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## The Influence of Dravidian Culture on The Non-Brahmin Movement

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**V.V.Ch.S.Narayana Dasari<sup>1</sup>**

M.A;B.Ed;AP SET

Research Scholar in History, Andhra Kesari University, Ongole, Prakasam Dt;AP.

Email Id: dhathri2012@gmail.com

Mobile No.8185011983

**Prof. G. Somasekhara<sup>2</sup>**

M.A;PGDITM.,Ph.D.

Department of History, Andhra Kesari University, Ongole – 523001.

### Abstract

The Non-Brahmin Movement, as it developed in the Madras Presidency, was a political response to the dominance of the Brahmins and at the same time a major cultural statement informed by non-Brahmin identity and Dravidianism. This is to say, the Dravidian cultural legacy and its distinguishing features, historical traditions, and cultural identity provided the necessary parameters for the Non-Brahmin Movement. Evidently, the cultural dimensions of the Non-Brahmin Movement, informed by the values of the Dravidian cultural legacy, provided the intellectual justification and the necessary agenda for the Non-Brahmin Movement, changing the political and cultural landscape of southern India. This article considers the role of the cultural identity of Dravidianism on the development of the Non-Brahmin Movement.

**Keywords:** Dravidian Culture, Non-Brahmin Movement, Madras Presidency, Justice Party, Self-Respect Movement, Periyar, Social Justice, Linguistic Identity

### Introduction

The Non-Brahmin Movement was a reaction to inequality and disparities of colonial rule in the Madras Presidency. Even though economic and political disparities played a significant role in launching this movement, there was another factor. The strength of this movement was based on the revival and reinterpretation of Dravidian culture. Dravidian culture had been given an indigenous, rational, egalitarian character and was perceived to be different from Aryan-Brahminical cultures. This

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form of cultural practice had emerged as a powerful vehicle of mobilization. It had transformed from a narrow and limited political agitation to a comprehensive social-cultural revolution.

The term "Dravidian" acquired academic popularity in the course of linguistic research in the nineteenth century, primarily with the research of Bishop Caldwell linking Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam languages together in the category of Dravidian languages. This linguistic grouping also facilitated a cultural identity for the people of South India. Dravidian culture was defined by: Strong regional linguistic traditions, Rich Literary Heritage (Sangam literature, Classical Telugu Poetry, etc.)

Distinct temple architecture and art forms & Social customs prevalent in areas different from North India These cultural aspects were redefined to prove the thesis that the society in South India was a civilized one and was not influenced by Aryans.

## **Aryan-Dravidian Theory and Cultural Assertion**

Such was the importance of the Aryan-Dravidian theory, though a subject of debate, that the non-Brahmin leaders came to accept the perception that the Aryans had imposed the strata of caste hierarchy and Brahminical dominance upon the indigenous Dravidian people. Henceforth, Dravidian culture came to stand for a symbol of resistance against cultural oppression.

## **Dravidian Culture and the Ideology of the Non-Brahmin Movement**

The cultural identity of Dravidian culture was exploited in a bid to question the Sanskrit-based cultures. The leaders argued:

At the expense of regional languages, Sanskrit was enforced, Ritualistic practices maintained caste system hierarchy & Religious orthodoxy maintained social inequality. In its advocacy of the Dravidian way of life, the movement questioned the caste systems.

## **Social Equality and Rationalism**

The reinterpretation of Dravidian culture emphasized rational and secular values. In particular, under the guidance of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, the Dravidian movement proclaimed: Self-respect marriages where there were no Brahmin priests, Opposition to idol worship and other ritualistic practices, Women's emancipation & Inter-caste Marriages. "These reforms were portrayed as a revival of the egalitarian ethos of the

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ancient Dravidian society." Dravidian culture developed to become an expression of regional nationalism. Unlike Indian nationalism, which was dominated by the elites of all upper castes, Dravidian nationalism was characterized by linguistic pride and social justice.

## **The Justice Party and Dravidian Cultural Influence**

The Justice Party, which means South Indian Liberal Federation and was established in 1916, used Dravidian identity to reinforce its political arguments. Their demand for communal representation (reservations) was framed as a necessary step to restore balance. The party believed that the pattern of governance must reflect the culture and demographics of the Dravidian majority population. The Justice Party administration: Increased access to education for those of non-Brahmin status, Promoted instruction in regional languages, Decreased usage of Sanskrit in the curriculum of education. Better job prospects for the marginalised section of society. These moves strengthened the claim of representative governance for Dravidian culture.

## **Periyar and Dravidian Ideology**

With the challenge of refocusing the Non-Brahmin Movement on the revival of Dravidian culture, Periyar E.V. Ramasamy made this movement more militant. He viewed caste as a structure in which the Aryan imposed oppression upon the non-Aryan; thus, he had to eradicate it absolutely. According to Periyar, the uniqueness of Dravidian culture was underlined by the fact that: Equality rather than hierarchy, Reason over superstition & Human dignity over ritual purity. In the 1930s and 1940s, this Non-Brahmin Movement morphed into a broader Dravidian Movement. The notion of "Dravida Nadu" was indicative of the deep-seated nature of the cultural assertion. Even though the political separatism declined with time, the cultural foundation remained strong to influence parties such as DMK and AIADMK.

## **Linguistic Pride and Anti-Hindi Agitations**

The most famous manifestation of the emergent Dravidian identity was the opposition to Hindi imposition. Anti-Hindi movements in the 1930s and 1960s rested on the premise that language is essential to the preservation of a culture. The Non-Brahmin Movement held that Tamil and other Dravidian languages are ancient and classical. Imposing Hindi means the domination of culture & Linguistic equality is essential to a federal democracy. This explains why this linguistic activism catered more to regional identity and shaped the political landscape after independence.

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## **Influence on Andhra and Telugu Regions**

In the Telugu-speaking tracts of Madras presidency, the Dravidian cultural ethos encouraged: The rise of regional pride, Advocacy for Reservations and Social Justice,

Introduction to Andhra identity - Evolution of Andhra identity & An intellectual critique of caste hierarchy. Though the political path of Andhra was later to take a different turn, the non-Brahmin movement in its early days was part of the broad Dravidian ideology.

## **Long-Term Impact & Critical Evaluation**

This cultural influence of Dravidian philosophy ensured that the Non-Brahmin Movement was not a transitory idea. Its lasting contributions are: The institutionalization of reservation policies, The emergence of Regional Political Parties, End of Brahmin Hegemony in Administration, Improved representation of backward classes & Cultural democratization. Currently, politics in South India carries on with the inheritance of Dravidian cultural assertiveness. Although the revival of Dravidian culture was a liberating force for the marginalized in society today, some scholars contend that : The division between Aryans and Dravidians has been over-simplified historically, At times, political mobilization exacerbated identity issues & Elite Non-Brahmin Factions Occupied Positions of Leadership. Even so, the impact of this movement upon the advancement of both social justice and democratization cannot be overlooked.

## **Conclusion**

Dravidian culture has been very instrumental in spearheading the formation of the Non-Brahmin Movement in the context of the Madras Presidency. It provided historical reinterpretation, cultural pride, ideological clarity, and emotional resilience in the crusade against social inequalities in society. Thus, associating political change with culture resulted in many changes in society in South India. Not only did the assertion of Dravidian culture defy the supremacy of Brahminism, but the Non-Brahmin Movement also redefined the nature of governance, education, and social interactions. This is where the effect of the Non-Brahmin Movement in the present administration of reservation policies and linguistic rights can be traced. Evidently, an understanding of the Non-Brahmin Movement cannot be complete without the understanding of the Dravidian culture's impact on the movement.

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