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## REPRESENTATION ISSUE OF DEPRESSED CLASSES IN LEGSLATIVE AND LOCAL BODIES IN COLONIAL TAMIL NADU DURING JUSTICE PARTY RULE

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### Abstract:

*Justice Party before it emerged as a political party, owes its origin to a social organisation called 'Madras United League' which was intended to for social uplift , amelioration of the disadvantaged people who suffered from oppression. With in a short period this League was called 'Dravidian Association'. The Justice party otherwise known as the 'South Indian Liberal Federation' was formed at the tail end of 1916. M.C.Rajah, R.Srinivasn, N.Sivaraj, R.Veeriyan, Alaelu Mangathayammal and other Depressed Class leaders joined the Justice Party and most of them became the founding members of the Justice Party. When the Justice Party came to power in 1921, its Caste-Hindu Leaders became arm-chair politicians and they looked after the interests of the caste-Hindus. For every privileged, the Depressed Class Leaders had to fight against the political domination of the cast-Hindu dominated the Justice Party. The Depressed Class member were not given proper representation in legislature and local bodies. The British Government nominated a few of the them. Hence the Depressed Class leaders like M.C.Rajah and R.Srinivasan came out of the Justice Party. The rapport between the Depressed Classes and Justice Party was almost ended with the death of T.M.Nair. The paper seeks to highlight the issues relating to the depressed classes and Justice Party over the representation in legislative and local bodies.*

### KEY WORDS:

Depressed Classes, Untouchables, Representation, Local and Legislatiev Bodiess, Adi-Dravida, caste-Hindus, Non-Brahmins

### INTRODUCTION:

#### REPRESENTATION IN LEGISLATURE

In 1920, the Depressed Classes were given only five seats in the Madras Legislative Council by nomination<sup>1</sup> and the non- Brahmins as a whole had secured twenty-eight seats.<sup>2</sup> On this issue, M.C. Rajah, the Spokesman of the Depressed Classes, pointed out: "The Non-Brahmin Caste Hindus, who form 80 per cent of voters, were able to capture 50 seats without the help of reservations; whereas the non-Brahmins who go by the name of the Depressed Classes were not able to capture even one seat by election. The Council at present constituted having only five Depressed Class Members and in order to make the Council really democratic, at least 20 seats out of 28 reserved for non-Brahmins should be transferred to non-Brahmin Depressed Classes".<sup>3</sup>

When the non-Brahmin Caste Hindu Party in the Legislative Council acted as the Guardian of the Depressed Classes, they only indirectly arrested the progress of the Depressed Class and crushed its hopes and aspirations. But the Depressed Class from the labouring population, served as the backbone of Justice

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Party.<sup>4</sup> Due to the indifferent attitude of the Justice Party, the Untouchable Leaders began to think and criticise and even demanded their rights on the basis of their population.

In supporting their legitimate demands, the Leaders of Depressed Class presented various points. Firstly, they pointed out that the Muhammeden Community which constituted nearly three million (2,865,285) or one fifteenth of the population in the Presidency, obtained Separate Communal Representation in the Legislatures and they were allotted thirteen elective seats and thereby their interest might be safeguarded by the appointment of their co-religionists in the State. The Indian Christians, who numbered only 1,380,672 or less than one-thirty third of the population, secured for them five elective seats<sup>5</sup> and three nomination seats (total eight). The Anglo-Indians, who numbered only 23,492 in the Presidency, secured for them one elective seat and one nominated seat (total two).<sup>6</sup> However, the Untouchables, who were mainly engaged in agriculture and suffered various disabilities, political, social, economic and educational and suffering from the stigma of Untouchability and Unapproachability, constituted 7,503,475 out of total population of 42,794,115 inhabitants of the Madras Presidency.<sup>7</sup> In fact, they formed one sixth of the total population.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, they pointed out that the number of Depressed Class voters from the Presidency was very small compared to other class voters because they were economically backward and socially depressed and they could not gain any special measures in the suffrage due to rigid qualification for voting rights.

They also remarked that these disabilities can be rectified by adopting a certain course of action. A differential qualification in the General Electorate should be provided. But this will be seriously objected to on the grounds of partiality. Therefore the alternative way was to ensure these Depressed Classes on the public bodies and Legislative Councils by means of nomination or election of such members.

For the solution of various points and for the knotty problem of Depressed Class Representation, the Madras Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha on 4th April 1923 and 24<sup>th</sup> September 1924 urged the Governor of Madras to give acceptance to their legitimate demands. The Depressed Class wished for Communal Representation of their Community in the Legislative Council on the basis of election instead of representation by nomination which they considered no real representation. In this connection, they noted that the Nominated Ministers, who formed Justice Cabinet in the Madras Presidency, were exercising undue influence in the course of their conduct in the Council. The Selected Members were therefore likely to be of the pliable type who would not serve the real interest of the Depressed Class Community. If the principle of nomination continued in the representation on the Madras Legislature, the Governor of Madras should reserve the portfolio of nomination in his own hands and nominate the representatives of Depressed Class Community in the legislature in consultation with the Madras Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha, the recognised political body of the Depressed Community.<sup>9</sup>

The Depressed Classes urged that Twenty Seats should be reserved for them on humanitarian grounds.<sup>10</sup> As an additional safeguard, there should be Statutory Provision that no legislation, affecting the Depressed Class, unless a clear two-third majority of Depressed Class Representatives were in support of the measure, could be passed. These provisions should form an integral part of the Parliamentary Statute when it comes up for revision. They also demanded the appointment of a Qualified Member of the Depressed Class Community on the Executive Council of the Governor of Madras.<sup>11</sup> To their demand for twenty seats in the Madras Legislature and two seats in the Indian Legislature, the British Government conceded to a certain extent.<sup>12</sup> The number of nominated members in the Madras Legislative Council for the representation of the Depressed Class was raised from five to ten.<sup>13</sup> In 1927, M.C.Rajah, a single Depressed Class Member, was nominated to the Imperial Legislature.<sup>14</sup> Thus in the case of representation to the Legislative Council, five members of Depressed Class in 1920, nine each in 1923 and 1926 and ten in 1930 were given accommodation.<sup>15</sup>

#### REPRESENTATION IN LOCAL BODIES AND MUNICIPAL COUNCILS

Before the ascendancy of Justice Ministry, representation was given to the Depressed Classes in Local Bodies and Municipal Councils. The nomination of these members was in the hands of Presidents even before the subject of Local Self Government was treated as a Transferred Subject. During the tenure of Justice Ministry, the representation of the Depressed Classes was made on the advice of Justice Leaders. In practice, the Depressed Class Members were not assured of even a single seat uniformly in every Local Board and Municipal Council. Perfunctory nominations were made and when the attention of the Justice Leaders was drawn to deserving candidates or unfilled vacancies, the Minister-in-Charge of the Department referred the Untouchable Leader to the Presidents of the Board, without justifying his presence in the administration. In fact, the accession of power had enabled the Justice Minister only to revert to the former position and leave the Untouchables where they were before.<sup>16</sup>

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Even though many elections took place for the various Local Bodies, the Depressed Classes were blocked from winning the election. Therefore, it was not easy for them to win the elections and enter the Local Bodies.<sup>17</sup> Even the few places given for Depressed Class Members, when they became vacant on account of the death of the holder, i.e., the case of Tiruvannamalai Municipal Council or through other causes, i.e., the cases of Chingleput and Cuddalore Taluk Boards, were subsequently filled by members of other communities.<sup>18</sup> Criticizing these activities of the Justicites, Andhra Patrika observed that “what is the use of merely making at random grand speeches about the uplift of the Non-Brahmin Communities and publishing them in the Press and on the Platform? Is it right to blame the Brahmins as mischievous on one side, and introduce, on the other hand, Kamma, the Reddi and Kapu Autocracy, without taking into consideration of the well-being of the Non-Brahmin Community as a whole? Was separate communal representation to the exclusion of the Brahmins obtained only for this purpose?”<sup>19</sup> The Paper further observed that the Justice Government had not done anything worth mentioning to the Depressed Classes, even though they said that Untouchables come under the non- Brahmin Classes and they would uplift the Depressed Classes very soon. In this context, the Paper questioned that “what amount of communal representation they had given to Untouchables in Local Body? Though separate communal representation was granted to them by the Justice Government in various Local Bodies, most of the posts were conferred upon Christians alone as a result of machinations of the missionaries.<sup>20</sup> It was a fact that on 1922, one Adi-Dravida and one Christian were separately appointed to represent the two communities in the Kallalur Taluk Board, but in 1923, only a Christian was appointed to the Gudiwada Taluk Board but not a Adi-Dravida. From this it was obvious that the idea of Justice Government was to make the Untouchable Community to go without any representation at all.”<sup>21</sup>

The Minister of Local Board, when asked about the non-appointment of an Adi-Dravida Representative on the Chidambaram Taluk Board, said that “the owner of the rented house in which the Taluk Board Office was located, had objected to the Adi-Dravida Representative entering the premises.” On this reply, M.C.Rajah, the Untouchable Leader, traded a series of questions to the Minister of Local Self Government, asking “how a public office which according to the Standing Orders of the Government, should be located in a place to which all castes and communities ought to have access, came to be located under such adverse conditions.” The Minister, when he could not provide proper answer to the question, simply said that “The Government have no information.” According to M.C. Rajah, this fact constituted the most tragic commentary on the attitude of the Justice Ministry towards Untouchables. He added: “there was nothing in truth original than the hideous features of the class despotism and caste tyranny.”<sup>22</sup>

As a matter of fact, one member in each District Board, with the exception of three such Boards, was from Depressed Classes. Still, there were a large number of Municipalities and Taluk Boards where representations were not given to this Community. During 1923-1924, four Members of Depressed Class for North Arcot District Board and one member in the Pollachi Taluk Board were provided berths.<sup>23</sup> It was suggested that the Depressed Classes should have atleast one member to represent their interest on every District Board.<sup>24</sup> During 1924 – 1926, twenty seats were given to the Members of Depressed Class in the District Boards and sixteen in the Municipalities.<sup>25</sup> The above representation clearly showed that the representation of the Depressed Class in Local Boards in the Madras Presidency was less than proportionate.<sup>26</sup>

The following Table shows how poor was the representation of the Depressed Classes in Local Boards in the Madras Presidency.

**Table**  
**Depressed Class Representation in Local Bodies**

| Year    | District Boards |            | Local Bodies       |            | Municipalities |                  |
|---------|-----------------|------------|--------------------|------------|----------------|------------------|
|         | No.Dt.Boards    | D.C. Reprn | No of Taluk Boards | D.C. Reprn | No. Munl       | D.C.Reprn        |
| 1921-22 | 125             | 17         | 125                | 66         | 79             | 46               |
| 1924-26 | 24              | 20         | 126                | 75         | 80             | 16               |
| 1928-29 | 25              | 25         | 129                | 128        | 81             | 81 <sup>27</sup> |



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Thus the Depressed Classes were poorly represented in the local and legislative bodies in Tamil Nadu during the rule of the Justice Party. The betrayal of the interests of the Depressed Classes made the Justice Party to gain adverse results in the elections held for the Madras State Legislature. The Depressed Classes turned against the Justice Party. M.C.Rajah, one of the founding fathers of the Justice Party vehemently attacked the vested interests of the Caste-Hindus who dominated the Justice Party. The British Administrators who awakened the Non-Brahmins against the Brahmins also awakened the Depressed Classes against the caste-Hindus. It was in 1919, Lord Willington, the Governor of Madras, nominated M.C.Rajah to his council in Madras. M.C.Rajah was the first member of the Depressed Classes to be thus nominated in the whole of British India. In the Central Legislature, there was no member of the Depressed classes till M.C.Rajah was nominated in 1927. The position of the Local Boards was no better. In many Local Boards, the Depressed classes had no representation at all during the rule of the Justice Party in Madras Presidency.

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