

GENESIS OF NON- BRAHMIN MOVEMENT IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY

M. Raman

Part time Ph.D., Scholar,

Research Department of History,

RaniAnna Government College For Women, Tirunelveli – 8.

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli – 12.)

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to describe the origin of Non-Brahmin Movement in Madras Presidency. Non-Brahmin Movement played a vital role during the 20th century in Tamil Nadu. In the twentieth century, numerically superior castes grouped themselves into Non-Brahmins and claimed their right in administration. They waged war against Brahmins through election and took measures for their political empowerment. This movement came into being to uplift the backward and depressed classes. The first to speak against the Brahmins was C. Sankaran Nair.

Keywords

Dravidian Association – South Indian Liberal Federation Andhraprakesika, Panchamapanty.

Introduction

A non-Brahmin social worker of Triplicane, C.Natesa Mudaliar started an organisation . for Non-Brahmins called Dravidian Association in 1912. On behalf of the Dravidian Association, he published two books namely, Dravidian Worthies and Non-Brahmin letters.¹ "This association professed to work for a Dravidian State, an idea of which was little heard later on."²

The South Indian Liberal Federation was started by T.M.Nair and P.Theagaraya Chetti in 1916.³ An English Newspaper 'Justice', a Tamil paper 'Dravidian' and the 'Telugu paper' AndhraPrakasika were started. T.M.Nair was a highly respected doctor. He took an active part in the Congress. In 1916 he expected to be elected by the Madras Legislative Council to the Imperial Council in Delhi. To his disappointment two Brahmins B.N.Sharma and V.S.Srinivasa Shastry were elected. This incident gave an impetus to the formation of a non-Brahmin Political Party and resulted in the formation of the South Indian Liberal Federation, which later on was Christened 'Justice Party' after its official journal Justice. The primary task of the Justices was to neutralise the Home-Rule Movement.⁴ The Hindu, the established English daily of Madras refused to give publicity to the Justice Party because it felt obliged to keep from its columns anything that smacked of communalism.⁵

The Justice Party was the only and all comprehensive party of the Non Brahmins of Madras. The first denunciation of the Non-Brahmin Manifesto was issued by P.Kesava Pillai, member of the Legislative Council. He called it as one "calculated to be harmful to the common causes and probably likely to promote the best interest of the classes, whom it sought to serve". Many Non-Brahmins were pained and surprised at the Non-Brahmin Manifesto and dissociated themselves from it.⁶ These public spirited men organised a 'Nationalist Meeting' at Gokhale Hall, Madras, on September 20, 1917, to show that there was a large number of Non-Brahmins in favour of Home Rule and that the south Indian People's Association represented only a minority of the Non-Brahmins.⁷

Justice Party

The first and most important conference of the Justice Party was organised in Coimbatore on August 19, 1917. The organiser, T.A.Ramalingam Chetty who was also a Congressman demanded that all persons attending the Congress Conference should be asked to sign a statement affirming that the aim of the Congress would be to attain self government only by gradual steps and further argued that all representative bodies in the future should contain the proper proportion of all communities and interests.⁸

The Montague Chelmsford Reforms announced the plan of increasing the participation of Indians in the governance of the country. Accordingly, the Government of India Act of 1919, introduced the system of Dyarchy in India. The reserve subjects were to be administered by the Government with the help of the Executive Council. The Transferred subjects were to be dealt with by the elected representatives. The drawback in the system was the division of powers to the effect that the important portfolios like finance, were reserved while less important portfolios like Local Self Government, Public Health, Hospitals etc. , were given to the elected Government. So the effective functioning of the Government was not possible.

The Congress was against the system of Dyarchy for it rightly felt that it would not permit effective functioning of the government. Further, Gandhi was against the policy of Council entry. Their opinions in the Congress about participation in the Government were divided. Many were against Gandhi's political tactics.

The Justice Party agreed to co-operate with the Government and to assume office under the new reforms. In its opposition to Brahmin domination it was assisted by members of the I.C.S. in Madras who also feared a Brahmin usurpation of both political and administrative power in the Madras Presidency.

In 1916 the Depressed Classes Society held a conference and requested the Government to enquire into the exact condition of the depressed classes and to make recommendation for measures which will secure freedom and justice for the depressed classes.⁹ The issue assumed political importance on the eve of Montague Chelmsford Reforms and led to a coalition between the depressed classes and the Non-Brahmins against the Brahmins and the Home Rule Movement. References were made

frequently to the deplorable condition of the depressed classes in the Non-Brahmin conference and the need to improve their condition was stressed. In October 1917, T.M.Nair addressed the Panchamas at Spurtank Road, Chetpet, in Madras at their request. He made a stirring speech asking them to assert their equality with other castes, shed the past formed by long submission and social injuries. He asked them to organize themselves to establish a committee of representatives for various areas so that the 'Non-Brahmin Party' and the 'Panchama Party' could participate together in politics.¹⁰ The Political Association of the Panchama agreed broadly with the stand taken by the South Indian Liberal Federation.

The Non-Brahmins and the depressed classes made several representations for reserved constituencies. Due to repeated representations made throughout India and considering the unequal social conditions the British Government agreed to have reserved constituencies. The Meston Award announced 28 seats (3 urban and 25 rural seats) all in the Plural member constituencies. This award enable the Madras Government to complete the franchise arrangements for the 1920 elections. The Justice Party was elected unopposed in 63 out of the 98 seats. With the support of the nominated members it claimed a total strength of eighty out of a Council numbering hundred and twenty. The Justice Party concentrated on Provincial matters, rather than those of an All India nature. This was partly due to dyarchical system. The Justice Party proceeded to strengthen its position in the public life of Tamil Nadu by bringing before the Legislative Council in Madras, a series of resolutions designed to give Non-Brahmins a greater proportion of Government jobs. It realised that the implementation of Government orders to redistribute government appointments in favour of Non- Brahmins would fulfill some of the party's first articulated ideals administrative power, social position and economic justice to the Non Brahmins.¹¹ The second communal Government Order to meet these objectives was passed in 1922. It directed that the main appointments in each district should be divided among the several communities; the G.O. was to be implemented not only at the time of recruitment but at every stage of promotion. This way they fulfilled the purpose for which they formed a party.

Conclusion

The Foregoing research articles reveals the origin of Non-Brahmin Movement. In 1912 Dravidian Association was started by C. Natesamudaliar a Non-Brahmin Social worker of Triplicane for Non-Brahmins. In 1916 T. Nair and P. Theyagaraja Chetti started South Indian Liberal federation which later on was Christened Justice Party after its official Journal Justice. The first and most important conference of the Justice Party was organized in Coimbatore on August, 19, 1917. In 1920 election a Justice Party was elected unopposed in 63 at of the 98 seats.

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