

# ROLE OF JUSTICE PARTY IN TAMIL NADU POLITICS

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The Brahmins had high political influence in the Madras State at the beginning of 20th century. During the election held in 1914 Brahmins upheld 11 seats out of 14 seats. Also in the Madras municipal election of 1919 they obtained more seats. They held more influence in politics as well as in society. The ordinary people were deprived of their chances of entering politics and not given opportunities in training themselves for handling governmental affairs. Moreover, they were considered to be useless by Brahmins.

Brahmins held a high status in society even from the early days. Well versed in Sanskrit the Brahmins kept politics, religion and education under their control. When the English came here, they learned and they were in high posts under the English Government.<sup>1</sup> Apart from politics they were offered high posts in medicine, education, revenue and judiciary. The census report of 1911 and the Madras university report of 1918 clearly proved it.

The social and economic differences and caste differences between the people who lived in Tamil land attracted the attention of great thinkers. Hence several organisations were formed to do away with the differences in politics and society and to bring about co-operation and various communities met at Madras in 1916 and cried for liberty, equality and justice.

## **The activities and growth of Justice Party:**

The Justice party which worked for the uplift of the down trodden people forwarded a series of demands to the government stressing the importance of education towards social welfare. So it requested the government to offer equal chance of education to all people and to reform Hinduism, reducing the highhandedness of the Brahmins. More over, it criticized the voting right on the basis of education and property and requested the government to offer voting right based on community.

The leaders of this party tried without a break to spread their doctrines among the people and collected party fund of lakhs of rupees within a year. They conducted conferences in all the important parts of the state and started branches of the party in all the places. Hence, within very short period the Justice party became popular obtaining the support of the large number of people.

**Meston proclamation:**

The preparation of the electoral roll started in 1918 for the election to be conducted in 1920. The Justice party wanted the roll to be prepared on the basis of castes and communities. But this demand was rejected by the electoral committee. The electoral committee consisted of V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and S.N. Baneiji.<sup>2</sup> The rejection of the electoral committee made the Justice party not to accept the recommendations of the committee. In the committee meeting held in London all the parties sent their representatives. The Justice party also sent its representatives with T.M. Nair as its leader. The unexpected death of T.M. Nair made K.V. Reddy the leader of the representatives. He explained the racial conflict found in Tamil land and requested the committee to prepare the electoral on the basis of caste and community. After hearing the requests of all representatives Lord Wellington offered 50% of the seats to Justice party. But the party demanded 55% of the seats on the basis of population.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the Meston electoral committee submitted its report to the government. More representations were given to backward people and more people were given voting rights as per the above report. The Justice party accepted this report and made preparations for the ensuing election. However, the report gave satisfaction to the Justice party and it explained this report as the "Meston Award".

**The Justice party in Administration:**

As per the report of Meston, elections took place in 1920.<sup>4</sup> As this report dissatisfied the Congress party, they did not contest in the election. With the view to remove the supremacy of the Brahmins and obtain necessary concessions from the government the Justice party decided to give co-operation to the English and contested in the election. Gaining victory in 63 seats out of 98 seats, the Justice party formed the government. Lord Wellington appointed Subbarayulu Reddiyar as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu in December 1920. The government was the first one formed on the basis of diarchy.

Obtaining great support of the people during their three years of administration the Justice party contested again in the 1923 election. The party got 48 seats out of 98 seats. As the party decided to proceed in co-operation with the English to the council, so that they might form the majority. The party came to power for the second time in Tamil Nadu with T.N. Sivagnanam Pillai as Chief Minister, who was a retired R.D.O., served as the president of the Tirunelveli district board.<sup>5</sup>

In the election held in 1926 the justice party met with utter failure, this happened due to the internal conflict of the party and the withdrawal of the support of Adhidraidas and Muslims. This led to the victory of Swarajya party which contested the election with utmost co-operation.<sup>6</sup> But they did not come forward to form the ministry. Instead they supported the ministry of independent candidate A.Subburayan.

Justice party which failed in the election of 1926 strengthened it in different ways and contested the election of 1930. The Justice party became victorious in the election as the Congress and Swarajya did not contest. Again the Justice party formed the ministry with B.Muniswamy Naidu as Chief Minister.

But in the election held in 1934, the Justice party failed utterly. Internal party conflicts and the dissatisfaction of the people were the reasons for this failure. Though the Congress party got majority seats it was not in favour of forming the government. Hence, the justice party formed the government in coalition with other parties. This time also B. Muniswami Naidu was given the Chief Ministership.<sup>7</sup>

During the election of 1937, there was keen competition between the national party, Congress and the state party, Justice party. Just as in the election of 1926 the people's party and the Muslim league worked against the Justice party. The votes which were meant for the justice party were scattered. So the Congress party obtained majority by getting 152 seats out of 215 seats in the legislative assembly and 26 seats out of 46 seats in the legislative council. As the administrative right was refused to the ministry, the Congress party was not for forming the ministry. Hence, the Justice party formed an interim government with K.V. Reddy as the Chief Minister. But in 1937 on the basis of the assurance given by the British Government, Congress party constituted the ministry with C. Rajagopalachari as the Chief Minister.<sup>8</sup> The Justice party which met with severe criticism of the people became inactive after 1937.

### **The achievement of the Justice party:**

The Justice party during its thirteen years of rule in Tamil land had achieved several things. Trying to establish justice in the society, the party was able to reduce, the supremacy of the Brahmins socially, politically and economically. To uplift the status of the non-Brahmins, the preference given to Brahmins in the public sector was reduced and employment opportunities on the basis of percentage were increased to ordinary people. The Employments Election Committee constituted by the ministry of Subbarayulu Reddiyar in 1924 was converted into the government Employment Selection Committee. Until the advent of the ruling of justice party, the Munsiffs of the District Courts were

appointed by the high courts and most of them were Brahmins. But in the ruling of Justice party, the government itself appointed the Munsiffs in the District, thereby giving chance to non-Brahmins to become judges.<sup>9</sup>

From the very beginning, Brahmins influenced education and religion. Higher education and entry into temples were refused to non-Brahmins. Assuming the ruling of the state under these circumstances the Justice party did not lose a moment to take steps to improve the educational status of non-Brahmins. In addition to fee concession and noon meals offered to the educationally backward, the number of students in the primary schools was increased as per necessity. The Justice party government also took steps to reduce the supremacy of Brahmins in Hindu religion. Apart from the restrictions of un-necessary activities, committees were constituted to maintain the properties of the temples. This helped them to restrict largely the unnecessary misuse of women and its influence in society.

With the advent of English in Tamil land, remarkable changes took place in the society. One among them was the foreign medical systems; this in turn led to the neglect of the native medical system. To re-establish the popularity of indigenous medical system among the people, the Justice party took innumerable steps. Moreover, steps were taken to increase the employment chances of downtrodden people. As per the Industrial Aid Act of Madras District in 1922 necessary help was offered to start new industries.<sup>10</sup> The downtrodden people of Tamil land did not have land even to construct a hut. The government granted lands to the landless, so that they might build a hut of their own. The conspicuous achievement of the Justice party was in regard towards the growth of higher education. In addition to the approval of the activities of the Madras University, it laid foundation stones to Andhra University in 1929 and Annamalai University in 1926. Today they are flourishing well in South India.<sup>11</sup>

### **The reasons for the fall of Justice party:**

Becoming very popular within a short period with the support of the non -Brahmins the Justice party was paralysed after the elections of 1937. Several reasons could be pointed out for this fall. When all the parties were against the English rule, the Justice party came forward to function in co-operation with the English government. To get support to their schemes they were forced to forget their original principles. This attitude was severely criticized by the followers of the party and other opposition parties.

The Justice party insisted on the preparation of electoral rolls on the basis of caste and religion. It also demanded to declare non-Brahmins as backward. But only non-Brahmin Hindus were approved as backward and the untouchables and the Muslims were forsaken. The dissatisfied in the party, due to this neglect of the untouchables and Muslims, quite the party under the leadership of M.C. Raja.<sup>12</sup>

When the Justice party came to power, conflict arose among the leaders for administrative posts, especially, the disparity began to widen among the Tamils and Telugus in Tamil land demanding political supremacy. Efforts taken to bring about co-operation among these two sects did not last long. The effects from this separation affected the later elections adversely. Though this party weakened, no one can underestimate its efforts to create awakening among the non-Brahmins.<sup>13</sup>

The Justice party happened to be only a state party. So its socio political estimation was short sighted. As the leaders of this party were belonging to different sections, the differences of opinion arose among them could not be solved easily; this affected the efficient administration of the party. Moreover, there was no harmony. The leaders of this party showed much interest in gaining power and not in strengthening the party. Moreover the party lacked drive, imagination, creative leadership and organizational skill. In spite of there defects, the Justice party determined to reduce the supremacy of the Brahmins, but not the total growth of the land.

### End Notes

1. P. Venugopal in Introduction, *Mirror of the Year*, Madras Dravidar Kazhagam, p. ix.
2. Many prominent non-Brahmin leaders were positively responded which included the leaders like Dr. C. Natesan, Dr. T.M. Nair, and Raja of Panagal.
3. Gopala Merlon, 'Non-Brahmin Movement and the Justice Party' in Justice Party Golden Jubilee Souvenir. It was stressed by Raja of Panagal and M.T. Subramaniya Mudaliyar in the tenth session of Non-Brahmin Confederation held in Dec. 1926 at Madura.
4. K. Subba Reddi, Presidential Address, Quoted in the *Justice Movement* 1917.
5. GO. 1561 - Public Dec. 19, 1912. Washbrook refers this order as the first Communal G.O. pp. 284-285.
6. G.O. 187 - (Edu) G.O. 22 (Public) Feb, 29, 1912 & Jan 21, 1918.
7. G.O. 19 (Home, Misc) 6 Jan 1920 and G.O. 986 (Revenue) 30 Apr. 1920, TNA.
8. This stand on the part of government was reflected in the evidence of H.G. Stakes in Evidence taken before the Reform committee [Franchise] Madras [Calcutta, 1919], 11,585.

9. G.O. 1157, Public Aug. 3, 1915; G.O. 1123 (Home, Misc) Oct. 23, 1917 In G.O. 986, Revenue, Apr. 30, 1920.
10. E.F. Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism* pp. 27-37.
11. The Committee was included the leading non-Brahmins P.T.Thiyagaraya Chetty, O.Thanikachalla Chetty, Rao Bahadur A.P patro, M.C.Raja besides Dr.C.Natesa Mudaliar, G.O.No.613, Public Services dt.16.09.1921.
12. G.O. No. 613, Public (Services) Sept.16, 1921.
13. G.O.No.128(2) of 1854.

