Chapter - III
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CONSOLIDATION AND RISE OF DEPRESSED CLASSES

The Depressed Classes occupied the lowest stratum in the Tamil society. They were segregated in the outside of villages and were denied the basic civic rights needed for their daily survival as human beings. They were almost allowed to live in the society without rights. They were in the Hindu society, but were out of the society too. Their leaders thought of forming organizations and to attain the civic rights necessary to the Depressed People. Before starting the organizations, the Depressed Class leaders ventilated their grievances through humble persuasions and petitions but could not achieve the desired goals.

Advaidananda Sabha

The earliest organization associated with the Depressed classes was Advaidananda Sabha, established by C.Iyothee Thass at Nigiris in 1870. He had two-fold objectives; one, opposition to the proselytizing activities of the Christian missionaries; two to explore the emancipatory potentials of Advitic tradition undermining varna and caste discriminations. Later in 1881, he sought to intervene in the census process and demanded that the aboriginal and depressed Communities be recorded as ‘Original Tamils’ or ‘Adi-Tamils’ or Poorva Tamizhargal’ and this was followed by a declaration in 1886 that the original inhabitants of this area was not Hindus.¹

Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha

Some learned scholars, businessmen and social workers belonging to the Depressed Class community formed an organization called “Adi-Dravida

¹ Revathi, V., Tamizhgathin Dalit Arasiyal Munnodigal, (Tamil), Pondicherry, 1977, pp.31-32.
Mahajana Sabha” at Chennai on 22 December 1892. This organization was registered under Act XXI of 1860 formally as “The Madras Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha”. This Sabha was the pioneer socio-political organization of Depressed Classes. It was organised to raise the social, moral and intellectual status of the Depressed Classes. It integrated all the associations of the Depressed Classes, and was registered on November 8, 1928 as “The All India Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha”. The Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha was constituted on the basis of a constitution, which was drawn up on democratic lines. The Sabha had hundreds of branches, located in the rural areas. Membership to the Sabha was open to individuals belonging to any Depressed Classes of above eighteen years of age. The executive committee took the responsibility of implementing the resolutions passed in the conferences and forwarded them to the government for favourable action. The branches of the Sabha were affiliated to the head office and there were several units all over Tamil Nadu. The Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha maintained a service army and a scout wing for regulating its affairs. The service army was a special wing of the Sabha and the members were mostly young people. The service army was entrusted with the responsibility of safe-guarding the rights and interests of the Depressed Classes. It was also the task of this army to arrange for agitations and demonstrations. The headquarters of the Sabha was at Nungambakkam in Chennai.


The major objectives of this Sabha were framed pointing at the development of the Depressed Classes. The Sabha was an eye-opener to the Depressed Classes. The Sabha decided to organise their own people and to educate them in a proper manner. In order to uplift their people, the Sabha came forward to publish Journals, books and pamphlets on various subjects such as political, social, scientific, and economic and literature. The Sabha encouraged the intellectuals and scholars to publish their works on various fields. The office bearers of the Sabha were entrusted with the work to organise and hold public meetings at various places on the many burning issues of the Depressed Classes. To make the illiterate Depressed Class people to became aware of their own deplorable condition, the Sabha planned to open and maintain libraries and free reading rooms and night schools. With these objectives the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha was organised in a better manner enabling the members to participate in its activities.

The frontline leaders who worked for the formation and successful functioning of the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha were P.V. Subramaniyam (1859-1936), R. Srinivasan (1860-1945), P.M. Madurai Pillai (1858-1913), M.C. Rajah (1863-1947), R. Veeraiyan (1882-1938), and J. Shiva Shanmugam Pillai (1901-1975).

P.V. Subramaniyam, was the life president of the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha. The very desire of P.V. Subramaniyam, was that all the Depressed Class people should have basic education. He encouraged them by offering financial assistance to go to schools. He himself started schools and bore the expenditure for conducting meetings and conferences to awaken the Depressed Classes. He attempted to remove the hurdles faced by the Depressed Classes.

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Classes in day to day activities by making appeals to the Governor and Viceroy. The next notable champion of the cause of the Depressed Classes was R. Srinivasan (1860-1945). He regularly visited the settlements of the Depressed Classes and awakened them to realize the necessity of education, to be hygienic, wear clean dress and give up eating dead animals. In 1892, he started a newspaper Paraiyan to ventilate the grievances of his men. He suggested ways and means for their amelioration and fought for his people. In recognition of his selfless services he was awarded with the title Rao Sahib on 20 February 1926.¹⁰

R.Veeraiyan, another Depressed Class leader from Kongu region led his people inside the post offices and other public places to which they were forbidden entry by tradition. He laboured a lot for his people through the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha and participated in many of its activities. Equal to the service of R.Srinivasan, M.C.Rajah worked for the Depressed Classes. Since his early days he rendered services as the secretary of the State Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha.¹¹ His book Oppressed Hindus (1925) ventilated the hardships of the Depressed Classes and prescribed ways for their elevation. He succeeded in persuading Paddison, the first Labour Commissioner to preside over the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha Conference which was held at Chidambaram.¹² He was the first to put forward the suggestion for separate electorates to the Depressed Classes and on political situation, he changed his stand for joint electorates.

During the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha served as a beacon of light to guide the


¹¹ Government of Madras, G.O.No.817, Law (General) Department, 25 March 1922.

Depressed Classes. The Sabha was an instrument which turned the attention of government towards the plight of the Depressed Classes. It fought against the social atrocities perpetrated on the Depressed Classes. It was a very popular organization representing a major proportion of the Depressed Classes. The Sabha organized periodical conferences in Madras as well as in the districts. These conferences were presided over by eminent public personalities who worked for the uplift of Depressed Classes. These personalities included not only leaders from the Depressed Class community but also the public spirited leaders from other castes. The Sabha made frequent representation to government through their petitions and memorandums for the redress of their grievances.\(^{13}\)

The Sabha demanded that a legislation to punish those who ridiculed the Depressed Class people by calling caste name. As education was considered a key to the path of social progress, the Sabha vehemently opposed the indifferent attitude of the caste-Hindus towards the education of Depressed Classes and requested the government to open schools at quarters of Depressed Classes. The Sabha pleaded for the proper representation of the Depressed Classes in the local bodies like village panchayats and municipalities. To protect the civic rights of the Depressed Classes, the Sabha demanded that the Depressed Class people should not be prevented from drawing water for drinking purpose from all the public wells and tanks. These views, grievances, expectations and aspirations were published in different journals.\(^{14}\) The Sabha while expressing its opinion on "The Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms" of 1918 observed that we should particularly protest against education being vested in the hands of Ministers who would look after the interests of their respective communities.

The Depressed Class leaders like M.C.Rajah spearheaded the move to change the nomenclature of the Paraiyas to Adi-Dravidas. In fact, as

\(^{13}\) Mohan, P.E., *op.cit.*, p.71.

\(^{14}\) Marimuthu, E., *op.cit.*, p.52.
early as 1892, the Depressed People had been agitating for this change. In 1917 a deputation of the Depressed Classes leaders presented a memorandum to E.S. Montagu and Chelmsford asking for a change in the name of the Paraiyas. In 1922, M.C. Rajah while moving a resolution for the change in the nomenclature of the depressed classes made a forceful and powerful speech advancing valid arguments in support of his plea. 'Paraiya' and 'Panchama' referred to the Depressed People and according to M.C. Rajah they were nothing but the references to denote the outcaste people. He argued that the Depressed Class people were the original inhabitants and the preservers of the original Adi-Dravidan civilization. The resolution was carried on 20 January 1922 and the government issued an order on 25 March 1922 directing the use of the term 'Adi-Dravida' in Tamil districts and the term 'Adi-Andhra' in Telugu districts in place of names like Panchama and Paraiya and it was not fully enforced until 1924.

The Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha under the leadership of M.C. Rajah agitated for adequate representation for the Depressed Classes in the legislative council and local bodies. The Sabha vehemently opposed the principle of nomination of members to the council. The Sabha demanded communal representation in the State Legislature, the Central Assembly, and the Council of States and requested the Governor to establish a separate department to look after the welfare of the Depressed Classes.

In May 1926, the tenth conference of the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha was held in Madras under the presidency of R. Veerian and it urged the Governor of Madras to appoint a commission to investigate into the condition of the Depressed People. In the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha meeting held in Madras in 1928, a number of resolutions were passed by which the total attention of the government was drawn towards the pitiable condition of the

16. Ibid.
Depressed Classes. It reiterated its earlier demand that the term Adi-Dravida should be used and that more members of the Depressed Classes should be appointed by the government. The twelfth conference of the Sabha was held at Madras in 1929 which appealed to the government to appoint a Depressed Class member to represent the Indian Labour Conference. The Conference urged the government to take immediate steps for the creation of separate departments in all the provinces to implement ameliorative measures for the welfare of the Depressed Classes. It also requested the government to appoint a separate commission to look into the problems of Depressed Classes.\textsuperscript{17} Due to the vigorous activities of the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha the Paraiahs of the northern Tamil Nadu were highly awakened. They co-operated with their leaders to gain political overtures.

**Dravida Mahajana Sabha**

C.Iyothee Thass, a Paraya by birth, was a great Tamil scholar. His writings establish him as a person well acquainted with Sanskrit, Pali and English. He was well versed in the philosophical thoughts of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity. He founded Dravida Mahajana Sabha in 1891 at Nilgiris. He emerged as the leader of the Depressed Classes and worked strongly against the practice of caste system and the atrocities committed on the helpless Depressed people. The Sabha stressed equal treatment to the Depressed people in the public places, and demanded reservation in the job opportunities and concessions and facilities in education for the uplift of the Depressed Class people. The conference of the Dravida Mahajana Sabha was held on 1 December 1891 at Ooty. Ten resolutions were passed. They were as follows:

1. There is no basis to call this community the Paraiahs. But still, they are addressed contemptuously as Pariah offending their sentiments. Besides illiterate and uncouth individuals calling those rich in education,

\textsuperscript{17} Marimuthu,E., *op.cit.*, pp.52-53.
culture and wealth, contemptuously as Pariahs, causes deep hurt in the latter and actually degrade them. Therefore, a law should be enacted so that those who address them contemptuously as Pariahs would be brought within the ambit of crime of defamation.

2. So that the poor of this community may progress, special schools for them be organized, teachers from this community be appointed and the pupils' fee be reduced to half.

3. That among the pupils of this community who pass out of the Matriculation entry examination be chosen and scholarship be given to them.

4. That those who pass out successfully be supported by employing them in the Government offices of Tamil Nadu.

5. That there be no obstacle to their employment to any position, according to their education and good moral character.

6. That in Municipal Corporation and Village Associations, even though not capable of paying much tax, representatives be chosen by this community, on the basis of education and character and co-opted so that they could speak with knowledge about the communities' problems and difficulties.

7. That the present arrangement in jails, of making the Parayars do all the lowly jobs, according to rule 464 of jail Code be changed.

8. That this community be allowed access to all the common wells and tanks of this country without any obstacle.

9. That prohibitions against the members of this community to enter or sit in those offices and courts where Hindus are employed, be removed and that petitions they bring be received inside the offices and prompt justice be meted out to them.
10. That in those villages where the community is in majority, responsible persons be employed in Munsif and Manikaran offices and when the Collector visits the villages, direct access to them be granted, for obtaining justice.\textsuperscript{18}

Thus the ten resolutions demanded civic rights, educational concessions, removal of certain objectionable rules in the Jail manual, economic advancement of depressed classes, due share in the appointment in government services including that of village offices.\textsuperscript{19} The copy of the ten resolutions was sent to M. Veera Raghava Achariyar who was then General – Secretary of INC. The INC had not sent any reply to the Dravida Mahajana Sabha.

To create awareness among the Depressed Classes, Iyothee Thass registered one weekly news magazine, \textit{Oru Paisa Tamizhan} registered under the number M.673 on 6 June 1907 at Rayapettah in Madras.\textsuperscript{20} He launched it on 19 June 1907 and printed it at Buddhist press of one Adimoolam. \textit{Oru Paisa Tamizhan} became simply \textit{Tamizhan} and came to acquire its own printing press, the Gautama Press, through a generous contribution from the Marikuppam – Kolar branch society, on 26 August 1908.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{18} Tamizhan, 14 October 1908 and 15 September 1909.


\textsuperscript{20} Tamizhan, 2 December 1914, p.1; Chezhian, P., \textit{Iyothee Thassa Pandhitar –Oru Arimugam}, (Tamil), 1995, p.7

\textsuperscript{21} Tamizhan was continuously published till the death of Iyothee Thass on 5 May 1914. On Wednesday, it failed to appear for the first time in its seven years of life; the subsequent Wednesdays too were blank; and finally on Wednesday, June 17, when it did appear, it carried a different print line: ‘edited by C.I. Pattabiraman’. As a son of Iyothee Thass, Pattabiraman run the news magazine from 17 June 1914 to 26 August 1915. Later Kolar Gold-Field G. Appaduraiyar published it from 7 July 1926 to 27 June 1934.
Iyothee Thass involved in the educational efforts of the Depressed Classes. His meeting and association with Henry Steele Olcott was indeed a happy coincidence and became instrumental in the organization of Olcott Free Panchama Schools in Madras. He invited Miss Mary Sarah and Palmor from America for the opening of the schools at Kodambakkam (1898), Theynampet (1899), Mylapore (1901) and Krishnampet (1901) in Madras. He preached Buddhism, morality and education among the Depressed people. He strongly opposed the conversion of the tea estate labourers in Ooty. After the demise of Iyothee Thass, John Ratnam and T.M. Nair looked after the entire works of the Dravida Mahajana Sabha between 1914 and 1917.

This organization was the outcome of a split in the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha. The split took place when the caste name Paraiah was changed to Adi-Dravida. The Sabha was organized in Madras and it collected an admission fee of Rs. 3/- from each member. It was open to all the Depressed Classes with certain conditions. The members of the Sabha protested against calling one section of the Pariahs as Adi-Dravidas and they cited the memorandum given by the Dravida Mahajana Sangam, Rangoon, formerly the branch of the Pariah Mahajana Sabha to the Viceroy in 1917, claiming themselves to be Dravidians. It was V.G.Vasudeva Pillai, who submitted this memorandum. A signature campaign was followed in the South Arcot, North Arcot and Chengleput districts opposing to call the Panchamas as Adi-Dravidas in Tamil Districts and Adi-Andhras in Telugu districts. These men demanded

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22. Tamizhan, 6 June 1912.


that they may be called Dravidas. The government’s stand then was to call any person of the community by the name it preferred.

The Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha and the Dravida Mahajana Sabha were the two associations which actively conducted periodical meetings independently and protested against the granting of home rule. The two organizations were keen on social reform other than constitutional advancement. The leaders of the Sabha viewed that unless and until caste distinctions were removed and the Depressed Classes treated, better India could not dream of either self government or home rule. In 1917, the Sabha passed a resolution stating that the immediate grant of home rule to India could be injurious to the masses of India in common and to the Depressed Classes in particular.

In 1917 the leaders of the Dravida Mahajana Sabha decided to amalgamate it with Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha. The amalgamation meeting was held at Spark Tank road, Chetput, Chennai. It was arranged by John Ratnam and M.C. Rajah. T.M.Nair in his special address noted the union between the non-Brahmins and Depressed people and recollected the ancient glory of the Depressed Classes. On 24 October 1917 at a meeting held at Sambudass Street, Chennai the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha and Paraiah Mahajana Sabha amalgamated. The editor of Dravida Pandian, John Ratnam presided over the joining function. In the meeting the leaders like M.C.Rajah, Madurai Pillai, Munisami Pillai and many others participated and expressed their happiness over the union of the two major organizations of the Depressed classes and also spoke about various needs of the Depressed Classes especially

27. Nambi Arooran, op.cit, p.53.
the entry of their pupils in various Hindu educational institutions and starting
of new schools for the Depressed Class students.  

The Dravida Mahajana Sabha integrated the Adi-Dravidas under the able
guidance of C. Iyothee Thass, and the Sabha also instilled among the Paraiah the
feelings the Adi-Dravidas, the early Dravidas and Adi-Tamils.

A.V.Panchama Charity Institution

In 1882 the A.V. Panchama Charity Institution was established. The
objectives of the Institution was to uplift Panchamas through the
establishment of free educational institutions, co-operative societies,
panchayats etc., O. Rajavelu Chetti was Secretary and Lady Hannah
Arokianathan was the superintendent of Panchama Charity Institution.  This
philanthropic institution gave timely monetary help to the needy Panchamas
and paved the way for their elevation.

Paraiyar Mahajana Sangam

In 1891 Paraiyar Mahajana Sangam was founded. Srinivasan was
the founder of the Paraiyar Mahajana Sangam in 1891. The first meeting was
held at Weslian Mission, Royapettai, on 23 December 1893. The second
meeting was held at Victoria Hall on 7 August 1895. These meetings claimed
the previous rights of the Depressed Classes. It also worked for the
emancipation of the Paraiah from many ills in the society. Its founder, by
starting the Paper Parayan brought political and civic awareness among the
Depressed Classes.

30 Dravidan, 26 October 1917, p.6


Depressed Class Mission

Depressed Class Mission was established at Mangalore in 1907. The object of the mission was to ameliorate the condition of the Panchama classes and other backward people. The object of the Association was achieved through starting schools and other institutions for promoting education, industry, economy and temperance among the Depressed People by providing them with residential quarters and helping them to build home needs. The mission was founded and organized by K. Ranga Rao who handed over the management to the Servants of Indian Society. The mission had under its management nine free day schools for boys and girls; nine night schools for young men; a special English school for teachers and old students; a free boarding house; an industrial workshop; a co-operative credit society; nine centres for promoting temperance, economy and social service; and “colonies” for houseless families. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, M. S. Ekambara Rao and A. B. Shetty acted as Secretary, Treasurer and Joint-Secretary respectively. This Mission spread educational knowledge and moral values among the Depressed people and brought changes among them.

Depressed Class Mission Society

Depressed Class Mission Society was another organization established in 1909. It was located at 97, Anna Pillai Street, George Town, Madras. The object of this mission was to elevate the social and moral condition of the backward classes by promoting education, providing work, remedying their social disabilities and preaching to them higher ideals of religion, morality, personal character and good citizenship. G. Narayanaswami Chetti was the secretary of the mission. As a service oriented society it committed a lot of ameliorative works which raised the conditions of the Depressed Classes to a large extent.


34. Ibid., Part II, Madras, p.289.
Organizations of the Pallas

The issue of caste exclusiveness raised by the European Christian missionaries and emigrants caught the imagination of ‘polluting castes’ of Tamil Nadu. The religious converts and repatriates awakened the Pallas, a division of Depressed Classes. Bhu Vaishya Indira Kula Sangam was the first organized effort of such awakened Pallas. The founder of this association was Perumal Peter who was an emigrant and organized the first conference of the Pallas in 1922. Representatives from 150 villages of Ramanathapuram district met at Sengottaipatti in Muthukulathur taluk. This caste conference urged the concerned people to give up the caste related obligations such as drum and beating, beating the breast by Depressed Class women in funerals of caste-Hindus. The Sangam was formally registered in 1923.35

In the Legislative Council some nominated seats are reserved for the Depressed Classes. Adi-Dravida and Adi-Andhra. The Pallas who lived in large number in southern districts of Tamil Nadu organized a conference of Devendra Kula Mahajana Sabha on 23 April 1924 in Settidayanpatti, Ramnad district and requested the government for their representation in the Legislative Council.36 In the conference they called their organization as Devendra Kula Mahajana Sabha under the leadership of S.Subramaniya Moopanar, a member of taluk board, Tiruchirappalli and Palani Andi Havildar. This Sabha functioned for the welfare of the Pallas. The association wanted that the government should provide separate wells for them as they were not beef eaters. Other demands were as usual related to political, economic and social welfare.37

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35. Alex, V., Karisalil Oor Oorani, (Tamil), Madurai, 1995, pp.1-50.


In the context of Great Economic Depression, the Pallas of Tirunelveli gave vent to their association. Indira Kulathiba Vellalar Aikya Sangam spanning its activities in the Tirunelveli district was set up in 1933. The objectives of the Sangam were: (a) to protect their kinsmen from caste oppression; (b) to create awareness amongst them to take education; and (c) to motivate them to pursue trade and business and to lobby for basic physical facilities in Pallar villages. The Sangam became defunct shortly after its birth. This was because of the repression let loose by oppressive Zamindars of Tirunelveli.\textsuperscript{38} The organizations of the Pallas brought their grievances to the rulers and exposed their pathetic conditions. Their organizations worked for the cause and interest of the Pallas who lived in large number in southern districts of Tamil Nadu.

\textbf{Arundhatiya Mahajana Sabha 1920}

Like the Pariahs and Pallas among the Depressed Classes, the Telugu speaking Arundhatiyars of Madras city started their association. Their leader L.C.Gurusami established Arundhatiya Mahajana Sabha in 1920 at Komaleeswaranpet, Madras to cater to the needs of his people. Gurusami was a significant personality, and after his death, the Sabha lost its vital function because this community was unable to produce a capable leader like Gurusami.\textsuperscript{39} The Sabha insisted that the Arundhatiyas were the Telugu speaking minority people and they were also Depressed Class people and from the beginning it demanded special privileges to their people. It brought awakening among them about the basic civic necessities.


\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Madras Year Book, 1923}, p.287; Mohan, P.E., \textit{op.cit.}, pp.49-50.
Madras Valluvar Mahajana Sangam 1935

This Sangam was started in 1935 and represented the cause of Valluvas. The field of specialisation of Valluvas was astrology and native medicine.\(^{40}\) The first provincial conference was held on 15 September 1935. In the conference of the Valluvas resolutions were passed demanding representation in local and provincial bodies and greater representation in public services and chances in educational field. In successive conferences, they passed resolutions demanding preferential treatment and greater representation. The Sangam also requested opportunities in public services. In 1955, the name of this Sangam was changed as South India Valluvar Mahajana Sangam, Madras.\(^{41}\) This Sangam brought unity among the Valluvas, a priestly class among the Depressed Classes. The scattered Valluvas in different districts were brought into oneness. It was the major achievement of this sangam.

Thus a great awakening among the different sections of Depressed Classes happened. The non-Brahmins also got awakening and received due recognition on the patronage extended by the British. The lukewarm attitude of Indian National Congress (INC) towards the Depressed Classes also shifted their loyalty towards the British in whom they have found a saviour and protector. As their interest was well looked after by the Labour Department, a brain-child of the British government, the envied Justicites began to show their animosity towards every welfare activity of the untouchables. In consequence the untouchable leaders openly criticized, reviled and made virulent attack on the policies, manners and selfish motives of the Justice Party and its leaders. Eventhough the British pre-occupied with imperialist designs, they did not neglect this oppressed section of the society. Due to the extension of the British

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\(^{41}\) Mohan,P.E., *op.cit.*, pp.50-51.
support, the political movement of the untouchables gradually detached itself from the non-Brahmin Movement, especially the Justice party with which it had identity for years.

National Problem

In the Imperial Legislative Council on 16 March 1916, Dadabhoy, a member moved a resolution which pleaded the government that "measures be devised with the help, if necessary, of a small representative Committee of officials and non-officials for amelioration in the moral, material and educational condition of what are known as the 'Depressed Classes' and that as a preliminary step, the local government and administration should be invited to formulate schemes with regard to local conditions". In his speech, he urged that provincial government should be encouraged to adopt a definite policy of improving the material prosperity of depressed classes who constituted a major strength of population. He further observed that '..... unless the stimulus comes from the Central government the provincial administration will not undertake any proper scheme of reforms. Most of the members of the Council unanimously stressed that the problem was of national significance. Considering to give effect to the resolution, the Imperial Government of India circulated the matter to all the provincial governments in order to know the works earlier done and the remaining works to be done. The replies of the Provincial governments for the first time revealed the magnitude and gravity of the problem.

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Recommendation of Board of Revenue

The government of India was paying attention on this burning problem, and the Board of Revenue after a careful consideration of the problem of the Depressed Classes recommended that “however liberal might be the attitude of the Government towards Depressed Classes and whatsoever might be the facilities created for the improvement of this condition, the desired effect could not be produced as long as there was no separate agency to carry out the policy of the Government in this respect. Proposals for improving the condition of these classes have in the past, from time to time received the approval of Government, but owing to the lack of special organisational effort they have failed of effect. There is generally indifference and often hostility to measures calculated to uplift the Depressed Classes and if the Collector is not keenly interested and has not the force of will to carry such measures through, they became entirely inoperative owing to the persuasive obstruction or indifference of his subordinate. It is therefore essential that a special officer with a suitable staff under him should be appointed as protector of the Depressed Classes”. An officer, the Board of Revenue added, would “impart continuity to all the remedial measures which Government had already sanctioned or may sanction in the future and prevent good intentions of the Government from being rendered ineffective by local indifference or opposition”. In supporting its stand the Board of Revenue further said that “Along with political reforms social reforms should be boosted more vigorously than before, so that the depressed classes may be enabled to make their voice heard in politics and that may not be left a helpless prey to the higher classes who at present monopolised education and with it prosperity and power. Really this step was one of the first


concerned actions of the British Government to improve the lot of the Depressed Classes in the Madras Presidency.\textsuperscript{48}

\textbf{Department of Labour}

In 1919, G.F. Paddison, a senior officer of the Indian Civil Service was posted as the first Special Officer\textsuperscript{49} for a term of two years to deal with measures of improving the Depressed Classes, and Aboriginals.\textsuperscript{50} G.F. Paddison was designated as ‘Protector of the Depressed Classes’ or ‘Commissioner of Labour’.\textsuperscript{51} To assist him a Deputy Commissioner of Labour was appointed in 1920. A Labour Advisory Board was composed of one European (Gilbert Slater), one Brahmin (K. Ramanujachariar) and one Adi-Dravida (M.C. Rajah) in the same year.\textsuperscript{52} Thus a new Department of Labour came into function since 1920 to cater to the needs of the Depressed Classes. The functions of this department were mostly concerned with the welfare of labourers and Depressed Classes - (i) the Administration of the Factories Act, \textsuperscript{53} (ii) the Management and Control of Criminal Tribes Settlement and (iii) the emigration of labour.\textsuperscript{54}

In the implementation of the Factories Act, the Commissioner of Labour was

\textsuperscript{48} Rajah, M.C., \textit{op.cit.}, p.60.

\textsuperscript{49} Government of Madras, G.O.No.643, Revenue Department, 17 March 1920.

\textsuperscript{50} Government of Madras, G.O.No.748, Revenue Department, 29 March 1919.

\textsuperscript{51} Government of Madras, G.O.No.271, Revenue Department, 29 February 1920; G.O.No.2254, Law (General) Department, 14 September 1920.


\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{54} G.O.No.2254, Law (General) Department, Government of Madras, 14 September 1920.
assisted by one Chief Inspector, three Inspectors and one Assistant Inspector. The other functions of this Labour Commissioner were to study the economic conditions of Depressed Classes and submit proposal to the Government for the improvement, to see that philanthropic bodies working in the field received such help from the Government as required and to promote education and also to look after the standard of living of these classes through allotting lands for cultivation, sites for building houses and providing better water supply. Department of Factories which was under the direct control of Board of Revenue was replaced to the in-charge of Commissioner of Labour with effect from 23 February 1920. G.F. Paddison was able to devote his whole time to the special duty from the middle of October 1919, as, owing to the shortage of officers. As a first step, he made a comprehensive survey of the work which had been already done and line on which future development should proceed. Concurrently with this work, he also supervised and directed the work of the special duty collectors in Thanjavur and other districts and of the officers-in-charge of criminal settlements and watched the interest of the Depressed Classes throughout the Presidency.

**Attitude of the Justice Ministry**

The primary duties of the Assistant Commissioners of Labour were: organizing co-operative credit societies for the acquisition of house sites and building of houses for general purposes, buying and selling commodities, providing civic necessities, providing communication facilities, preparing

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schemes for the colonization, promoting education by starting schools, and assisting members of them in all possible ways. However, little progress was attained in the direction of the promotion of education and sanitation amongst the Depressed Classes largely on account of lack of funds.\textsuperscript{59} Ever since the Labour Department was created, the Justice party was not in favour of it. \textsuperscript{60} The Legislative Council members especially O. Thanikachalam Chetti tried his best to abolish the offices and programmes of the Labour Department and to reduce its financial aids. He also wished to post an Adi-Dravida as a Commissioner of Labour.\textsuperscript{61} M.C. Rajah condemned the move and said that the ruling party was trying to post an Adi-dravida as Commissioner with the aim to sing chorus to the unscrupulous ruling party which was trying to twist, distort and misuse facts.\textsuperscript{62}

In his bid, O. Thanikachalam Chetti moved and got a resolution in the Council to abolish the offices of Personal Assistant to Labour Commissioner\textsuperscript{63} and other Assistant Labour Commissioners who had rendered exemplary services.\textsuperscript{64} Provoked on the cynical attitude of the stalwarts of the Justice Party, M.C. Rajah spoke at the Second South Indian Adi-Dravida Congress held on 21 and 22 July 1923 at Kovilpatti, Tirunelveli,\textsuperscript{65} thus:

"Owing to the abolition of the Four Labour Assistant Commissioners, the work

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{60} Rajah, M.C., \textit{op. cit.}, p.61.


\textsuperscript{62} Rajah, M.C., \textit{op. cit.}, pp.66-67.

\textsuperscript{63} K. Sunderacharlu was appointed as Personal Assistant to G.F. Paddison, the Commissioner of Labour. (G.O. No. 2121, Law (General) Department, Government of Madras, 24 July 1934, p.60.)

\textsuperscript{64} Report on the Administration of the Madras Presidency, 1922-1923, Madras, 1923, p.16.

\textsuperscript{65} Rajah, M.C., \textit{op. cit.}, p.64."
on behalf of the Depressed classes has come to a standstill. When the resolution asking Government to abolish those posts was discussed, it was fought hard, but the party in power would not condescend to listen to the arguments, but standing on the high platform of a majority passed the resolution to abolish the four Assistant Labour Commissioners. We hoped that the non-Brahmin party would safe-guard our interests and in that hope we gave them support in spite of the warnings of the Brahmins and now we see that we are like the rider in the Tamil proverb who trusting a mud horse got into the stream only to find the mud horse dissolve into dust under him and himself left to swim or sink ...... in the name of Justice and democracy they (Justice party) will go down. I do not wish them this and end, but if it comes they will have to thank themselves. Now the abolition of the four Assistant Labour Commissioners had brought in a deadlock in the Labour Department.

As the Assistant Labour Commissioners who served since 1920 in Thanjavur, Godawari and Chengleput districts were removed, special staff members were appointed. The work of the Labour Department was extended to the South Arcot district in 1921. But after the trouble in the Mill area and when the Justice Party turned against the Personal Assistant of the Labour Department and in order to get rid of him they appointed officer in the cadre of a Deputy Collector, as the Commissioner and the officers in the Deputy Tahsildar cadres as Labour officers. A District Labour officer was appointed in 1922 in the districts where special work had been commenced. They were generally selected from among Deputy Tahsildars and Tahsildars and those who had completed the Deputy Collector’s test, and appointed by the Collectors, subject to the approval of Commissioner of Labour. The subordinate labour

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68. Ibid.

staff was also appointed by the Collectors. Although this staff worked directly under the supervision of the Collectors, the Commissioner of Labour had the full power of supervision of the work of the district Labour officers both in matters of policy and detail. The Labour Department grew fast in its metamorphosis and scope.\(^70\)

On that situation, in his visit to Masulipatnam, G.F.Paddison the Labour Commissioner openly remarked that the Department has not got sufficient money which is the pre-requisite for the uplift of the Depressed Classes: “as you must depend upon yourselves and God will certainly help those who help themselves”.\(^71\) Thus G.F.Paddison clearly indicated that the allotment of fund to the Labour Department was not sufficient one. About the financial stringency, the anti-Justicites remarked that it was due to the higher salaries paid to the ministers.\(^72\) But the Dravidian an organ of the Justice Party observed that the financial stress was due to the salaries drawn by the innumerable Englishmen and Brahmins who received in thousands.\(^73\) In this connection M.C.Rajah observed that during 1921-1922 the Labour Department asked for a grant of 6.47 lakhs for labour and allied departments. This matter was discussed in the Legislative Council but the grant was reduced to one lakh. In 1922-1923 the Department budgeted for 12.25 lakhs. After the first shift in the finance Committee, the amount was cut down to 7.87 lakhs for labour and allied Departments. When this amount came before the Legislative Council, it was further reduced by 21,380. He charged that the Justice Party members, who constituted majority in the Finance Committee, in the first year of their ministry cut off the allotment of money to the Depressed Classes and in the second year, removed all the important functioning officials of the Government.

\(^70\) Saraswathi,S., op.cit., p.157.


\(^72\) F.N.R., 17 June 1922.

\(^73\) Dravidian, 8 June 1922.
and this outrageous procedure crippled all the resources of the Labour Department. 74

Advisory Committee

The Governor of Madras resolved to appoint an Advisory Committee of Depressed classes in 1923, 75 consisting of some of the members of the Legislative Council especially those who were interested in the welfare of the Depressed Classes. The Commissioner of Labour and the Secretary to the Public Works and Labour Department were ex-officio members of the Committee and A.R.Knapp was proposed to be the President of the Committee. The President was authorised to nominate to the Committee’s local members for the discussion of the local subjects. The proposed nominated members of the Committee were P.Kesava Pillai, R.Srinivasan, P.Gopalan, P.V.S.Sundaramurthi and N.Devendru Garu. The function of the Committee was expected to be merely of an advisory nature. 76 Several proposals were made in the Legislative Council to constitute such Advisory Committees in the districts with the members from each taluk to assist the District Labour officer. Such Committee, the Justice Government felt would not be as thoroughly conversant with the needs of the people as the regular labourers staff who were constantly in contact with the people. The idea of constituting the Committee with members of the Depressed Classes was also rejected by the Justice Government on the ground that suitable men and sufficient members would not be available. 77 Therefore it was also deduced that the Justicites were not interested in the welfare activities of the Depressed Classes.

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74. The budget estimate was prepared by every Department and placed before Finance Committee which constituted by majority of members in power. Thereupon, again it was placed before the Council for final decision. (Rajah, M.C., op.cit., p.68.)


76. Government of Madras, G.O.No.2917, Law (General) Department, 5 December 1923.

77. Saraswathi, S., op.cit., p. 158.
When the Government of India asked the Madras Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha to send its opinion on the report on Indian Constitutional Reforms in 1918, the latter in its view pointed out that “We are averse in the present condition of public opinion, and in the present stage of social and moral progress, and with the ideas which now rule the social relations of communities, to the establishment of dual Government in this country. We are therefore opposed to any department of the administration being transferred to popular control. We would particularly protest against education being vested with the “Ministers”. These ministers would take after the interests of their particular communities and either neglect us or train us in such a way that we may look upon them for ever as our masters.” Further, it demanded scholarships and liberal fee-remissions in the admission of their children in schools and colleges. They also demanded a net work of free hostels established throughout the Presidency for the children of Depressed Classes.

**Labour Schools**

Education was monopolised and was under the domination of the Brahmins. It was denied for a long time to the Depressed Class people. Prior to the formation of Justice Ministry the British Government increased the number of schools and a considerable amount was allotted for the growth of education every year. Further the bureaucracy was moved by the outcry of the Gokhale about the compulsory elementary education and the agitation carried on by the Congress, increased the expenditure on education year after year. When dyarchy was introduced in the Madras Presidency, education became a transferred subject and the education Department came under the control of a

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Provincial Minister. In December 1920, Lord Willingdon, the Governor of Madras appointed A. Subbarayalu Reddiar as Chief Minister who also held the education portfolio. As the Justice Ministry was bound to adopt the compulsory elementary education as initiated by British bureaucracy, the number of schools and students increased in the coming years. The Legislature of 1920s was keenly interested on the problem of the Depressed Classes and was eager to extent state aid to them in various ways. In April 1921, the educational budget was entirely rearranged to meet the needs of the time. On the resignation of A. Subbarayalu Reddiar as Minister of Education, A.P.Patro took a large number of measures for the progress of education. Due to his efforts, the elementary education Council was established in each district. But this Council did not succeed in developing elementary education to the expectation of the Government as the members of the Council showed lesser interest. But the minister noted that the scarcity of funds was the reason for failure. Notwithstanding the minister’s view, he was criticized by his die-hards. They argued that primary education should be given priority and the minister’s farce was irrelevant and inconsistent.

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83. F.N.R., 9 January 1926.


Dissatisfied at the function of the Justice Ministry, the Madras Governor entrusted the educational interest of the Depressed Classes to the Labour Department. Since the time onwards occasional controversies occurred over the Jurisdiction between the Justice Ministry and Labour Department. The Labour Department with which the promotion of elementary education of the Depressed Classes was entrusted had grown in its size. It opened separate primary schools for the Depressed Classes called ‘Labour Schools.’ When its activities multiplied a good number of such schools sprang up. The total number of these schools increased from 7,651 to 10,035 during 1922-1927.\(^8\)

**Scholarship**

In 1922, M.C. Rajah introduced a resolution, that in view of the poverty of the Adi-Dravida and other depressed classes aggravated by the hike of prices and the increased cost of living this Council recommends to the Government that “the value of the scholarship given by them at present to pupils in primary and secondary schools and students in colleges be doubled.” In supporting this resolution L.C. Gurusami observed that “Depressed Classes are generally very poor. Because of their poverty, education does not make a great way among them. Education alone will raise them from their low condition of all the facilities and benefits – nothing is as important and essential as education. Government will give all possible help to the pupils of the depressed classes even at the risk of cutting expenditure incurred in other direction – giving increased scholarships.”\(^9\) A.P. Patro, a caste–Hindu minister of education vehemently opposed the resolution.\(^1\) He remarked that “poverty was not the particular monopoly of the Adi-Dravidas or other Depressed Classes. Difficulties are common to all, Brahmin boys too. Scholarships were to pay fees but not to maintain them i.e., feeding, clothing, luxuries, etc. The

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\(^1\) Rajah, M.C., *op.cit.*, p.81.
amount being given now is more than the fees that are to be paid.” To this statement of A.P. Patro and M.C. Rajah emphatically protested. He observed that “I wonder when and where he discovered these facts, whether before or after he assumed office. If Brahmin boys are poor, why did he not press their claims as a non-Brahmin leader, and if the Depressed Classes were not the only classes suffering from the pangs of hunger, why did he and his party make a speciality of the advocacy of their claims? Does he see no difference between the poverty of the depressed classes and the poverty of the other classes? Does he not know, the poverty of the Depressed Classes is due to the age-long oppression by other classes?” Feared at the opposition raised by M.C. Rajah, the minister showed his grace in other day speech. M.C. Rajah observed this speech in the manner that “I have ever heard from the lips of A.P. Patro the responsible minister such kind of speech in this House.93

However, the resolution of M.C. Rajah was defeated. Therefore, M.C. Rajah observed that whenever he pressed the claims of the Depressed Classes, the caste-Hindus came in the way to minimize the claims of the Depressed Classes and got those resolutions defeated.94

Again in the same year, M.C. Rajah introduced another resolution, “that this Council recommends to the Government for the next five years not less than fifty percent of the scholarships awarded by the Government in educational and Industrial Institutions under their control be reserved for and given to the members of the Hindu Adi-Dravida and other depressed communities.” But this resolution was passed.95 Besides in the year M.C. Rajah introduced another resolution that candidates for S.S.L.C. examination

93 Rajah, M.C., op.cit., pp.81-83.
94 F.N.R., 12 May 1923.
belonging to the Adi-dravida and other Depressed Classes be exempted from the payment of examination fee. A.P.Patro remarked that remission will be given but a general proposition of this sort will not be possible to accept. Therefore M.C.Rajah without alternative way withdrew his resolution.  

On the other side, the Labour Department worked for the admission of the Depressed Class pupils into public schools and thereby it got a Government order. In this way the admission of pupils belonging to Depressed Classes into the schools under the public management was ordered. Separate schools were also started. Refusal to admit them was considered as denial of education to the Depressed Classes. Local bodies were warned that subsidies paid on behalf of schools under their management would be withdrawn if they did not admit the pupils of the depressed classes. At the same time, the Education Minister issued an order to the effect that the Government would render financial assistance to the local bodies that wished to impart compulsory education, only if the latter levied an education cess. Several local bodies refrained from adopting the system of imparting compulsory education on account of their unwillingness to levy an additional cess when the people were already groaning from an intolerable burden of taxation. Thus the Justice Ministry obstructed the growth of schools and admission of number of students to the extent to which they could have increased. Besides, caste prejudices were strong in some places. An extreme case was recorded in a village in North Arcot district where caste-Hindus pulled down a shed put up for the school on

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96 Ibid., pp.2123-2125.

97 Government of Madras, G.O. No.87, Education Department, 16 January 1923.


100 F.N.R., 9 January 1926.
However the Labour Department was keen that public school should be situated in places of accessible to the Depressed Classes.\footnote{Rajaraman, P., \textit{op.cit.}, p.241.}

**Hostel for Depressed Class Students**

M.C. Rajah started a hostel for Depressed Class pupils in 1921. Until then there was no hostel for the Depressed Class School going students and children. The hostel was started in February 1921 under the superintendence of M.C.Rajah for the benefit of the students of the Depressed Classes. In the beginning the strength was twelve between February and April 1921, eighteen in June, seventeen in July to October and nine in November and December 1921.\footnote{Government of Madras, G.O.No. 1247, Law (General) Department, 24 April 1923.} The hostel was run with the help of public subscriptions and the aid from the government. The Labour Department assigned a sum of Rs. 3,000 under the educational grant. The understanding between Labour Commissioner and M.C.Rajah was that M.C.Rajah should fund money to meet one third of the cost for the running of hostel because the Justice Government clearly stated that it would not undertake full financial responsibility in this matter but also stated that further allotments would not be sanctioned until the hostel could show substantial collection through private enterprise. However, M.C.Rajah furnished account aggregating to Rs. 4,594-11,9 (over and above the amount sanctioned) and urged a further grant of Rs.1,500/- by stating that he was trying to secure subscriptions and that help was urgently necessary lest he will be put to the necessity of closing the hostel completely. This plea of M.C.Rajah was recommended to the Justice Government through the Labour Commissioner but the Justice Government put aside the matter and did not look

\footnote{Report on the Administration of the Madras Presidency, 1926-1927, pp.133 -137.}
into the matter. Besides, the ongoing labour strike at Carnatic and Buckingham Mills in Madras obstructed the prosperity of running the hostel. M.C.Rajah could not collect subscription under these circumstances. Disheartened at the situation, M.C.Rajah at last closed the hostel.

G.F.Paddison, the Commissioner of Labour who was interested in the welfare activities of the Depressed Classes felt that there was no hostel in Madras for the students of the depressed classes with the abrupt end of the hostel run by M.C.Rajah. In his financial budget report for the year 1923 to the Justice Government, the Labour Commissioner urged to provide one lakh rupees for the educational activities of the Depressed Classes. It included the demand of Rs.60,000 for starting new schools for the Depressed Classes and Rs.30,000 for the scholarships to Depressed Class students who were undergoing educational and industrial training, and Rs.10,000 for the re-opening of the hostel once M.C.Rajah was running. But the re-opening of the hostel issue initiated through the Labour Commissioner envied the non-Brahmin leaders of Justicities who provided stumbling block and tried to influence the Commissioner of Labour not to take any risk on that direction. As a first step A.P.Patro objected that it was not the duty of the Labour Commissioner to involve in the opening of the hostel which was purely connected to the Education Department. Further he stated that as the Government was in the financial crisis, the Commissioner of Labour should convince the Minister of Education (A.P.Patro) and get it his co-operation in allocating fund for the running of the hostel. This view of the Education Minister clearly showed that he was not interested in the re-opening of the hostel. With this view, he also tried to discourage the Commissioner telling him that there was practical difficulty in opening a hostel on various ways. The Malas, Madigas,


Bavuris will not live together. An Adi-Dravida manager will be least competent to manage the hostel and caste disputes will arise among them. Apart from this, if the Labour Commissioner tried to arrange for different boarding houses, it will incense jealousy among them leading to clashes. Pointing out many shortcomings, the Minister also questioned the Labour Commissioner if the hostel was for the benefit of all these communities, how could the hostel be run on the worst situation. Further, A.P. Patro as a way to refuse allocation of fund to the hostel pointed out that already accusations were levelled against the Justice Government that they are partial to the Depressed Classes and were spending all available sources on them with the aim to neglect other communities, who were also economically and educationally so far worst than the Depressed Classes. In spite of these even though A.P. Patro furnished details before the Commissioner of Labour the latter firmly stood on his heels. He viewed his plan that "the hostel should be run under the control of the Government, its working should be left in the hands of some private body, if a suitable one is available; if not, arrangement will be made to supervise it by the Commissioner of Labour himself." The Commissioner of Labour accordingly urged Rs.10,000 for the re-opening of the hostel. Bowing to the mounting pressure of the Commissioner of Labour and fearing that if the Justice Party went against the interest of the Depressed Classes, the latter would not support the former, the Justice Government drawn willy-nilly to the demand of the Commissioner of Labour. Accordingly, for re-opening the hostel for Depressed Class students in Madras a sum of Rs.10,000 was sanctioned and provided. The hostel was re-opened on 1 December 1923.

108 Government of Madras, G.O.No. 2443, Law (General) Department, 6 October 1923.
109 Ibid.
110 Government of Madras, G.O.No. 1247, Law (General) Department, 24 April 1923.
111 Government of Madras, G.O.No. 2443, Law (General) Department, 6 October 1923.
Thereafter the Government began to run hostels and also provided aid to the hostels run by the private bodies. There were four hostels – the Slater Hostel at Perambur, the Sundaracharlu Hostel at Salem, the Paddison Hostel at Madras and Depressed Class Hostel at Masulipatnam.

**Labour Strike**

The Buckingham and Carnatic mills of Madras were European enterprises. On 11 May 1921, the textile workers of Carnatic Mills and on 20 June 1921, the workers of Buckingham Mills respectively went on strike claiming higher wages. M.C. Rajah persuaded P. Thiagaraya Chetty and other non-Brahmin leaders to take the leadership of the Labour Union and prevent them from involving into non-cooperation, for it was against the interest of the non-Brahmins and Government. The European business community was furious at the rise of Trade Unionism, especially under politicians' patronage. The Government of Madras was hesitant to involve in the Labour disputes partly from a lingering attachment to laissez faire, partly from lack of first-hand knowledge of industrial conditions. However, the Government often found itself drawn willy-nilly into disputes on the side of the management. At a meeting that was held on 19 June 1921, the Depressed Class workers in the presence of M.C. Rajah recalled the bitter lesson they learnt in the earlier strikes and lock-outs and decided not to give cooperation to the non-cooperators. Therefore, they wrote a letter to the President of the Madras Labour Union stating that they were extremely poor and hence could not afford to a further loss of wages by participating in such strikes. In fact, in the strike about ten to twelve thousands workers and their families about 50,000

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113. *Journal of Historical Studies*, p.5.


members i.e., one tenth or one eleventh of the city population suffered. This situation in Madras came to a head in the second half of 1921. About 800 Depressed Class workers returned to work at the Buckingham Mill on 27 June 1921, in defiance of a strike called by the Madras Labour Union. Thus the Protector of the Depressed Classes and Labour Department got the Depressed Class Labour to work.

This stand of Depressed Class workers irked caste-Hindu members of the Union. O. Thanikachalam Chetty and other non-Brahmin Justice Party members turned against the stand of the depressed class workers. They represented the cause of the non-Brahmin caste-Hindu labourers. In this connection, M.C. Rajah observed that the non-Brahmin leaders fell into the trap of the Congress and Home-rule leaders who, instead of distinguishing between non-cooperation strikers and loyal strikers, divided the labourers into caste-Hindu strikers and Depressed Class non-strikers and stimulated caste-Hindu non-cooperation strikers to go to the caste-Hindu leaders of non-Brahmin party and persuade them to take side against non-strikers. And the non-Brahmin leaders, partly out of fright and partly out of flattered vanity and partly in the hope of capturing labourers, who had already been captured by the Congress and Home-rule leaders, openly came out against the interest of the Depressed Classes. In September 1921, P. Thiagaraya Chetty, the leader of non-Brahmin caste-Hindu Party wrote a letter to the Government of Madras to deport the Depressed Class labourers out of Madras. M.C. Rajah repeated and regretted about the statement in his Council speech on 12 October 1921 thus: “A suggestion was recently made


118. David Arnold, op.cit., p.70.


120. Journal of Historical Studies, p.6.

121. Rajah, M.C., op.cit., p.63; Government of Madras, G.O. No.1415, Law (General) Department, 19 May 1923.
that the Depressed Class families should be packed like rats and put in trucks and deported out of Madras." But the Government stood along with the Depressed Class workers and extended police escort and protection to them during the strike period. Their co-operation with management was criticized by the caste-Hindu labourers. Almost at once violence flared up between the Depressed Class people and caste-Hindus. Due to their own grievances with the Depressed people the Muslims aided the caste-Hindu in the labour dispute. The slums of the Depressed People in the mill area were set on fire and workers attacked. Police and British troops were unable to control the fires that raced through the wood-and-thatch hovels or to prevent violence in the maze of narrow streets in the mill area. The caste-Hindu labourers inflicted injuries on some workers by using curious fashioned swords and knives. Until 5 October 1921, there were continuous fire accidents which were not detected by the police. At last, the police resorted to shooting to quell the riot. The Labour Commissioner of Madras and the British agencies were accused by the caste-Hindu leaders as protecting the Depressed Classes and supporting the police. Justifying the attitude and behaviour of the caste-Hindu labourers in *Justice* an English media organ of the Justice Party wrote in its issue on 7 September 1921 thus: "public opinion....... holds that present deplorable state of affairs has been brought about partly at all events by undue pampering of the Depressed Class Labourers by the officials of the Labour Department and partly perhaps unconscious encouragement given to them by a few police officers. O. Thanikachalam Chetty, demanded a new Commissioner of Labour, a new Commissioner of Police and a new Governor in the Council. Indeed M.C.Rajah observed that it was unnecessary because the Government officials had


123. David Arnold, *op.cit.*, p.70; H.F.M.File No.78, p.263.


done their duty to protect the workers while they were going to work.\(^{126}\) The leaders like Thiagaraya Chetty, Muhammed Usman, Ramasamy Mudaliar and C.Natesa Mudaliar prepared a report on the strike situation.\(^{127}\) On its submission to the Government, the Government rejected it with the following remark: “ .... As no more than reproduction of fears and anxieties expressed to the signatories by the members of the caste-Hindu Community in Mill area .... The Government can hardly accept these apprehensions as proof that responsibilities of the disturbances rest on outside only. The history of these troubles is sufficient to rebut any such assumption and the Government are well aware that feeling of anxiety and terror are widespread in the Depressed Classes in the city.” \(^{128}\) Following this, Lionel Davision, the Home member after having analysed those strike issues and problems arrived at the decision that “it is no longer merely a labour dispute confined to strikers and non-strikers but a faction fight inflamed by caste prejudices.”\(^{129}\) So it was deduced that the Justice Party while supporting the cause of caste-Hindus had behaved detrimental to the welfare of the Depressed Classes.

**Depressed Class Service Army**

The Depressed Class Service Army was organized on 25 October 1931 in Madras. Its president was T. Sundararao Naidu and the secretary was S.P.I. Balagurusivam. The organiserers were P. Selvanatham and J. Shivashanmugam Pillai. It organised a meeting at Chindadripet on 8 November 1931. In it the aims of the organization were clearly announced. They are as follows

1. It was not an organization to promote ills of the caste system and creating ill between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins.

\(^{126}\) F.N.R., 10 September 1921.


2. It aimed at the attainment of liberty, liberation and reform measures from the government on passive ways.

3. It was an organization to fight against those parties and organizations who worked against the interest of the Depressed Classes.

4. It was an organization to back the leaders who were interested in the promotion of the affairs of the Depressed Classes.

5. It was an organization to fight against the leaders who in the name of Depressed Classes promoted their own interest.

6. This organization determined to oppose any leaders or organizations that instigate division between the Depressed Classes and Caste-Hindus in the name of religion.

7. The other aim of this organization was to leave the religious people on their own ways of worship, and to prevent the Depressed people not to go to the temples of the caste-Hindus and Brahmanical temples.

8. It did not like to involve in the issues of theists and atheists.

9. To attain liberation of the Depressed Classes, the Organisation determined to fight against the practice of varnashrama dharma, the orthodox Brahmins, and unjust religious leaders.

10. It aimed to create unity among the different sections of the Depressed Classes and to attain it to a larger extent.\(^\text{130}\)

On 28 February 1932, in a meeting of the Depressed Classes at Napiar park, Chennai, B.R. Ambedkar delivered an address insisting on the liberation of the Depressed Classes from the social taboos. Shivashanmugam Pillai and S.P.I. Balagurusivam welcomed Ambedkar and viewed that the arrival of Ambedkar gave a new strength to the Depressed Classes.\(^\text{131}\). In another meeting held under the auspices of Depressed Class Service Army on 14 July 1932 appreciated the services J.Shivashanmugam for the Depressed

\(^{130}\) Dravidan, 10 November 1931, p.6.

\(^{131}\) Ibid., February 1932, p.6.
Class people. In the subsequent meetings M.C.Rajah, N.Sivaraj and a host of other Depressed Class leaders participated and analysed the political situation which emerged following the separate electorate issues in 1930s. In the meetings of this organization all the Depressed Class political leaders of various political parties attended and mobilised their people for their liberation.

Thus the Depressed Classes were awakened and guided by their pioneer leaders and organisations. They were identified and their activities were integrated through their socio-political organizations. Iyothee Thass was a pioneer leader of the Depressed Classes who attempted to elevate his people by founding Dravida Mahajana Sabha and some Buddhist associations. The role of R. Srinivasan and M.C. Rajah was equally important and they also worked for the elevation of the Depressed Classes both in the legislative forum and in the public life.

132. Ibid., 18 July 1932.

133. Ibid., 9 September 1932, p.10 and 31 October 1932, p.10.