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EMERGENCE OF DRAVIDIAN 'JUSTICE PARTY', AND FORMATION AND MEASURES OF THE JUSTICE MINISTRY IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY

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ABSTRACT:

The Justice Party was emerged in the wake of the domination of the Brahmins in all spheres of Public life since the establishment of the colonial British Power in Madras Presidency. The spread of Western education helped the Brahmins to occupy all key positions in colonial administration. On the other hand, the same education and dissemination of the western ideas goaded the Dravidian non-Brahmins to unite themselves into the organizational level. The Brahmins were considered the Aryan invaders. The non-Brahmins were considered the native Dravidians. The Dravidian non-Brahmins began to question the privileged position of the Brahmins in the beginning of the Twentieth Century. The British Administrators and Colonial Missionaries like Robert Caldwell began to inculcate the high spirit among the elite non-Brahmin leaders and they provided some data relating to the preponderance of the Brahmins in all positions in the administrative setup. To counter the domination of the Brahmins the non-Brahmins formed Justice Party and when the Party formed Ministry in 1920, it initiated a number of political and social measures which enhanced the Dravidian non-Brahmins in Madras Presidency.



KEY WORDS: Non-Brahmins, Dravidian, Brahmins ,Aryans Justice Party, P.Theagrava Chetty, Dr. T.M.Nair, University of Madras, Madras Presidency.

INTRODUCTION:

The early Sanskrit literature of North India referred 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.¹ Further, Caldwell wrote about the existence of the pre-Aryan Civilization of the Dravidians and also used the word "Brahmans" as synonymous with "Aryans".² 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.³

According to Somasundara Bharathiar, a prominent Tamil scholar, the foremost Aryan stranger, who swam southward across the boundless jungles, was awed by the splendor of the Royal Pandyan

Courts, and he was not too arrogant to request shelter in the hospitable Tamil region that thrived in a sunny environment.⁴ 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 there. 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 top of the society and pushing down the native all non-Brahmin caste groups, branding them as Sudras, to the lower level.⁵ 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 1855, the Brahmins held 237 of the 305 posts in the upper levels of the district administration of the Madras Presidency. The following table shows the continued dominant position of the Brahmins in government service in 1912.⁶

Table: 1
Dominant Position of Brahmins in 1912

		Percentage of Appointments Held
I	Sub Judges	
	Brahmins	83.3
	Non-Brahmins	16.7
	Muslims	Nil
	Indian Christians	Nil
	Europeans and Eurasians	Nil
II	District Munsifs	
	Brahmins	72.6
	Non-Brahmins	19.5
	Muslims	1.6
	Indian Christians	3.9
	Europeans and Eurasians	2.4
III	Deputy Collectors	
	Brahmins	55
	Non-Brahmins	21.5
	Muslims	10.5
	Indian Christians	5
	Europeans and Eurasians	8

(Source: Ponnudiy, K., *The Dravidian Movement and The Black Movement*, Chennai: Visal Expo Publishers, 1998, p.77; 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.14.)

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.⁷ 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.⁸

Continuously the Brahmins were top in the sphere 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.⁹

As early as 1895, a non-Brahmin official with the pen-name *Fair-Play* submitted two pamphlets to His Excellency Lord Wenlock, Governor of Fort St. George. In the first pamphlet 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.¹⁰ The letter also pleaded for reservations in the Indian Public Services for the non-Brahmins in proportion to their population.¹¹ The second pamphlet 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 realized by the educated non-Brahmins towards the Brahmins.¹²

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.¹³ But their efforts failed to materialize due to lack of awareness among the non-Brahmin communities. However, it revealed the beginning of such a thinking among some of the educated non-Brahmins in that direction.

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 ventilating their grievances. 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 Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar, who later became the secretary of the association. At the first anniversary of the League on 10th 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'*.¹⁴

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.¹⁵ This kind of meetings brought the young non-Brahmin graduates on one stage and helped them to get intimate connection with the prominent non-Brahmin elites. Many eminent non-Brahmin leaders such as P. Theagaraya Chetty and Ramarayananagar, the Rajah of Panagal, 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 Dr. 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.¹⁶

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. The *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. The Madras Dravidian Association "prepared the ground for the emergence of the Justice Party" and it "might be rightly called the predecessor to the Justice Party".¹⁷

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.¹⁸ 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 1904¹⁹ 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.

Genesis of the Dravidian '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 20th 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 Dr. 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 Association*' for publishing a daily newspaper in English, Tamil and Telugu respectively.²⁰ A political association was also formed under the name of '*The South Indian Liberal Federation*'.²¹

The South Indian People's Association issued a historic document known as *The Non-Brahmin Manifesto* on 20th December 1916.²² The Manifesto surveyed the conditions of the non- Brahmins, referred to the predominant position of the Brahmins in government services, education and society and underscored the ways for the development of the non-Brahmins in due course. 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.

The Non-Brahmin Manifesto mostly prepared by Dr. 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. The Manifesto has been described as *the 'Magna Carta of the Non-Brahmins'*.²³ But the Brahmin English daily, *The Hindu*, whose attitude towards the non-Brahmin movement was extremely hostile, dismissed the Manifesto in its editorial on 20th December 1916 as it could serve no good purpose but it was bound to create bad blood between persons belonging to the same great Indian Community.²⁴

The South Indian People's Association brought out its first issue of the English daily newspaper *Justice* on 26th February 1917. *Dravidan*, the Tamil daily was started in June 1917. The Telugu weekly *Andhraprakasika*²⁵, 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 Dravidian 'Justice Party'.

It may be noted 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. This Association also published two dailies, one in English, *Indian Patriot*, edited by C. Karunakara Menon and another in Tamil, *Desabaktan*, edited by Thiru. Vi.

Kalyanasundara Mudaliar.²⁶ 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 was introduced in 1919 and after which the Madras Presidency Association ceased to function.

On 20th 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 realization of responsible government in India, as an integral part of the British Empire. Following this, a mission headed by Montagu visited Madras on 14th December 1917. The representatives of many associations met Montagu and presented memorandums. Among them four were non-Brahmin associations. Dr. T.M. Nair represented the South Indian Liberal Federation and made a forceful plea for communal representation.²⁷

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 19th August 1917, strangely coinciding with the day on which Montagu announced certain constitutional reforms in Indian administration.²⁸

The second conference was held at Bikkavole. in Godavari District on 27th -28th 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 3rd -4th November. Within a week's time, on 11th- 12th November another conference under P. Theagaraya Chetty was organized at Bezwada. The Tamil non- Brahmin leaders of the districts of Tirunelveli, Ramnathapuram and Madurai organized a conference at Tirunelveli on 30th November and 1st December 1917. Another conference of Tamil non- Brahmins was held under the presidentship of K.S. Durai Rajah of Pudukkottai at Salem on 9th December, 1917.²⁹

Thus the Justice Party geared itself up to meet the challenges posed by the of Home Rulers and to work for the upliftment of the non-Brahmin community availing themselves of the opportunities provided by the introduction of the Montagu- Chelmsford Reforms.

Formation of the Justice Ministry and Benevolent Rule

Under the Government of India Act of 1919, the first General Elections to the Madras Legislative Council were held in December 1920. As the Congress Party had launched the Non- Co-operation Movement, it did not participate in the elections. The Justice Party won a tremendous victory capturing 63 seats out of 98. Further, 18 nominated members came forward to support the Justice Party. Thus, the Justice Party had a strength of 81 in a chamber of 127 members.

Lord Willingdon, the Governor of Madras, invited P. Theagaraya Chetty, the leader of the majority party, to form the ministry. But P. Theagaraya Chetty declined to accept the offer and proposed A. Subbarayalu Reddy for the Chief Ministership. Therefore A. Subbarayalu Reddy was appointed the First Minister of the Cabinet. Rajah of Panagal, P. Ramarayaningar and K. V. Reddy Naidu were appointed the second and third ministers. The new ministry assumed office on 17th December 1920. But within a short period A. Subbarayulu Reddy resigned from Chief Ministership due to ill-health. Following this, P. Ramarayaningar was appointed the new Chief Minister and A.P. Patro was inducted as a minister.

In the second General Elections to the Madras Legislative Council held at the end of October 1923 also, the Justice Party came out successful and formed the ministry with the Rajah of Panagal as Chief Minister and A.P. Patro and T.N. Sivagnanam Pillai as ministers. But the Justice Party received a shock, when its founder leader P. Theagaraya Chetty passed away on 28th April 1925. His demise was an irreparable loss to the Justice Party.

In the third General Elections held in November 1926, the Justice Party suffered a severe setback. It was able to capture only 21 seats. The Congress Party secured 41 seats out of 98 and the Independents secured 36 seats. The Governor Goschen invited Dr. P.Subbaroyan, an Independent, to

form the ministry. A. Ranganatha Mudaliar and R.N. Arogyasamy Mudaliar were appointed the second and the third ministers. But both of them had to resign from the ministry over the differences of opinion on the reception to be given to the Simon Commission. Following this, on the advice of the Raja of Panagal, the Governor appointed S. Muthiah Mudaliar and M.R. Sethuratnam Aiyar as second and third ministers. The Rajah of Panagal, the last of the trio of the Non-Brahmin Movement, died on 16th December 1928. In the General Elections held in 1930, the Justice Party emerged victorious and formed the ministry under the leadership of B. Muniswami Naidu. P.T. Rajan and S. Kurnaraswami Reddy were appointed the second and third ministers. The new ministry assumed office on 27th October 1930. But due to internal differences in the Justice Party, B. Muniswami Naidu resigned the Chief Ministership in November 1932. Thereupon the Rajah of Bobbili became the Chief Minister, whose ministry continued till 1937 when the general elections were held under the Government of India Act of 1935.³⁰ The Congress Party won a tremendous victory capturing 159 seats out of 215.³¹ The defeat of the Justice Party was complete and, in fact, it was the end of the Justice Party.

Some of the services rendered by the Justice Party Government were noteworthy. Social justice was the main plank of the Justice Party. So it's very first act was to pressurize the government to follow social justice in the appointment of government servants. On 16th September 1921 the Government of Madras issued the first Communal Government Order extending the principle of the distribution of appointments among various castes and communities, which was already observed in the Revenue Department, to all other departments of the government. The G.O. further directed the heads of departments to submit half- yearly returns showing the number of new recruits in the permanent service during the half-year and classifying them under the following heads: Brahmins, non-Brahmin Hindus, Indian Christians, Muhammadans, Europeans and Anglo-Indians and others.³²

In 1922, the Government introduced a selection board for each Government college to regulate the admission of students so that there would be no preponderance of students belonging to anyone particular community. For example, the Selection Board for the Presidency College, Madras resolved to allot fifty per cent of the available seats to Brahmin students and the remainder to students drawn from other communities. On 15th August 1922, the Government issued a second communal G.O. extending the principle of proportionate representation for various communities in appointments to the realm of promotions also.³³

On 18th December 1922, the Justice Government introduced a far-reaching social bill, the Hindu Religious Endowment Bill, in the Madras Legislative Council. The Bill aimed at ensuring the efficient administration of Hindu Religious Endowments in Madras Presidency. The Hindu temples and mutts in Madras Presidency had enormous property either through endowments or through the accumulation of income derived from pilgrims. The trustees of the temples and mutts utilised the funds in any way they chose and did not maintain any accounts. So it became imperative on the part of the Government to stop the plundering of the public funds and take steps for the proper spending and accounting of the funds meant for the purpose. Hence the Hindu Religious Endowments Bill was brought forth. After a long debate the Bill was passed in April 1923. But several temples, mutts and other religious organizations appealed to the Viceroy to withhold his assent. Meanwhile, the general elections to the Council were held in October 1923 and the Justice Party won a massive victory and formed the second ministry. In April 1924, the Bill was introduced for a second time and passed quickly. At last, the Viceroy gave his assent to the Bill in 1925.³⁴

The Justice Government introduced free and compulsory education for the first time for boys and girls in Madras city and subsequently the scheme was extended to other municipalities.³⁵ P. Theagaraya Chetty, as the Mayor of Madras, introduced in 1920 the free mid-day meals scheme to school children. The Labour Department opened separate primary schools called Labour Schools for the students of Depressed Classes. In 1923, The Government brought forth an Act to reorganise the University of Madras with a view to creating a teaching and residential university in Madras with constituent arts and professional colleges within a radius of ten miles and with affiliated colleges scattered over the length and breadth of the Madras Presidency.³⁶

The Justice Party was pioneer political party in the Madras Presidency. Started as an organization of the Dravidian non-Brahmins, it emerged as political party in the name of its newspaper,

'Justice'. 'The Non-Brahmin Manifesto', published by P.Theagrava Chetty helped the non-Brahmins to think about their low position and act swiftly to enhance their status politically and socially. Either directly or indirectly, the British were helped the non-Brahmins to capture power under the implementation of Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms and the Dyarchy. The domination of the Brahmins in Indian National Congress, Nationalist Movement, Home-Rule Movement and administrative setup was considered a threat to the existence of the British Power. With the support of the British Administrators, the Justice Party formed Ministry and initiated a number of socio-political measures in Madras Presidency during its seventeen years rule. A notable among them were Communal Government Orders, the Hindu Religious Endowment Act, the Educational Act, Industrial Act and the Public Service Commission. These measures reduced the preponderance of the Brahmins and enhanced the position of the non-Brahmins in public spheres. Further, the Justice party was considered 'Mother Party' to all the Dravidian parties that emerged in the Independent Tamil Nadu

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