

# Dravidian movement

November 13, 2018

## Manifest Pedagogy

Personality based tangential topics

Usually when we study personalities, we focus on prelims aspects and at the most mains question on the personality itself if it can be fitted in the syllabus. But recent times UPSC has been asking issues in the syllabus surrounding the personality. For example, the world history question in CSE 2018 on indentured labor was asked because of the death of V.S.Naipul, A Nobel laureate and Indian origin writer whose writings deals with cultural alienation, identity dilemmas of colonial migrants. Hence we have taken Dravidian movement as an issue because of death of Karunanidhi.

## In news

*Death of Karunanidhi, the Most Prominent Dravida.*

## Placing it in syllabus

Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present – Significant events, personalities, issues.

## Dimensions

1. Origins of Dravidian identity
2. The establishment, reforms and limitations of Justice party
3. V. Rama swami Naicker life and ideas
4. Activism and role of Dravida parties post-independence.

# Content

## Origins of Dravidian identity

The British divide and rule policies found their expression in the Aryan invasion theory and giving credence to the idea that Dravidian language speakers are the original inhabitants of India.

Bishop Robert Caldwell was a missionary and linguist, who academically established the Dravidian family of languages. Robert Caldwell used the term Dravidian to separate the languages spoken in South India from other, more Sanskrit-affiliated languages of India.

Caldwell asserted that the Tamil speakers were “indigenous Dravidian” people, distinct ethnically and, most critically for him, religiously, from their high-caste oppressors, whom he referred to as “Brahmanical Aryans”.

The historical research and the dating of Sangam Age and its contrast with the Vedic literature was also used in arousing a consciousness of difference and parity with the Sanskritic culture of north.

Communal division between Brahmins and non-Brahmins began in the presidency during the late-19th and early-20th century, mainly due to caste prejudices and disproportionate Brahminical representation in government jobs.

The Dravidian movement also claimed that Brahmins were originally from the north and that they had imposed Sanskrit, religion, and their heritage on the people of South India.

## Justice party

### Formation

The Justice Party was a political party in the Madras Presidency of British India. It was established in 1917 by T.

M. Nair and P. Theagaraya Chetty and was the first backward class mobilization which created social change and political empowerment.

### Political ideology

1. It opposed Brahmins in civil service and politics, and this anti-Brahmin attitude shaped many of its ideas and policies.
2. It opposed Annie Besant and her Home rule movement, because it believed home rule would benefit the Brahmins.
3. The party also campaigned against the non-cooperation movement in the presidency. It was at odds with M. K. Gandhi, primarily due to his praise for Brahminism.
4. Its mistrust of the Brahmin dominated Congress led it to adopt a hostile stance toward the Indian independence movement.
5. By petitioning the imperial administration which was more than willing to oblige they got reservations for the non-Brahmins through the Government of India act of 1919.
6. This attitude of justice party gave it a pro colonial tinge.
7. It did not send representatives to the Central Legislative Assembly, the national parliamentary body. After it won the provincial elections under government of India act of 1919. Because of its ideological tropes of anti-Hindi and anti-Aryan ideology.

### Achievements

Empowerment of lower classes:

- Gave reservations to various communities in government jobs.
- Legislation that allowed Dalits to use all the public space without discrimination.

- Temple entries to non-Brahmins were allowed.
- Marriages without Brahmin priests and increased acceptance of inter-caste marriages called self-respect marriages.
- The abolition of Devadasi system.
- The party also played a vital role in allowing women to contest elections paving way for Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy to become the first woman legislator in India.
- Initiating the mid-day meal scheme.

But the movement declined because of

- Abuse of power and corruption.
- The image of the Justice Party as the organization of rich landlords and Western-educated upper-caste non-Brahman intellectuals of Tamilnadu and Telugu country contributed, to a certain extent, to its downfall.
- The Dalits of the region were not given due representation.
- The rising popularity of the congress party under the effective leadership of c. Rajagopalachari the lost in electoral politics in 1926 to Swarajya Party.

### **Ramaswami Naicker**

The Self-Respect Movement or Dravidian Movement was founded in 1925 by E. V. Ramasamy with the aim of achieving a society where backward sections have equal human rights, and encouraging backward sections to have self-respect. His ideas of self-respect were propagated through the Tamil weekly **Kudi Arasu**. Periyar wrote several articles on women's rights, on atheism and against the caste system.

He represented alternative political traditions in the age when Indian national congress was attempting to establish a unitary ideal of nationalism against colonialism.

**Periyar's movement was based on ideals of self-respect and social empowerment**

1. Deep faith in rationalism and a critical attitude.
2. Trenchant criticism of all religions and a deep faith in atheism.
3. Dismantling of Brahmin hegemony which he considered the worst enemy of individual self-respect.
4. Revitalization of the "Dravidian Languages" (that include Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Tamil) which have greater antiquity and separate identity when compared to the Sanskritic languages of north.
5. He launched a Tamil cultural offensive of a reinterpreted Ramayana a version transposing hero and villain, in which the Sri Lankan king Ravana becomes a heroic Dravidian of 'excellent character', and the Aryan prince Rama a conniving, "despicable character" .
6. He participated in Vaikom Satyagraha of 1924, a mass movement to demand that lower caste persons be given the right to use a public path in front of the famous Vaikom temple.
7. Social reform by the abolition of existing caste systems, religious practices for which he advocated inter-caste self-respect marriages without the need for Brahmin priest.
8. Equality with stress on economic and social equality formed the central theme of the Self-Respect Movement and was due to Periyar's determination to fight the inequalities.
9. He argued that women needed to be independent, not mere child-bearers, and insisted that they be allowed an equal share in employment. He considered birth control to be important for women's freedom. The Self Respect Movement sanctioned property as well as divorce rights for women.
10. He appealed to people to give up the caste suffix in their names, and to not mention caste. He instituted inter-dining with food cooked by Dalits in public conferences in the 1930s.
11. He aimed for every human being to act according to

reason, and shall not be subject to slavery of any kind or manner.

12. A sense of pride and valorization of Dravidian and Tamil antiquity.

13. Periyar also propagated the positive identity of non-Brahmans as members of a 'Dravidian nation' entitled to sovereign independence from the Indian union and strengthened an exclusionary regional nationalism.

Periyar declared that the Self-Respect Movement alone could be the genuine freedom movement, and political freedom would not be fruitful without individual self-respect. He demanded that self-respect should precede Swaraj. He took over the justice party and renamed it as Dravida Kazhagam.

### **Post-independence role**

The DMK was formed in 1949 by some of the ambitious followers of Periyar under the leadership of C N Annadurai. Unlike Periyar this group had deep seated political ambitions.

The DK and DMK movement, started initially as a protest against the domination of the Brahmans in Tamilnadu, was given a new dimension after India's Independence when the attack was directed against the alleged domination of North India.

Main demand of the DMK was establishment of a separate Dravida Nadu / Dravidistan consisting of the four southern states.

The passing of the 16<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment in 1962 which made the advocacy of secessionism a crime made DMK change its constitution and drop the demand for secession.

The party stance changed from the demand for secessionism to greater state autonomy while limiting the powers of center making Indian federalism into a bargaining federalism.

Efforts by the Indian Government to make Hindi the sole official language after 1965 were not acceptable to many non-

Hindi Indian states, who wanted the continued use of English. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), a descendant of Dravidar Kazhagam, led the opposition to Hindi.

To allay their fears, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru enacted the Official Languages Act in 1963 to ensure the continuing use of English beyond 1965.

The text of the Act did not satisfy the DMK and increased their skepticism that his assurances might not be honoured by future administrations. As the word "English may" did not give any guarantee of continued future usage.

As the day of switching over to Hindi as sole official language approached, the anti-Hindi movement gained momentum in Madras State with increased support from college students.

On 25 January, a full-scale riot broke out in the southern city of Madurai the Congress Government of the Madras State, called in paramilitary forces to quell the agitation; their involvement resulted in the deaths of about seventy persons (by official estimates) including two policemen.

The agitations of 1965 led to major political changes in the state. The DMK won the 1967 assembly election and the Congress Party never managed to recapture power in the state since then.

The Official Languages Act was eventually amended in 1967 by the Congress Government headed by Indira Gandhi to guarantee the indefinite use of Hindi and English as official languages. This effectively ensured the current "virtual indefinite policy of bilingualism" of the Indian Republic.

As there is no real contradiction between regional and national identity and as Indian national integration is based on respect to cultural pluralism and the guiding ideal of Indian constitution being unity in diversity the nation was able to absorb these pressures without any violence.

## **Test yourself: Mould your thoughts**

Justice Party and Self-Respect Movement exhibited alternative political traditions with distinct proclivity to empowerment of lower classes. Elucidate.