

## CONFLICT BETWEEN HOME RULE LEAGUE AND NON-BRAHMIN MOVEMENT

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### Abstract

*The Birth of the Home Rule Movement synchronised with the consolidation of non-Brahmin Movement. In fact the catalyst which triggered the formation the formation of non-Brahmin political organisation was the emergence of the Home Rule League of Annie Besant on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1915.<sup>1</sup> The associates of Annie Besant were all Brahmins and her views were derived from the Brahmin influenced works of Puranas, Manu Code, the epics, hindu heros and Festivals of Hinduism.<sup>2</sup> These views were strongly ridiculed and their credibility was questioned by the well versed non-Brahmins. Thus the development of the Home Rule Movement and its counterpart Dravidian ideology created a new dimension in the politics of the state of Madras and was pushed into the Fore-Front of hat political wave. As a matter of fact, the arrival of Annie Besant put an end to the factional fight and internal feud in Tamil Nadu Congress. And her definite campaign for Home Rule demand confronted the British with the most serious and largest movement among the dissidence of Tamil Nadu. To check the possible Brahmin domination through the Home Rule agitation, the non-Brahmins stood firmly against the transfer of power from the British to Brahmin overlordship or Brahmin oligarchy.<sup>3</sup>*

*Keywords: Home Rule Movement, non-Brahmin Movement, Annie Besant, Manu Code, Tamil Nadu Congress, Justice Party*

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### Non-Brahmin Manifesto

The prominent non-Brahmin leaders like T.M. Nair and P.Thiyagaraya Chetti and a group of thirty non-Brahmins had started a Joint Stock Company under the name of South Indian People's Association in 1916. They published the newspaper - The Justice, Dravidian and Andhra Prakasika in English, Tamil and Telugu respectively, to propagate the creeds of the Association.<sup>4</sup> for that P.Thiyagaraya chetti issued the historic document popularly known as Non-Brahmin Manifesto. The Non-Brahmin Manifesto Presented a detailed statistics which showed the high concentration of Brahmins in Public services, in public bodies and the educational system with their little percent of total population in Madras state. Accordingly, at first, it was stated that the non-Brahmins formed forty to forty-one and half percent of the population, but remained without political privileges. Secondly, it advocated the need for the revision of the Indian constitution to grant gradual autonomy and legislative Freedom. Thirdly, it considered the Home Rule as the extreme claim and an unsuitable one to the need of the hour. Fourthly, it wished that the post war scheme of reforms should be included in Communal representation of the non-Brahmins.<sup>5</sup>

Generally, the Brahmins were shocked at the issue of the non-Brahmin Manifesto. They blamed the British officials like Alexander Cardew Gillman and pry and whom the Brahmins suspected were responsible for its preparation and setting of the non-Brahmins against the Brahmins.<sup>6</sup> After the proclamation of the Manifesto, the non-Brahmins more vigorously involved in the political activities them ever before and started a new political party.

### Justice Party

In 1917, The South Indian people's Association was renamed as South Indian Liberal Federation.<sup>7</sup> In due course of time it came to be unofficially known as the Justice party after the name of its English daily Justice.<sup>8</sup> This party strengthened its organisational setup and drafted a new constitution with crystallized objectives. They were broadly classified as follows: To create and promote the educational, materialistic and moral progress of all communities in Madras state other than that of all Brahmins. To discuss public questions and to make a true and timely representation of the views and interests of the people of Madras state to the Government It disseminated its views through public lectures, distribution of literature and by other means to the public. Therefore, the Justice party dared itself to face the situation if warranted from the side of the nationalists.

Soon after the Formation of the Justice party, it became an urgent need to propagate its ideas to the public. At the same time it was found to counter the propagation of the Congress and Home Rule League. Generally the pro-non-Brahmin press media viewed that the granting of self-Government would lead to the perpetuation of Brahmin authority in the nation and hence they stood for the rights of the non-Brahmin community.<sup>9</sup>

The growth of the Dravidian movement and the awakening of the non-Brahmin were totally disliked by the Brahmins and its allied Congress party. Hence in order to check and to thwart the Congress and its allied factions in Home Rule League they tried their best to check its move. According to them the growth of Dravidian movement would injure the growth of 'broad-minded nationalism' in Tamil Nadu. The Congress took the press media to ventilate its vast package of objectives. The newspapers were the Commonweal, New India, Desabhaktan, Indian Patriot, Hindu Nesan, Lokopatri Vijaya Vikatan, The Hindu, Swadesamitran and Andhra Patrika. They indicated that Home Rule agitation would be a stepping stone for the attainment of self-rule in India and believed that political liberty should precede social reform.

The Justice Party was born mainly due to the socio-political conflict in Madras city. In order to prevent Brahmin domination, the non-Brahmins opposed the Home Rule Movement. They stood firmly against the transfer of power from the British to a Brahmin overlordship. The number of the Justice Party through its English daily, the Justice attacked the New India and Mrs. Annie Besant, its editor and ridiculed her as an Irish Brahmin.<sup>10</sup> The Party left no time in making propaganda to mobilize public support. The Justice Party proved to be a political party of the non-Brahmins which was prepared to counteract Congress and the Home Rule League. The Congress applied different techniques to check the growth of the Justice party. It won over a number of non-Brahmin leaders to the national stream through which, the Congress criticized the non-Brahmin movement.

The Non-Brahmin nationalists in the Congress joined together under the leadership of P. Kesavapillai and planned to establish an organisation against the Justice Party. Accordingly, the non-Brahmin nationalists organised a nationalist conclave at Gokhale Hall, Madras on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1917, to show their side and that they were in favour of the Home Rule demand of the Congress. The South Indian Liberal Federation was only an organisation of minority from the non-Brahmins. Again they adopted a resolution to form an association to defend the interests of the non-Brahmins. In this way the Madras Presidency Association was formed in 1917 with P. Kesavapillai as its president.<sup>11</sup> The object of the Association was to declare and to promote the educational, social and political advancement of the non-Brahmins in the state.<sup>20</sup> This object was similar to that of the Justice Party and to win the heart of the Non-Brahmins. The leaders such as P. Varadarajulu Naidu, T.V. Kalyana Sundara Mudaliar, V. Chakkarai Chetti, George Joseph and E.V. Ramasami Naicker joined the Association. The Association published two dailies, the Indian Patriot in English edited by C. Karunakara Menon and Desabakthan in Tamil by T.V. Kalyana Sundara Mudaliar. The Association demanded for communal representation which was accepted by the Congress Party. It should be noted that both the non-Brahmin associations agreed the common issues of Communal representation, aimed at in the long run, enable the leaders of both associations to merge together when the actual role of the Congress was revealed.

The Pro-Brahmin oriented Madras Presidency Association insisted that Communal representation for non-Brahmins should be embodied as an integral part of the Congress League scheme.<sup>13</sup> This was in a way considered the claims of the Justice Party as the sole spokesman of non-Brahmins. Though the Madras Presidency Association acted as a counter organisation to the Justice Party, the non-Brahmins realised that their literacy rate was rising and that they had the necessary qualifications to compete with the Brahmins.

### Communal Representation

The main target of Justice Party was aimed at securing Communal representation under the prevailing uncertainty in the political sphere on this issue. The Justices under T.M. Nair reached London in June 1918 and insisted on communal representation for non-Brahmins. They sought a Franchise by which only non-Brahmins would be permitted to vote for non-Brahmin candidates in the Provincial Legislative Council, as had been in the case of the Muslims under the Minto-Morely

Reforms. The Government of India constituted the South Borough Committee or Franchise Committee to furnish a report on the nature of Communal and separate electorates. However, the Committee had rejected the basic data furnished for Communal representation as demanded by the non-Brahmins on the ground that they outnumbered the Brahmins. The Government of India did not agree with the South Borough committee. Instead, it recommended that at least thirty out of sixty one non-Muhammadien seats should be reserved for non-Brahmins in the Madras Legislative Council, leaving the rest open to unrestricted contest. Following this, K.V. Reddi Naidu, the leader from the non-Brahmins of Justice Party to the joint select Committee, presented a memorandum to the joint committee demanding Communal representation. The recommendation of the Joint Committee was debated on 23 December 1919 and the bill was finally placed on the statute book under the title 'Government of India Act, 1919'.

Thus the reservation of seats for non-Brahmins in the Madras Legislative Council was left to the contesting parties to decide the number of seats to be reserved.<sup>14</sup> Lord Willington, the Governor of Madras convened a conference on 13 January 1920 to decide the question of reservation of seats to non-Brahmins.<sup>15</sup> The Brahmin group was led by C.P. Ramasami Iyer and the non-Brahmins by P. Thiyagaraya Chetti. Despite these, they could not arrive at an agreed Formula on the reservation of the seats.<sup>16</sup> Getting disappointed, Governor Willington finally advocated reservations of fifty percent of seats for the non-Brahmins. The Justices demanded seventy-75% and rejected the offer of the governor and the question was referred to an arbitrator headed by Lord Meston of Agra. He was given an award known as Meston Award in March, 1920 which recommended that out of Sixty Five general seats for the Madras Legislative Council, twenty eight seats to be reserved for the non-Brahmins<sup>17</sup> which was the first political victory for the Justice party with the constitutional protection for non-Brahmins. Following this, the first elections for the new council was held during the month of November and the elected members took their oaths on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1920. At the general elections held in 1920 and 1923 the Justice Party obtained a majority of the seats and the leaders of the party were called upon to form the Ministry.<sup>18</sup> The Communal representation resolution was debated hotly in the Ministry. At last the resolution was put to vote. Fifty nine voted for it and twenty two against it. It was then the turn of the Government to act on the above council resolutions. For this purpose the ministry issued the First Communal order on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1921<sup>19</sup> which aimed at the distribution of appointments from among the various castes and communities. There were six categories viz: the Brahmins, the non-Brahmin Hindus, the Indian Christians, Muhammadians, Europeans, Anglo-Indians and others. The order assured all communities with allotted seats in the Governmental services in the ratio of 5:2:2:1 respectively. Yet it proved to be less beneficial to the untouchables.

The Second General elections to the Madras Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly were held on 31 October 1923 and following that the second popular president, the Raja of Panagal was appointed by the Governor again. From 1920-1923, the Ministry issued Communal orders specifically reserving jobs for particular communities in Public services and education institutions. Also, the Justice Ministry took up certain more legislative reform measures against social evils. On one side, this proved to be a fulfillment of the Justice party's objectives and on the other side the deliberations in the Legislature on the abolition of early Child Marriages, raising of the age of consent and the abolition of the Devadasi system that created an impression among the people in favour of the ministry. The Justice ministry brought the Kallars under the preview of the depressed section. Therefore the Labour department brought forth many amelioration measures through the Kallars reclamation department.<sup>20</sup>

One of the main plank of the programme of the Justice Party was the upliftment of the depressed classes.<sup>44</sup> For that the Madras Government appointed G.F. Paddison as the Labour Commissioner to supervise the ameliorative measures necessary for the upliftment of the depressed classes. As a result of it, in 1923 the ministry allotted Rs. 1,00,000/- for the educational activities of the depressed classes and as a result of these, the total number of these schools increased from 7,651 to 10,035 between the year 1922 and 1927.<sup>21</sup>

On the Social side, some measures were undertaken for the overall progress and upliftment of the depressed classes. M.C. Rajah and W.P.A. Soundarapandia Nadar<sup>22</sup> moved resolutions in the

Madras Legislative Council recommending the Government to bring in legislation penalizing any kind of obstruction in using public roads, public chatrams, wells, schools, etc. by the people irrespective of caste and creed.<sup>23</sup> The resolution was accepted by the Government. Another important resolution, moved by M.C. Rajah recommending to the Government was that the term Panchama or Paraya, used to designate the Dravidian Community in southern India should be deleted from Government records and to substitute it with the term Adi-Dravida in the Tamil districts. Answering to the request of the resolution the Government gave an undertaking that it had no objection to call the members of this community as Adi-Dravida or Dravidas but explained its inability to re-edit it in the old records. The Government directed that the term Adi-Dravida or Dravida shall in future be adopted in the place of Panchama or Paraya or similar terms in the official documents.

### Abolition of Devadasi System

As a notable social measure, the Justice Ministry played a vital role in the abolition of Devadasi System in Madras Presidency. The word 'Devadasi' means a servant or slave of God Deva means God and Dasi means Servent.<sup>51</sup> The desasi system was an evil practice in the Hindu Society according to which young girls were dedicated to temples at a tender age. They were also called as dancing girls because their duty was to dance before the idols during the Poojas (Ceremonies). The regular duties of the 'Devadasis' were attending and waving of lighted lamps in front of the deity at sunset, sing in praise of duties and dance and proceed with processions. The Devadasis were popularly known as dancing girls by the English because their chief duty was to dance in front of the idols during processions and 'Poojas'. They were good artists since they were given training in the arts of music and dance.<sup>24</sup>

According to Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Devadasi' was an unmarried Hindu Female, who had undergone the ceremony of a marriage with an idol either in the Hindu temples. In 1927 Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, the Deputy Chairman of the Madras Legislative Council started a crusade against the 'Devadasi' problem. On November 1927 Dr. Reddi forwarded a motion in the Madras Legislative Council proposing that the Devadasi System should be stopped through legislation.

Again in 1929 Muthulakshmi Reddi prepared a bill to be introduced in the Legislative Council. On 24 January 1930 she introduced a bill in the Madras Legislative Council to prevent dedication of women and children to Hindu temples in the presidency of Madras. According to the Bill dedication of Hindu women to temples was declared illegal and the dedicated women could conduct valid marriages. Another object of the bill was to punish the persons who permitted, performed or participated in the Ceremony of Pottukattu or any similar ceremony.<sup>26</sup>

The Madras Devadasi prevention of Dedication Bill was introduced in the Madras Legislative Assembly by Mrs. Ammanna Raj on 7 December 1938<sup>27</sup> and it was referred to the select committee. In spite of the support extended by women folk, the bill was not passed because of the resignation of the Congress ministry in 1939. The Bill finally became an Act as No. XXX of 1947 and came to be known as the Madras Devadasis Act of 1947 the social legislations piloted by the Justice Ministry became landmark events in the history of Madras Presidency by which the Devadasis were allowed to marry. As a result of the social legislations the Hindu women were legally allowed to lead a legal and moral life.

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