CHAPTER IV

IDEOLOGY AND IDENTITY FOR ELEVATION

Ideology and identity forms one of the basic tools of any movement. The Hindu religion and its ideology has been central axis of caste system and responsible in oppressing the depressed classes. Searching an alternative ideology for accessing what were denied to them became inevitable to the leaders and movement of depressed classes. The depressed classes have searched the ideology for their liberation outside the Hindu religious frame. Thus, they adopted the Dravidian and modern ideology. Theoretically, one of the basic ideas of the former was anti-caste and the later recognized every individual as a citizen and provided the right to access to all the sacred and secular public spheres without any caste and religious distinction. Ideologically, the depressed classes’ movement aligned with the movements, which have similar ideology and confronted with the movements which have the contradictory ideas. Rift also emerged within the depressed classes’ movement due to the ideological similarities and dissimilarities. In every idea there was unity and disparity aroused among the leaders. Some of their ideas got success and some others
were defeated. Thus this chapter explores, the ideologies derived by the leaders of depressed classes for their elevation and to whom they aligned and confronted. Split within the leaders of depressed classes is also discussed in this chapter.

**The Religious Debate**

Since the caste system constructed on the basis of Hindu religious ideas, which produced the concept of untouchability and other oppression, there were two different ideas emerged among the depressed classes regarding their struggle for equality. Some leaders thought that equality could be achieved within the Hindu religious fold thus they advocated the people to stick on with Hinduism. Thus they supported the struggles for temple entry and other religious rights. But some other leaders thought that equality could not be achieved within the Hindu religious fold. Thus they campaigned and propagated that, since Hinduism is the basic cause for untouchability, discard it and embrace the alternative religion. They attempted to construct an alternative socio-cultural life through conversion to other religions in general, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam in particular.

**Searching Equality in Hinduism**

Some depressed classes reluctant to adopt other religions because they could not give up their traditional religion, deities and rituals. They made attempts to attain social emancipation within the traditional system. Adi-Dravida Conference held at Tirukoilur on 21st May 1921 worried to note that, on account
of inhuman and unjust caste differences of Varnashrama Darma and on account of the refusal of admission and prohibition of the Adi-Dravidas to enter into the Hindu temples and have their worship despite their being caste-Hindus, there is a gradual degradation and degeneration of the principles and tenets of the holy Hinduism. Therefore this conference requested the guardians of the Hindu religion such as “Matathi Pathis” (Heads of the Hindu Religious Mutt) of different places, and the Trustees of the various Hindu temples to turn their attention on this problem and to consider the advisability of making suitable arrangements for the admission of the Adi-Dravidas into the Hindu temples.¹ Some leaders like Sahajanandam sought the people to remain in their own religion but they did not insist the people to accept Brahminical texts and its philosophies. They advised to adopt Thirukkural as their holy book and passed resolutions to establish a separate gurukulam for them. Some leaders of depressed classes viewed that equality must be achieve within the Hindu religious fold. Thus, in this regard differences of opinions aroused among depressed classes in 1930s. M.C. Rajah for the first time participated in a temple oriented Saiva meeting conducted by depressed classes in Thirugana Sambandar temple. He and his supporters advocated that temple entry was their fundamental right. R. Srinivasan delivered his speech in an Adi-Drava Conference held on 17th May 1932 at North Arcot that, temple entry is necessary. As it is a common place, each and every man should have that right.² But some other depressed class leaders thought that temple entry is not necessary and passed resolutions

¹ G.O. No. 1680, Law General (20 October 1921).
² Dravidan (21 May 1931), p. 6.
regarding this in conferences. ³ Adi-Dravida Youth Sangam also wanted to boycott Brahminical way of Hindu temples instead of that they advocated their people to worship the temples established by their ancestors in their localities without caste discrimination.⁴

As per the resolution passed in an Adi-Dravida conference held on ⁴th July 1937 Tanjore, Adi-Dravidas decided to stop giving fund to the temples where ever the right of temple entry denied to the depressed classes and decided to utilize this fund for the education of Adi-Dravidas.⁵ At this juncture difference of opinion broke out between the depressed classes leaders. While depressed class leaders collectively accepted the decision taken by Ambedkar regarding the conversion of other religion and planned to convene a conference to discuss this matter, Swami Sahajanandam declared his own notification of conducting an Adi Hindu Conference within a short period. It was condemned and denied by other depressed class leaders. They warned the people that the Adi Hindu Conference is not the conference of Adi-Dravidas and Sahajanandam is not our representative.⁶

In turn in the South Arcot conference held on ³⁰th July 1933 Swami Sahajanandam demanded the people to give full support to finish the work of Nandanar temple which was laid foundation by Gandhi. It was also condemned

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⁴ Dravidan (21 August 1931), p. 6.
by depressed class leaders. According to them temple is not a basic necessity to the depressed classes.\textsuperscript{7} Searching alternative religion which was ready to give equality to them was very popular among them.

**Alternative Religion for Equality**

There were two important reasons for selecting alternative religious path. Unlike Hindu religion these alternative religions Ideologically insisted equality. They gave material support and education which had been denied in the Hindu religion to the depressed classes. Thus a section of depressed classes got ready to embrace the alternative religion. According to Ghanshyam Shah, it was formed part of the social protest movement.\textsuperscript{8} In the 7\textsuperscript{th} All India Adi-Dravida Conference held on 26 April 1930 at Amroti, president Nichal Jay compared the religious conversion with non co-operation of untouchables with caste-Hindus.\textsuperscript{9} Importance of conversion for liberation from untouchability was propagated by Ambedkar in 1935 and he declared that “I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu”.\textsuperscript{10} According to him, “so long as we remain in the religion which teaches a man to treat another man as filthy, the sense of discrimination on the account of caste which is deeply rooted in our minds, cannot be abolished. For annihilating castes and untouchability among the untouchables, change of

\textsuperscript{7} Kudiyarasu (29 September 1935), p. 17.
\textsuperscript{9} Dravidan (02 May 1930), p. 2.
religion is the only antidote”.

Ambedkar himself with number of people converted to Buddhism. E.V. Ramasamy advised the depressed classes that “if you want to go to another religion choose Islam for conversion”. After the announcement of Ambedkar the depressed classes convened a meeting at Madras in 1935 for endorsing the views of Ambedkar. But even before Ambedkar’s propagation the depressed classes in Madras Presidency had begun to take alternative religion.

Iyothee Thass, a leader of Paraya caste, projected the Parayas as the Buddhists and in 1911 census he asserted separate identity for depressed classes. He reconstructed Buddhism in colonial Tamil region and continuously explained, interpreted and justified his formulation till his death in 1914. The Pallars and Chakkiliars took Christianity as the alternative path before Ambedkar’s propagation. The Christian missionaries worked among the depressed classes and helped them in improving their downtrodden conditions inspired their fellow people. Majority of Pallars of Alapuram, Ramanathapuram district had converted to Roman Catholic Christianity. An English Catholic priest arrived in 1900 at Seethaikurichy, a village in Tirunelveli district baptized

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number of Pallars to Christianity. The Methodist missionaries worked in Dharapuram and Karur regions converted number of Paraya people. When Swedish missionaries worked in the heart land of the high lands in Thirupur, Coimbatore, Palghat, Pollachi and Dindigul took up work in the rural areas of Coimbatore in the 1920s; they met with the relatives of the Parayas who had converted to Christianity in the Dharapuram area. These people had seen their kin benefit from conversion, and asked the Methodist Missionaries for baptism. A decade later Madharis also came with the same request. As a result number of Madharis (Chakkiliyar) baptized.

In 1930s depressed communities in Kallangudi, Mounni, Bavanakkottai, Paramakudi, Kalvikudi and Puthukotai eagerly converted to Christianity in large number on account of the oppressions of Nattukottai Chettis and Nattars. Government took some steps to make compromise between them but failed. In Kallangudi problem started while Nattukottai Chettis ordered a Paraya to demolish his tiled house. He refused to do so. In retaliation land lords refused to give job to the Parayas. Subsequently, the broken hearted Parayas decided to convert into Christianity. Ultimately, the whole village was converted to Christianity. But people could not solve the problem even after conversion due to the inequality prevailed among Christian churches. The condition of

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17 Gunnel Cederlof, Bonds Lost: Subordination, Conflict and Mobilization, p.67.
18 Ibid., p.54.
19 Gunnel Cederlof, Bonds Lost: Subordination, Conflict and Mobilization, p.54.
20 Nagarathuthan (30 December 1934), p. 3.
untouchable Christians was worse in Catholic churches because they were not only opposed by high caste-Hindus but also by the high caste Christians. In catholic churches separate places were allotted for them. According to the news published in Nagarathuthan on 8th August 1937, fine imposed on an Adi-Dravida boy who was unknowingly sit on the seat of high castes came to light.\textsuperscript{21} In order to get the support of high caste people church fathers also accepted these atrocities. Hence some depressed class leaders advocated their fellowmen to take conversion to Islam for attaining equality.\textsuperscript{22} In 1920s number of families in Thirupur converted to Islam for the sake of life with self respect. In Silayampatti 69 depressed classes converted to Islam on 6th October 1929 because of the oppression of caste-Hindus. Others promised to convert to Islam in the forthcoming days.\textsuperscript{23} In 1930 around 50,000 depressed classes sent an ultimatum to the Arya Samajist and warned them that “we are going to convert into Islam religion because we could not come out from untouchability though we were subjected to Sudhi”.\textsuperscript{24}

Ghanshyam Shah claims that though the conversion was an attempt to break the subordinate relation with the dominant caste-Hindus it has so far been localized and has not emerged in the wide form of movement.\textsuperscript{25} But here it should be noted that though adorning alternative religion was not emerged as

\textsuperscript{21} Nagarathuthan (08 August 1937), p. 10.
\textsuperscript{22} Kudiyarasu (05 July 1931), p. 19.
\textsuperscript{24} Dravidan (05 July 1930), p. 14.
wide form of movement it gave a vibrant shock to the Hindu religion and its leaders. Like this, another significant idea was changing the demeaned social identity which too was against the Hinduism.

**Homogenize the Heterogeneous Identities**

The artificial heterogeneous character of the unequal graded caste system in every layer has been dividing the people and which is the major hurdle against the solidarity. According to Ambedkar, “Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible.”\(^{26}\) The heterogeneous identity made impossible the solidarity even among the people who have experienced the same kind of oppressions. Though the castes under the category of depressed classes were heterogeneous, their experience of untouchability, exclusion and oppressions were homogenous in character. Thus as an oppressed heterogeneous caste groups, they had same kind of aspirations for their liberation. But, calling these heterogeneous groups by various names was one of the major hurdles to bring them under one umbrella. It also made their movements politically too weak. The numerical strength had played a crucial role in receiving political and economic benefits which were given by government in the name of communal reservation. Hence the solidarity of the oppressed became unavoidable necessity in the political economic arena to get concessions and in the socio cultural sense their solidarity became inevitable to fight against the oppression. This situation pushed the heterogeneous

\(^{26}\) Ambedkar, B.R., ‘Caste in India”, in Ghanshyam Shah (Ed.), *Caste and Democratic Politics in India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), p. 94.
depressed caste groups to become a homogeneous one. Utilizing this opportunity the leaders of the depressed classes attempted to achieve their solidarity through single identity. There was no difference of opinion among them in the process of deleting their existing identities because which demeaned them. But in the adopting process controversial opinion was emerged among them. Now, deleting the heterogeneous identities is expressed.

**Ousting the Demeaned Names**

The dominant castes demeaned the depressed classes by calling the caste names such as Parayan, Pallan and Chakkilian and in all the records of the British government the same names had been registered. Hence the depressed classes struggled to oust such names. To achieve this they passed resolutions through that they condemned the use of such names and sent plea to the government to delete the same in records. The Tirukoilur Kallakurichi and Villupuram taluks Adi-Dravida Conference held at Tirukoilur on 21st May 1921 strongly condemned the attitude of so called dominant caste people calling the Adi-Dravidas as Panchamas, Pulayas, and Tiyars.27

A.G.A. Dunning, President of the Sambavar Maha Jana Sangam demanded that the word, “Paraya”, should not be used to designate the depressed classes in government records. Further he pointed out that the whole community of Sambavars in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu whose mother tongue is Tamil, regard the use of the word, Paraya by the government in official

27 G.O. No. 1680, Law General (20 October 1921).
statements and other records as nothing short of insult hurled at them. “No greater insult could be hurled at a man than by calling him a Paraya. Since the word was whole-heartedly and universally disliked by the community which now goes by the name, it is clearly a moral wrong to call them Parayas” he said. He again said that since the uplift of the depressed classes in India has come to be one of the chief concerns of the British government, it would be only in the fitness of things to remove all such caste names as carry a social sting with them, and which, of course, are most repugnant to the communities concerned.\textsuperscript{28} R. Veeraian in the Legislative Council in 1925 objected the usage of the term Paraya not only in issuing summons to the depressed classes but also calling them before the people summoned in the court.\textsuperscript{29}

In 1926 in the Council he again raised the same question. Veeraian also opposed using the reproachful suffixes such as Palla, Chuckkili etc in the law courts, police stations and other public places. Even after government orders declared it as the violation of law, the same thing was continued.\textsuperscript{30} As a result, the depressed classes began to protest against the usage of these reproachful terms in any form. As a part of this movement the depressed classes asked the government to change the filthy names of common places and villages also. For instance Singanallur people wrote a letter to E.F Thomas, District Collector Coimbatore demanding the changing of the name the place Natham to

\textsuperscript{28} G.O. No. 4554, Law General (28 October 1930).
\textsuperscript{29} MLCD, Vol. XXIV (26 August 1925), pp. 767 – 768.
Depressed classes appealed the government to issue a ban on Nandanar drama. Because, in public places caste-Hindus used to perform Nandanar Charitram drama and utilizing this opportunity they used the word Paraya. It kindled the feelings of depressed classes. They passed resolutions against it and brought this matter to the knowledge of government. Consequently, the government banned this drama and the news was informed to the people through thandora. Veeraian asked all depressed communities to report to the caste organisations and government those who violate the rules. At this juncture, for the purpose of census report, the government permitted people to use any caste name by which they wish to be recorded and to adopt in the Census report. Since the depressed people hesitated to stick to their filthy names which put up with their degradation they sought to identify them by their distinctive name.

Adidravida: A Racial Homogeneous Identity

The depressed classes identified them with the Dravidian race. The name of their organization, the magazines published by them etc. were titled as

31 G.O. No. 291, Public (23 March 1931).
32 Saint Nandanar was one of the celebrated sixty three Nayanmars who spread Saivism in south India. Although he was born at an untouchable caste about 1600 years ago, he rose to pinnacle of glory through a disciplined and dedicated life of virtue and piety, hard and honest labour. He earned the adoration and esteem of all irrespective of caste and creed. His birth as an untouchable was a bar to enter temples and offer worship.
33 Informing Government Orders and other messages to the village people by beating a drum like instrument.
34 Kudiyarasu (18 March 1928).
35 G.O.1680, Law General (20 October 1921).
Dravidian. The first Paraya organization was named after the Dravida Mahajana Sabha which was founded in 1881 at Nilgris by Iyothee Thass.\textsuperscript{36} He was one of the early leaders of Parayas noted themselves as ‘\textit{Poorva Tamizhar}', the primitive Tamils, and caste less Dravidians.\textsuperscript{37} The Pallars held a conference on 20\&21 May, 1922 at Sriramasamudram (now Arialoor) was named after Trichy Zillah Dravida Uzhavarkula Conference.\textsuperscript{38} The title indicates that the sangam accepted the concept of dravida. Since non-Brahmin caste-Hindus also assumed Dravidian identity, depressed classes had to differentiate themselves from the caste Hindus. It compelled them to adopt the term \textit{Adi} which connote the first and the original inhabitants. Claiming the \textit{Adi} was a common phenomenon among the all depressed classes in India.

Their first and foremost association of the depressed classes in Tamil land was named as “\textit{Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha}”.\textsuperscript{39} On behalf of the Sabha a petition was submitted to Montegu and Chelmsford demanding their contemptuous name Paraya should be replaced in government records by the name Adi-Dravida even before 1920. When this question was raised in the Legislative council in 1918 Alexander Cardew observed as follows:- “I doubt whether Dravidians would be a very suitable name for the Panchamas, because it


\textsuperscript{38} G.O. No. 2962, Law General (03 November, 1922).

\textsuperscript{39} Rajah, M.C., \textit{The Oppressed Hindus}, p.34.
belongs particularly to the Tamils and would be of very doubtful appropriateness as applied to the Telugus. No doubt the idea of calling the Panchamas Dravidas or Adi-Dravidas has started in Tamil country, without sufficient reflection as to whether it would suit the corresponding Telugu classes. I think they may have to think some more appropriate names. The name Adi-Dravidians or original Dravidians would not be unsuitable for the Tamil Panchamas who undoubtedly represent an older strain of inhabitants of South India than the so called Aryans—but it would not do to extend the term to persons dwelling north of Pennar.”

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 nomenclature of the depressed classes into Adi-Dravida officially was done as a result of the concerted efforts taken by M.C.Rajah. When he was the Secretary to the “Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha” and Member of the Legislative Council he persuaded the council to accept the term Adi-Dravida to denote the untouchables of Madras. Regarding this, a resolution was brought by Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar in 1921. Subsequently discussions started again regarding this matter.

P.C. Dutt argued that Adi-Dravida is a name unknown to the vast majority of the community proposed to be thus named. If it is adopted, in course of time it will gather to itself the same significance as the word Paraya unless the

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40 G.O. No. 630, Home (30 August 1918).
community improves its status in the meantime. As regards the choice of new name not only is there the difficulty about the Telugu Panchamas referred to by Sir Alexander Cardew, but there is the further difficulty that the Panchamas of Southern India are not agreed among themselves whether the name should be “Dravida” or “Adi-Dravida”. In a resolution passed by the Dravida Mahajana Sabha also, it articulated the fact that the term ‘Adi-Dravida’ has on account of and in connection with the recent disturbances at Madras, become odious and recommended another substitute. Further the Sabha viewed that as the Adi-Dravida signifies the original tribes, such as Todas, Cherumas, etc and according to the eminent writers, such as Gustav Oppert, Bishop Caldwell, Justice Ramanthamby and others that Panchamas are Dravidians, the name ‘Dravida’ should be used to designate the Panchamas exclusively as distinct from the Caste Dravidians, who are the non-Brahmin Hindus and who have their own caste appellations.

In addition to this, the depressed classes members representing the community in the Madras Legislative Council unfortunately belonging to only one section of the community and did not represent the views of the community in general and it is consequently immature to consider the resolution at this stage. Ultimately the government decided to left it entirely to the community itself. The individual has a perfect right to use any of these terms at his discretion and no resolution of the council could bind him. Consequently this resolution was withdrawn. At this critical situation once again in the Legislative Council

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43 G.O. No. 1680, Law General (20 October 1921).
meeting the following resolution was moved by Veeraian and passed on 20th January 1922:- “in future the words ‘Paraya’, ‘Palla’, ‘Chakkili’, and ‘Madigas’ should not be entered in public records against the names of Adi-Dravidas and that in all muster rolls, registers, service books and other public documents, the words, if used, should be omitted.” Thus the term Adi-Dravida came into use in government records.

**Sticking with Caste identity**

The very purpose of the terminology Adi-Dravida was to include all the depressed classes that experienced untouchability and oppression. The leaders particularly who were born at Paraya caste had taken efforts for the Adi-Dravida identity but some section of Parayas rejected it. A resolution of a conference of Pallars held in Tiruchirappalli shows that the Pallars also accepted this terminology in 1931. But there was no evidence to prove that the Chakkiliars had adorned the same term. However in course of time there was a strong opposition of Adi-Dravida identity among the Parayar, Pallar and Chakkiliar.

In the 11th Adi-Dravida conference held under the leadership of Gurusamy passed the resolution that the term depressed classes should be substituted by Adi-Hindus and asked the government to amend the name in all government records. Dunning on behalf of Sambavar Maha Jana Sangam demanded that the old racial name of Sambavar may in future be substituted for the ignoble word,

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44 G.O. No. 3571, Law General (16 December 1924).
45 *Kudiyarasu* (01 July 1931), p. 11.
46 *Kudiyarasu* (15 January 1928).
“Paraya” and the name of the community be changed into “Sambavar” and also the word Paraya may be deleted from all government records in future and replaced by the word, “Sambavar”, chiefly in the census records and those of the educational department.  

The Devendrakula Mahajana Sabha conducted its conference on 23rd April 1924 at Settidianpatti of Ramanathapuram district. In this conference the Pallars called themselves as Devendrakula Vellalars under the leadership of S. Subramania Moopanar who was the member of Trichy Taluk Board. The Devendrakula Vellalar Conference held in Tiruchirappalli on 28th June 1931 passed a resolution that “the name ‘Devendrakula Vellalar’ should be used in all government records instead of the caste names Pallar, Kurumbar, Kaladi and Pannadi.

The Chakkiliyars and their sub-castes adorned the term Arunthathiyar for them. Regarding this in the Madras Legislative Council on 5th August 1932 H.M. Jahannatham moved a resolution. In support of this he argued that the Arunthathiyar community called by different names in different areas, but they are, not only in all essentials, but in all particulars, one identical community. They speak one language, they worship the same deities, observe the same ceremonials alike in death and marriage, intermarry and above all, have been pursuing one and the same industry for thousands upon thousands of years, and there is not one circumstance dividing any one of these sections from any

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47 G.O. No. 4554, Law General (28 October 1930).
49 *Dravidan* (01 July 1931).
other. So they should be called by their original name of their community, the Arunthathiya. Because it would bring the spirit of unity among themselves, an oneness of aims and aspirations and an esprit de corps which is one of the greatest essentials of a community’s progress and recognition by the government of the oneness of all the sections of our community would greatly facilitate their endeavours to obtain from it an adequate consideration of their joint grievances.

As a result, on behalf of government an undertaking was given that the government would have no objection to call the members of the communities Arunthathiya’ if they prefer to be so called. The government desire that, if it is necessary to mention in a government record or document the caste of any member of the above mentioned communities, who describes himself as an Arunthathiya, he should be so described in the government record and if he expresses a desire to have the suffix ‘Ayya Garu’ or ‘Ayya Avargal’ appended to his name, that suffix should be used when he is addressed. And in the Legislative Council on the 5th August 1932 the following resolution was passed:—

“that this council recommends to the government that the communities now called Madiga, Chakkiliyan, Mathanga Kosangi, and Adi-jambuva (including Kommu, Chindu, Mastingu) be hereafter entered in government records as Arunthathiya with the suffix of ‘Ayya Garu’ or ‘Ayya Avargal’. Balagurusivam spoke in the Depressed Classes Volunteer Group inaugural meeting that the view of some people for adopting the name Adi-Dravida Volunteer Group is a wrong opinion. Depressed Classes Volunteer Group is an

50 G.O. No. 3351, Law General (10 September 1932).
51 MLCD (05 August 1932).
apt name for this association because that term was coined by British government after a prolonged examination. So all depressed people irrespective of caste can join this organization.\textsuperscript{52}

The above said incidents show that there was strong opposition to the homogenous identity, the Adi-Dravida. Some reasons have shattered their solidarity under a homogenous identity. Each depressed castes have separate mythological stories regarding their origin such as some claimed their origin on par with the Brahmins, the priestly class, some claimed with Kshatriyas, the ruling class, and some with Vaisya, the merchant class. It forced them to stick with their own mythical identity and demand separate name for their community and separate concessions.\textsuperscript{53} In addition, there were different customs among depressed classes and the feeling of superior and inferior. Among the Paraya, a sect called Amma Parayar or Choli Parayar considered themselves as superior than other Adi-Dravidas. So they did not follow widow remarriage and other customs which were usually followed by others.\textsuperscript{54} Among the Pallars the Aatha Pallar considered themselves as superior than the other sub-section. Between the Paraya and Pallar the later claim they are superior to the former.

Besides they did not have matrimonial relation among them. Above all, though the nomenclature Adi-Dravida was adorned to all the depressed classes since it was introduced and demanded by the Legislative Council Members who

\textsuperscript{52} Dravidan (27 November 1931), p.7.
\textsuperscript{53} Kudiyarasu (24 January 1932), pp. 10-11.
\textsuperscript{54} Kudiyarasu (30 December 1928).
belonged to Paraya caste others thought that it was the name of Parayas only. The economic and political interest of each caste was one of the main causes for claiming the heterogeneous identities. Because they thought that under common name few castes would be dominated and benefited all concessions granted by the government. Due to these reasons the claim for heterogeneous identities continued. Thus the new racial identity Adi-Dravida did not receive unanimous support from the depressed classes.

**Ideological Similarities with non-Brahmin Movement**

Due to the ideology of rejecting Aryanism and accepting Dravidianism, the depressed classes had gained support from the non-Brahmin caste groups that also agreed the Dravidian identity. Gail Omvedt asserts that, “Yet they shared common traditions with the non-Brahmin movements, stressed common themes, used a common language and nearly always looked to alliance”. 55  S.V. Rajadurai, V. Geetha asserts that like the Depressed Classes Movement the non-Brahmin movement also propagated anti-caste discourse56 and in the magazine *Kudiyarasu*, which was published by E.V. Ramasamy the leader of the Non-Brahmin Movement, he had written many articles in support of depressed classes. Thus the ideological similarities between the Depressed Classes Movement and the Non-Brahmin movement brought them very closer and

provided support to each others. The leaders and members of these movements desired to attend each other’s conferences, meetings and struggles.

The Paraya community made close contact with E.V. Ramasamy and joined with his movement. Some important leaders who joined with the E.V.R. movement were Sathiyavani Muthu, a woman, Appathuraiyar etc. Though the Pallars had contact with E.V.R. there was no single popular leader of Pallar who had affiliated with non-Brahmin movement. But E.V.R. presided at the Devendrakula Conference of Periyakulam Taluk, Theni district, which was organised by the Pallars on 31 August, 1936. In a few Pallars’ Conferences E.V.R. had addressed. But while seeing the conferences of Parayas, E.V.R. had attended more than 20 conferences all over Tamil Nadu.

The print media of the non-Brahmins such as Dravidan, Kudiyarasu, Puratchi and Nagarathutan had given wide space coverage regarding the issue of depressed classes whereas the other media had not given such space. Self Respect Movement which was the part of non-Brahmin movement fought for the social causes of depressed classes. Self respect meeting insisted and passed resolution to cancel the license of the coffee shops and hotels which denied access to the depressed classes. Some renowned people those who were

60 Nagarathutan (22 October 1933).
popular in the Non-Brahmin Movement also extended their support to the day today problems of the depressed classes. In the Second Madras Presidency Anti-untouchability Conference, Panagal Raja spoke that I am ready to render financial support to the people those who filed a complaint against Pachayappa College refusing admission to the panchamas. Here, it is to be noted that the Justice Movement, of course desired the educational uplift of the depressed classes and they supported in accessing the public wells, streets and tanks. But they did not conceded to their demand for communal representation in politics. It led to the quit of depressed classes leaders from the justice party.

**Separate Electorate: Split and Defeat**

According to Andre Beteille “alienation from Hinduism is not the only path, however, for ambitious harijans. In fact, the most popular path of upward mobility nowadays is through corporate political action. The politicization of the harijans has followed a regular and continuous path…. It was only in the 1930s with the rise of Ambedkar that the harijans emerged as a separate political force.” Ambedkar believed that capturing the political power was the only way to liberate the depressed classes from the oppression of the dominant castes. M.C. Rajah had a spoke the importance of political power in other words that “If our representatives had formed a strong contingent in the council, there

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would have been no anti Adi-Dravida crusade in the Pulianthope troubles, no suggestion to deport Adi-Dravidas from Madras, no abolition of Assistant Labour Commissioners, no rejection of the Irrigation Bill. In the beginning the leaders of the depressed classes aspired for political representation but later for capturing political power the idea of separate electorate and dual voting right was emerged among them. They strongly believed that the real political power could be achieved only through the mechanism of separate electorate. The fact was that the Government of India Act of 1919 provided separate communal representation to the depressed classes in the public bodies for the first time in India.

The Governor General of British India nominated the depressed classes’ members for the Legislative Councils. Consequently, the depressed classes had got an opportunity to represent their grievances to the government. In this situation a Royal Commission, in 1928, was appointed under the chairmanship of Sir John Simon to investigate the working of the 1919 act. The Simon (Indian Statutory) Commission in 1928 faced the opposition of the congress for its non-Indian character but the depressed classes gave a warm welcome to it. M.C. Rajah provided a treat to the representatives in Simon commission.

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64 G.O. No.1415, Law General (19 May 1923).
65 The depressed classes representatives could be elected by depressed classes only in separate electorate.
66 The depressed classes could cast their vote for both the depressed classes representatives and other caste representatives.
69 *Dravidan* (05 April 1929), p.6.
depressed classes’ organizations and their leaders were aspired to the introduction of separate electorate. In a memorandum, the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha insisted on separate electorates for the depressed classes arguing that joint electorates were worse than even nominations, as depressed class candidates elected by caste-Hindus would not work for depressed classes.  

The Devendrakula Vellalar Conference held on 28th October 1928 at Chencheri in Perambalur taluk supported separate electorate. R. Veeraian in the Second Madras Presidency Adi-Dravida Conference which was held on 16 February 1929 insisted that we should not believe dominant caste men instead we should welcome Simon Commission. In support of this, he quoted the statement of Lala Lajpat Rai that there was no way to untouchables for development unless they co-operate with the Simon commission.

After the Commission submitted its report, Indian representatives were called to London for a Round Table Conference. The work of the Commission was distributed among nine committees. One of it was minorities committee to which the most difficult work of finding a solution to the communal question was assigned. Having perceived the importance of the committee, the Prime Minister of England Ramsay Macdonald assumed its chairmanship. The deliberations of the committee became significant, when Ambedkar submitted a memorandum to this committee. As per the memorandum, a separate electorate for the depressed

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71 *Kudiyarasu* (04 November 1928).

72 *Dravidan* (20 February 1929), p.7.
classes was demanded by him.\(^7^3\) Ambedkar’s statement, ‘we must become a ruling community’ has become one of the most famous saying of the movement. In 1930 Round Table Conference, he made his position clear with regard to independence arguing that untouchables more than any other section needed freedom from British rule, because only under ‘Swaraj’ or self rule, would they have a chance at a share in power, and that was the key to their liberation.\(^7^4\)

Ambedkar and Srinivasan on 2 January 1931 submitted a report before the Minority Sub-Committee in the Round Table Conference.\(^7^5\) While the Round Table Conference held in London, in support of the separate electorate and their representatives Ambedkar and Rettaimalai Srinivasan, the depressed classes conducted several meetings, conferences and passed resolutions. In the meetings and conferences thousands of people participated to know the political improvement.

**Opposition of M.C. Rajah**

M.C. Rajah initially supported separate electorate and later opposed it. In Salem Adi-Dravida Conference held on 16\(^{th}\) May 1931 under his leadership, while he delivered his lecture, he vehemently supported separate electorate and bitterly criticized the leaders those who supported the joint electorate and


\(^7^5\) *Dravidian* (01 January 1931), p.4.
nomination. He spoke that whereas all Adi-Dravida associations such as All India Adi-Dravida Maha Sabah, Madras, Adi-Dravida Maha Sabah, Madras Arunthathiya Sabah and Adi-Dravida Mahana Sabah supported separate electorate, Madras Presidency Depressed Classes Sangam demanded separate nomination and Bombay Depressed Classes Sangam under the leadership of Ambedkar demanded joint electorate. But the people those who opposed separate electorate Rettaimalai Srinivasan and Ambedkar had been elected as the depressed classes’ representatives to sent to the Round Table Conference. However, after people protested against joint electorate, Ambedkar changed his view and supported separate electorate.76 In the Chengleput Adi-Dravida conference held on 7th June 1931 M.C. Rajah not only supported separate electorate but also passed resolution in support of it.77

At this juncture, a special conference convened by Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabah at Gokale Hall, Madras on 15th September 1931. In that meeting Swami Sahajanandam condemned British government inviting only two depressed classes’ representatives to the Round Table Conference. He said that “it shows that the government did not give much importance to the welfare of the depressed classes. At least 10 representatives should have been invited. Because of their low number during discussion there was not enough representation to support them and to cast their vote in support of their proposal.”78 In Arupukottai depressed classes conference held on 5th November 1931 M.C. Rajah condemned

77 Dravidan (09 June 1931), p.6.
78 Dravidan (16 September 1931), p.2.
the speech of Gandhi as it portrayed Ambedkar and Rettaimalai Srinivasan were not depressed class leaders.\textsuperscript{79} After that the situation was completely changed. All of a sudden, M.C. Rajah the supporter of separate electorate unexpectedly began to insist joint electorate. He declared his view in favour of joint electorate in the Executive Committee meeting of all India depressed classes summoned on 21\textsuperscript{st} February 1932 under his leadership.\textsuperscript{80} In addition he said that it is not only his own opinion but all Depressed Classes Association. It was vehemently opposed by depressed class leaders. They replied that very few associations only send their representatives to this meeting. Therefore this decision was against vast majority of depressed classes. Since M.C. Rajah could not come to a conclusion at once, he planned to convene another meeting at Nagpur to decide this matter.\textsuperscript{81} This issue became a prime factor for the split among depressed class leaders and weakening their movement. Utilizing this opportunity dominant caste people widened the gap among these leaders. People belonged to depressed classes also attacked each other regarding this matter.\textsuperscript{82}

At this critical situation on 15 February 1932 depressed classes meeting held under the leadership of Rettaimalai Srinivasan, condemned M.C. Rajah’s demand of joint electorate and it demanded separate electorate and adult franchise.\textsuperscript{83} At Iruhur a Depressed Classes’ Conference held on 10 March 1932

\textsuperscript{79} Kudiyarasu (22 November 1931), p13.
\textsuperscript{80} Kudiyarasu (13 March 1932), p.13.
\textsuperscript{81} Dravidan (14 March 1932), p.1.
\textsuperscript{82} Dravidan (28 April 1932), p.6.
\textsuperscript{83} Dravidan (16 February 1932), p.3.
which also condemned M.C. Rajah’s demand of joint electorate and it supported separate electorate. M.C. Rajah signed an agreement with Moonje, the leader of Hindu Mahasabha and justified his agreement.

M.C. Rajah said that “by the minority agreement supported by Ambedkar and Srinivasan we will get few seats only but by the Raja-Moonje Agreement we can get enough electorates based on our population. So we oppose separate electorate. For instance, as per Minority Agreement we get 40 seats out of 200 Assembly Constituencies in Madras alone, the seats in other states are very low in number whereas, by the Rajah-Moonje Agreement though the number of seats allotted in Madras Assembly are 30 we can get more seats in other constituencies. The total number of seats allotted to the depressed classes would be higher as per the Rajah-Moonje Agreement than the Minority Agreement. Ambedkar and Srinivasan concentrate in their own Assembly Constituencies such as Bombay and Madras they are not aware of the loss of constituencies in other assemblies.” Further he said that “by the separate electorate depressed classes representatives would have been travelled to vast area. Since we have no separate party we would have support a party for our development.” On 16 March 1932 supporters of M.C. Rajah led a procession against Ambedkar and separate electorate by bi-cycles and Lorries in support of Raja-Moonje Agreement. These activities made suspicion on M.C Rajah and some people

85 *Dravidan* (20 April 1932), p.7.
86 *Kudiyarasu* (28 February 1932), p.10
87 *Dravidan* (17 March 1932), p.5.
began to blame that due to his desire on minister post, M.C. Rajah supports joint electorate.\textsuperscript{88} While he returned to Madras he was welcomed by black flag.\textsuperscript{89} After Congress formed ministry in Tamilnadu in 1937, M.C. Rajah once again opposed congress and supported Ambedkar. In the Adi-Dravida conference held on 19\textsuperscript{th} May 1937 at Palayamkottai in Tirunelveli district under the leadership of M.C. Rajah he accepted his mistake in the affair of separate electorate.

**Separate Electorate Awarded**

Though the demand of separate electorate received stiff resistance it was awarded. The British Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald announced his Communal Award on 16\textsuperscript{th} August 1932 for the electoral representation of different communities. The award provided separate constituencies for depressed classes and dual votes were also given to them. In that constituency the members of depressed classes’ candidates only could contest and he/she could be elected only by the members of depressed classes. The depressed classes also could cast their vote with Hindus in general constituencies.\textsuperscript{90} But this system faced vehement opposition from Gandhi.

**Gandhi Defeated Separate Electorate**

Gandhi was completely against the Communal Award announced by the British government. He said that the British made an attempt to separate the

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\textsuperscript{88} *Kudiyarasu* (17 July 1932), p.10.
\textsuperscript{89} *Dravidan* (04 April 1932), p.8
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untouchables from the Hindu fold which could not be accepted at any cost. Gandhi declared in the Round Table Conference that “Ambedkar is not the depressed class representative”. Further he said that the “untouchable hooligans will make a common cause with Muslim hooligans and kill caste-Hindus.”

Finally he observed fast unto death to change the decision of the government. It forced Ambedkar to quit from the decision of the separate electorate. As a result of the rift, the famous Poona Pact was signed on 24th September 1932 between congress leaders and Ambedkar in Yervada Jail of Poona to save the life of Gandhi.

According to this agreement, in the place of a separate electorate “joint electorate” for the depressed classes with the caste-Hindu majority was accepted. While a chance of far effective liberation and freedom was thus lost by these people, Ambedkar did get some compensation in the form of a large number of seats for the depressed classes. Thus the political power achieved by the Communal Award of 1932 was collapsed by the Poona Pact.

**Contradiction with Gandhi and Congress**

The Depressed classes neglected the prime aim of the Congress to attain national independence, because of the oppression experienced by them at the hands of their native people. M.C. Rajah rightly expressed it that “While the

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higher castes are indulging in transcendental politics and national-building, we are denied the elementary rights of citizenship walking in the king’s high-way and drawing water from public wells places….\(^95\) This condition forced them to struggle against the dominant caste oppression on them and to ignore the national movement. They thought that if India attained independence automatically the power would transfer to the hands of dominant castes that would harmful to them. Once again they would have been suffered as slaves at the hands of dominant castes. So they declared that unless untouchability abolished national independence would be meaningless. The leaders of depressed classes expressed this view in their conferences. They also made criticism against the Congress. In the Tanjore Adi-Dravida conference held on 4\(^{th}\) July 1931 presided by Swami Sahajanandam, he spoke that congress never gave importance to the abolition of untouchability.\(^96\) But such statements of depressed classes were vehemently criticized by the press.

Referring the proceedings of the Salem District Adi-Dravida Conference presided by M.C. Rajah the magazine Tamil Nadu observed that “though the Adi-Dravidas do not oppose national liberation the attachment they have for the British government becomes evident from their speeches and resolution. This is indeed the misfortune of India. The Adi-Dravidas should not forget that congress men have, during the past ten years, takes great trouble to get rid of untouchability than the government, missionaries and others. The Adi-Dravidas


\(^{96}\) Kudiyarasu (12 July 1931), p.7.
should boldly and unitedly strive to make all sorts of sacrifices for securing wealth, education, titles and posts, if among the six crores of untouchables 1000 persons are prepared to sacrifice their lives, there is no doubt, that their object will be achieved. We would request the untouchables, to give up the practice of accusing others and seeking refuge under the government and prepare them for a passive war.” But soon it realized its mistake. Reverting to this subject the very next day the Tamil Nadu observed that “we have received a piece of bad news today that the Malabar district board is going to put up notice boards in certain streets prohibiting the people belonging to lower castes from using them. We think that civil disobedience alone is the proper remedy for doing way with such iniquitous prohibition. It is our considered opinion that, unless the Adi-Dravidas secure political liberty their grievances will not disappear.”

The depressed classes were aware of the importance of national independence. Even though they did not want to change the government from one hand to other they demanded the government with true representation.

They never opposed the congress demand of national independence but they thought that this is not the apt time to attain it. They wanted the congress to abolish native slavery prior to the abolition of foreign slavery.

Regarding the liberation of depressed classes Ambedkar and Gandhi had contradictory ideological views. Ambedkar opposed Hindu religion and graded unequal caste system but Gandhi supported it. The depressed classes publicly

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97 NNPR (Native News Paper Report), Part II (30 May 1931).
98 Dravidan (21 November 1930), p.5.
declared in the 7th All India Adi-Dravida Conference that “unless Gandhi lend his support to the depressed classes against high caste people the depressed classes should not give their support to Gandhi and his Non Co-operation Movement against British. Till then India should not get swaraj”\(^99\) Crucial contradiction had arisen when Ambedkar demanded the separate electorate which was vehemently opposed by Gandhi. The depressed classes’ leaders appealed the people that not to believe Congress party, Gandhi and its followers, maintain unity among all depressed classes.\(^{100}\) In 1930s this issue created tension from India to London. While the Round Table Conference held in London depressed classes not only conducted several meetings in support of their representatives Ambedkar and Rettaimalai Srinivasan, and separate electorate but also passed resolutions against Gandhi and Congress. The depressed classes opposed Gandhi’s statement “Ambedkar is not depressed classes’ representative”.\(^{101}\) To encourage Ambedkar and Rettaimalai Srinivasan the depressed classes sent around 54 telegrams, of them 52 were against to the statement of Gandhi.”\(^{102}\) The defeat of separate electorate by Gandhi annoyed the depressed classes against him and Congress.

**Modern Law for Civic Rights**

Since the ancient Hindu Laws prohibited basic needs and other rights to the depressed classes, they attempted to get it through making of modern

\(^99\) *Dravidan* (02 May 1930), p.2.

\(^{100}\) *Kudiyarasu* (05 July 1931).


\(^{102}\) *Kudiyarasu* (29 November 1931), p.15.
laws. They tried to get these rights by the idea of civic rights of tax payers. They believed that if modern law legally permits some rights then accessing what were denied to the depressed classes, it will be very easy to access and nobody could oppose it. R. Srinivasan said that “So long as there is a law they will abide by it”. The depressed classes nominated Members to the Council introduced motions which sought legal sanction to access most elementary civic rights such as the accessing public drinking water resources, roads and streets, public offices, train, bus etc. M.C. Rajah and R. Srinivasan introduced two motions in 1919 and 1924 respectively.

M.C. Rajah introduced a resolution titled “Resolution Re Free Access to Public Wells and Choultries by Depressed Classes” in the Council in 1919 when he said that, “I ask that the Government may make it perfectly clear that the depressed classes have a right to use public wells, choultries, etc. It is not a new right that we ask to be extended to us. We believe that we have the right as citizens of British India to use all wells, choulteries etc. constructed and maintained out of public funds to which the depressed classes contribute as rate-payers”. Due to vehement opposition, he was forced to withdraw the resolution. At the Madras Legislative Council, a resolution introduced on 5 March 1921 by C.V. Venkataramana Ayyangar against “racial distinction among the railway passengers”. For that M.C. Rajah extended his support. He said that, “…my community find it very difficult to get a morsel of food from the Indian

103 MLCD (22 August 1924), p. 823.
refreshment-rooms attached to the railway stations....if this is passed I am sure it will put an end to all the differences between various classes, castes and communities”.

Besides, they went a step forward that punishment should be given by laws to those who oppose the citizenship rights. The Tirukoilur Kallakurichi and Villupuram taluks Adi-Dravida Conference held at Tirukoilur on 21st May 1921 pleaded the British government to enact a special legislation to penalize and punish all those people, who prevent the Adi-Dravidas from making use of the public roads, public wells and tanks, railways etc., enabling the Adi-Dravidas to exercise their rights and privileges of citizenship.

R. Srinivasan on 22 August 1924 introduced another motion at Madras Legislative Council for getting the basic civil rights. While introducing the motion he said that, “my reason for moving this is to remove untouchability. I hope all know what it is”. He again said that, “Public road, street or pathway, I mean the road street or pathway that is maintained by Government, or local board or where there is a right of way should be open to all members of the depressed classes. Similarly, with regard to wells and tanks maintained by the Government or by local bodies, these also should be available for the use of the all members of all communities. I have included in my resolution public offices and places where public business is transacted. These also should be accessible to all the communities alike”.

S. Satyamurthy, a Brahmin by birth seconded this motion.

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105 MLCD (05 March 1921), p. 588.
106 G.O. No. 1680, Law General (20 October 1921).
107 MLCD (22 August 1924), pp. 822-823.
and some Members supported it hence the motion was passed. According to the motion:

a. That there is no objection to any person or persons belonging to any class or community walking through any public road, street or pathway in any town or village; and

b. That there is no objection to any person belonging to the depressed classes having access to the premises of any public office, well, tank or place of public resort or to places and buildings where public business is transacted in the same manner and to the same extent as persons belonging to the community of the caste Hindus in the country.\footnote{MLCD (22 August 1924), p. 830.}

Finally this motion was announced as a Government Order and it was circulated to all the Government offices for implementation.\footnote{G.O. No. 2660, L&M (25 September 1924).} Even after passing this motion the depressed classes people struggled in various places to fetch water in common wells and tanks, walk in public streets, get admission in schools, to travel in bus etc. Though that Government Order permitted elementary civil rights to the depressed classes, they were forced to experience the same exclusion as usual. Hence the depressed classes’ representatives continuously voiced for implementing the above said Government Order to protect the interest of the depressed classes.

In a letter written by Veeraian to the Law Member regarding the inconvenience of depressed classes during travel he appealed that “if the district
board have not yet framed bye-laws for taking the depressed classes also into the motorbus the license should be cancelled. The district collector has got voice with reference to cancellation of the license. So also the district board engineer. At least back seats may be kept for Adi-Dravidas and there should not be such distinction. Necessary action may be taken in the matter as it tells upon the self respect, prestige dignity and honour of the whole Adi-Dravida community”.

In the end of the 1930s to access the elementary needs and other citizenship rights the leaders of depressed classes introduced bills. A bill was moved by M.C. Raja titled as “A Bill to Provide for the Removal of Social Disabilities among Certain Classes of Hindus”. It was again titled it as “A Bill to Provide for the Removal of Civil Disabilities among Certain Classes of Hindus”. In the bills ‘social disabilities’ was changed as ‘civil disabilities’. Thus the above described bills introduced by the leaders of depresses classes clearly shows that for getting the basic needs and other rights they derived the modern ideas, and ideologically framed the bills. Since these bills became the Government Orders and Act the depressed classes used it as a weapon to struggle for their legal rights it resulted the illegal counter oppression of the dominant castes on them.

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