madras Presidency however it looked more

14. Ibid.
like an all-powerful despot. London and Calcutta exercised only a loose discipline over its activities and very seldom interfered beneath it. Moreover before 1920 there were no popular political institutions in the Presidency and Fort St. George's will remained unchecked from below". This is how the political situation in Madras was described by D.A. Washerbrook.  

In this most benighted of all provinces, from the 1870s new pressures on the empire and on the southern political economy led to a change in the picture. A new political consciousness came about the South and "modern forms of politics" slowly emerged. Also new conflicts based on religious, caste and regional identities came to surface. By 1917 Madras was leading the whole of India in regard to the Home Rule Agitation, communal movements, and the demand for regional autonomy. The political life of Southern India appeared to have undergone a massive transformation by 1917. Madras hitherto known as the most conservative of the Presidencies, suddenly exploded into political activity.

The Home Rule agitation and the non-Brahmin movement were the two principal manifestations of this activity, based on new ideas and appearance of new political structures. Madras City, the Provincial capital became the centre of such activity, because of the influence of the local, western-educated Indians and a group of men who emerged prominent in the business, negotiating between the new institutions of the Provincial capital and the numerous interest groups seeking favours from them. These men, it so happened, were mostly from the Brahmin community inhabiting certain areas of Madras City, like Mylapore and Egmore some of them successful lawyers and administrators in the Province. Wealthy and highly educated, they occupied legal positions and helped the service communities and their specialised knowledge and broad contacts made them useful as Advisers and Assistants to the bureaucracy. The influence of this small group of men was indeed extraordinary. In fact they came to be referred to as the Mylapore clique, and some of them held key positions as Judges in the Madras High Court, members of the Senate...

of the University of Madras and the Madras Legislative Council or the Governor's Executive Council, while a few others were connected with the Corporation of Madras, the Madras Port Trust, the Pachiappa's Trust Board, and Government Commissions. The influential members of the group formed a society called the Dharmarakshana Sabha to bring about Temple reforms. Since the Provincial Government was in a bad shape financially, the Government sought the co-operation of these men in various ways, in return for some concession towards responsible Government.

It was about this time that the Home Rule League was started in Madras by an Irish lady, Dr. Annie Besant, who campaigned against the British rule in India.

Besant's Home Rule Movement caught the imagination of the educated people all over India and the Home Rule League got the support of the influential Brahmin group.

17. A society for temple reform which used the Courts to place the Mylapore's nominees in the management of some of the wealthiest temples of the province. Influential Brahmins were in it: C.J. Baker, op.cit., p.24.

18. Mrs. Annie Wood Besant (1947-1933) was born in London of an Irish mother and Irish-English father. In (Continued/foot-note to the next page...
After an unfortunate marriage to an Anglican Minister, she became interested in atheism and in 1874 joined the National Secular Society. For many years she worked with Charles Bradlaugh, lecturing, writing tracts, and articles, championing birth control and women's rights, and socialism (in 1885 she joined the Fabian Society). In 1889 running as a Freethinker she was elected to the London School Board. The same year she was converted to Theosophy. As a close friend of Madame Helena Blavatsky (d. 1891) she was instrumental in drawing the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society into the field of social reform, but during the 90s her principal interest was occultism.

She lived in India for several years. She founded the Central Hindu College, Banaras in 1898, and in 1907 designated by Colonel Henry Steele Olcott, founder President of the Theosophical Society, as his successor, she was elected President of the Society. She moved to Adyar. In the late summer and autumn of 1913 she gave a series of eight lectures in Madras which marked her first step towards a full scale involvement in Indian politics. She went to England in 1914 and gave a speech at Queen's Hall, on the subject of India's Political needs and wrote several letters to newspapers pleading for 'Justice to India'. Returning later in the year, she acquired an English-language daily, the old-Madras Standard and renamed it New India, the first issue of which appeared on July 14. She wrote in an Editorial of New India (1916 June 8) that her purpose was to press forward the preparation for the coming changes in India and to claim steadily India's place in the Empire." She wanted the extremists to join the Congress and popularised the doctrine of self-Government. To implement the latter aim she began her work for Home Rule, and in this she clashed with the British authorities in Madras and created a legend for herself by her stubborn resistance to the Government. She founded the Home Rule League, and was interned. She became President of the Congress at the end of 1917 at Calcutta. Her attitude towards the Montford Reforms made her unpopular. She was despised and "forgotten in the welter of political events". Her constitutional agitation was supplanted during the Rowlatt troubles by Gandhi's compelling and dramatic Satyagraha campaign. Besant contributed in a number of ways to the politics of South India and of India generally. She died in December 1933.
in Madras City, and later spread to the districts. The Madras Government was unhappy about Besant's challenges and were dismayed at the divided loyalty of those who had hitherto been considered loyal to the rul. Some of the Government's own trusted men seemed to have one foot on the side of the Besant's nationalist agitation movement while they tried to cling on to their power and influence arising out of their official connections.

Added to this the Telugu-speaking nationalists agitated for a separate Andhra, and in 1917 they were granted a separate Congress Organisational unit. At the Nagpur session of the Congress in December 1920 Congress work in South India was divided into three linguistic groups in the Province. C. Rajagopalachari, an ardent supporter of Gandhi returned from Salem to Madras City and attempted to convert the Madras wing of the Congress party into an active pro-Gandhian Organisation. He

19. Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari: Born in 1879; was very successful as a lawyer in Salem. Left Salem after his wife's death and took to active politics in Madras City. He was a Municipal Chairman of Salem for a period. An important lieutenant of Gandhi, he was jailed in 1921 and 1930. Edited Young India, in 1922. Established the Gandhi Ashram at Tiruchengode, was M.L.A. (Madras), Prime Minister of the Province in 1937-39, and Chief Minister from 1952 to April 1954. He became Governor of West Bengal and later the first Indian Governor-General. He later founded the Swathantra Party. He died in 1975.
however encountered difficulties because of the situation created by the Home Rule Movement, the activities of the Justice Party and the drive for a separate Andhra. The Home Rule League and the non-Brahmin movement were the culmination of a long-term process of political change in the South.

During the period 1916-1929, the nationalist politicians who belonged to the Brahmin community, the highest caste in the South Indian Society, were challenged by a group of non-Brahmins who had then recently begun to take an active part in the politics of Madras. In the condition of Indian society, politics and political leadership in Madras State can be taken to illustrate the decisive role of caste. The story of Madras politics during the last two decades shows an intelligible and in many ways a very viable pattern of political adjustment of the instruments of modern representative Government to the exigencies of a durable social order based on caste. The caste conflict between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins in Madras was a projection of the pre-existing social rivalry. The belief was held by

21, E.F.Irschick : op.cit., (Introduction )
some non-Brahmins that Brahmins were racially different from non-Brahmins, the idea having been posited by some European writers that the non-Brahmins were Dravidians and the original civilisers of the region, while the Brahmins were "the aryan invaders" from the North. This led to the view that the Dravidians had been conquered and culturally suppressed by the Aryans and their institutions supplanted by an imposed 'Sanskritic' Aryan culture and religion, and caste system by which the non-Brahmins had for centuries been kept in an inferior position."22 There were linguistic, cultural and social differences between the two groups, which contributed to the growth of a feeling of separatism.

When Morley-Minto Reforms made the beginnings of representation, and elections were held in the Province under it, it was found in the quadri-lingual province of Madras (Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada) that in the small electorates of educated persons one whose caste was more numerous in the electorate had better chance (other things were nearly equal) of being elected.23

22. Ibid.
The defeat of an otherwise well-equipped candidate in an election where the Brahmins have not supported him (he was not a Brahmin) is believed to be the immediate occasion for the founding of the first great non-Brahmin political party in Madras. 24

"Political parties were not built around their ideologies. In the case of the Justice Party, it was its functions that attracted support, not its attributes." 25

The formation of the Justice Party was a significant political event in Madras. It was an off-shoot of an Association called the South Indian Liberal Federation, formed in 1917 with the declared "realistic and specific" objective to advance, safeguard and protect the interests of the non-Brahmin community, in Madras Province. Newspapers, the Justice in English, the Dravidian in Tamil were started to propagate the party's ideas.

When the Brahmins came to settle in Southern India, the ancient kings and chieftains desiring to secure the benefit of yagas and other religious ceremonies accorded

24. Ibid.
to them the supreme position in society by reason of their education and scholarship and simple living and high thinking. The Brahmins naturally tried to introduce their socio-religious organisation into Tamil society, and as a religious oligarchy and a social democracy (which the Tamils were) would not mix, it led to conflict. 26 The people of South India could not be organised in terms of the four Aryan Varnas as in Northern Indian, and social jealousies began to manifest themselves in the relationships between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmin caste groups in the South. Combining land ownership and religious exclusiveness, the Brahmins with their earlier English education began to get into office under the British in urban areas. They were the first to respond to westernisation, and their literary tradition gave them an initial advantage in this. With their command of English they entered the ranks of the colonial administration gaining a new criterion of status in addition to their old and new political and economic advantages which further widened the gap between the elite and the masses. 27

27. Ibid., p.11.
A counter elite of these politically articulate and highly educated members of the communities and castes of lesser status and power arose. As they felt that the Nationalist movement would only strengthen the position of the Brahmin castes, the non-Brahmins of the Madras Presidency allied themselves with the colonial regime seeking protection of their position and neutralisation of the power differences in the population. The non-Brahmin elite also gradually came to take interest in the education of their communities.

The Justice Party consisted of rich businessmen and seasoned politicians led by Pitti Theagaraya Chetty as a powerful group in opposition to the Brahmin stronghold. Since nearly 98 percent of the population in Madras Province comprised of non-Brahmins, they had a feeling of distress that a very small minority of Brahmins should have become so influential as to hold most of the important public offices in Government, including the University Senate, the High Court, etc. The non-Brahmins realised that the success of the Brahmins was largely due to their ancient literary traditions and consequent "skill to pass examinations." The Brahmins accused the non-Brahmin leaders of weakening the cause of Home Rule by showing their loyalty to the British rulers. 28

Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar in 1914 founded the Dravidian Home, a hostel for non-Brahmin students in the City and later started the Dravidian Association to advance the non-Brahmin's political power through Dravidian uplift. The Raja of Panagal was chosen as its President and Dr. T. M. Nair, Vice-President, and Dr. Natesa Mudaliar himself the Secretary. Its declared objective was the establishment of a Dravidian State under the British Raj, a Government of, by and for the non-Brahmins.29

After the formation of the South Indian Peoples' Association in December 1916, the Secretary, Pitti Theagaraya Chetti issued the non-Brahmin Manifesto, setting out the conditions of the non-Brahmin communities and indicating the directions in which to advance.30 The manifesto adverted to the overwhelming preponderance of Brahmins in the public services and Governmental bodies and noted that the virtual monopoly of political power by them was due to the educational advancement of the Brahmin community which gave them political influence and advantage, economic power and social prestige as an exclusive elite in juxtaposition to the illiterate masses constituting more than 95 percent of the society.31

30. See Appendix for the text of the Manifesto.
The manifesto voiced alarm at the growing Brahmin agita-
tion for Home Rule and stated that "we are not in
favour of any measure which in operation is designed or
tends completely to undermine the influence and authority
of the British Rulers who alone in the present circum-
stances of India, are able to hold the scales even
between creed and class." The Association stood firmly
opposed to power being transferred to a Brahmin over-
lordship. Several conferences were held by prominent
non-Brahmins to highlight the differences in Brahmin and
non-Brahmin ideologies, and they resented the professed
Brahminical superiority in intellect, culture and religion.
They proposed that appropriate steps be taken to uplift
the social and political status of the non-Brahmins in
the province. The newspapers, The Justice, The Dravidian
and Andhra Prakasika, gave publicity to the grievance of
the non-Brahmins.

In August 1917 the South-Indian Liberal Federation
came into being at a conference of non-Brahmins. The
name of the party organ was adapted from Cemenceau's Justice,
and opponents of the Federation referred to it as the
Justice Party, and the Federation itself adopted the
label as its unofficial name.  

It was from the Justice Party that the Dravida Kazhagam led by E.V.Ramaswami came into existence, and then the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam of C.N.Annadurai was formed after a split of the Dravida Kazhagam, and the latest the Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam led by the matinee idol M.G.Ramachandran was an offshoot of the D.M.K. Though the different splinter groups adopted different styles of idiom and functioning, they were all actuated by the same motivation, namely to safeguard the interests of the non-Brahmins whom they called Dravidians.

It is to be noted that events since the formation of the Justice Party and its successors have shown that "if caste-centered politics was inescapable in India, Madras Province has shown that it was perfectly suitable and quite viable." The non-Brahmin movement between 1916 and 1920 was mostly confined to Madras City and in course of time the Justice Party shaped its politics like that of the Brahmins to win the favour of the

34. R. Bhaskaran, Sociology of Politics, p.43.
In the initial stages the non-Brahmins and their leaders were not clear in their mind as to how they should deal with their counterparts. At one stage they talked of the need to overcome "the political Brahmin", and at another stage perhaps for their own self-interest, if not survival. They got themselves sanskritised by following the Brahminic code and behaviour in order to get up the social ladder. It may be observed that between 1916 and 1920 when there was ample opportunity for the Justice Party to help the non-Brahmin cause to develop into a mass movement like the Congress, it backed out. In the meantime the movement caught the soft corners of the Madras Government due to its loyalty to the British ruling power. With the march of time the Justice Party soon shaped its politics like that of the Brahmans to win the favour of the rulers for its own advantage.

Justice Party and Dyarchy in Madras

The non-Brahmin movement in Madras, which had been

35. Lord Willingdon's advice to Viceroy Lord Irwin dated June 30, 1923: "Please do not think the Brahmin and non-Brahmin are at each other's throat like Hindus & Muslims in the north. There is no violent antipathy in social matters; they meet and are quite friendly... (Willingdon Papers, Vol. V).
launched during the war years with the blessings and the support of the British gained in strength after the war, owing to the Congress boycott of the Councils. The Justice Party formed the first ministry in Madras under the Montford Reforms and carried out measures for extending education, co-operation etc., and for increasing the representation of non-Brahmins in the services, in which there was undoubtedly an excessive proportion of Brahmins, 36 due to historical reasons.

The battle for leadership of the Province under Dyarchy was on the laps of the prominent Brahmins and non-Brahmins. The Justice Party demanded that seats for non-Brahmins in the new Legislative Council be reserved for them. The last stage of the battle for leadership began at the first elections to the new Legislative Councils held in 1920, during the Governorship of Lord Willingdon in Madras. The Justice Party got its candidates elected to seats reserved for the majority under the Constitution (24 out of 65) and this was indeed a legal recognition of the fact of caste. 37 Though for a fact the Brahmins never got

37. R. Bhaskaran, Sociology of Politics, p.45.
themselves elected in any significant number since 1920 to the Madras Legislature, "the need to prevent Brahmin leadership in the provincial politics was acknowledged and has never been doubted since." 38

The Justice Party won and its leaders held the ministerial positions for all except a few months during the dyarchy rule. As the founder of the Justice Party, Pitti Theagaraya Chetti thought he was getting old, and also due to his pre-occupation in the Madras Corporation he was unable to take up Ministerial responsibility. He therefore nominated three members from his party, who included A. Subbarayalu Reddiar as the leader. But because of his ill-health, the Raja of Panagal took over the reigns of the Government as the Chief Minister.

While in the rest of India it could not be said that the creed of the Justice Party won mass acceptance, the leaders of the Party besides being able men with experience of administration and considerable local influence were also identified by caste with the voting communities and the present advantage of employing the

38. Ibid., p.45.
available power of the Government for the desired amelioration overweighed the uncertain prospect of total power to be gained by the overthrow of a strong foreign Government as aimed at by the nationalists.

The nationalists, however, were highly critical of the practical and cautious realism of the Justice Party as a "species of cowardly and selfish betrayal of the country's cause." Controversies apart, it was very much of a fact that on account of the qualities of leadership of the Justice Party, stable Governments were set up and run which adopted a policy of securing by administrative procedures and legal processes, adequate representation of the non-Brahmin castes in the public services and the vestibules to these services like schools and colleges."

The British found that the Brahmin lawyers were taking a leading part in the anti-British nationalist agitation, and calculated that they could secure support for the Government from among the non-Brahmins by making it appear that their interests lay with the Government rather than with the Congress. As the non-Brahmin leaders were more concerned with immediate results and the prospect of wielding power, however limited, than ploughing the sands by aligning themselves with the

39. Ibid., p.54.
Congress, they chose to sail with the British Government. It cannot be denied that this policy did serve the interests of the more advanced sections among the non-Brahmins. Their proportion in the services was considerably increased by the adoption of the Communal Ratio, under which the Brahmins' share was limited to 2 out of 14 jobs in all fresh recruitment. Though the Communal G.Os. of the Justice Party Government were vehemently criticised by the nationalists, "that this policy was well conceived and politically irreversible was demonstrated when 30 years after the first Communal G.O. issued by the Justice Party, its principle (a ratio for community-wise selection) had to be incorporated into the Indian Constitution by an amendment. This is proof positive of the abiding, pervasive and crucial nature of caste in our politics.

Even after the thumping victory of the Justice Party in the elections under the Dyarchy scheme, the prominent Brahmin group did not disappear or go into the wilderness. Both Lord Willingdon and his successor


41. R. Bhaskaran, op. cit., p.54.
See Appendices I & II for the text of the Communal G.Os.
Lord Goschen, as Governors, had a soft corner for the Brahmins and nominated them to the Governor's Executive Council, and appointed C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer as Advocate-General, who played an influential role in Madras politics.

The Legislative Council set-up under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms created a wide spectrum of politics to cover the entire province. Men from the districts also gained entrance to the provincial politics which had hitherto been concentrated in the City. Perhaps this was also responsible for the Brahmins becoming influential if not powerful. The Council, as contrasted with the Council under the 1909 Act, provided a better representation. There were 92 elected members, each district sent two or three members, while 13 Muslims, 5 Christians, 6 Landholders, a European, a Planter, 5 representatives of Chamber of Commerce and one representative of the University came to be elected. To these the Government added 23 nominated members.42

42. C.J. Baker, Politics of South India, p.39.
The Justice Party ministers were the chief arbiters in the new arena and had considerable patronage at their disposal for the party itself was not so much as an association of men with common ideas or political interests, as the meeting ground for all those petitioning for ministerial patronage. And the Ministers exercised their patronage in various ways, in regard to the local bodies, education, and temples. Contrary to their pre-1920 stance of anti-legislative interference in temple affairs, they wanted to legislate on temples, on the ground that many temples were badly administered and their funds squandered or even embezzled. In the teeth of strong criticism, the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act was put on the Statute Book (in 1925) which gave enormous scope for patronage. As the Indian Civil Service men were not in favour of the service appointments being in the hands of politicians, they wanted a Staff Selection Board to protect the public services and do justice to the deserving candidates.


"While in some temples a few landholders families and caste groups were in control, in many cases the matter was open to local competition, and even Courts were not empowered to intervene. It became necessary to control temple administration and finance since temples gave men, power, patronage and status in society, besides mobilising votes during local and provincial elections."
But finally the Madras Public Service Commission, a statutory body, was created in 1929 to control appointments to the services and to ensure protection to the services from political influences.44

After the death of the Raja of Panagal in 1928, three leaders succeeded as Chief Ministers, but each had his own drawbacks: they lacked stamina and organisational ability of the Raja of Panagal. Dr. P. Subbarayan was singled out for his 'indecision'; Munuswamy Mayudu for "his connections with the nationalists of the day"; and the Raja of Bobbili for possessing a yes-man's attitude who had to be commanded rather than courted. With the succession of men of such calibre the Justice Party began steadily to weaken and other problems hastened its deterioration. The Tamil Paper, The Dravidian, ceased publication in 1932, The Justice went into liquidation after a few months.

Earlier, in the 1923 elections to the Second Council, the Swarajist wing of the Congress decided to participate in the elections with the intention of "destroying the Constitution from within"45 but were

44. G.O.No.327 Public, May 23, 1929 - Madras Record Office.
45. The Hindu, January 26, 1923.
unable to defeat the Justice Party. But in the elections of 1926 the Swarajists riding the crest of the wave of success of C. Rajagopalachari's Salt Satyagraha in Tanjore, defeated the party and gained a majority in the Third Legislative Council. But despite their majority in the Council, the Swarajists refused to form the ministry, and supported an independent ministry headed by Dr. P. Subbarayan. A Congressman G. V. S. Narasimha Raju was elected President of the Council. The Congress under the leadership of Gandhiji again boycotted the Legislative Councils, and in the elections of 1930, the Justice Party made a clean sweep at the polls. But in the absence of any effective and strong opposition, the party which in the third council was well-disciplined and close-knit, began to weaken, marked by schism, afflicted with bitterness and marred by mutual recrimination. During the period of its subsequent disintegration under the Fourth Council, the Justice Party went through a series of chaotic attempts to salvage its vestige of strength. It condemned the dyarchy it had long supported, demanded complete provincial autonomy, and even allowed its members to join the Congress in an attempt to exploit the non-Brahmin feeling within the Congress to its advantage. Though it threw open its membership to Brahmins, no one responded. In the 1934
elections the Justice Party was completely routed by the Congress which had lifted the ban on Council entry and won every seat it had contested. But the Congress Party did not accept office, and the Raja of Bobbili continued as the First Minister through an extension of the Fourth Council until the end of 1936 when Provincial Autonomy under the Government of India Act of 1935 came into operation.

With the Act of 1935, dyarchy in the provinces was abolished and responsible Government instituted, except in regard to certain matters over which the Governor exercised individual control. In Madras the Act provided for a Legislative Assembly and a Legislative Council, both based on a widely extended franchise. In addition to the Congress and the Justice Party, a number of new political groups which had sprung into existence contested the elections, like the People's Party, the Madras Provincial Scheduled Castes Party, the Madras Presidency Muslims Progressive Party and a revived Muslim League.

In the elections of 1937, the Congress won a decisive victory securing 159 of the 215 seats in the Assembly and 26 of the 46 seats in the Council. But
the Congress refused to form a ministry until it got an assurance from the Governor against misuse of the discretionary power held by him. An interim ministry formed under Sir K.V. Reddy's leadership was shortlived, for within six months the Congress Party reversed its stand and accepted the assurance of the Viceroy and accepted office. C. Rajagopalachari formed the first Congress ministry.

The defeat of the Justice Party reflected the growing strength of the nationalist movement and the party was unable to survive the impact of the political storms that raged during the thirties largely because of its very success in its principal aims and also because in any demand for the extension of the area of self-rule they could have no policy different from that of the Congress. The comparative weakness of the non-Brahmin ideology in the non-Tamil areas of the Presidency was a factor for the defeat. Several of the great figures of the Justice Party turned away from politics to business (the Raja of Bobbili, Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar and Sri P.T. Rajan), and some joined the Congress and got into high offices. The turning point came when the Congress decided to accept office. Riddled with factionalism

and allround discontent, the party had to face bitter attacks for persistence in its communal orientation and the nagging charge of being an agent of British Imperialism. Countering feebly with the weak cries for Swaraj, the party declared its opposition to the three B's: the British, the Brahmin and the Bania, but it was not finding it easy to overcome its long association with the Government.

The Justice Party strangled itself on the rope it had itself woven; support of the British raj had brought it to power but with the impact of national self-consciousness and aspiration for swaraj, its imperial connections brought it to utter defeat. 47

After the 1937 debacle, some of the leaders of the Justice Party joined E.V. Ramaswamy's self-respect movement, formed to safeguard and protect the interests of the non-Brahmin community after the Justice Party's eclipse from active politics.

In retrospect, the emergence of the Justice Party in 1916 under the inspiration of the founding members of the S I L F and its fall in 1937 were historic. A movement which claimed to defend a majority of 98 percent of non-Brahmin population in the province rested with a handful of wealthy and influential men in Madras City. It gained the first ministry under the new Dyarchy Constitution, and retained control over the Government for nearly two decades, except for a few months. During this period, several developments took place on the political horizon. One was Gandhi's ascendency in 1920 following his non-cooperation campaign of 1920-21; another was the rise of the Swarajists who worked against dyarchy between 1923 and 1927; yet another event was the Civil Disobedience agitation between 1930 and 1933. During this period several of the Justice Party men started to drift, and in fact some of them refused to support the Justice Ministers in 1926, and instead they tried to support the independent ministry in 1927 and later the re-shuffled ministry in 1928. When the future of the leadership of the party was hanging in the air, some Justicites abruptly left the party, likewise a good many estate-holders also deserted it.
There was confusion in the minds of the Justice leaders themselves, some of them showed favour to Brahmins to secure suitable jobs. For instance R.K. Shanmugam Chetty who was a staunch advocate of the cause of non-Brahmins and a close associate of E.V.R., helped to place the sons of some prominent Brahmins in important jobs. Personal motivation got the better of any commitment to ideology.

Secondly the Justice Party failed to build a mass base and lacked mass appeal unlike the Congress, some of the party leaders were found to be motivated by narrow personal interests and lust for power and positions. And what is more it lacked leadership like that of Mahatma Gandhi or Kamaraj, with their own strategies and record of sacrifice and public service. It was observed that "the spirit of nationalism which had been roused by the two Satyagraha campaigns triumphed over the forces of narrow communalism and pro-British vested interests entrenched in the Justice Party". It is in this political milieu that Kamaraj emerged first as the state level leader and then at the national level.

48. Relatives of S. Srinivasa Iyengar, M. Ramachandra Rao & P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer were provided jobs (Bobbili to R.K. Chetty, March 5, 1936).
49. S. Kumaraswamy Reddiar remarked at a party conference in 1927 "Pretensions apart, we are all job-hunters, nobody need to be ashamed to confess it."