CHAPTER IX

THE NON-BRAHMIN MOVEMENT AND NATIONALISM

The Non-Brahmin Movement found its origin in Madras as an offshoot of justice party there with practically the same objects. Later it spread to Maharastra, Kolhapur and Karmataka in the first quarter of the 20th century. Here the Non-Brahmin party included the Marathas, Jains, Vokkaligas, Lingayats, (Veerasaivas) Reddis, Vaishyas, Khatriyas, Valmiks, Kurubars and untouchables.

The Non-Brahmins had their own grievances. The Brahmins secured the largest number of Government posts although the Non-Brahmins were numerically by far the largest. The educated Non-Brahmins did not possess the same political powers that the Brahmins had.

According to them, the less fortunate people were deprived of the chances by the fortunate in obtaining the Government services, concessions in schools and colleges, in getting scholarships, in securing social facilities and monetary help from the
Their emancipation from the social subordination and political subservience was as much in plank in their platform as the achievement of their political freedom. (Therefore, the Motto of the party was "Equal opportunities to all").

It was a body with social, educational, economic and political objects. It was in no way related to the religion. This is clear from the address delivered by Rao Bahadur B.Muniswami Naidu to the South Indian Non-Brahmin Federation: liberal

I need hardly state that the South Indian Liberal Federation was not started as an anti-Brahmin Movement, but its main aim was .... the improvement of non-Brahmin communities and the securing of equal opportunities to all the communities in the government of the country and the administration of all activities thereof paid or honorary. 1

It was so to say a question of distribution of spoils, percentage of seats and favours.

To quote Gandhi, the case of the Non-Brahmin Party was a political one. "When I wrote in "Young India" on the Non-Brahmin question in Maharashtra, I little realised that the Non-Brahmin case was largely, if not entirely, a political matter and that the complaint was not so much against the Brahmins as a class by the Non-Brahmins as a class, as by some educated Non-Brahmins against the Nationalists who were mostly Brahmins."¹

The British Government played the Non-Brahmins against the Brahmins and endeavoured to prolong its policy of fostering quarrels in order to divide and rule.² The British wanted to destroy the communal harmony, damage the prospects of national unity. They held out political inducements to the Non-Brahmins.

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¹ M. Gandhi, Young India 1919 - 1922, S. Ganesan Publisher, Madras, 1922, p. 424.
² Ibid. p.426.
The prime need of the hour was the promotion of education and social uplift. A few earnest souls among Lingayats of Karnataka took up the work of Revivalist activity at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1888, (Saradesai of Vantamuri) (a small principality in Belgaum district), by name(Raja Lakhama Gowda) went to England and returned after two years. He fully realised the prime necessity of giving education to the people. Therefore he gave munificent donations for the purpose. (Artal Rudragouda and Gilganchi) collected money from Navalgund and Gadag Talukas and sent Shivalingappa Hosali for I.C.S. Examination. In 1904 under the presidentship of Sreevant Linga Raj of Sirsang, Lingayats organised their Mahasabha (Veerasaiva Mahasabha) which was attended by the prominent leaders of all parts — North Karnataka, Mysore, and Sholapur. That created social consciousness in the community and subsequent Mahasabhas and conferences were held. Lingayat Education Association came to be started. Linga Raj of Sirsangi bequeathed the whole of his estate for promotion of education of Lingayat students. (Later Mrutyunjaya Swamiji of)

Dharwar started Free Boarding for students in 1917.

Vokkaligas took up the revivalist activity on a large scale after 1900. The Vokkaligara Sangha was started at Bangalore with a view to foster and improve the economic and social conditions of Vokkaligas through education. For the benefit of the students, they established hostels at many places in Mysore. Later on, these hostels served as the centre of social and political activities. Other communities also followed suit.¹

²Daxina Maharashtra Jain Sabha was started in Sangli; and under its auspices Jain Boardings were opened at Sangli, Kolhapur and Hubli.² Similarly Reddy Conference was held and Reddi Social and Educational League was established which ran Reddi Boarding for students of that community. Likewise was awakening in other communities such as Kurubars, Valmiks and Marathas who held their own respective Sabhas, Mahasabhas and Conferences and endeavoured for the social and educational advancement of their communities.

¹Ibid, p. 29.
Thus, communal institutions were established to improve the social and economic conditions through education. Many feared that these communal groups would lead to harbouring the feelings of malice instead of maintaining the attitude of friendly competition towards each other and ultimately damage the cause of national unity. However, these fears were belied. In this connection it is worth noting the address delivered by Lingaraj of Sirsangi who was the founder President of Veerasaiva Mahasabha held at Dharwar in 1904. He also presided over the second Mahasabha held in December, 1905.

The main object of our gathering is to undertake social reforms and to give impetus to the development of arts and crafts. Some Western learned, nationalist leaders and the patriots of the Congress organisation thought that such conferences would lead to social discord. Their contention was that communal conferences of that type would damage the cause of national unity. Because, India comprises of several religious, castes, colours and creeds. If all the communities, in our country, organise such conferences, national unity would be impossible. Such contentions have no value. Because, if each individual, each family, each community, put
an effort, to improve its own conditions, the progress of the country is automatically assured. The aggregation of families constitutes a community and the sum-total of many communities form a nation. Therefore, if the efforts were made to eliminate the communal differences to achieve the progress and unity of the country, effort would be strenuous, and the country has to wait for a long time for that attainment. But the effort would be easy, if each community should endeavour to improve its own conditions, the progress and unity of the country would remain intact if each community holds such conferences. ¹

He further said:

"Let Brahmins, Jains and Muslims and all other communities organise their own Mahasabhas. There will be no harm done to the national cause with no malice or jealousy towards those who are more progressive, let the communities, which are backward tread the path in which they have gone and achieve progress. For the solution of problems common to all communities, let them all join for a united attempt. There should be no element of selfishness or unfairness in these things. Those communities which are more

¹. Ibid, p. 30.
advanced should treat the less fortunate communities with sympathy and consideration. All should guard against harming the unity of the country which is of paramount importance. These are the ideas and motives which have prompted the formation of this Mahasabha, and we have no desire to quarrel with other communities or to blame them. Let my co-religionists always bear this in mind." (Translation of the speech made by Lingaraja of Sirsangi - quoted in the History of Freedom Movement in Karnataka, Vol. II)

Further he impressed upon the Lingayats the importance of education. The idea of education for the prosperity of the future progeny was gradually being realised by the educated gentlemen. Still the Lingayat community lagged behind, as compared with the other communities. The reason for their backwardness was poverty. The parents or guardians were unable to incur expenditure on education. They preferred agriculture and trade to education. So, Lingaraj Desai stressed the necessity of collecting funds to open schools in the villages in order to give at least primary education. Unless that was done the spread of literacy in the Lingayat community would be a remote dream. Therefore, he gave a substantial
monetary support for the cause of education. Thus he contributed a good deal for the progress of education in Karnataka.

Due to the progressive policy of Shahu Chhatrapati Maharaj, Kolhapur made strides of progress in the education of masses that comprised mostly the backward classes. His Highness fully realised the unbalanced state of social progress of the Non-Brahmin communities. He saw that there was one sided educational advancement of the people limited only to regenerate class. He gauged the situation and realised that unless the Non-Brahmins pursued the path of Western education there was no hope of being rescued from the domination of the advanced class. In this respect he was fortunate in securing the services of Mr. Sabnis who was his Tutor, guardian, and Dewan. He discussed the matter with the liberal minded Brahmins like Mr. Ranade and Mr. Gokhale who wholeheartedly supported the case. With the help of Shri. Shahu Maharaj, there sprang up several hostels for

2. Ibid, p. 137.
Marathas and other communities including the Muslims.

(A Jain conference was held at Nippani in 1901. It started a hostel for its boys at Kolhapur in 1901. Mr. Chaugale who was promoted as the Chief Judge by His Highness, was given encouragement to start the educational movement among the Lingayats in June 1907. The Maharaja invited to Kolhapur the leaders of Lingayat community such as Rao Bahadoor Rudragouda of Artal and Sardesai of Vantamuri who had undertaken the educational activities. They visited Kolhapur in June 1907. Their visit resulted in the starting of the Lingayat hostels which accommodated about fifty students and received a substantial monetary help. His Highness attended the Lingayat Conference held at Siddhagiri, a hill-station eight miles away from Kolhapur. He encouraged the community to establish communion with other communities. As a result of his concerted efforts, he achieved, by about 1917 unity, co-operation, and co-ordination.

1. Ibid, p. 138.
2. Ibid, p. 144.
3. Ibid.
among the various Non-Brahmin communities not only in Kolhapur but also outside. His earnest desire was that the Non-Brahmin movement should be well-organised and well-represented. He encouraged social workers and journalists. He gave substantial monetary help to the organs that promoted the cause of the Non-Brahmins. The "Vibhakar" of Belgaum (a Kannada paper) was one such organ which was edited by Panditappa Chikkodi. The "Karnataka Times" was published from Dharwar by Shivalinga Shastri.

Shortly after the First Karnataka Political Conference of 1920 held at Dharwar under the Presidency of Sir V.P. Madhava Rao, the First Karnataka Non-Brahmin Political Conference was held at Hubli under the presidency of Sir P. Tyagaraja Chetty, and as an adjunct to the latter the Karnataka Non-Brahmin Social Conference and the Karnataka Non-Brahmin Educational Conference were held the former being presided over by Shahu Chhatrapati of Kolhapur. It was a great gathering held on the eve of the first elections of

the reformed councils. Shahu Chhatrapati's enthusiasm knew no bounds when he received rousing reception from the tens of thousands in Karnataka. He describes his impressions of the visit to a friend in Kolhapur in these words:

The political conference was very vigorous indeed. The speeches were strong and almost extreme... Even if you had been here, you would also attended this conference...... After all I attended it and I feel within me that I did a very good thing. God will protect me. .... I request you now to release me from the state work and enable me to spend the few years of life that still remain for me in serving the people.¹

In Madras, the marvellous success of the Non-Brahmin movement was wholly due to the two celebrated twin Dr. T.M. Nair and Sir Tyagaraja Chetty,
who were in a real sense the founders of the Industrial Democracy in India. The movement was essentially democratic in nature. It was largely economic, political and social in its bearings and was aiming at achieving all round advancement of the people.

S. Sreenivas Ayyangar has criticised the movement as undemocratic. The reason why the movement is alleged to be not democratic is stated by K.V. Reddy Naidu in his address as the President of the third Tanjore District Non-Brahmin Conference:

The next reason, why our party is alleged to be not a democratic party is that we exclude the whole community of Brahmins, the vast majority of the Non-Brahmins and the entire Mohamadan community. Now it is true that we exclude the Brahmins, for, what co-operation is conceivable between the victim and the victimiser?

1. Ibid., p. 577.
It is against flesh and blood. There is not a single Non-Brahmin in this province who does not daily feel the pinch of Brahmin oppression. The Ryot in the village; the trader in the town; the clerk in the office; the teacher in the school; every subordinate non-Brahmin official in the public services of the country, and even the Wakil at the Bar; may the patient in the hospital; and the guest in the Choultry all know it and feel it. Some of them may not have openly joined our party for fear of further oppression; some cannot join it, being public servants; while a large number not being politically minded, do not care to be known as pledging themselves to any political creed. But they all sympathise with our movement.\(^1\)

\(^1\) Ibid, p. 5.
The Amritsar Congress had declared that the Reform Act was unsatisfactory, inadequate and disappointing.\(^1\) At the same time, they began to angle for the Non-Brahmin support at Tinnevelly.\(^2\) But so far as the Non-Brahmins were concerned, they considered the reforms as a great advance over the then existing state of affairs.\(^3\) This is clear from the presidential address delivered by K.V. Reddy Naidu:

We have long been complaining of the oppression and tyranny of the Brahmin oligarchy. The coming elections afford one great opportunity for us to be rid of that tyranny and to become once more free citizens. The fortunes of our party and of the great Non-Brahmin community will, for a long time largely depend upon the results of these elections.\(^4\)

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1. Ibid, p. 15.
2. Ibid.
4. Ibid, p. 15.
Let us take advantage of this opportunity at once without any hesitation. If the Brahmins come into power they will consolidate it and work it out to our further disadvantage.¹

The work of the last three years would go all in vain. Therefore, my friends, go to the country, educate the voter, and impress upon him the value of the vote. The Non-Brahmin voters form an over-whelming majority and the secrecy of the ballot will protect them from the sinister influence of the official, the vakil and the priest.²

Fight, fight till you win. ³

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
Remember that you have been fighting not for yourself but for the cause, for the great Non-Brahmin community.¹

If you let the Brahmins come into power, these will be no-where in the public services.²

It is gratifying to note that the neighbouring state of Mysore has given so good a lead in this important matter, especially in the educational uplift of the depressed classes, that we cannot do better than copy her example. In short, we want a complete system of free and compulsory elementary education.³

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid, p. 16.
In his presidential address to the fourth Trichinopoly Non-Brahmin Conference on 24-9-1921 Mr. C. Ramalinga Reddy, M.A. (Cantab), F.M.U. said:

Our party has the unique distinction of representing national and social democracies with equal emphasis and in perfect union.  

We stand for social emancipation as well as political for the Swaraj of the masses, as contrasted with that of the classes. We wish to build from bottom upwards on the lines laid down by our illustrious leaders, Dr. T.M. Nair and Sir P.T. Chetty.


2. Ibid.
Ours is the party of national and social democracy. It is the only one of its kind. We stand for progress all round educational, the root cause of our ills, economic, social and political.

Let us not sit quiet, self-contended. We must raise big funds and carry systematic propaganda. We must link ourselves up with similar organisations in other parts of India and make ourselves the national party that we in essence are and play our rightful part in the larger life of the country. Our brethren in the different parts of India have begun to rise. What is required is the consolidation of social democracy and I trust that in this great national

1. Ibid, p. 25.
task big with the redemption of humanity, we of Madras as the best organised group of social democrats, will take the lead.¹

But according to Gandhi: "The movement owes its vitality, not to the religious or social disability, but to the political ascendancy of the Brahmins, which the latter undoubtedly enjoy by right of merit. That grievance must vanish if the Nationalist Brahmins, having evolved larger views about Swaraj, taboo all Government posts and boycott the councils and nominated seats on Municipalities. It is clear to me that the Government, in accordance with its confirmed policy, will play the Non-Brahmins against the Brahmins, even without the knowledge of the forms and endeavour to prolong its lease of life by fostering quarrels between the two, and holding out the political inducements to the Non-Brahmins.

The reason why the question has assumed a more acute form is that Non-Brahmin leaders are trying

¹ Ibid., p. 28.
to influence the electorate in their favour and are telling the electors that, Non-Brahmins being weak, they must seek the British alliance. Brahmin leaders are naturally trying to influence the same electors and dissuade them from using their vote. This gives rise to bad blood, but not more than when the moderates and the Nationalists are fighting. The most painful part of the situation, however, is that the Non-Brahmin leaders, who claim to represent the masses and to feel for them, will by their co-operation with the Government, or by seeking to better their condition by Government aid, will actually tighten the hold of the Government on the masses. And by their countenancing the Govt. aid they will make more difficult the remedy of the Punjab and the Khilafat wrongs. The Non-Brahmin policy is thus demonstrably suicidal."

Gandhiji thus warned that the remedy did not lie in their (Non-Brahmins) alliance with the Govt. which is bound to defeat the very purpose. It would be dangerous if the Non-Brahmins were being tempted by few Govt. posts.¹

Unfortunately the relations between the Brahmins and the Non-Brahmins became strained.

"Unfortunately however, on account of some serious difference having arisen in the reception committee of the first Karnataka Conference, an important section of the people mostly consisting of the Non-Brahmins seceded from the conference and issued a manifesto calling upon Non-Brahmins not to participate therein but to hold a separate conference of their own. Accordingly a special conference was held at Hubli in July 1920 under the presidentship of Sir Tyagaraj Chetty, the well-known anti-Brahmin leader of Madras."²

1. Ibid.
2. Report of the Inquiry Committee, appointed by the Working Committee of the All India Congress Committee to inquire into the Firing by the authorities on the crowd at Dharwar, on the 1st July 1920: Commissioners; Abbas S. Tyabji, (continued)
But fortunately there was no acute Hindu-Muslim problem in Karnataka. If both Brahmins and Non-Brahmins had come to appreciate the importance of territorial integrity and one-ness, the friction between the two communities would have diminished and the Karnataka's unity would have hastened.

(Karnataka lost its unity of purpose, dividing itself into Brahmins and Non-Brahmins. But this, however, did not come in the way of strengthening national movement in Karnataka. Since it came under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi and Nationalism thrived rapidly throughout Karnataka.)

Retired Chief Justice, High Court, Baroda, S.S. Setlur, Advocate, some-time Judge, Chief Court, Mysore, M. Bhawani Shankar Niyogi, Advocate, Nagpur, pub: R.S. Hukkorikar at the office of the District Congress Committee, Dharwar, 1921, p. 3.