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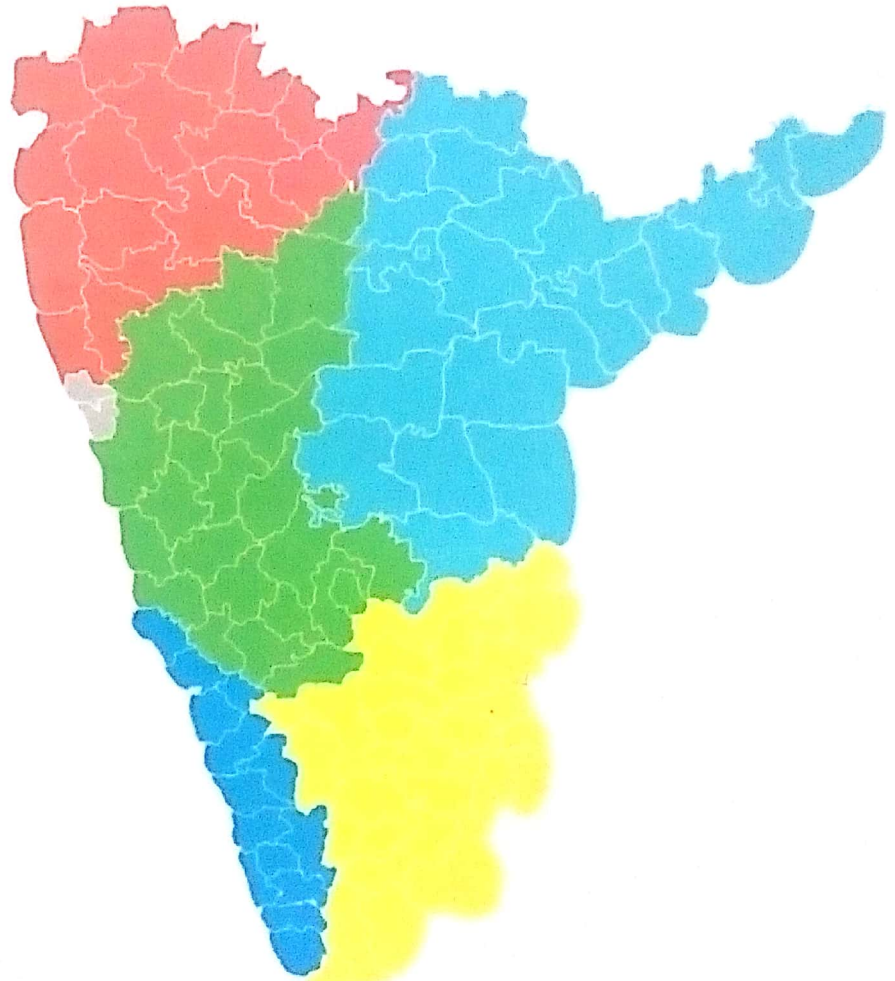
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GENESIS AND GROWTH OF NON – BRAHMIN MOVEMENT IN TAMIL NADU IN THE LATE COLONIAL TAMIL NADU

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Abstract

In the ancient India, the Hindu society inherited the four fold varna system after the entry of Aryans. As a result upper castes including Brahmins gained importance. This trend continued till the advent of the British. After their entry, middle class emerged through their policies of education and administration. This reform by the British and the services rendered by Christian missionaries created awareness among the lower classes. When Brahmins dominated in every sphere of life, certain leaders belonging to Non – Brahmin communities projected the socio- economic problems of the backward classes which resulted "Non – Brahmin Movement". The role of South Indian Liberal Federation and Justice Party in the promotion of educational, social, economic, political, material and moral progress of Non- Brahmin communities is highlighted in this paper.

Keywords: Non – Brahmin Movement, Brahmins, Justice Party, Backward Classes

Brahmins who were less than four percent of the population enjoyed a monopolistic socio-religious, politico-economic position. Hence there was imbalance in social, political and economic conditions in the 19th century. When the Brahmins could occupy the higher echelons of the society, people of other castes were subjected to oppression and were denied opportunities in education and job opportunities. This paved the way for the emergence of Non-Brahmin Movement to bring out awakening among the Non-Brahmins and unity among them to achieve relief. This was enhanced by the role of Christian missionaries, British government, scholars and leaders belonging to Non-Brahmin communities.

Justice Party in Tamil Nadu

In 1916 when the Indian National Congress was dominated by Brahmins, in Tamil Nadu leaders belonging to the non-Brahmin communities like T.M. Nayar and P. Thiagaraya chetty projected the socio-economic problems of the backward and depressed classes and consolidated their political programme into a parallel movement and determined to counter the domination of Brahmins in politics. They formed a party called South Indian Liberal Federation and issued a manifesto projecting the grievances of non-Brahmins particularly of communal representation to them.¹

The South Indian Liberal Federation, Madras Dravidian Association and the South Indian people's Association merged themselves into one party called Justice Party named after the newspaper 'Justice' issued by South Indian Liberal Federation.² Justice Party emerged as a political party from the social organization 'Madras

United League' and its main aims included social uplift and amelioration of the disgruntled people who suffered from oppression. The persons responsible for the organization of Madras United League were Saravaana Pillai, G. Veerasami Naidu, Doraisami Mudaliar, S. Narayanasami Naidu, Dr. C. Natesaa Mudaliar, Dewan Bhadura Karunakara Menon and Raju Ramaraja Ningur Known as Rajah of Panagal.³

The ideals of the Justice Party include "promotion of the educational, social economic, political, material and moral progress of all communities other than Brahmins in the southern part of India, timely representation to the government to safeguard the interests of non-Brahmin communities and dissemination by public lectures and distribution of literature to create public opinions and awareness among the non-Brahmins.⁴

Since the Mantagu and Chelmsford report did not provide communal electorate to the non-Brahmin class South Indian Liberal Federation urged the Madras Government and as a result, South Borough Franchise Committee was appointed with two Indian members, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and S.N. Banerjee who were Brahmins. South Indian Liberal Federation opposed this committee and made agitation in each district.⁵

In the first general elections, Justice Party captured 63 seats out of 98. In the official review of India it has been stated as 'For the first time in the history of India, the lower castes of Madras have asserted themselves against the intellectual oligarchy of the upper and have seized political power in their own hands... The first bulwark of caste dominance in political matters has been stormed as a result of the recent constitutional changes'.⁶ Rajaraman

observes, "The Justice Party was the earliest political party in modern India to condemn *Varnashrama Dharma* and its concomitant evils; it avowedly stood for the abolition of caste. It considered caste as a baneful sin of society. In all its political conferences and confederations it laid stress on the need of enacting social legislation to establish and egalitarian society and to elevate the depressed classes. The leaders of the Justice Party urged all the non-Brahmins to promote inter-caste marriages among the different sections of their communities".⁷

The Justice Party was interested much in job reservations for counter elite.⁸ The party accepted social justice as its main principle and the communal representation of non-Brahmins in government services was one of its goals. In 1917 at the non-Brahmin conference held at Coimbatore, the party adopted a resolution on public services with reference to the Public Service Commission recommendation. The important rules of the resolution include,

1. When competent application belonging to different communities apply for a place, it should be given to the applicant belonging to the community which has not had due representation in the office or service.
2. Appointments should be so distributed that not more than 40 per cent of the appointments are held by the same community in the same office or service.
3. One third of the appointments of sub-Magistrates and Deputy Tahsildars and a fair proportion of those of Deputy Collectors should be thrown open for direct recruitment and preference should be given to deserving young men belonging to communities not duly represented in the service.⁹ Impressed by the recommendations of the Miller Committee Report of the Mysore State, O. Thanikachalam Chetti, a member of the Justice Party in the Legislative Council proposed a resolution to urge the Madras Government for adopting such instructions of the Mysore Government. It observes "that this council recommends to the government that a standing order be issued to every officer or board or body of offices authorized to make appointments to the public services to give preference to candidates from the non-Brahmin communities (including therein Christian, Muhammadians members of the Depressed classes) until a provision of atleast 66% amongst the officers carrying a salary of Rs. 100/- per mensem and upward and a provision of 75% amongst offices carrying a salary less than Rs.100/- are reached within a period of seven years from this date so long

as such candidates possess the minimum qualification prescribed by the rules relating to appointment to the public services, although such candidates may be less qualified than the Brahmin candidates".¹⁰

Explaining the rationale of the resolution put forward, Thanikachalam Chetti also observed, "This resolution provides a remedy for a long standing, deep-seated and fostering sore from which the non-Brahmin communities have been suffering for a long time. In this Presidency, the non-Brahmins for decades past, have been kept down from rising higher both in the matter of recruitment and in the matter of getting promotion by the Brahmins who managed to capture higher appointments in the State, leaving the crumbs to their less fortunate brethren".¹¹

After being passed by the Legislative Council, the resolution was given effect as the first communal G.O. By the Madras Government on 16th October 1921. According to the G.O. the principle scheduled for the Revenue Department in Boards Standing order No. 128 (2), on the subject of communal representation was to be extended to all grades of appointments in the several departments of government. All the officers and heads of departments empowered with the recruitment authority were advised to follow this principle in future recruitment. This G.O. also insisted the heads of departments, district judges and collectors to submit half yearly reports about the recruitment details for the categories of Brahmanas, non-Brahmin Hindu, Indian Christian, Muhammadans, Europeans, Anglo-Indians and others.¹²

On 15th August 1922, a second communal G.O. was issued since there was dissatisfaction about the inadequate nature of the returns called for by the first communal G.O. In addition the Second communal G.O. was issued for getting full information about the returns to know about the progress of the various communities in the process of communal representation in the government services. Its direction were:

1. Endeavours should always be made to divide the principal appointments in each district among several castes. 2. In order to give effect to this policy the government directed that the principle specified in the Board's standing Order should be translated into action both at the time of initial recruitment and at every point at which men were promoted wholly by selection and not by seniority. 3. Besides, the government gave direction that yearly returns were to be made by the Heads or departments showing the

extent to which each of the six main sub-divisions of the communities was represented in each department.¹³

These two communal G.O.'s marked the success of the Justice Party in its struggle for social justice against the caste monopoly of Brahmins in government services. According to Rajaraman in his book, *The Justice Party* it has been observed, "The noble principle which lay behind the communal G.O.'s have been incorporated in the Indian constitution by the first amendment Act passed in the year 1951. It can not be denied that some of the ideals for which the Justice Party stood had not failed to fascinate even administrators like Jawaharlal Nehru.¹⁴ This success acted as a booster for Justice Party ministers to recruit Indians to public services at higher levels in their departments. Both the Rajah of panagal and the Rajah of Bobbili tried their best in the process of Indianisation of government departments. Rajaraman remarked: "Indianisation of services in the departments of transferred half was nothing but a logical extension of communal representation which the Justice party cherished.¹⁵ Thangavelu observed, "Though the Depressed Classes formed one fifth of the total population of the Madras presidency their demands for equality in the society and policy of the day demands for equality in the society and polity of the day were not given due consideration by the Justice Party, the so-called spokesman of the non-Brahmins in the presidency".¹⁶

The Indian nation was able to preserve its highly stratified society as the people followed the principles of Hindu society. Robert Caldwell used the word, 'Brahmins' as synonymous with 'Aryans'. In the beginning of the Twentieth Century the Brahmins were most advanced and powerful community and the non-Brahmins were backward and powerless community. In Madras Presidency, the power and prestige of the Brahmins were absolute and the non-Brahmins were in a position of almost total subservience. Though it was invaded by several conquerors, its social fabric was not influenced much. The British who came to India as traders, projected themselves as followers of non-interference policy, they sowed the seeds of social change through their administrative and educational policies. During the freedom struggle, though congress gave more

importance to nationalistic thought than social reform measures, non-Brahmin movements emerged and gained momentum. These movements especially Justice Party in Tamil Nadu fought against Brahmin chauvinistic policies and were able to get several reforms granted like communal reservation.

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