

CHAPTER - IX

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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This chapter contains the findings and recommendations based essentially on the data collected on the conditions and progress of the Depressed Classes, the impact of the work of governmental and non-governmental agencies and the attitude of the general public, including the Depressed Classes themselves which are discussed in the foregoing chapters. The data collected and examined provides deep insight into the problems faced by the Depressed Classes and the extent to which they have achieved progress. This, in turn, has made it possible to identify the major causes for the deplorable plight of the Depressed Classes to assess the purpose of the ameliorative measures and to gauge the extent to which these measures had been of benefit to these classes. In the light of the conditions of the Depressed Classes at the time of independence the Researcher has put forth his recommendations for further improvement of their conditions. The findings and recommendations are classified into : (a) Social; (b) Economic; (c) Civil;

(d) Political and (e) Educational. The findings are listed first under appropriate headings and the recommendations are given next.

Findings

(a) Social Aspects :

Regarding the origin and stratification of the Depressed Classes, the views are many and diverse. No two researchers hold identical views about the origin of the Depressed Classes and the evil of untouchability.

One view is that the Depressed Classes were once the aboriginal pre-Dravidian People who were conquered and subjugated either by the Dravidians or Aryans. Dr.B.R. Ambedkar, who evolved the theory of 'broken men' holds the view that the Depressed Classes were the Dravidian or Nāga Tribesmen who inhabited the whole of India and were subjugated by the Āryan Invadors. There is reason to believe that the Depressed Classes of North India and those in South India originated from different roots.

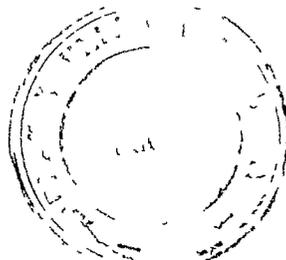
There is another view which regards the Depressed Classes as a part of the Sudra Varna who were suppressed into slavery by later Āryans. We may infer, on the basis of different theories, that the Depressed Classes included both Āryan and non-Āryan Tribes.

Segregation, the social cause of setting one group against another, has been in existence in India for many centuries. This has been practised in India very vehemently. The evils of untouchability and unapproachability have been closely associated with the practice of segregation. It is indeed difficult to fix the date when segregation or untouchability originated in India. Only deductions and surmises are possible.

In the Rig Veda, the earliest of the Vedas, there is no mention of untouchability. Stratification of society on vocational lines was done during the later Vedic period only. Beginnings of untouchability are discernible during the period of the Dharmasastras and Dharmasutras, viz., 600-300 B.C. There are evidences in the literature of this period to support this contention. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who connects untouchability with the practice of beef-eating

fixes 400 A.D., the probable date when cow slaughter and beef-eating were banned by law as the period during which the evil of untouchability sprouted on the soil of India. But evidence is to the contrary. That is, there is evidence to prove that at least a section of the people were regarded as Untouchables long before 400 A.D. None can dispute the fact that untouchability has been in vogue in India for the past several centuries. The problem is about the exact date of its origin.

In the Tamil region too, the attempt at fixing the date of the origin of untouchability has many-setbacks. The literatures of the Caṅkam period do not speak of Untouchables and untouchability. In fact, those classes who came to be regarded as Untouchables later, were enjoying better social status during the Caṅkam age. The gradual transformation of a simple and flexible society into a complex and stratified one took place during the post Caṅkam age, that is, between 300 and 600 A.D. It was during the period of the later Caṅkam works that the idea of ceremonial purity and impurity cropped up in the minds of the people in the Tamil society. What took place was a combination of the Āryan system based on Varna and the Drāvidian pattern based on vocation.



When Brāhminical Hinduism took firm and deep roots in the Tamil region during the medieval period, untouchability and its attendant evils were firmly established in the society. Though there is no explicit statement regarding the practice of untouchability during the Medieval period, we can only infer its presence from certain description of some communities being regarded as Untouchables. It is heartening to note that untouchability did not meet with whole-hearted approbation from all. The Saivite and Vaishnavite saints condemned this evil practice. In the Kannada-speaking regions the Liṅgāyat or the Veerasaiva movement led by Basaveswara in the 13th Century A.D., condemned untouchability. The Siddhas who lived in the Tamil region between the 13th and 16th centuries were virulent in their attack on the caste system and the notion of pollution. The emergence of the Valaṅgai and Idāṅgai factions in the Tamil society during the medieval period paved the way for factional fights between communities.

As days rolled by, the vehemence of casteism and the attendant social evils increased in intensity and vehemence. This is aptly attested to by the occurrences

during the modern period. Even during the hegemony of the Muslims in parts of the Presidency of Madras untouchability continued to be practiced. During the rule of the Nāyaks the situation worsened. Kingship in India had been associated with religion and hence the Brāhmin priest enjoyed an enviable position in the court and society. The Brāhmins, under the patronage of Hindu Kings, were mainly responsible for perpetrating the caste system and for keeping a sizeable section of the society in perpetual darkness. Ample illustrations in support of this view could be called from the Nāyaks of Madurai.

By the time the British gained a foothold in the Indian peninsula the caste system had been firmly entrenched in the minds of the people. The stratification of the society was rigid. A number of taboos were enforced. Even though the Depressed Classes were treated worse than animals they had developed a sense of fatalism or Karma and were taking things for granted. Socially they were extremely backward because they were kept so for many centuries. Though they were Hindus, yet the Depressed Classes had no access to places of public worship. In society they were condemned to live a life of sub-humans.



Public utilities like roads, tanks and wells were not for their use. An individual's station in life and status in society was determined by the caste to which he belonged. Selfish interests of the caste Hindus were camouflaged by religious purity.

It was during the rule of the British that steps were set afoot to set matters right in the case of the Depressed Classes. The British rulers, in the beginning, were not enthusiastic about social reforms. There were two reasons for the sluggishness of the British. First, they did not want to earn the hostility of the well-to-do and influential section of the society. Secondly, the caste Hindus and Brāhm̄ins who were in the employ of the British saw to it that nothing constructive was done to better the lot of the Depressed Classes. Even when large-scale atrocities were committed against the Depressed Classes, the official machinery barely moved to rectify the wrongs. Offence against the Depressed Classes mostly went unchallenged and unpunished. This may be attributed to ignorance of laws or personal and political pressure. The amount of opposition to temple entry goes to show the belligerency of the caste Hindus. They were unwilling to share these privileges with their unfortunate brethren.

(b) Economic :

One cannot expect a class that has been denied all social benefits to do well on the economic front. Though the Depressed Classes were the possessors of wealth and prestige in bygone days, in the modern period they were at the receiving end. They had lost all their possessions. Either they were forcibly taken away or they were constrained to part with them. In the end they ended up as worse than slaves. They were in eternal bondage to their masters who were mostly the caste Hindus. There was no succour for them in this life. Poverty and disease were the lot of these people.

With the coming of the British, steps were initiated to provide the basic economic necessities to the Depressed Classes. Even in the assignment of wasteland the Depressed Classes did not benefit. They were condemned to perform the menial jobs only. Professions and trades were kept away from them.

In this also we notice the callous nature of the caste Hindus. Suppression of the Depressed Classes at all

levels was the aim of the caste Hindus. Neither the Governmental nor the social organizations could do anything substantial to change this attitude.

On the economic front, the Depressed Classes have been either neglected or humiliated. Due recognition has not been given to them taking into account their strength, ability, potentiality, eagerness and initiative. Full employment has not been given to members of the Depressed Classes under the public and Private sectors. The number of candidates from the Depressed Classes securing jobs is not in proportion to their population and particularly with reference to 18% of reservation approved by the Government. This is more so in prestigious bodies like the Atomic Energy Commission, Indian Oil Corporation, National Gas Commission and the like.

An explanation that is putforth in this connection is that the requisite number of candidates from among the Depressed Classes are not forthcoming to fill the posts under reservation.



(c) Civil :

When a people have been denied both social privileges and economic benefits, they cannot be expected to possess any civil rights. This was true in the case of the Depressed Classes. Even the rudimentary civil rights and amenities were totally denied to these classes. When, on occasions, the Depressed Classes were permitted the enjoyment of certain civil rights like voting in elections, they had to suffer in the process. They could not use public roads with impunity. Communal clashes between the Depressed Classes and other communities were common occurrences, especially during and after elections to the legislature and local bodies. In these clashes the victims were invariably members of the Depressed Classes. It was also common for personal quarrels between individuals to escalate into communal clashes. Things are not very much different even now.

(d) Political :

On the political front, the Depressed Classes were, for a long time denied due recognition and consideration.

It was only after repeated pleas and entreaties that a lone member, M.C. Rajah, could find place in the legislature. The demand of the Depressed Classes was for adequate representation. It was with this view that they demanded separate electorates. But the political parties were trying to use the Depressed Classes only as pawns in their game and not as beneficiaries. Ultimately the demand for separate electorate went unfulfilled.

(e) Educational :

A grievous injury that has been committed by the Government against the Depressed Classes is the incessant propaganda regarding the benefits that are being given to them. An indiscriminate use of the media is seen day in and day out. The propaganda that is done by the Government regarding the concessions extended to the Depressed Classes in educational, employment, economic and political spheres tend to create an adverse opinion in the minds of the general public about the Depressed Classes. As a consequence, hatred and animosity tend to grow rather than abate with the passage of time.

In the field of education the Depressed Classes are still in a backward condition. Their literacy percentage is very poor even in the elementary and secondary education. In higher education majority of them are placed in Arts but not in Science, Technology and Professional courses, owing to the stepmother-treatment of the authorities of and want of timely Government aid. The creation of separate hostels for these students are of course helpful but in practice these hostels are nothing but 'Pupils' Cēris' (Slums). Even in their educational careers these unfortunates have lost their opportunity of free inter-course with other caste Hindu students. The maintenance of separate hostels promotes segregation. They must be discouraged.

Further, the data collected by the Government and the Administrative Reports of the Harijan Welfare Department are highly defective and incomplete. They do not provide an accurate picture about the condition of the Depressed Classes. More often, the reports which originate in the Departments of Government are exaggerations and not factual.

Under these circumstances, there is room for much

innovation and improvement. If the tendency to learn by experience is developed, there will not be much cause for worry in the days ahead. In the light of the above, the Researcher ventures to put forth a few recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Since it is next to impossible for the Depressed Classes to get justice under the existing system, it is felt that an independent body, answerable only to the Head of State, may be appointed to look after the needs of the Depressed Classes and set right any harm or injustice done to them. This body, in composition, may be similar to the 'Ombudsman' which is in existence in Sweden, Denmark, Australia, etc. This body may be invested with powers to issue proper directives to all institutions, educational and otherwise, departments of Government and Private bodies regarding admission, appointment and promotion. This body may also be invested with adequate and appropriate powers either to prosecute or to punish, or to do both, whenever the agencies fail to comply with the constitutional safeguards provided and orders issued.

2. So as to provide encouragement to the Depressed Classes on the economic front, steps may be initiated to assign to members of the Depressed Classes ancillary and subsidiary contracts in heavy industries. Suitable financial assistance may also be extended to the Depressed Classes to enable them to execute the works assigned to them, without financial constraints. Such advances made may be recovered on easy instalments. Members of the Depressed Classes may be assigned shares in industries and companies and the value of the shares thus assigned may first be borne by the Government and later realised from them in easy instalments. The system of reserving 18% of jobs in Government may also be extended to the private sectors.

3. As the Depressed Classes are beneficiaries of many concessions from Government, certain classes who do not come under this category tend to obtain false certificates to the effect that they belong to the Depressed Classes. Such practices, if went unchecked, would ultimately jeopardise the position of the Depressed Classes. Hence it is suggested that a fool-proof system should be evolved so as to prevent the practice of issuing false certificates.

4. More concrete steps should be taken by the Government and social organizations to encourage inter-caste marriages so as to assimilate the Depressed Classes with the rest of the society. To make inter-caste marriages a success, generous financial grants, general concessions and statutory protection against persecution should be provided. This would, in course of time, help to increase social mobility and reduce the distance between the different communities.

5. Efforts should be made to do away with the system of setting up distinct and different places of habitation for the Depressed Classes. Isolating the Depressed Classes from the rest of the society will not benefit them. It is common in urban areas for different communities, including Depressed Classes, to live together in perfect unity. The same attitude should be cultivated in the rural areas also.

6. The Depressed Classes themselves should cease to regard themselves inferior to others. They should willingly come forward to shoulder any responsibility and to pursue any honourable vocation.

7. The Depressed Classes should earnestly endeavour not to practice untouchability and social ostracism among themselves.

8. Untouchability is the corollary of caste system. Casteism in Hindu society must be rooted out. Abolishing the sub-castes is the first step to eradicate casteism. If the numerous sub-castes are abolished the tension of casteism will be lessened, and their number would be reduced.

Hinduism is not for caste-system but some of the superstitions and fantastic beliefs in peculiar taboos tendered the growth of caste system. Such superstitions and taboos must be rooted out from the Hindu-Society.

For this 'Renaissance' the Hindus must be properly educated. Rationalistic way of thinking must be the background to that 'proper education'. Such institutions must be backed by the Hindus and the Government.

9. Some of the filthy occupations and vocations are supposed to be the root causes of the caste system and for

the evil of untouchability. Such occupations are to be either generalised or modernised. For example, carrying the night soil on the heads by the Depressed Class workers is an indecent and uncivilized practice. Scavenging must be scientifically mechanised. Such is the case in tanning, carrying the carcass, burying the dead bodies, beating drums etc., After modernisation these should be made high paid jobs and it will naturally attract people of all other castes.

These recommendations, if implemented, could produce a society free from untouchability and Untouchables. A society which is free from these evils could rightly be proud of itself.

Let us conclude with the glorious sayings of Dr.B.R. Ambedkar while presenting the draft of the Constitution to the Constituent Assembly :

"On January 26, 1950, we have equality in politics and inequality in social and economic life. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up."