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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**NEW APPROACHES IN POLITICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY: A STUDY THROUGH NON-POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS IN TAMIL NADU**

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**Abstract**

This study explores new approaches in political historiography in Tamil Nadu by examining non-political organizations. Traditionally, political history has focused on elite figures and formal movements, often overlooking the role of grassroots organizations and marginalized communities. This paper argues for a broader perspective that includes Subaltern Studies, oral history, cultural history, and feminist historiography. By analyzing social reform movements, cultural groups, educational institutions, and labor unions, the study highlights how these organizations have influenced political awareness and activism in Tamil Nadu. It emphasizes the importance of cultural identity and community mobilization in shaping political dynamics. The findings suggest that non-political organizations play a vital role in advocating for social justice and empowering marginalized groups. Overall, this study contributes to a more inclusive understanding of Tamil Nadu's political history, encouraging further exploration of the connections between culture, identity, and politics.

**Keywords:** Political History-Non-Political Organizations-Tamil Nadu-Subaltern Studies- Oral History-Cultural Identity- Social Movements-Labor Unions-Feminist History -Social Justice.

**Introduction**

Political historiography has traditionally focused on the study of political events, leaders, institutions, and movements that directly engage with governance and power structures. In India, much of the historiography has revolved around nationalist

movements, political parties, and state machinery. However, in recent decades, scholars have begun to adopt new approaches that extend beyond traditional political actors to include social, cultural, and religious organizations in shaping political landscapes. This shift towards a broader

understanding of politics allows for the exploration of how non-political organizations, despite not having direct political agendas, have played a crucial role in influencing social change, political thought, and policy development.

Tamil Nadu offers a fertile ground for such studies due to its rich history of social reform movements, cultural organizations, religious institutions, and educational bodies, which have all had significant political impacts. Non-political organizations, such as the Self-Respect Movement, various religious reform movements, labor unions, and educational institutions, have historically been key drivers of political consciousness in Tamil Nadu. These entities, while not directly engaged in electoral politics, often mobilized large sections of the population on issues like caste inequality, linguistic identity, and social justice. For instance, the Self-Respect Movement, though framed as a social reform organization, provided the ideological foundation for the Dravidian political parties that later dominated Tamil Nadu's political scene. Similarly, religious organizations advocating for equality and social justice indirectly contributed to political shifts by shaping public attitudes and societal values.

The role of these non-political organizations in political historiography represents a new way of understanding power dynamics in society. Instead of focusing solely on political parties and leaders, this approach delves into how grassroots movements and social organizations have influenced political structures. These organizations often addressed social issues that were later picked up by political parties, demonstrating how the boundaries between the political and non-political are often blurred. By including non-political entities in the study of political historiography, we gain a more nuanced understanding of the broader socio-political context and the indirect ways in which political change occurs.

This article seeks to explore these new historiographical approaches by examining the role of non-political organizations in Tamil Nadu's political development. It will focus on various non-political actors, such as social reform movements, religious

and cultural bodies, labor unions, and educational institutions, that have significantly shaped political discourse in the state. Through a detailed analysis of these entities, this study aims to show how non-political organizations can be central to understanding the political evolution of a region, thereby offering a more comprehensive view of political historiography in Tamil Nadu.

## **Historical Overview of Non-Political Organizations In Tamil Nadu**

The political landscape of Tamil Nadu has long been shaped by a complex interaction between various non-political organizations and political movements. While traditional political historiography focuses on political parties and their leaders, recent approaches in historiography emphasize the critical role of non-political organizations in shaping social and political consciousness. These organizations, including social reform movements, religious groups, cultural bodies, labor unions, and educational institutions, contributed to the development of political ideologies and the mobilization of public opinion, often in ways that indirectly influenced political events and outcomes.

## **Social Reform Movements: Pioneers of Political Thought**

One of the most influential non-political movements in Tamil Nadu was the Self-Respect Movement (1925), spearheaded by E.V. Ramasamy Periyar. Though the movement primarily aimed at eradicating caste-based discrimination and promoting gender equality, its ideological underpinnings had a profound political impact. The Self-Respect Movement critiqued the dominance of Brahmins in Tamil society, calling for the upliftment of the "backward" classes and advocating for rationalism and atheism. These ideas became a cornerstone for later Dravidian politics, with political parties like the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) adopting many of its tenets.<sup>1</sup> Though the Self-Respect Movement did not directly engage in electoral politics, its anti-caste ideology influenced the rise of Dravidian political parties, which led to significant

changes in Tamil Nadu's political and social structures. By promoting social justice, challenging the status quo, and advocating for linguistic and cultural pride, the movement helped to lay the foundation for Tamil Nadu's political consciousness.<sup>2</sup> This illustrates how a non-political movement can wield considerable political influence through its social goals.

In addition to the Self-Respect Movement, other reformist movements such as the Ayyavazhi Movement, which emerged in the 19th century under the leadership of Ayya Vaikundar, also played a vital role in addressing caste inequalities. Though primarily a religious reform movement, Ayyavazhi challenged the oppressive caste system, particularly among the marginalized Nadar community. Its social message of equality and justice indirectly influenced political attitudes, particularly in terms of advocating for the rights of the downtrodden. The movement's emphasis on unity and social equality resonated with later political movements, especially the Dravidian and anti-Brahmin movements.<sup>3</sup>

### **Religious and Cultural Organizations: Advocates of Identity and Autonomy**

Religion and culture have always been deeply intertwined with politics in Tamil Nadu. Various religious and cultural organizations have contributed to the political landscape by shaping public opinion, promoting regional identity, and influencing social policy. The control of temples, religious rituals, and the interpretation of religious texts were often contested spaces that became arenas for political and social change. One prominent example is the role of Tamil Sangams, or literary societies, that were established to promote the Tamil language, literature, and culture. Although these societies were cultural in nature, they carried strong political undertones. The promotion of Tamil as a cultural symbol became a rallying point against the perceived imposition of Sanskrit and Hindi, which were seen as symbols of North Indian and Brahminical dominance. The cultural renaissance led by these organizations was a significant precursor to the rise of Tamil linguistic nationalism, which became a central theme of Dravidian political parties.<sup>4</sup>

The Justice Party (*South Indian Liberal Federation*), which came to power in the early 20th century, drew on many of the ideas promoted by these cultural organizations. Though the Justice Party was a political organization, its policies were influenced by the growing sentiment for Tamil identity and anti-Brahminism, both of which were cultivated by non-political entities such as Tamil literary circles and social reform groups. This illustrates how cultural organizations can influence political developments by shaping societal attitudes and identity.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to linguistic and cultural movements, religious reform organizations also played a role in Tamil Nadu's political evolution. The Ramalinga Adigalar Mission, for example, was a 19th-century religious movement that promoted egalitarianism and spiritual purity. Although Ramalinga Swamikal's mission was primarily spiritual, his teachings on social equality and his emphasis on feeding the poor challenged the deeply entrenched caste system. The movement contributed to the broader discourse on social justice, influencing later reformist and political ideologies.<sup>6</sup>

### **Educational Institutions: Catalysts for Political Awareness**

Educational institutions in Tamil Nadu were also instrumental in shaping political consciousness, even though their primary mission was to impart academic knowledge. Colleges like Madras Christian College and Presidency College became hubs for intellectual and political debate, fostering a generation of leaders who would go on to play pivotal roles in both social reform and politics. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these institutions were spaces where students and faculty could freely discuss ideas related to colonialism, nationalism, and social justice. Many of the future leaders of Tamil Nadu's political movements were educated in these colleges, where they were exposed to ideas of self-rule, social equality, and anti-imperialism. The discussions held in these academic circles often transcended the confines of the classroom and influenced broader political and social movements in the region.<sup>7</sup>

Madras University was another critical educational institution that contributed to the intellectual ferment in Tamil Nadu. The university became a space for the development of Tamil linguistic and cultural pride, as many scholars and students advocated for the use of Tamil in academic discourse and public life. This movement toward linguistic pride eventually influenced the Dravidian political parties, which made the promotion of Tamil language and culture a cornerstone of their policies.<sup>8</sup>

### **Labor Unions: Champions of Economic Justice**

Labor unions, particularly those formed during the late colonial and post-independence periods, played a significant role in advocating for workers' rights in Tamil Nadu. Though labor unions are not typically considered political organizations, their influence on labor laws and social policies has had a profound impact on the political sphere. One of the earliest labor movements in Tamil Nadu emerged among textile workers in the industrial city of Coimbatore. The Coimbatore Labor Union, established in the 1930s, fought for better working conditions, fair wages, and workers' rights. Though the union did not initially engage in formal politics, it played a key role in shaping labor policies and influencing political parties to adopt pro-worker stances.<sup>9</sup> The rise of labor movements in Tamil Nadu also laid the groundwork for the formation of political parties that advocated for social justice and economic equality, such as the Communist Party of India (CPI) and later the DMK, which integrated labor issues into their political agendas.

### **Social eform Movements and their Political impact in Tamil Nadu**

Social reform movements have played a significant role in shaping Tamil Nadu's socio-political landscape, particularly during the 19th and 20th centuries. These movements, while not political in the traditional sense, profoundly influenced political ideologies and actions in the state. Their focus on caste reform, gender equality, and social justice laid the foundation for the emergence of political movements and parties that advocated for similar principles. This section examines some of the

key social reform movements in Tamil Nadu and their lasting political impact.

### **The Self-respect Movement**

One of the most influential social reform movements in Tamil Nadu was the Self-Respect Movement, founded by E.V. Ramasamy, popularly known as Periyar, in 1925. The Self-Respect Movement was an anti-caste, anti-religious orthodoxy movement that sought to dismantle Brahminical dominance and promote the rights of non-Brahmins, particularly the marginalized and backward classes. Its focus on rationalism, self-respect, and social equality challenged the entrenched social hierarchies of the time.

Though the Self-Respect Movement did not initially engage in formal politics, its critique of the caste system and its advocacy for social reform directly influenced the political discourse in Tamil Nadu. The movement's emphasis on social equality and its rejection of Brahminical dominance resonated with the Dravidian political parties that emerged in the mid-20th century, particularly the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). The DMK adopted many of the principles of the Self-Respect Movement, such as opposition to caste-based discrimination, promotion of Tamil linguistic pride, and advocacy for secularism. The movement's ideals became central to the political platform of the DMK, which came to power in Tamil Nadu in 1967 and has remained a dominant force in the state's politics ever since.<sup>10</sup> The Self-Respect Movement's influence extended beyond political parties. It shaped social policies in Tamil Nadu, leading to significant reforms in areas such as marriage, education, and gender equality. The movement promoted women's rights, including the right to education and the abolition of dowry. Its progressive stance on gender equality was ahead of its time, influencing not only political leaders but also policymakers and social activists.<sup>11</sup>

### **Ayyavazhi Movement**

Another important social reform movement in Tamil Nadu was the Ayyavazhi Movement, which emerged in the 19th century under the leadership of

Ayya Vaikundar. The Ayyavazhi movement, though primarily religious, had a profound social and political impact. It sought to reform the oppressive caste system, particularly among the Nadar community, which faced severe social and economic marginalization. Vaikundar's teachings emphasized social justice, equality, and the unity of all people, irrespective of caste.<sup>12</sup> The Ayyavazhi movement's emphasis on social justice and equality had a lasting influence on Tamil Nadu's political culture. Its challenge to caste hierarchies inspired later social and political movements, including the Justice Party and the Dravidian movement, both of which sought to empower non-Brahmin communities and reduce caste-based oppression. The movement's impact was particularly felt in southern Tamil Nadu, where its followers actively participated in social and political movements aimed at improving the status of marginalized communities.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Justice Party and Non-Brahmin Movement**

The Justice Party, founded in 1916, was closely linked to the broader Non-Brahmin Movement in Tamil Nadu, which sought to challenge the dominance of Brahmins in the political and social spheres. Though the Justice Party eventually became a political entity, its origins lay in social reform efforts aimed at achieving greater representation for non-Brahmins in government and education. The party advocated for the abolition of hereditary privileges, the promotion of non-Brahmin interests, and the expansion of education and employment opportunities for marginalized communities. The Justice Party's policies were heavily influenced by earlier social reformers, such as Iyothee Thass, who had championed the cause of Dalits and non-Brahmins. Thass, a Dalit scholar and social reformer, had advocated for the recognition of Dalits as a distinct social group and called for their inclusion in government services and educational institutions. His ideas, along with those of other social reformers, laid the groundwork for the Justice Party's efforts to secure social and political rights for non-Brahmins.<sup>14</sup>

The Justice Party's emphasis on non-Brahmin representation had a profound impact on Tamil Nadu's political landscape. It led to the establishment

of affirmative action policies, including reservations for backward classes in government jobs and educational institutions. These policies, initially introduced by the Justice Party, were later expanded by the DMK and AIADMK, which continued to advocate for the rights of non-Brahmin and marginalized communities.<sup>15</sup>

### **Political Impact of Social Reform Movements**

The social reform movements in Tamil Nadu not only transformed the social fabric of the state but also had a lasting political impact. By challenging the caste system, promoting gender equality, and advocating for social justice, these movements laid the groundwork for the Dravidian political movement that would dominate Tamil Nadu's politics from the mid-20th century onwards. The Self-Respect Movement, the Ayyavazhi Movement, and the Justice Party all contributed to the rise of political parties that prioritized social justice, secularism, and Tamil identity. Moreover, the legacy of these movements is evident in Tamil Nadu's political policies today. The state's progressive social policies, including affirmative action, women's rights, and welfare programs for marginalized communities, can be traced back to the ideologies promoted by these reform movements. In this way, the social reform movements of Tamil Nadu have had a far-reaching influence, shaping not only the state's political parties but also its social and political institutions.

### **Religious and Cultural Organizations in Tamil Nadu and their Political Impact**

Religious and cultural organizations in Tamil Nadu have historically played a significant role in shaping the state's socio-political environment. Though these organizations were often created with religious, cultural, or linguistic objectives, their influence transcended these boundaries and left a lasting mark on Tamil Nadu's political landscape. By promoting regional identity, social justice, and community welfare, these organizations indirectly influenced political ideologies, movements, and policies.

## **The Tamil Sangams and the Promotion of Tamil Identity**

One of the most prominent cultural movements in Tamil Nadu was the Tamil linguistic revival, largely driven by organizations like the Tamil Sangams. These literary and cultural societies were formed with the primary goal of promoting the Tamil language, literature, and cultural heritage. While their focus was on the revival and preservation of Tamil identity, these organizations had a significant political impact, particularly in the context of Tamil nationalism and linguistic pride.

The Tamil Sangams emerged as a response to the perceived imposition of Sanskrit and Hindi, which were seen by many in Tamil Nadu as symbols of North Indian, Aryan, and Brahminical dominance. The cultural revival of Tamil identity became a powerful force in the region, advocating for the recognition of Tamil as a classical language and opposing the spread of Hindi as a national language. The emphasis on Tamil linguistic pride directly influenced the political agenda of the Dravidian movement, which adopted the cause of Tamil identity as a central pillar of its political platform. The Dravidian political parties, such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), capitalized on this sentiment by promoting Tamil language, culture, and regional autonomy.<sup>16</sup>

The efforts of these cultural organizations also led to the institutionalization of Tamil in education and governance. The Anti-Hindi Imposition Agitations of the 1930s and 1960s, which were strongly supported by the Tamil Sangams and other cultural bodies, forced the central government to modify its language policies and grant Tamil a more prominent role in public life. This demonstrates how cultural organizations, though primarily focused on linguistic and cultural revival, significantly shaped the political landscape of Tamil Nadu by mobilizing public opinion around issues of identity and autonomy.<sup>17</sup>

## **The Ramalinga Adigalar Mission: Social Reform through Spirituality**

The Ramalinga Adigalar Mission, founded by Ramalinga Swamikal (also known as Vallalar) in the 19th century, was another religious movement that had profound social and political implications in Tamil Nadu. Though primarily focused on spiritual purity and egalitarianism, the mission's teachings on compassion, social justice, and equality transcended religious boundaries and influenced social reform movements in the state.

Ramalinga Swamikal advocated for the elimination of caste distinctions and promoted the idea of universal brotherhood. His emphasis on feeding the poor and caring for the downtrodden challenged the existing social order, which was deeply rooted in caste hierarchies. While the Ramalinga Adigalar Mission did not engage in formal political activities, its message of social equality resonated with later social reformers and political movements that sought to dismantle the caste system.<sup>18</sup>

The mission's ideals of social justice and compassion also found their way into the political discourse of the Dravidian movement and other reformist political parties in Tamil Nadu. By promoting values of equality and social welfare, the Ramalinga Adigalar Mission contributed to the development of a political culture that prioritized social justice, particularly for marginalized communities. Its focus on the redistribution of wealth and resources also influenced welfare policies that were later adopted by political parties in Tamil Nadu.<sup>19</sup>

## **Religious Reform Movements: The Ayyavazhi and Political Mobilization**

The Ayyavazhi Movement, which emerged in the 19th century under the leadership of Ayya Vaikundar, was both a religious and social reform movement that sought to address the oppression of the Nadar community in southern Tamil Nadu. Although primarily a religious movement, Ayyavazhi had a profound impact on the social and political dynamics of the region by challenging the existing caste system and advocating for social justice.

Ayya Vaikundar's teachings emphasized the unity of all people, regardless of caste, and called for an end to social discrimination. His followers, mostly from the marginalized Nadar community, were inspired to fight against caste oppression and demand greater social and political rights. The movement's emphasis on social equality and justice had a lasting political impact, particularly in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu, where it mobilized large sections of the population to participate in social reform and political activism.<sup>20</sup>

The influence of the Ayyavazhi Movement extended to the Justice Party and the broader Non-Brahmin Movement, both of which sought to challenge Brahminical dominance and secure political representation for non-Brahmin communities. The movement's emphasis on social justice and the upliftment of marginalized communities influenced the policies of later political parties, including the Dravidian parties, which adopted similar principles of social reform and anti-casteism.<sup>21</sup>

### **Cultural and Religious Organizations in Modern Tamil Politics**

The legacy of religious and cultural organizations continues to shape Tamil Nadu's political landscape today. The promotion of Tamil identity, regional autonomy, and social justice remains central to the political discourse in the state. Political parties like the DMK and AIADMK have carried forward the ideals of these movements by implementing policies that prioritize the welfare of marginalized communities, promote the Tamil language, and resist perceived cultural domination from the North. In addition, religious organizations continue to play a significant role in Tamil Nadu's socio-political fabric. Many religious institutions, particularly those associated with social reform, continue to advocate for policies that promote equality and social justice. The involvement of religious leaders in social welfare activities, such as education, healthcare, and disaster relief, further cements the connection between religious organizations and political change in the state.

Overall, the religious and cultural organizations in Tamil Nadu have been instrumental in shaping not only the social consciousness of the state but also its political ideologies and movements. By promoting values of equality, identity, and justice, these organizations have left an indelible mark on the state's political landscape.

### **Educational Institutions and Labor Unions in Tamil Nadu: Their Role and Political Impact**

Educational institutions and labor unions in Tamil Nadu have played crucial roles in shaping the socio-political landscape of the state. While educational institutions have been central to social reform and the promotion of Dravidian ideologies, labor unions have been instrumental in advocating for workers' rights and influencing political movements that address class inequalities. Together, they have contributed to the state's progressive policies and the empowerment of marginalized communities.

### **Educational Institutions and Social Change**

Educational institutions in Tamil Nadu, particularly those founded during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, became hubs of social and political change. Colleges such as Presidency College and Madras Christian College were critical in fostering a generation of socially conscious individuals who would later participate in political movements. These institutions played a key role in spreading the ideas of rationalism, anti-casteism, and social equality, which became central to the Dravidian movement. For example, scholars such as Periyar and C.N. Annadurai, who were both deeply influenced by educational reformers, advocated for the inclusion of education for all, particularly marginalized communities, to break down the caste barriers in society.<sup>22</sup>

The influence of educational institutions also extended to Tamil linguistic pride. The promotion of Tamil language and culture within these institutions helped consolidate the Tamil identity, which would later become a cornerstone of the political agendas of parties like the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK).

By linking education to social upliftment, these institutions became a driving force behind the progressive policies that sought to empower backward castes and communities.

### **Labor Unions and Class Struggles**

Labor unions in Tamil Nadu have also had a profound impact on the political landscape. Emerging during the early 20th century, labor unions were closely tied to the industrialization of the state, particularly in cities like Chennai (formerly Madras) and Coimbatore. The growth of industries such as textiles, railways, and plantations saw the rise of labor movements demanding better wages, working conditions, and labor rights. The Madras Labour Union, established in 1918, is one of the earliest examples of organized labor in India. It became a platform for workers to voice their grievances and challenge the exploitation of industrial laborers.<sup>23</sup>

Labor unions often had overlapping concerns with political movements, particularly those advocating for social justice. The unions worked closely with political parties like the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Dravidian parties, which supported workers' rights and labor reforms. The political activism of labor unions contributed to the implementation of progressive labor policies, such as the introduction of minimum wage laws, social security benefits, and union recognition.

In addition to their economic demands, labor unions in Tamil Nadu were also deeply involved in broader social justice movements, aligning with causes such as caste-based reservation and the fight against Brahminical dominance. As a result, labor unions became a political force in the state, ensuring that the working class was represented in policy-making and governance.

### **New Historiographical Approaches in the Study of Tamil Nadu's Political History**

Historiography, the study of how history is written and interpreted, has undergone significant changes in recent years, especially in regions like

Tamil Nadu, where the political landscape is deeply intertwined with issues of caste, language, identity, and social justice. The rise of new historiographical approaches reflects the need to move beyond traditional narratives that focused primarily on elite actors, colonial administrators, and nationalistic leaders. These new approaches have broadened the understanding of Tamil Nadu's political history by incorporating perspectives from marginalized groups, regional identities, oral traditions, and social movements.

One of the most important historiographical approaches that has influenced the study of Tamil Nadu's political history is Subaltern Studies. This framework, pioneered by historians like Ranajit Guha and Partha Chatterjee, seeks to center the experiences of those traditionally excluded from historical narratives, such as the working class, Dalits, women, and tribal communities. In Tamil Nadu, the application of subaltern historiography has led to a re-examination of political movements through the lens of caste oppression and social exclusion.

For example, the study of anti-caste movements like the Self-Respect Movement and the Justice Party has gained new depth by focusing on the experiences and agency of non-Brahmin communities. Subaltern historiography challenges earlier interpretations that viewed these movements solely through the prism of elite politics, instead highlighting how they empowered marginalized communities to assert their political and social rights. This approach also critically examines the limitations of these movements, such as their initial focus on non-Brahmins while often sidelining the voices of Dalits and women.<sup>24</sup>

By focusing on the voices of the oppressed, subaltern historians have transformed the understanding of Tamil Nadu's political history from one dominated by a few influential leaders to a more complex narrative involving mass mobilization and grassroots activism. These scholars have emphasized the role of Dalit leaders like Iyothee Thass and Pakkuvayan, who articulated early forms of anti-caste ideology and critiqued both colonial and Brahminical

oppression long before the emergence of mainstream Dravidian politics.<sup>25</sup>

### **Oral History and the Use of Folklore**

Another key historiographical approach gaining prominence in Tamil Nadu is the use of oral history and folklore to reconstruct political narratives. Tamil Nadu has a rich tradition of oral storytelling, folk songs, and ballads that have preserved the collective memory of communities, particularly those who have been marginalized in written records. The inclusion of oral histories in the historiographical process allows for a more inclusive and democratic form of history writing, as it captures the experiences of communities that have been left out of elite-driven historical accounts.

Oral histories have been particularly useful in documenting the political activities of rural and subaltern groups, whose contributions to Tamil Nadu's political history are often overlooked. For instance, oral accounts from rural Dalit communities have shed light on the grassroots mobilization during land reforms and anti-caste movements, offering perspectives that are absent from official records. Similarly, the inclusion of folk songs and oral narratives related to figures like Periyar and Kattabomman provides a richer, more diverse understanding of these leaders' impact on Tamil society and politics.<sup>26</sup>

This approach has also allowed for a rethinking of historical events from the perspective of everyday people, rather than from the standpoint of political elites. For instance, the anti-Hindi agitation of the 1930s and 1960s, typically understood through political speeches and legislative records, is reinterpreted through oral testimonies as a broader cultural movement that involved ordinary citizens in the fight for linguistic and regional identity. Oral histories thus bring forth the collective action of communities and their resistance to cultural and linguistic hegemony, offering a more nuanced understanding of Tamil Nadu's political landscape.<sup>27</sup>

### **Cultural History and the Role of Identity Politics**

Another important historiographical shift has been the rise of cultural history, which explores how identity—whether based on language, caste, or religion—has shaped political movements in Tamil Nadu. This approach moves beyond the study of political events and actors to explore the cultural symbols, rituals, and every day practices that have influenced political ideologies and affiliations. In Tamil Nadu, where language and regional identity have played a central role in political mobilization, cultural history has been especially relevant.

The Dravidian movement, for example, cannot be fully understood without examining the cultural and linguistic pride that fueled its rise. Historians employing a cultural history approach have explored how the promotion of Tamil language, literature, and arts became a political tool for mobilizing support and resisting North Indian (Aryan) cultural dominance. The symbolic significance of the Tamil language, and its portrayal as the carrier of a distinct and ancient civilization, helped create a sense of regional identity that was central to the political platforms of the DMK and AIADMK.<sup>28</sup>

Cultural historians also examine how festivals, cinema, and public spaces have been used to reinforce political ideologies. The use of cinema, for instance, has been a crucial element of Dravidian political strategies. Scholars have explored how films starring political leaders like M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) and Jayalalithaa helped shape political discourse and identity in Tamil Nadu. By examining how political narratives were constructed through cultural symbols, rituals, and media, this historiographical approach provides deeper insights into the relationship between culture and politics in the state.<sup>29</sup>

### **Intersectionality and Feminist Historiography**

The incorporation of intersectionality and feminist historiography into the study of Tamil Nadu's political history is another emerging trend. Intersectionality, a concept developed by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, emphasizes the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression, such as caste, gender, and class. Feminist historians in Tamil Nadu have employed this framework to

examine how women from marginalized communities have navigated political spaces and contributed to social and political movements.

While women like Moovalur Ramamirtham and Rukmini Lakshmipathi have long been recognized for their roles in political and social reform, feminist historiography delves deeper into how caste and gender intersected in their activism. This approach also highlights the contributions of Dalit women and working-class women, whose political struggles have often been sidelined in mainstream historical narratives. Feminist historians argue that Tamil Nadu's political history cannot be fully understood without recognizing the diverse experiences of women, particularly those from marginalized communities, who were instrumental in shaping political ideologies and movements.<sup>30</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This study highlights the importance of incorporating non-political organizations into the historiography of Tamil Nadu, revealing a richer and more nuanced understanding of the region's political landscape. By moving beyond traditional narratives that focus primarily on elite figures and formal political movements, we can recognize the significant contributions of grassroots organizations, social reform movements, cultural institutions, and labor unions in shaping political consciousness and activism.

Through frameworks such as Subaltern Studies, oral history, cultural history, and feminist historiography, this research emphasizes the voices of marginalized communities and the role of cultural identity in political mobilization. These approaches

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illuminate how non-political organizations have advocated for social justice, championed the rights of the oppressed, and fostered a sense of community among diverse groups in Tamil Nadu.

Moreover, the findings underscore the interconnectedness of culture, identity, and politics, suggesting that a comprehensive understanding of Tamil Nadu's political history must consider the diverse experiences and struggles of all communities. By acknowledging the influence of non-political actors, this study contributes to a more inclusive historiography that reflects the complexities and dynamism of Tamil Nadu's political environment. In conclusion, recognizing the significance of non-political organizations invites further exploration into how these entities shape political discourse and social change. This research not only enriches the historical narrative of Tamil Nadu but also sets the stage for future inquiries into the evolving relationship between culture and politics in the region.

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