CHAPTER- I

DALIT SOCIETY

The rigid practices of caste, religion and superstitious beliefs had been of such a magnitude that many times in the past they caused an incalculable harm to the Indian society. These barriers paved the way to slavery under the foreign hands. Unfortunately the ancient shastras of the Hindus namely the Vedas the Upanishads and Smritis have been misinterpreted and therefore the Hindu Society not being satisfied with the creation of four main castes namely the Brahmins (priests) the Kshatriyas (rulers) the Vysyas (traders) and the Sudras (agriculturists). The Hindu society created an untouchable caste namely the Panchamas (Dalits). These untouchables were subjected to many hardships and sufferings, the worst of which was social boycott. Distinctions based on birth and religion due to man’s ignorance and selfishness, insolence and bigotry were created and perpetuated ills in the society. Frequent foreign invasions created a chasm between man and man on the basis of caste, religion and race. Atrocities were committed against human dignity in the name of God and religion. The superiority and inferiority of one caste over the other proved to be a scourge in the Indian Society.’ The Brahmin sect enjoyed special privileges from the rulers by living in separate Agraharams. They also enjoyed gifts of lands made to them by the rulers. Next to the Kshatriyas came the Vaishyas, whose profession was trade. Then came the other Non-Brahmins called the Sudras, who formed the bulk of the population. The fifth and final caste in the
social state was ‘The Panchamas’. They were socially ostiacised and economically exploited, physically oppressed by all the above groups. The Untouchables lived like animals in colonies on the outskirts of the villages and formed a separate unit. There was no opposition or revolt from them against the social segregation. People were made to believe that the suffering of man in this birth was nothing but the result of his past ‘Karma’ (or action) and nothing can be done to ward off the blows of fate. Birth alone determine the superiority or inferiority of one caste over the other. People belonging to the upper castes looked at the hierarchical division and satisfied by comparing themselves with the lowest sect namely the untouchables. It encouraged the ego tendency among the upper castes. Lack of self confidence sometimes innocence and inferiority complex was exploited by the caste Hindus to their improvement.  

The Dalits

The term ‘Depressed Classes’ denotes the Ex-Untouchables of India. They were the sum total of untouchable castes sprang out of administrative exigencies. A perusal of the official records shows that this term was in currency between 1920 and 1935. In the Census Report of 1921, over six million people covering nine castes were listed as Depressed Classes. The figures given in this report could only be regarded as an approximation, because no effort had yet been made till then to define the term ‘Depressed’. But in 1931 based on the stigma of Untouchahility, the Depressed Classes were

identified and enumerated 15.5 percent of the population of Madras Presidency was found to belong to this category.²

The Census Report States ‘Viewed primarily regarding the existence of social disabilities, the figure is a minimum, considered strictly as the personal polluting power, the figure is a maximum.³ Again, to denote the Depressed Class people, the terms ‘Pressed ‘Oppressed’, ‘Repessed’ and ‘Submerged’ were also used. The term ‘unprivileged’ is being used to denote the Untouchable Classes of people since the privilege that would seem to be common rights enjoyed by humanity was denied to them.

‘Untouchable’ is a name generally applied to persons in the lowest rank of Hindu society. The Webster Dictionary vividly describes the ‘Untouchable’ as a member of a large hereditary group in India having traditional Hindu belief and quality of defiling by contact the person, food or drink of a member of a higher castes and formerly being strictly segregated and restricted to menial work.⁴

Currently the Hindu word “Dalit” is commonly used to denote the Depressed Classes. This was first used by Swamy Shardhananda. But in Marathi, the term was used to denote the members of Scheduled Castes. First, the term became applicable only to members of the Mahar Community in Maharashtra but later it included all the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes

³ Ibid.
and Neo-Buddhists, landless labourers and those economically exploited.⁵ In Maharashtra, the Mahar Community is an untouchable community. To begin with, there is no generic name of common acceptance that actually describes this group of people. In the Puranas, they were called Aspusyas, Avarnas, C'handals, Antyajas, Jambavans, Varishals, Antya, Bhangi etc. The expressions Antyaja, Antywasi and Bahiya were used by B.R. Ambedkar in his book, ‘The Untouchables’, and he concluded that the Untouchables were the “Broken Men” of the Aryan society.⁶

Harijans

The Scheduled Castes were christened as ‘Harijans’, by Mahatma Gandhi. In the Hindu pantheon, ‘Hari’, is the preserver of the world. Since the Untouchables were the people who were totally neglected by the bulk of the society, it was appropriate to name them as ‘Harijans’. The literal meaning of the term ‘Harijans’ is “Children of God”. For many years, Gandhiji himself used the terms like ‘Untouchables’ ‘Fandiamas’, ‘Antayaja” (the last born) and ‘Bhangi’. The term ‘Bhangi’ refers to a low-caste of north India engaged in scavenging. Gandhi used it figuratively to mean all the untouchable classes. But in early 1930 Gandhi began to use the term, ‘Harijan’ part of propaganda for the eradication of Untouchability.

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⁶ Ambedkar, B.R., The Untouchable Who were they? and Why they became Untouchables”? New Delhi, 1948, pp.5-12.
Gandhi borrowed this term from the poem of one Narasirnha Metha, a well-known poet of Kathiawar, the native place of Gandhi. Since then he had begun to propagate this term in his journal and later renamed the journal as ‘Harijan’. He wrote, “All the religions of the world describe God pre-eminently as the Friend of the friendless, Helper of the helpless, and Protector of the weak. The rest the world apart, in India who can be more friendless, helpless or weaker than the forty million or more Hindus of India who are classified as Untouchables”.7 Thereafter, in his writings he always used ‘Harijans’ as the name signifying ‘Untouchables’. The term thenceforth became a shining bowl for his propaganda missionary. Moreover, through his weekly the Harjan and his Harijan Sevak Sangh, Gandhi did his best to popularise this term, ‘Harijan’. It began a political slogan for Congress and a tool in the hands of Caste- Hindus to prove their concern for the cause of Untouchables. This term, ‘Harijan’ served the political purpose without opposing their social hierarchy.

The term, ‘Harijan’ was begun to be used in records from 1930.8 (Gandhi later changed the name, ‘Navajivan’ to ‘Harijan’). In order to appreciate this term the Government of India issued an order in 1947 to record the Untouchables as ‘Harijans’. The order states: “The Government has directed that term Harijans should be used to denote persons belonging to the Scheduled Castes in all public records except in proceedings under statutory enactments

until the statute is amended”. But during Gandhi’s own life-time, the term was objected by the leaders of the Depressed Classes.

M.C. Rajah, the leader of Depressed Class raised a strong objection and said, “Harijan - meaning Children of God” denotes all Hindus and hence it is inappropriate for the “Depressed Classes”. Rajah asserted that the castes concerned could very well adopt a name for themselves and that no one else had the right to give them a name. It is to be noted that this term ‘Harijan’ has not found a place in the Constitution of India. Instead the term, Scheduled Caste has been incorporated in the Constitution.

During the discussion on the amendment of the Local Boards Act in the Bombay Legislative Council, Ambedkar’s group in the council protested against the use of the term ‘Harijan’ for statutory purpose. In this connection, P.G.Solanki, Ambedkar’s Lieutenant, told the House not to give recognition to the term and warned that they would not do so without facing the remonstration. He said, “the word has been introduced by Mahatma Gandhi with the sole object of giving them a dignified name, but nearly 98 to 99 percent of the Scheduled Castes do not like the word”.

Scheduled Castes

The Government of India in 1935 listed all the hereditary Untouchable Communities in the different provinces in a ‘Special — Schedule’. An order-

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10. G.O.No.849, (Development) Department, 9 April 1939.
in-council issued under the Government of India Act, 1935 called as designated names of the castes in the list as ‘Scheduled Castes’. In the list concerning the Madras Presidency, eighty six Untouchable Castes came under the category of “Scheduled Castes”

This term ‘Scheduled Castes’ became the legal administrative term of the British Government and from 1935 onwards in order to provide political representation and special assistance in educational and employment matters, this term was used in the place of Untouchables. This has been incorporated in the Constitution of the Republic of India. Indian Constitution

The Constitution gives the meanings of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Articles 366(24) and 366(25) respectively. Article 366 (24) says ‘Scheduled Castes’ means such castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within such castes or tribes as are deemed under “Article 341 to be Scheduled Castes for the purpose of this Constitution”.

Article 366 (25) says ‘Scheduled Tribes’ means such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under “Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purpose of this Constitution”.

Article 335 of the Constitution makes provision for the reservation of services and posts to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It simply indicates that Untouchability has been taken as the scale to prepare such list of
Scheduled Castes. And therefore, National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was appointed under Article 338.

“Article 331 of the Constitution empowers the President of India, after consulting the Governor of the concerned state, to notify an order, the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes by this Constitution he deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to that state”. And the second clause of the article empowers parliament to pass a law to include in or exclude out from the list so notified by the President, “any caste, race, tribe or parts of or group within any caste, race or title”.

What are the basic principles on which the caste is decided as “Scheduled Castes”? It began with an attempt of J.H. Hutton, the Census Commissioner of India, 1931, to provide a basis for listing the Untouchable Castes. He suggested consideration of seven disabilities for the purpose. They are

1. Whether a caste was entitled to worship in Hindu temples
2. Whether a caste received the services from clean Brahmins
3. Whether a caste received the services from barbers, washer men, etc.
4. Whether a caste used to take water from public wells
5. Whether acute utilized or used the public roads, paths and the public conveniences
6. Whether a caste was entitled to enter into educational institutions, occupational institutions, etc.

7. Whether a case had the free social intercourses with the rest of the people.

And the like phenomena were also to be examined.12

It simply means that those who had been denied the very civil rights or human rights were the Untouchables or Scheduled Castes. These disabilities of Depressed Classes were varied from region to region and also the number of Depressed Classes was also varied from time to time. When the government took special interest to uplift them, more and more castes demanded to include their names in the list of Scheduled Castes and so there was no end of the problem.

Now the literary and practical meaning of ‘Depressed Classes’ is clearly understood [Depressed + Classes = Depressed Classes]. The former is the adjective form of the verb ‘Depress’ which means to press down and later is plural of class’ which connotes “one group of a usually society wide grouping of people according to social status, political or economic similarity, or interests or ways of life in common”. Thus, in ordinary parlance the ‘Depressed Classes’ should mean a group of people pressed down. But it refers to the persons of lower castes or Untouchables.

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The term ‘Depressed Classes’ began to be used in official records in the early Nineteenth Century and as a result of the Government’s resolution to extend educational facilities to the lower rungs of society. In the first stage, all the untouchables, aboriginals, hill tribes, criminals and the like classes were included in the list of Depressed Classes. But in course of time it was confined only to Untouchables, since the Tribals are not untouchables. V.R. Shinde, who formed the “Depressed Classes Mission society of India” in 1906, says, “The term “Depressed Classes” does not include the comparatively blessed human beings, hordes of whom are still defiantly standing outside the pale of Civilization in India and are partaking with beasts and birds in the romance of natural life”.13

In 1918, when the Southborough Committee visited India, all the leaders of Untouchable Castes presented their memorandum restricting the “Depressed Classes” to cover only the Untouchables. B.R. Ambedkar in his memorandum pointed out that the confusion about the expression was unreal because for all practical purposes the Untouchables and the Depressed Classes were the same.14

Hence, since 1919 the term, ‘Depressed Classes’, has gained statutory recognition. For the first time, the Government of India Act of 1919 provided for the political representation for the Depressed Classes, through nomination of members of this class in the Local bodies. J.T. Martin, the Census

Commissioner, prepared a rough estimate of the minimum number which could be considered to form “Depressed Classes of Hindu Community”. In the field of legislature also, the term became official.

During a discussion on the educational facilities of the Untouchables, M.R. Jayakar observed, “By Depressed Classes, I mean those who suffer from social disabilities like Untouchability”. The Indian Statutory Commission also defined the term as ‘Persons who cause pollution by touch or by approach within certain distance”.

The State Government of Bombay appointed the Sarte Committee to consider the nomenclature of Untouchables. The Committee recommended ‘Depressed Classes’ should be used in the sense of Untouchables. On this basis the Government of Bombay adopted a resolution to designate ‘Untouchables’ as the Depressed Classes. The Sarte Committee also distinguished the Depressed Classes from the term Backward Classes. The Backward Classes are ‘Shudras and occupied a dominant position in the economic and political life of the villages. The Indian Franchise Committee demarcated the Depressed Classes and they were considered less than ‘Shudras’ who occupied dominant position in the economic and political life of the villages. And further the Committee said, that the Depressed Classes should not be included with the primitive and aboriginal tribes even though they were economically poor but

they were not Untouchables. Both the Backward Classes and Tribes are touchables and hence superior to the Untouchable Depressed Classes.

Thus, the Untouchables were labelled as Depressed Classes in 1932 and in future Constitution. It was taken to mean Untouchables of Hindu fold only. Though the ‘Depressed Classes’ itself was substituted by the term ‘Scheduled Castes’ in the Government of India Act of 1935, it retained its cream and continued to he used as a synonym of untouchables.

The list of Depressed Classes prepared by Hutton, the Census Commissioner of 1931 and the list of Scheduled Castes published by the Government in accordance with the Government of India Act of 1935 are more or less the same. The defacto Depressed Classes 1931 is the dejure of 1935.

**Adi-Dravidas**

Since 1900, the Depressed Classes of the Madras Presidency have been known by different names like Pancharnas, Paraiyar (Pariahs) in Tamil region, Malas, Madigas, in the Telugu speaking areas. The term, Adi-Dravida’ was commonly used to designate the Untouchables of Tamil Nadu, but it was not used in Government records prior to 1920. The change in the nomenclature of the Depressed Classes into Adi-Dravida was done as a result of the concerted efforts taken by M.C.Rajah, a leader of the Depressed Classes.

The Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha was the earliest socio-political association of the Depressed Classes of Tamilagam. In 1857, some learned
scholars, businessmen and social workers belonging to the Depressed Classes formed an association. In December 1892, this association was registered under Act XXI of 1860 as ‘The Madras Adi Dravida Mahajan Sabha’.  

This Association was started with a aim of organizing the Depressed Class people. The leading figures behind the formation of this Association were P.V.Subramanian Pillai, Mylai Chinnathambi Pillai (the father of M.C. Rajah), Pandit C.Iyothee Thass, M.C.Rajah, R. Veeraiyan, Rettairnalai Srinivasan, M.C. Madurai Pillai, and J. Sivashanmugam Pillai.

In the year 1917, M.C. Rajah the leader of the Depressed Classes led a deputation consisting of P.V. Subramaniam Pillai, K. Munuswami Pillai, V. Rajarathinam Pillai, Venugopal Pillai, V.G. Vasudeva Pillai and Tiruppugal Ammal and presented a memorandum to E.S. Montagu and Lord Chelmsford asking for a change in the name of the Depressed Classes. The relevant portion of the memorandum run thus: “The very name by which these people refer to us breathes contempt. We should therefore request the Government to help us in our efforts to attain social elevation by issuing orders that hereafter in all Government communications we should be designated as Adi-Dravidas or the original Dravidas, thus bringing us into line with the non-Brahmin Hindus who are spoken of as Dravidas”.  

In 1922, M.C. Rajah, while moving the resolution in the Madras Legislative Council for the change in the nomenclature of the Depressed

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19. Ibid., p.2048.
Classes, made a forceful speech advancing valid arguments in support of his plea.\textsuperscript{20} Rajah drew the attention to the real connotation of the terms “Paraiya” and “Panchama”. The former meant something mean and despicable, while the latter denoted one who was an outcaste. Rajah expressed: “We are the original inhabitants of this land and we never submitted to the yoke of caste. We are the true descendants of the original inhabitants and preservers of the original Adi-Dravidian civilization”.\textsuperscript{21}

This resolution (No.225) was supported by T.Namberumal Chetti, M.C. Madurai Pillai and K.Srinivasan Iyengar and S. Somasundaram Pillai. They pleaded for the removal of the stigma and extended support to the resolution. The resolution was carried out by then Government. It issued an order in 1922 directing the use of the term “Adi-.Dravida” in Tamil Districts and the term “Adi-Andhra” in Telugu Districts, “Adi-Karanataka” in Karanataka Districts in place of names like Panchamas and Paraiyas”.\textsuperscript{22}

An order was issued on 25\textsuperscript{th} March 1922 to record in the Government documents as cited above.\textsuperscript{23} But however, this order was not fully enforced until 1924. A volley of questions was raised by R. Veeraiyan against the officials who did not comply with the Government Order. On behalf of the Government, the Rajah of Panagal (Chief Minister) stated that the Government

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p.2047.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p.2048.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p.2950.
\textsuperscript{23} G.O.No,817, Law (General) Department, 25 March 1922.
would not use the caste names of the Depressed Classes and that it would take any action if any one used the caste names instead of the term, ‘Adi-Dravida’.  

Many of the Depressed Classes men were not even aware of the change in the name of their Community. A few communities started calling themselves as “Adi-Dravidas”, but many others did not. But, the term “Adi-Dravida” was known even before 1922. It was found in the Census Report of 1911 and some castes of the Depressed Classes were entered as ‘Adi-Dravidas’.

And in the Census report of 1921, there found 50,015 Adi-Dravidas in Tamil Nadu apart from Paraiya and other names. And in 1931 and 1951 Census, there were 16,19,277 and 19,53,669 Adi Dravidas respectively. The population of Paraiyas and Pallas was also enumerated separately. This was because the officials of the Government had not taken keen interest in enumerating these castes to the list of Adi Dravidas. Secondly, the Depressed Classes themselves were not aware of the change in their name to “Adi-Dravida”. Thirdly, from the very beginning, the Pallas did not want to change their caste name from Pallas to Adi-Dravidas and they prepared the name “Devendra kula Vellalars” instead of “Adi-Dravidas”.

In 1920, G.A. Natesan tabled a motion in the Madras Corporation to change “Panchama” into “Adi-Dravida” and a mass meeting of Adi-Dravidas was held to support it. From 1920 onwards, the term Adi-Dravida was used in the Madras Corporation records. Following the examples of the Untouchables

in Tamil Nadu, the Untouchables of Andhra and Karnataka began to call themselves as “Adi-Andhra” and “Adi- Karnataka” respectively.

It should be noted that the change of name did not either socially or materially benefit the Depressed Classes. The Superintendent Census Operation M.W.M, Yeatts said: “There is something infinitely pathetic in the vain idea that a change of name can reverse the stigma of centuries. It is a mistake to encourage terms which obscure real social units. That so ugly and clumsy a term as Adi-Andhra should come to obliterate such real and lively distinctions as Mala and Madiga is hardly to the good communities of such numerical importance and pronounced individuality should he encouraged to retain and develop a pride in their cognomens”.26

But certainly the change in terminology found definite place in the statutory records and constitutionally they were regarded as the citizens and the constitutional rights were accorded.

**Dalit Communities**

The practice of collecting data on caste in the Census was in vogue till the year 1931. The Census Reports of the years 1911, 1921, 1931, 1941, 1951 and 1961 listed forty major Hindu castes. In the year 1964, the Government had recognized 120 castes as eligible for special status. Of these, six castes, Chakkiliyan, Kuravan, Nayadi, Pallan, Paraiyan and Valluvan, received special

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treatment. Since these six castes are found in all parts of the state, the leading ones from among them have been considered for special attention.

**Paraiyas**

The ‘Paraiyas’ of Tamil Nadu, who form a sizeable portion of the Tamil society, may be taken as the typical representatives of the Depressed Classes in the South. It is from their caste name that the word ‘Paraiya’ meaning an ‘Outcaste’ has been coined and added to the English language. ‘Paraiyas’ forms a distinct caste with a number of sub-castes. They have their own rules, caste headmen and Panchayats. They guard their traditions and usages from encroachment by the castes above and below theirs. “They are, equally with the higher castes, filled with that compound of pride of birth, exclusiveness and jealousy called caste feeling.”

The word ‘Paraiya’ is of great semantic interest. Various roots are attributed to its origin. One view is that ‘Paraiya’ is derived from the root word ‘Parai’ which means a kind of drum. The ‘paraiyas’ are considered traditional drum beaters. Some scholars raise objection to this derivation on the following grounds. The ‘Paraiyas’ act as drum-beaters only on occasions like festivals, marriages and funerals of high caste Hindus, but they normally engage themselves as cobblers, weavers and as cultivators. In Kannada also the word ‘parai’ means drum, but the Depressed Classes in Karnataka are not called

‘Paraiyas’. Instead, they are called as ‘Holeyas’. In Tamil Nadu, ‘Paraiyas’ are not the only drum-beaters. In this connection, the barbers too act as drummers during festive occasions. In certain areas of Tamil Nadu, there is a separate caste called Melakkaran whose profession is beating a drum called Melam. One of the Gods of the Tamils, Siva, is said to play a kind of drum called ‘Utukkai’ while his first devotee ‘Nanti’ is an expert player of a type of drum called ‘Mattalam’. But the Lord or the Nanti is not regarded as Paraiyas. “It seems in the highest degree improbable that a large and at one time powerful community should owe its name to an occasional occupation, which one of its divisions shares with other castes”.29

Only once does the word ‘Paraiya’ occur in Sangam literature.30 It is found often in the inscriptions of the Cholas of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries A.D.31 In ancient Tamil literature, the beaters of battle drums are called Valluvas and Pulaiyas.32 Pulaiyas are also described as drum-beaters during funeral processions. The drum which is used on such occasions is called ‘Capparai’ meaning funeral drum. The word ‘Paraiya’ must have first been applied only to those Pulaiyas who beat drums during funeral processions.33

Later, the word came to be applied to all Pulaiyas. The word ‘Paraiya’ is derived according to some scholars from the word ‘Paraiyar’34 which denoted a

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30. Puram. V. 335.
32. Natrinai, 77; 1-2, Purarn, 287; 1-3.
33. Perunkatai, Line 159,p. 316.
34. Perumal Pillai, A., Adi-Dravidar Varalaru, (Tamil), Madras,1922, p.65.
line of Chera Kings, according to ‘Pathitruppattu’, a Sangam Classic. The
descendants of the Chera Kings, Perunceralimporai and Kutakko
llanceralirumporai, who were defeated by Cholas, were called Paraiyas.
Another view is that the ‘Paraiyas’ were the Nagas of Sri Lanka who were
conquered by a Chola King and brought as captives to work in the construction
of the banks of the river Kaveri. The Tiyas, a Depressed Class of Kerala, are
also regarded as a branch of the Nagas. In the Tamil Ramayana, Lanka is
mentioned as the town of the Paraiyas. These are mere conjectures from
which no categorical conclusions can be deduced.

Another root for the word ‘Paraiya’ is the word Para which means
rock. Here, the term ‘Paraiyas’ denotes a hill people. The contention is that
originally the ‘Paraiyas’ inhabited the hill tracts and later on came to the plains.
This is an unconvincing argument because in the ancient Sangam literature of
the Tamils, the Paraiyars of Tamil Nadu are described as one of the tribes
inhabiting the Mullai region, which is situated between the hills and the
plains, and they are mentioned as weavers and cultivators and not as a
mountain people.

35. Pathitruppattu, 8,9.
37. Srinivasa Iyengar,N., Tamil Studies, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi,
1986, p.403.
39. Oppert, Gastava, The Original Inhabitants of Bharata Varsa (or) India, Delhi,
1972, p.60.
40. Puram, V.335.
Paraiyan is also designated as the original owner or ruler of the land.\textsuperscript{41} In this context the word ‘Par’ which means earth or land is taken as the root. The argument is that the ‘Paraiyas’ were the original owners and rulers of the Tamil region and that when they were conquered, their lands were confiscated from them and they were subjected to slavery.

The term ‘Paraiyan’ is derived by some from the Sanskrit word ‘Para’ which means foreign. Those who were foreign to their culture were denoted as ‘Paraiyar’ by the Brahmins.\textsuperscript{42} The term ‘Paraiyar’ indicated those who spoke ill of the Brahmins. It is said that those who ridiculed the Brahmins were condemned and oppressed and segregated by the Brahmins when they became predominant in the Tamil society.\textsuperscript{43} The term ‘Paraiyar’ could also have originated from the term ‘Palaiyar’ meaning ancient people. It is probable that the ancient people of the Tamil region, Palaiyars, came to be called ‘Paraiyars’ by the passage of time. Even to-day a tribe called ‘Palaiyar’ is to be found in the Palani Hills of Tamil Nadu.\textsuperscript{44} But they are not related to the Paraiyars of the plains.

The notable difference between Palaiyars and Paraiyars is that the former abstain themselves from beef eating while the latter relish it. The Palaiyars are not Untouchables, whereas the Paraiyars are an Untouchable Depressed Class.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Rajah, M.C., \textit{The Oppressed Hindus}, Auxillery Press, Madras, 1922, p.31.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
Though explanations concerning the origin of the Paraiyars are many and varied, each contains some element of truth. The term ‘Paraiyar’ indicating a drum-beater may be taken as a plausible explanation. But the term ‘Paraiyar’ was not popular during the Sangam Age. It was only during the reign of the Imperial Cholas that this term became popular. The segregation of the ‘Paraiyas’ was done during this period. During this time the Brahmins were pre-eminent in the society. The term ‘Paraiyar’ was used derisively by the Brahmins and Brahminised Hindus to indicate those who were foreign to the Brahminic culture. Though the original Tamil word ‘Paraiya’ seems to have been derived from the word ‘Parai’ meaning drum, later on the term came to connote those ‘outcastes’ who were foreign to the Brahmanic culture.

There are many legends concerning the origin of the ‘Paraiyas’ and in each some element of truth is discernible. It may be inferred from these legends that the ‘Paraiyas’ were once priests in the temples of Siva like the Brahmins and that their beef-eating habit reduced them in status. In the bygone days, priests used to offer meat to Gods and Goddesses. In Tirumurukatruppadai, a Sangam classic, mention is made of sacrificing a goat to Lord Muruga and offering its flesh to Him.\(^{45}\) It is said, in Periyapuranam that Kannappar, a devotee of Siva, offered the meat of pigs to God.\(^{46}\) It is probable that the ‘Paraiyas’ were once priests and when animal sacrifice was discontinued, the Brahmins could have usurped their place.

\(^{45}\) Thirumurukatruppadi, 11: 218, 232, 233.
\(^{46}\) Periyapuranam: Kannappa Nayanar Puranam, V. 150.
Valluvas

Valluvas are actually a section of the Paraiyas. In the ancient Tamil society, they enjoyed the status of priests. This is attested to by literary and Inscriptional evidences. In the Census Report of 1891, Stuart says that the Valluvas were priests to the Pallava Kings before the coming of the Brahmins and continued to be so for sometime even after their coming.47

Even to-day Valluvas act as priests at the ceremonies of Paraiyas, Chakkilas and other Depressed Classes. They are erudite scholars in Tamil literature and are noted for their skill in casting horoscopes and foretelling the future. They have great skill in surgery and act as rural doctors. Tiruvalluvar, the author of *Tirukkural*, is considered a Valluva by caste, The legend that Tiruvalluvar was born of a Brahmin father and a Paraiva or puaiva mother was a concocted story. In the earlier editions of *Tirukkural* this story does not find place. But it is found in later editions.48

The Valluvas occupied the pride of place in the ancient Tamil society. *Tivakara Nikantu*, a Dictionary of the Eleventh Century, mentions the Valluvas as royal priests who performed funeral obsequies in the king’s household.49

49. Tivakara Nikantu, 2, p.29.
The enviable position held by the Valluvas in the ancient Tamil Society is brought to light by the post-Sangam classic. When the Brahmin priests replaced them, the status of the Valluvas began to deteriorate. Their efforts to regain their lost position were thwarted by the Brahmins who had the patronage of the kings. It was in anger that the Valluvas set adrift the rumour that it is an ill-omen to see a single Brahmin on one’s way. This is believed by many even to-day. The Valluvas and their Paraiya followers began to shun the presence of Brahmins in their villages. Even to-day if, by chance, a Brahmin enters a Paraiceri, the Paraiya women sprinkle cowdung water on the spot touched by the feet of the Brahmin to cleanse it.

Chakkilias

The Chakkilias found in Tamil Nadu are not natives of the soil. It seems that they migrated to the Tamil region from Andhra Desa and Mysore State. This is deduced from the fact that they speak either Telugu or Kannada. It is not known as to when this migration took place. Mention of Chakkilian Kuntil (plot of the Chakidlian) is made in an inscription of the Chola period (1030 A.D.) Madigas, the counterparts of the Chakkilias in Karnataka, claim that they are the ‘children of Matangi’. The Chakkilias of Tamil Nadu are not sure of their origin. The Chakkilias seem to be one of the ancient inhabitants of the Dravida Country. They are as ancient as the Paraiyas. It is said that the

53. Ibid.
Matangas, who were conquered by the Western Chalukyan King Mangalesa (567-610 A.D), were the progenitors of Madigas.54

According to H.A. Stuart, they belonged to a ruling dynasty called, ‘Matanga’.55 It may be inferred that the Chakkiliyas, similar to the Paraiyas, were an ancient tribe who were subjugated as Untouchables by the Brahmins and other high caste Hindus because of their beef-eating habit.

Pallas

The degree of untouchability of the Pallas is next to that of the Paraiyas. The ‘Pallas’ form an important segment of the village society because they form the bulk of agricultural labourers. They are good at cultivating paddy. Their womenfolk are good at planting and weeding paddy. They seem to have been good at this work even from the Sangam Age. In support of this view there are many references to women of the last class, namely, Kataiciyar.56 The Pallas are also denoted by the title Kataiyar.57 The ancient heroic tribes called Mallas described in Sangarn classics were probably the ancestors of the Pallas.

The word ‘pallam’ in Tamil means a pit or low-lying owlying region. It is suggested that since paddy fields are found in low-lying areas and since the Pallas are usually engaged in the cultivation of paddy, the name ‘Pallan’ could

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54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., p.131.
57. Ibid.
have been derived from the word ‘pallam’.\(^{58}\) This explanation is not satisfactory. The ‘Pallas’ and Pallis (Padaiyatchi or Vannia Kula Kshatriyas) considered themselves descendants of Pallavas who once ruled over Andhra and Tamil regions. They assume the title of Muppan (elderly person), Kutumpan and Mannti. The latter may be a corruption of the word Manradi, a title borne by Pallava (Kurumba) people. From this it is surmised that the Pallas are the descendants of the old Pallavas.\(^{59}\) In Tamil lexicons the Pallavas are classified as outcastes. It is probable that after the defeat of the Pallavas by the Imperial Cholas, the remnants of the former were reduced to slavery by the kings and their Vellala nobles. It is said that one Adandra Cholan brought a large number of Vellalas from the Tulu Country and made them clear the forests in Tondaimandalarn and with their help suppressed the Kurumpas.

A large number of the Kurumpas were killed by the Vellalas by treachery and the surviving ones were enslaved as agricultural labourers.\(^{60}\) In recognition of this achievement, the Chola King honoured the Vellalas by conferring on them the title, Mutali. There is not much historical truth in these traditional lores. But it may be inferred that the Kurumpas, who were the remnants of the Pallavas, were enslaved by the Chola Kings in the remote past. Nelson is of the opinion that the Vellalas, after having suppressed and enslaved the Kurumpas at the end of the Ninth or the beginning of the Tenth Century

\(^{58}\) Thurston, Edgar, \textit{op.cit.}, Vol.IV, p.473.
\(^{59}\) \textit{Ibid.}
A.D. colonized Tondaimandalam. The higher class Pallavas who accepted Chola sovereignty and joined the Chola army were called Pallis or Pataiyatchis.

The low class Pallavas who were reduced to slavery came to be known as Pallas. Oppert is of the opinion that the Pallas and Pallis represent the ancient inhabitants of the mountains in South India. Those who continued to live in the mountains were called Mallas, Malas and Mahars, and those who came down to the plains came to be known as Pallas, Pahlavas, Pallavas, Bhillae, Bhila and Ballalas.

The Pallas calls themselves Devendra Kulattar (descendants of Indra, Lord of Devas). A medieval inscription connects the Kutumpans, a branch of Pallas, with the Pandyan Kings.

All traditions connected with the origin of the Pallas bore out the fact that they were an ancient community of Tamil Nadu, and that they were owners of land and cultivators of wet land. The Pallas are well-organised community and they are sub-divided into a number of sub-sects. The antiquity of this community is understandable from several factors including the performance of buffalo sacrifice. The depressed state in which this community is found today may be explained by its failure to adapt itself to the culture of the Aryanised groups of Tamil society.

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61. Ibid., p.29.
Madigas

The Madigas are distributed throughout Mysore region but 88 percent of this caste is found in Mysore, Bangalore, Kolar and Tumkur Districts. According to the 1921 Census, they numbered 296,821. H.A. Stuart, writing in the Madras Census Report of 1891 says: “Formerly a Matanga dynasty was in Canarese Country and the Madigas are believed by some to be the descendants of people who were once a ruling race”.  

The Madigas themselves have no traditions of any connection with a ruling race and the conjecture may be due to a mere similarity of names and to the belief that, being aboriginal, they might have ruled the country at some remote past.

It is stated that a Western Chalukya King Mangalesa (567-610 A.D.) conquered Mantangas, but it is surmised that they were a hill tribe and the forefathers of the Madigas.

Madigas claim to be the children of Matangi. Matangi is a Sanskrit name for Kali and it is possible that the Madigas once played a significant part in the worship of the Goddess. The employment of Chakkiliya and Madiga women in Sakti worship adds colour to this supposition. The Matangas and the Kalachchuris are mentioned in connection with Mangalesa who was the younger brother and successor of Keertivaraman I, whose reign lasted from 567-611 A.D. Of the Matangas, nothing is known except the mention of them.

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Matanga means a Candala, a man of the lowest caste, an outcaste, a kirata, mountaineer, a barbarian. The Madigas usually call themselves Matangi Makkalu or ‘children of Matangi or Durga’, who is their Goddess. It is probable that the Matangas were an aboriginal race of little importance to have left any record of them. The tutelary deity of the Madigas is Mathamma or matangi who is said to he worshipped by the Komuttis under the name of Kanyaparaneswari.65

Madigas speak Kannada or Telugu according to the locality they live in. The Kannada Madigas do not inter-marry with the Telugu Madigas who are leather-workers. They follow a primitive way of tanning and preparing leather.

The Madigas are the lowest caste and they live apart in quarters outside the village. They are not permitted to use the common well and they have their own barbers and washermen. A Madiga should not approach a Brahmin within a distance of about twenty paces. Any Brahmin who has been touched by a Madiga must purify himself by bathing and washing all his clothes and by changing the sacred thread. The Brahmins are not allowed to enter the living quarters of the Madigas. The Madigas are more primitive than Holeyas and they differ considerably in outward appearance from the higher castes.

**Other Dalit Communities**

Similar to the Paraiyas of Tamil districts, the Holeyas of Mysore and Malas of Andhra are good agricultural labourers. They may be regarded as a

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less civilized class of the same race that was inhabiting the country from time immemorial. This is attested to by researchers in anthropometry and ethnology. These Untouchables segregated themselves and avoided the Brahmins. The practice of the Holeyas shunning the entry of Brahmins into their villages is cited in support of this theory.\textsuperscript{66} The Untouchables of the Kanarese region are called Holeyas. The Holeyas acted as priests of village Goddesses. The Malas of the Andhra region are the custodians of the Goddess Gowri, and Nandi and Ganesa.\textsuperscript{67} The Malas are equivalent to the Paraiyas of Tamil Districts. A major group of the Depressed Classes in the Malabar region is the Pulaya, widespread throughout the present-day Kerala.

That some of the Depressed Classes were of much use to the society is evident from the fact that the Holeyas in Mysore decided the boundary of disputes.\textsuperscript{68} The Komutis (Merchants) and Kammalas (Blacksmiths) invited the Madigas and Vettiyans (grave-diggers) at the time of marriages, and if the invitees were not satisfied with the reception, they had the right to cut down the plantain trunks in the marriage pandal (shed). This practice refers to the recognition of the lordship of the soil in bygone days by these Depressed Classes.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{66} Sivashanmugam Pillai, J., \textit{op. cit.}, p.13.
\textsuperscript{67} Thurston, Edgar, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol.VI, p.82.
\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Census Report of India, Report, 1921}, Madras, 1922, p.158.
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 159.
An interesting picture emerged after a comparative study of the population of the Depressed Classes in the Census Reports of 1911 and 1921. When one analyse the distribution of the Depressed Classes in the different districts, it is noticed a fall in the strength of Holeyas in Bellary, Coimbatore, and South Canara. This fall is a reflection of the general decrease in the population. The fall in South Canara was partly made up by the presence of 20,000 Malas in that district. Considerable decrease in the population of Madigas occurred in Bellary.

This sight might be attributed to the famine conditions which were present at the close of the decade. The fall in Cherurmans in Malabar was accompanied by an abnormal increase of Mappillas. There had also been a marked fall in the strength of Malas in Guntur and Karnool where the Christian community had gained. There were fewer Pallas in the Districts of Tiruchirapalli, Coimbatore and Tanjore. This might be due to emigration in large numbers. There had been a considerable increase in the number of Paraiyas except in the Districts of Tirunelveli and the Nilgiris.

The decline in the Nilgiris might be attributed to decrease in recruitment for the tea estates. The fall in Tirunelveli might be due to large scale emigration to Ceylon. The fall in the population of the Chakkiliyas in many southern districts might also be due to emigration. Until 1911, of all the communities whose members migrated to Ceylon, the Paraiyas topped the list. This is clear
from the following figures. 42,493 Paraiyas, 28,596 Pallas, 18,066 Ambalakaras, 15,759 Kallars, 13,738 Vellalas, 9,753 Agarnudaiyars and five Brahmins migrated to Ceylon during this period. From these figures, it is clear that migrants from the Depressed Classes were more when compared to other castes. Around 619,000 people from the Depressed Classes migrated to Ceylon between the years 1911 and 1921.

The 1921 Census Report listed nine communities as Depressed Classes and the total population of these was given as 6,372,074. No attempt at an exhaustive enumeration was made and the figures for 1921 would actually be 7,003,400. In the absence of an absolute identity in classification, this figure has to be treated as an approximation. But it is evident that the strength of the Depressed Classes has not increased at the same rate as the population as a whole. The fall may be attributed to conversion, emigration and disappearance under other names not tabulated. Taking the Madras actual population for 1931 as the quota of Depressed Classes to the difference between recorded and actual population, the increase in Depressed Classes raised to 5½ per cent from that single circumstance. Christians increased by 3 per cent over the decade, the aggregation being 413,070. Allowing ten per cent for normal increase, there remains 275,000 whose appearance can be attributed to conversion and of these practically all were Depressed Classes. This is equivalent to 3.9 per cent of the 1921 Depressed Classes total. Hence, an increase of 9½ per cent is perceptible when emigration and conversion to Christianity are taken into account. Remaining circumstances of distortion would easily bring the increase to well
would easily bring the increase to well over ten per cent. No allowance has been made for conversions to Islam. Muslims increased by 16.3 per cent over the decade. Allowing 10.3 per cent for natural increase, there remain 171,900 who may be attributed to conversion, i.e. 2½ per cent of the 1921 total of the Depressed Classes. Even allowing a generous margin of conversions from non-Depressed Classes, the true increase for the Depressed Classes is almost certainly above the gross Madras Presidency rate.70

As far as the distribution of the Depressed Classes in the Presidency of Madras was concerned, the Paraiyas, without exception, were found in almost all the Tamil districts. Equivalent to the Paraiyas were the Malas who were the predominant Depressed Class widely distributed in the Telugu districts. In the Southern districts of Tirunelveli, Madurai, Ramnad and Thanjavur, the Paraiyas were known as Jambavans or Sambavans. In parts of Thanjavur and Madura Districts and in South Arcot, the Paraiyas still continue to style themselves as Paraiyas and not as Adi-Dravidas. In the Northern Districts of North Arcot, Changelpet and Madras and in parts of Coimbatore, the term AdiDravida has wide currency.

According to J. Sivashanmugam Pillai, there were thirteen subdivisions among the Adi-Dravidas. They were Valluvan, Thathan, Thangalan, Turasi, Kurri, Thi, Murasan, Amber, Vadoohu, Au, Vary, Vettiyan and Koliya. The Koliyas are similar to the Holeyas of the Kanarese Districts of the

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70. Ibid., p. 160.
Presidency and the former who occupy the adjacent parts of Karnataka State and in Malabar may be regarded to have emigrated from Mysore State. The population of the Holeyas in 1891 was 155,000. This declined to 92,000 in 1921 and 50,000 in 1931.

The Government in 1931 permitted the use of the term “Panchamas” by the Holeyas in response to their request. The Vettiyan, who was the grave-digger and watchman in villages, was found in almost all the Adi-Dravida villages. To-day this community is known as Thalayari. In certain districts, the Vettiyan was known as Thotti whose job was scavenging. This community too is a sect of the Paraiyas. Though the job of scavenging still continues to be performed, the nomenclature Thotti has disappeared from use. The Pulaiyas of Malabar are comparable to the Thottis in that both perform similar tasks, According to philologists, the term “Pulaiyas” is a derivation of the term “Holeyas”. The Thathan was a community whose job was to work as an official in the funeral ceremonies of the Depressed Classes. Their number was very negligible. The Thangalan, a sect of the Depressed Classes, were economically sound and they abstained from beef-eating and followed the custom of the Caste Hindus. Today even this nomenclature has disappeared.

The Pallas were the predominant community of the Depressed Classes in the Districts of Madurai, Rarnnad, Tirunelveli and parts of Coimbatore, Trichy, Thanjavur and Salem. Among the Depressed Classes, the Pallas were the only group which had innumerable subdivisions. The following were the
sub-divisions of Pallas: Ayya Pallan, Amma Pallan Anja Pallan, Atha Pallan, Kadaiy Pallan, Konga Pallan, Manganattu Pallan, Chozhiya Pallan, Thondaiman Pallan, Izha Natta Pallan and Devendrakulathan. They were also known by the names of Kudumban, Kaladi, Moopan, Kadaiyian, Pamiaiyandi, Mannadi, Pattakkaran and Mambattikkan. In the State of Pudukkotai, there were seven sections of Pallas. These divisions have now disappeared. It is said that in the District of Tirunelveli, there were eighteen sub-divisions of Pallas. 71

The 1921 Census gives the following figures of population for the major sub-divisions of the Pallas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Divisions of the Pallas</th>
<th>Figures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arya Pallan</td>
<td>12,991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amma Pallan</td>
<td>105,607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anja Pallan</td>
<td>100,696</td>
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<tr>
<td>Atha Pallan</td>
<td>32,391</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kandaiya Pallan</td>
<td>18,830</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mangalanattan</td>
<td>15,544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chozhiyan</td>
<td>41,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thondaiman</td>
<td>49,231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devendrakulathan</td>
<td>75,780</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


71 Ibid.
In 1921 Census, the Paraiyas, Pallas, Vettiyan, etc. were listed as Adi-Dravidas, and as a consequence, the figure for Adi-Dravidas shows a marked increase while the figure for the different communities registered a decrease. Similarly, in the Telugu districts, after 1921, the Depressed Classes were listed as Adi-Andharas. In the 1921 Census, there were 665,000 people listed as Adi-Andhras.

There is similarity in profession between the Madigas of Canarese areas and the Chakkilias of the Tamil Districts as both were engaged in leather work. The Chakkilias in the Tamil areas styled themselves as Aruntathiyas. The Madigas were, according to the 1901 Census, the predominant Depressed Class (88%) in Mysore, Bangalore, Kolar and Tumkur. According to the Census Report of 1921, the Madiga population was 296,821, of which males were 139,386. The denominations among the Madigas were Jambavans, Padmajatiyavara and Matangas. Similar to the Holeyas, the Madigas too were called Panchamas. The divisions among the Madigas sprang up on the basis of the languages spoken by them, the food they ate and their place of habitation.

Each language group has three endogamous divisions which are Taniga Buwadavaru, Hedige Buwadavaru and Mora Buwadavaru in Kannada and Tale Buwadavaru, Gampa Buwadavaru and Mora Buwadavaru in Telugu. The last in each language group is again sub divided into single and double moras. These divisions are named after the manner in which the bride and bridegroom eat food (Buwa). Apart from the above, the Madigas have two other divisions among them known as Jambavans and Dakkaloru. The former are gurus of the
Madigas and the latter are the hereditary bandsmen of the Madigas and are treated as outcaste.

The Valluvas who were called Velas in the Kerala region were a priestly class of the Depressed Classes. The Valluvas were spread throughout the Tamil Districts though they were a minority. Similar priestly classes were found in the Canarese and Telugu regions also. Even after the 1921 Census, when almost all the Depressed Classes listed themselves as Adi-Dravidas, the Valluvas, by contrast, continued to be listed separately. Though the Valluvas were the priests of the Depressed Classes, they never had matrimonial alliance with other Depressed Classes. Though they maintained their separate identity among the Depressed Classes, they continued to be regarded as a Depressed Class. They, of course, exhibited the caste pride of the Brahmins.

The Pulayas and Cherumans were the predominant Depressed Classes in the Malabar Region of the Presidency of Madras. In the district of the Presidency, the predominant Depressed Classes were Bavuris and Haddis. The Composite State of Madras included within its boundaries four predominant linguistic groups, namely the Tamils, the Telugus, the Kannadigas and the Malayalees. Obviously, among the Depressed Classes also, there were sections speaking these different languages, predominant among them being the Tamil-speaking Depressed Classes. The largest group of the Depressed Classes which was spread throughout the Presidency was the Paraiyas. This is evident from the population statistics and the distribution ratio. What was common to all the Depressed Classes was their social and other disabilities. It is also interesting to
note that each of the major Depressed Class had numerous sub-divisions or sub-sects. All the Depressed Classes put together comprised about one-sixth of the total population of the Madras Presidency.