Conclusion
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History of Depressed Class Movement in Tamil Nadu is the history of the marginalisation of the Adi-Tamils in their home land. This study traces the origin and growth of depressed class movement in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century which marched towards the path of attaining social and communal justice to the downtrodden and voiceless people who were neglected and denied the basic human rights for a long period. In fact, the movement had grown towards the end of receiving compensatory justice to the accumulated disabilities suffered by this historically disadvantaged section of this society, and absorb them educationally and occupationally into the mainstream of national life.

The Depressed Class Movement stressed equal opportunities for all irrespective of caste and creed. Monopoly and dominance by any caste appeared to cause negation of social order. In the beginning the emergence of this movement is connected with the Christian missionaries and beneficial measures of the British administrators. The Depressed Class people were awakened in Tamil Nadu due to the services rendered by the British and Christian missionaries. Indeed the establishment of the British power helped the socially handicapped people in many ways. The British left their legacy in all fields of public activities. Their blessings in the development were industrial growth, railways and commercial relations, irrigation system, granting of loans for cultivation. They organised agricultural exhibitions, restricting the evictions of tenants and abolition of some hereditary ills of the society.

The British journalists and Christian theologians cum scholars freely mingled with the natives and searched for reasons behind the unknown social
customs and unearthed evils that were heaped under the garb of religion. They encouraged democratic trends, artistic excellence and literary grandeur. The elite leaders among the depressed sections like Iyothee Thass, R. Srinivasan and M.C. Rajah questioned the reality and vitality of Hindu caste social stratification. The various progressive social measures of the British and western type of administrative measures further worked out as a causative factor for the change of new mode of life, which violently disturbed the stagnant and stinking waters of the existing cesspool. Because of these all round developments, many further changes were effected. The monopolisation of educational and civil rights of Brahmins was broken. The fields of education and administration were opened to the public in order to cater to the needs of all sections of the people. There was a slow awakening among them. The British Government had taken some interest towards them by offering a package of economic incentives on humanitarian grounds. Therefore the Depressed Class people were looking forward to Christian missionaries and British Government for benefits rather than to the INC which was waging a battle against the British.

The Depressed Class Movement in Tamil Nadu is associated with the consolidation efforts done by the Depressed Class leaders. To consolidate the Depressed class people, many organizations emerged. The most notable among them were Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha, Dravida Mahajana Sabha and Pariyar Mahajana Sabha, Arundhatiya Mahajana Sabha and the Madras Valluvar Mahajana Sangam. The consolidation of the Depressed Classes marked a vivid expression of a just desire of the suppressed communities for civic and political rights denied to them for ages.

The Depressed Class Movement in Tamil Nadu has been the ideological struggle of whether political or social freedom should be
given preference. The Dravidian forces demanded social liberation and social justice. The national forces demanded political liberation. The British bureaucrats exposed the Brahmin oligarchy by providing some official data to the educated non-Brahmin leaders. They also created Local and Zillah Board organisations in order to facilitate their political friends, especially the big non-Brahmin businessmen. These trends marked the beginning of the consolidation of Dravidian forces, which removed all the ill-feelings from among the Dravidians. The non-Brahmin leaders like Thiagaraya Chetty and T.M. Nair came out of the Congress and started the process of amalgamation of the Dravidian elements into a single unit. In 1917 Justice party emerged. The party identified itself with the idea of social justice.

In the middle of 1910s the Depressed Class Movement in Tamil Nadu synchronized with the non-Brahmin Movement. Corresponding to this trend, the Justice Party urged communal reservation to the non-Brahmins. To function as the real representative body of the non-Brahmin caste-Hindus, the Depressed Classes and Weaker Sections, the Justice party sought all their support. This growth of the Justice party was an eyesore to the Congress, dominated by Brahmins. The charismatic personality of T.M. Nair attracted the Depressed Class leaders like M.C. Rajah and R. Srinivasan to give their heart and soul to the Justice party. In due course, the Justice Ministry adopted social justice as one of its declared principles to enable the non-Brahmins to take their right place in the administration of the country. The Ministry distinguished itself on its dedicated administrative and legislative measures against all social ills and evils.

From 1921 to 1932 the Justicites, through unrelenting labour succeeded to some extent in securing their lawful rights. The unique formula advocated by the Justice Ministry to secure social justice for the non-Brahmins was
on the principle of communal representation by which all communities got representation in government administration and public services. The policy of communal rotation through communal orders constituted one of the major social reforms aimed at reducing the Brahminical grip on the bureaucratic set up.

In the middle of 1920s the Depressed Class Movement in Tamil Nadu is connected with the independent activities of the Depressed Classes. The rise of Depressed class leaders and their awakening leveled criticism on the function of the Justice Ministry. They viewed that the Justice Ministry was not without major limitations. The Depressed Classes who formed one fifth of the total population in the Madras Presidency were not given equal share and due consideration by the Justice Ministry, the so called spokesmen of all the non-Brahmins. The Depressed Classes who were carried away by the non-Brahmin consciousness later realized it was illusory. They felt that the Justicites began to show their animosity towards every welfare activity of the Depressed Classes. In fact, after the death of T.M. Nair there was no real Justicite leader who strove hard for the welfare of the Depressed Classes. In consequence the Depressed Class leaders openly criticized, reviled and made virulent attack on the changing policies, maneuvers and selfish motives of the Justice leaders. Therefore, the political movement of the Depressed Classes gradually detached itself from the non-Brahmin movement headed by Justice Party with which it had identification for many years.

Thereafter the Depressed Class Movement in Tamil Nadu coincided with and connected to the extension and support of the Depressed class people to EVR. and his SRM. At this juncture the vacuum created by T.M. Nair in the non-Brahmin politics was fulfilled by EVR, another non-Brahmin crusader. Endowed with great energy, and lofty vision, EVR. attracted the Depressed Class sections towards him. At first, he expressed his
social reform idea within the Congress fold. His persistent demand for communal representation as a remedy for inadequate representation of all community and his subsequent strong conviction of creating a caste-less and classless society almost created a stir in the social order. He even criticised Gandhi's unsteady stand on the principle of *varnashrama dharma*.

The Depressed Classes made their representation to the government on many occasions through their organisations like the Adi-dravida Mahajana Sabha, Arunthathiyar Mahajana Sabha and the Madras Provincial Depressed Class Federation. These organisations, unified their people and encouraged them to show their numerical strength. The awakened Depressed Class people also agitated for civic rights over the use of the wells, roads and temples and status symbols such as dress and ornaments which were denied to them for a long period. The demand of such civic rights in southern parts of Tamil Nadu created communal confrontation disturbing the social set up. It taught the lesson that, inspired by the principles of socialism, communalism and self-Respect ideology, the growing younger generation of Depressed Classes was no longer in a mood to have their houses burnt or their property destroyed without retaliation.

Then the Depressed Class Movement in Tamil Nadu got closely associated with the all India communal politics. The regenerated Depressed Class leaders felt that their sufferings could not be represented properly to the government when there was lack of elected representatives for them. It was denied to them and the result was the age-long sufferings of them at the hands of caste-Hindus. Therefore, the untouchable leaders like B.R. Ambedkar, M.C. Rajah, R. Srinivasan and N. Sivaraj criticised the working system of dyarchy in provinces, for it ensured communal reservations of seats only to the caste Hindu non-Brahmins. Gandhi and his Brahmin companions feared that the granting of separate
electorate to the Depressed Classes would affect the conglomeration of Hindus, for the latter would go out of the ambit of Hinduism. As the Simon commission report ignored their demand, the Depressed Class leaders insisted on and strongly stood for communal electorate as the only solution to all their problems. Round Table Conferences were convened to mitigate it. On behalf of the Depressed Classes, B.R. Ambedkar and R. Srinivasan participated. On the other side, representing the Hindu population Gandhi attended. No settlement was reached there. On failure, Gandhi started his fast unto death. B.R. Ambedkar agreed for joint electorate and to the stand of Gandhi with a heavy heart only with the aim of saving the latter and the Depressed Class people on the expected attack from the caste-Hindus.

At this juncture, the role of Gandhi in enlisting the mass support was an acclaimed one. As an obligation to the Poona Pact, Gandhi started All India Harijan and Anti-Untouchability tours in Tamil Nadu during 1933 and 1934. Gandhi learned a lesson that without establishing social base it is difficult to fight the British politically. He gave up the Civil Disobedience Movement and involved in the social problem of removing untouchability. In this connection, leaders like EVR observed that Gandhi's latter stand was due to apprehension that the Depressed people would secede from the Hindu fold. On this ground he was also reviled harshly by B.R. Ambedkar. After clearly knowing the tendency of Gandhi and the orthodox members, B.R. Ambedkar and EVR hated the temple entry attempts of the Depressed people.

The eradication of untouchability and the temple entry events through the legislative measures formed the climax of anti-untouchability campaign. After getting the public opinion, the Anti-untouchability bills were again left to hot discussion in the legislature. Taking advantage of these loopholes, the orthodox Hindu members tried to stamp out the bills, for they feared that if their old custom
was violated, their temples would be defiled and their suzerainty over temples and society would be wiped out. The Congress leaders especially Rajaji induced the leaders like M.C. Rajah and C.S. Ranga Iyer to introduce the bills. To win the support of the Depressed Classes, the Congress leaders promised them to implement all the pending social measures when the popular government was formed after the election. Likewise, the Rajaji ministry which ascended to power in Madras Presidency on 14 July 1937, introduced many legislative measures such as Prohibition Bill and Civic Disabilities Bill for the benefit of the Depressed Classes.

The Depressed Classes of Tamil Nadu were not content with the Civic Disabilities Bill and general Bills passed by Rajaji Ministry. Getting the civic rights, the Depressed Classes moved forward to the next step. They considered the denial of temple entry was the highest form of untouchability and attainment of the right of temple entry was the important phase in their relentless struggle for social justice. They put forward proposals to the Congress leaders to decide whether they should be in the Hindu fold or to exit. Thus the Depressed Classes gave priority to temple entry for they aspired to live as Hindus. As a step in this direction, M.C. Rajah introduced a temple entry bill in the Madras Legislature. Rajaji who encouraged the bill later dropped his support when it came for discussion. In fact M.C. Rajah who had pinned his hopes on the Congress leadership was cleverly cheated. Therefore, he bitterly regretted the service he had rendered for the cause of the Congress in signing the Poona Pact and winning the Depressed people to the side of the Congress firing tirade against B.R. Ambedkar and R.Srinivasan. However, Rajaji, the Premier who felt some hesitation initially came forward to experiment the temple entry of Depressed class people in Tamil Nadu, pertaining to historical expediency and compulsion, emboldened on the inspiration from developments in the neighbourhood such as Vaikom and Sucindram Satyagrahas,
attempts at Nasik and Guruvayur and temple entry proclamation in Travancore, 1936. Rajaji too passed Malabar Temple Act. At the inspiration of Rajaji, A. Vaidhyanatha Iyer, the president of the Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh along with five Depressed Class members and a Nadar entered the famous Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple on 8 July 1939. The sanatanists raised a hue and cry and placed all possible barriers to the temple entry agitators. They filed cases against A.Vaidhyanatha Iyer, R.S. Naidu, the trustee and some others. Meanwhile, Rajaji passed temple entry ordinance and subsequently Madras Temple Entry Act and saved all those who had entered the temples with Depressed Class members violating the age-long custom. The courts also upheld the provisions of the Act and gave injunctions against sanatanists. After the Madurai temple entry, six other major temples in the southern parts of Tamil Nadu were thrown open to all. Since 1939 some other major temples at Srivilliputhur, Srirangam, Tiruvarur, Kanchipuram, Tiruchendur and Sankarankoil were thrown open. Thus the aspiration of the Depressed Classes was lawfully satisfied. It marked the culmination of the Depressed Class Movement in the Colonial Tamil Nadu.

The Congress party consolidated its position among the Depressed Classes by implementing the promises it made in the Poona Pact in 1932. Untouchability and its practices in any form were abolished legally under Article 17 of the Indian Constitution. Article 35 gave Parliament the power to declare the practice of untouchability by a cognizable offence. It was under this provision that the Indian parliament passed the Untouchability (Offences) Act through a unanimous vote in April 1955. The Act was amended as “The Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955”. In 1960s, the Depressed Classes have moved somewhat away from both the traditional mode of status mobility, sanskritization, and away from the more radical separatist movements. Their voting is a potent political force, and
their leaders have used these votes effectively to make their political empowerment. Further as the existing law was found inadequate, a new legislation called “The scheduled Castes and scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 was brought into effect from 31 January 1990.

The Depressed Class Movement secured many things and made achievements for the Depressed Class people. It elevated the status of the Depressed Classes in all the fronts. The labour schools and Adi-Dravida Welfare schools came into being on the toil of the Depressed Class Organisations. They secured reservation in legislature, public services and educational institutions. Above all, they were united as one eventhough they had many divisions under the able leadership of B.R. Ambedkar who was regarded as the *messiah* of the Depressed Class movement.