CHAPTER-III

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The socio- political movements were mainly responsible for the social awakening and transformation of the Tamil society. As a prelude to the social awakening, the rise and growth of political consciousness, the introduction of Western education, the judicial system, the administrative measures and the reorganization had paved the way for the rise of a new middle class. However some of the associations like the Zamindars Association, The Bengal British India Society of 1843, The British India Association of 1851, The Bombay Association of 1852 were largely responsible for the social awakening. Initially these groups consolidated themselves into political associations in caste-based society. The caste-Hindus, who formed a predominant social group in the state, along with the depressed section, worked against the Brahminocracy. It resulted in the rise and growth of the non-Brahmin movement. Though these movements functioned on parallel lines, ultimately they helped the convergence of new trends and helped the people to attain social awakening.

Spread of Western Education

The socio-political awakening in Tamil Nadu was mainly due to the introduction and spread of Western education which worked under diverse circumstances. It initiated an awakening among the people through administrative measures, missionary and voluntary enterprises. The earliest educational system known as Gurukula system was beneficial mainly to the upper caste-Hindus. When the English East India Company was in power, certain forces persuaded it to introduce an educational system based upon the west. The efforts of some of the civil officers of the Company, the activities of the Christian

missionaries and the rise of a new consciousness among the enlightened Indians prepared the ground for the introduction of Western education. The East India Company came forward to impart education and as per the Charter Act of 1813, a sum of not less than one lakh of rupees was allotted to promote scientific knowledge.[1] Further, the Minutes of Macaulay, 1835, directly put an end to the native system of education. With the help of the native reformer Rajaram Mohanroy, Lord Macaulay implemented English education and thereby replaced Sanskrit. It united the Indians to some extent and promoted the growth of national awakening in India and increased communication activities between the people of different regions of India.[2] The introduction of English education in Madras Presidency promoted a close association of the Tamils, the Malayalees and the Kannada-speaking people, which in turn contributed to an alignment of a cultural and Dravidian affinity. Thus, English language helped to cut across the linguistic barriers by serving as the 'lingua franca' for the multi-lingual people of South India. It also helped the elites of South India to discuss the common problems relating to the political developments, social emancipation and awareness among the rural people.[3] The elites of all section who studied the history of the French Revolution and the history of modern governments etc, generated the ideas of democratic and constitutional reforms in their own regions.

Christian Missionaries and Voluntary Agencies

Besides the elite section of the people, the Christian missionaries played a vital role in the awakening and transition of the society. The

1. Atmand Misra, *Grants in Aid of Education in India*, Madras, 1973, p.9.

2. *The Modern Rationalist*, Madras, February 1983, p.11.

3. Sukbir Choudry, *Growth of Nationalism in India, 1857-1980*, Vol.1, New Delhi, 1973, pp.17 and 338-339.

Charter Act of 1813 freely allowed the Christian missionaries to enter the various activities for modernizing the South Indian society. They conducted the meeting at the premises of district headquarters under the patronage of the Collectors and discussed the problems relating to social degradation and evil practices which prompted the people to wake up from the slumber. The association of the people with the missionaries helped them to read and study the literary works and books of the missionaries on castes in India, Hindu manners, customs and ceremonies, slavery and agricultural bondage in South India in the nineteenth century, Parayas and the land, wrongs of the Parayas, Panchama education, Shanars of Tinnevelly and Castes and Tribes of Southern India. Further the works of Christian writers and their missionary activities analysed the Indian problems in detail and exposed the prevailing discriminative social set up.[4]

Some of the texts were also compiled with the assistance of Indians. They are grammar books, dictionaries in English and vernacular languages. They were highly valuable for the emerging middle class. Further, the Christian sundry publications such as the *Madras Mail, The Harvest Field, International Review of Missions, The Madras Christian College Magazine, The Foreign Field, Kingdom Overseas* etc., extended the knowledge on the socio-economic and political problems of the caste-ridden society in Tamil Nadu.[5] The people, who read them, condemned the Hindu superstitions and social practices based on Manu dharma. These westernized Indians cultivated a sense of self-respect and self-consciousness which clearly proved the fact that the works of the missionaries aroused the consciousness of the downtrodden people and created a new worldview.

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4. Manickam, S., *Studies in Missionary History*, Madras, 1988, pp.145-146.

5. *Ibid.*

The Christian missionaries were the first and foremost in encouraging the educational activities in Tamil Nadu. In 1873 John Anderson, a missionary of the Church of Scotland, opened at George Town in Madras, a school known as General Assembly School which later developed into Madras Christian College. In 1841 Elphinstone, the Governor of Madras, opened the high school of Madras where education of an advanced nature was imparted. This school later developed into the Madras Presidency College. With the commencement of universities and vernacular schools on the basis of Charles Wood's Despatch of 11th July 1854, the missionaries actively entered the field of education. They also understood that education was one of the fields where the spade work could be done to improve the condition of the backward people.[6] As the first step, they attempted to provide social rights to them in the caste-ridden society. They recruited the degraded and condemned men and women of the Hindu society, in their houses as domestic servants and these jobs facilitated a close association with the Englishmen. They freely allowed the poor and illiterate men to approach them and treated them on par with the high caste people.

The advocates of Christianity served the poor people even during the natural disasters like famines and droughts which hit Tamil Nadu between 1865 and 1880. The Christian Mission Society, London Mission Society, Young Men's Christian Association and Anglo-Indian Association of Southern India vigorously preached their new socio-religious philosophy of equality, liberty and fraternity.[7] They rendered valuable service by influencing public opinion against social abuses

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6. Trilok Nath, *Politics of the Depressed Classes*, Delhi, 1987, p.26.

7. Sobhanan, B., (ed.), *A History of the Christian Missions in South India*, Tiruvananthapuram, 1996, passim.

like degradation of women and custom. They mobilised a number of Shanars, Panchamas and other deprived sections of society.[8] The missionaries did a lot for the poor land labourers, bonded serfs and helpless victims who were nurtured in bad circumstances. As a result, the poor and the destitute, acquired a new dignity, instead of being dirty, dishonest, drunken and immoral. They slowly became worthy members of the society, acquiring a new sense of human dignity. Colonies were laid open to them, where they lived freely and fearlessly. Welfare schemes were extended to the non-Christians too. Universal brotherhood was also practised. Their kind touch and cheerful service gave hope to the hopeless and voiceless lives, and led them in the path of progress. The constant criticism of the missionaries against casteism, Brahminism and puranism compelled the orthodox Hindu elites to change their attitude not only ideologically but also practically. This modified position of the caste-Hindus went a long way in removing the social barriers and the social evils. Appreciating the works of Christian missionaries, T.V. Seshagiri Iyer, a high caste-Hindu himself remarked: "He was not concerned with their endeavours to gain converts. The work of foreign missions also is waking up the educated classes of India. It has made them realize that they would be losing ground if they neglect the untouchable classes."[9]

Thus the agencies of Christian faith, by giving basic necessities, educated the bottom-line people. The gradual development among the backward classes persuaded them to embrace Christianity, where they experienced love and respect. The growth of these new scholars from the ranks of backward people, in due course, exceeded that of the Brahmins, the hereditary scholars. In women education, the Indian

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8. Shankar Pathak, *Social Welfare*, Madras, 1981, p.68.

9. Natesan, G.A., *The Depressed Classes of India*, New Delhi, 1977, p.54.

Christians went ahead of all of them. Although they maintained that the intellectual charter had laid great emphasis on the principle of 'equalitarianism', it did not reach all sections, especially the backward classes. Therefore, they urged the government to make educational institutions accessible to all classes irrespective of castes. On account of their persistent demands, the government schools were thrown open to all.[10]

Further the British government in 1890's, made primary education compulsory for all and came forward to render scholarships, stipends and other forms of material support to the children belonging to the backward sections during the training periods. The Madras Government reported that in 1901 those who studied in middle schools, high schools and colleges were mostly Christian students belonging to the poorer sections. By 1910, their position further improved in the districts of Madras, Madurai, Coimbatore and Tirunelveli and literacy rate of the depressed class increased considerably.

Excluding the Christian missionaries, many voluntary agencies and energetic sympathizers contributed valuable services in the field of education to rescue the socially backward people from the darkness of illiteracy. In this endeavour, John Rathinam of Madras, between 1886 and 1889, established three elementary schools, a middle school, and a student hostel in Madras city. Col. Olcott, the founder of Theosophical Society, strongly believed that education is the evident panacea for all social disorders. He rendered great service in disseminating knowledge to those at the bottom of the society. As a result of these services, five schools came into being in Madras, collectively known as 'Olcott

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10.   Shankar Pathak, *op.cit.*, pp.78-85.

Panchama Free Schools'. These elementary schools excelled other ordinary schools. In addition to the above schools, one Chellappa Mestri established an Anglo-Vernacular School at Marikuppam. In the same year, another person M.Y. Murugesan established two schools-one at Marikuppam and the other at Champion Reffs. In 1907, the depressed class people of Madras Presidency established a school and library in Bangalore Cantonment.[11] In 1911 Swami Sahajanandam, an untouchable saint and a highly cultured Sadhu, started a primary school at Chidambaram under the name of Saint Nandanar School and in 1916 inaugurated Nandanar Educational Society. The society had its branches in eight villages around Chidambaram and created an awakening regarding the rights and privileges offered by the Government to the helpless people.[12]

Progressive Measures of the British

The humane minded organizations brought to some extent the neglected section of the society to a level ground to compete with the people of other castes with equal chances. Even afterwards, the British Government, by taking drastic measures, tried its best to redeem the suffers from the shackles of complicated problems which embroiled on the basis of caste system, age old customs and religious practices. In this context, the government undertook progressive measures to widen their knowledge and to provide opportunities for them to walk into a new society, which was expected to be casteless. When the British rule was firmly established in India, it evolved a new economic system and technology and had a new approach to the social and cultural problems.

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11. Kamalanathan, T.P., K. *Veeramani is Refuted and the Historical Facts about the Scheduled Castes Struggle for Emancipation in South India*, Tiruppattur, 1985, pp.54-55.

12. Rajah, M.C., *Oppressed Hindus*, Madras. 1925, pp.18-19.

As a consequence, society witnessed a transformation from the old economic system like Zamindari and Mansabdari to a new order. The introduction of transport system such as railways, buses and tramways in cities and digging channels and laying roads, and the establishment of modern industries necessitated the creation of labour force among the Tamils. Such a trend developed their consciousness. It also helped the people to achieve unity. Further, the common restaurants helped to bring down the caste inequality and distinctions. There was a great demand for labour force to work in rubber plantations, tea and coffee estates of French and British colonies. Seeing the opportunity, the British Government sent shiploads of workers from Tamil Nadu to far off countries like Fiji, South Africa, Mauritius, West Indies, Malaysia and neighbouring Sri Lanka.[13] Moreover, in India the British Government created employment opportunities to the Tamil labourers in tea and coffee plantations of Wynad, Coorg, Mysore, the Nilgiris and Anamalais. The introduction of modern transport system, cheap postage and innovation of the printing press, improved the communication system and greatly helped the free movement of labourers, who acquired a new outlook on life. Gradually, their economic and psychological foundations, which was based upon untouchability was totally transformed.[14] The working class of Tamil districts emigrated to foreign countries and they became economically well-off. On their return home, they gave all possible help to the rest who were still poor. The British administration and the new bureaucratic setup helped to uproot all the traditional social barriers in the long run.

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13. Manickam, S., *Slavery in Tamil Country*, Madras, 1982, p.67.

14. Celestin Bougle, *Essays on the Caste System*, Coimbatore, 1971, p.82.

The British servants took keen interest in fostering common unity, social interaction and other interpersonal relations among the different groups of weaker sections. Hence, they very carefully nurtured the idea of secularism in their judicial administration. Complete uniformity in legal system and other aspects of life provided an opportunity to the sufferers who, in turn, slowly received relief and liberation from the oppression of the traditional society.

The British, in the passage of time, found out the absence of justice in the existing native administration which compelled the British in 1818 to conduct an enquiry into the condition of the poor bonded labourers under the highly influential caste conscious landlords.[15] Further, the Collectors of all districts of Tamil Nadu were instructed to bring out an adhoc report about the means to rehabilitate them. Based on the report of Collectors, the Company's Government enacted the Act of 1833, which placed the working class in a safe position as apprentices in most British possessions. As the next step, the government enacted the 'Slavery and Abolition Act of 1843' and thereby legally abolished slavery and its connected evils.[16] By the eradication of the institution of slavery, this act at first banned the sale of slaves. Secondly, regarding the arrears of monetary payment, the court directed landlords not to involve themselves in alleged possession of slaves. Thirdly, no man was allowed to take away the properties for default of payment and exploiting their poor economic condition was prohibited. At last the Act warned the defaulters, who were committing atrocities on the helpless people, that they would be punished severely.

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15.   *Journal of Historical Studies*, Vol.1, Madurai, 1989, p.8.

16.   Shankar Pathak, *op.cit.*, p.68.

The government then concentrated on removing the other disabilities suffered by the people. It decided to assert civil equality in public institutions. In this endeavour, through a press release, it declared that all public institutions maintained at the cost of government should be easily accessible to all classes without any distinction. In the same spirit, the British Government also passed the 'Caste Removal Act of 1850' in order to eradicate casteism on humanitarian considerations. It encouraged the people to mingle with one another. The beneficiaries of the British laws developed staunch faith in the British administration. Most of them embraced Christianity to protect themselves from the wrath of the caste-Hindus. At the same time, they also faced certain problems like inability to inherit their ancestral property. To remove this problem, the Government enacted the 'Religious Disability Act of 1856' which allowed the Christian converts to inherit their ancestral properties as a civil right. This civil measure slowly hit the foundation of the sacred domain of Hinduism which was strongly built upon the age-old practice.[17]

The Government also came forward to remove other civic disabilities. On 16th May, 1859 the Travancore Government under the instruction of British Resident of Madras granted permission to the women of depressed classes including the Shanars, to wear upper clothes on their breast and shoulders.[18] Further in the same year, the Government enacted 'District Police Act' by which in every village at least two or more family members of depressed classes were posted as Talayaris and Vettis who served as village police. They were treated as government officials. In 1862, the Government enacted the 'Indian Penal Code' which replaced the existing Brahminic code of Manu-dharma, which upheld caste system and

17.   Natesan, G.A., *op.cit.*, pp. 126-127.

18.   Kesavan, K., *Kovil Noolaivu Porattangal*, (Tamil), Villupuram, 1997, p.63.

encouraged discrimination. The new British code clearly pointed out that every man is equal before the law. Even the Brahmins were not exempted from the capital punishment, which was absent in the Manu code. Thus inequality, which prevailed between the socially backward and the forward people, was legally forbidden. In 1884, the Revenue Department asserted that slavery was abolished completely in British India. As a matter of fact, the civil laws and other progressive measures, undertaken by the British created a great awakening among the working class and poor people.[19] Concurring with this view, V.Krishnaswami Iyer remarked, "British legislation has done a great deal and perhaps all that is possible for the legislature to do for the downtrodden classes'.[20]

Socio-Religious Reform Movement

The elite socio-religious leaders at national and regional level organized many associations and educated the masses against the institution of untouchability. They tried to wipe out the existing social evils which hampered the growth of the untouchables.[21] They aimed at improvement in the social status and civic position of the untouchables. The removal of untouchability and all its allied evils formed an important item in the programme of all socio-religious reformers who served in India. In this endeavour, Rajaram Mohanroy, by founding the Bhrama Samaj on 20th August 1828, attacked untouchability as a by-product of caste system. Keshab Chandra Sen, another leader of Prarthana Samaj, by organizing social conferences paid attention to their upliftment. The social reformer, Jotirao Phule of Maharastra, contributed a lot for the moulding of their

19. Nagoorkani, P., *Struggle for Social Justice in Tamil Nadu, 1916-1939*, Ph.D. Thesis, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, 1992, pp. 41-42.

20. Natesan, G.A., *op.cit.*, pp. 126-127.

21. Suneila Malik, *Social Integration of the Scheduled Castes*, New Delhi, 1979, p.6.

consciousness and worked for their emancipation. In 1877, by establishing Sathyashodha Samaj Society of Seeking Truth, he worked for redeeming the untouchables from the exploitation of the caste-Hindus. Another leader, Dayananda Saraswathi, by founding Arya Samaj in 1875, pleaded with the masses for removal of discrimination in the society. Swami Vivekananda, by founding Ramakrishna Mission, worked for the removal of the practice of untouchability. Along with his followers, he attempted to eradicate caste system from Hindu society and viewed untouchability as the cause of India's downfall and which turned Indians cowards and thoroughly contemptible.[22]

Another organization known as Theosophical Society, founded by Madam Blavatsky and Col. Olcott in 1886, stood against the **varnashrama dharma**, and upheld the universal brotherhood of man. Another valiant fighter in this direction was Sri Narayana Guru of Trivandrum in Kerala State. He contributed much to the upliftment of the oppressed classes in South India. By establishing Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (S.N.D.P) in 1903, the followers of Sri Narayana Guru worked in Madras for the material progress and social upliftment of the untouchables.[23] Muthukkutti Swamigal, who fought against caste system, introduced a number of reforms in religious practices. Ramalinga Adigal of South Arcot also tried to remove caste distinctions and worked for the untouchables and led them in the path of socio-political awakening.

Besides the above social organizations, the community-minded leaders also started various newspapers that helped them to realize social justice. D.A.John Nadar started a newspaper called *Dravida Abhimani* in Salem. *Vijayavikatan* was started by K.S.Kathirvel Nadar at Royapuram in Madras. Govindasamy Nadar started a paper, *Sanror*

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22.   Murthy, B.S., *Depressed and Oppressed*, New Delhi, n.d., p.40.

23.   *Indian Express*, Madurai, 18 August 1991, p.4.

Kula Viveka Bodhini at Kilariyam in Thanjavur district. S.A.Muthu Nadar, another veteran Nadar leader, started *Nadarkula Mitran* at Aruppukkottai.[24] T.Vijaya Durasami Grammaniar started *Kshatriya Mitran* at Tandaiyarpet in Madras. Besides these papers, *Nadar Nanban*, *Pandiya Kula Deepam* and *Vinoda Vikatan* came into being and worked to redress the grievances of the Nadars by exposing their social disabilities to the public and to the Government and thereby, attempted to protect the welfare of the Nadars. These newspapers inspired them to fight for social rights on par with caste-Hindus.[25]

Integration of Depressed People

The untouchables were the last group in the social ladder to get awakening among the people of Tamil Nadu. This belated awakening was due to the fact that they were economically deprived, socially submerged, culturally decadent and politically weaker for long time. They were unable to ventilate their grievances and were living as silent sufferers. As members of the subaltern classes and groups, they form part of the labouring masses that actively participate in the production process and wealth creation.[26]

Under these circumstances, the problem of untouchability became a national issue. The nationalist caste-Hindu leaders took up the cause of the depressed because they constituted a big vote bank. Some selfless socio-religious leaders also worked for the cause of the untouchables at the national level and mobilized them. Such leaders were the products of western education.

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24. Rajadurai, P., *Uravinmurai*, (Tamil), Viruthunagar, 1991, pp.41-42.

25. Rajadurai, P., *Sattamantrathil Soundarapandiyanar*, (Tamil), Viruthunagar, 1991, pp.41-42.

26. Manickam, S., *Conspiracy of Silence*, Madurai, 1995. pp.1-2.

The enthusiasm of the national reformers galvanised the untouchables of Tamil Nadu to organize themselves under the leadership of these leaders. In 1891, they formed the Dravida Mahajana Sabha to represent their grievances and requirements to the Government.[27] The Sabha conducted its conference at Ooty on 1st December 1891, where ten resolutions were passed regarding better treatment for the untouchables such as separate school scholarships, and stipends, reservation of jobs in public services, public rights and removal of all social restrictions. The Sabha sent copies of these resolutions to government and all the socio –political bodies. In 1892, the untouchables of Madras also formed another association known as Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha. These two organizations tirelessly represented the problems of the untouchables to the government. Consequently the Government of Madras appointed Sri Srinivasaraghava Iyengar to study their condition. His report depicted the pathetic condition of the untouchables and recommended to the government to take necessary steps.[28]

The Madras Government heard the reasonable demands of the untouchables and issued favourable orders which provided all possible help to the untouchables of Tamil Nadu by establishing schools and allotting lands to the landless and ex-servicemen among the untouchables. Further, as a result of the British initiatives, many members of the depressed society were given postings in the administrative setup. They entered public services at various levels such as sirasthars, engineers, surgeons, inspectors, managers, registrars, head writers and guards.[29]

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27.   *Murasoli*, (Tamil Daily), Madras, 19 February 1990.

28.   Kesavan, K., *Kovil Noolaivu Porattangal*, p.120.

29.   *Unite*, Vol.2, No.1, May 1993, Viruthunagar, pp.62-63.

To press for more reforms, the Madras Mahajana Sabha invited the untouchable leaders to a conference in Madras in 1892. C.Iyothi Dass and a few other untouchable leaders, who participated in it, put forward the proposals to the government for the assignment of poromboke lands to them and establishment of more schools. R. Srinivasan, another depressed class leader, reiterated this proposal in a conference at Westley High School in Madras. C. Ioythi Dass openly flayed the Indian National Congress as an association of the Brahmins and accused those Brahmins of occupying key posts in the British administrative set up and preventing the officials from doing anything for the untouchables.[30]

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed tremendous changes in the socio-political life of the people. In spite of the colonial nature of the British rule in Tamil Nadu, spectacular changes took place in the thinking pattern of the people during this period. On the one hand, there took place political awakening as a counter move against the administrative policies of the colonial power. On the other hand, the progressive legislations and reform measures introduced by the British supplemented the socio-political consciousness. Truly, the political movement by the end of the nineteenth century transformed itself towards social goal with the initiative of non-Brahmins. Ultimately the social ideology predominated over national issues at least for a few decades under the non-Brahmin leadership. The non-Brahmins along with other depressed classes began to organize themselves for social justice. In fact, social justice is a basic requirement for social harmony and national unity.

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30.   Kamalanathan, T.P., *op.cit.*, pp.24-25.