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EDUCATIONAL AND HEALTH MEASURES OF THE JUSTICE PARTY IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY

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Abstract:

From 1850 and 1910, the Madras Presidency saw the domination of the Brahmins of Egmore and Mylaopre Groups and Vembakkam Family in all spheres of the public activities. These circumstances had their direct impact among the elite non-Brahmins who began to realise the importance of a political organization which was expected to address their grievances. It resulted in the formation of the South Indian Liberal Federation which in turn was known as Justice Party, named after its English newspaper, Justice. The August Declaration of Montagu of 1917 ensured gradual reforms. As per the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, elections were held in Madras Presidency in 1920. Justice Party came to power in 1921. When Justice Party assumed power, it was interested in initiating educational and health measures which were beneficial to the non-Brahmin Society. This paper seeks to examine those educational and health measures which were undertaken by the Justice Party which had been power in Madras Presidency from 1921-1937. The end of the second decade of the Twentieth Century witnessed with the beginning of educational and health measure sin Madras Presidency.

KEYWORDS:

Dyarchy, Portfolio, University, Disease.

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the political philosophy of the Justice party was based on the intention that self Government would mean Brahmin Government under which the position of non-Brahmins would become worse than under the British Government.¹ Their economic measures, which were implemented through their policies, programmes and the impact of the same during the period of Dyarchy in Madras Presidency was mainly shaped by the political ideology.

The first objective of SILF declared in October 1917 was to promote the Educational, Social, Economic, Political, Material and Moral progress of all communities of Southern India other than Brahmins.² Except the last one i.e. moral progress, all the other objectives clearly reflected their Socio-economic philosophy which had gained maximum focus during their rule.

DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN CAPITAL

Though there was no precise understanding about the relationship between education and

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economic growth, there was a broad agreement among the Justice Party leaders that educational planning should be given topmost priority because it not only contributed for the development of human capital but also the economic and moral emancipation of non - Brahmins. Hence the party engaged both short - term educational plans and drew up long - term ones.

EDUCATIONAL GROWTH

The contribution of Justice Party for the development of educational institutions was much. Before the Justice Party assumed office, the number of public institutions were 1607 with a pupil strength of 66200. When the party took office, they went to 35895 and 1692000 respectively. During the end of the second Ministry, they stood at 50941 and 2440874 respectively.

A.P. Patro, who held the portfolio of education during the first two terms, brought about many changes to improve not only the elementary but also secondary and higher education. During his period, education was taken to the door of the villager and habituate him to the necessity of literacy.³ During the initial periods of the first Ministry, the Government set up district educational councils and secondary education boards which helped the administration of schools.⁴ Free and compulsory education of boys and girls of certain age was provided through the Madras Elementary Education Amendment Act of 1934 and 1935. Though the amount of compulsion through these amendments came under criticism, the purpose was to 'ensure that all money spent by the Government in the case of elementary education nearly tended to improve literacy'.

However, the lack of food and half-starved conditions of students posed a threat to these schemes. To meet this problem, Mid-day Meals Scheme was first introduced at the Corporation Schools of Madras which resulted in the dramatic improvement of the admission of students from a combined strength of 811 in 1922-23 to 1671 in 1924-25. However, the scheme was withdrawn for sometime due to financial constraints. Then it was revived with the help of Corporation funds.⁵ These measures adopted by the Justice Party attracted the socially backward and poor children to school and paved the way for their uplift.⁶ This type of compulsory education was also extended to females and depressed classes. Stringent measures were also taken to safeguard the interests of the latter.⁷

HIGHER EDUCATION

Regarding higher education, the Madras University Act of 1923 was of great significance. To meet the growing problems of higher education, it was felt that the old University Act should be modified. 'The constitution had to be altered to give it a democratic set-up. It was considered that the University system should be in direct touch with and controlled by public opinion.⁸ Moreover, 'for Non Brahmins, at least, Madras University principally geared to the interests of Tamil Brahmin'.⁹ Considering all these, A. P. Patro, the Education Minister, introduced the Bill to reorganise the Madras University and the Act was passed during 1923.

RE-ORGANISATION OF MADRAS UNIVERSITY

According to an official report 'the Act provides for the reorganisation of the Madras University with a view to establishing a teaching and residential University at Madras while enabling the University to continue to exercise due control over the quality of the teaching given by the colleges which are constitute the University or are affiliated to it. The constitution of the old University has been remodelled mainly along the lines of Calcutta University Commission's Report and the controlling authorities of the University are now the Senate, the Syndicate, the Academic Council and the Council of Affiliated Colleges'.¹⁰

FORMATION OF ANDHRA UNIVERSITY

Latter, the Andhra University Bill was also passed for the 'rapid development in the study of Telugu language and literature'.¹¹ The creation of Andhra University encouraged the Tamils to start another University to promote the interests of Tamil language and culture. Tamilians now also began to demand that a separate university be created in the heart of the Tamil country to serve the interests of Tamil culture, since Madras University, with its Sanskritic and Brahmanical affiliations, was unable to give Tamil-speakers the right kind of cultural atmosphere and training. Their demand was supported by the Madras University Senate, which passed a resolution recommending the establishment of a university for each "principal

linguistic area within the Presidency." As a result of a discussion in the Council on 22nd March 1926, a Tamil University Committee (originally under the chairmanship of the Justice Party Development Minister, T. N. Sivagnanam Pillai) was set up. During the course of 1927 it took evidence from a great many educators, politicians, and others as to the precise nature that the proposed Tamil university should take. P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar, a Tamil Sri Vaishnava Brahman scholar of considerable academic repute, who had suggested the need for an Andhra university in 1916, told the committee that there was a good deal of popular demand for a Tamil university.¹² Another Tamil Professor S.Somasundara Bharati, said that "the mere fact that the Tamils see the the Andhras have achieved a university of their culture and language has whetted the desire of the Tamilians for a university."¹³

FORMATION OF ANNAMALAI UNIVERSITY

The deciding factor was the receipt of a substantial endowment from Sir Annamalai Chetti, a member of the Nattukottai Chetti caste group long famous for its donations to temples and other religious and educational establishments, both non-Brahman and Brahman. Thus Tamil wishes were met, and in 1929 a university, called Annamalai University, was founded at the temple center of Chidambaram in South Arcot district. Under the terms of the grant, the university was to encourage both Tamil and Sanskrit.¹⁴ Apart from these measures, the regime also set up selection committees which helped to select candidates for most important colleges in the Province.¹⁵

Thus the efforts of the Justice Party to promote education from Primary to University level was total and contributed a great deal for the development of education in the Presidency during the first few decades of this century. This foundation was the main reason to keep the present Tamil Nadu within the first few places in the all India literacy level rank.

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

Regarding agricultural education also, Justice Party contributed for a constructive beginning. During the period of dyarchy, the agricultural education was in the hands of the Director of Agriculture. The establishment of Agricultural Colleges was recognised early by the Justice Party as an integral part of the work of Department of Agriculture and one such college had been established in Coimbatore. Another significant development in this sphere was the upgradation of the diploma course of Coimbatore College to a degree course leading to B.Sc. Agriculture Degree (1923) and the College was affiliated to Madras University.¹⁶ The students strength was gradually increased from 20 in 1923 to 48 in 1926. This had also resulted in the expansion of teaching staff.¹⁷

HEALTH IMPROVEMENT

As regards health, the contributions of Justice Party were significant. The 'history of health care in the Madras Presidency witnessed series of legislative measures introduced by the Justice Party to regulate the nature and role of the medical profession in delivering health care to the people. In the year 1924, a scheme specifically designed to deliver health care to the rural people was introduced. The basic objective of this new scheme namely the 'Subsidised Rural Medical Relief Scheme' (SRMRS) was two fold: 'to bring medical relief with in easy reach of the rural population' and at the same time 'to encourage the private practitioners to settle down in rural areas'.¹⁸

The period 1930 s witnessed another scheme called 'Honorary Medical Scheme' (HMS). The main aim of this scheme was to achieve economies in the total expenditure on health-care, in addition to the two objectives of SRMRS. This scheme also encouraged independent medical profession in the presidency.¹⁹

A school of Indian Medicine was opened in 1924 following the recommendations of a Committee headed by Khan Bahadur Usman in 1921, with a four year course in Ayurvedic, Unani, and Siddha Medicines, supplemented by a course of instruction in anatomy and physiology according to the allopathic system. These courses were extended in 1930 by one more year with more input from alopahy.²⁰ In 1926, the Madras Nurses and Midwives Act was introduced. Then came the Indian Medical Council Act of 1933 in order to establish a 'Uniform minimum Standard of higher qualifications' in medium for all Provinces.²¹

The first two terms of the Justice Ministry the number of medical institutions of all classes rose from 737 in 1920 to 1006 in 1926, of which the public institutions constituted 683 and 939 in the respective periods. Within these public institutions rural dispensaries showed maximum share. For instance out of the 1006 institutions in 1926, the local fund institutions, constituted 773. Similarly, the Madras Administration Report also showed the increase in the number of patients treated, vaccinated etc.

There is an abundance of evidence to suggest that a large number of the people in colonial South India suffered continually from a number of deficiency diseases. Their susceptibility to these diseases was a result of their diets which were defective in many respects, particularly in terms of 'Protective food'. Under and malnutrition meant not only low resistance to infections, loss of vitality and productivity, but in many cases also death. The frequent visit of famine was also one of the main reasons for this under- and malnutrition. Under such conditions the free meal scheme of Thyagaraja for school children mentioned earlier was a commendable effort though in a limited extent due to financial constraints. It was thus a forerunner for similar schemes to come up in future with suitable enlargement in its content and coverage. Though this scheme encouraged admission and attendance in schools, it gained added significance in health care in the light of the nutrition-mortality link.

The total health care in the Presidency was measured from a village survey. The villages resurveyed one on the whole healthy and not afflicted by endemic diseases like malaria, hookworm, etc. Since the passing of the Madras Village Panchayats Act in 1920 with powers of taxation and administration of civic affairs, some improvements had been effected in sanitation and medical relief.²² Thus it is very clear that the Justice Party, within their limited constitutional and financial powers, took effective steps to improve the human capital, particularly education and health of all the people in the Presidency during the period of dyarchy.

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