



DISSENSIONS AND DECLINE OF THE JUSTICE PARTY

Dr. P. Nagoorkani

**M.A., Ph.D., Assistant Professor of History , School of Historical Studies ,
Madurai Kamaraj University , Madurai.**

ABSTRACT :

The paper attempts to draw attention on the dissensions and the factors which paved the way for the decline of the Justice Party in Madras Presidency. The internal dissensions of the party and lack proper leadership in 1930s are the major factors for downfall of the Justice Party in the political scenario of Tamil Nadu politics. Indeed the political development that had taken a peculiar shape in the Tamil Country led to the anti-Brahmin sentiment and the formation of the Justice Party which held sway for more than two decades.



Leaders of the Justice Party like C. Natesa Mudaliar , P.Theagaraya Chetty and T.M.Nair demanded communal representation in all branches of administration and legislatures. Justice Party was in powers for seventeen years from 1920-1937. The Swarajists like Satyamurti rode full tilt against it by branding it communal. In 1926, it was defeated by the Swarajists. Though it lost its hold after 1926, it helped greatly the non-Brahmins to consolidate their position and power. But the continuous internal dissensions in the Party on linguistic, caste and regional basis also crumbled the prospectus of the Party in Madras Presidency.

KEYWORDS : Justice Party, Brahmins, Non-Brahmins, E.V.Ramasami, T.M.Nair, Theagaraya Chetty, Natesa Mudaliar, Swarajists.

INTRODUCTION

Pre-Independence political history is characterized by the prominent role played by Brahmins in Madras Presidency. Until the mid 1930s, the majority of leaders and members of the Tamil Nadu Congress party belonged to the Brahmin caste and the English speaking educated elite.¹ In this situation, in 1916, P.Theagaraya Chetty, T.M.Nair and others formed the South Indian People's Association to protect the interests of the non-Brahmins. On 20th December 1916, it published its famous Non-Brahmin- Manifesto' in which they highlighted the pathetic plight of the non-Brahmins and stressed the need for representation according to the strength of each community.² Later the South Indian People's Association became the South Indian Liberal Federation and Justice Party. It was formed to fight against social and political injustice. Its motto was to do away with caste distinctions altogether.³ The leaders of the Party were members of non-Brahmin upper castes such as the Vellalas, Reddys, Kammas, Velamas and Nairs and the higher merchant castes. It was an expression of the frustration of these castes to the ever-growing influence of Brahmins, especially in the urban areas.⁴

The first General Elections for the Legislative Council constituted as per the Montford Reforms were held at the end of November 1920. In the Legislative Council with 127 Members the Justice party acquired a strength of 81 and the first ministry formed by the Justice party assumed office on 17th December 1920. P.

Theagaraya Chetty as leader of the Justice party should have formed the ministry. But he was a great leader who was not attracted by the glamour of office and wanted to really serve the people and work for the welfare of the non-Brahmin community. He asked Subbarayalu Reddiar, an advocate and a fellow student of his at the Presidency College to form the ministry. Subbarayalu Reddiar as Chief Minister formed the ministry.⁵ Within a short period Subbarayalu Reddiar resigned on account of his failing health and the Raja of Panagal succeeded him as Chief Minister.⁶ The second General Elections to the Legislative Council was held on 31st October 1923. The Justice party was returned as the majority party with reduced strength. Internal feuds and dissensions began to manifest in the party. A splinter group under the leadership of C.R.Reddy, who later on became the Vice-Chancellor of the Andhra University, brought a no confidence motion and it was defeated. The leading light of the Justice party and the acknowledged leader Theagaraya Chetty who guided the Justice party to victory in 1920 and 1923 Elections died on 28th April 1925 and the party suffered an irreparable loss.⁷ The leadership of the Party devolved on Raja of Panagal. In the General Elections to the Assembly and Legislative Council held on 8th November 1926, the Justice party was defeated.

P. Subbarayan, formed the ministry and Justice party was functioning as an opposition Party in the Legislative Council. With the premature demise of Raja of Panagal on 16th December 1928 the Justice Party's ascendancy in the political field was nearing its end.

In the elections to the Legislative Council in 1930 the Justice party was successful and Munuswamy Naidu as leader of the Justice party formed the Ministry. A no confidence motion was brought against him for his sneaking affection for the Congress and Swarajists. He resigned and Raja of Bobbili became the Chief Minister on 5th November 1932.⁸ The first election to the Legislative Assembly as per the Government of India Act 1937, took place in February 1937 and the Justice party and its leaders were defeated in the elections. The Congress won 159 seats out of 215 and formed the ministry. Thereafter the Justice party rule in Madras Presidency came to an end.

The Justice party was defeated not so much by the strength of their opponents but by the intrigues of their own party colleagues. Distribution of patronage like appointments to high posts resulted in internal feuds dissensions and disappointments. When no confidence motion was brought against the ministry headed by Raja of Panagal, he said on the floor of the house that he realised *"the significance of Gladstone's complaint that for every appointment he made, he created 20 enemies and one doubtful friend"*. C.R.Reddy speaking about the loyalties of the members of the Justice party said *"Appointments result in attachments while disappointments lead to detachments"*. When C.R.Reddy was not appointed as Chairman of the District Board, Chittoor, true to his own saying he became detached with the Justice party and brought the no confidence motion against Raja of Panagal.⁹ Appointments were few. Aspirants were many. That brought disunity and disaffection among the Justicites. After the death of Raja of Panagal, there was lack of dynamic leadership that hastened the closure of the Justice party. The Justice party's rule in the State came to an end after the diarchy Constitution came to an end and enactment of the Government of India Act and formation of the Congress Ministry in Madras took place in February 1937.

E.V.Ramaswamy, joined the Congress in 1919. There was predominantly Brahmin leadership in the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee. E.V.R. was the president of the Tamil Nadu Branch of the All India Spinners' Association which was intended to popularise "Khaddar" and promote its sale in the country. The secretary, a Brahmin, appointed a number of persons belonging to his community to key positions in the Association. E.V.R. was noticing how Brahmins were promoting their own interest in organisations sponsored by the Indian National Congress. Predominant Brahmin leadership in the Congress and the lack of political and social awakening among the non-Brahmins brought E.V.R. closer to the ideals of the Justice party and their fight for communal justice found an echo in his heart. He moved a resolution at the Tamil Nadu Congress Conference at Tirunelveli in 1920 urging the Congress to accept the principle of communal representation in Government employment and educational institutions. The subject Committee which screened important resolutions before putting them before the Conference passed the resolution. Srinivasa Iyengar who presided over the Conference disallowed the resolution stating that it would cause communal tension. At the next annual Conference at Thanjavur in 1921 E.V.R. wanted to propose the same resolution

on communal representation. C. Rajagopalachari an astute politician of Madras persuaded E.V.R. from proposing the resolution on the ground that time was not ripe for such a resolution. Then at the Thiruvannamalai Conference in 1924 presiding over the Conference E.V.R. made a powerful appeal for acceptance of his resolution on communal representation. The resolution was put to vote and lost.

V.V.S.Iyer a staunch Congress man started a "Gurukulam" at Seranmadevi in Tirunelveli District. The institution was established with the object of imparting religious education to youths and inculcating in them the spirit of patriotism and infusing into them a passion for social service. Separate dining was enforced for the Brahmin students and the non-Brahmin students. Even the food served to the two sections of the students was different. As ninety five per cent of the contribution for the establishment and maintenance of the institution came from non-Brahmins and since V.V.S. Iyer without maintaining equality between Brahmin and non-Brahmin students, brought up non-Brahmin students in an atmosphere of inferiority. E.V.R. as Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Congress refused to make payment to "Gurukulam" unless common mess was conceded. But V.V.S. Iyer without the knowledge of E.V.R. managed to obtain the cheque for that amount from the Joint Secretary, who was a Brahmin.¹⁰ E.V.R. was infuriated over the incident and declared in a meeting held at Salem in April 1925 that the Brahmin question should be settled even while the British supremacy lasted in the country; otherwise they would have to suffer under the tyranny of Brahminocracy. Varadarajulu Naidu, another close associate of E.V.R. declared that the "Gurukulam" is going to be deciding factor in the national life of non-Brahmins. They would no longer accept a position of inferiority in the national institutions. While Gandhiji wanted this year to be a "spinning year", Varadarajulu Naidu declared it to be "non-Brahmin year". The Congress leaders made a counter charge that E.V.R. and Varadarajulu Naidu are responsible for stirring up communal feelings in Tamil Society.

The Gurukulam institution showed that Brahmins whether traditionalists or progressives were essentially communal in outlook. Before the animosity over the "Gurukulam" controversy subsided the annual conference of the Congress at Kanchipuram came to be held in 1925. E.V.R. made the last and the sixth attempt at getting the Tamil Nadu Congress to pass the resolution regarding communal representation in Government Services. Thiru.Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, a great friend of E.V.R. and the President of the Conference sensing the opposition to the resolution did not permit E.V.R. to propose the resolution. The Conjeevaram Conference made E.V.R. to realise the futility of hoping for advancement of the interests of non-Brahmins by remaining in the Congress.¹¹

CUDDALORE MEETING

On 10th September 1927, E.V. R. addressed a public gathering At Cuddalore. There he had spoken that Gandhiji eulogized Brahmins as the 'repositories of knowledge and embodiments of sacrifice' and advised them to stick to their traditions of austerity, accepting only what non-Brahmins chose to give them. In the same vein he appealed to non-Brahmins not to usher in a new class of untouchables by hating Brahmins, whom he considered the guardians of Hinduism. He further stressed in the same speech that non-Brahmins in their ire against the Brahmins should not wreck the system of *varnaashrama dharma*, the bed rock of Hinduism. To him this was a universal law and a law of spiritual economics, 'designed to set free man's energy for higher pursuits in life'.

E.V.R. expressed to Gandhi his confirmed belief that "true freedom for India" would be achieved only with the destruction of the Indian National Congress, Hinduism and Brahminism and at a public meeting addressed at Tirunelveli E.V.R. said that if Gandhiji's advice is accepted, it would relegate all the caste Hindus to the position of 'Sudhras' and they will end up only in serving Brahmins. E.V.R. felt convinced that the Congress not only failed to remove social inequalities but also created perennial impediments to the social and economic progress of non-Brahmins. He left the Congress party in disgust in 1925 and founded the Self-Respect movement which attracted the socially and economically backward non-Brahmin castes and scheduled castes.

In course of time, the Justice party gave up social reform programmes in favour of retaining political power. E.V.R.'s self respect movement without diverting its energy in politics, conserved it to work for the

social progress of non-Brahmins masses. The self-respect movement became a mass organisation in its programmes and was oriented towards larger interests of the masses rather than to the privileged few in the non-Brahmin community. E.V.R.'s self-respect league carried its propaganda in favour of communism and atheism to get rid of the capitalists as a class and all religions to secure to all people equality in life irrespective of sex or status.

The Justice party maintained their alliance with self-respect movement hoping that an alliance with a mass organisation like the self-respect movement would improve their chances in the forthcoming elections in 1937. Secondly the Justice party had no propaganda machinery or enthusiastic propagandists for disseminating its policies, and no Tamil Newspaper to spread its message. The Tamil newspapers of Justice Party, *Dravidan* had already passed into the hands of E.V.R. during the life time of Raja of Panagal. So, the Justice party had an informal political alliance with the self-respect league to provide the necessary propaganda weapon to fight the Congress. E.V.R. had considerable influence in the Tamil wing of the Justice party and a large number of people from the self-respect league infiltrated into the ranks of Justice party. In spite of the self-respect league working for the Justice party, it lost the elections and Congress Ministry took office in Madras under the leadership of Rajagopalachari popularly known as Rajaji on 14th July 1937.¹²

Rajaji introduced compulsory study of Hindi in schools. E.V.R. spearheaded the anti-Hindi movement. His self-respect league was becoming a powerful organisation with branches in almost all mofussil towns, with two popular newspapers, *Viduthalai* and *Kudi Arasu* and a team of talented speakers in Tamil. On account of the anti-Hindi agitation *Viduthalai* office was raided on 5th October 1938, back issues of the paper and account books were seized and the publisher, E.V.Krishnaswamy brother of E.V.R. was arrested. Anti-Hindi volunteers picketed the Hindu Theological School, Triplicane, which was teaching Hindi to the students. The Government filed a charge-sheet against E.V.R. alleging that he was inciting women to picket the Hindu Theological School with the intention of obstructing the students and teachers from entering or approaching the school and the Magistrate on 5th December 1938 convicted E.V.R. to undergo rigorous imprisonment for one year and to pay a fine of Rs.1000. As a result of his imprisonment, E.V.R.'s personal image rocketed sky high to the bewilderment of the Congress Government. Between 7th and 31st December 1938 five hundred meetings were held in Tamil Nadu to protest against the conviction and imprisonment of E.V.R. who was regarded as saviour and protector of the Tamil culture.

Raja of Bobbili resigned from the Justice party in November 1938. Opinion was gaining round that a man of the masses like E.V.R. should lead the Party if it was to survive the political crisis caused by the resignation of Raja of Bobbili. In the Fourteenth Confederation of the Justice party held on 29th December 1938. E.V.R. undergoing imprisonment in Jail, was elected leader of the Justice party.¹³ According to the convention of the party whoever was elected as the president for the Annual Confederation would automatically become the leader of the Party. As per the convention, E.V.R. became the leader of the Justice party. The Justice party had thus passed from the hands of the "Coterie of Aristocrats" into the hands of E.V.R., the representative of the common people.

While undergoing imprisonment in Bellary Jail, E.V.R.'s health started deteriorating. He was transferred from the hot climate of Bellary to the Coimbatore Jail. He lost 23 pounds, and his health was causing anxiety and agitation for his unconditional release was mounting. Even the Congress men expressed deep concern over the failing health of E.V.R. He was unconditionally released on 25th December 1939.

On the out-break of the Second World War in September 1939, the Congress Ministry resigned. E.V.R. made progressive Tamilisation of the Justice Party and a demand for "Dravida Nadu" or Dravidian State came to be made. No other Justice party leader enjoyed the support of the masses as E.V.R. In the Sixteenth Confederation of the Justice party, held on 27th August 1944 C.N.Anndurai popularly known as Anna moved the resolution to change the nomenclature of the Justice party into Dravida Kazhagam, popularly referred as D.K. and to transform into a social organisation to work for the social awakening and uplift of the non-Brahmin masses. The resolution was passed and Justice party came to be called Dravida Kazhagam. E.V.R. was elected to the Chair to preside over the Conference and as per the party convention E.V.R. elected to

the Chair became the leader of the Justice party called Dravida Kazhagam to give a new image vitality and strength to the party.¹⁴

To conclude, the very success of the Justice Party formed the basis of its downfall. It totally alienated the sympathy of the downtrodden people who were mainly responsible for its success. On 11th May 1921 when the workers of the Carnatic Mill struck work, the untouchables did not participate in it and remained aloof. The untouchable leaders who backed the Justice Party came out of it in mid 1920s. According to M.C.Rajah, the Justice party leaders paid only lip-service to his community.¹⁵

Indeed the Justice Party secured more government jobs to non-Brahmins. The non-Brahmin castes vied with one another for scramble of power and position. This tendency in them alienated the sympathy of the very group which brought it to power. It became the intellectual backwater of a few wealthy landlords and merchants who by their self-centred activities paved way for its ruin. P.Theagaraya Chetty passed away in 1925 and with it him the party began to decline.¹⁶

To safeguard their identity and interest, the Brahmins started Varnasharama Sabha and journals, *Varnashrama Dharma* and *Hindu Message*. Annie Besant became their mouth piece and her *New India*, the defender of their *dharma*. Like non-Brahmins, the Brahmins conducted conferences to propagate views among them. Even they passed a resolution to preserve their race. They stressed the importance of the *Vedas* and *Smritis*.¹⁷

For the first time in the history of the Tamil Country, the Brahmins became so vociferous that when challenged, they did not even mind to change their traditional calling. Even in the Legislative Council, such sentiments were heard frequently.¹⁸

The polarity between Brahmins and non-Brahmins ultimately resulted in the formation of Self-Respect Movement in 1926. The Vaikom hero, E.V. Ramasami who headed the movement along with his lieutenant S.Ramanathan to restore the past of the non-Brahmins.¹⁹ When the Rajah of Bobbili relinquished of the party in 1938, E.V. Ramasami was chosen as president of the party. Thus the top leadership of the party which was always in the hands of Telugus, slipped into the hands of a Kannidga of Tamil Country. The prime Telugu leaders of the party from Andhra region severed their connections with the Justice Party. The dissociation of the Telugu Zamindras from the party reduced the Justice Party largely made up of Tamils of the Tamil districts alone.²⁰ Dravida Kazhagam's social reforms and policies attracted a band of educated young men who rallied round E.V.R. and C.N. Annadurai to build up a sovereign State for the Tamils. As the Party leader, E.V.R. made the Justice Party as Dravida Kazhagam, and it became a social outfit. At last the Justice Party disappeared from the political scenario. P.T. Rajan who operated the party in the old name, could not mobilize the mass support.

END NOTES

1. Chuyen, Gilles, *Who is a Brahmin?*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2004, p.124.
2. Radhakrishnan, P., 'Backward Class Movements in Tamil Nadu' in Srinivas, M.N., (ed.), *Caste-Its Twentieth Century Avatar*, Delhi: Viking, 1996, p.117.
3. Subrahmanian, N., *The Brahmin in the Tamil Country*, Madurai: Ennes Publications, 1989, p.131
4. Subramanian, P., *Social History of the Tamils,(1707-1947)*, New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 1996, pp.42-43
5. Rajaraman, P., *The Justice Party, A Historical Perspective, 1916-37*, Madras: Poompozil Publishers, 1988, pp.214-215.
6. Hardgrave, Robert, L., *Essays in the Political Sociology of South India*, Delhi: Usha Publications, 1979, P.21.
7. Thandavan, R., *The Dravidian Movement*, Chennai; The Academy of Public Affairs, 2001, p.79.
8. Hardgrave, Robert, L., *The Dravidian Movement*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1965, p.23.
9. Rajaraman, P., *Glimpses of Social Movements in Peninsular India*, Chennai: Poompozil Publishers, 2013, p.71.

10. Udhayasankar, I., *Periyar E.V. Ramasamy : Communal Justice and Social Recognition*, Chennai: Anna Centre for Public Affairs, 2006, pp.55-62 .
11. Arooran, Nambi, K., *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism, 1905-1954*, Madurai : Koodal Publishers, 1980, p.159.
12. Baker, C.J., *The Politics of South India, 1920-1937*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd, 1976, p.314.
13. Baliga, B.S., *Tanjore District Handbook*, Madras : Government Press, 1957,p.113.
14. Rajayyan, K., *Tamil Nadu A Real History*, Trivandrum : Ratna Publications , 2005, p. 383.
15. Irschick, Eugene, F., *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism , 1916-1929*, Bombay : Oxford University Press, 1969, p.191.
16. Subramaninan, P., *op.cit.*, p.66.
17. *New India*, 25 July 1916.
18. Subramaninan, P., *op.cit.*, p.67.
19. More , J.B.P., *Rise and Fall of the 'Dravidian' Justice Party, 1916-1946*, Nirmalagiri: Institute for Research in Social Science and Humanities, 2009, p.43.