

The Pioneering Dravidian Movement: Transformation in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

In Indian history, the nineteenth century was a bright period that has been referred to as a time of reawakening. In many facets of national life, it brought about drastic transformations. In India, people's social lives underwent a tremendous upheaval during the beginning of the twentieth century. A significant effort had been made to eliminate the long-standing problems and irregularities that pervaded society, and the transformation had been felt throughout the length and breadth of the subcontinent for a number of reasons. As the Self-Respect Movement approaches its centennial, it is clear that the Justice Party and Dravidian movement have infiltrated every aspect of society and every individual in Tamil Nadu. Thus, the main intention of the present paper is to examine Periyar's ideologies and trace the circumstances that led to the formation of the Justice Party in Tamil Nadu. It also made an attempt to analyze the social transformation and its impacts. For this study, analytical and interpretive methodologies were used.

INTRODUCTION

Periyar was instrumental in promoting social and cultural awareness while fighting for the rights of women, widows, and children. South Indian's political, social, and religious lives were influenced by the Self-Respect Movement. The Periyar Movement has made exceptional contributions to the cause of equality. The social revolutionary objective of the Periyar Movement has quickly come to be identified with philosophy creation, propaganda methods through an organisational approach, and historic victories. Self-respect is an important humanistic ideal that applies to all of mankind, according to the founder of the Self Respect Movement, who founded it in 1925 with the goal of liberating the socially oppressed masses in Tamil Nadu.¹

Factors Contributing to The Birth of Justice Party

- Brahmins were considered as the "protectors of Hindu tradition" and "regulators of religious life and social interaction" among Hindus.² The Brahmin's doctrine of supremacy was supported by the sacred literature of the Hindus, most of which was their creation throughout the millennia.³

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Table 1.1: distribution of appointments among the various departments (1919)

<i>Classes in Public Works Department (1919)</i>					
<i>Name of the posts</i>	<i>Brahmins</i>	<i>Non-Brahmins</i>	<i>Muslims</i>	<i>Christians</i>	<i>Total</i>
Superintending Engineers	2				2
Executive Engineers	10	4			14
Assistant Engineers	8	5		1	14
Sub-Engineers	46	8			54
Supervisors	63	15		1	79
Overseers	132	27	2	1	162
Temporary:					
Sub-Engineers	2				2
Supervisors	3				3
Overseers	132	66	1	6	205
Total	398	125	3	9	535
Classes in Revenue Department					
Higher posts: Deputy Collectors, Tahsildars, Deputy Tahsildars and Sub-Magistrates	394	178	50	57	679
Revenue Inspectors	638	130	11	21	800
Classes in Judicial Department					
Senior Judges, sub-Judges and district Munsiffs	143	56	6	11	216
Classes in Educational Department					
Higher Posts in Educational Department	310	29	23	28	390

In 1919, the Secretary to the Franchise Committee received figures from the Government of Fort St. George regarding the percentage of appointments in the Madras Presidency's public services held by people of various castes and creeds.⁴ The following statement illustrates the distribution of appointments among the departments of Public Works, Revenue, Judicial, and Education⁵:

A critical analysis of the tables indicates that Brahmins dominate in various high-level posts in government services.⁶ The following table illustrates the male literacy rate according to the Census Report of India, 1921, Madras.⁷

The leading non-Brahmin castes made noticeable educational advancement, according to the aforementioned data.⁸

In Madras, well-known groups were at variance with one another. V. Krishnaswami Iyer led the Mylapore Clique, while the Egmore group was

headed by C. Sankaran Nair, T. Rangachari, Kasturi Ranga Iyengar, and T.M. Nair.⁹ They

Table 1.2: Male literacy of selected Castes, 1901-1921 (In Per Cent)

<i>Name of the Castes</i>	<i>1901</i>	<i>1911</i>	<i>1921</i>
Tamil Barhman	73.6	71.9	71.5
Telugu Brahman	67.3	68.2	59.7
Nair	39.5	41.9	42.9
Chetti	32.0	39.1	39.5
Indian Christian	16.2	20.4	21.9
Nadar	15.4	18.1	20.0
Balija Naidu, Kavarai	14.3	20.9	22.3
Vellala	6.9	24.6	24.2
Kamma	4.8	12.2	13.6
Kapu, Reddi	3.8	9.0	10.2
Velama	2.5	3.6	7.0

Table 1.3: List of press continued to be mostly a Brahmin weapon in the Madras Presidency

<i>Name of the publication</i>	<i>Language of the publication</i>	<i>Edition</i>	<i>Circulation</i>
Ananda Bodhini	Tamil	Monthly	3,000
<i>Andhra Patrika</i>	Anglo-Telugu	Daily and Weekly	8,300
The Hindu	English	Daily, Tri-weekly and Weekly	5,000
Indian Review	English	Monthly	3,000
Madras Mail	English	Daily, Tri-weekly and Weekly	4,968
Madras Times	English	Daily	3,000
Messenger of the Sacred Heart	Tamil	Monthly	3,800
New India	English	Daily	8,500
Nigazhkalasatyam or the Present Time	Tamil	Quarterly	3,000
Satya Duta or Messenger of Truth	Telugu	Daily and Tri-weekly	4,200
Swadesamitran	Tamil	Monthly	4,400

were necessary as the bureaucracy's advisors and assistants because of their relationships over the entire province.¹⁰

- A very small percentage of Brahmins entered the government and the professions, but this "minority" gave the impression of a dangerous "majority" because it came dangerously close to controlling all positions that were supposed to be politically significant and, therefore, close to the foreign sovereign authority.¹¹
- The Brahmin element predominated in the Madras Legislative Council from 1910 to 1920, according to the Council's composition at the time. Every door of the office were locked against non-Brahmins, and if a vacancy appeared, a Brahmin official let his relatives in.¹² As a result of their displeasure with the Mylapore group's increasing dominance over the province's government.¹³ The Brahmins had also considerable control over the press, a potent mass medium. The below table illustrates that the press continued to be mostly a Brahmin weapon in the Madras Presidency.¹⁴
- The founding of a social group known as 'the Madras United League' can be linked to the origins of the Justice Party.¹⁵ At its inaugural annual conference, this league's nomenclature was changed to Madras Dravidian Association because its earlier name

did not accurately reflect its goals. From then, it developed into a fully fledged non-Brahmin organisation. Madras Dravidian Association, the association's new name, officially began operations on November 10th, 1912, with new guidelines.¹⁶ A small but significant number of non-Brahmins in Madras took their first concrete move toward self-organization by founding 'the Dravidian Association Hostel'. Additionally, this society provided a venue for personalities in literacy as well as political leaders. Numerous literary and political gatherings were planned under its auspices.¹⁷

- In 1916, there were elections for the Imperial Legislative Council. Men with Home Rule and Mylapore ties beat the leaders of the emerging Non-Brahmin movement, notably P. Theagaraya Chetti, in local council elections conducted in 1916. As a result, the 1916 election not only left the non-Brahmin leaders disappointed, but it also strengthened the sense of hostility between the two groups. These are the main factors contributing for the birth of Justice Party

Transformation in social welfare initiatives and its Impact

Social Sphere

In 1920, the Justice Party-led administration of the King of Panagal granted caste privileges to all



communities, including Brahmins, to guarantee reservations in public services. Caste reservation was established in response to this by Ordinance No. 613, which was published on September 16, 1921.¹⁸ However, caste-based reservations were outlawed by the Supreme Court following India's independence and Periyar then had a battleground to contend with. As a result, the Indian Constitution's first amendment was proposed in the parliament for reservation in 1951.¹⁹ Finally, the Dravida Kazhagam regards the victory of preserving the 69% Reservation. The distribution of Tamil Nadu's 69% reservation is as follows²⁰:

The Dravidian movements contributed to the continued strengthening of the social justice politics created by the Justice Party, which now constitutes a significant portion of India's overall political weight.

Periyar's Concept of Women's Emancipation

"Women should develop physical strength like men. They must take exercise and get training in the use of weapons. They must acquire the ability to protect themselves when any person tries to molest them"²¹

The reformed marriage system of addressing the bride and groom in Tamil was adopted in 1926 by Periyar, who founded the self-respect movement. On July 18, 1967, Chief Minister Anna submitted a bill to amend Tamil Nadu's laws on Hindu marriage. The proposal eventually approved and

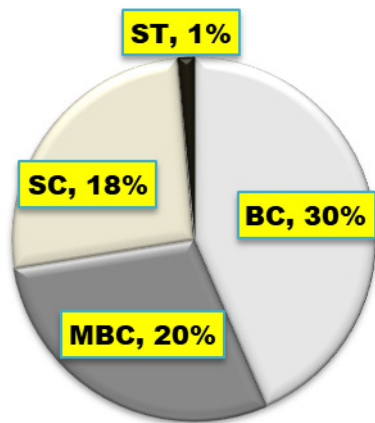


Figure 1.1: Distribution of 69% reservation in Tamil Nadu

was made into law.²² The Government of Tamil Nadu implements the following policy measures: women's welfare department, Service Homes, orphanages,²³ Tamilnadu Social Welfare Board, *Sathiyavanimuthu Ammaiyar Ninaivu* Free Supply of Sewing Machine Scheme, *Mahalir Madram*, Working Women Hostels,²⁴ *Sivagami Ammaiyar* Memorial Girl Child Protection Scheme, Dr. *Muthulakshmi Reddy Ninaivu* Inter-caste Marriage Assistance Scheme, 1967, Dr. *Dharmambal Ammaiyar Ninaivu* Widow Remarriage Assistance Scheme, 1975, E.V.R. *Maniammaiyar Ninaivu* Marriage Assistance Scheme for Daughters of Poor Widows, 1981 – 82, *Annai Therasa Ninaivu* Marriage Assistance Scheme for Orphan Girls, 1984-85, *Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Ninaivu* Marriage Assistance Scheme, 1989.

Ministry of Disabled Persons

Making sure that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as other citizens to participate in society is a crucial component of promoting equity for everyone. The Mental Health Act of 1987, the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act of 1995, the National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act of 1999, and the Rehabilitation Council Act are four pieces of legislation that are specifically focused on the protection, welfare, rehabilitation and development of people with disabilities (1992). The government is compensated by ensuring a 3% employment reservation.²⁵

Family Planning

Birth control and population management are prerequisites for India's development and progress on all fronts and for any endeavour to attain sustainable growth.²⁶ The population control issue would not have been a difficult challenge if Periyar's thoughts had been properly taken into consideration in 1931 and society would have been considerably more forward-thinking and progressive.²⁷ The Indian government implemented the welfare programmes: Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy Maternity Assistance Scheme (1989–1990) and the Family Planning, Reproductive and Child Health Project (1997–1998).

There has been considerable progress in the field of family planning in Tamil Nadu.²⁸

Transgender's Empowerment

The transgender community experiences many sorts of harassment as well as stigma from their families and society at large. In order to institutionalise the concerns of this marginalised and stigmatised group, the Tamil Nadu government has taken a number of actions. In order to offer welfare measures and solve their difficulties, the Transgender Welfare Board was established. In 2011–2012, transgender self-help groups were also established. To offer compensation and protect the rights of transgender persons, the Prevention of Atrocities Act (1989) was passed. The ratio of nominees for the board from transgender and non-transgender NGOs would be 50:50.²⁹

Education Spheres

In the area of education, the Justice Party made significant gains. All levels of educations like primary, secondary, training schools and technical industrial schools and schools for blind & Deaf institutes were advanced promptly under its rule.³⁰ Since its beginnings, the Justice Party has made free and compulsory education one of its professed ideals. For the sake of the fishing community, a unique training institute was created.³¹ Mid-day meal scheme for students was also implemented across the state.³²

With the help of special imperial and provincial grants numerous Universities, Arts Colleges, Colleges for Professional Training and colleges of engineering and medicine were established.³³ Free bus transportation up to Government College was offered to students under the DMK administration. In Tamil Nadu, a programme was put into place to give girls free two-wheelers. The fact that many students benefit from numerous welfare programmes, including the free uniform, textbooks, laptops, bicycles, bus concessions and others, is a major social accomplishment. Various welfare initiatives have been implemented in the area of education, including the National Policy on Education (NPE) - 1986 (revised 1992 & 2019), Free Coaching Classes (1965), Periyar EVR Nagammai Scheme - Free Education (1989-90), Girls Hostels (2008-09), Special

Incentive Scheme for Girl Students, and others.

Cultural Sphere

The Hindu Religious Endowment Act was a significant piece of social legislation that was passed under the Justice Party's rule. It was a revolutionary move. It had vowed to struggle against Brahmin domination in both the religious and political spheres.³⁴ The first temple entry protest in Tamil Nadu was the agitation held on January 18, 1926, at Sushindram Temple. The greatest social achievement of the Justice Party is the Hindu Religious and Charitable Institutions Act of 1923, followed by the establishment of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Board in 1925. In 1970, the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly passed the All Caste Priesthood Act under the government led by Karunanidhi.³⁵ Though this action was subject to various legal problems, it was implemented in order to remove the thorn in Periyar's heart.³⁶ Periyar emphasised the reformation of writing considering the print characters, composer, waste of time, cost of money and difficulty in learning. At first, he demonstrated and followed by doing it himself. He then held a research seminar with an expert committee and recommended the findings to the government. It was fulfilled during Periyar's centenary celebration in 1978 at Erode.³⁷ In 1929, the first Self-Respect Conference at Chengalpattu passed a major resolution that the people should give up titles added to their names to indicate caste or class.³⁸ In Tamil Nadu today, no one can put the caste title after the name, but in all other states, the caste name continues after the name. Other major resolutions of this conference include equal property rights, a marriage age of 16 years, a prohibition on child marriage, widow remarriage, the freedom to choose partners regardless of caste, creed, or race, equal rights for women to practise any profession and a prohibition on dowry.³⁹

Other Impacts

The existing scheme of welfare measures to benefit the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes cover a wide gamut of incentive like economic benefits, and reservation in appointments to Government services.⁴⁰ Under DMK regimes, 20% of the reservation was also

provided to anyone who learned in Tamil medium. The Madras Board of Transport was established.⁴¹ Since co-operatives were strengthened as a result of these efforts, the non-parish community profited immensely.⁴² From all districts and rural regions, engineers and physicians have emerged in Tamil Nadu. Slum clearance Work in Tamil Nadu has been hitherto attended to by the T.N. Housing Board.⁴³ The Dravidian movement's beliefs of women's emancipation and Periyar's relentless advocacy served as the cornerstones of women's advancement in Tamil Nadu.

CONCLUSION

As a result, all the daughters of India got equal right to inherit the properties of their parents. All these silent revolutions have been taking place devoid of any armed struggle or violence by the Periyar Movement, by instilling the principle of Self-Respect in the minds of the people. He stands most prominently for self-respect, for egalitarian society, for abolishment of all forms of suppression, for eradication of religious blind belief, and for superstitious, for women's rights equal to the rights of men, for a generally proper human behavior which leads to a life full of harmony, satisfaction and pleasure. All these concepts are of significance universally. Particularly his commitment to Rationality conforms to the expectation of Global Humanism. His views on women's right are revolutionary by all means, especially for the epoch in time when they have been voiced. Hence, his movement and his ideologies created great impacts on the state of Tamil Nadu. Whatever the evils were created by man, they would be tackled in a deft manner to make a better society. It is for the youths and rationalists to bestow their thoughts, energy and efforts for the creation of a new world to come.

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