

# THE DRAVIDIAN MOVEMENT IN TAMIL NADU AND IT'S LEGACY

(Periyar E. V. Ramaswamy Endowment Lectures  
Madras University 1981)



BY

A. N. SATTANATHAN



UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS

1982

© University of Madras, 1982

Price Rs 3-50

---

Printed at Rathnam Press, 41, Badrian Street, Madras-1.

44 884

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	... <i>i-iii</i>
<b>Lecture I</b>	
Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu and its emergence as a political force	... 1
<b>Lecture II</b>	
The Varying political phases of the Dravidian movement	... 13
<b>Lecture III</b>	
Castes as pressure groups	... 27
Bibliography	... 40

## INTRODUCTION

### The Dravidian movement in Tamil Nad and its legacy

I must at the outset express my deep sense of gratitude and appreciation to the authorities of this oldest university in the South for extending an invitation to me to deliver these series of lectures under the Periyar E. V. Ramaswami Endowment. Not being closely associated with the affairs of the University, I was under the impression that only academics, scholars of eminence and people who have distinguished themselves in several fields are extended this honour. It is not a mere expression of formal humility when I say that I don't seem to fall under any of these categories. I am a retired Civil Servant who spends his time (when it is not necessary to earn a living) studying current affairs. About fourteen years ago, I started writing articles on political, economic and historical affairs to several newspapers in India. I also had occasion to study certain aspects of our social and political system, when I was called upon to Chair the Tamil Nadu Backward Classes Commission. Since then, I have taken a sustained interest in the Backward classes agitation and counteragitation in recent times. The range of subjects from which I was given a choice for the present lectures fall very much within my sphere of interest and study. I therefore welcomed the offer.

I have a personal interest as well. I knew Periyar fairly well for about 10 years before his demise. My first contact with him was in the middle thirties when he visited Bombay, attended by two of his distinguished disciples - both of whom are alas no more. He was staying with a friend of mine in Dadar and the saintly bearded appearance of the prophet of athelism and the sishya-like demeanour of the two disciples attracted the attention of the neighbourhood Hindu ladies, who took him to be a great Swamiji from the South. The ladies spoke to his host and wanted a "Darshan" to be arranged. The

"Darshan" was arranged for the next morning with the stipulation that it was Swamiji's day of silence. The ladies arrived with trays of flowers, fruits and sweets and placing them around the great man, sat by his side in silence. He nodded his head several times in appreciation and waved his hands as if in blessing. The ladies departed thoroughly happy and the Swamiji left Bombay the next day.

I wrote this up in a newspaper article in 1967 or 1968 and the veracity of the episode was accepted by Periyar who sent for me after being told about this article. I used to see him there-after fairly frequently. He had a tremendous sense of humour and was quite child-like in his appreciation. I used to tease him by saying that coconuts will be broken on the various statues which were being erected all round the country and pooja offered to the godless prophet. He used to burst into laughter and his mirth was uncontrollable when I suggested that, even Brahman ladies would break coconuts on his head. Such matters have already come to pass!

I am grateful to the University for giving me an opportunity for paying my tribute once again to him who has done so much for the common people in so short a time. His work will bear the stamp of immortality.

## LECTURE I

# DRAVIDIAN MOVEMENT IN TAMIL NADU AND ITS EMERGENCE AS A POLITICAL FORCE

### 1. Origins of the Movement — was its Dravidian ?

The most outstanding event in South Indian History in this Century is the rise and spread of the Non-Brahman movement, better known as the Dravidian movement. For the first time in Indian History, caste, not religion or race entered into politics as a major force. Though the Dravidian movement is quite a modern Chapter in Indian History, scholars already have divergent views on its origin. It is now almost a matter of historical research. The widely held impression is that the movement originated in the early years of this century in what was then the Bombay Presidency, especially in its Maharashtra region and spread to the South. It is worth remembering that in those years the region South of the Vindhya, was divided into two large administrative units — The Bombay Presidency and the Madras Presidency; and in between lay a few large and small princely states. But we cannot give a date for the commencement of what is essentially a socio-religious and ethnic movement. Dates can be assigned for something connected with a personality or a historical or physical event. If it is regarded as a movement of the Castes other than the Brahman against the Brahmans, it might have existed in some form or other since the days of the Aryan settlement, and Buddhism and Jainism may even be called anti-Brahman movements. But these were not certainly Dravidian in any sense. In any case these movements were largely religious and social reformation movements, and were not directed against the Brahmans as a Varna or Caste. No hatred was preached against the Brahmans. Any agitation or movement of the castes other than those exclusively Aryan, can be described as Dravidian only if all these castes were exclusively of Dravidian origin and there were no Kshatriya or Vaisya Caste of Aryan descent. The

modern Movement is not Dravidian in that sense. - It was and is definitely Non-Brahman.

## 2. Socio-Religious Reforms in Historical times

The Brahmans were sometimes rulers and often the power behind the throne ever since the Aryans settled in India, right upto the Muslim invasion and rule in the 9th and 10th centuries. Throughout this period there were no agitations as such against Brahman political and administrative dominance or influence. The movements that surfaced from time to time were for social reform and relaxation or simplification of the Brahmanical rituals. There was no direct attack on the ritual superiority of the Brahman caste in the social scale. Mythology asserts through the Parasurama story that the Kshatriyas who raised their head were put down. From time immemorial, the epics and Puranas through preaching the doctrines of Karma, Punarjanma and related concepts, made the vast masses accept their inferior socio-religious and economic lot.

## 3. No Wholesale Aryan Migration

There was no rational attempt systematically made to denounce these concepts. As far as South India and particularly Tamilnadu is concerned, there may be some truth in the assumption that all castes other than Brahmans are Dravidians. As modern historians like N. Subramanian have very laboriously tried to convince readers, what happened in South India was not a wholesale migration of the Aryan Brahmans from the North, with their entire caste system, - there was only the introduction and subtle implementing of the caste frame work or caste culture. The local tribes and occupational groups were assigned places in the ritual Varna social scale according to the Aryan concept of the caste structure, and needless to say that the Princely dynasties were given Kshatriya status and geneology. Some of the trading castes assumed the titles of Vaishyas; and all other occupational groups with their local variations were allotted places in the large Sudra fold. There is no evidence, which can stand the test of critical scrutiny to indicate that there

was any protest or revolt against this cultural adaptation by the indigenous Tamil people in ancient days. Sangam literature and early post-Sangam literature give no indication of any unwilling acceptance of the Aryan cultural concepts. Sanskritic mythology and ideas spread in the land, just as the local gods and rituals were also sanskritised with Aryan religion and mythology.

#### 4. References in early Tamil literature

A modern scholar has tried to find Anti-Brahmanism even in Thirumandiram of Thirumoolar generally believed to be of the 5th or 6th century A.D. The scholar has referred to the description of the holy thread, and the Sikha (tuft of hair) in some stanza in the second Tantra as derisive and that Thirumoolar was ridiculing the Brahmans generating thereby Anti-Brahmanism. What Thirumoolar has given there is the tantric symbolism relating to the holy thread and tuft of hair. In an earlier stanza Thirumoolar has extolled the Brahmans by saying that Brahmans by reciting the Gayathri in the ordained manner, obtained Siva's grace and conquered Maya. After having paid such tribute to the Brahmans, he is unlikely to preach hatred against them. Thirumoolar was one of the earliest Siddhas who were masters of Tantric art. They did not think it necessary to conform to the external forms of religion; nor did all of them ignore idol worship or employment of priests. Siddhas were neither Anti-Brahmans or anti-Aryan.

Brahmans continued to enjoy their privileged position and even in temples under the Saivite Mutts (established during the period of the Nayanmars) officiated as the chief priests as they do now. I think it is the height of chauvinism, to say the least, to give antiquity to Dravidianism or Non-Brahmanism and relate it to Thirumoolar and the Saivite Cult that developed in the 7th and 8th Centuries.

It is very surprising that a sociologist of great eminence, Dr. Ghurye, has even excelled the scholar referred to earlier, in attributing anti-Brahmanism an even greater antiquity in his latest



edition of "Caste and Race in India." The absence of Sanskrit words or translations from Sanskrit in the Sangam age, the development of Tamil language and literature independently of Sanskritic influences are cited as instance of Anti-Aryanism or Anti-Brahmanism. Equally uncritical, if not absurd, is citing the presence of many Vellalas and even Parayas amongst the Alvars and Nayanmars, and that a Vellala - Sekkilar was the author of the Periya Puranam, as illustrations of Non-Brahmanism. The learned Sociologist describes the chauvinism of the Dravida Kazhagam and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam pamphleteers of the thirties and forties, as only revivals of the anti-Brahmanism of the earlier ages. The Pallavas, the Cholas or the Pandyas who ruled Tamil Nad never showed anti-Brahmanism. In fact they were responsible for importing Brahmans in batches from time to time from the North and settling them round the temples they built.

##### 5. Anti Brahmanism — A Modern Phenomenon

Anti-Brahmanism or Non Brahmanism under the guise of Dravidianism is definitely a phenomenon of the British Administration raising its head towards the end of the 19th Century. The British to consolidate their administration, had to rely on the upper caste in Hindu hierarchy, the Brahman, who had the tradition of learning and whose aptitude for administrative work was well recognised for centuries. Further because of their ritual superiority they would command respect and obedience from the ordinary people. Petty Brahman officials are obeyed and respected, because they are Brahmans. Valentine Chirol writing in 1910 (in Indian Unrest) compared their position as Government Servants as illustrative of Lord Erskine's Filtration theory; and further stated "British education in India became closely associated and connected with religion by which the higher education of the Hindus was in the hands of Brahmans and mainly intended for them." This process was quite pronounced all over the two Southern presidencies and the Princely States also. Towards the end of the 19th century 80 to 90% of all jobs available to Indians were occupied by Brahmans; and they were dominating other

professions also. It is needless to quote statistics of the number of Government servants, lawyers etc. of the period as these are often quoted in several reports and publications.

#### 6. A Movement of Protest by the Higher Non-Brahman Castes

What I would like to emphasise is that the present Non-Brahman movement, actually mis-called Dravidian movement - a point fuller explained in a later context - is a modern phenomenon, arising at about the same time for identical reasons in Maharashtra and the Madras Presidency. There is no evidence that it was imported into Madras from Maharashtra, though there was contact between the leadership at a later stage. It was a protest aimed at impressing the British Administration. It was not essentially anti-Brahman as such in the beginning, though it assumed a hate complex at some later stage. The movement embraced Muslims and Christians and strange to say, there is no evidence of the depressed classes (as they were then called) being involved in it. It was, however, essentially a movement of the higher Non-Brahman castes, the top people outside the Brahman caste who were always aspiring to take their place, if not ritually, but in social and political and official importance. Even historically, under the Pallavas, Cholas, Pandyas, and even the Nayaks, higher offices, especially in the Court and Field Administration were held by Vellalars and Mudaliars. As Velirs in the early Chola days, they were not only big land-owners, but feudal chieftains, raising and keeping troops. They married their daughters with the Royal families. Their pre-eminent position was maintained even under the later Pandyas and Nayaks - as Dalavoys. With the Telugu Cholas and Nayak rulers, the Naidus and Reddiars also came up as landlords and claimants for top positions and eventually these three groups dominated the non-Brahman people. Only under the British rule they lost their position and in the beginning of the 20th century, they wanted to regain their historic position as leaders of the Non-Aryans or Non-Brahmans. Under the circumstances it would not be correct to say that the Non-Brahman movement in Madras was an off-shoot from the Maharashtra region of the Bombay Presidency. The only thing

that can be said is that similar movements arose in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu about the same time and for similar reasons.

#### 7. Why the Movement Started in the South

In trying to explain why the Dravidian movement started in the South and not in the North, Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Rudolph in their several studies could only say that the Brahmans were very conspicuous in the South as the only true Aryan twice-born and in the North there were several Non-Brahman twice-born castes, like Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, and a new caste also came into prominence since the Mughal days who competed successfully with the Brahmans in securing a good share of Government jobs and places in the learned professions – the Kayasthas. The Brahmans lost their dominance in the North after the advent of the Muslim conquerors. Even after the arrival of the British, the Brahmans did not rise to any commanding positions. There were not so many temples and places of learning where their services were required. Another factor, however, minor it may be, was that the Brahmans – men and women – were generally not distinguishable from the others by dress or manner of speech and behaviour, as is the case in Tamil Nadu. The existence of agraharams and numerous temples made their position conspicuous in addition to their overwhelming presence in the services and professions.

#### 8. The objectives of the Non-Brahman Elite

The aspiration of the Non-Brahman leadership in the early years of the century, was to replace the Brahmans fast from their dominant position in officialdom and places of political influence and power. But they also realised that without education, economic power or political influence, the process would not be easy unless they got outright support from the British bureaucracy. The new Non-Brahman elite which was fast gathering strength expressed their distrust of the new Nationalist movement of the Congress, as in their view,<sup>1</sup> with its Brahman

leadership the Congress would stifle the progress of the ordinary people after the British rule was eliminated. The new leadership was openly hostile to the Nationalist movement and stood solidly behind the British.

### 9. The Non-Brahman Manifesto and Non-Brahman Leadership

Their apprehensions were expressed in the Non-Brahman Manifesto of 1916. The manifesto and the South Indian People's Association which issued it, stood firmly against the transfer of power from the British to what they feared would be Brahman over-lordship. Soon after, in August 1917, the South India Liberal Federation was formed to function as a political organisation under the leadership of Dr. T. M. Nair, P. Theagaraja Chettiar, and Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar. Though it would have been a sacrilege some years ago to comment on the leadership, I would like to make some observations. But for the fact that the Presidency of Madras included a part of Kerala, Dr. Nair would not have been in Tamilnad Politics, and in his native Kerala the movement never took root at all, though Brahmanical orthodoxy was at its worst there; Chettiar was a Telugu speaking businessman and the other was a Mudaliar. Nair was the most prominent spokesman of the Federation and he had his personal reasons. It was a closely knit elite of rich people from the higher echelons of society—who in no way represented the masses, or knew them or could speak their idiom. They did not seriously contemplate any social reconstruction or economic uplift to benefit the masses. The fact was that the movement never approached the masses and it was largely urban oriented. There is no evidence of their ever having thought of the depressed classes. As landlords they could hardly afford to take any note of them. Its membership consisted only of the first generation of educated upper caste Non-Brahman graduates or educated professionals. They were worried over the growing number of Brahmans in Public Services, in the District Boards which had been set up as a first measure of local self Government, and the Brahman influence in the Home Rule movement which was very vocal in Madras under the leadership of Dr. Annie Besant.

## 10. The British attitude towards the Non-Brahman Movement — A Review.

In this connection it is interesting to see what the British Administration thought in those days of this Brahman dominance in the spheres of learning and Government services.

The British bureaucrats foresaw the trend towards Brahman dominance in the Madras Presidency, though they constituted only 4% of the population and realized the wisdom of arresting its place in the interest of social justice. Even in the small legislature that was constituted under the Minto-Morley Reforms, the Brahmans were dominant. Even as early as 1907 the Home Department of the Government of India in drafting a Scheme for Indian Participation suggested for the legislative council of Madras, 17 non-Official seats to be filled by special electorates of Caste and Occupational groups, and this system gave substantial representation to Non-Brahmans including Christians, and Mohammedans. This method of communal representation in the Legislatures was strongly criticised all over India. Needless to say, it was badly received by the Press in Madras as repugnant to national solidarity. In fact, it was condemned as a vicious design to kill the young patriotic movement before it could gather strength. It was another manifestation of 'Divide and rule' said a leading Newspaper under Brahman control. The only support the scheme received was from the Muslims and the Non-Brahmans who were not organized to mobilize any public opinion and they had no newspapers of their own to give expression to their views. In fact the lack of unity amongst the Non-Brahman castes prevented any nomination of a leader acceptable to all the castes. Each caste in fact wanted a representation and any caste left out felt aggrieved. All these were to change substantially though not radically in 1917, when the Justice Party emerged as a political factor. The Non-Brahman elite was developing; and largely owing to the apprehension of Brahman dominance flourishing under any system of Home rule, anti-Brahman propaganda was launched in public platforms and in the few papers and journals which were started

then for this specific purpose. Matters came to a head in 1916. The election of the members of the Imperial Legislative Council was held under the Minto-Morley Scheme. Dr. Nair, the leading light of the Non-Brahman movement was defeated by the limited electorate and a Brahman was elected. This was taken as a challenge to the Non-Brahman cause and things began to move fast thereafter. This has already been referred to as a personal factor that determined Dr. Nair's interest in the new movement.

The British policy at least as far as the Madras Presidency was concerned, was to encourage the new development. Here was a group of people who wanted them to stay in India indefinitely and who preferred British Rule. It was natural for the British to encourage and support this development.

#### 11. Some 'Might have beens' of history

When the Non-Brahman movement was gathering strength, the Brahman leadership could have acted with greater wisdom. Rajaji, though not at the helm of Congress affair in Madras had tremendous influence over the party. The other leaders were also men of character and ability. But none of them were able to tear the veil of Maya that clouded their thinking and vision. They should have been able to foresee the inevitability of the Non-Brahman claim for some sort of communal representation and social justice. They should have tried to pacify E. V. Ramaswamy their old friend and Congress colleague in the years to follow. The Brahman leadership always sure of their divine right and intellectual superiority failed to allay the apprehension in the minds of the Non-Brahman elite, that they were trying to perpetuate their anachronistic dominance. The result of this failure was the resounding call, half a century later, by the leader of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam that theirs was a Government by the fourth caste - i.e. a Sudra Government. The basis for this Sudra Raj was prepared by the Non-Brahman Manifesto and its corner stone was laid by the Justice Party.

## 12. Tamil renaissance

Before we begin to evaluate the achievements of the Justice Party I would like to say a few words about the awakening in the literary and cultural spheres that began during this period. The Nationalist movement itself gave a tremendous fillip to the study of ancient Hindu culture and literature. Any political revolution is accompanied by this kind of renaissance. Under the encouragement given by the Dravidian awakening, Tamil literature blossomed forth in all its splendour. Tamil Music, Art, Poetry and Drama took distinct shape. Tamil prose expanded and developed in all its manifold variety. I must add, however, that all this revival was not supported solely by the Non-Brahman or Dravidian movement. The Congress too, had its share of credit and Brahman poets and scholars have their honoured place in Tamil revivalism. Spoken Tamil got special attention and was developed to a degree that could not have been anticipated in the 19th Century. The writers and orators of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam have contributed a great deal in this direction.

## 13. Chauvinism

As a side-effect there developed an excessive chauvinism to find in ancient Tamil and Tamil Country everything that the modern world wants. It also led to Anti-Hindi agitation with very doubtful benefits either to Tamil or to the Tamil people. The extremists are not convinced yet, that neither Hindi, Sanskrit nor English would harm Tamil. The rest of India which regarded all South Indians as Madrassis, and black barbarians began to know the Southern people better and to appreciate their qualities and historic contribution. In a sense Dravidianism initially shook them up. The unfortunate tendency that Dravidianism and Tamil chauvinism represented in the earlier demand for separate Dravidastan was given up by the far seeing statesman Anna and attempts are being made to merge the Tamilian resurgence into the mainstream of Indian nationalism and the cultural renaissance that is taking place all over the country.

In conclusion, I must observe that language and cultural renaissance are not peculiar to the Tamils and that it is a special gift of the Dravidian movement. Such renaissance has taken place in Kerala, Gujarat, Bengal and Orissa, to mention only a few. This is only an aspect of the greater revivallism. The Dravidian movement gave this a special twist and linguistic fervour and made it more distinctive and chauvinistic.



## LECTURE II

### THE VARYING POLITICAL PHASES OF THE DRAVIDIAN MOVEMENT

The Non-Brahman movement in the Madras Presidency falls into three clear phases (1) From the Non-Brahman Manifesto in 1916 to 1926. — This is the period of the Justice Party (2) the movement under Periyar's leadership which had a definite Dravidian overtone from 1926 to 1949. This period covers the founding of the Dravida Kazhagam and self-Respect Movement and (3) From 1949 when Anna broke away from Periyar. This phase is purely political and cannot properly be treated strictly as a continuation of the Non-Brahman movement. As social and political agitation the Non-Brahman or Dravidian movement may be said to have withered out by 1949, though political and social life in Tamil Nadu since then has been permanently influenced by the ideas of the Justice and Dravidian phases of the original movement.

#### 2. Self-Government under British guidance

In 1916 the British rulers were inclined to concede some form of self-government and were willing to share their power with some selected Indian elements. They found the atmosphere in Madras getting more congenial for this purpose. A group of people from the landed aristocracy was organising a party which "was not in favour of any movement to undermine the influence and authority of the British Rulers." — as the Manifesto clearly defined its political attitude. This view was further defined in the "Non-Brahman" the official organ of the South Indian Liberal Federation. "Our goal is the goal of Self-Government, but we want to be led there by the British." It is worth recording at this stage that the Federation was not called Dravidian Liberal Federation, but South Indian Liberal Federation." In a Memorandum submitted to the Government of

Madras this federation argued that there could be no proper territorial representation at least in the Madras Presidency. Dr. Nair in a speech quoted in T. Varadarajulu Naidu's book "The Justice Movement" asserted that there was no tradition of self-government in India and that Indians required training by gradual stages towards self-government. It must be emphasised that the Justice party at no time was against Independence or self-government. Their only point was that it must come gradually as in their opinion, Home Rule meant Brahman rule. They argued that in elections, Non-Brahmans could not successfully compete against Brahmans and made a case for communal electorates for Non-Brahmans on the basis of their numbers, property qualification, and tax paying capacity. At this present date with the experience of several elections behind us, one feels aghast, that a 96% majority should seek safe-guards against a petty minority of 4%. In spite of these representations and the sneaking sympathy that the British had for the Justice party the Montague-Chelmsford report rejected the idea of special Non-Brahman electorates, as the idea of safeguards for the majority against a minority was inconceivable to them. The question of determining the nature of the electorate was left to be further examined by the Southborough Committee set up in 1918.

### 3. Communal electorate

A series of Non-Brahman Conferences were held in this connection to canvass support for communal electorates. There was even a suggestion to boycott this committee. The Southborough Committee reported against conceding separate electorates for Non-Brahmans, who out-numbered the Brahmans in a ratio of 22 to 1, taking caste Hindus alone; and on the basis of the property and other qualifications recommended for the voters, the ratio was 4 to 1. The Committee felt that the Non-Brahmans should organise themselves and get their fair share of representation by sheer weight of numbers. The Government of India which had sympathy for the Non-Brahman movement, did not accept the Southborough Committee's views. The Government was apparently strongly influenced by the views of the Madras

Government; that the argument based on numerical strength may be sound in a country accustomed to democratic institutions; but taking the reality of social and political factors into account in the Southern Presidency, the numerical superiority of the Non-Brahmans would not prevail, and that the Government would be left in the hands of a Brahman dominated oligarchy. Therefore, the Government of India recommended that at least 30 out of 61 general Non-Muslim seats in the Madras Council should be reserved for Non-Brahmans, leaving the other seats for open contest. But the battle for reservation was not won so easily and the Non-Brahman leaders, were in no mood to give up. They were fast acquiring political and negotiating skill and pursued the matter both in India as well as in England. In spite of the Government of India's recommendation, the Government of India Act of 1919 as passed by the British Parliament, while admitting the principle of reservation, left the number of seats to be so reserved and the modalities to be settled by the locally contending parties. Just about this time, something favourable to the Non-Brahman cause had happened, namely the transfer of Lord Willingdon from Bombay to Madras as Governor. It is believed that the transfer was effected with the purpose of helping the Justice party, as Willingdon had by then successfully managed similar agitations in Bombay. But the position taken up by the Non-Brahman leadership was that, 75% of the seats should be reserved for Non-Brahmans. Even Willingdon could not solve the tangle, though he was prepared to stake his reputation for 50% of the seats. Next came the Meston award which dealt a severe blow to the Non-Brahman leadership, as it agreed to only 24 seats and asserted "that Non-Brahman numerical superiority should be exploited by proper organisation." All this bitter fighting over seats, engendered anti-Brahman feelings and hatred of the Brahman became almost a creed of the followers of the Non-Brahman movement. Ultimately a compromise solution was provided by the Government, very much on the lines of the views of Lord Willingdon—a 50% reservation with the right to the Non-Brahmans to contest any number of seats in excess. The fear of the Non-Brahman leadership that their majority would be reduced

to a minority in the Council vanished. A majority was given all the protection normally given to a minority in a plural society - a unique feature in political history anywhere. In the long run, whether future historians will acclaim this as a triumph for the Non-Brahmans remains a question mark.'

#### 4. Electoral success of the Justice party

In the three successive elections held under this system in 1920, 1923 and 1926, in a House of 98, the Non-Brahman majority was 57, 61 and 56. The Brahmans with their small numerical strength returned 17, 14 and 18 members demonstrating that their strength did not depend on numbers alone. The other 24 seats which was a constant number was for special interests including Muslims. In view of this majority from 1920 to 1926, the Justice Party was able to take part in the Dyarchic administration in the State. It cannot be said however that all the Non-Brahman masses were with the Justice Party and the Non-Brahman movement. As the history of the Congress movement testifies, there were large numbers of Non-Brahmans of all classes, educated and otherwise, landlords and peasants in the Congress. But the Congress decided on Non-Cooperation and there was no Congress party in the Council, even as an Opposition. The Justice party had no organised opposition party to grapple with in the beginning. The only dissident voice came from the Brahmans of non-Congress persuasion. The others generally voted with the Government. In the 1923 elections, the Non-Brahmans had a bigger majority (61 against earlier 57) but some of them did not belong to the Justice Party. A dissident group of the Congress called the Swarajya Party under the all-India leadership of C. R. Das entered the legislature and there were many Non-Brahmans amongst them. By that time, there was a rift in the Justice Party as well, as power always leads to quarrels over its sharing. In the third election, though there were 56 Non-Brahmans many of them belonged to the Swarajya party. They had 40 seats, while the Justice party had only 20. Of the 40 Swarajya partymen, many must have been Non-Brahmans.

## 5. Decline of the Justice party

The decline of the Justice Party began in 1926, though it continued till 1937 as a political party. Though a purely Justice ministry was not formed after 1927, the Justices exercised influence over the Independent ministry that was subsequently formed. It met its electoral doom in the first elections held under the Government of India Act of 1935, when it secured only 12 seats out of 86 it contested. Thereafter, it lingered in the background. During the years the Justice Party was in office, political scientists and observers felt that, here in Madras, was the beginning of the two party system, which is regarded as so very essential for the successful working of parliamentary democracy. Several groups functioned as an opposition and when the Swarajya party entered the Legislature, there really was a well-organized parliamentary opposition. The subsequent performance of the Justice Party after the elections, under the Government of India Act of 1935, belied all these hopes. The reason for this political failure to function even as a sizeable opposition party, must be found in the absence of a mass base and the lack of a cadre of village level workers essential for a party organization. It was a party of leaders. There were no village level, constituency level or even District level party functioning effectively. The glamour of the brightly dressed Rajas and Zamindars who lead the party could not hold together the masses for long. More important still was the lack of homogeneity among the numerous Non-Brahman castes. A few castes which were traditionally dominant in several localities, dominated the party and the loaves and fishes of office went to the young graduates of these castes. They entered the Revenue Department and the Judiciary in increasing numbers as Deputy Tahsildars, Deputy Collectors, and Munsiffs, and in later days, came to top positions. There were no crumbs even, thrown to the aspiring and hungry young men of the lower castes, who came to be known even then as Backward Classes - let alone the depressed classes. Absence of a mass base and a region-wide organizational net-work brought the Justice party a quicker end than it deserved. It was left to younger leaders who came several years later to

build up the mass base and organizational network and regenerate the Non-Brahman Party under a different name. That credit goes to the scholar, writer and orator from Conjeevaram, C. N. Annadurai. It is not the purpose of this lecture to describe the legislative and administrative achievement of the Justice Party which were by no means negligible.

But what is historically remarkable is the legacy left by the party and the movement, which is influencing and will continue to influence South Indian politics and social life for generations. In creating this legacy, the contribution of Periyar is very impressive and it deserves careful consideration.

#### 6. Periyar and the Dravidian Phase

Kashinath Kavlekar in his study of the Non-Brahman movement, describes the entry of Periyar into the movement as the beginning of the Dravidian phase. Till then it was only Non-Brahman, with the limited objective of getting positions of power and influence in Councils and Boards and a larger number of jobs [In Government services for educated Non-Brahmans. Periyar ran the movement with larger objectives and undertook simultaneously social reform work besides political propaganda. He made it a mass movement and he had the requisite training for it.

Periyar's coming over to the Justice Party was neither deliberate nor accidental. Having been nurtured in the Congress for several decades and having played a prominent role in the Councils of the Tamil Nadu Congress, it would not have been easy for him to join the Justice party, when he walked out of the Congress. Some years of soul searching must have preceded the decision. It was because E.V.R. was a man of the masses and could develop mass contact, that the Justice party elected him as its leader in 1938. Though E.V.R. had left the Congress in 1926, after facing repeated defeats and rebuffs from the Tamilnad Congress over several matters, the most important being adoption of a Resolution supporting communal representation in the Legislature, a subject which was being hotly debated at

that time.<sup>5</sup> He was not sitting idle or nursing his grievances in the intervening 12 or 13 years. He had already started the Self-Respect or Suya Mariyadai movement at a Conference in 1929. He had already taken part in leading the opposition against teaching or spreading Hindi in the South. In fact he had already formulated all his ideas, social, religious and political, which he was to propagate during the next four decades, he strode across Tamil Nad like a colassus.

### 7. Demand for Dravida Nad

The Dravidian phase of the movement as contrasted to the Non Brahman, raised its head for the first time openly in 1939, when Periyar put forth the demand for Dravidanad before Sir Stafford Cripps during his first political visit, canvassing Indian support for Britain's war effort. He also had a resolution passed at a Conference demanding that for the well-being of the Dravidians, the Madras Presidency, the home of the Dravidians, should be constituted as a separate state directly administered by the Government of India. This synchronized with the commencement of the propaganda regarding the Two Nation theory formulated by Jinnah. A Tamil Weekly called "Dravida Nadu" was also started to propagate this idea of a separate state. This espousal of the cause of a Dravida state, lead to the identification of the Non-Brahmans of the South as Dravidians, and the word stuck to all movements and parties that sprang out of this phase. This gave it an ethnic colour, which the term Non-Brahman did not. This "Dravidian" appellation gave rise to a tremendous amount of chauvinism and Tamil revivalism, on an unprecedented scale. Surprisingly, the other regions of Dravidasthan did not respond to this cry of a separate state. This development was too much for the older elements of the Justice Party, the knights and Dewan Bahadurs and the zamindars. The matter was further aggravated when in the 1944 Salem Conference Periyar demanded resignation by party members of all Government jobs, surrender of titles etc. He was putting into practice the lessons he learnt in the Congress.

### 8. Emergence of the Dravida Kazhagam and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam

The conservative elements, of the old Justice Party withdrew their association with Periyar's movement and whatever was left was converted into the Dravida Kazhagam. Periyar and his young apostles headed by Anna were already preparing the ground for this new phase and for the first time, a defiant populist Non-Brahman movement, stubbornly calling itself Dravidian came into existence under younger and more revolutionary leadership. This was to change the destiny of Tamilnadu unmistakably in the coming years. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) was formed in 1949 by what might be called a split in Periyar's Kazhagam. From the very beginning, its objective was political, capturing power through the ballot box. Before we come to this phase, the lasting achievements of Periyar must be considered.

### 9. Atheistic and Self Respect Movements

Periyar is known as an uncompromising atheist, who wanted to break Hindu idols. He denigrated Hindu Gods and Goddesses, and vilified the Sanskritic epics and puranas. He has a hard core of followers in the atheistic pursuit - but I doubt whether it has made any substantial dent in Hindu ritualism and temple worship of the masses. I can well understand the logic of Periyar's iconoclastic atheism. He was a rationalist. He wanted to destroy the caste system. But he realized caste is an integral part of the Hindu religious system built round the theistic pantheon represented in the Sanskritic epics and puranas. Caste is described as God-ordained. Even the Gita affirms this. "Chatur Varna mayasrishtam" Says Bhagawan. The iconoclast's reaction to this relation between caste and religion would be to destroy the faith in gods and the caste system and the Hindu social structure would automatically wither. But Hinduism is very tenacious and it has withstood many such strong attacks. His teachings have made people think, and numerous reforms have been slowly effected. Man's attitude towards religion, has



undergone changes. His lasting contribution is the concept of self-respect or Suya Maryada. People at that time ridiculed Periyar because he could not even think of a pure Tamil phrase Suya and Marjatha (Maryada) are of Sanskrit origin. The practical person that Periyar was, did not bother about this. The word Than-manam was considered to replace Suya Maryada. But the word Suya Maryada held its ground against Tamilian chauvinistic substitution. It is the self-respect movement which has transformed the outlook of all Non-Brahmans in Tamil Nadu, including Muslims, Christians and Scheduled castes. Every Tamilian now thinks he is inferior to none and has developed a sense of his own worth. The feudal concepts that guided human relationships are fast disappearing. The idea of superiority and inferiority by birth or calling is no longer tenable. This is a kind of revolution which has no parallel in Indian History. The caste system is slowly loosening its ritual hierarchical nature, though it is still there, especially in the rural areas. Periyar, apart from his rationalistic attack on God and religion, did not make any strenuous efforts to mitigate the evils of the caste system, or to bring about equality amongst the castes in other respects. But what he accomplished through the Self-Respect movement entitles him to be remembered as one of the greatest figures in the history of social reform in India. Even after his death, his influence is spreading in areas outside Tamil Nadu. Though Periyar's immediate followers did not grow in numbers, his ideas spread steadily amongst all sections of people, even un-connected with the Justice Party or the Kazhagam. In my opinion his greatest contribution was that he taught us to set our minds free and hold our heads high.

#### 10. Anna's Epoch

C. N. Annadurai was a good Tamil Scholar, well read in English Literature, Politics and Economics, and a master of Tamil and English oratory. Along with half-a-dozen front line Lieutenants of E. V. Ramaswamy, he formed the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam with the definite purpose of making it a modern political party,

and not merely a vehicle of EVR's iconoclasm. His first approach was towards the common man. He had successfully convinced the Tamil masses that wiping away tears from their eyes was his foremost concern. As he began to gain strength and as he felt that political power would sooner or later be in his hands, he realized that preaching of hatred would not pay. Brahman baiting was slowly given up, and appealing to the Tamilian's past glory and the excellence of ancient Tamil Literature succeeded in arousing Tamil chauvinism, which was essential to build up the strength of the party in its early stages. As he grew in political stature, he changed his role from a rabble-rouser and proved himself to be a politician of statesmen-like qualities, and a far-sighted administrator.

#### 11. Propaganda Triumphs

There was no difference between the Dravida Kazhagam of Periyar and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam of Anna as far as their social goals were concerned. Periyar devoted his energy to social enlightenment, removal of superstition and the tyranny of the sacerdotal caste, and the elimination of the political and administrative influence of the Brahmans. He spoke and wrote tirelessly and led many whirlwind propaganda tours. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam sought to gain the very same ends through capturing political power. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam organized demonstrations and protest meetings on a wider scale and in 1953, the best opportunity for a demonstration of power came its way, when Rajaji during his brief Chief Ministership introduced an Educational Reform measure for imparting traditional occupation to students in schools as part of the vocational educational programme. It also organized a train stopping movement to disapprove of Jawaharlal Nehru's criticism of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. Rajaji's Education Bill was withdrawn giving the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam a taste of political success. It led repeated agitations against Hindi and kept up the tempo of agitation, and attracted large numbers of the student community to its fold.

## 12. Contesting Elections

In 1956 the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in a conference at **Trichy** decided to contest the 1957 elections and issued a **Manifesto**. In this Manifesto, all the negative positions for which the **Dravida Kazhagam** movement was known, found expression; but on the issue of a separate Tamil Nad, it adopted an attitude approving the existing Federal Structure of the Constitution - but wanted each state to have the right to secede.<sup>11</sup> Some die-hard partymen might have thought this was a climb down. But this was a sure sign of Anna's political foresight. There was some condemnation of what they regarded as the Northern exploitation of the natural resources of the South. There were several socialist overtones in the manifesto which proclaimed that the party stood for a classless, casteless, society. Kamaraj at that time, was the Congress Chief and being a man of the masses, coming from the lower strata of society, was hailed by Periyar, Anna's Guru, as a True Tamilian, for whom alone all followers of the **Dravida Kazhagam** should vote. And he vigorously campaigned for him and against the **Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam**. The 1957 elections brought an overwhelming victory for Kamaraj as the Congress captured 133 seats with 45.3% of the votes cast. The **Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam** made its debut into the Madras Assembly with 15 seats and 14.6% of the votes cast. This is a glaring example of the manifest evil of the "First Past the Post" principle of the single member Constituency system. Some political Commentators called this the Congress multiple factor. With a minority vote, an organised party by contesting in a large number of constituencies against an unorganized opposition can win an overwhelming majority of seats. The **Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam** won also two Lok Sabha seats. But being the largest single group in the Madras Legislative Assembly it formed the official opposition. The lesson learnt in this election was that **Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's** strength lay mainly in the large urban areas. It soon captured the Madras City Corporation and in alliance with the Communists made a strenuous and successful attempt to capture most of the city and town municipalities.

By this time an internal conflict arose which led to the final parting of ways for E.V.K. Sampath - one of the founders of the DMK. Strangely enough, Sampath's outspoken criticism of the leadership was that they had given up their original plan of Dravidasthan. And it is ironic that after a year, he joined the Congress and became one of its trusted leaders in Tamilnad.

### 13. D.M.K.'s Climb to Power

The next election was due in 1962. In the new election manifesto, a more realistic attitude was taken and the emphasis was on economic problems - rising prices. It also softened in practice and in speech its attitude towards Brahmans in many ways. Capturing 50 seats in the local Assembly with 27.10% of voter support, it became the greatest challenge to the Congress in the Southern state in all its history. It also sent 7 members to the Lok Sabha. The success of the D.M.K. movement must not be judged only by its score of 50 seats; in 15 constituencies, it lost by less than a 1,000 vote margin. By this time the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leaders had learnt their political lessons and had proved themselves to be expert election managers. They had expanded their geographical base further beyond the big cities and the Northern Districts, and their flags and slogans were seen and heard all over the Southern Districts. It was a pity that Anna lost the election but he was soon elected to the Rajya Sabha. In the next general election of 1967 the party swept the polls with a land slide victory and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam was firmly in power with Anna as the Chief Minister. As a writer in the "Economist" described, for the first time blackmen with un-pronounceable names were in the seats of power. This marks the beginning of a new age in the politics of Tamil Nad. Though Anna did not live long to guide his party and shape it into a well disciplined political force, he made certain of one thing. The age of Brahman leadership in politics - politics of any major party - was over, so also Brahman dominance in Government service. The rule of the Sudra had begun.

#### 14. Two party system

One can safely say at this stage that, some sort of a two-party system which we hoped for 50 years ago when the Justice Party was founded might materialize. The Congress may some day regain its strength and may seize power from a Dravida splinter party, but that Congress will be Non-Brahman oriented, and will have to bear all the outward trappings of a Dravidian party though it might speak in a different idiom. As one of our respected leaders said - only a party with a Dravidian outlook will get the sympathy of the voters. As the Dravida Kazhagam gave place to Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam split again into 2 parties. Perhaps there may be other splits and partial re-unions. That seems to be the course in Indian politics. What is happening in the Congress may be repeated in Tamilnad too, with the inheritors of the Dravida Kazhagam and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam heritage, But there will always be a powerful Dravidian oriented party, either in power or in opposition.

#### 15. Rule of the Sudras

When I mentioned a little while ago about the Rule of the Sudras. I am reminded of the predictions contained in the Mahabharatha and the Srimad Bhagavatham that in Kallyuga, Sudras will rule. But the Sudra of that age was one of the Chathur Varnas. But the term Sudra of the present day embraces a few thousand castes with their own conception of ritual superiority. Which Sudra would rule is the question one should try to answer now. As I indicated in general terms, the succession from Brahman dominance, first passed on to the higher castes among Non-Brahmans, who again form only a small percentage of the total population. The Non-Brahman movement, it is needless to say, has not brought about any homogeneity amongst castes. If the adult franchise has succeeded in anything, it has definitely succeeded in arousing caste consciousness and caste rivalry. The succession is already passing from the higher caste Non-Brahmans to the more numerous

backward class Non-Brahmans. In every political party, this inner party struggle based on class or caste grouping goes on, either openly or covertly. When there is a charismatic personality, a large group from different castes tends to rally round that person, as it happened with Kamaraj and Anna and one or two others. We have yet to wait and see how fast the succession passes down to the leadership of the lowest classes in the Sudra fold and then to the scheduled castes. The leavening and levelling down of all castes into a well-knit homogenous democratic society is a process which will take time. But modernization, industrialization, urbanization and faster means of communication and transport, extension of trade unions, Communist ideas - all these are contributing to the equalizing and unifying process. But we still have a long march ahead.

## LECTURE III

### CASTES AS PRESSURE GROUPS

1. In the last two lectures I explained the growth of the Non-Brahman movement and its political and social consequences in general. There is nothing like a Non-Brahman caste or community as I have repeatedly observed. The term covers everybody other than the Brahman and includes the Harijan, Christians and Mohammedans. Leaving aside the Christians and Mohammedans and the Scheduled Castes, there must be a few hundred major castes and a few hundred minor castes. Even the last Census Report to record caste names, did not enumerate all castes. But for political considerations it is necessary to take careful notice of some of the major castes. For our purpose, the Scheduled Castes can be taken as one unit: though there is a hierarchy of different castes, two of them being the most numerous and important. Towards the end I deal with the problem of the Harijans in general—but not as a pressure group.

#### 2. The Distribution of Major and Minor Castes

The caste topographical map of Tamil Nadu presents an interesting picture of interplay of the major agricultural castes. In every district, there is a fair proportion of Harijans ranging from 15% to 22%, giving an average of 18%. They are largely agricultural labourers and in the Pre-independence days, no better than slaves and bonded servs. Above them come the proper agricultural castes—the Vanniakula Kshatryas in Chingleput, North and South Arcot Districts, Salem and Dharmapuri, in many areas matching or exceeding the Harijans in numbers. In Trichy and Tanjore Districts, they are confined to a few taluqs and in the rest of the State, they are thinly spread. In the southern districts of Madura, Ramnad and Tirunelveli, the Kallars and Maravars occupy a similar position. The Vanniyars and Maravars include a minority of small land-owners and

cultivating tenants, but the bulk of the people are agricultural labourers, doing the same work as the top layer of the Harijans. The other major caste is the Kongu Vellalas who are the important land holding and cultivating classes in Salem, Coimbatore and part of the Madura district with the difference that few of them are agricultural labourers as such. There are three other major castes, who are not exclusively agricultural, namely the Idayars or Yadhavas the weaver Caste of Kai Kolar and the Shanans, better known as Nadars. The Vellalas according to the Census Report are numerically the largest. But all of them are not the Karkarthars or Saivite Vellalas and Mudaliars. The Kongu Vellalas are not separately enumerated, and their present population is estimated at 25 to 30 lakhs. There are nearly a hundred sub-castes, including even a fictional caste called Veerakodi Vellalas and all of them are grouped together under Vellalas.

### 3. Traditional Upper Castes

Traditionally, land had been owned substantially by Brahmans, Vellalas of the higher sub-divisions, Naidus and Reddiars. Owing to the impact caused by education, government service and other professions, and the passing of Zamindari and tenancy legislation, Brahman land ownership has declined, but the others still retain their prominent position. Literacy amongst them was always higher than the average and in the earlier years of the Non-Brahman or Dravidian movement, the beneficiaries displacing the Brahmans came largely from these higher Hindu Non-Brahman castes. They are dominant castes, and they exert pressure effortlessly as their interests demand.

Naturally this position would not be meekly accepted by the other Non-Brahman castes especially by the numerically bigger castes. In fact, the resentment against their inferior ritual position in the caste hierarchy began as early as the last years of the 19th Century and this resentment led to different consequences.



#### 4. Sanskritisation

The first step, these major castes took was what is now called Sanskritisation by sociologists; - adoption of a Brahman, Kshatrya or Vaisya appellation in place of the old caste name. A Brahman caste name will only evoke contempt and will never pass muster as the Nadars discovered very early when they adopted the rituals and signs of the twice born. The next best are Kshatrya and Vaisya. The other features of Sanskritization are observing Brahman feasts and rituals, becoming fully or partially vegetarian.

#### 5. Vannikula Kshatrya

The Pallis or Padayachi as they were known, adopted the caste name Vannikula Kshatrya, even towards the last two decades of the 19th century. Their Maha Sangham was founded about the same time as the Indian National Congress itself and several social reforms were brought about; but nobody appears to have taken their Kshatrya origin seriously, by giving them a status next to Brahmans. Their own leaders accept this. Though they are the biggest single community amongst caste Hindus, nowhere are they in the position of becoming a dominant caste, though they over rule some smaller castes in their localities by weight of their numerical superiority. One reason for this is the low level of educational achievement and the absence of a sizeable upper crust, there being very few big land lords, merchants or moneyed people. In sheer frustration, the caste politicised itself in the belief that, success in elections would bring them the status of a dominant caste and prominence in politics and administration.

#### 6. Toiler's Party

A young man from Cuddalore, from a good middle class family founded the Toilers' Party in the late forties and organized the Vanniya caste particularly in South Arcot and Chingleput, and another lawyer who had already some political experience did similar work in North Arcot and nearby areas, under the name of Toilers' commonweal party. The formation of the two

parties representing the largest single caste made, the caste a major pressure group. It is worth noting that in spite of its size, not many joined the Justice Party or Non-Brahman movement earlier, or the Dravida Kazhagam movement later. It had maintained its individuality, and developed pride in its role as the leading backward caste. Without much effort or money the Two Toilers' parties together secured in their first electoral debut in 1952, 24 seats in the Madras Assembly and a few in Parliament too. As the leadership was not united, Rajaji who formed the ministry won over one of the leaders with a following of six and saw to it that the Commonweal party was dissolved. It was perhaps the first instance of mass defection engineered by Congress leadership. A few years later, Kamaraj did to the main Toilers' party, what Rajaji did to the Commonweal party. The Toilers' party ceased to exist as a Legislative party, till it was revived again in 1963. But it met with no electoral success, as the castemen by that time lost faith in the caste based party and leadership. In spite of the groups' merger with the Congress, the M.L.As of the caste in the Assembly functioned together unofficially as a pressure group for promoting the advancement of their fellow castemen, especially in getting jobs and honorary appointments to places of importance. The functioning of the Vanniyar caste whether as a party, or as an unofficial pressure group, clearly indicates the slow displacement of the forward castes by backward castes in all regional political parties. Their efforts bore better results in the matter of Backward Class representation in services and in seeing that an adequate number of the caste were chosen as candidates for election by every contending political party. In every party in the Tamil Nad Assembly there are Vanniyars. There are traditional Congressmen, and there are equally committed persons in the other parties. With charismatic leadership, they may try to capture the organizational machinery of one of the existing parties and dominate it.

#### 7. The Nadars

The caste 'Shanan' as it was originally known in the earlier decades of the century, apart from being considered very low in

the social<sup>1</sup> ritual scale, was regarded as untouchable in some parts of Tirunelveli and in Kanyakumari. Hence the tenacity with which its leaders decided to uplift their position. As I observed earlier, Sanskritization by calling themselves some kind of Brahmans was a failure, as it only exposed them to ridicule. They tried to improve their lot economically, first by becoming transporters and traders in jaggery, (the product made out of tapping the palmyrah palm) and then gradually spreading to retail and whole-sale trade in spices, grains, firewood etc. In the course of two or three generations, they became a respected trading and industrial community in Madurai and Ramnad Districts and later in all urban areas in the State. There was an organized attempt to improve the education of the younger generation and their Sangam took steps to establish their own schools and colleges. In this, they had the example and assistance of their people who went over to Christianity, in large numbers very early. Their social consciousness even led them to ask for the removal of the caste name from the list of backward communities, though subsequently they realized their mistake and petitioned for restoring reservation. A fairly substantial crust of a well-to do trading class has developed—not in any way comparable to the professional trading community of Chettians—and the community was lucky to produce a leader of Kamaraj's eminence. The caste however, is not politically as conscious as the Vannikula Kshatrya, but is a force to be reckoned with. Every political party would like to have their support in the southern districts, and in every election, Nadars have got elected to the Local Assembly and to Parliament. They pull their weight and their politicians join together in the caste interest, in whatever party they may be. They have not shown preference for any political party, though their first choice would be Congress. Every party leader tries to accommodate Nadars in positions of power. The caste has no political ambition to form a party or to dominate one, but furnishes an example of successful group effort, unparalleled by any other Tamil Nadu caste. The only comparison would be with the Ezhavars of Kerala.

The Nadar leadership being largely from the trading classes, believes in maintaining good relations with the Government of the day, whatever be its political complexion. Their general attitude is non-partisan. They have made no effort to ally themselves with any other major caste to form a larger block. Their rivalry and suspicion of the powerful Marava caste in the southern districts, stands in the way of any alliance between them. The Vanniyars, a numerically larger caste, with greater political consciousness and reasonable success in elections, cannot match its success as a pressure group with that of the Kallar, Maravar or the non-partisan Nadar caste. Politics has strengthened caste consciousness among the Vanniyars—but has no such impact on the Nadars, whose caste consciousness is kept well under control.

#### 8. Kallars and Maravars

This is another large group whose impact on the politics of Tamil Nadu deserves some study. The Maravars of Tirunelveli and Madurai and the sister community of Kallars who spread out from Ramnad District, together constitute perhaps the second largest single community. There is an allied caste called Agamudiar and taking this along with the other two castes, a larger group is sometimes called Mukkulathor—the three tribals. The impression of the Tamil Nadu Backward Class Commission was that, while the Kallars and Maravars would like to unite with the Agamudiar, the latter especially from Tanjavur District, do not show any such affinity. Their literacy rate has always been higher and traditionally they have been a service caste. The percentage of agricultural labourers amongst them is smaller. They would like to associate with the Tuluva Vellalar, who sometimes call themselves a branch of the Agamudiar. The Kallar and Maravars have the advantage that, many Zamindars and Princes flourished in their castes and held powerful positions, till recently, in the southern districts. The Raja of Ramnad is a Marava and the Raja of Pudukottai is a Kallar. Apart from this aristocratic heritage, in recent times they produced leaders like Muthuramalinga Thevar and Mookiah

Thevar and there was a tendency for Maravas to favour the Forward Block. But Kallars and Maravars are to be found now in all political parties. The Maravas constitute 13% of the population of Tirunelveli and about 9.5% of the Ramanathapuram District. The Kallars form 9% of the population in Madurai and 10% in Thanjavur. Taking the Kallars and Maravars together, they constitute a power in the three southern districts. They have been able to return to the State Assembly, a number of M.L.As far in excess of the percentage of their population. The reasons apparently are the strength of their martial tradition, caste cohesion and competent political leadership. Though the bulk of the people are poor agricultural labourers and cultivating tenants, they are making good progress. They are becoming highly politicised and have an eye on the winning post. If allied with the Vanniyars of the northern districts, they would form a powerful caste combination; but chances of such collaboration are remote. But they are a force to reckon with politically and they will manage to have the last word on any matter concerning the southern districts, despite the Nadars' achievements in many fields.

#### 9. Number alone is not a determining factor — Example of yadhavars and Kammalars

I have dealt with the ascriptive tendencies of three of the major castes. Their strength largely depends on the population being concentrated in sizeable numbers in some areas. This gives them considerable political weightage. There is at least one major caste with a bigger population than the Nadars or Maravars or Kallars — I refer to the Idayars or Yadhava caste, but as the population is scattered fairly evenly in all the districts, they do not command a decisive voice, even in one Assembly Constituency. Political parties do not find it necessary to put up a Yadhava candidate, unless it be on consideration other than caste. In no Assembly have they been able to send more than 4 or 5 members and they cannot aspire to become a pressure group in politics as the other major castes have managed to become. The position of other castes without concentration in at least some areas is

worse still. The Kammalar group or the oil monger (Vaniya) which has its population thinly spread over all the districts, has no chance of returning an M.L.A. Similar is the lot of the weaver caste. The numerically big castes manage to send a good number of MLAs though not in adequate proportion to their population. The thinly spread castes have no chances at all, under the present system of election. But the dominant castes by their social, economic and political influence at the local and State level manage some how, to get themselves more than adequately represented. The exception is the Brahman who form 3% of the population and should expect 7 or 8 members at least to be elected; but they have none.

To function effectively as a political pressure group is easier for the dominant castes and they do so in practice, whatever be the complexion of the Government in power. Mere number alone does not count, except when it enables a larger number of MLAs to be returned. The economic and other achievements of the caste, are equally important. If, from a caste there are one or two powerful ministers with discreet caste loyalty, and a strong coterie of MLAs around each, one can say that there is a nucleus of a pressure group. It will be more effective, if outside politics, the caste is well represented among the superior Government servants, amongst High Court Judges and other professions.

#### **10. Communal Representation**

Any examination of the position of castes will not be complete unless a reference is made to communal representation in public services. The growth in power and the ability to arouse public opinion and Government support in favour of the major Backward Communities, is largely due to the communal concession policy pursued in the Presidency, since the beginning of the century; and in turn, the agitational strength of particular castes had from time to time changed and shaped the communal representation policy.

It must be mentioned at the outset that, the communal representation policy in the Madras Presidency is anterior to the

Non-Brahman or Dravidian movement. The list of Backward or Depressed Classes as it was known then, owes its origin to the Grants-in aid code framed in 1885. This code provides for aid to poor students from the untouchable or depressed castes. This list was reviewed and amplified in 1906 and 1913. Till 1913, no attempt was made to distinguish the backward castes from the depressed castes. A list of castes other than depressed castes was prepared in 1925. The two lists were further revised on the basis of 1931 Census. The purpose of maintaining these two lists was only to regulate the grant of half school fee concession. After Independence, the half fee concession was converted to full fee concession to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes alone. The list of Scheduled castes is a statutory list under the constitution. The list of Backward classes was revised from time to time, on the basis of the educational and social backwardness of the castes agitating for inclusion in the list compiled by the State government. The facilities originally contemplated were confined to fee concessions in schools. This however greatly helped the progress of education of these people.

Because of the social awakening and political consciousness of the masses, a number of castes in the Backward class list agitated for facilities on a par with Scheduled Castes. Some of them even petitioned for inclusion in the list of Scheduled Castes. In 1957, the Government of Madras approved of a list for the first time, of Most Backward Classes for granting more educational concession only, and not for reservation in appointment.

#### 11. The Communal G.O. 1921

The story of communal representation in the services as distinct from educational concession, however begins only with the Non-Brahman manifesto of 1916. The Tamil Nadu Backward Classes Commission Report gives the following statistics of employment in Government Services: "It is on record that between 1894 and 1904, in the provincial Civil Services, out of 16 officers 15 were Brahmins, among 21 Assistant Engineers 17 were Brahmins, out of 140 Deputy Collectors 77 were

Brahmans and out of 128 District Munsiffs 98 were Brahmans." This was inevitable as according to E.F. Irschwick, who had made a deep study of this subject, during these years, between 67 and 71% of the graduates of the Madras University came from a single community - Brahman. As a result of the Non-Brahman agitation from 1915 Government introduced the principle of communal representation in services from 1921, by introducing a system of rotation of recruitment, among five different groups. This is hailed as one of the greatest achievements of the Justice Party. This system of appointments based on rotation under 5 categories continued for 25 years - till Independence. I do not intend to pursue the course of communal representation, and the modification made to the list from time to time. My purpose in giving this brief resume of communal concession in education and communal representation in services is only to underscore the relation between the political and social awakening of the Non-Brahman castes (including the Scheduled castes) and their desire for greater share in the service and educational opportunities provided by the State. The Justice Party gave the lead and any amount of preaching of the theory of equality before law could not check the movement and the Congress Government after Independence continued the same policy and even amplified it. Needless to say, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam will do nothing to weaken or discourage the policy of representation based on caste - or classes. The term "Class" is but a euphemism. In fact, the Madras or Tamil Nadu example is now copied and even elaborated in other states. This progress of the backward class or caste representation has now provoked counter attack from the forward castes even in Tamil Nadu. Things have come to a stage now that backwardness is becoming a vested interest. Once a caste is included in the list, it is impossible to remove it. Political parties will regard such an action as nothing short of political suicide as they view everything from the "voting strength" point of view. More and more castes are included in the list. Against the views of the Backward Classes Commission, several castes with large population have been included in the list after 1971; so much so that nearly 80% of the population are backward



(including Scheduled Castes and Tribes). In fact, there are so many loop-holes in the wording of caste names and in the administrative orders, that every caste, other than the Brahman, can find its way into the backward class list. This in fact, is continuously going on and the disparities are widening, instead of reducing. Social justice will be abused and rendered ineffective if the State does not review the policy from time to time, at least once in ten years.

## 12. Unequal Beneficiaries

What is happening is an unfortunate trend. The list of backward classes is being expanded and the proportion of reservation has also increased, now covering almost 70% of the appointments and seats in educational institutions. The forward classes have always opposed reservation as discouraging talent and depriving the state and society of the services of the meritorious. This agitation is spreading in all the states. Apart from this, the really backward classes have always complained that a few forward or progressive castes, included in the list, manage to secure for themselves a share of the reserved quota, far in excess of their number. In Tamil Nadu according to the Backward Classes Commission, a few castes with a total population of 20 or 25 lakhs had managed to secure more than 60% of the reserved posts in Government services and seats in educational institutions. In view of this, the less progressive among the backward castes claim proportional representation, an almost impracticable proposition.

## 13. Reservation to be Revised

Modern society and modern thinking will not admit that environmental and social handicaps cannot be eradicated by conscious effort in a generation or two. There is plenty of talent amongst the backward castes, as we have seen from their progress in the professions, examinations and service achievements. The Nadar Community has demonstrated this remarkably. This talent will flourish better with some competition. The leaders of the backward classes must realise that, they cannot depend on

State support forever. Now youngsters are beginning to depend too much on the reservation support. The Non-Brahmans and particularly what are known as the backward classes have had advantages, secured for them by reservation in admission to educational institutions and by liberal reservation in government service. It is true that, at present this reservation is confined to State services, and not to the Central services, public sector and business organisations. This however, is under examination by the Backward Class Commission appointed three years ago by the Janata Government. It is only fair that reservation is conceded for the Backward Castes in Central Services, as it has been done for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, some backward castes have made good progress: Some are lagging behind. On the whole, the progress is not adequate enough to bring them on a par with the forward classes. Inevitably, the progress is uneven. The young men and women require to put in more effort and not to depend too much on reservation.

#### 14. Removal of the Upper Crust

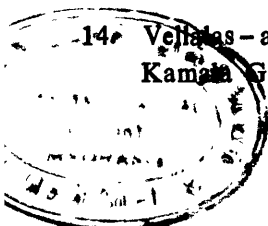
There are two tendencies which have become noticeable. Reservation has helped the backward classes for nearly six decades - from the twenties to the eighties - practically three generations. The benefit of reservation has gone mostly to the few top castes amongst the backward and to an increasing layer of upper crust in each caste. The filtration process has not been thorough or uniform. This is not surprising and to some extent, unavoidable. It would be a step in the larger interests of society and of the backward classes themselves, if a check is applied to both these tendencies. There has been thinking on these lines among administrators; but the opposition of vested interests has been too strong to carry out the necessary pruning. But sooner or later, the removal of the two kinds of upper crust will become unavoidable; otherwise we will be encouraging the castes to form a class system within the caste system - not an altogether desirable trend in a democratic and socialistic society.

I have not included the Harijans in my discussions on the Non-Brahman Movement as this Movement affected mainly the ranks of the Non-Brahmans, other than the Scheduled Castes. Reservation for the Scheduled Castes in educational institutions and services, and representation in the legislature is guaranteed under the Constitution itself, and both Central and State Government have been adopting various measures to enable these people to avail themselves of their opportunities. But here again, the beneficiaries have been a small upper crust, drawn from one or two of the more progressive castes amongst them. The general economic improvement among them is perhaps, a little more noticeable than is the case with the lower strata of the backward classes. This has inevitably led to clashes between them in various places. The land-owning classes who employ agricultural labourers and their fellow cultivating tenants are very reluctant to accord equality of treatment to the scheduled Castes. These people are now very conscious of the special constitutional protection that they enjoy. Having imbibed self-respect ideas from the Non-Brahman movement and egalitarian ideas from the labour movement they no longer tolerate the indignities inflicted on them by the caste Hindus. If the social and political fabric is to be preserved, both the state and Central Government and Hindu society at large, should secure for the Scheduled Castes, their place in the sun.

24884  
6

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. **The Dravidian Movement** – Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr. Bombay Popular Prakashan, 1965.
2. **Minorities in Madras State (Group Interests in Modern Politics)** S. Saraswathi, Impex India, Delhi, 1974.
3. **The Modernity of Tradition. (Political Development in India).** Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne H. Rudolph, University of Chicago Press, Chicago. 1967
4. **Electoral Participation in a South India Contest** – David J. Elkins Vikas Publishing House Ltd. Delhi, 1975.
5. **Caste and Race in India** G. S. Ghurye, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1979.
6. **Party and Democracy in India** – S. N. Sadasivan, Tata Mcgraw Hill Publishing Co. Ltd., Delhi, 1977.
7. **Caste in Indian Politics**, Edited by Rajan Kothari, Orient Longman Ltd., New Delhi, 1970.
8. **Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu – 1920 – 1940** N. K. Mangala Murugesan, Koodal Publishers, Madurai 1980.
9. **Non-Brahmin Movement in Southern India 1873 – 1949** Kashinath K. Kavlekar, Shivaji University, Press, Kolhapur, 1979
10. **Thirumandiram (G. Varadarajan Edition)**
11. **Report of the Backward Class Commission, Tamil Nadu 1971.**
12. **Report of the Backward Class Commission, Government of India (Kaka Khalekar Report) 1955.**
13. **Politics and Conflict in South India 1916-1929-1969 –** Irswick, E. A.



14. **Vellal** – a Socio-historical perspective is an essay by Kamala Ganesh in South Indian Studies Vol. II 1979.