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## IN SEARCH OF COMMUNAL JUSTICE – AN ORGANISATIONAL MOVE OF THE DRAVIDIANS IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY TAMIL NADU

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### ABSTRACT:

*The paper is an attempt to focus the emergence of the Dravidian forces in the beginning of the Twentieth Century Tamil Nadu. When the Aryan-Brahmins dominated every sphere of public activity, the non-Brahmins suffered much and they were backward in social and political setting but economically they were equally strong along with the Brahmins. The missionary scholars like Robert Caldwell creating the term 'Dravidian', illustrated the Dravidians as separate identity and they had a culture which was differed from the Aryans. Thus the missionaries and the British high officials posted the top position of the Brahmins in the political setuo and the lower condition of the Dravidians. When the political system well formed under the Montagu Chelmsford Reforms, the non-Brahmin Dravidians clamoured for communal representation in the Madras Government . It resulted in the ascendancy of the non-Brahmins in political domains.*



**KEYWORDS:** Dravidian, Aryan, Brahmins, Non-Brahmins, Justice Party, T.M.Nair Communal Representation, Madras, Annie Besant, T.M.Nair, C.Natesa Mudaliar.

### INTRODUCTION :

The early Sanskrit literature of North India referred to the people of South India as Dravida. Robert Caldwell was the first, in modern times, to use the word 'Dravidian' to refer to the four principal languages of Southern India - Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. Further, Caldwell wrote about the existence of the pre-Aryan Civilization of the Dravidians and also used the word "Brahmans" as synonymous with "Aryans". Taking the cue from Caldwell, the Tamil scholars identified the Brahmins with the Aryans of North India, whose migration to the South, according to K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, started from 1000 B.C. onwards.

The first Aryan who crossing the South India astonished the magnificence of the Royal Pandyan Courts, and took shelter in the hospitable Tamil land. It was well portrayed by f S. Somasundara Bharathiar, a great Tamil scholar .<sup>1</sup> Thus the Aryans (Brahmins) who came to the Tamil land were well received by the kings and people in general and granted lands and wealth to settle down here. But in return they introduced the caste system, which was till then unknown to the Tamil society. As centuries

passed on, the caste system became more and more rigid, placing the Brahmins on the top of the society and pushing down the native Tamils, branding them as Sudras, to the lower level. The Brahmins' hold on the society was complete and total, compelling every other community to follow their dictum. This artificially created inferior position was not acceptable to the Tamils who started challenging this from the beginning of the Twentieth Century.

The establishment of the British rule in Tamil Nadu at the end of the Eighteenth Century also enhanced the prestige and position of the Brahmins. Under the British rule, other than the Europeans, the Brahmins occupied a large number of important positions in the government. In the upper levels of the district administration of the Madras Presidency, out of 305 posts, the Brahmins held 237 posts in 1855. The following Table-1 shows the continued dominant position of the Brahmins in government service in 1912.<sup>2</sup>

**Table-1**  
**Preponderances of the Brahmins in 1912**

<b>Sub-judges</b>	<b>Percentage of Appointments held</b>
Brahmins	83.3
Non-Brahmin Hindus	16.7
Indian Christians	Nil
Europeans and Eurasians	Nil
<b>District Munsiffs</b>	Nil
Brahmins	72.6
Non-Brahmin Hindus	19.5
Muslims	1.6
Indian Christians	3.9
Europeans and Eurasians	2.4
<b>Deputy Collectors</b>	
Brahmins	55
Non-Brahmin Hindus	21.5
Muslims	10.5
Indian Christians	5
Europeans and Eurasians	8

Thus the Brahmins cornered a large number of important positions in the government service in spite of the fact that they constituted only three per cent of the population. This disproportionate seizure of government offices by the Brahmins caused frustration and bitterness among the educated non- Brahmins, who started demanding their rightful due in the government service in proportion to their population.

The Brahmin domination continued in the field of education. In 1921, the male literacy among the Brahmins was 72 per cent and the percentage of the Brahmin students graduated from the Madras University between 1870 and 1918 was 70. In 1917, among the six newspapers published from Madras with the circulation of more than 3000 copies each, three were owned and published by the Brahmins. The fourth newspaper published by Annie Besant also supported the Brahmins. The other two were published by the Europeans. Thus there was not a single newspaper at that time to support the cause of the non-Brahmins.

As early as 1895, a non-Brahmin official with the penname *Fair-Play* wrote open letters to Lord Wenlock, Governor of Fort St. George. In the first letter entitled *The Non-Brahmin Races and the Indian Public Service*, it was pointed out that in spite of the fact that the British were the rulers of India, in reality it was only the Brahmins who ruled it and the Indian National Congress represented only the Brahmin interests. The letter also pleaded for reservations in the Indian Public Services for the non-

Brahmins in proportion to their population. The second letter entitled *The Ways and Means for the Amelioration of the Non-Brahmin Races* gave a scheme for the institution of a national association to secure equalization in distribution of appointments in the public services among all classes of the people and appealed to the princes and zamindars for starting a journal to support the cause of the non-Brahmins. These letters were the earliest manifestations of the long-burning feeling of frustration, fear and bitterness felt by the educated non-Brahmins towards the Brahmins.<sup>3</sup>

As early as 1909, two lawyers in Madras city, P. Subramanyam and M.Purushotham Naidu made an attempt to form an organization under the title *The Madras Non-Brahmin Association* for the purpose of ameliorating the condition of the non-Brahmins.<sup>4</sup> It was materialized solely as a social progressive association.<sup>5</sup> But their efforts failed to materialize due to lack of awareness among the non-Brahmin communities. However, it revealed the beginnings of such a thinking among some of the educated non-Brahmins in that direction.

### MADRAS DRAVIDIAN ASSOCIATION

In 1912, some of the non-Brahmin government officials in Madras mainly from the Revenue Board Office and the Public Works Department who had suffered from the partiality and unfair treatment of their Brahmin superior officers, formed an association called The Madras United League, especially for the purpose of expressing their grievances.<sup>6</sup> Though the League was started by the government officials, other interested non-Brahmins were also permitted to join it. One such non-Brahmin leader was C. Natesa Mudaliar, who later became the secretary of the association. At the first anniversary of the League on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1912, it was decided to change the name of the association, as it was considered that the name of the association was neither indicative of the constituents of the association nor its objectives. So the Madras United League was changed into the Madras Dravidian Association.<sup>7</sup>

One of the main activities of the Madras Dravidian Association was the reception accorded to the non-Brahmin graduates of the year. The first congratulatory meeting of the new graduates was held at the Hindu High School, Triplicane. This kind of meetings brought the young non-Brahmin graduates on one platform and introduced them to the elite of the non-Brahmins. Many eminent non-Brahmin leaders- such as P. Theagaraya Chetty and the Rajah of Panagal Ramarayaningar participated in those meetings.

Another important work of the Madras Dravidian Association was the establishment of a hostel at Akbar Sahib Street in Triplicane for the non-Brahmin students, in July 1916. The non-Brahmin students, who came to Madras from other districts for higher studies, found it difficult to get accommodation in the city hostels due to caste barriers. So it was decided to set up a hostel to give accommodation to the non-Brahmin students. The hostel, called the 'Dravidian Home', was placed under the care of C.Natesa Mudaliar. It was considered that the establishment of the Dravidian Home was the first practical step of a small but influential group of non-Brahmins in Madras to organize themselves.<sup>8</sup>

### TWO POPULAR BOOKS

In 1915, the Madras Dravidian Association published two important books, '*Dravidian Worthies*' written by C. Sankaran Nair and *Non-Brahmin Letters* by an obscure author. '*Non-Brahmin Letters*', contains twenty one letters, signed and addressed to different persons by name. They portrayed the current feelings of despair among the non-Brahmin youth and the growing non-Brahmin consciousness among them. One of the letters suggested the establishment of a 'national' college making the Dravidian vernaculars the medium of instruction. In fact, the publication of these letters symbolised the political awareness of the non-Brahmins that the establishment of an organization to fight against the Brahmin monopoly in the field of education and government services was the imperative need. As a matter of fact, the Madras Dravidian Association prepared the ground for the dawn of the Justice Party" and it was called the forerunner to the Justice Party.<sup>9</sup>

About this time the British rulers of India, because of the compulsion of the World War situation, announced that steps would be taken towards responsible, representative self-government after the War. Following this announcement, Annie Besant, who had earlier joined the Congress, started the Home Rule Movement. She had already associated herself with the Theosophical Society in Madras City and began to extol the virtues of ancient Aryan civilization and Sanskrit literature. She organized the Madras Hindu Association in January 1904 and justified the fourfold caste system, supporting her argument with Sanskrit literature. When such a woman started working for the Home Rule Movement, naturally the educated non-Brahmins felt that it would result in the entrenchment of Brahmins in the administration of the country. Therefore, the non-Brahmin leaders felt the urgent necessity to unite and counteract Besant's Home Rule Movement, in order to promote and preserve the interests of the non-Brahmin communities.

### DAWN OF THE JUSTICE PARTY

About thirty non-Brahmin gentlemen of position and influence both in Madras and the mofussil met at the Victoria Public Hall in Madras on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1916 and resolved to start a company for publishing a newspaper and to form a political association in order to advance, safeguard and protect the interests of the non-Brahmin community. P. Theagaraya Chetty and T.M. Nair were the prominent leaders, who had participated in that meeting. Soon a joint stock company was started under the name of South Indian People's Association for publishing a daily newspaper in English, Tamil and Telugu respectively. A political association was also formed under the name of The South Indian Liberal Federation.

The South Indian People's Association issued a historic document known as *The Non-Brahmin Manifesto* in December 1916. The Manifesto surveyed the conditions of the non-Brahmins, referred to the predominant position of the Brahmins in government services, education and society and pointed out the directions for the progress of the non-Brahmins in future. It considered the demand for Home Rule as an unsuitable one for the then existing conditions. At the same time, it declared that the non-Brahmins were strongly in favour of progressive political development and that the Indian Constitution should be revised after the War. Meanwhile, the British authority which alone could hold the scales even between various castes and creeds should continue. It demanded that the post-war scheme of reforms should be such as to enable every class and caste to get representation according to its number. It concluded with an appeal to the non-Brahmins to organize themselves in associations and educate themselves to do everything possible to ensure the general development of their community.<sup>10</sup>

*The Non-Brahmin Manifesto* mostly prepared by T.M. Nair and signed by P. Theagaraya Chetty, the Secretary of the South Indian People's Association, gave the clarion call to the non-Brahmins of the Madras Presidency to awake, unite and join the struggle against the domination of the Brahmins so as to get their rightful due in government services, education and society.<sup>11</sup> The Manifesto has been described as *the Magna Carta of the non-Brahmins*. But the Brahmin English daily, *The Hindu*, whose attitude towards the non-Brahmin movement was extremely hostile, dismissed the Manifesto in its editorial on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1916 as "it can serve no good purpose but it is bound to create bad blood between persons belonging to the same great Indian Community".<sup>12</sup> Even Annie Besant and C.P.Ramasami Iyer criticized the manifesto as unworthy of serious political consideration because it created a passion for communal representation.<sup>13</sup>

The South Indian People's Association brought out its first issue of the English daily newspaper *Justice* on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1917. *Dravidan*, the Tamil daily was started in June 1917. The Telugu weekly *Andhraprakasika*, which was started in 1885, was acquired and changed into a daily. *Justice* became so popular that the political party, The South Indian Liberal Federation, organized by the South Indian People's Association, also later came to be known as the Justice Party.<sup>14</sup>

It may be noted here that another non-Brahmin association called the *Madras Presidency Association* was formed in September 1917 with the support of the Brahmins mainly to counter the claim of the Justice Party that it was the sole representative organization of the non-Brahmins. Most of the members of the Madras Presidency Association were from the Congress Party and so they

supported the Home Rule Movement.<sup>15</sup> This Association also published two dailies, one in English, *Indian Patriot*, edited by C. Karunakara Menon and another in Tamil, *Desabakthan*, edited by Thiru. Vi. Ka.<sup>16</sup> The Association pleaded for the reservation of a certain number of seats for non-Brahmins in general electorates, which was against the demand of the Justice Party for the creation of the separate non-Brahmin electorates. The British accepted the plea of the Madras Presidency Association and included it in the Montagu- Chelmsford reforms which were introduced in 1919 and after which the Madras Presidency Association ceased to function.

On 20<sup>th</sup> August 1917, Montagu, the Secretary of State, announced in the Parliament that the policy of the British Government was to associate Indians in every branch of the administration and to foster self-governing institutions in order to ensure the progressive realisation of responsible government in India, as an integral part of the British Empire.<sup>17</sup> Following this, a mission headed by Montagu visited Madras on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1917. The representatives of many associations met Montagu and presented memorandums. Among them four were non-Brahmin associations. T.M. Nair represented the South Indian Liberal Federation and made a forceful plea for communal representation.<sup>18</sup>

From August 1917 onwards, the Justice Party began to organize a number of conferences in the districts to create awareness among the non-Brahmins and to strengthen the party. The first conference of the Justice Party under the Presidentship of the Raja of Panagal was held at Coimbatore on 19 August 1917, strangely coinciding with the day on which Montague announced certain constitutional reforms in Indian administration.<sup>19</sup>

The second conference was held at Bikkavole in Godavari District on 27-28 October 1917. The Kumara Rajah of Chellapalli presided over this conference. The next conference under the presidentship of K. Subba Reddy was held at Pulivendala in Cuddappah District on 3<sup>rd</sup> -4<sup>th</sup> November. Within a week's time, on 11-12 November, another conference under P. Theagaraya Chetty was organized at Bezwada. The Tamil non- Brahmin leaders of the districts of Tinrunelveli , Ramnad and Madura organized a conference at Tirunelveli on 30<sup>th</sup> November and 1<sup>st</sup> December 1917. Another conference of Tamil non-Brahmins was held under the presidentship of K.S. Durai Rajah of Pudukkottai at Salem on 9<sup>th</sup> December, 1917.<sup>20</sup>

To conclude, The British officials and scholarly Christian missionaries created a great Aryan-Dravidian divide which was well nurtured by the non-Brahmin western educated class in Madras Presidency. They formed non-Brahmin and Dravidian organizations, conducted and even chaired them. By doing so, they consolidated the Dravidian elements for demanding communal reservation. They formed Justice Party which provided a catalyst to the non-Brahmin Dravidians to meet the challenge of Home Rule led by Annie Besant, and to work for the upliftment of the non-Brahmin community availing themselves of the opportunities of communal reservation and representation, provided by the introduction and implementation of the Montagu- Chelmsford's reforms.

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