CHAPTER II

CASTE IN THE POLICY OF THE RAJ: PROTECTIVE MISCEVALIATION IN BENGAL, 1911 - 1937
The theory of two main racial components of Hindu society, one consisting of the privileged high castes and the other of the depressed classes, had been impressed on the minds of the colonial policy-planners by the various ethnographic studies. The ethnographers had classified and quantified such social groups, so that the government could now locate them and identify them. And in the days of political turmoil, it was not unnatural for them to jump to the conclusion that men of the higher castes, with their entrenched social, economic as well as political interests, were the real adversaries of the Raj and the principal participants in the nationalist movements. Therefore, in order to dilute the intensity of the anti-imperialist agitation at the beginning of the twentieth century, the government sought to encourage political separatism among the so-called 'depressed classes', as it was done in the case of the Muslims. And if the Bengal government was a bit reluctant, because of its preoccupation with the Muslims, it was persuaded to adopt such a policy by the Government of India, looking at the situation from an all India perspective. It is, however, not true to suggest that before the British took such measures, the lower castes of Bengal, particularly the
untouchables, could fully identify themselves, socially or culturally, with the high caste Hindus. As the Muslims had already developed a social and cultural identity of their own and distinct from that of the Hindus, so did many of the lower castes vis-a-vis the high caste Hindus, to some extent. But what was essentially a social and cultural dichotomy, was now given a definite political shape. A conflict of socio-cultural identity was transformed into a conflict of interests.

The first major direct initiative to develop a separate identity among the depressed classes came on the eve of the census of 1911. The new Census Commissioner, in his letter to the Provincial Superintendents in May, 1910, pointed out that there would be no classification of castes according to social precedence. But in another circular, dated 12 July 1910, he asked for separate classification of the 'depressed classes.'

Gait the Provincial Superintendent in Bengal, accordingly issued a circular announcing separate enumeration of the 'depressed classes.'

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2. J.C. Cumming, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, General Dept., to the Secretary, Government of India, Education Dept., No.1760, 18 March, 1911, General Dept. (Miscellaneous), GB, File No.10-C/30-2, A March 1911, Progs. Nos.29-31.
classes' in the coming census. It became at once the target of attack by the nationalists, who saw in it a sinister political motive, allegedly prompted by the Muslim League. It was designed, they thought, to reduce the numerical superiority of the Hindus through non-recognition of certain untouchable castes as members of Hindu society. The measure was perhaps designed not merely to enhance the existing Hindu-Muslim political dichotomy, as the nationalists suspected, but also to politicise another social dichotomy, that between the caste Hindus and the untouchables. The circular met with a strong opposition from all sections of the Hindu press, and the interference of both the retiring and the in-coming Viceroy was sought in the matter. 3

Surendranath Banerjee, on behalf of the Indian Association, sent a memorandum to the Government of India, urging the withdrawal of the notorious circular, which had created a "painful impression" in the mind of the Hindu community. He also objected to the classification of castes according to social precedence and the use of such derogatory adjectives as "low castes" or "unclean castes" in the census reports. "It is not understood what good such a classification is intended to serve", he pointed out, "but the mischief sure

3. 'Annual Report on Indian Papers Published In the Bengal Presidency During the year 1910', (Calcutta, 1911), p. 36, Home (Political), GI, B July 1911, Reg. No. 1220.
to attend its appearance in an authorized Government
publication is obvious." His other objection was against
imposing rigidity on an otherwise dynamic system, by denying
the individuals and communities the opportunity of returning
themselves under new titles and new caste-names. It was
indeed, an age-old practice in India which the colonial
ethnographers had overlooked. And it is no wonder that
Government, relying heavily on their conclusions, sought
to frame its policies on the assumption of a static
status-heirarchy with permanent social divisions.

However, the storm raised by the nationalists
forced the Government to retreat, although temporarily.
The circular was withdrawn through a press communique on
10 December 1910, which stated that there would be no departure
from the established practice regarding the enumeration of caste.

4. Surendra Nath Banerjee, Secretary, Indian Association,
to the Secretary to the Government of India, Education
Dept., 3 March 1911, General (Miscellaneous), GB,

5. See, Hitesranjan Sanyal, Social Mobility in Bengal,

6. 'Report on the Native-owned English and Vernacular Newspapers
of East Bengal and Assam for the year 1911', Home (Political),
GL, 8 June 1912, Prog. No.74; J.C. Cumming, Secretary,
Government of Bengal, General Dept., to the Hon'ble Secretary,
Indian Association, Calcutta, No.2271, 10 April, 1911,
General (Miscellaneous), GB, File No.10-C/30, A July 1911,
Progs. Nos.6-7.
The Education Member, Mr. Butler, declared in the Imperial Legislative Council on 3 January 1911, that the opinion expressed by the Census Commissioner reflected his personal views and that the government did not identify itself with them.7

Such attempts at classification of Hindu society was the result of a continuing shift in colonial policy towards protective discrimination in favour of certain social groups, whose loyalty had to be ensured in order to balance off the influence of the nationalists. By the beginning of the twentieth century the higher castes of Bengal had become identified with the nationalist movement, if not in reality, at any rate, in the perception of the Raj. The partition of the province in 1905, was designed, among other things, to strike at the root of the power of these high-caste Bengali Bhadraleoks. The new administration of Eastern Bengal and Assam, through its education and employment policies, sought to destroy, what Richard Cronin has called, the "class rule" by the Hindu landowning, money-lending, professional and clerical classes, mainly belonging to the three highest Bengali castes, the Brahmins, the Kayasthas and the Baidyas. The draft Resolution which Sir Lancelot Hare:

7. Surendra Nath Banerjee, Secretary, Indian Association, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Education Dept., 3 March, 1911; also J.G. Cumming, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, General Dept., to the Secretary to the Government of India, Education Dept., No.1760,18 March 1911. General (Miscellaneous), GR, File No.10-C/30-2, A March 1911, Progs. Nos.29-31.
the second Lieutenant-Governor of the new province, submitted to Lord Minto on 31 October 1906, emphasized "the frequent exclusion in many offices of all but a few castes of Hindus" which had "sometimes gone so far as to make of some offices almost a family gathering." The other communities, particularly the Muslims, did not get their dues as a result; and their interests had to be protected. The Resolution ultimately got Minto's approval, when Risley, the then Home Secretary, strongly supported it. Hereafter protective discrimination in favour of the Muslims became a regular feature of British policy. And the Muslims in return became the strongest supporters of the Raj in Bengal, except during the short interregnum of the Khilafat movement.

Parallel to this, the colonial government was also gradually moving towards a similar policy in relation to the lower caste Hindus, who were also backward in comparison with the high caste bhadraloks, and, therefore, could be used to weaken the nationalist movement. The area where the government first concentrated its attention was, of course, education. For it was education alone which could elevate the status of these people and would enable them to compete with the bhadraloks. Accordingly, in the early years of the twentieth century, the government committed itself to, what

Nilratan Sārcar described in 1913 as "a policy of affording special facilities in matters of education to comparatively non-progressive sections." 9

Hitherto education of these lower caste people had been left to the endeavours of the Missionaries. The government provided only a handful of special scholarships for a loose category of people known as the "backward classes", covering disparate social groups. 10 These scholarships, as Mr. Kuchler, the Director of Public Instruction, admitted in 1913, were not expressly given for the 'depressed classes', but for a much wider range of boys. But they were open to the 'depressed classes' as well. Had there been more funds, as he acknowledged, "a great deal more" would have been done in this direction. 11

In this connection, however, the D.P.I. announced in the Bengal Legislative Council that "Government has long been alive to the necessity

9. General (Education), GB, File No.11C-9-1, A April 1913, Prog. No.67.


11. General (Education), GB, File No.11C-9-1, A April 1913, Prog. No.67.
of making some provision for the education of what are
called the depressed classes ........... the classes
that belong to the very lowest classes of the Hindu
social system, or are outside the pale of caste altogether."
The main problem regarding their education was not merely
poverty, for poverty was not peculiar to them alone.
It was rather a problem of "social ostracism" and
their "general indifference to education."12 The
government had also taken some special measures to
solve them.

In Bengal, so far as primary education was
concerned, the boys of the depressed classes did not
face any difficulty in the matter of admission. Moreover,
to attract pupils of these classes, the government
either admitted them free or gave a capitation grant
to the individual gurus. At the same time, the
government opened special schools in localities
where these classes happened to be settled in large
numbers.13 In 1912-13, the Government of India
sanctioned a recurring grant of Rs.9,42,000 for
elementary education in Bengal. This grant had to
be expended largely on the extension of free elementary
education for those who could not afford to pay fees.

12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
"the poorer and more backward sections of the population."
Moreover, the Government of India had also provided a non-recurring grant of Rs.3,65,000, out of which a sum of Rs.30,000 was spent on schools in backward areas.14 These schools either charged no fees, or only fees far lower than those paid in ordinary schools. As a result of all these measures, as Samman, the next D.P.I. announced in the Bengal Legislative Council on 28 February, 1914, one-third of the boys attending primary schools in eastern Bengal and one-tenth in western Bengal were reading practically free.15 A large section of these recipients of government patronage definitely belonged to the "depressed classes".

So far as high school education is concerned, there were 39 government high schools in the Presidency of Bengal around the year 1913.16 There was also no rule barring the admission of pupils on the ground of nationality, sect or caste. But however careful the government might have been about observing absolute neutrality in matters of admission, there were, as an official admitted, cases of


indirect or concealed discrimination. For, "all over
the world Head Masters prefer [ed] boys of a good class
to 'outsiders'. Nevertheless, the government did
whatever they could at the given situation to improve
education of these boys. Schools situated in the
backward areas were given larger aid. In 1915 certain
classes of lower primary, upper primary, middle vernacular,
middle English junior and senior scholarships were reserved
for the 'backward classes'. Under the revised rules
one graduate scholarship tenable at Dacca College, was
reserved for either a Muslim or a member of a 'backward
class'. Apart from this, there were two college
scholarships, two junior scholarships, six school
scholarships, six upper primary scholarships and fourteen
lower primary scholarships reserved for the boys of the
'backward classes' in three eastern Bengal divisions,
Dacca, Chittagong and Rajshahi. There were also five
engineering scholarships, tenable at Dacca College of

18. Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings, Vol.45,
Engineering, reserved for the Muslims and members of
the 'backward classes'. Moreover, the government
expenditure on the "education of the backward classes"
also leaped enormously during these years - from
Rs.19,732 in 1914-15 to Rs.36,929 in 1915-16. This
amount was over and above the cost of reserved
scholarships.

As a result of all these measures, the number
of "pupils of aboriginal descent or drawn from depressed
classes" was increasing gradually. But still the
great difficulty which the students of these communities
had to experience was in the matter of hostel
accommodation. The problem of untouchability and
segregation was yet to vanish totally and therefore,
separate hostels had to be provided for these students.
The government also came forward in this field and
established a number of special hostels for those
boys, especially in eastern Bengal, during 1913-14.
For Namasudras, hostels were opened at Jhalakati,
Pirojpur and Barisal in Bakarganj district, in
Orakandi in Faridpur district, in Dacca for boys reading

19. General (Education), CB, File No.28-33, A November


21. Resolution No.391T-G, Govt. of Bengal, General Department (Education), 13 June 1914, General (Education), CB,
File No.88-11, A August 1914, Progs. Nos.77-89.
in Dacca College and in Rajshahi for those studying in Rajshahi College. Apart from these, there were hostels for Jogis in Chittagong and Comilla, for Rajbansis at Rangpur and for Mahishyas at Dacca. Other proposals were also under consideration. All these hostels were either fully financed or partly subsidised by the government and the boarders were charged either no fees, or fees which were only nominal. There was also a demand for such a hostel in Calcutta. But the government hoped that the Calcutta problem would be taken care of by Calcutta University which had been administering its own mess-scheme.

The attention of the Bengal government was, however, more closely drawn to the question of the 'depressed classes' in 1916. In March that year, there was a resolution moved by Mr. M.B. Dadabhoy in the Imperial Legislative Council, recommending that measures should be devised for the amelioration of the moral, material and educational condition of the depressed classes. Although the resolution was ultimately withdrawn, the Government of India, on this occasion, wanted to consult the local

governments about this important issue. The latter were asked to provide information regarding the actual castes and tribes that could be grouped under this category and their numbers, the nature of disabilities that existed, the measures that had already been taken for their moral and material improvement, and what more could be done in future. 23

To the Bengal government the most baffling question seemed to be the definition of the depressed classes. As an official frankly confessed, "we have not found any authoritative definition of the expression. It was not certainly synonymous with the expression "backward classes" which was much more comprehensive." 24 In England, material condition furnished the main criterion of depression, while the Government of India adopted other criteria, such as social degradation, educational backwardness, aboriginal descent, and hereditary criminal propensities. Accordingly, they adopted the classification of the Bombay government which stipulated that 'depressed
classes' should include three social and ethnic groups: (i) the untouchables, (ii) the aboriginal and hill tribes, and (iii) the criminal tribes. The Bengal government accepted the definition, although this classification was not regarded "suitable to Bengal, where many of the classes referred to cannot be called depressed except as regards social ostracism". Moreover, the Government of India did not state definitely what they meant by the untouchables. As the census enquiries of 1911 had revealed, their position in Hindu society of Bengal depended on a number of finer distinctions of social behaviour. However, for the present purpose, the Bengal government decided to ignore these niceties and classified only those who caused pollution by touch or presence within a certain distance. The census of 1911 had provided ample information about such groups which contributed more than one per mille of the general population of Bengal. A list was prepared on that basis and sent to the Government of India. A task which could not be fulfilled in 1911, due to public protest, was now secretly accomplished.

The list included twenty-one "Untouchable Hindu and Animist Castes or Tribes", six "Aboriginal and Hill"
tribes" and four "Criminal Tribes"—thirty-one social
groups in all. But as O'Malley, who prepared the list,
himself admitted, it was full of anomalies which could not
be avoided in the absence of any concrete and objective
criterion. The Jogi and the Rajbasis, for example, were
not covered by the definition of the 'depressed classes'
and, therefore, could not be included in the list, although
they were considered as 'backward classes' by the Education
department. On the other hand, many of the groups included
in the list were "now at a fairly satisfactory level of
education." The preparation of such a list, as O'Malley
apprehended, would tend "to stereotype a state of affairs",
which was gradually changing itself and in no time would
have little relevance to reality.

In Bengal, as the government reported, the social
structure was "not so rigid and inflexible as elsewhere",
and, whatever disability there might have existed, the
government preferred to rely on "the good sense of the
community" for their "gradual disappearance." So far as

26. L.S.S. O'Malley, Secretary, Government of Bengal,
General Dept., to the Secretary, Government of India,
Home Dept., No.7, 2 January, 1917, General (Education).

27. General (Education), GB, File No.1E-8, A January 1917.
Progs. Nos.14-17, Notes, pp.11-12.
positive action was concerned, it had been "their consistent policy to extend and improve education among the depressed classes." A number of steps had also been taken in this direction, and if the government could not do more, it was only because of "want of funds." The Government of Bengal, however, thought, at least at this stage, "that the material betterment of these classes must depend on the general progress of the province, and that there is no particular reason why Government should intervene to give special facilities to individual classes." The problem of the depressed classes till now was not high in the priority list of the Bengal government. The more "urgent problem of Bengal", it thought, was "to bring the Muhammadans into a state of educational equality with the Hindus." Together with this, there had also been the burden of other reforms of a more general character. And these two programmes were regarded "for some time to come/to) be the first care of Government." Before accomplishing these, it seemed to be undesirable to take up any other large or expensive scheme. 28 However, it was from this period onward that the Government of Bengal began to rearrange its priorities, and gradually shifted towards a deeper commitment to a policy of

positive action for the amelioration of the condition of the depressed classes, along with the Muslims. Initially though, it proceeded through non-government agencies, as far as possible.

The enquiry in 1916 had revealed that a number of non-government voluntary organisations had been working among the depressed classes. They did commendable work without much government assistance. The most notable of these organisations was certainly the Bengal Depressed Classes Mission, which had recently changed its name into Society for the Improvement of Backward Classes. The society had already spread its network far and wide - it had been running schools, in about seven districts of eastern Bengal. As the government realised, it was doing "pioneer work in a direction which had not hitherto received adequate attention from either local bodies or inspecting officers."

Hence, its enthusiasm had to be recognised and patronised in order to derive some benefit out of its initiative.


1918, the Secretary of the Society applied for a recurring grant of Rs.5,000, which was granted in October that year. But the Society was not any more allowed to function independently. Conditions of the grant subjected it to close government inspection and virtually made it a government agency.

In May 1918, the attention of the government was also drawn to the necessity of establishing special hostels for the students of the depressed classes residing in Calcutta - a problem which did not seem to be that urgent four years ago. Now as "an experimental measure", the government decided to start two special messes in Calcutta under a resident superintendent. But the responsibility had to be undertaken by Calcutta University, which was to be provided with a special grant of Rs.3,000 per annum for this purpose. The messes were started in July in rented houses and in view of the poverty of the majority.


32. Ibid; also L.S.S. O'Malley, Secretary, Government of Bengal, General (Education) Dept., to the Director of Public Instruction, Bengal, No. 569T-Edn., 18 October, 1918, General (Education), GB, File No.10-23, A October 1918, Progs. Nos.17-24.

33. L.S.S. O'Malley, Secretary, Government of Bengal, General (Education), Dept., to the Director of Public Instruction, Bengal, No. 216T/Edn., 20 May, 1918, General (Education), GB, File No.11-2, B May 1928, Progs. Nos.34-44.
of the boarders, they were charged only nominal seat rents.

Apart from this, various trust funds were also being utilised for opening schools for the depressed classes.

One of the objects of the Kevson Trust was to establish primary schools for the depressed classes in the neighbourhood of Calcutta. Out of this fund, in December 1919, it was decided to establish three schools, two for boys and one for girls, in Diamond Harbour sub-division of the 24 Parganas. In April next year, another such school was opened in the same district out of the Sussex Trust. But by far the most important measure adopted in this direction was the Bengal Primary Education Act of 1919, which provided for both voluntary and compulsory education. However, its basic principle was that compulsory education should not be introduced until proper arrangements had been made for primary education on a voluntary basis. Moreover, initially it was applicable only to the municipalities, and, only in a

34. K.L. Datta, Offg. Registrar, Calcutta University, to the Director of Public Instruction, Bengal, No.424, 27 July, 1918, General (Education), GB, File No.14-3. 3 May 1920, Progs. Nos.34-44.

35. Director of Public Instruction, to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, General Dept., No.506/3P-37-P-19, 2 August, 1919, General (Education), GB, File No.11-31. 9 December, 1919, Progs. Nos.63-71.

36. Director of Public Instruction, to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, General Dept., No.104/3P-39-P-20, 6 February, 1920, General (Education), GB, File No.11-13. 6 April 1920, Progs. Nos.253-255.
subsequent phase, it might be extended to selected unions. The Act, failed to benefit the depressed classes immediately, as most of them lived in the rural areas and were traditionally apathetic about education.

II

A more important question around this time was that of depressed classes' representation in the legislature. The Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 had accepted the principle of special electorates to protect the interests of particular communities. And this brought the question of the lower castes from the realm of philanthropy to the arena of politics. More so, because the nationalists at this time were demanding a higher degree of self-government and the British were opposing such demands by citing "the necessity for protecting minorities." However, the constitutional reforms were being talked about, and in such talks the 'depressed classes' figured prominently. The Franchise (Southborough) Committee recommended for Bengal the nomination of one depressed classes' representative who would


38. Minute of Dissent by P.C. Lyon, 10 September 1916, Home (Confidential), GB, File No. 167B (1-2) of 1916; Sir J.H. Douboulay, Secretary, Government of India, Home (Political) Dept., to the Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal, 20 March, 1917, Home (Confidential), GB, File No. 219 (1-2) of 1917.
put up their views, before the Council and point out where their particular interests were being affected. The Parliamentary Joint Select Committee appointed to consider the Government of India bill of 1919, however, observed that "the representation proposed for the depressed classes is inadequate. Within this definition are comprised, as shown in the report of Franchise Committee, a large proportion of the whole population of India." They, therefore, recommended "to give such classes a larger share of representation by nomination, regard being had to the numbers of depressed classes in each province ...... This representation should, if necessary, be in addition to, but not indiminution of, the general electorate." The Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms spelled out this policy in regard to the treatment of the depressed classes in more categorical terms: "we intend to make the best arrangements that we can for their representation in order that they too may ultimately learn the lesson of self-protection. But if it is found that their interests suffer, and that they do not share in the general progress, we must retain the means in our hands of helping them."


41. Quoted in Appointment (Reforms), GB, File No. 6R-2, A April 1920, Progs. Nos. 3-10, Notes, p. 13.
The Government of Bengal was also alive to the problem of the depressed classes, although this problem was not as acute in Bengal, as the Chief Secretary Kerr observed in his evidence before the Franchise Committee. He had, therefore, suggested that if necessary, they could be represented by nomination. In October 1918, the Government of Bengal noted that under any ordinary electoral scheme, "it is more than likely that the higher castes, and the legal profession will continue to prevail" and hence the backward castes required "special consideration." In the franchise proposal submitted in December 1918, they suggested that the Governor should have the power to nominate four non-official members from these classes, whose services would be useful in Council but who would be unlikely to stand for election in any electorate that may be set up. The Government of India also preferred to provide four seats to two depressed classes, because a single member would be "rather lonely in the Council and would not be able to domuch for his community."

42. Appointment (Appointment), GB, File No.6R-37, A September, 1919, Progs. Nos.2-4, Notes, p.5.
43. Appointment (Reforms), GB, File No.6R-2, A April 1920, Progs, Nos.3-10, Notes, p.13.
44. Appointment (Appointment), GB, File No.6R-37, A September, 1919, Progs. Nos.2-4, Notes, p.5.
But the Bengal government subsequently revised its position and considered it "unnecessary to earmark four seats for depressed classes." It did not want to allot nominated seats to specified interests before the elections and to increase total council membership was out of question, for that would "upset carefully calculated proportions and lead to fresh difficulties."45

The Government of India Act of 1919 formally recognised the 'special needs' of the depressed classes by including a representative from these classes among the fourteen nominated non-official members in the Central Legislative Assembly. In the provincial legislatures, they were represented by four nominees in the Central Provinces, two each in Bombay and Bihar and one each in Bengal and the United Provinces. But the Government of India was not very happy with just one nominated member in Bengal which contained a large untouchable population. Hence in January 1920, they suggested the reservation of one or two more nominated seats for them, if the Government of Bengal so desired.46 But the latter apprehended difficulties in going by population ratio alone. First of

45. Telegram from Bengal, Appointment, Darjeeling, to India, Home, Simla, 15 September, 1919, Appointment (Appointment), GB, File No.6R-37, A September, 1919, Progs. Nos.2-4.

46. S.P.O'Donnell, Secretary, Government of India, Reforms Office, to the Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal, No.156P, 28 January 1920, Appointment (Reforms), GB, File No.6R-2, A April 1920, Progs. Nos.3-10.
all, it was not certain as to "what castes would come within the definition of depressed classes". The enumeration of 1917 gave a population of 7 million for such classes, out of a total 45 million population in the province. And, therefore, population ratio would entitle them to about one-seventh of the seats in the Council, i.e., 15, which was a far larger number than that proposed by the Government of India. This was also "practically out of question in view of their relative importance". Moreover, the enumeration itself was not final or beyond doubt. For example, the Mahishyas were not included among the depressed classes, although with the low franchise adopted, many of them would be entitled to vote in the general constituency.47 The next important reference to the question was to be found in the Seventh Quinquennial Review on the progress of education in India for 1912-1917, in which an estimate of the number of the depressed classes was given by Sir Henry Sharp, the then Education Commissioner for India. He included the same castes as in the report of O'Malley in 1917, but the population figure he arrived at was 6.7 millions. To add to the confusion, the

47. Appointment (Safwan), CB, File No.6R-2, 1 April 1920, Prag. Nos. 3-10, Notes, p.13.
Franchise Committee Report gave the unenfranchised population figure for Bengal as 3.9 millions. 48 However, of the unenfranchised, only the Scheduled were articulate in demanding such special representation and suitable non-officials could perhaps be found to represent them. But it was doubted whether such non-official representation could be found for the other races. Apart from this, there was the numerical strength of the Scheduled, and also that of theScheduled; these two sections were expected to win some seats in the general constituencies as well. In view of the circumstances, the Government of Bengal decided that one nominated seat proposed by the Franchise Committee was sufficient. 50

But the issue was once again raised in 1928, in view of the report of the Reform Enquiry (Sub) Committee of 1928. The Committee refused to permit any general widening of the franchise due to the lack of evidence.

48. Appointment (Reforms), 20, Sub Vo. 18-2 of 1922, 1 April 1922, Pages Nos. 1-61, Notes, p.3: 'Race Relations: Competing Equalities: Law and the Backward Classes in India', 1922, Table 15, p.1555.

49. Appointment (Reforms), 20 Sub Vo. 9 of 1929, 4 April 1929, Pages Nos. 1-10, Notes, pp.13-14.

50. E. C. Syri, Additional Secretary, Govt. of Bengal to Secretary, Govt. of India, Reforms Office, No. 67, A.C. 17, March 1928, Appointment (Reforms), 20, Vol. 18-2, 4 April 1929, Pages Nos. 1-10; also, Appendix.
practical training of the electorate. But they were unanimous in their opinion that further representation of the depressed classes was required. The government of India in this connection wanted to know the opinion of the Bengal Government and invited its views on whether suitable methods could be formulated for the representation of these classes by election. But the latter was not in favour of such an extension. The foremost difficulty, it pointed out, was "about the framing of a suitable franchise", and a "suitable electorate", for there were as yet "no data as to the number of electors from these classes". The government was still not sure "as to who are to be included" in the list of 'depressed classes'.

The Calcutta University Commission had prepared a list of such castes who were educationally depressed. But the list did not include certain other castes, such as the Mahishyas, Rajbansis, Kapalis or Jogis, many of whom might not have been educationally backward, but in other respects deserved and demanded special protection. The Census of 1921 made

51. H. Tonkinson, Secretary, Govt. of India, Home Dept., to the Chief Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, No.F-290-25, Public, 21 May, 1925, Appointment (Appointment), GB, File No. 6R-42, A July, 1925, Progs. Nos. 3-4.

a fresh estimate of the population of such classes, and took into account many castes which were not so classified previously, such as Mahishya, Rajbansi, Jalia Kaibartta, Kalu, Khandait, Kurmi etc. But even then, the list did not include either the Kapalis and the Jogis or the Dhobas, Dosadhs and the Sundis who were classed as depressed in 1917. Although it was acknowledged that it was not easy to define the depressed classes, the confusion came to a head when the Census Commissioner for India did not accept the classification made by the Census Superintendent for Bengal. This was evident from the fact that while the latter estimated the number of depressed classes in Bengal at about 11½ millions, the former at only 9 millions. Under the existing confusion, therefore, it was really difficult to form a separate electorate for certain widely scattered listed castes, setting them apart from the other unlisted castes situated in a similar condition, and above all, denying the same privilege to the Muslim cultivators who would certainly resent such an arrangement. Hence the Bengal government was in favour of nomination, if additional representation was at all to be provided for. But such additional representation was considered to be both unnecessary,

because these classes were not socially oppressed in Bengal, and politically inexpedient, because a few more additional nominated representatives would upset the balance between rural and urban representation and would involve communal difficulties. In these circumstances, "the real requirement", the government thought, "is increased representation not of the depressed classes but of the poorer class of the population ....... The solution of the problem lies in lowering the franchise so as to give these classes more weight in the general constituencies." 54

Another important question which was also being raised around this time was about the representation of the depressed classes in government services. In February 1907, the Government of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, in the Resolution on the employment of Muslims, had also referred to the necessity of recruiting members of important Hindu castes other than those usually employed in government offices. But no definite policy in this direction

54. L. Birley, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Dept., No. 1419A.D, 22 June 1925, Appointment (Appointment), GB, File No. 6R-42, A July 1925, Progs. Nos.3-4; also Notes, pp.3-7.
was formulated at that time. In 1913, the Government of India declared in the Imperial Legislative Council that "any reservation of such work for them to the exclusion of others is scarcely practicable." But gradually it began to shift from this position and an enquiry in 1919 revealed that many departments under the Government of Bengal were already giving "special facilities" to the members of the depressed classes to obtain appointment, although there was not yet any such reservation policy formally declared by the government. In September 1920, the Government of India by way of giving effect to the proposal of the Public Services Commission, instructed the Bengal government to introduce competition, if found feasible, for the recruitment to the Provincial Civil Services. But in doing so, "due regard ... was to be paid to the need for representing in the services different classes and sections of the community." The Bengal


government had already accepted competition as feasible, but this competition was to be restricted among candidates nominated by college authorities. So far as communal representation was concerned, it was decided to earmark one-third of the appointments for the Muslims. But for the depressed classes, such reservation was not considered to be "safe", owing to the dearth of qualified candidates. They would be ensured an opportunity to compete and then be left to their own efforts and ability to secure an appointment. But the government moved from this position subsequently. The first Notification that came out in 1922, instructed the heads of colleges and the Director of Public Instruction to nominate candidates for the examination, with due regard being paid to the desirability of different classes and communities being represented. The Selection Committee, which included a representative of the depressed classes, was asked to select candidates from these nominations. In doing this, they were not to be guided by "such considerations as the politics of the candidates' relations, family status

and caste”. But the selection had to be “so made that not less than one-third of the candidates shall be Muhammadans, and not less than one-sixth shall be either Anglo-Indians or members of the depressed classes”.

As regards appointments, nothing was explicitly said now, but it was informally accepted that the same proportions would be followed in making the appointments as well.

The results of the first examination revealed the difficulties of fitting communal representation within the competitive system. The existing rules were criticised for not providing adequate safeguards for the representation of the depressed classes. Grouped as they were with the Anglo-Indians, the depressed classes could not compete with them on equal terms, as Bhishmadeb Daz, their representative in the first Selection Committee pointed out. Moreover, the Selection Committee had doubts and disagreement as to the classes which should come under this category. And even if this elusive problem was settled, as in this case the Calcutta University Commission list was later accepted, this

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60. Notification No. 5796A, 27 May 1922; Memorandum for Guidance of the Selection Committee, Appointment (Appointment), GB, File No. 1D-1, A November 1922, Progs. Nos. 114-417; also, Appendix F, p.XVII.

raised new problems. It was impossible to reserve appointments for them according to strict numerical ratio, as higher education was still very limited among them. However, it seemed inevitable that some "special facilities" had to be given to them as well, if a reservation policy was to be continued for the Muslims. The government was also committed to this principle, as it had accepted recently a Council resolution which proposed to secure a proportion of the appointments to the depressed classes. The problem, therefore, was how to achieve it in a proper way.

There were several alternative solutions, but each involved a number of political and administrative difficulties. To accept the right of every caste and community to a proportion of public appointment on the basis of their numerical strength, as was done in relation to the Muslims, would lead to "a perfectly impossible position." That idea was also considered to be "separatist in tendency and opposed to the spirit of competition", although it had to be followed in the case of the Muslims for "historical and other good reasons". The other alternative was to scrap the reservation system altogether. But in "the present state of education", that "would lead to all the appointments being absorbed by one class of the community which would not be to the interest of the State". At the same time, to reserve
certain proportions of appointments for the depressed classes as a whole, would have the undesirable effect of stimulating "competition for eligibility to this title", and given the "individual differences in advancement", one group might go ahead of the others and "get all the appointments reserved for the rest". Hence the only way out of this impasse was "for Government to nominate". The Notification of 1923, therefore, explicitly stated that "Government reserve the right to nominate any qualified candidate" belonging to "the backward classes as enumerated ....in the University Commission's Report." In doing so, even "the question of a minimum qualifying standard for appointment" could as well be ignored.

When all these constitutional and executive measures were being taken, the education of the depressed classes was not neglected either. Following a resolution in the Council, proposed by Syed Emdadul Haq in March 1922, the Bengal government had provided for a budgetary allocation of Rs.20,000 for the improvement of education.


63. Notification No.7721A, 30 July 1923; Memorandum for guidance of the Selection Committee, Appointment (Appointment), GB, File No.1D-1, A October 1923, Progs. Nos.3-19.

64. Appointment (Appointment), GB, File No.1D-1, A October, 1923, Progs. Nos.3-19, Appendix A, p.xvi.
among the backward classes. Out of it, 103 new scholarships, ranging from upper primary to graduate levels, were instituted for students of these classes, a Namasudra hostel was started at Faridpur and additional grants were sanctioned to the Baptist Zenana Mission and the Society for the Improvement of the Backward Classes. The latter Society, from 1923 onwards, received an annual grant of Rs.6,250 from the government and since 1922 all the government funds allocated for the schools of the depressed classes were distributed through them. The number of schools under their control and the number of pupils under instruction by them had also increased phenomenally between 1918-19 and 1924-25. As there was a fall in private subscriptions, the Secretary of the Society in February 1926, applied for an additional recurring grant of Rs.5,000 per annum towards the maintenance and improvement of the new schools started by the Society. The D.P.I., however, recommended a grant of Rs.3,000 per annum for a period of five years, which was sanctioned in March 1927, on condition that the amount of private subscriptions raised by the Society should not be less

65. Education (Education), GB, File No. 11C-92, A December 1923, Progs. Nos.8-9, Notes, pp.1-2; Education (Education), GB, File No.11C-105, B December 1923, Progs. Nos.1033-34.

than half of the total government grant. Before that, a special non-recurring grant of Rs. 400 had already been sanctioned for the purchase of a lantern and a set of slides for the lantern-lecture work of the Society, undertaken to "disseminate among the village people ideas about sanitation, epidemics etc." Meanwhile, the grants to the depressed classes' hostels in Calcutta were continued and the Government promised to consider sympathetically further proposals for similar hostels, although financial assistance would depend upon the availability of funds. Finally around August 1927, following a Council resolution, the Government started contemplating about a massive primary education programme for the students of the depressed classes, involving a budgetary allocation of Rs. 3 lakhs.

The question of the depressed classes acquired additional importance in the middle of 1928, when the Government of India, under the suggestion of Mr. M. S. Ingram of the Church Missionary Society in the United Provinces, proposed the appointment of a Special Officer in Bengal to look after the interests of the depressed classes. The proposal had originally come in 1926 but at that time the Bengal government did not consider it necessary at all. Now after two years, when the question was raised again, many in the government thought that some such step was urgently called for, in order to ameliorate the condition of the depressed classes. There was already a Special Muhammadan Officer to look after the interests of the Muslim community in the province. So far as the depressed classes were concerned, the condition in Bengal, it was acknowledged, was "altogether different from that of Madras." Yet the enquiries, undertaken on the occasion of the visit of the Simon Commission, revealed that more than half of the Hindu population in Bengal belonged to the depressed classes. So, numerically, the problem was a large one. Furthermore, the leaders of such classes were constantly

agitating against the lack of sympathy on the part of the government and there was the constant hazard that they might "believe in whatever is mentioned to them by the Congress people". Under the circumstances, the Governor-in-Council decided in September 1928, that an "officer will be placed on special duty to investigate the desirability of appointing a special officer to look after the interests of the depressed classes in Bengal". W.S. Hopkyns was given this assignment and he was supposed to begin his enquiry after the departure of the Simon Commission.72

Hopkyns conducted a detailed and elaborate enquiry which was completed in May 1929. The depressed classes "were defined as including the 'untouchables', meaning those who defile others by their presence or their touch and also those who, owing to their ignorance and backwardness, are liable to be exploited or otherwise ill-treated by other classes among whom they live". Accepting the 1921 census figures, their number was enumerated at something over 11,200,000. His report, however, concluded that, generally speaking, the backwardness of the depressed classes was now "more due to poverty and ignorance than to the disabilities of caste"; and hence, a special officer was not required. Their

72. Appointment (Appointment), GB, File No.5M-114, A November 1928, Progs. Nos.15-16, Notes, pp.2-3; Appointment (Appointment), GB, File No.5M-114 of 1928, A February 1930, Progs. Nos. 7-20, Notes, p.5.
primary need was education and funds to supply it. The Rural Primary Education Bill, then being talked about, would be of great value to these backward classes if passed into law. But failing that, certain remedies, as advised by the Director of Public Instruction, might be applied and these included extension of free-studentships, creation of additional reserved scholarships and special allotments for giving adequate grants to schools attended by the pupils of the depressed classes. Finally, grants to Missions and Societies, such as the Society for the Improvement of the Backward Classes, which were already doing good work, had to be enhanced. 73

The Government, acting upon his recommendations, resolved in November 1929 that the appointment of a Special Officer to look after the general interests of the depressed classes in Bengal was not necessary. But at the same time it accepted "the principle of doing everything possible for the improvement of the depressed classes" and the different departments were asked to submit definite schemes to this effect. 74 A detailed programme, however,

73. Report of the enquiry; H.E. Stapleton, Director of Public Instruction, Bengal, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Education Dept., No.378, 22 March 1929, Appointment (Appointment), GB, File No.5M-114 of 1928, A February 1930, Progs. Nos.7-20.

had already been prepared by Sir P.C. Mitter. These depressed classes, he argued, were "a special charge" of the Governor, as the existing royal instructions required him to make "due provision for the advancement and social welfare of these classes ..... /who/ specially rely upon our protection and cannot as yet fully rely for their welfare upon joint political action ......".

His recommendations included, first of all, the Primary Education Bill and then additional scholarships, preferably at the lower level of education and in the technical and medical institutions, but not at the higher stages of conventional education, for that would only increase the number of unemployed disgruntled bhadraloks. Secondly, provision had to be made for at least Rs. 50,000 annually for encouragement of the existing and the new societies which would run schools for the depressed classes. In addition to this, at least 10 per cent of the ministerial appointments in certain districts where these classes were mainly concentrated, had to be reserved for them, along with some special facilities for deserving youngmen of these classes to enter higher services. For the improvement of the material condition of these classes, he suggested special organisation of their caste occupations through co-operatives and the employment of an officer of the co-operative department for this purpose. Finally, to implement all these programmes,
he recommended the allocation of at least Rs.1,25,000 by the government.75

Many of the recommendations made by Hopkyns and Mitter were later implemented by the government. The Bengal (Rural) Primary Education Bill was passed by the Provincial Legislative Council in August 1930. Around the same time, the Director of Public Instruction started investigations to formulate a definite scheme for the extension of free-studentship, additional scholarships and special allotment for schools attended by the pupils of the depressed classes, while the government had already been spending a sum of over one lakh of rupees for such purposes. And in spite of financial stringency, additional grants were asked for the societies working among these people.76

So far as higher provincial services were concerned, nomination from among such candidates had already been provided for and a widening of its coverage by including new castes into the list was also being considered.77


77. W.S. Hopkyns, Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal, to all Commissioners of Divisions, Nos.1874-8 A-D, 7 October 1929, Appointment (Appointment), GB, File No.1D-146, A December 1929, Prog. No.5.
of the district officers in 1930 preferred an extension of such special facilities to the Mahishyas and the Rajbansis. They were not included in the Calcutta University Commission list, but were not as yet in a position to compete on equal terms with the Hindu and the Muslim candidates. It was decided, therefore, to amalgamate the census list of 1921 and that of the Calcutta University Commission to have a fairly exhaustive list of castes who should legitimately belong to this category. In the new list that was issued, the Namasudras, Mahishyas and Rajbansis were bracketed as "Minority Communities" along with Anglo-Indians, Indian Christians and Buddhists, and other groups were included as "Backward Classes". The list was not final or beyond revision, as other groups at any time could apply for inclusion. A separate competitive examination was proposed for them; but if inspite of that, adequate number of candidates failed to qualify, the government could nominate to not more than 10 per cent of the existing vacancies. The government also reserved the right to nominate candidates from these classes to the Upper Medical Service, but in this case no percentage was fixed.78

In August 1930 the Governor-in-Council proposed to extend such facilities to ministerial appointments as well, as this was found necessary for "the encouragement of education

78. Correspondence with district officers in Appointment (Appointment), GB, File No.1D-146 of 1929, A September 1930, Progs. Nos.12-17; also, Notes, pp.3-5, Appendix A and B.
among the backward classes". For this purpose, the list finalised for the Provincial Services was adopted, with the omission of the Anglo-Indian and Indian Christians whose educational standards were considered to be higher than those of the other communities in the list. So far as the reservation of a certain percentage of appointments was concerned, most of the district officers opposed it on the ground that sufficient number of suitable candidates were not yet forthcoming from these classes. However, in Faridpur and Bakarganj, which had a large concentration of the depressed classes, it was found that the high caste bhadraloks, who constituted only 13.5 per cent of the population in the former district, and 14.5 per cent in the latter district, had the chance of getting 66.6 per cent of the appointments open to the non-Muslims. Hence an experiment in reservation could be made in these two districts. The Memorandum that was issued in April 1931 to this effect, did not prescribe any percentage for all the areas and districts. Only for Faridpur and Bakarganj, it was stipulated that "at least 1 out of every 3 non-Muhammadans appointed to ministerial

79. R.H.Hutchins, Additional Deputy Secretary, Government of Bengal, Appointment Dept., to all Commissioners of Divisions, No.10622-626 A, 12 August 1930, Appointment (Appointment), GB, File No.4D-15 of 1929, A August 1930, Prog.No.6; also Notes, pp.4-5.

vacancies must belong to the backward classes." In other areas, the appointing authorities in the districts were instructed to encourage candidates from these classes. Such candidates "who possess the qualifications required for any such appointment", it was specifically mentioned, "should not be rejected merely because other candidates have reached a higher standard." But such preference would be applicable "only to admission to probation, not to confirmation after probation." However, even in spite of this circular, not many candidates from the backward classes were appointed in ministeral jobs during the next two years. This was either due to lack of suitable candidates or the prior claims of other communities, notably the Muslims. This did "not necessarily imply", as the government representative emphasized in the Legislative Council, "that no attempt has been made to follow out the instructions ........."

Meanwhile, by October 1930 the Director of Public Instruction had finalized a scheme for additional free studentships for students belonging to the backward Hindu classes. At present, he pointed out, the numbers of


free-students from non-Muslim, including the backward sections, and Muslim communities in government schools were ordinarily 5 per cent of their respective enrolments. This naturally operated adversely on the members of the backward classes belonging to the Hindu community. "It would, therefore, seem desirable" he emphasized, "that these backward classes should also be allowed concessions equal to, if not greater than, what are admissible in the case of Moslem pupils". His suggestion was, the students from these sections of the community "should be allowed special concessions in the shape of free studentships upto an annual limit of 15 per cent of their own enrolment." When the finance department raised the question of the loss of revenue, he argued that it "is not desirable to regard the question only from the point of view of probable loss to Government: there is such a thing as political exigency also." The proposal was ultimately sanctioned in April 1932, and it was to be applicable in Government as well as in Government-aided schools.

83. H.E. Stapleton, Director of Public Instruction, Bengal, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Education Dept., No.1147, 27 October, 1930, Education (Education), GB, File No.7S-3, A April 1932, Progs. Nos.34-36.


85. H.R. Wilkinson, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Education Dept., to the Director of Public Instruction, Bengal, No.1510 Edn., 27 April 1932, Education (Education), GB, File No.7S-3, A April 1932, Progs. Nos.34-36.
As the discussion of the constitutional reforms started during this time, the question of the depressed classes acquired much more importance. But before we go into that, it will be pertinent here to mention the views of the Bengal government on a few significant bills introduced in the Imperial Legislative Assembly, as they would reveal the attitude of the government to the whole issue of the status of the depressed classes. These would further show that through all these measures the government was merely trying to win over the depressed classes and not certainly aiming at a fundamental social revolution, although there were some such proposals that ultimately could benefit these classes in a much more concrete way. In December 1932, Raja and Ranga Iyer sought to propose in the Assembly the Untouchability Abolition Bill, which would outlaw all forms of penalty, disadvantage or disability on the members of the untouchable castes. Almost simultaneously, permission was sought for introducing in the Madras Legislative Council two other similar bills, the Removal of Depressed Classes' Religious Disabilities Bill and the Temple Entry Disabilities Removal Bill. The introduction of all these bills required the prior sanction of the Governor-General and for this, the Bengal government was asked to communicate its views. The matter was hereafter "carefully considered" by

86. Telegram from Home, New Delhi to Bengal, Calcutta, No.2881, 20 December 1932, Home (Confidential), GB, File No.2/33.
The two Hindu members, Sir P.C. Mitter and B.P. Singh Roy thought that the passage of such bills would be deeply resented by a large section of the Hindu community. But "on a strict application of the principles hitherto applied," it was found "difficult to justify refusal of sanction ........." However, so far as the Assembly bill was concerned, it was found, that "consideration of expediency seem to point clearly to refusal of sanction, provided such refusal can be supported by adequate reasons." As it involved" a very extensive invasion of private rights within the Hindu community," the possible argument against sanction would be that "it could not with propriety be submitted for the decision of a legislature unless unmistakable evidence had been furnished of a general desire on the part of the Hindu community for such a change .........". It was doubtful whether such an argument would be "sufficiently impressive"; but nevertheless, this could be used "for delaying the progress of the bill ........." The other alternative was for the government to introduce a carefully drafted bill, which would ensure the depressed classes "a position of complete equality before the law with members of the higher castes, while leaving all private rights
untouched." In that case the initiative would remain in the hands of the government which then "might successfully claim that it went as far as legislative interference could properly go." The possibilities of this course, therefore, needed to be "carefully explored."  

Even in spite of a threat from Gandhi to resort to fast, sanction to the Madras bills was refused by the Governor-General, on the ground that pilgrims to Madras temples came from all over India and, therefore, it was not a provincial issue to be decided in the provincial legislature. The Assembly bill was allowed to be introduced, although the Government insisted that "the consideration of any such measure could not proceed unless the proposals are subjected to the fullest examination in all their aspects not merely in the legislature, but also outside it by all who will be affected by them."  

The Untouchability Abolition Bill was discussed

87. R.N. Reid, Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal, to the Secretary, Government of India, Home Dept., D.O. No. 7922 P.S., 30 December 1932, Home (Confidential), GB, File No. 2/33.

88. C.M. Trivedy, Deputy Secretary, Government of India, Home Dept., to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, No.D 323-33, Poll, 25 January, 1933, Home (Confidential), GB, File No.2/33.
in the Legislative Assembly in September 1933 and January 1934, and finally on 1 February the motion for circulation of the bill was adopted. But in course of the debate, it was pointed out by the Law Member, that if the depressed classes were removed from the category of outcastes, they must be given a definite status in Hindu society. Consequently, notice was received of two bills, the Hindus' Status Bill and the Depressed Classes Status Bill, both of which required previous sanction of the Governor-General for introduction. The first bill proposed to give the untouchables the status of Brahmans and thus made a fundamental attack on the Hindu religious and social system. The Government of India decided to refuse sanction to this bill, as to permit the introduction of such "a drastic revolutionary measure" in the legislature was considered to be "contrary to public policy". The other one, the Depressed Classes Status Bill proposed by C.S.Ranga Iyer, provided that the depressed classes should henceforth be regarded as Sudras and be governed by laws applicable to Sudras. It was not considered to be that objectionable, but the local governments were asked to assess the possible effect that its introduction or public discussion might have on the Hindu community.89

89. H.G. Hallet, Secretary, Government of India, Home Dept., to the Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal, No.D 1281/34 Poll., 24 February 1934, Home (Confidential), GB, File No. 210/34.
C.C. Ghosh and B.P. Singh Roy, the two Hindu members of the Bengal Government, thought that "any endeavour to include or exclude persons from the society through legislative enactment would be an infringement on the civil rights of the members of the community." The government should not go for it only "to placate political social reformers", for that would be "highly inexpedient on political grounds."  

G.P. Hogg, the then Chief Secretary, however, visualised the possible impact of this Bill in an entirely different way and from a different perspective altogether. "I do not think", he noted, that "anything is to be gained by stifling discussion of the proposal ....... Indeed, it might be preferable politically if the subject were freely discussed..." For such a discussion would bring out the cleavages within Hindu society and would thus tear it apart. Firstly, the depressed classes and the untouchables would object to their permanent classification as Sudras, for that would check the process of "social climbing". The orthodox section, on the other hand, was likely to be divided on the subject. Some would probably approve of a scheme which would stereotype the Hindu system and put an end to social climbing. Others might resent the inclusion of untouchables or outcastes with whom they preferred to avoid contact. In this way, a public discussion would surely divide Hindu Society into warring.

90. Note by C.C. Ghosh and B.P. Singh Roy, 14.3.1934, Home (Confidential), GB, File No.210/34, Notes p.3.
groups. But after the discussion had done its job, when the proposal would come for a final opinion, "it should be opposed . . . unless the depressed classes and untouchables themselves unmistakably welcome the proposal and signify that they are prepared to accept it." However, the Governor-in-Council preferred to be more cautious and decided to advise, that "consent should not be given to the introduction of the Bill." For it sought to bring about a fundamental change in the constitution of Hindu society. If the introduction and discussion of the present bill were allowed, a widespread impression would undoubtedly be created that government favoured such a change and, however mistaken that impression might be, it would be impossible to remove it from the minds of the masses who did not understand the refinements of legislative procedure. Furthermore, the leaders of the depressed classes themselves were likely to object to such a measure which might obstruct the process of corporate social mobility. Later, Ranga Iyer withdrew his bill in the face of strong opposition and many orthodox Hindus in Calcutta breathed a sigh of relief.

91. Note by G.P. Hogg, 12.3.1934, Home (Confidential), GB, File No.210/34, Notes, p.3.

92. Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal, to the Secretary, Government of India, Home Dept., No.1591 P.S., 19 March 1934, Home (Confidential), GB, File No.210/34.

93. Telegram from the Secretary, All India Varnashram Sangh and Temple Defence Committee, Calcutta to Home Member, Simla; also General Secretary, Shree Sanatan Dharma Sabha, to the Viceroy and Governor-General in Council, 30 August, 1934, Home (Political), GI, File No.50/8/34-Poll.
The Simon Commission had, in the meantime, brought to the fore the question of separate representation for the depressed classes. The Commission agreed that in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and the United Provinces the untouchables did "not suffer so severely as in the south". But it would be "a mistake to suppose", they thought, "that the problem does not exist in these provinces." There had been considerable efforts to ameliorate their condition. But the progress had been and was likely to remain slow. 94 Hence they deserved some special protection in order to secure their legitimate political rights. But the Commission decided against a separate electorate, for this would mean a precise definition of all who are covered by the term, thus stigmatizing each voter in the list and obstructing the rise of such 'depressed' people to a higher status in the society. As a solution, the Commission proposed that there should be some reservation of seats and the proportion of such reserved seats to the total number of seats in all the Indian general constituencies should

be three-quarters of the proportion of the depressed class population to the total population of the electoral area in the province. The Governor in consultation with the associations of such people would certify which candidates should be authorised to stand for the depressed class seats.\textsuperscript{95} The Government of Bengal in August 1930, accepted in principle the recommendations of the Commission, but did not agree to the proportions suggested by them. Because any decision regarding proportions, it thought, would require a careful examination of the number of people of the depressed classes in areas where they were largely concentrated and to adjust their representation with some regard to the total representation of these areas. However, the deliberations at the Round Table Conference had made it evident that it was generally felt that some provision should be made in the new constitution for better representation of the depressed classes, and that the method of representation by nomination was no longer regarded as appropriate. The Minorities Sub-Committee report of the first Round Table Conference showed that the representative of the Depressed Classes demanded that they should be regarded a separate community for electoral purposes. But the Government of India

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid, Vol.II, p.67
was not yet sure about its feasibility. Hence in its Despatch on Constitutional Reforms, the matter was referred to the Indian Franchise Committee, to be headed by Lord Lothian, which would secure to the depressed classes adequate representation by the best practicable means. 96

In responding to the enquiries by the Indian Franchise Committee, the Bengal government found difficulties in recommending such a practical means. First of all it agreed that a general extension of franchise might not secure to the depressed classes representatives of their own choice. It was true that there were 8 (elected) standing M.L.C.s (out of 46 Hindu M.L.C.s) belonging to these groups. But most of them came from two articulate castes, the Namasudras and the Rajbansis (if the Mahishyas were included the number would have been even more). Hence even if a general extension of franchise would bring in more representatives from these classes, they would belong to these articulate groups and the others would be left behind. Hence, the depressed classes, the government realised, "cannot be left without more adequate safeguard in the scramble for power." But it was not prepared to accept the "group system of representation" as contemplated by the Franchise Committee, for it appeared to be "fanciful,

96. Appointment (Appointment), GB, File No.1R-54,A April 1932, Progs. Nos.43-83, Notes, pp.28-29.
complicated and impracticable." Nor it was in favour of
creating another separate electorate as desired by the
depressed classes' representative in the Round Table
Conference. The principle of the reservation of seats
had been accepted, but this involved a number of
difficulties.

First of all, so far as the depressed classes
were concerned, there was no experience of reservation in
the province. Hence the number of such reserved seats
according to population ratio had to be determined. And
for that, it had to be decided definitely which castes should
be included within this category. The 1931 census had
classified 82 castes as either depressed or backward with
a total population of 7,756,301 persons. The list included
the untouchables, groups of aboriginal derivation and castes
of low status in Hindu society. The Revenue department
included six other castes to the list with a population
of 3,04,643. The Rajbansis were included, as advised by
Hopkyns, in 1929; but the Mahishyas were excluded, for they
were considered to be "able to look after themselves." The
list was forwarded to the Franchise Committee in March
1932; but it was stated to be a provisional list.

99. H. Graham, Special Officer to the Government of Bengal,
to the Joint Secretary, Indian Franchise Committee,
No. 7126A, 31 March 1932, Appointment (Appointment), GB,
File No.1R-54, A April 1932, Progs. Nos. 42-83.
Now the main problem was to determine the number of seats to be reserved for these classes. Some in the government thought that the "rough and ready formula" suggested by the Simon Commission was the most practicable. But others preferred to wait for the recommendations of the Provincial Franchise Committee appointed in January 1932. In its report submitted in March, that Committee made only one important recommendation, i.e., a lowering of franchise or direct vote to be conferred on all paying at least 12 annas local tax or rate. But Mukunda Behari Mullick, the depressed classes' representative in the Committee, in his Minute of dissent, claimed for the depressed classes at least 35 seats in a chamber of 200 in Bengal. So far as franchise was concerned, the Indian Franchise Committee recommended "differential franchise" if necessary, to bring the depressed classes electorate up to their population ratio or in any event as near as possible to 10 per cent of their population strength. The Bengal government accepted the 10 per cent ratio, but hoped that no differential franchise would be


necessary to reach it. The provisional electoral rolls prepared in July 1933 proved this contention.

The Communal Decision announced in August 1932 put an end to all contemplations and calculations. Under its provisions, the members of the depressed classes, qualified to vote, would vote as usual in general constituencies. But in view of "the fact that for a considerable period these classes would be unlikely, by this means alone, to secure any adequate representation in the Legislature a number of special seats will be assigned to them ....... These seats will be filled by election from special constituencies in which only members of the "depressed classes" electorally qualified will be entitled to vote." Such voters would, therefore, vote both in general and special constituencies. This proposed arrangement of special constituencies would be terminated after twenty years. But in the meantime they might be abolished with the consent of the classes concerned.

The Decision was, however, confined in scope to the provincial legislatures only. In Bengal, it was acknowledged that a majority of voters in some general constituencies would belong to the depressed classes. Accordingly, pending further investigation, the number of seats to be reserved for them was not fixed. But it was intended, that "the Depressed classes should obtain not less than ten seats in the Bengal Legislature." 

The Communal Decision raised a storm in Indian politics as Gandhi, then in confinement at Yeravda, decided to fast unto death, unless the separate electorate for the depressed classes was revoked. This arrangement, he thought, would signify a permanent split in Hindu society, would perpetuate the stigma of untouchability and would stand in the way of eventual assimilation of the untouchables into the Hindu community.

The crisis came to an end with the Poona Agreement between the representatives of the depressed classes and the caste Hindus, signed in September 1932, in the presence of Gandhi. The agreement accepted the principle of reservation of seats for the depressed classes out of the general electorate seats.

103. 'Communal Decision,' 4 August 1932, Home (Political), GI, K.W. to File No. 41/5/32-Poll. According to the Decision, in a house of 250 members in Bengal, 80 were declared to be general seats, out of which 10 were earmarked for the depressed classes. The rest of the seats were distributed as follows: Muslims-119, Indian Christians-2, Anglo-Indians-4, Europeans-11, Landholders-5, Universities-2, Labour-8, Commerce, Industry, Mining and Planting-19.

104. Marc Galanter, op.cit., p.31.
in the provincial legislatures - in Bengal the number of such reserved seats would be 30, instead of 10 awarded in the Communal Decision. But election to these seats should be by joint electorates, subject, however, to a particular procedure. All the members of the depressed classes registered in the general electoral roll of a constituency would form an electoral college which would elect a panel of four candidates belonging to the depressed classes for each of such reserved seats by the method of the single vote and four persons getting the highest number of votes in such primary election were to be the candidates for election by the general electorate. In the central legislature, 18 per cent of the seats allotted to the general electorate would be reserved for the depressed classes and the same procedure of election would be followed. The arrangement would continue for ten years, unless terminated before by mutual agreement. Apart from representation in the legislature, the Poona Pact also envisaged that every endeavour should be made to secure a fair representation of the depressed classes in the public services and in every province an adequate sum should be earmarked for providing educational facilities for the members of these classes.105

The agreement appeared to be "reasonable" to His Majesty's Government. Moreover, the condition of Gandhi was so critical that he might collapse any time. Under the circumstances, the Government of India accepted the Poona Pact without any delay. However, its full implementation, it was stated, would need further consideration, as it contained many provisions which lay outside the scope of the Communal Decision which mainly dealt with the question of representation in the provincial legislatures. The Bengal Government had no other option but to accept it; but it did so with reservations. First of all, there was no time to assess the opinion of the classes affected by the agreement. There was no public protest for the time being, because of the necessity to save Gandhi's life. But disaffection could legitimately be apprehended, as the caste Hindus had lost 20 more seats and none from Bengal were among the signatories of the Pact, which so seriously affected the political life of the province. On the other hand the Depressed Classes Association of Bengal had already registered its protest against the insufficient number of seats reserved for their


members. But despite all these, the Poona agreement was taken to be a settled fact, and the Government of India Act of 1935 merely embodied its main provisions. It granted six reserved seats in the Central Legislature and thirty in the Bengal Legislative Assembly for the depressed classes who were henceforth to be known as the "Scheduled Castes." The term "depressed" had been in use to indicate backwardness in various matters like social and educational. But its use as a constitutional epithet would increase the confusion. Moreover, it was not the intention of the government to label any particular caste or tribe with the stigma of untouchability or depressed character. Hence the value-free term "scheduled" was adopted, as the castes concerned would be entered in a schedule for electoral purposes.

The first and foremost problem in connection with the implementation of this constitutional programme was to define the Scheduled Castes and to fix up their final list. The Simon Commission had recommended that the Franchise Committee would undertake for each province the framing of a definition of depressed classes and the determination of their numbers. The Committee decided that the term should


be applied only to those who were untouchables.\textsuperscript{110} The Communal Decision had also envisaged that the definition in each province would be based on this general principle; but modifications were allowed, where the application of the general criterion of untouchability was likely to result in a definition unsuitable to the special conditions of the province. The Bengal government considered this criterion unsuitable to the general conditions of Bengal, and adopted instead a more general criterion of "social and political backwardness". A provisional list of such castes was prepared and a Resolution in January 1933 declared that: "The list has been prepared on the basis of the social and political backwardness of these castes and the necessity of securing for them special representation in order to protect their interests." However, before making the list final, the local government decided to publish it for criticism and invited opinions from associations and individuals for inclusion or non-inclusion of any caste or castes in the list.\textsuperscript{111} Along with this, the district officers were asked to examine the "social, political, economic and

\textsuperscript{110} Appointment, GB, File No.8L-15, B April 1933, Prog. No.37, Notes, pp.2-3.

\textsuperscript{111} Resolution by - The Government of Bengal, Appointment (Reforms) Department, No.122 A.R., 16 January, 1933, Appointment (Reforms), GB, File No.1R-2 of 1933, A April 1934, Progs. Nos.9-61; also, Notes, p.4.
educational position of the castes" in their areas, "to determine whether the castes are below the general level of development and so deserve special representation to protect their interests". They were "asked particularly to note that social precedence in itself was not a determining factor."

By September, the government received a number of representations from public bodies, caste associations and individuals. The recommendations of the Divisional Commissioners and District Officers had also been carefully considered. On the basis of that a final list was prepared and forwarded to the Government of India. It included 76 castes, while the previous provisional list had 86.

When the Government of India Bill was announced, the First Schedule to the bill defined the Scheduled Castes as "Such castes, races and tribes corresponding to the classes of persons formerly known as the 'Depressed Classes' as His Majesty in Council may specify." The Government of Bengal had some objections to this definition. First of all, the term 'depressed classes' was never defined in precise language;

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112. R.N. Gilchrist, Reforms Officer to the Government of Bengal, to All Commissioners of Divisions and all District Officers (except Chittagong Hill Tracts), No.1790-1820 A.R., 4 April 1933, Appointment (Reforms), GB, File No.1R-2 of 1933, A April 1934, Progs.Nos.9-61.

it was used in a loose manner covering a miscellaneous group of castes, races and tribes. The Poona Pact on the other hand, had stipulated that the 'Scheduled Castes' must belong to the Hindu community. But if the definition proposed were to stand, then it would be possible to read it as implying that all backward races or tribes, whether they belonged to the Hindu community or not, should be included within the term 'Scheduled Caste.' In that case, 'Scheduled Caste' population would be raised by over half a million. Moreover, the Christian members of such castes would have to be included. Such an "extension of the Poona Pact to non-Hindus, would represent a political change of the first importance.\textsuperscript{114} Caste Hindu opinion would strongly resent the inflation of the Scheduled Caste numbers by the inclusion of the 5,28,000 members of the "primitive tribes" who did not belong to the Hindu community. The Scheduled Caste leaders would equally take strong objection to it. Indian Christian opinion would be grievously shocked by the suggestion that the Christian members of the primitive tribes should be grouped for electoral purposes with the Scheduled Castes. Finally, this would

\textsuperscript{114} R.N. Gilchrist, Reforms Commissioner and Joint Secretary, Government of Bengal, to C.K. Rhodes, Joint Secretary, Government of India, Reforms Office, D.O.No.866 A.R., 2 April 1935, Appointment (Reforms), GB, File No.1R-88, A November 1935, Progs. Nos.27-39; the Christian converts from the depressed classes were enjoying special educational facilities along with other members of such classes since 1929, see, Education (Education), GB, File No.1E-8, B September 1929, Progs.Nos.294-297, Abstract.
also affect delimitation of constituencies. The Secretary of State accepted the objections of the local government and decided to revise the existing definition in the First Schedule to the Bill as follows:

"....'the Scheduled Castes' means such castes, races or tribes, parts or groups which appear to His Majesty in Council to correspond to the classes of persons formerly known as 'the depressed classes' as His Majesty in Council may specify".

Indian Christians all over India were to be excluded from the definition of the Scheduled Castes; and in Bengal alone, persons professing tribal religions and Buddhism were to be excluded from this definition. All these revisions were incorporated in the Scheduled Caste Order of 1936, which also contained the final list of the Scheduled Castes for the purposes of the First, Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Government of India Act of 1935. The list included 76 castes and was almost the same list forwarded to the Government of India in September 1933, with the exclusion of the Sutradhars.


who had protested against their inclusion and the inclusion of the Sundis who had put up a vigorous agitation for inclusion.118

This final list of Scheduled Castes was also full of anomalies, as on the previous occasions. It included a number of aboriginal tribes who did not as such belong to the Hindu community. On the other hand, it excluded many castes who did not want to be included, such as the Telis, Kalus, Jogis and Sutradhars. But it incorporated many others against their wishes, as in the opinion of the government, they fulfilled the condition of social and economic backwardness, although many of the former group lived in a similar socio-economic condition as those of the latter. Therefore, sometimes the principle of self-determination and sometimes the judgement of the government decided the status of a caste. And this judgement was entirely subjective, as there was no definite standard to measure the social or economic backwardness of a

caste. The list thus prepared was nevertheless final, so far as electoral arrangements under the new constitution were concerned. It was also to be followed in matters of recruitment to the public services both provincial higher services and ministerial jobs. In this sphere, no further step was immediately deemed necessary to give effect to the provisions of the Poona Pact, except only fifteen per cent of the ministerial vacancies in nine districts of Bengal being reserved for the minorities and backward classes.

The other problem connected with the implementation of the constitutional reforms was related to the delimitation of Scheduled Caste constituencies. Past electoral records

119. Secretary, Indian Association, Calcutta, to the Reforms Officer to the Government of Bengal, 15 February 1933; Secretary, Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha, to the Reforms Officer to the Government of Bengal, No. 4469, 15 February 1933; R.C. Roy, Hony. Secretary, Bengal Depressed Classes' Association, to the Reforms Officer to the Government of Bengal, 17 February, 1933, Appointment (Reforms), GB, File No.1R-2 of 1933, A April 1934, Progs. Nos.9-61; also, Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings, Vol.41, No.2, 27 March 1933, pp.572-573.


121. G.P. Hogg, Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal, to the Secretary, Government of India, Home Dept., No.10255A, 20 August 1934, Appointment (Appointment), GB, File No. 4M-1 of 1933, A September 1934, Progs.Nos.7-12; also, Memorandum No.9898A, Government of Bengal, Appointment (Appointment) Dept., 21 September 1936, Appointment (Appointment), GB, File No.4D-3 of 1934, A November 1936, Progs. Nos.31-44.
showed that in many districts where more than half of the population belonged to these castes, only caste Hindu candidates were elected in all the previous elections. Even if there were some depressed classes' Members of the Legislature, many of them did not truly represent their interests — some of them being substantial landlords, like Prasanna Deb Raikat, Ranjit Pal Choudhuri or Srish Chandra Nandi, and some representing the Congress, like Hem Chandra Naskar, Mohini Mohan Das or Hosseni Raut. So the "real point" was not the returning of a few Scheduled Caste candidates, "but returning members who represent the Scheduled Castes." And with this purpose in view, the special constituencies had to be devised.\textsuperscript{122} These reserved seats, as decided by the Provincial Advisory Committee, would be confined to rural areas alone, where they were mostly concentrated and were to be distributed on the basis of their population by divisions and districts.\textsuperscript{123} A preliminary calculation showed that roughly 49 percent of

\textsuperscript{122} Note by R.N. Gilchrist, 23.8.1932; also, Appendix I&II, Appointment (Reforms), GB, File No.1R-133 of 1932, A July 1933, Progs. Nos.20-21, Notes, p.3.

\textsuperscript{123} Appointment Department, Reforms, Memorandum on the Scheduled Caste Constituencies for the Bengal Legislative Assembly, Appointment (Reforms), GB, File No.1R-30, A April 1934, Progs.Nos.103-111.
the Scheduled Caste population lived in western Bengal, 28 per cent in northern Bengal and 23 per cent in eastern Bengal. The distribution of seats then ought to be about 15 for western Bengal, 8 for northern Bengal and 7 for eastern Bengal. No district with less than one per cent of the Scheduled Caste population of the province would get any reserved seat. Later, the rule was revised to allot one seat each to five such districts, i.e. Howrah (0.69), Nadia (0.63), Murshidabad (0.69), Malda (0.69) and Tippera (0.75); Bogra (0.27) and Pabna (0.42) were combined to get one seat; but Rajshahi (0.48), Noakhali (0.27) and Chittagong (0.18) had to go seat-less.\textsuperscript{124}

Another knotty problem that intrigued the local government, was whether the members of the Scheduled Castes should be freely allowed to contest the unreserved seats as well. In two divisions, Presidency and Rajshahi, and in eight districts (Jalpaiguri and Siliguri combined) the Scheduled Castes were in a majority; in some other districts the numbers were nearly equal. Hence, if they were allowed to contest unreserved seats without restriction they could capture several seats over and above the reserved quota of 30.

\textsuperscript{124} Appointment Department, Reforms, Statement V: Allocation of Depressed Class Seats in Rural Areas, Appointment (Reforms), GB, File No.1R-30, A April 1934, Progs. Nos.103-111; also Notes, p.22. Distribution of Scheduled Caste population and allocation of seats in AppendixII.
The number of such additional seats, given the present numerical ratio, might be as large as 8, with the consequence of 38 out of 66 general rural seats in Bengal going to the members of the Scheduled Castes. This "may not only defeat the objects of the Poona Pact itself, but may result in a travesty of the whole principle of representation." As the Pact stood, it could only be dissolved with the mutual consent of the parties. But if the Scheduled Castes of Bengal were placed in a privileged position of having 30 reserved seats and the chance of several more in open competition, then their consent was not likely to be secured easily. Thus the Pact might result "in a permanent advantage to the Scheduled Castes at the expense of the Caste Hindus." Certainly this was not intended by the Pact, otherwise the caste Hindu representatives would not have agreed to it. The only remedy to this anomalous situation, was to make it a condition that in any multiple-member constituency, with one or more reserved seats, no Scheduled Caste candidate would be eligible for election, unless he had passed through the panel procedure as envisaged in the Poona Pact. "The protection, in the peculiar situation in Bengal", the local government argued, "...... need not go further; if it does so, the reservation passes from protection to domination." 125

The Indian Association and some of the Hindu Members of the Legislative Council also supported the contention of the Bengal government by demanding that the members of the Scheduled Castes should be prevented from contesting any unreserved seat, except in constituencies where there was no reserved seat at all.\textsuperscript{126} The Secretary of the All Bengal Depressed Classes Federation, however, thought that such prevention would "virtually amount to denial of the rights of the Scheduled Castes as members of the general Hindu community."\textsuperscript{127} Naturally, this would be a negation of the central idea of the Poona Pact. Hence, ultimately, the members of the Scheduled Castes were allowed to contest for the unreserved seats as well, along with the 30 reserved seats. The polling for the Primary (Panel) election for the reserved seats took place on 21 November 1936, and that for the general elections between 18 and 22 January 1937.\textsuperscript{128} The results showed,


\textsuperscript{127} Aprakash Gayen, Acting Secretary, All Bengal Depressed Classes' Federation, to R.N. Gilchrist, Reforms Commissioner and Joint Secretary, Government of Bengal, 15 July 1935, Appointment (Reforms), GB, File No.1R-9 of 1935, A January 1936, Progs. Nos.1-17.

\textsuperscript{128} Bengal Legislative Assembly Electoral Programme, Home (Constitution and Elections), GB, File No.R3E-58, A May 1937, Progs. Nos.92-125.
that in addition to 30 reserved seats, the Scheduled Castes had also captured two more non-reserved seats. And the coalition ministry that was formed subsequently under Mr. A.K. Fazlul Haq, included two Scheduled Caste ministers, Mukunda Behari Mullick (Namasudra) and Prasanna Deb Raikat (Rajbansi).

The "Government is ready, has always been ready and will always be ready, to help [the] Scheduled Castes....", declared the new Chief Minister in the Bengal Legislative Assembly on 14 March 1939. In fact, from 1937 onwards, the government had been offering all conceivable facilities to the members of the Scheduled Castes, particularly in the sphere of education. A State scholarship for study abroad and 19 special scholarships for medical education for the Scheduled Caste students were created. A recurring provision of about Rs. 30,000 was sanctioned for other scholarships and stipends for the students belonging to the Scheduled Castes, along with an additional lump provision of Rs. 5 lakhs for affording them further educational facilities. A Special Officer belonging to the Scheduled Caste community was appointed to look after their educational needs. A Scheduled Caste


130. 'Report on the Political Situation in Bengal for the second half of March 1937', Home (Confidential), GB, File No. 10/37.

Education Committee was also appointed in 1939, with Dr. W.A. Jenkins as the Chairman, the Special Officer as the Secretary and 13 Scheduled Caste M.L.A.s as members. The Committee was supposed to "investigate the problem of improving the education of the scheduled castes in the province and to make their recommendations in the matter .......".\(^\text{132}\)

In the public services, however, the Scheduled Castes did not make much headway. Only two of their members in 1937-38 and three in 1938-39 could get through the Special Clerkship Examination; the corresponding figures for the Bengal Civil Service Examination being only two for both the years. Out of 32 appointments made by the Public Service Commission through selection in 1937-38 only one Scheduled Caste candidate was appointed in the Bengal Medical Service (Upper) and among 36 such appointments made in 1938-39 one such candidate was selected as Inspector of Factories. In the latter case, of course, the Scheduled Caste candidate was given appointment by overruling the claim of a caste Hindu nominee recommended by the Commission. And then, in the sphere of representative bodies, the new Calcutta Municipal Amendment Act of 1939 provided for 3 seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes, to be filled in by nomination.\(^\text{133}\)

\(^{132}\) Two years of Provincial Autonomy in Bengal, Publicity Department, Government of Bengal, (Calcutta, 1939), pp.32,48,80,275. Details of scholarships and stipends for the Scheduled Castes during the period 1938-40 in AppendixIII.

\(^{133}\) Bengal Ministry and the Hindus of Bengal, Publicity Department, Government of Bengal, (Calcutta, 1940), pp.1-5
'Protective discrimination'[^134] in favour of the 'depressed classes', later called the 'Scheduled Castes', was thus a persistent feature of British policy in Bengal. It had started developing since the early twentieth century and by 1937, it had become firmly established. The Bengal government was a bit uncertain about its possible coverage, partly because of the necessity of patronising the Muslims who were politically more important in this province than the depressed classes, and partly because the problem of untouchability and social discrimination or disability was relatively less severe in Bengal than in other parts of India. The central government, on the other hand, wanted to introduce a uniform policy throughout India and the reluctant local government was, therefore, forced into it. Of course, the latter was never wholly averse to it. The colonial ethnographers, as we have seen, had already pointed out the existence of a depressed community in Bengal which

[^134]: So far as the British period is concerned, the term 'Protective Discrimination', seems to be more appropriate than 'Compensatory Discrimination' used recently by Marc Galanter. The fundamental assumption of the British was that the interests of the relatively backward communities needed special 'protection'. It was only after independence, that the Constitution of India proposed to 'compensate' the Scheduled Castes for the past discrimination they had been subjected to. cf. Marc Galanter, op. cit., pp.2-3, and Chapter 3.
deserved special protection of the government. And the political exigencies were also dictating such a policy, which would run parallel to that of rallying the Muslims. The difference in attitudes between the two governments seems to be merely confined to the perception of the nature and extent of such a protective policy and certainly not about its rationale or desirability.

The most important question in this connection was to determine the probable beneficiaries of such a protective policy. The Bengal government sought to solve this elusive problem by preparing lists of such castes on no less than eight occasions between 1917 and 1936, each list being taken to be an improvement over the previous one and each list being found faulty on the next occasion. As a result, they included different sets of social groups, although some names were common in all. This anomalous situation was partly due to the absence of any objective criterion to determine the social rank of the different groups. It was, perhaps, not even possible to fix up any such objective criterion either. Hence the subjective judgement of the government alone decided whether the economic, social or educational status of a particular caste was so backward as to deserve the special protection of the government. Thus the colonial government became a more direct arbiter of social and economic
life in the country and the system of patronage-distribution became dependent on caste-identity or a subjective assessment of the socio-economic conditions of not the individuals but the castes they belonged to. Caste-consciousness, as a result, was articulated in the field of secondary-group relations and structural pluralism was reinforced.

This brings us to the question of the role of government in a plural society and its possible impact. In a liberal pluralist society, the government sometimes intervenes to prevent discrimination, but it never makes any formal distinction between groups of people, defined in terms of racial or ethnic origin, either for providing benefits or exerting penalties. In such a society, the individual gets his economic or political rewards on the basis of his personal merits and not for his group-affiliation. In such a system, the policy of the government to structural issues is strictly _laissez-faire_. In corporate pluralism, on the other hand, racial or ethnic groups are recognised as valid social entities and the distribution pattern of political power and economic rewards is based on group-affiliation and group rights. In other words, group-membership plays a significant role in educational access, occupational placement, income, political power and other
similar matters. The very logic of this reward-system thus puts pressure on the members of the racial or ethnic groups to stay within the group for marriage, close personal friendship, institutional life and social identity. Structural pluralism is thus emphasized and sustained. In fact, it sometimes becomes necessary to adopt such a model of rewards in order to allow submerged groups which have suffered heavy discrimination in the past to catch up with the other groups within a reasonable span of time. But in a colonial set up, the model may have other justifications - notably the imperatives of a policy of divide et impera. And this may perhaps explain why the British government in India moved from its early laissez faire (so far as its reward system was concerned) to a policy of protective discrimination or in other words, from a liberal pluralism model to that of corporate pluralism, in the early twentieth century.

What Eugene Irschik concluded for Madras may perhaps be legitimately generalised for India, and for that matter for Bengal as well. On the one hand, the colonial government, through all these executive and constitutional measures, was perhaps seriously trying to redress the existing social imbalance in Indian society. But, on the other, by encouraging self-awareness and political aspirations of the lower castes,

it tried to keep the nation divided and weak, at a time
when anti-imperialist agitation was gathering momentum
all over the country. It had now become necessary "to
popularize the need for a continued British connection
with India and in so doing maintain the stability of the
British position." "As regards the depressed classes",
 wrote the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, "our objective
is to raise them from degradation and merge them in the
general level of the population." For that purpose, it
was decided to offer them the "special protection" of the
government and "that no room for doubt ...... would be
left on that point." It indicated, in the words of the
Viceroy himself, a change from an "attitude of neutrality"
to a policy of "active assistance." At the same time it
seemed politically expedient to secure them "adequate and
suitable representation" in the legislative bodies, so that
they could exercise "real political influence", not only to
make their needs known, but also "to ensure that those needs

136. Eugene Irschik, Politics and Social Conflict in South
India: The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism,
1916-1929, (University of California Press, Berkeley

137. Extract from a Private and personal letter from the
Viceroy to Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for
India, 13 February 1934, Reforms Office,GI,File No.
180/33-Reforms, Notes, p.18.

138. W.H. Lewis to Mr. Hallett, Government of India, Home
Dept., 15.12.33, Reforms Office, GI, File No.169/33-R.
are not overlooked."\textsuperscript{139} It seemed "preferable from every point of view to encourage them to make use of their powerful block of votes to extract for themselves the concessions they desire."\textsuperscript{140} Attempts to politicise caste were, therefore, motivated not by the philanthropic urge alone but by the desire to encourage separatist political tendencies as well.

Indian society also responded in a way the colonial government expected it to. The constant attempt of the government at classification and quantification of castes for the purpose of patronage-distribution, made the Indians conscious of their caste identity. It had always been an important factor in India, so far as the primary or

\textsuperscript{139} 'The Viceroy's Speech In Reply To An Address Presented By A Deputation Of The Leading Members Of The Depressed Classes on Wednesday, The 29th March 1933', Home (Political), GI, File No. 50/IV/33-Poll.

\textsuperscript{140} Note by M.W. Yeatts, 26.11.33, Reforms Office, GI, File No. 180/33-Reforms, Notes.
interpersonal relationships were concerned. But now it became important in the realm of secondary group relations as well, thus transforming a socio-cultural dichotomy into a conflict of interests. Caste in the process became a politically relevant category. Structural separation between castes, particularly between the lower castes at the one end and the higher castes on the other, was thus reinforced and given an additional lease of life - although such separation was now valid more in a secular rather than ritual context.