Introduction
INTRODUCTION

Tamil Nadu is in the extreme south of peninsular India. The state falls in between 8°5’ and 13°35’ North latitudes and between 76°15’ and 80°20’ East longitudes. On the eastern and southern sides, the state's shores are washed by the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean respectively. On the northern side, the state shares its borders with Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh and on the west lies Kerala state.

In the sprawling polyglot Madras Presidency, the Tamil regions were the dominant element. They constituted a third of the land area and half of the population- 21 million out of nearly 43 million in 1921. Tamil Nadu was more urban than its regional neighbours. On 1931 nine of the fifteen largest towns and cities in the Madras Presidency were located in Tamil Nadu, including the four most populous- Madras (6,47,230), Madurai (1,82,018), Trichinopoly (1,42,843), and Salem (1,02,179). The present Depressed class population of Tamil Nadu is 1,18,57,504 (Males 59,32,925, Females 59,24,579) out of total population of 6,21,10,839 as recorded in the census of 2001.¹ Tamil Nadu is further distinguished from its neighbours unlike the other linguistic regions of the Dravidian south; almost the whole of the Tamil speaking area was under one administration. Thus, the Tamil districts of the Madras presidency constituted a relatively compact and homogenous linguistic stock, and they correspond closely to the State of Madras (renamed Tamil Nadu on 14 January 1969) which was formed by the reorganization of India's states.

¹ Government of India, Census of India 2001, Tamil Nadu, New Delhi, 2005, Vol. 1, p.XVIII.

**Social Structure**

A.R. Desai has described the social structure stratified into the divisions identified as castes. He writes, “The castes constituting the series were hierarchically graded, each caste being considered inferior to those above it and superior to those below it. The status of a man born in a particular caste was determined by the rank of that caste in this hierarchy. One born in that caste has his status predetermined and immutable. Thus birth decided his status which could not be altered by any talent he might show or wealth he might accumulate”.

Hindu society is stratified into numerous hierarchical layers. These layers are sealed and are called castes. The Hindu faith upholds the myth of the divine origin of the caste system. The social structure of Indian society witnessed caste segregation, economic disparities and religious anomalies. Based upon the *varna* system, the Hindu society was divided into four classes, viz., the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vysyas and Sudras.

In the passage of time the fourfold system which mingled with the social divisions of the Tamils came to be classified into three primary divisions, namely the Brahmins, the caste-Hindus and Depressed Classes. The Brahmins were also called unit-Brahmins who held the highest position in society. The caste- Hindus or the non-Brahmins were placed next to the

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Brahmins in the social strata. Among them were the Mudaliars, ChettiarS, Naidus and Vellalas who wielded much influence in the society. The Nadars, Thevars, Vanniyars and Adi-Dravidas were commonly called depressed sections till the end of the first half of the twentieth century. They were denied entry into the temples and were prevented from making offerings to the deities.

In the Indian context, the 'Scheduled Castes' of today are the 'Depressed Classes' of yester years. The term ‘Depressed Classes” began to be used in official circle in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. These Depressed Classes shared certain common features of discrimination, degradation and exploitation due to contemptuous treatment they suffered at the hands of caste-Hindus for over long years. ‘Untouchability’ and ‘segregation’ were the two essential attributes of this class. The expression of ‘Depressed Classes’ is made up of two words ‘Depressed’ and ‘Classes’. In the ordinary parlance the Depressed Classes should mean a group of people pressed down. Romans had their slaves, Spartans their helots, British their villains, Americans their Negroes, Germans their Jews and Indians their depressed people who were considered as low classes.

In 1881 the population of the Depressed Classes in the erstwhile Madras Presidency was 4,439,233, in 1891 their number was 5,162,086, an increase of about 7,25,000 or seventeen percent while the percentage of increase of the whole population for the Presidency was only 15.5. In a caste-ridden society, this section of society alone represented about one fifth of the total population of the Presidency.

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10. Ambedkar, B.R., The Untouchables Who were they and Why they became Untouchables?, New Delhi, 1948, p.155.
The population of Depressed Classes in Tamil Nadu, according to the 2001 census is 1,18,57,504. Depressed Classes such as the Paraiah, Pallars, the Chakkliars, the Madigas, etc., are subsumed under the broader category ‘Adi-Dravida’.

The principle of untouchability was carried too far in the observance of what was known as distance pollution. Among the caste-Hindus, the Brahmins alone, who belonged to the priestly class, were permitted to enter the sanctum sanctorum of the temple. Violations were considered to be serious. To ward off such an evil, fresh consecration was required for purification.

Study Area

Tamil speaking population of the Madras Presidency of the colonial era forms the area of present study. This jurisdictional restriction has been made to cut the size of the vast material available for the whole of the Madras Presidency, so that a crisp and comprehensive study highlighting all the issues and themes pertaining to a smaller region could be successfully attempted on the subject under study.

Objectives

The present study is concerned with socio-political study of Tamil Nadu of the last quarter of the ninth century and first half of the twentieth century. The study aims to realize the following objectives:

- To describe the prevailing social structure of the Tamil society in the given period of the study.
- To find the low condition of the Depressed Classes and to find out the real reasons for it.
- To describe the relations which prevailed between the Juristicites and the Depressed Classes.
- To trace the history of the Depressed Class organizations in Tamil Nadu.

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To describe the struggle waged by the Depressed Class leaders for the communal reservation.

To describe the legislative measures initiated by the Congress ministries against the practice of untouchability.

To describe the level of involvement of Congress leaders in the temple entry agitations in different parts of Tamil Nadu.

To evaluate the efforts and works rendered by the Depressed Class leaders for the uplift of their people.

Plan of the Study

The proposed thesis entitled "Depressed Class Movement 1885-1947" consists of six chapters besides an Introduction and a Conclusion.

In the Introduction chapter the physiography of Tamil Nadu, the Tamil districts in the Madras Presidency, the social structure of the Tamil society, explanation of the term Depressed Classes, the population of Depressed Classes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, scope of the study, objectives of the study, plan of the study, source, hypothesis and methodology is discussed.

Social Hierarchy and Stratification forms the first chapter of the study. The social setting of the Tamils in the given period is taken for analysis. The Tamil society in the nineteenth century witnessed caste segregation, economic disparity and religious anomalies. The four fold varna system of the Indo-Aryans, in the passage of time, penetrated in the Tamil society and subsequently, three layer classes metamorphosed. The Brahmins as an elite section were in the upper strata that enjoyed all privileges and held high position in the Tamil society. The caste- Hindus or the non-Brahmin high castes as a second layer of the society gained tremendous influence in the society. The third layer of the society was the Depressed Classes. They are also called collectively Adi-Dravidas and constitutionally, Scheduled Castes. The Depressed Classes or Aboriginals of the Tamils (Poorva Tamizhargal in Tamil) were treated untouchables and denied the fundamental and civic rights.
The second chapter is Depressed Classes: Consciousness and Mobilization. The Depressed Classes were numerically sixty million out of three hundred million of the Hindu population. Among them nearly twenty percent of Indian population was Depressed Classes. The services of the Christian missionary uplifted their position in the society and to large extent created consciousness and awakening. The social reformers also highlighted their pathetic condition and condemned the practice of untouchability. The early Depressed Class leaders, their organizations, role of the press, their literary works, their platform speeches highly created consciousness among the Depressed Classes and focused their grievances. Realising the situation, the British tried to take remedial measures which forms the discussion.

Consolidation and Rise of Depressed Classes constitutes the third chapter. An attempt has been made to trace the origin and growth of the Depressed Class organizations and their founders, their role and their efforts to stir their people towards integration. Dravida Mahajana Sabha (1891), “The Madras Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha” (1892) and “The All India Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha” (1928) actively conducted periodical meetings, conferences, and were keen on attaining social reform other than constitutional advancement. These Depressed Class organizations consolidated their people towards a progressive path in all the fields and took concerted efforts towards uplift.

The fourth chapter is Non-Brahmin Movement and the Justice Party. A thrust was given to the political awakening of the non-Brahmins and the formation of early Associations. The non-Brahmin leaders of eminence and erudition are people like P.Theagaraya Chetty and T.M. Nair who inspired and nurtured the non-Brahmin public. The spirited leaders like P.Ramarayaningar, Subbarayalu Reddiar, A.P. Patro and P.Subbarayan, began to organize the non-Brahmins. The non-Brahmins started South Indian People Association, the South Indian Liberal Federation which ultimately became Justice Party after the name of the Justice an English paper in 1917. How the Justice Ministry was formed in Madras Presidency in 1920 and the non-Brahmins entered in government offices are discussed.
In the fifth chapter **Hectic Politics: From Resurgence to Reservation Issue** is discussed. The chapter highlights the hectic politics over the issue of separate electorate all over India with special reference to Tamil Nadu. Most of the Depressed Class leaders and the Self-Respectors in Tamil Nadu advocated separate electorate to the Depressed Classes. The nominated Depressed Class leaders began to fight either independently or collectively in the legislative forums. Starting Self-Respect Movement E.V. Ramasami (hereafter E.V.R.) advocated the cause of the Depressed Classes. His works made an immediate impact upon them. As a consequential outburst, resurgence took place among them to get away from the traditional caste and religious binds. Violence took place in the southern Tamil Nadu especially in the Ramanathapuram district. The Congress in the mid 1930s initiated the constructive programme. In the meantime, the appointment of Simon Commission stimulated considerable political activity of the Depressed Class organizations. They demanded the grant of effective and adequate representation to them in the provincial and central legislatures and in the various local self governing bodies. On the basis of the recommendations of the Simon Commission Report three Round Table Conferences were held at London. Thereafter the British Prime Minister Ramsay Mac Donald announced the ‘Communal Award’ on 17 August 1932. Gandhi was against the communal award and therefore he subsequently undertook an interminable fast in Yerwada jail on 20 September 1932. At last on the fifth day of fast an agreement known as ‘Poona Pact’ was signed. Realising the disapproval of depressed classes on his stand, Gandhi evolved other methods to appease the former. By 1932 political compulsions regarding communal reservation issue made Congress intensify anti-untouchability campaign.

The sixth chapter is entitled **"Temple Entry Campaign"**. This chapter highlights the temple entry events in Tamil Nadu. Temple entry was considered the climax of the anti-untouchability campaign. The entry into temples also was viewed with the end of the practice of untouchability. E.V.R. played a remarkable role to attain rights for the depressed people. The Temple Entry Proclamation of Travancore Government was another mile stone which inspired to the temple entry fighters in Tamil Nadu. The Madurai Meenakshi
Amman temple entry was first of its kind in Tamil Nadu. The Srirangam temple entry event was also an important one in the temple entry programme of the Congress. The temple entry bills of P.Subbarayan, C.S. Ranga Iyer, M.C.Rajah, C.Rajaji and subsequent hot discussions in the legislature brought to light the seriousness of issue of untouchability. Thus the temple entry in orthodox Braminical temples was successfully conducted. In the post-independent period in the private temples and village temples the Depressed Class people are not allowed even though the Constitution ensured equal rights to all which led to caste and communal riots at many places in Tamil Nadu.

In the ‘Conclusion’ research findings are given in a sequential way and summary of all chapters is attempted.

Hypotheses

The Study attempts to investigate the following hypotheses framed by the scholar.

1. The Depressed Classes in the Tamil speaking population of the Madras Presidency, especially the educated leaders began to awaken, organize, and associate themselves with their people and began to expose the oppression of the caste-Hindus for a long period.

2. The Depressed Class leaders allied themselves with the Justice Party and the non-Brahmin Congress leaders till the first two decades of the twentieth century.

3. For what reasons in 1920s the Depressed Class leaders began to come out of the non-Brahmin movement and began to relinquish their membership from the Justice party.

4. Hostile relations developed between the Depressed Classes and caste-Hindus in Tamil Nadu over the many issues like representation, name change, postings and communal reservation.

5. The Justicites when came to power became arm-chair politicians and began to ignore the interest of the Depressed Classes.
6. The Congress took the issue of untouchability and temple entry campaign as a part of Constructive Programme and the agreed terms made in the Poona Pact.

7. Was the temple entry event of Madurai was the precursor to the opening of all the major temples in Tamil Nadu?

8. Whether all the Village temples are thrown to the Depressed Classes? For what reasons problems were raised there?

Methodology

Historical Methodology has been adopted to trace and unfold the rise and growth of Depressed Class Movement in various phases in Tamil Nadu. Further, the study also adopts analytical approach to the problems and concerns of the Depressed classes. Besides, an analytical study of the source materials serves the purpose of reconstructing the past in a spirit of free enquiry and with a view of presenting as objective an account as it is humanly possible.

Source of Information

The thesis entitled Depressed Class Movement in Tamil Nadu, 1885-1947 is presented mainly based upon the sources of primary and secondary nature which are kept and preserved in the Tamil Nadu State Archives, Periyar Library, Connemara Library all in Chennai, and Madurai Kamaraj University Library and Theological College Library, Madurai, and Manonmaniam Sundaranar University Library and Central District Library, Tirunelveli, and V.O. Chidambaram College Library, Tuticorin.

Primary sources constitute archival records, reports, proceedings, Government orders, gazetteers, manuals, newspapers in Tamil and English. Government Orders relating to Public, Education, Home, Revenue, Judicial, Law (general) and other Confidential Fortnightly Reports, Under Secretary's Safe Files and Administrative Reports pertaining to the 1885 to 1947 have been consulted for this study. They provide ample information about the condition of Depressed Classes in the socio, economic and political spheres, the genuine
efforts of the British, the Depressed Class and non-Brahmin leaders for the uplift of the downtrodden and about the organizations of the Depressed Classes and their demands and the rise of Depressed Class leaders. District gazetteers and manuals, census reports and native newspaper reports throw some light on the awakening and socio-economic condition of the Depressed Classes in Tamil regions. Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council and Assembly (1921-1947), Dictionary of National Biography and Indian Annual Register (1929-1947) is useful to identify the Depressed Class leaders who fought for the emancipation of the Depressed Classes and for the freedom of the nation and promotion of justice.

The perusal of the back number of Tamilan, Dravidan, Adi-Dravida Mitran, Harijan, Kudi Arasu and other newspapers of Depressed Class leaders throw much light on the role of Depressed Class leaders in the legislative forums and public platforms.

Printed books in Tamil and English constitute the secondary sources. M.C. Rajah himself a distinguished leader of the Depressed Classes of Tamil region contributed a book titled Oppressed Hindus, in which he highlighted the socio-economic deprivations from which these people suffered at the hand of the caste-Hindus. J. Sivashanmugam Pillai in his book The Life, Selected Writings and Speeches of Rao Bahadur M.C. Raja, M.L.A. gives a vivid picture of M.C. Rajah’s role as a committed leader of the Depressed Classes for whose uplift he associated himself with the British, the Justice Party and the Indian National Congress. The Autobiography of Diwan Bahadur Rettamalai Srinivasan provides a valuable reference to this study. The book describes his life and career as a leader of Depressed Classes in Tamil Nadu. C. Iyothi Dass Pandithar’s The Open Letter to Dewan Bahadur Hon. S. Srinivasa Iyengar, 1892, the Proceedings of the First Provincial Conference of the Depressed Classes of the Madras presidency, (Madras, 1928) and the Proceedings of the Adi-Dravidha Mahajana Sabha, 1920, (Madras, 1928) are the book-lets containing letters, speeches and resolutions. T.P. Kamalanathan’s (Comp.) K. Veeramani is Refuted and the Historical Facts about Scheduled Caste’s Struggle for Emancipation in South India
has highlighted the negligence of the rights of the Depressed Classes during the Justice Ministry. G.T.S. Boag’s *Madras Presidency (1881-1931)* gives a graphic account of the British administration in the Madras Presidency, about forty years. P.Rajaraman’s *The Justice Party- A Historical Perspective 1916-1937* eulogises the contribution made by the Justice party for the welfare of the Depressed Classes in Tamil Nadu. His interpretation of facts highlights the real motive behind the Justice Party for taking the cause of the Depressed people. S.Saraswathi’s *Minorities in Madras State: Group Interest in Madras Politics* is a noteworthy work and relatively more relevant work. In the fifth chapter of her study, “The Political Role of the Fifth Varna”, she traces the role of individual leaders and other Depressed Class Associations of Madras in fighting for their political rights. G.Thangavelu’s *Depressed Classes in the Composite State of Madras: 1909 to 1947 A.D. - A Socio-Political Study* (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis) and P.E. Mohan’s *Scheduled Castes: History of Elevation, Tamil Nadu, 1900-1955*, and G.Rengaraju’s *Struggle for Temple Entry in Tamil Nadu, 1872-1955* (unpublished Thesis Ph.D) give a graphic account of Governmental and individual and voluntary Organisations’ efforts to uplift the Depressed Classes during the first half of twentieth century. Eugene F. Irschick’s *Political and Social Conflicts in South India*, S.Gopalakrishnan’s *Political Movement in South India, 1914-1929* and Robert, L. Hardgrave, jr., *The Dravidian Movement* also highlights the friendly and hostile relations prevailed between the caste-Hindus and Depressed Classes. A critical and comparative study of the different sources and the collaboration of evidences are helpful to reconstruct the History of the Depressed Class Movement in Tamil Nadu.