CHAPTER VI

STATE RESPONSE TO ELEVATION AND ASSERTION

The depressed classes’ movement had been adopted pro-British stand and opposed the Indian National movement. Sharma justified this pro–British stand of depressed classes that they did not perceive the British rulers as their enemies because the native upper caste land lords were their direct exploiters, and hence freedom for India had no meaning for them. The depressed classes assumed that Indians’ self rule would be the rule of dominant castes’ and it would oppress them. Hence they opposed the national movement. Since British India state laid basic foundation for the elevation of the depressed classes, they followed the pro-British stand point. According to Anand Teltumbde, “Historically, development of Dalits has taken place entirely with the mediation of state; firstly through the colonial state…” Kamalanathan says British administrators introduced reforms step by step which indirectly benefited to the depressed classes.

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3 Kamalanathan, T.B. *Dalit Viduthalaium Dravidar Iyakkamum*, p.54.
In short, they thought that after the advent of the British only, the depressed classes enabled to elevate their position and able to lead a life like others.\footnote{Kamalanathan, T.B. *Dalit Viduthalaiyum Dravidar Iyakkamum*, p. 58.} No doubt, the material concession and some basic citizenship rights such as, right to access to common resources and public sphere given to the depressed classes by the British state certainly played a crucial role in developing the depressed classes. At the same time it was also true that the British state did not give proportionate representation to them in the administration. Furthermore the British state rejected to support the depressed classes whenever and wherever they attempted to utilize the material concessions and to assert the rights at public domain. Instead of protecting the rights of the depressed classes the British state criticized and victimized them. The British took double stand, both positive and negative, in the matter of depressed classes. Their prime motive was not to liberate the depressed people from the clutches of caste oppression but to continue their rule in India by adjusting with the caste system and its function. At the same time the situation prevailed during the beginning of 20\textsuperscript{th} century urged the British to involve in the matter of depressed classes. In addition to this few British officials took keen interest in the social reformation of Indian society. Thus this chapter explores how the British Indian state has responded to the elevation and assertion of the depressed classes.

**Diarchy Government**

Realizing the necessity of popular cooperation and support for continuing the British rule in India, on 20\textsuperscript{th} August, 1917 Montagu, the Secretary of State for
India issued a famous declaration of British policy towards India; “the policy of his majesty’s government- is that of increasing association of Indian in every branch of Indian administration and the gradual development of self-governing institution, with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British empire.”\(^5\) In pursuance of the declaration Montegu-Chelmsford report was published in 1918, which was passed by the British parliament on 23\(^{rd}\) December, 1919.\(^6\) The most significant change made by the act of 1919 was in the field of provincial administration under the system known as “Diarchy”.

Diarchy is a derivative of two Greek words “di” meaning twice and archie” meaning rule, so it means dualism in government. The subjects to be dealt with by the provincial government were divided into two parts, reserved subjects and transferred subjects. Reserved subjects were administered by the Governor with the help of the Executive Council. The transferred subjects were looked after by the Ministers who were chosen by the governor from the elected members of the legislature. The reserved subjects were as under- administration of justice, police, prisons, irrigations and canals, drainage and embankments, land revenue administration, famine relief etc. Transferred subjects included agriculture and fisheries, cooperative societies, education, excise, local-self government etc. In the provinces the executive was two-fold; at the head of each was the governor with special power and responsibilities. One was the governor

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with his council administering the reserved subjects and the other was the
governor with his ministers administering the transferred subjects the governor
was neither bound to accept the advice of the councilors nor that of the ministers.
His supremacy in provincial matters was left unlimited and unrestricted.

Provincial Legislature was consisted of one house known as Legislative Council.
In this Council majority of members were to be elected, the next being nominated
by the governor to give representation to special interests and classes. No bill
passed by the council could become law without the assent of the governor. All
proposals regarding appropriation of revenues were to be made by the governor
alone.  However this dual government system gave an opportunity to the Indians
to take part in Indian administration.

Through diarchy Justice Party members entered into Legislative Council
in 1920s. Thus, the British India bureaucracy was a mixture of both British and
Indian officials. The important officers particularly District Collector,
Superintendent of Police, District Magistrate, and Commissioner of Labour etc
were British, whereas the subordinate posts were held by Indians such as the
Brahmins and other dominant castes. Since the act of 1935 provided provincial
autonomy, in the election of 1937 congress contested and won a decisive victory,
securing 159 out of the 215 seats in the Assembly and 26 out of the 46 seats in
the Council.  

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8 Sanjay Prakash Sharma, *Dalit society and upliftment*, p.84.
Some Step Forward Policies

Contrast to the traditional rules of Hindu caste system which excluded the depressed classes from public domain and secluded them in a separate place the British state has adopted the modern progressive principles which included them in public sphere. To include the depressed classes in public sphere particularly in educational institutions the British Government had passed some inclusive policies which legally permitted the depressed classes to access the public sphere and spaces. In order to stop the exclusion in educational institutions some provisions were made under the Madras Elementary Act, 1920. According to this Act the grants should be withheld from private institutions which deny admission to any pupil merely on the ground of the caste or community to which he belongs. A rule of the Act made a condition that the building used for a school should be accessible to pupils of all castes and communities. With a view to remove some of the obstacles in the way of the admission of depressed classes’ students under public management schools, the British government in an order again issued the following instructions:

1) That where a school under public management is situated in an Agraharam, chavadi or temple or other area from which Panchama children are excluded, steps should be taken to transfer the school to some locality to which all classes of the population have access;

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9 G.O. No. 609, Law Education (27 April 1932).
2) That in cases where the private owner of a rented school building objects to Panchama children being admitted into it, steps should be taken to secure for the school some other building in respect of which this objection could not be raised; and

3) That no school building should hereafter be constructed out of public funds unless it is certified that is in a locality accessible to all classes including Panchamas.¹⁰

In order to admit the depressed classes’ children at public schools the government informed the local bodies that separate schools for depressed classes should not be opened and persistent efforts should be made to overcome the opposition of the dominant castes to the free admission of the children of depressed classes. The Commissioner of Labour in this regard said that “It has always been the policy of the Labour Department to open separate schools for Depressed Classes children only where there are no schools at all in the locality or where the existing Local Board or aided schools either are inaccessible to the Depressed Classes, although not inaccessible, resolutely refuse to admit Depressed Classes children”.¹¹

Like such provisions made in educational institutions, some rules were passed in transport system also. One rule was made related to the passenger boat that “The holder of a “second class” licence shall carry all passengers without

¹⁰ G.O. No. 329, Home Education (17 March 1919).
¹¹ G.O. No. 1600, Education (13 August 1930).
distinction of caste”.

In the Motor Vehicles Act of 1924 a new provision was made. By that, “it would be a violation of the condition of the permit for a motor bus driver or conductor to refuse to accept a fare from an Adi-Dravida or Adi-Andhra tendering it.”

But the demand of depressed classes for getting legal sanction to access public pathway, well etc. were rejected by the British authorities by saying “there was no statutory bar to use the public wells and choultries by members of the depressed classes”. They thought that “the real bar is bar of social tyranny and that must be broken by social reform.”

The activities of British authorities remembered the depressed class leaders regarding the resolution titled “Resolution Re Free Access to Public Wells and Choultries by Depressed Classes” introduced in 1919 by M.C. Rajah and faced strong opposition and criticism.

J.H. Thonger opposed it and said that “M.C.Rajah represents the Panchama of India and I represent the Panchama class of the European-the Mount Road tradesman. We have been debarred for many years past from the wells of society, but we have not brought forward resolutions in the council to improve our case. There has always been a bar against trade. Of late years we have established a position which a few years ago were considered impossibility. Twenty five years ago, we were not considered fit for association, but now it is recognized that a tradesman can be a gentleman. A tradesman is considered

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12 MLCD (16 November 1921), p. 1435.
13 MLCD (29 October 1925), p. 329.
14 G.O. 2660, L&M (25 September 1924).
15 Proceeding of the Legislative Council (20 November 1919), pp. 152 – 161.
worthy of association. The Panchama is in the same position he occupies the lowest rung of the ladder—but there is nothing to prevent him from rising. You cannot get rid of caste by a resolution in the Legislative Council you cannot force your non-Brahmin or Brahmin brethren to receive you, any more than you can induce the government officials to receive us. The only way to get it done is by education and generally by working out your own salvation, and not by expecting government to work it out for you, I would appeal my honourable colleague not to kick against a stone wall; there is no use expecting privileges which are the prerogative of others, unless those who enjoy them are prepared to share them with you.” ¹⁶ British officials like Thonger neglected such kind of legislations and the welfare of depressed classes because they thought that this was not the duty of the government to safeguard the interests of Indian subjects. Finally M.C. Rajah was forced to withdraw the resolution. However the government had the opinion that “the Government has no objection to any member introducing a Bill to remove these disabilities”. ¹⁷

After the resolution of M.C. Rajah was withdrawn, during the ruling period of Justice Party the government allowed R. Srinivasan to introduce the motion in 1924 under the title “Use of Public Roads, Wells, etc. by Members of the Depressed Classes”. The content of this resolution had no difference with the resolution introduced by M.C. Rajah in 1919. Finally due to the support of the

¹⁶ Proceeding of the Legislative Council (20 November 1919), pp. 152 – 161
¹⁷ G.O. No. 2660, L&M (25 September 1924).
Justice Party the resolution of R. Srinivasan got passed.\textsuperscript{18} Thus the British India government granted legal sanction to the depressed classes that like all other persons depressed classes also can access public roads, wells etc. Thus by means of Acts, Rules and Government Orders, the British India government had adopted and implemented modern democratic principles, which gave strong grip to the elevation of the depressed classes. Here it should be noted that the struggle of the depressed classes’ and their movement also played a crucial role in passing such legislations.

\textbf{A Step Backward Policy}

One of the prime motives of the resolution introduced by R. Srinivasan at the Legislative Council was to access common water resources which were completely monopolized by the dominant castes. Though the government passed the resolution it refused to adopt it as a policy. Instead, the government had adopted separate water resource policy in the case of depressed classes. It was clearly noted that “as regards public wells the policy is to provide separate well for the depressed classes and not to throw open existing wells for the use of all classes”.\textsuperscript{19} Whenever dispute regarding water access aroused, the government provided separate water resources to the depressed classes. At the village Nanjai Magathu Valkai as usual while water dispute started in 1925, the Commissioner of Labour said that “whatever the rights of the case, such a course would only permanently embitter the relations between the two communities and is also

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{MLCD} (22 August 1924), pp. 822 – 830.

\textsuperscript{19} GO. No. 2660, L&M (25 September 1924).
obviously impracticable. After visiting the village, I have decided that the best plan is to give the Adi-Dravidas a pond of their own so that there will be no cause for friction in the future. I have issued orders to the district labour officer accordingly.”

For the question raised by A. Satyamurthy about the disabilities of the depressed classes in Chidambaram and Villupuram to access the public tanks and wells, Home Member replied that in the course of the investigation by the Labour department into the needs of the Adi-Dravidas in the villages of Villupuram Taluk, disabilities such as those referred to were brought to the notice of the labour staff. Steps will be taken to remove them when funds permit. Satyamurti again asked why funds are required, and why steps cannot be taken irrespective of the funds being available are not? The Home Member answered that we cannot provide wells or separate facilities of that type unless we have funds. Satyamurthy asked “why Government cannot use all their powers to insist upon all public tanks and wells being thrown open to all his majesty’s subjects, irrespective of caste?” He replied that “I am afraid I did not quite realize that my Hon. Friend’s intention was as large as that. I thought his intention was merely to call our attention to particular cases in particular localities and to ask what we can do in a particular locality. But if he wants a more general statement, I should suggest his putting a further question at the next meeting, and I shall be quite prepared to answer”. 21 This debate clearly shows that the British India

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21 G.O. No. 3455, Law General (05 December 1924).
government was strictly adopted the separate water resource policy to the depressed classes.

**Poor Practice**

Though the progressive legislations were passed without much difficulty for the betterment of depressed classes, the implementation process was not an easy task to the British government because it was opposed by the upper caste people. Thus, the British imposed some prior-conditions while implementing the legislation. The government declared that “unless the public streets inhabited by orthodox people are treated as business centres, the so-called depressed classes cannot have free access to those streets”.\(^{22}\) The Chief Minister, the Raja of Panagal, said it very clearly that “They are entitled to enter these streets and lanes whenever they have business…”\(^{23}\) In one case regarding the accessibility of the Agraharam, a Minister said that “Rasipuram Agraharam road does not serve as a passage to the Tahsildar’s office or any other public office”.\(^{24}\) In some cases British tried to change the difficulties of depressed classes but, they faced several problems while implementing the legislation. As per the Madras Elementary Education Act accessibility of the school building to all classes was one of the conditions for getting recognition to run a school. This act enabled the government to withhold the grants of the schools which refuse admission to any pupil merely on the ground of the castes and communities to which he belongs.

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\(^{23}\) *Ibid*.  
But no action was taken against the government aided educational institutions which denied admission. Though the government ordered to stop the grants of the schools which denied admission to depressed classes but no such schools were withdrew from receiving government grants.\footnote{G.O. No. 646, Law Education (04 May 1932).} Instead of taking action against such schools the government permitted to open separate school. In another case in Kurumbalur village near Tiruchirappalli, depressed classes complained that, they could not get the basic commodities easily from the shops in the village. British could not make open the village shops for the use of depressed classes. Instead of that, steps were taken to open a new shandai (weekly market) there to get their goods weekly without difficulty.\footnote{HFM, Vol. 106, p. 620.} In addition, the government did not come forward to protect the rights of depressed classes to pass through the public pathways. In 1937 Adi-Dravidas were deviated their usual path which passed through the fields during Masi Maham, Hindu religious festival procession and took the deity by the main street passing the Siva temple and the caste Hindu quarters. It was objected by the caste-Hindus. While this case was brought to court the Sub-Magistrate said that the Adi-Dravidas should not use the main street.\footnote{Ibid., p. 718.} Thus though the British India government adopted modern progressive policies, it had failed totally to implement it.

In a few cases, the government had punished those who violated the rules. A private transport agency printed in their bus ticket against the Motor By-laws that “no accommodation will be given to the depressed classes”. Due to the
complaint made by the depressed classes the government ordered to levy a fine amount of Rs. 50 from the transport agency. Generally, most of the institutions violated the government rules were left free without giving any punishment, though the depressed classes struggled to take action against them. The British officials considered that, the problems of depressed classes could be solved only through the social reforms. Hence, though they couldn’t completely implement the legislation, they solved the depressed classes’ needs by giving it separately to them.

**Unreached Material Concessions**

The British India government introduced some reforms to uplift the pitiable condition of the depressed classes. Opening of separate schools, fee concessions, hostel facilities etc were some facilities given to the depressed classes’ children for getting education. They started co-operative societies, provided lands for house sites, drinking water facilities, burial grounds and pathways. In order to have own water resources for the depressed classes, the government provided financial assistance for sinking new wells and digging other forms of water sources. But the attempts of the government to ameliorate the condition of the depressed classes were blocked by the upper caste employees working from the lowest to the highest grades of all government departments. Since most of the officials belonged to the Brahmin and non-Brahmin dominant castes, they showed little interest in the development of the depressed classes. Thus, they prevented the depressed classes from getting concessions given by the

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28 *MLCD* (02 November 1925), p. 780.
British government. If the depressed classes brought this to the notice of British officials, they again directed their subordinate officials such as Brahmins and other upper castes to enquire the matter and asked them to solve the problem amicably. Thus the depressed classes always got disappointment.

**Political Representation**

The depressed classes believed that, the political power was one of the important tools for liberating them from the oppression of the dominant castes. Hence they demanded the government to give political representation to them. The Montegu-Chelmsford reforms had given them political representation in the Legislative Council in which they got a space for articulating the problems experienced by the depressed classes at the hands of dominant castes and government officials. After the Justice Ministry came to power, it expanded the political representation of depressed classes. For example, the Madras Municipal Act, passed during the period of Boboli Raja, provided separate electorate for the depressed classes in Municipal Council.29 During congress rule also it was continued. In 1937 Congress captured the power in Madras Presidency. At this juncture, Swami Sahajanandam, a depressed class Member of Legislative Assembly in 1937 brought a motion, which demanded two depressed class Ministers in the Cabinet. He spoke in the Assembly that “we have full belief on congress ministers. Though the ministry possessed twelve ministers they could not do anything for the depressed people and would not have full satisfaction for us like the possession of congress ministers. However our people aspire to have

two depressed class ministers in the cabinet. In their view higher post is an instrument to abolish untouchability. Since depressed class people constitutes one sixth of the total population we demand two ministers.”

Chief Minister C. Rajagopalachari in his response to this motion replied that “As regards the Harijan representation in the Cabinet, the Cabinet is not a mere compartment but the engine of the whole train. We cannot go on loading it too far. Otherwise the engine will not draw the train. If we make the compartments too heavy, the steam boiler that is inside will not be able to draw the train and the whole thing will collapse. That is the difficulty about the Cabinet. Hon. Member who spoke about it will be satisfied that, I am a Harijan. My Hon. Colleague Mr. Muniswami Pillai is a Harijan. So that, there are at least two Harijans on the Cabinet and I am grateful to the statement made by the hon. Member that I am a Harijan. As a matter of fact that is a statement that will apply not only to the Cabinet but to the whole House. I imagine that all of us are so confirmed in the policy that we have to adopt with regard to the Harijans that no Member or the Leader of the Harijan community need have any difficulty or anxiety in this matter”.

Employment Opportunities

From the second half of 18th century a few British officials voiced against the monopoly of Brahmins in government services. In 1871 W.R. Cornish, Census Superintendent of Madras warned against viewing every question

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30 G.O. No. 2163, Public (12 November 1937).
connected with the progress of the country through Brahmin spectacles. Alexander Cardew, a Member of the Governor’s Executive Council suggested that fixed percentage of vacancies might be earmarked for different communities and competition restricted to members of the same community. In order to safeguard the rights of depressed classes, an exclusive department, named Labour Department was started by the British government. Commissioner of Labour post was created in this department, to look after the grievances of the depressed classes. The Justice Party government passed three orders popularly called “Communal G.O.s” in the years 1921, 1922 and 1928 respectively providing reservation in appointments for different communities. By that, depressed classes were bracketed with ‘others’ for one post while non-Brahmins got 5, Brahmins 2, Muhammadans 2, and Anglo-Indian and Christians (including Europeans) 2. In the roster system 7th post was allotted to the depressed classes. Thus the depressed classes totally disappointed with the communal G.O. Although, the communal reservation system was introduced, the depressed classes got a very meagre number of employment opportunities under this system. The number of depressed classes in provincial services in the beginning of twentieth century was the example for this. During 1900-1927 there was none from the depressed classes in the gazette rank of All India Services, and in the year 1927 of the 1148

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32 G.O. No. 748, Revenue (29 March 1919).
33 Padmanaban, A., Dalits at the cross roads- Their Struggle Past and Present, pp.71-72.
posts in the gazette rank of provincial services there was only one post held by a member of the depressed classes. And, of the 6957 non-gazette posts in the salary range of Rs 100 per month only five posts were held by people of depressed classes. In the same year there were 20,610 non-gazette posts in the salary range of Rs. 35 to 100 per month. Among these there were 57 posts held by the men of the depressed classes. \(^{35}\) This shows that the British India government had given less priority to depressed classes.\(^ {36}\)

**Untouchability Practice in Jail**

In jails, the British India government treated the prisoners according to their caste’s position in the hierarchical caste system thereby the untouchability practice was entered in jails too. Some rules in jail manual accepted untouchable practice such as separate cooking places, clothing and bedding for Brahmins. Tin and aluminum vessels were given for Brahmin convicts while other convicts were given earthen vessel to protect the customary practices of the caste based society. When Veeraian raised questions regarding this division in the council, the Home Member answered irrelevantly that “the government is unable to understand the exact meaning of the question prisoners are not divided off in work or at parade on caste considerations.”\(^ {37}\)

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\(^{36}\) Padmanaban, A., *Dalits at the cross roads- Their Struggle Past and Present*, pp.71-72.

\(^{37}\) G.O. No. 3482 Law General (08 December 1924).
Negligence of Issues

Generally, whenever the Members who belonged to the depressed classes demanding information regarding the issues of depressed classes at Legislative Council, they got the answer that “the government has no information regarding this.”\(^\text{38}\) Though the separate Labour Department was started by the British, especially for the welfare of the depressed classes, in most of the cases, the reply was “information is not available and is being called for.”\(^\text{39}\) In the Singanallur issue government refused to interfere at once and then directed District Magistrate. He directed District Superintendent of Police. As usual he submitted a report that, “it was not necessary to make a regular departmental enquiry, as his preliminary investigation satisfied him. When the leaders demanded to place the report that was received by the government on the table of the Legislative Council the reply was “the government considers this to be unnecessary”\(^\text{40}\)

In some cases the government neglected to enquire the atrocities. While Devakottai region heavily affected by violent attack depressed classes’ leaders demanded repeatedly the government to appoint an enquiry committee. Even if a resolution was passed related to this, the government did not consider it necessary to appoint a committee, and said that, the appointment of a committee would only


\(^{39}\) G.O. No. 611, Law Education (03 April 1930).

\(^{40}\) G.O. No. 291, Public (23 March 1931).
serve to revive dead or dying animosities.\textsuperscript{41} This shows that the government was deliberately neglected the issues of depressed classes. It also illustrate that the government was not interested in collecting and preserving the information regarding depressed classes and unwilling to settle their issues.

**Tackling the Violence**

Whenever the depressed classes asserted their legal rights at public resources and sphere then they were faced stiff resistance from the dominant castes. They also experienced violence at the hands of upper caste have been described in chapter V. Protecting their lives and properties forced the depressed classes to take shelter at the government which was the only one option they had. They complained against the dominant caste and the government officials, who failed to protect the depressed classes, when they faced the violence at the hands of dominant castes. They also requested the government to give protection to them. In such cases, instead of protecting the victims and their legal, the government issued prohibitory orders against the depressed classes and justified the oppression of the upper caste. It also assassinated the characters of the depressed classes’ leaders and victimized the victims.

The government generally issued the 144 prohibitory orders against the depressed classes, whenever they attempted to assert their legal rights. According to this prohibitory order they were debarred from accessing public domain. Usually, it was happened in the case of accessing the public water

\textsuperscript{41} *HFM*, Vol. 106, p. 715.
resources. In Enadur water dispute, a petition was received by the District Superintendent of Police on 22\textsuperscript{nd} June 1932 that, the water pots carried by the Adi-Dravidas women going to the tank were broken by the caste Hindus on 16\textsuperscript{th} June 1932. Instead of giving warning to the caste-Hindus for imposing atrocities on depressed classes, the Circle Inspector of Police reported that, urgent orders under section 144 Cr.P.C. was required. Sub Magistrate of Conjeevaram issued an urgent ex-parte order on 3\textsuperscript{rd} July 1932 forbidding the Adi-Dravidas from entering the tank to take its water.

With a view to prevent the depressed classes from conducting the public meeting, the 144 prohibitory orders issued against the depressed classes. Through that the government banned the lectures and meetings of depressed classes. For example, 144 Cr.P.C. was issued for preventing the Adi-Dravidas from holding communal meetings and giving lectures for a period of two months in the Tiruvadanai Taluk in 1931.\textsuperscript{42} In order to prohibit the Adi-Dravida leader A.S. John from convening the predetermined meeting in Eluvankottai 144 order was passed.\textsuperscript{43} The depressed classes’ leaders could not spoke even about the social evils. Since majority Inspectors of Police and Sub-Magistrates were caste Hindus and Brahmin they informed about the meetings of depressed classes at once and demanded the government to prevent it.\textsuperscript{44} Thus the prohibitory order of the government against the depressed classes practically protected the domination and superiority of the dominant castes.

\textsuperscript{42} Justice, vol. XV (31 January 1931), p. 3.
\textsuperscript{43} HFM, 106, p.704; Dravidan, (03 July 1931).
\textsuperscript{44} HFM 106, p.699.
The bureaucrats of the British India government were stand on the side of dominant castes whenever dispute arises between the dominant castes and the depressed classes. The British officers and subordinate dominant castes British servants generally believed the statement of dominant castes’ during violent attacks. They criticized the depressed peoples’ version that it is untrue or greatly exaggerated. For example, when the ill treatments experienced by the Adi-Dravidas of Kallathur, Tholar and Nanjai Magathu Valkai were brought to the notice of the Commissioner of Labour, he said that, “there is no reliable evidence whatever to support the allegation.” In Perungalur water dispute, Commissioner of Labour stated that “…there was no truth in the allegation of the Adi-Dravidas.”

In almost all incidents officials either British or Indian accepted and elaborately described the brutality done by the dominated castes in their reports. But finally they very simply concluded the report that “nothing else occurred”. Even in the murder of depressed classes, they used the same statement or finished the murder case as suicide. Generally, in the socio cultural issues which arouse between the dominant castes and the depressed classes the British officials justified the oppression of the dominant castes.

The following statement of Labour Commissioner was the best example for this. According to him, “As regards umbrellas and sandals the Adi-Dravida community as a whole removes their sandals and put down their umbrellas when passing through the caste streets. They do this as a mark of respect and do not

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appear to consider that they have any grievance in the matter. As a matter of fact they very seldom indeed use sandals or carry umbrellas. The very few people who do so are the few better educated Adi-Dravidas who rather flaunt their education and better status before objectionable persons.”  

46 He failed to see that the removal of sandals and downing of umbrellas was one of the forced untouchable practices on depressed classes by the dominant castes.

In the issue of wearing jackets and shirts by depressed classes in the beginning of 1930s in Ramanathapuram district, Commissioner of Labour, justified that “The Nattars were emphatic that they had no objection at all to the depressed classes’ women wearing clothes over the upper parts of their body nor had they any objection to the men wearing shirts except on ceremonial occasions….I think their view is justified. These ceremonial occasions are part of the religion of these communities…Even an orthodox Brahmin when he enters a temple wears nothing above the waist”.  

47 But he failed to see that the removal of upper dress was imposed only on depressed classes’ women but the dominant caste women always wear jacket even when they enter in temples. Most of the issues were usually enquired by the subordinate officials of Commissioner of Labour. They usually twisted the real occurrence and submitted the report in favour of upper castes. Thus, the voice of depressed classes did not reach the British officials. If they brought the truth to the notice of the government, it was minimized by a simple word exaggeration. Because of these reasons, the depressed classes blamed the subordinate officials that they treat the serious

47 G.O. No. 1356, Public General (20 October 1932).
issues very lightly. Almost in all cases the caste-Hindu official’s report submitted in the name of Commissioner of Labour. Though the Commissioner of Labour himself visited the particular spot he spent few hours there. That was not an enough time to understand the real problem. It was questioned by Veeraian that, “may I know the enquiry made by the Commissioner of Labour?”

   Home Member answered “the Commissioner of Labour enquired and reported to the government.” But in the Commissioner’s report, while he explains the enquiry, he pointed out that, “my district Labour Officer has not come across any instance of such an objection.”

   This statement shows that, the report was prepared by someone who was directed by him. These justifications of the Commissioner of Labours and other British bureaucrats clearly explores that, the British took pro-dominant caste stand whenever socio cultural issues arise. They expected the depressed classes to obey the orders of dominant castes unconditionally. They also criticized even the wearing of sandals and the carrying of umbrellas by educated depressed classes as for showing their education and better status.

Victimizing the Victims

   The depressed classes were not only the victims of the hierarchical caste system but also victimized by the British. When they knocked the doors of the British India Government for protection and justice the government itself again victimized the depressed classes. Regarding the exclusion of depressed classes

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from entering into courts, officers appointed by the government enquired the matter and submitted reports revealing the real events about the difficulties of depressed classes. But they justified it as it was not due to the orthodox on the part of the presiding judge but it was the *mamool* which the members of the depressed class adopt, that was the cause of their standing outside the court and concluded that there had been no opposition in the courts for admission inside.\(^49\)

Regarding the upper cloth issue, the dominant caste District Magistrate of Ramanathapuram, said that, “It is true that some of the social and religious customs enforced upon the Adi-Dravidas are repugnant to the present day conditions and ideas, but at the same time any attempt to introduce a sudden reform is bound to have disastrous effects”.\(^50\) Like him the Commissioner of Labour has also expressed the same view. According to him, “One must sympathise with the depressed classes in their desire to rise in the social scale and no impediment must be placed to their way in achieving this desire. The mistake that has been made is that they desire too rapid an advance”.\(^51\)

In almost all the violence cases especially setting fire to the huts, the enquiry report concluded that, the victims (depressed classes) had been set fire to some of their huts to implicate the accused.\(^52\) In some incidents, though depressed classes predicted the outbreak of violence, the British government simply neglected their complaints saying it is not possible to do anything on the

\(^{49}\) G.O. No. 712, Law General (03 March 1925).

\(^{50}\) G.O. No. 1356, Public General (20 October 1932).

\(^{51}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{52}\) HFM, Vol. 106, p.25.
vague allegations contained in the petition.\textsuperscript{53} The depressed classes’ agricultural labourers of Vettakaranpudur who were tortured by the dominant castes made a petition to the government officials in this regard. Even though the government officials accepted that some sorts of violence have occurred, they criticized that, the depressed classes’ people are exaggerating the issues.\textsuperscript{54} In majority cases government answered that, the government enquired into the allegations and found that, they were mostly false and exaggerated.\textsuperscript{55} Above all, the government criticized that, depressed classes leaders were mainly responsible for the outbreak of violent attacks.

\textbf{Character Assassinating the Leaders}

The Leaders of depressed classes articulated their own peoples’ pathetic condition but the British India state had assassinated their characters and consequently, it affected their struggle. Generally, the British government blamed the leaders of depressed classes those who fought for the betterment of their own people. The officials labeled the leaders as “he is a man of bad character”\textsuperscript{56} “he is a man of straw hailing”\textsuperscript{57} and “they were self appointed champions for their own ends”. Regarding violence on depressed classes, R. Veeraian wrote a letter and sent it to \textit{Madras Mail} that “…it will be an eye opener if I produce evidence to show that the terrorists are instigated more by

\textsuperscript{53} G.O. No. 1883, Law General (11November 1921).
\textsuperscript{54} G.O. No. 402, Law General (05 February 1923).
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{HFM}, Vol. 106, p.713.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Ibid.}, p.654.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Ibid.}, p.703
police that the so-called high caste-men…I have evidence to show that the police have been at the bottom of most trouble and they are systematically encouraging such terrorism”. A government officer in his letter to the Chief Secretary to Government noted that “Veeraian has no foundation for the sweeping charges which he has leveled against the police and I think that he ought to be called upon to withdrawn them. It might also be pointed to him that in publicly advancing a serious unfounded charge of this sort against the police he is doing this cause a very great damage.”

Thus the police stood with the side of dominant castes and refused to protect the victims. But, instead of making further enquiry and punish such officials, the government too had victimized the depressed classes leaders. In some other issues the government officials assassinated their character in very worst form.

The Commissioner of Labour criticized John, one of the leaders of the depressed classes articulated the upper cloth struggle that “He seemed to be a man of undesirable person. He is apparently a native of Ceylon who was very little interest in Ramnad affairs”. The District Magistrate of Ramanathapuram criticized that “In succession to Ponniah one John appeared on the scene…He also sent petitions grossly exaggerating things and styling himself as the President of the Adi-Dravida Maha Sabha. …two were self-appointed champions for their own ends, collecting subscriptions from the poor Adi-Dravidas, and making a living thereby”. Ponniah was a cook of Ramanathapuram sub-

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59 G.O. No. 1356, Public General (20 October 1932).
60 Ibid.
collector\textsuperscript{61} and John was the editor of a magazine \textit{Indian} which was published in Ceylon.\textsuperscript{62} Both were campaigned for the separate electorate in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{63} The Commissioner of Labour’s criticism against the leaders couldn’t be acceptable because they worked and earned money for their living and committed themselves to the elevation of depressed classes.

Similarly, Muniswami Pillai communicated the issue of Singanallur to the government. Slater, the District Magistrate of Coimbatore asked the concerned officials to submit the report regarding the actual occurrence of the incident. After enquiry a officer submitted the report that “I can find no justification for Muniswami Pillai’s remark that the Adi-Dravida parents ventured to take their boys through the \textit{Agraharam} … It will be noticed that the caste people allowed the boys to go through with the parents, but assaulted the later on their return. It looks as if the parents had indulged in a little provocation.”\textsuperscript{64} Hence by means of character assassinating of the depressed classes’ leaders the British India government had collapsed the attempts of the depressed classes’ for liberating themselves from the oppression of the caste system. The bureaucrats whether they were British or Indian viewed the issues of the depressed classes through the dominant castes lens. Thus it is clear that the British India state had double face, the positive and negative.

\textsuperscript{61} G.O. No. 611, Public Police (08 November 1932).
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Dravidan} (14 August 1929), pp. 1-2.
\textsuperscript{63} G.O. No. 611, Public (08 November 1932).
\textsuperscript{64} G.O. No. 29, Public (23 March 1931).
Compromise: An Eye Wash

During the violent attacks reached its zenith leaders demanded the government to conclude this violence through the compromise. At this critical situation in Devakottai region the Nattars approached the Joint Magistrate to make a compromise between the two parties, and he also met the Adi-Dravida representatives in this connection. The Adi-Dravida representatives on this occasion had been headed by John, but the Joint Magistrate did not consider John’s actual presence at the negotiations desirable. John attached a series of conditions. He requested the District Magistrate to issue instructions to the local officers to take steps to effect peace on these conditions. Since it was not considered, the question of settlement was postponed. In the case of Then nirvayal a peace deputation of Nattars went to Kalanivasal near Karaikudi, where the Adi-Dravidas had gone, to invite them to return. In Singanallur issue, after that the case was filed, the accused presented a petition to withdraw the case and were ready to compromise. But the district magistrate rejected it as it brought by one party.\(^{65}\) Thus compromise plan did nothing fruitful.

At this juncture in 1931 Soundrapandiyan moved the following resolution that “this council recommends to the government to appoint a committee of both officials and non-officials to investigate into, and report on, the ill-treatment of the depressed classes in the Devakottai sub-division of the Ramnad district, as alleged in the memorandum submitted to government by the president of the Ramnad district Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha” in doing so he said that “the

\(^{65}\) G.O. No. 291, Public (23 March 1931).
social customs prevailing in the presidency were responsible for the treatment of the depressed classes by the so-called higher classes. The remedy for this lay in the intervention of officials and non-officials. In this particular district Ramnad, the non-officials have failed to take part and it was the duty of the officials to intervene. In the particular case complained of, the Kallar community was brought into disgrace, and it had become a matter of every day’s occurrence. They could not allow such a sort of thing to continue.” Muniswami Pillai seconded the resolution. He said that at a time when there was a change coming about in the public horizon, things nearer in this presidency were getting horrible. It was necessary that the rudimentary principles of citizenship must be safeguarded and therefore the state of affairs existing in this presidency must be investigated.

Dorairaja said that as the only representative of the Kallar community in this house he was in a hopeless minority, but still he emphatically protested against the manner in which the members of the Kallar community have been allowed to be vilified. For this resolution 42 supported and 22 opposed. Thus the resolution was carried. But the government did not pay attention to establish a committee. Regarding this home member answered as for the appointment of the committee, I may say that this committee instead of solving the problem may promote communal bitterness what will happen is this. The two parties will range themselves on opposite sides and party feeling will run high. What we want is some sort of reconciliation or other. I would say that instead of

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67 MLCD, Vol. LIV (01 November 1932).
the government appointing a committee, public spirited citizens may visit the place and call the leaders to a conference and somehow or other bring them to some agreement so that these quarrels may come to an end.\textsuperscript{68} Thus instead of appointing a committee the District Magistrate was asked by government to bring the leaders together and endeavours to restore amicable relations between the two classes, but replied that he did not think such effort would serve any useful purpose but be more likely to revive the trouble. He noted, however, the advice of government for future guidance should further trouble arise.\textsuperscript{69}

The Nattar and Adi-Dravida situation was peaceful for sometime but in 1932 there was a recrudescence of trouble. The District Magistrate however effected a compromise between the two parties whereby the Nattars agreed not to insist upon any of the previous customs except the non-wearing shirts at religious marriage and funeral functions. It was considered as the victory of Nattars. The Labour Commissioner also held a conference at Kandadevi at which a large representative gathering discussed the whole course of the trouble and endorsed the District Magistrate’s compromise as being an eminently fair one. In connection with the disturbances in 1932 the following resolution was passed in the legislative council in November 1932;-- “this council recommends to the government to appoint a committee of both officials and non-officials, not exceeding five in number to enquire into the report on the alleged atrocities committed by the nattars of Devakottai sub-division of the Ramnad district on the depressed classes in June and July 1932”. Even after, the government refused to

\textsuperscript{68} \textit{HFM}, Vol. 106, p. 713.
\textsuperscript{69} G.O. No. 611, Public (08 November 1932).
appoint a committee.\textsuperscript{70} Thus the compromise plan was meaningless and the violent attacks continued. After 1932 leaders of all India Harijan Seva Sangh, and Provincial Harijan Seva Sangh and Arya Samajists made a compromise plan.

Important leaders visited the spot and arranged a meeting at Vettiyyur, a village situated twenty miles from Devakottai. The depressed class leaders who were present represented to the party their main grievances. One of them said that they wanted freedom to wear shirts and any clothing on festival occasions particularly. Another represented that there was opposition to their women wearing petti-coats and the oppositionists wanted that the Harijans should not effect any reform especially with regard to clothing. A third represented that there should not be any opposition to their women using brass vessels instead of mud pots and all wanted there should not be any social boycott against them. Because on account of the boycott, the Harijans of the place were not given their usual work in the fields and that they had to go to other places seven miles and ten miles away to find work among non-Hindu landholders. Dr. Rajan instanced the situation of Anaiyadivayal where almost the entire community of depressed classes had embraced Christianity and asked whether the Nattars and other caste Hindus who had raised opposition Harijan reform were satisfied with the situation\textsuperscript{71}

M.C. Rajah and Gopalsami dealt the dangers of the Hindu society as a whole and warned the inhabitants of the grave consequences not only to their national solidarity but also to the entire Hindu fold if the Hindu leaders without

\textsuperscript{70} *HFM*, Vol. 106, pp.714-715.

showing sympathy to their fellow inhabitants viz., depressed classes. The Nattar leaders who were present at the meeting assured that to overcome a few recalcitrant members of the community who were still opposed to the reform movement among Harijans. Even after violent attacks on depressed classes was continued. The British government took no measure to stop the atrocities.

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