APP LO
S T U D Y C E N T R E

TNPSC GROUP I & II PRELIMINARY

WORKSHEET
EVOLUTION OF 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY SOCIO-POLITICAL MOVEMENTS IN TAMILNADU

Introduction

1. The Brahmans were sometimes rulers and often the power behind the throne ever since the Aryans settled in India, right up to the Muslim invasion.

   The Brahmin community emerged in early Indian history as a priestly and intellectual group associated with Vedic culture.

2. Brahmins occupied a central position in society by performing rituals, preserving sacred texts, and guiding religious practices.

   Through their control over education, language (Sanskrit), and religious knowledge, Brahmins gained high social status.

3. The varna system institutionalized Brahmins at the top, granting them social authority and privileges.

   Over time, Brahminical influence shaped law, customs, and moral codes in Indian society.

The Nature of caste system in South India
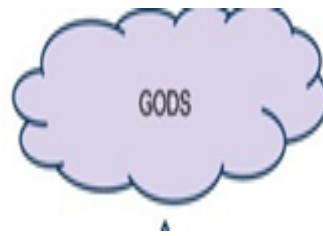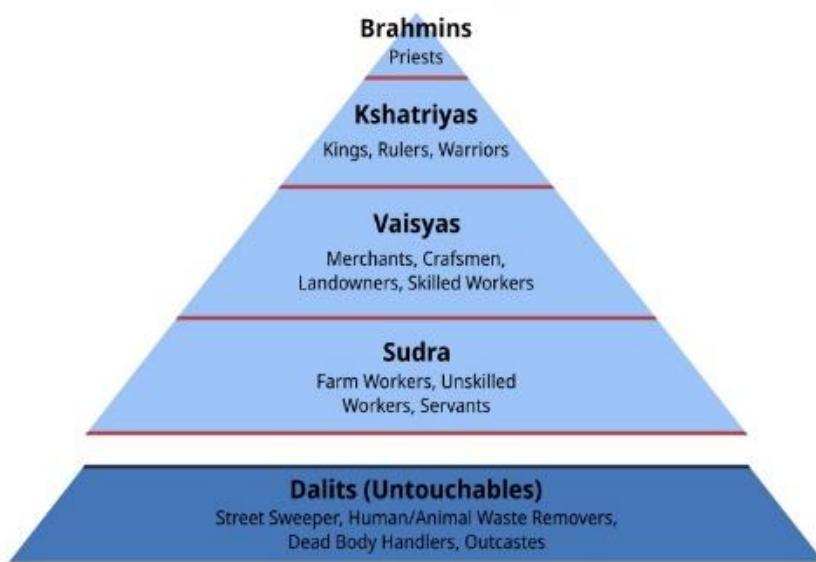
4. In south India the caste system was more rigid than in northern India due to Brahmins high ritual status and this influence lasted for a long time in society and administration because of assumed priestly character and this led to the their supremacy in the given socio-economic and political power.

5. Society was divided into hierarchically ranked communities, with ritual purity and pollution determining social distance.

    Though the Brahmins who formed a 'microscopic minority' in numerical strength, they become a dynamic minority in political and economic power and social status through their cultural advantages.

6. Brahmins occupied the top position, while numerous intermediate castes performed productive and service roles.

   Depressed communities were subjected to untouchability, segregation, and severe social disabilities.

7. The system was reinforced by custom, religion, and local authority, making social mobility extremely limited. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, caste oppression in South India provoked powerful reform, non-Brahmin, and self-respect movements.

8. So by a natural historical process the Brahmin-non-Brahmin division become clear cut from early historical times.

Social Structure in the 19th century Madras Presidency

9. The modern political development of the Madras presidency at the turn of twentieth century witnessed the social formation of Hindus into three groups viz. the Brahmins, non-Brahmins and the depressed classes or in other words Brahmins, Sudras and untouchables.

10. In the Madras Presidency, Brahmins emerged as a dominant intermediary group under British rule, especially from the early nineteenth century.

    Their early access to English education, missionary schools, and Sanskrit–English bilingual learning gave them a competitive advantage in colonial employment.

11. The British valued Brahmins for their literacy, clerical skills, and familiarity with law and administration, leading to their over-representation in revenue, judiciary, and clerical services.

12. Urban centres like Madras (Chennai) became hubs where Brahmins secured positions as teachers, lawyers, translators, and civil servants.

     In social status the non – Brahmins are regarded below Brahmins but above the depressed classes.

13. The main sects of non-Brahmins are the trading class which included the castes Nattukottai Chettis, Beri Chettis, Komatti Chettis etc., and the cultivating class which comprised of Tamil Vellalas, Kongu Vellalas, Agamudaiyars, Vanniars, Reddis, Naidus, Nairs, etc., and the depressed classes are included Adi Dravidas or Panchamas and Tribals.

14. Intermediate castes such as agriculturists, traders, and artisans formed the productive backbone of society, but remained socially subordinate to upper castes.

15. Depressed and marginalized communities were subjected to untouchability, social exclusion, and severe restrictions on movement, residence, temple entry, and access to public facilities.

16. British rule introduced new social classes, including English-educated elites, clerks, lawyers, and professionals, particularly in urban centres like Madras.

17. Women were generally confined to domestic roles, with limited access to education and public life, though early reform efforts slowly questioned these restrictions.

    Social oppression and exclusion during this period generated widespread resentment among non-Brahmin and depressed communities.

18. These conditions laid the foundation for nineteenth-century social reform movements, questioning caste domination, superstition, and inequality.

Political History of Madras Presidency

19. 1639: Francis Day obtained permission from Damarla Venkatapathy Nayak, a local Nayak chief.

    The Company established a settlement at Madraspatnam.

20. 1640: Construction of Fort St George, the first English fortress in India.

    The area developed into:
    a. White Town (British)
    b. Black Town (Indian population)

    Madras emerged as the headquarters of Company operations on the Coromandel Coast.

21. 1688: Establishment of the Madras Corporation, the first municipal body in India.

    The Carnatic Wars were fought between the British and the French to control South India.

22. After defeating the French and their Indian allies in the three Carnatic Wars, the East India Company began to consolidate and extend its power and influence.

    However, local kings and feudal chieftains resisted this.

23. The first resistance to East India Company's territorial aggrandisement was from Puli Thevar of Nerkattumseval in the Tirunelveli region.

    This was followed by other chieftains in the Tamil country such as Velunachiyar, Veerapandiya Kattabomman, the Marudhu brothers, and Dheeran Chinnamalai.

    Known as the Palayakkarars Wars, the culmination of which was Vellore Revolt of 1806.

24. Madras Presidency of South India came into existence due to the administrative and political needs of the British. The Madras Presidency was formed in A.D. (C.E.) 1801 by Lord Wellesly.

    The Presidency, as it existed during the 19th and 20th centuries, comprised of the present states of Andhra Pradesh, Malabar region of Kerala, Southern Karnataka, Southern most part of Odisha and Union Territory of Lakshadweep.

25. Except for the territories of the kings of Ramanathapuram, Pudukkottai, Travancore and Mysore, all other areas were included.

   Administrative Structure of the Presidency: The Presidency was governed by a Governor appointed by the British Crown, and Fort St. George served as the Capital.

26. **Key Features of the Administration:**

   Governor and Council: The Governor of Madras, assisted by a Advisory Council, was the highest authority in the Presidency. They were responsible for administering justice, collecting revenue, and maintaining law and order.

   Revenue Administration: The British introduced new systems of land revenue collection, including the Ryotwari System.
   The Supreme Court of Madras was established in 1862

   Military Presence: The Presidency had a strong military presence, with several garrisons stationed in strategic locations.

27. In 1835, English was declared as official and administrative language in India.

   People who are fluent in English were appointed in all government services.

28. Due to the establishment of 'Jamindari' and 'Ryotwari' system in the initial part of 19th century, 'Landlords', 'Zamindars' and other dominant groups spearheaded in entire Madras Presidency. All the above said are "Caste Hindus". Caste Hindus domination in all villages greatly affected the villages and particularly, the down trodden communities were kept aside from the lands in all villages of India.

Domination of Brahmins in society and administration

29. The local power of castes, i.e., land ownership, holding of posts in the governmental administration and urban sources of income determines the ranking of social dominance

30. In the Madras Presidency, "dominance" did **not** mean numerical majority; it meant **disproportionate presence** in (i) **government/administrative employment**, (ii) **law and courts**, (iii) **English education and the new professions**, and (iv) the **early leadership layer** of modern politics (especially before communal reservation and mass non-Brahmin mobilisation). Though the Brahmins in south represented a least population in Hindu fold attained dominance in all those Spheres.

31. The Brahmins through the ritual status with the holding of position such as Mirasdar, Zamindars etc. in large number established socio-economic dominance which in turn assisted them to infiltrate in large scale into the administrative posts of the British Government.

32. The Brahmins dominated the civil services since the examinations were conducted through open competition right from 1853. Due to this trend it further widened the cleavages of inequality between Brahmins and non-Brahmins.

W.R. Cornish (19th Century)

33. Dr. William Robert Cornish, then Surgeon-General of Madras, served as the Superintendent of the 1871 Census.

34. His report is one of the earliest administrative documents to comment on social inequalities – especially the over-representation of Brahmins in government employment.

35. Cornish analysed caste composition, literacy, occuptions, and distribution of employment.

> Cornish on Brahmin Dominance in Government Posts.

36. Cornish clearly stated that Bramins were occupying a disproportionately large share of higher government jobs despite forming a small minority of the population.

37. Brahmins formed 3-4% of the population of Madras Presidency.

    - A major share of position in revenue administration
    - Most posts of clerks,writers, accountants (kanakkupillais)
    - Large share of jobs in education, judicial establishment, and subordinate magistracy

38. Cornish remarked that this imbalance was structural, not accidental.

39. Viewing every problem through a 'Brahmin lens' is not good for government policy.

   Government posts should be limited according to the population of the very large Hindu and Muslim communities.

   Government policies should be such that no particular caste is given primary importance.

Tremenheere Report (19 Century)

40. The Tremenheere Report, submitted by J.H.A. Tremenheere, then Collector of Chingleput (now Chengalpattu), in 1891, focused on the socio-economic conditions of Dalits in Tamil Nadu.

41. The report highlighted the severe oppression and inhuman conditions faced by this community and recommended land distribution to improve their situation. This led to the Depressed Classes Land Act of 1892 and the assignment of Panchami lands to Dalits.

42. In September 1892, the Madras Presidency passed the orders to assign plots conditionally to members of the community. Conditions dictated that these plots could not be transferred to any person who is not a member of Scheduled Castes through sale, gift, mortgage or lease.

43. It is said that up until 1934, land in the order of 1.2 million acres was assigned to members of the community and such plots are known as *Panchami* Land. In particular, *Panchama* means the fifth, which can be taken to refer to the place attributed to 'Untouchables' outside the *varna* system. Hence, the land for *Panchamas* was named *Panchami*.

44. Schools for lower caste groups are called as "Panchamer School". 'Ayothidasa' and 'Singaravela' opinioned that "Panchamer Schools" can be called as "Adidravidar" schools. Since it is the traditional name carved to the category.

Growth of Educated Non-Brahmins: (20th Century Madras Presidency)

45. By the turn of the 20th century some of the educated non-Brahmins, most of them from the Madras city as well as in the district hailing from rich land owning and merchant castes began to aspire for political power and official influence commensurate with their wealth and status in society.

46. One of the foremost factors contributing to this growth was the **spread of Western and English education**, which, after the late nineteenth century, began to extend beyond Brahmin monopoly through government schools, aided institutions, and missionary colleges that admitted students from landed, trading, and artisan castes.

47. The **economic advancement of several non-Brahmin communities**, such as Vellalas, Mudaliars, Chettiars, Naidus, Nadars, and Pillais, enabled them to invest in modern education, professional training, and urban residence, thereby creating a new class of educated elites outside the Brahmin fold.

48. The **expansion of colonial bureaucracy and public services** generated a demand for clerks, teachers, revenue officials, lawyers, and medical practitioners, which encouraged non-Brahmin families to pursue education as a means of securing salaried employment and social prestige.

49. Another significant factor was the **emergence of caste-based associations and social reform movements**, which consciously promoted education as a collective strategy for self-advancement and challenged traditional hierarchies that had restricted access to learning.

From the Director's Desk

Rise of Non-Brahmins (Impact of Tamil Rennaissance and Social Reform Movement)

50. The Term 'Dravidian' refers to both a historical region and a people connected to egalitarian values, while 'Tamil' refers to the oldest language in the Dravidian Family.

    At the same time Brahmins were identified as "Aryans" and the custodians of Sanskrit civilization whereas non-Brahmins were considered as "Dravidians" and the custodians of Tamil language, culture and civilization.

51. Two factors (1) Brahmins claiming superiority over Non-Brahmins and (2) Brahmins monopolizing educational and employment opportunities transformed the Dravidian identity into Non-Brahmin identity (In Maharashtra too Mahatma Jyotiba Rao Phule launched a Non-Brahmin movement on similar lines). Dravidian also indicated the Non-Brahmins in South India.

52. In the post mutiny period, the non-brahmin leaders undertook social reforms rather than political reforms. After the introduction of Minto Morley reforms in 1909 the non-brahmin leaders of Madras Presidency began to protest the inadequate representations to them in education and employment.

53. The **introduction of representative institutions and electoral politics after 1919** further stimulated educational aspirations among non-Brahmins, as political participation required literacy, legal knowledge, and administrative competence.

54. The formation of the **Justice Party** played a decisive role in consolidating educated non-Brahmin leadership by articulating grievances against Brahmin dominance in education and government employment and by actively encouraging schooling and professional training among non-Brahmin communities.

55. Urbanization and the growth of cities like Madras facilitated **exposure to print culture, newspapers, debates, and public associations**, which fostered political consciousness and reinforced the importance of education among emerging non-Brahmin middle classes.

Sir Alexander Gordon Cardew (1913) (Beginning of 20th Century)

56. He is reported to have stated that in the competitive examinations for the Provincial Civil Service, which were held between 1892 and 1904, out of sixteen successful candidates fifteen were Brahmins, giving a ratio of 95 percent of Brahmin success.

57. Out of 140 Deputy Collectors in Madras at the time, 77 were Brahmins, 30 Non-Brahmin Hindus and the rest Muhammadans, Indian Christians, Europeans and Anglo Indians.

58. It is curious to note that even where competitive examinations did not exist, as for instance in the Subordinate Judicial Service of the Presidency, the major portion of the appointments was in the hands of the Brahmins, Sir Alexander Cardew stated that, out of 128 permanent District Munsiffs in 1913, 93 were Brahmins, 25 non-Brahmin Hindus and the rest Muhammadans, Indian Christians, Europeans and Anglo-Indians.

    From these and other figures of a like nature, he naturally concluded that an open competition for the Civil Service in India would mean almost complete monopoly of the service by the Brahmin caste and the practical exclusion from it of the non-Brahmin classes.

    Sir Alexander Gordon Cardew, a member of Governor's Executive Council submitted statistical details (1913) to prove that the Brahmins who formed only three percent of the population cornered most of the opportunities.

Anti-Brahmanism – A Modern Phenomenon

59. In the Madras Presidency, Brahmins historically emerged as a dominant community due to a combination of pre-colonial ritual status and colonial opportunities.

    The British to consolidate their administration, had to rely on the upper caste in Hindu hierarchy, the Brahman, who had the tradition of learning and whose aptitude for administrative work was well recognized for centuries.

60. Further because of their ritual superiority they would command respect and obedience from the ordinary people. Petty Brahman officials are obeyed and respected, because they are Brahmans.

61. The colonial state preferred Brahmins for clerical, judicial, and revenue positions, valuing their literacy, adaptability, and intermediary role.

    As a result, Brahmins became disproportionately represented in administration, education, and the professions during the nineteenth century.

62. Towards the end of the 19th century 80 to 90% of all jobs available to Indians were occupied by Brahmans; and they were dominating other professions also.

    Non-Brahmin communities, largely excluded from education and government service, experienced systemic disadvantage and social marginalization.

63. Anti-Brahmanism, therefore, did not exist as a coherent ideology in the pre-colonial or early colonial periods.

    It emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a modern, political, and social response to colonial-era inequalities.

64. Anti-Brahmanism questioned institutional privilege, not individual Brahmins, and sought representation, equality, and social justice.

   In essence, Brahmins historically established dominance in the Madras Presidency through education and colonial employment, whereas anti-Brahmanism arose later as a modern critique of unequal structures, not as an ancient or primordial conflict.

Standing Order No. 128(2) – Exact Text Reconstruction (1854)

"In making appointments to the subordinate offices, Collectors shall select such persons as are competent in reading, writing, and accounts; and *preference shall be given to those who belong to families in which such duties have been ordinarily exercised*.

Breakdown of Key Phrases

65. **"Competent in reading, writing and accounts"**

   - This meant basic literacy and numerical skill, but in practice required *English-educated* or *Sanskrit/vernacular-literates*.

   - Appointments to lower-level government posts should not be the exclusive right of a few influential families.

   - It was clearly stated that positions for each district should be distributed in such a way that the main communities in that district receive them.

66. **"Preference shall be given to those who belong to families in which such duties have been ordinarily exercised"**

It effectively made government service **hereditary**, favouring:
  ❖ Brahmin *kanakku* families
  ❖ Vellalar/Mudaliar/Pillai clerk lineages
  ❖ Temple accountant families

It excluded Shudras, most non-Brahmins, and all depressed classes.

Why This Text Is Crucial

❖ It proves **caste preference was officially reinforced** by the British administration.

❖ It is original evidence cited later by:
  ○ **Non-Brahmin Movement**
  ○ **Justice Party**

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