

# From a manifesto to a movement

How the Justice Party in Madras became the stepping stone for political empowerment of non-Brahmins



RAJMOHAN GANDHI

The author acknowledges in his new book, *Modern South India: A History from the 17th Century to Our Times*, that part of the pull to write a history of the region was the "South Indian-ness" of his mother, Lakshmi Devadas Gandhi. In his four-centuries-long story, from 1600 to modern times, he attempts to study "the people inhabiting this varying, intricate peninsula." It is a story of four powerful cultures – Kannada, Malayali, Tamil and Telugu – and "yet more than that, for Kodagu, Konkani, Marathi, Oriya and Tulu cultures have also influenced it, as also other older and possibly more indigenous cultures." Of the four principal cultures, which are "unsurprisingly competitive" and yet complementary, he finds the Tamil part the most Dravidian and possessing the oldest literature. An excerpt:

The 1911 census showed that Brahmins were slightly over 3 per cent of Madras Presidency's population, and non-Brahmins 90 per cent. Yet in the ten years from 1901 to 1911, Madras University turned out 4,074 Brahmin graduates compared with only 1,035 non-Brahmin graduates. Numbers for other groups (revealing also how the Empire classified the population at this time) included 'Indian Christian', 306, 'Mohammedan', 69, and 'European & Eurasian', 225.

A little over 22 per cent of Tamil Brahmin males in the presidency were literate in English by 1911. The corresponding figure for Telugu Brahmins was 14.75, for Nairs in Malabar around 3, for Balija Naidus 2.6, and for Vellalas just over 2. Among Kammars, Nadars and Reddis, males literate in English were below half a per cent.

Many more had attained mother tongue literacy: 72 per cent of Tamil Brahmins, 68 per cent of Telugu Brahmins, 42 per cent of Nairs, 20 per cent of Indian Christians, and 18 per cent of Nadars.

The span from 1914 to 1918 – in Europe the World War I years – saw competition in Madras between na-



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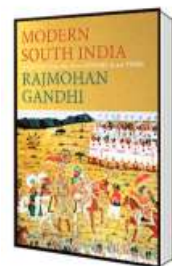
tionists and opponents of Brahmin domination. A small but significant advance for the latter was the opening in 1914 of 'The Dravidian Home' for non-Brahmin students. Financed by men like Panaganti Ramarayaninagar (the Raja of Panagal), whose lands lay in the Telugu country to the north of Madras, this hostel was run by C. Natesa Mudaliar, a Vellala doctor in the city.

## Demand for Home Rule

Leading the Madras nationalists was the Irishwoman Annie Besant (1847-1933), who had arrived in India in 1894 after tumultuous years in England where she announced that she was an atheist before embracing theosophy. Though also spending time in Varanasi, her political base was Madras, where in June 1914 she purchased a newspaper, renaming it *New India*.

Through the paper, she asked for Home Rule for India. That stand, plus Besant's oft-expressed adoration for India's scriptures, her impressive bearing, and her eloquence made her a force to reckon with. The British in Madras, official and civil, responded to Besant with dislike, and *New India* was frequently asked to furnish security, all of which added to her popularity.

On September 3, 1916, she



■ **Modern South India: A History from the 17th Century to Our Times**  
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launched the Home Rule League. District centres appeared, and one of Besant's allies, the Congress leader P. Varadarajulu Naidu, an Ayurvedic doctor from a prominent Telugu-origin family near Salem, made speeches in Tamil about Home Rule. There was parallel activity on the other side. On November 20, 1916, around 30 or so eminent non-Brahmins met in Madras's Victoria Public Hall to form the South Indian People's Association (SIPA), a joint-stock company for publishing English, Telugu and Tamil newspapers which would voice non-Brahmin grievances.

## Non-Brahmin manifesto

A month later, on December 20, readers of *The Hindu* and of Besant's *New India* were treated to SIPA's 'Non-Brahmin Manifesto', which declared opposition to 'the Indian

Home Rule Movement', portraying it as a Brahmin exercise for gaining control over Madras Presidency. It also announced the start of a new political party, the South Indian Liberal Federation (SILF).

Although the manifesto claimed to speak for all non-Brahmins, and its signatories included Telugu, Tamil, Malayali and Kannada names, SILF's first aim was 'not so much to attract a following as to influence the official policy of the British in Madras Presidency'. More places for non-Brahmins in government service and in colleges was the immediate goal.

SIPA's daily newspaper in English, *Justice*, first came out on February 26, 1917. The Tamil daily *Dravidian* appeared in mid-1917. Published from 1885, the *Telugu Andhra Prakasika* was acquired.

Soon SILF became known as the Justice Party. Many of its members took the line that 'Tamil', 'Dravidian' or 'Dravidian', 'non-Brahmin' and 'South Indian' were synonymous terms, as were 'Brahmin', 'Aryan' and 'North Indian'. Their wish was to 'rouse all the non-Brahmins to a recognition of their past glory with a view to put the haughty Brahmana who is the intruder from the North in his proper place'.

Although it attacked Brahmins, Aryans and the caste system, the Justice Party remained elitist. Moreover, its leaders quarrelled publicly, and the colonial establishment's praise for the party became an embarrassment. Yet the future would identify SILF as the foundation for non-Brahmin political power in the South.

On August 20, 1917, Edwin Montagu, His Majesty's Government's Secretary for State in India, had announced in the House of Commons a new policy of 'increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration' and of developing 'self-governing institutions' towards the 'progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire'.

The Montagu announcement triggered a range of claims. Pointing out that Muslims had received special treatment in 1909, the Justice Party said that non-Brahmins (comprising, it was asserted, 40 million of the presidency's population of 41 million) should have something similar.

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# Colombo's perceptions

India encounters a range of reactions in Sri Lanka: appreciation, support, suspicion and opposition



RAJIV BHATIA

There are no winners in the political crisis in Sri Lanka. President Maithripala Sirisena, whose actions triggered the crisis, Mahinda Rajapaksa, who as Prime Minister lost two confidence votes, and Ranil Wickremesinghe, former Prime Minister who enjoys majority support in Parliament, are locked in a draw.

## A ringside view

Against this backdrop, what are the perceptions among the main political actors, which impact Sri Lanka-India relations? A delegation of eminent Indian scholars, former civil servants and a retired navy chief, led by Lalit Mansingh, former Foreign Secretary and chairman of the Kalinga Lanka Foundation (KLF), was in Colombo last month. The delegation's candid discussions with four leading think tanks and numerous key players on different sides of the political divide provided a ringside view of the situation.

Cutting across party lines, a clear bipartisan consensus emerged about Sri Lanka's continuing need to nurture a positive engagement with India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiatives to improve the relationship evoked appreciation. But given the asymmetries in size and power, Sri Lanka finds itself overwhelmed by India's presence. Hence, resisting India's overtures for closer cooperation may be seen as part of Sri Lanka's assertion of its independent identity.

From the Sri Lankan perspective, cultivating China as a counter to India makes strategic sense. The country needs huge capital for its development. China seems to be the only source willing to provide it, albeit on increasingly tougher terms. Many Sri Lankan intellectuals and policymakers reject the notion of a Chinese 'debt trap' and criticism of the 99-year lease given to China for Hambantota Port as 'neo-colonial'. They argue that they would accept Chinese money, but refuse to embrace China's presence. Rather unconvincedly, they claim expertise in knowing and dealing with China.

On India-China rivalry, pro-Rajapaksa interlocutors sought a balance in Sri Lanka's ties with the two Asian powers. A strong, though unrealistic, plea was made suggesting that China-Sri Lanka relations should not be seen from the narrow prism of the complex relations between India and China. They advanced two additional arguments:

one, for most projects Colombo had approached India initially and turned to China only later; two, 'China delivers, while Indian bureaucracy delays' was a constant refrain.

It appears Sri Lanka may be turning away from its identity as a South Asian nation to assert its role as an Indian Ocean country, imbued with an ambition to connect better with ASEAN and Japan. Discontent over the impasse in SAARC and challenges in strengthening the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation are behind this shift. Economic opportunities that could result from better international maritime connectivity and the potential of the blue economy are other motivations. Concerning the Indian Ocean, Colombo clamours for India's collaboration in its efforts to turn the region into one of peace and harmony. Some express support for reviving the trilateral maritime cooperation among India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Others believe that India and China must cooperate for the region's benefit.

## Economic issues

On economic cooperation with India, Mr. Wikremesinghe has been more upbeat than the President or Mr. Rajapaksa. In retrospect, one of the triggers for the crisis was his insistence to move ahead with projects identified in the MoU signed with India in April 2017 that had Mr. Sirisena's opposition. Mr. Wikremesinghe, on a recent visit to Delhi, sought to transfer Mr. Modi's concern over delays in project implementation to Mr. Sirisena. Besides, Mr. Wikremesinghe's apparent refusal to take seriously Mr. Sirisena's anxiety over reports of an attempt on his life brought the two to the breaking point.

The KLF delegation heard how the Sri Lankan industry feared being flooded by Indian goods and professionals. The Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement is yet to reach finalisation. Assessment in Colombo is that Indian investors prefer to invest at home; hence Sri Lanka's push to attract new investments from Southeast Asia and beyond. The point, however, is that all investors will be risk-averse when the country is unstable and politically fractured. The Sri Lankan Tamil view continues to be supportive of a proactive policy stance by India.

India encounters a range of reactions in Sri Lanka: appreciation, support, suspicion and opposition. Indian diplomacy plays on a sticky wicket. New Delhi is committed to refraining from interference in a neighbour's internal affairs, but it will always defend its vital interests. While being fair to all sides, it is closely monitoring the unfolding crisis.

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## SINGLE FILE

# A political march

Movements such as the farmers' march in Delhi can be sustained only if they resist short-term electoral baits

AKRITI BHATIA



Conversations with many of the farmers who had occupied the streets of New Delhi in November revealed that their inspiration to protest was drawn from the Kisan Mukti March that took place from Nashik to Mumbai early this year. It also flowed from the poignant images recently seen in the media – of the bleeding and blistered feet of farmers, of Tamil farmers with human skulls at Jantar Mantar, and of the Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Rally in Delhi this September.

Yet this time was different and unprecedented. The tens of thousands of farmers had travelled from across the country enduring difficult journeys to the capital. Their sole aim was to get their demands heard, to reclaim their rural livelihoods, their fundamental rights, and Parliament itself. They wanted a resolution to the agrarian crisis.

Taken a step further, their mass action reflects a desire to reset the economic and political agenda of the country. This was a planned display of strong political will, made possible by the participation of 208 farmers' and labour organisations and the support of 21 political parties which have shown willingness to consent to two private bills brought forth by the farmers: one on freedom from indebtedness and the other to do with increasing the Minimum Support Price in accordance with the Swaminathan Report.

The most striking aspect of the rally, however, was the coming together of diverse local issues. There were sugarcane farmers from U.P. and Haryana who are affected by the non-payment of dues, farmers from Maharashtra and Karnataka who are facing crop failure due to an acute water crisis, farmers from parts of U.P. who are facing water contamination due to industrial emissions, farmers from Tamil Nadu who are facing crop destruction due to stray animals, climate change and rising input costs, and farmers facing indebtedness. There were Dalit farmers who are facing landlessness, women farm workers who brought up the issue of unequal pay and Adivasi farmers who spoke about land dispossession despite having cultivated indigenously for thousands of years. Many of these concerns were linked to corporatisation of the farm sector processes.

The trickier question, however, is whether broader and deeper alliances and solidarities with the urban working class, who tend to share more in common with the rural distressed, will yet emerge. The more far-fetched but important support could come from the urban and middle classes if they could be sensitised towards the demands of those who fill empty stomachs across the land. Finally, even if the ruling elites and the Opposition realise that these farmers have the potential to influence the 2019 Lok Sabha election, as any act of mass mobilisation might do, the success and sustainability of these movements depends on how they resist short-term electoral baits.

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## FAQ

# Flying into losses

Why there is a crisis in the aviation industry

JAGRITI CHANDRA

## What is the crisis?

The three main publicly listed airlines in the country – IndiGo, SpiceJet and Jet Airways – slipped from profitability to steep losses in the first nine months of the current calendar year. These airlines together account for 70% of the domestic market share.

## Why are they in trouble?

With crude oil prices having risen over the past year and a half, the cost of Aviation Turbine Fuel saw a 40% rise. Fuel accounts for the biggest expenditure for an airline – anywhere between 30 and 40% of the total expenditure incurred. At the same time, the rupee has seen a consistent fall and even breached 74 to a dollar in early October, though it has stabilised to a degree now. This meant that fuel costs apart, airlines were spending

more on payments made in foreign currency for engine lease rentals, and maintenance and purchase of spare parts. Despite this rise in operational costs, the airlines have been unable to raise fares because of stiff competition among them. In fact, the lean months of July, August and September saw carriers wooing passengers with attractive offers in an attempt to fill up seats, as is the norm during this season every year.

As a result, by the end of September, market-leader IndiGo posted a loss of ₹6,52.1 crore – its first loss since being listed. The airline saw a nearly 60% rise in its expenses to ₹7,502.2 crore compared to the previous year. Of this, fuel expenses at ₹3,035.4 crore accounted for an almost 50% increase and the remainder was because of rupee depreciation and an inability to raise fares. Importantly, the cost

incurred on fuel in the second quarter was double that in the same period last year.

To make matters worse, as airlines embark on a massive fleet expansion, there are more seats to fill than ever before, as many of these airplanes are pressed into service on the already popular routes. All domestic airlines have among them more than 570 airplanes as of now. IndiGo alone has climbed up from 77 aircraft in March 2014 to 198 until December 2018, growing 2.5 times in the past four years. A third of this capacity addition by IndiGo happened during the current calendar year. Altogether, domestic airlines will be adding over 1,000 planes in the next seven-eight years.

## What does it mean for passengers?

An airline shutting down could impact connectivity

and compress capacity on important routes and drive up airfares. Air travel is no more a luxury, but a necessity, and impacts the economy. So, possible airline failures will impact the public directly and indirectly.

However, experts say that an airline closing down is unlikely, though there could be a merger or a consolidation.

## What lies ahead?

Short-term cyclical issues are unlikely to impact the long-term strategic outlook. India is the aviation market of the 21st century and experts see a profitable future for most Indian carriers, if infrastructure, policy and regulatory framework improve. According to the International Air Transport Association, the global aviation body, India will be the third biggest aviation market by 2024 after China and the U.S.

## FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 6, 1968

# Naxalite 'revolution' crushed, claims police

Police sources here [Calicut] said to-day [December 5] that they could now state that the forest areas of Pulpalli, Tirunelveli and Kottiyur had been cleared of most of the terrorists. Peace had been restored in the area and the so-called Naxalite 'revolution' had been crushed, they said. According to these sources, so far 25 persons, including Ajitha and her mother, Mandakini Narayanan, have been arrested in connection with the Pulpalli attack on November 24 and three others held under Section 151 Cr. P.C. (preventive custody), for having given shelter to the Naxalite terrorists. Police sources also stated that the original estimates regarding the number of attackers were "exaggerated" and it was now known that while in the Tellicherry incident less than 150 took part, in the latter - Pulpalli incident - the number was about 25 only.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DECEMBER 6, 1918.

# The Kut Prisoners. Treat at Bombay.

The second batch of Kut Prisoners, consisting of 19 Indian officers, arrived in Bombay to-day (December 5) by the transport vessel "Egypt". They were accorded a warm welcome on disembarking at Alexandra Docks this afternoon. After the reception was over and the officers were garlanded, Risaldar Ajab Singh Sarkaria, 7th Lancers, one of the returned party, in a speech described the sufferings they had to undergo during the concluding stages of the siege and afterwards and expressed warm gratitude to British Government for all it had done to ameliorate their lot during their captivity. After the speech he was congratulated by General St. John and three cheers were given to Their Majesties as well as returned heroes. Risaldar Ayab Singh, interviewed by an "Advocate of India" representative on Board the vessel, which was then lying in stream off the Apollo Bunder, recalled some interesting facts connected with the memorable siege and capitulation.

## CONCEPTUAL

# Age-crime curve

SOCIOLOGY

This refers to the observation that the tendency to commit violent crime increases during early adolescence and peaks at late adolescence before it drops and flattens in the 20s and 30s. It is claimed that the age-crime curve applies to people across various cultures and can be explained by various evolutionary factors. This empirical phenomenon was first noted by American criminologists Travis Hirschi and Michael Gottfredson in their influential 1993 paper "Age and the Explanation of Crime". Some have even argued that age and intelligence are also related in a similar manner, with the intelligence of people peaking in their late 20s.

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