CHAPTER VI

IMPACT OF CASTE IN THE EVOLUTION OF DEMOCRACY

It might not be palatable, but true, that the development of Parliamentary institution in India, were not so natural, but artificial or deflected. This had become essential in any scheme of giving responsible government to India lest the fruit of freedom would fall into the hands of any aristocracy. This was to avoid a struggle, or a state bordering upon violence, with a danger of reverting back to oriental dictatorship, engineered either by the high or by the low. Such internal conflicts would have proved even the very end of the system of government for which Indian democrats had been clamoring. The history of freedom movement of India is an index that the price of caste is national freedom.

The delay in the establishment of Parliamentary institution

Most of the British endeavours upto 1935 seems to lay greater emphasis in preparing the society ready and fit to receive every installment of power which meant delay in realising the ultimate aims. India had been very slow in realising the evils that caste had produced, and it is but genuine to think whether or not Britain left India in a hurry in 1947; for, even after their departure, special safeguards were provided in the constitution in favour of the Depressed Classes.

Caste system and its anarchy

Caste system had produced the greatest anarchy and confusion in the political camp; one caste denouncing the other. Instead of arraying against foreign rule, they had turned against each other. The high castes were condemned as arrogant and selfish and the low castes as accursed, eventhough
they belonged to the same religious entity. They freedom struggle had pointed out that the Hindu religion is the most disorganised, than being called as unorganised religion in the world. The alarming weakness of the Hindu edifice, the discordant cries, and the failure to asses the dangers that accrued to its intolerance, all posed a poignant spectacle to the political Reformers.

British attitude was not to settle down in India and their rule was temporary. But they had decided upon a great scheme of reform so that when they left they could honourably look back with a common bond, of enjoying the benefits of a democratic system of government. It was with these high ideals and the zeal for reform they had helped India in here struggle to attain nationhood and to become privileged to enjoy the benefits of a system of Government which Britain herself inherited after centuries of struggle. British effort was to break down the great inequality and the undemocratic features that the caste system presented. Britain largely confined her initiative to politics, without giving offence to the social and religious sentiments of people, but leaving both, inevitably to be lifted by the people among themselves.

Caste Tyranny

Caste by its gradation had led to contempt. This had been India’s tradition. Otherwise it is difficult to account for the perpetuation of the Depressed Classes, rightly called the oppressed or suppressed classes in India. The mischief of the caste system and its most pervasive injury. According to Sir William Archer is hatred Caste system worked like a virulent epidemic, and the bacillus of arrogance first generated among the Brahmins, the microbe spread, by
way of servile imitation through all classes with a passion to despise, and look down upon which became universal and ineradicable.  

In politics and administration it led to the most cruel form of tyranny. Any exclusive privilege to political power combined with social and religious intolerance would have produced the greatest anomaly in India; a minority tyrannising over a vast majority. To avoid this great calamity, British rule salvaged the untouchables and made it impossible any longer, for any community to tyrannise over the other. This was the emancipation that the various communities achieved under the successive reforms. But as long as caste remained, caste prejudices would remain, tyranny in one form or another would inevitably continue. It would be impossible to revolt against it. As Fisher had pointed out, inconvenient as many of these caste customs are, complete and terrible and terrible ostracism follows any effort to revolt against them. The fact, that many of the progressive organisations in India campaigning against caste means, not that case has lost its hold, but rather that these men are of high courage, willing to pay by personal sacrifice for their convictions.

**The Outcastes**

The depressed Classes of the Hindu society were not, for a long time, recognised as a part of the Hindu society. The other untouchables above them were treated no better. Their living was sub-national. Many of the fundamental rights had been stripped off. They were no one else than the chief agricultural

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population of India, who by their sweat and toil produced the agricultural wealth of the country. But they had been fenced off from their fellow beings. Untouchability constituted the highest form of social tyranny exercised on a national scale over a vast section of the Indian population. There was an abnormal cruelty exercised on them, when they were denied all the benefits of the advancing civilisation. It was this social system that had broken the image of India before the nations of the world.

**Caste system and oppression**

Within the Caste Structure, three features are specially important. One is Brahmanism; the other Untouchability. Brahmans like caste itself is one without parallel in the modern world. They formed the Aristocratic element in Hindu society, in a special sense.

Their origin is as doubtful as their present position is strange, but it seems likely, in earliest times, they were a kind of medicine men who were reputed, to be able to control nature by spells. But they had degenerated into the common oppressors of all. The untouchability they practiced, the contempt with which they treated them, made it difficult, if not impossible, for the evolution of a democratic society.

**The effect of caste system**

The chief practical effect caste produced on the Hindu mind had been that of servility. This wonderful phenomenon is not a fortuitous event, an

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3 Sir George Schuster and Guywints, *India and Democracy Macmillan &co* 1941.

ethnological caprice, a monstrous oriental production, the fruit of a tree which
grew up spontaneously from neither fruit nor root.

The social organisation of the Hindus was of a type which did not
facilitate but rather increased the difficulties of political organisation. The
peculiarity in India was that the divisions were deeper, more bitter and more
absolute than in most other countries, the groups were more egocentric, less
aware of one another, less willing to cooperate for the common welfare. The
result is disunity; The unity if any that existed was the most primitive type.

However, the Temple entry to the Depressed Classes opened a new
chapter in the history of India. Hindu religion had for the first time shown a
tendency to become democratic. Admitting the untouchables into the temples
made it possible for a free mingling of the people in all walks of life. This had
reflected in the social life of the country in general. There are welcome signs,
and definitely a break with the past. But is evident, that caste has safesbled India
politically by substituting class exclusiveness for solidarity, class vanity for
patriotism. It has impoverished here physically, it has corrupted her morally and
it has paralysed her intellectually.\(^6\)

**Caste and internal feuds**

Every democratic country in the world had its own difficulties in the
evolution and growth of democratic institution and India was as exception. But
the problems that India presented were too peculiar. The growth of nationalism

\(^5\) Ibid.,

itself had been affected, as the Indian statutory commission pointed out, by neustional, racial, religious, provincial and finally caste Interests.\textsuperscript{7} No doubt the unity imposed upon India after British rule to overcome these dangerous cleavages were very strong, but the feuds among them absorbed the energies and devotions of the majority of the people, and there were only few signs of willingness to surrender such claims to the common good. The commission warned that without such a surrender, there was little hope for the growth of a true sense of citizenship and rightly assessed that Nationalism in India when developed should be utilised for the good; otherwise it would tend to lead to strife and futility.\textsuperscript{8}

The history of constitutional development in Madras reveals that the social condition had produced the most disastrous results in her history and it had proved to be the greatest obstacles in the may of unity. Of all the Fissiparous tendencies in the Indian society there was none more damaging than caste. No such system of national dismemberment, of tribal strictness and autonomy had ever prevailed in any other country. Caste dissolved the social compactness found in other countries, infused the poison of deadly strife into the small village communities scattered in tens of thousands over the land, produced enmity between neighbours on the most trivial grounds and exercised the strongest power of disintegration the human race had ever been subjected to and only displayed a spirit of binding and uniting in relation to those selfish creatures who belonged to


\textsuperscript{8}The Hindu, dated 23 June 1965,
one and the same caste and who thereby were kept apart from all the rest of mankind by an unnatural divorce.\(^9\)

**Caste system affecting the Hindu Muslim unity**

Caste, it might appear worked only within the provinces of state, but in fact, it had affected the whole society and stained the Hindu Muslim relationship which had been already strained became of religious disputes. The Untouchability practised by the high caste Hindus towards the latter accounted for aggressing the betterness between the two communities and this was the result of the social discrimination prevalent in the Hindu society being carried to its logical limits. No doubt, caste is the only one of the many ills of India, but it is fundamental for all the other ills. The feud among Hindus which had split up into a thousand less is the most unnatural of all feuds over know, it the greatest social solemnity. It is monstrous and unnatural and violates the morality and the many of every human being.

**Caste and Nationalism**

Loyalties, affections, social intercourse, marriages, politics are guided by feelings of caste which narrowed down the useless of every citizen. It had hindered the healthy growth of a national feeling and obstructed national progress. Caste and nationalism are contradictory terms and when the former gains momentum, the lesser esturally dies out. It cute at the very root of the larger sensation of the society and made an united Indian nation and obvious

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impossibility by mutual antagonism. Instead of generosity and cooperation, to help the growth of unity, it drives an edge between man and man and group and group. No wonder, it is India’s enemy No.1.

**Political Entanglements**

The growth of democratic institutions, unfettered by social cleavages had become difficult in India. Politics in India had thus been given a strange and primitive colouring. This makes a real difference between the political set up in England and in India. Neither the electorate nor the election is free from the corrupt influences of caste and effect the integrity and homogeneity of political parties and ministries respectively. The composition of ministries and their life is controlled by the feelings that the different groups stir from time to time. Divisions in the cabinet commonly occur not because of serious differences of opinion on national issues but on questions of appointment, the choice of candidates for the party promotion of government servants, postings, composition of the service commission and the like. It is these issues, which had become varietal. Wherever the real like issues that affected the security and prosperity of the nation are, as they were relegated to the background. The vision of the Cabinet and parties had been marred by the illusion often produced and presented by the great communal problems that entangle them in difficulties. Political principles are generally nullified by social divisions. Thus there had always been

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10Laber B. (Fred) *India’s Silent Revolution*, Macmillan Sco, Newyork, 1920, p. 175.

a tendency to by pass and to side track the issues in the working of democratic government.

No doubt, let by a master hand, the Cabinet had proved to be the balance wheel of communalism, which as it ought to be, but it had proved to be a danger of democratic institutions.\footnote{The Hindu’ dated 20\textsuperscript{th} Jan. 1965. p. 6}

**Betrayal born out of social weakness**

Successive conquests of India by foreigners was possible because of the inherent weakness of the Indian society where the people never offered an united front. Hindu society was left to itself because of the impassable barriers of caste. Thus, it had proved to be an instrument of anarchy. It is a misnomer to call a man a Hindu and label him as a Non caste or an outcaste. Internal harmony became impossible. The peace loving nature of the Hindus, and the pretended tolerance they speak of, are born out of a sense of defeatism and a failure as or organise the disintegrated society. Not that tolerance is bad or peace is superfluous, but they are definitely not born out of India’s strength but off springs of her weakness. Indian weakness to defend herself is proverbial, otherwise it is difficult to explain the multitude of kings within and a score of foreign conquerors from without. The society is weak and religion so dominant that the former loses the power of resistance. The obedience that caste shows to the Hindus society is pretentious than the pretentions of the Hindu society to disown it. The society is incoherent in the extreme and ostentatious in its manifestations,
the core of it being superstitious. Its professions are alien to politics. It had corrupted society and politics.

**Man reduced to the convenience of caste**

If India had to receive responsible Government in stages, it poses a fundamental question of the worth of her social system. It is evident, there is no other urgent problem than the problem of India’s survival and she cannot prosper as an united nation with her social system. It appears, that the conquest of the evils in society should be the first step for the conquest of all her problems. It is not so much as economic poverty that India is encountering, but spiritual poverty and poverty of the mind. It is true that India is not a poor country but a country of poor people. Their piety, their education, their literary pursuits all finally and in the promotion of caste feeling. The charities, the trusts, the Endowments, temples all bear a caste mark. There are separate Pantheon of God and Goddesses, allotted for Brahmins, caste Hindus, and other Non castes. Man had been reduced to the conveniences of caste and religion, instead of caste religion made use of for his elevation.

**Caste Tyranny**

Inevitably affect the freedom of the individual. From 1909 to 1935, it had been the work of British Statesman to free every caste from the clutches of the other. But its influence continued in a subtle form. The lack of sympathy is manifest in every caste. The refusal to admit the depressed classes to public places, refusal to admit into temples, into educational institutions, into the services, into politics were very flagrant questions, in the constitutional history of
the country. They really constituted the fundamental problems in Indian History. They accounted for the ebb and flow in India’s struggle for Freedom. America had won her freedom in 1777 and eventhough there had been a loud talk in India for Independence, it was granted to her only in 1947. Apart from this, even when smaller Nationals could achieve their Independence earlier, India had to wait patiently in spits of her impatience.

**Caste an anti-national Institution**

No other country could rescue India from her fall, than herself. India might become rich, but would remain poor with her obsolete social institutions. The failure of the communists in India is a pointer to the prejudices of caste. Communism could never succeed in India, as caste is more deep rooted to accommodate any revolutionary changes. If caste is a defense against communism, it might be appealing to retain, it, but the tragedy is that it threatens democracy also. It is conservative, and hence a shield against revolution, but is does not allow progress and unity which are vital to the survival of the nation. Caste is capable of betraying the country. The platform on which caste is placed for exposition is anti-national. Faltering steps India had, but caste without falling had accompanied her soul.

**Indian Superstitions and the paradox of foreign rule**

The birth of atheistic doctrines in the wake of the reform proposals in the thirties and the question of temple entry were a sharp resection to the caste system. They had questioned the superstitious beliefs of Hindu religion. They

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13 G.O. No. 58 dated 10 Jan. 1935, Public (General) Department, Government of Madras.
had even held that the world Hindu was an Attribute to those living in India, used by the Muslims for the first time.\textsuperscript{14} They wanted religious tyranny to disappear, and preached earnestly to get rid of caste and creed. The atheists pointed out, that blind religious beliefs would only arrest human progress. They, rightly said, without any reservation, that when Indians worshipped Gods and remained pious, foreigners ruled over them. Through their piety, India attained only slavery. None had become a hero; the chief results were disappointments and futility in National life. The atheists declared, that only when India learnt to live as a single community, without distinction of high or low, and when exploitation on behalf of religion or caste die out, there would not be any salvation to India.\textsuperscript{15}

To them, freedom of worship and religion does not imply the perpetuation of superstition, exploitation and tyranny. The criticism was only against those unsocial acts, which were inconsistent with India’s unity and progress. These ideas had come to the forefront in the wake of the Reform proposals as a chain reaction after the communal Award, the Poona Pact and the discussion of Temple entry. It became necessary that unless those superstitious beliefs, which had nothing to do with the Hindu religion were questioned, there might not be that self realisation among the common people, far less with the orthodoxy. Salvation for the untouchables was not a more political question, it involved social and religious problems as well. Atheism as such, had not made heavy inroads into the Hindu society, but worked as a moral agency in reforming the Hindu religion and society. Caste is a shame to the individual, but it is true that it is a greater

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.,

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.,
disgrace to the society and to the country.\textsuperscript{16} Gandhiji was criticised that he worked only for the abolition of untouchability but did not touch the fundamental question of caste, for untouchability itself was the essence or the final product of casteism.\textsuperscript{17}

**Social reforms to precede political responsibility**

Ever since the inception of the Congress, there had been a controversy\textsuperscript{18} whether it should be social reform or political reform that should proceeded. It was in recognition of the necessity to point out the defects in the Hindu society that the social conferences were held simultaneously along with the congress. But the social conferences were abandoned and the congress under Tilak condemned the social conferences, and to those who bent upon those conferences, were threatened that the conference pandals would be burnt. Congress had abandoned social reforms and laid emphasis on administrative and political reforms. The constitutional history of India reveals that congress was a failure both in the political arena and in the social front. The consequence was that it created doubts whether India could enjoy the benefits of Swaraj and safeguard her Independence.

**Caste system alien to Tamils**

Inspite of all the damages that caste has done to society and politics, it had been admitted that caste distinction according to Tamil literature had been


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 17 – 19.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 20.
brought about only after the Aryan invasion, sages like Thiruvalluvar had condemned the tyrannising influence of caste.\textsuperscript{19} However one significant point about caste system in India is that there was no community or caste in India which had not a foreign blood, except the Rajputs. Hence caste purity could be nothing but a myth.

**Buddha’s Career, a revolt against caste**

The noble career of Lord Buddha is an unfailing testimony of a dedicated life and a revolt against caste. By absorbing Buddha into the fold of the Pantheon of Hindu Gods, Hindu religion could not be purified. It needs a revolution in thinking and India should take a conscious and bold step forward to emulate the pioneering work of great Reformers to redeem from her fall.

\textsuperscript{19} Kalyanasundarnar, V., *Ilamai Virunthu*, Madras, p. 38.