

## Backward Class Movement in Princely Mysore (1916 -1930)

**Sreedhara. H**

Asst. Professor SBRR Mahajana First Grade College Mysore, Karnataka, India

---

### Abstract

Princely Mysore observed several social movements during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One important among them was Backward class movements. This further became popular as a historical movement for modern Karnataka. The main objective of this was to give social, economic, educational justice to the backward people, creating reservation in government jobs and improving the economic standard of the people. This movement which was started in Mysore later on extended towards whole of Karnataka.

In 1917 the Justice Leslee Miller Committee had been formed for the upliftment of the backward classes. On the basis of this committee's report, a certain percentage of reservation was fixed for them. But Sir M. Visvesvaraya argued in vain that the posts should be filled on the basis of merit, or else the efficiency would deteriorate. Over this issue he tendered his resignation for the post of Dewan in 1918.

**KEYWORDS:** Princely Mysore, Backward Class, Sir M Visvesvaraya, Justice Leslee Miller Committee and reservation.

---

An attempt is made in this paper to trace the backward class movement in princely Mysore (1916 -1930). The backward class movement which began at the turn of the century has taken different dimensions and the problem continues to evade permanent solution. It is interesting to note that backward class movement mainly centred round the recruitment to government posts at various levels. Here an attempt is made to study the movement during the second and third decades of the present century, when major groups of the state's population participated in the movement. The study is based on government publications like proceedings of the legislative bodies, government orders on recruitment, contemporary newspapers, private papers of some important leaders of the time, besides secondary publications relating to the subject.

#### ➤ Background

The controversy regarding recruitment to government jobs began a few years before rendition. As D.V. Gundappa has pointed out, for about 30 years since rendition the conflict centred round "Mysorean versus Madrasi." Since the Brahmins in the neighbouring Madras provinces were better qualified, a large number of them got into the service of Mysore at all levels. During the dewanship of Seshadri Iyer and later, Brahmins of Madras were preferred to Mysore Brahmins. As a result, the latter started the agitation asserting their claims with the slogans "Mysore for Mysoreans" and this ended with the appointment of M. Visweswaraya as dewan.<sup>1</sup>

For a long time since rendition all the dewans were Brahmins and a new awareness arose among non-Brahmins, and the controversy "Mysorean versus Madrasi"

transformed itself into “Brahmin versus non-Brahmin” in the second decade of the present century.<sup>2</sup>

The backward classes, who constituted about 90% of the total population of the state, by and large, remained uneducated and did not have proper representation in the legislative bodies or in government service. There were signs of awakening among them early in the present century and they started organizing themselves on communal basis.<sup>3</sup> They were influenced to a large extent by similar movements in the neighbouring British Indian provinces of Madras and Bombay.

The backward classes resented and reacted to the political influence and dominance in the government service of one community during the second decade of the present century in the state. There were similar movements in Madras and Bombay. As such, influenced by the reaction of the backward classes in the neighbouring British Indian provinces, some leaders of backward classes in Mysore state also became vociferous in expressing their grievances. As a leader pointed out, public life in India at that time meant chiefly a scramble for places and offices. As C.R. Reddy pointed out “office is a social lever of the highest importance and as such we must see that we get our share...”<sup>4</sup> It was felt necessary that those offices were distributed fairly as between the different classes of people.

The first meeting of the backward classes “convened by the leading sympathizers of the cause of the masses,”<sup>5</sup> was held on November 18, 1917 at Bangalore under the presidentship of Annaswami Mudaliar. About 3000 people representing 30 communities were present at the meeting.

M. Basavaiah, who had earlier in 1916 unsuccessfully moved a resolution in the Mysore Legislative Council pleading for special funds for scholarship to backward classes,<sup>6</sup> addressed the meeting first. In his survey of the political situation in the state, he held that there was “the disproportion of the development of a section of lakhs of people compared with the different sections composed of a population over twenty-eight times as large from the statistics in the different grades of education and the representation of various communal interests in the Representative Assembly, local boards, municipalities and the Legislative Council. Hence, the political voice of 90% of the people was almost nothing compared with the development of one community which had monopolized it. S

Such a difference was seen in all the stages of administration from the village to the highest council.”<sup>7</sup> He called upon the backward class people to speak out boldly and bring them to the notice of the ruler. He emphasized that they needed a common platform for all people where they may be equally treated.

Basavaiah held that the monopolist controls all offices, the press and the self-governing bodies and manufactures public opinion. He warned the authorities of their opposition to the increase of the powers of all bodies if communal representation was not given to them and said “we want the state to be ruled by the sovereign and his people but no oligarchy.”<sup>8</sup> He called upon the backward class people to organize themselves and to make clear two things that (i) “we cannot and will not accept the monopolist’s leadership in social and political matters; (ii) that we will speak in our own voice, express our own feelings, demand our own rights and safeguard our own interests.” He held for all that, communal representation was absolutely necessary.<sup>9</sup>

In view of the government proposal to give increased powers to local bodies, a resolution was moved by M. Subbaiah urging upon the government about the “imperative

necessity of enabling all communities to equally participate in the benefits of the scheme” by remodeling the legislative and local bodies and “by the introduction of the principle of communal representation, so as to make them really democratic, well balanced and truly popular.”<sup>10</sup>

In Mysore, also a meeting of the backward class people was held in November 1917, at D. Banumaiah School under the presidentship of Rao Saheb H. Channaiah and in a resolution demanded representation for all communities in the legislative and executive bodies of the government.<sup>11</sup>

The leaders of the backward class people felt the need for an organization of their own to represent their grievances. Hence, at a meeting held on December 6, 1917, they founded ‘Prajamitra Mandali’ the first political party in Mysore state. Rao Saheb H. Channaiah became the President and M. Basavaiah became its organizing secretary. Mohammed Kalami, D. Banumaiah, Mohammed Abbas Khan, M. Subbaiah and others constituted the executive committee.<sup>12</sup> They decided to submit a memorial to the Maharaja about their demands for equal representation of all communities in various bodies. The executive committee meeting of Prajamitra Mandali met in Bangalore on February 17, 1918 under the presidentship of H. Channaiah and was attended by representatives from different parts of the state. The committee decided to publish a manifesto and it was unanimously approved. It demanded facilities for the spread of education among all the backward communities and representation in the government service on population basis.<sup>13</sup>

A branch of the Prajamitra Mandali was started at Mysore at meeting held on February 10, 1918 at D. Banumaiah school under the presidentship of Channaiah. The objectives of the Mandali were reiterated at the meeting.<sup>14</sup>

In response to the demands made by backward class people, the government decided to set apart a sum of Rs. 1 lakh to the education of backward classes. The backward class leaders submitted a memorandum to the Maharaja in June 1918 to undo the injustice caused to them. The Maharaja expressed his deep sympathy with the demands of the backward classes and assured them of special facilities at their advancement.<sup>15</sup> Some facilities like fee concessions, scholarships were given to backward class students and the recruiting authorities were directed to give preference to them.

#### ➤ **JUSTICE MILLER COMMITTEE (1918-1919)**

On the resignation of M. Viswesvaraya in 1918, M. Kantharaj Urs was appointed the dewan and he was the first non-Brahmin. The question of adequate representation of all communities in the state in the public service had engaged the attention of the government for some time. In 1918 the government felt the need for a comprehensive review of the situation and for taking more definite measures for the increased representation of backward communities. In August 1918, a committee was appointed with Leslie C. Miller as Chairman, C. Srikanteswara Iyer, M. Muthanna M. C. Ranga Iyengar, H. Chennaiah, Gulam Ahmed Kalami and M. Basavaiah as members.

The terms of the committee were “(i) changes needed if any, in the existing rules of recruitment to the public service, (ii) special facilities to encourage higher and professional education among members of the backward communities, (iii) any other special measures which may be taken to increase the representation of the backward communities in the public service without materially affecting efficiency.”<sup>16</sup> The

committee submitted its report in July 1919 and the government obtained the opinions of heads of departments. The civil servants opposed the report. After careful consideration, the government decided to attempt “at a definite standard of representation of the backward communities in the public services,” and decided “that the proportion of the members of backward communities.... Should be gradually raised to 50 per cent of the total strength within seven years.”<sup>17</sup>

The committee defined the backward communities as “all communities other than Brahmins who are not now adequately represented in the public service.”<sup>18</sup>

The orders constituted “no more than a legitimate and inevitable step in the direction of the fulfillment of a policy inaugurated” by previous dewans. In fact, as early as 1892, while considering the question of recruitment to the civil service, K. Seshadri Iyer had recorded in a minute the necessity “to maintain a proper proportion of all classes in the services” and had remarked that Brahmin community was well represented.<sup>19</sup> In spite of that, the Miller Committee report and the government order thereon had been the subject-matter of severe criticism at the hands of those who had dominated public opinion from the vantage point of official position which had been exclusively in their possession.<sup>20</sup> Even the Hindu of Madras upheld the orders on Miller Committee report and criticized the opposition voiced by the Brahmin groups in Mysore.<sup>21</sup>

Orders were passed providing many facilities for the amelioration of weaker sections. Fees was abolished upto Middle school level and backward class students were given scholarships which were allotted to deserving students by committees consisting of both official and non-official members. Additional facilities like writing materials were supplied to Panchama boys. All schools were thrown open to panchamas and it was opposed by the orthodox groups who demanded the withdrawal of that order. But the Maharaja showed statesmanship in taking a firm stand by declaring that they were also his subjects and thus silenced the opposition of the orthodox groups.<sup>22</sup>

After Miller Committee report and the government orders thereon, the situation in regard to representation of backward classes in government service improved substantially. The government instructed the heads of departments to give adequate representation to all communities and directed them to furnish annual returns of appointments made. The government called for explanation of those officers who did not furnish information and held them responsible for the omissions in not adhering to the G.O. on communal representation.<sup>23</sup>

As a result of a number of measures taken by government, representation of backward classes in government service increased from 30% in 1921 to 42% in 1926. Mirza Ismail followed a conciliatory policy and the government ordered to give 3 out of 4 to backward class candidates in departments where representation had not reached the stipulated 50% and to give 2 out of 3 in the departments where 50% had reached.<sup>24</sup>

#### ➤ **BACKWARD CLASS CONFERENCE(1929)**

The Prajamitra Mandali and the backward class movement in Princely Mysore reached a definite stage of its agitation, when they held the first statewide non-brahmin conference at Mysore in October 1929 under the presidentship of Arcot Ramaswamy Mudaliar. As the president pointed out, the very fact that the backward class movement had survived for so many years should convince the critics that “there is some cardinal principle of truth and justice on which it is based, some rocky foundation of equity from

which it cannot be shaken .... equal opportunities to all and of justice to everyone and injustice to none.”<sup>25</sup>

The conference took the stand that the backward class people should participate effectively in administration by getting adequate representation in the different departments of public service. The president declared that the movement was born to do away with the social tyrannies and obstacles to progress and to elevate the masses. He held that the movement was “a social revolt against the fossilized India of Manu.”<sup>26</sup>

## REFERENCES

1. D.V. Gundappa, Mysoorina Dewanaru (in Kannada) (Mysore, 1971) pp. 15 to 16.
2. B. Kuppaswamy, Backward class Movement in Karnataka (Bangalore, 1978) pp. 41-44.
3. Vokkaligara Sangha in 1906, the Lingayat Education Fund Association in 1909 and the Central Mohammedan Association 1909, the Durubara Sangha and the Adidravida Abhivridhi Sangha were important among the organizations.
4. Letter from C.R. Reddy, dated 20 January 1917, File No. 48/1921 C.R. Reddy Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.
5. The Justice 20 November 1917, found in C.R. Reddy papers.
6. Mysore Star, July 16, 1916.
7. The Justice, 20 November 1917.
8. Ibid
9. Ibid
10. Ibid
11. Mysore Star, 4 November 1917
12. Ibid, 13 January 1918
13. Ibid, 3 March 1918
14. Ibid, 17 March 1918
15. Addresses of the Dewans of Mysore to the Mysore Representative Assembly from 1913-1938 volume III (Bangalore 1938) pp. 166-167.
16. Proceedings of the Government of His Highness the Maharaja of Mysore, May 1921. (Bangalore 1921) p. 1.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid. p. 2.
19. Address of the Dewans, p. 13, p. 165.
20. Letter to Editor, Mysore Star, 31 July 1921
21. The Hindu, 22 and 23 June 1921.
22. Proceedings of the Mysore Legislative Council (December 1926) p. 326.
23. Proceedings of the Government of His Highness the Maharaja of Mysore May 1920 (Bangalore, 1920) p. 8.
24. Proceedings of the Legislative Council. June 1927 (Bangalore 1927) p. 74
25. Mysore Star, 19 October 1929
26. Ibid, 12 October 1929.