CHAPTER I

EVOLUTION OF DEPRESSED CLASSES CATEGORY

Caste is one of the prime and peculiar characters of Indian society in the world. Due to this peculiarity both the native and foreign scholars of anthropology, history, sociology, philosophy and political science have been engaged in empirical and theoretical studies on caste. This chapter does not dispute with these descriptions and theories but it explores why and how the depressed classes’ category evolved. A conventional term or a category, depressed classes which did not use to indicate any caste and creed, but commonly used in British records between 1920 and 1937 to denote the people of several oppressed castes, who comprised 1/5th of the total population. Before exploring the depressed classes’ category evolution, understanding what is meant by caste is essential. Some viewed that it is a socio-cultural system and to the others it is an economic and political system.

K.M. Panikkar claims that, “caste is not merely a principle of social division, but a comprehensive system of life, dealing with food, marriage,
education, association and worship”.¹ Thus inter-caste marriage, inter-caste dining etc are strictly prohibited. Ambedkar, one of the notable champions of the depressed classes mentions in his writing on caste that the Brahmin, Hindu religious text and ideology of pure and impure had played a crucial role in the formation of caste. According to him, “The caste system has two aspects. In one of its aspects, it divides men into separate communities. In its second aspect, it places these communities in a graded order one above the other in social status”.² One of the fundamental principles of the caste system is membership which could be achieved only by birth.

G.S. Ghurye claims that, “castes were groups with a well-developed life of their own, the membership thereof, unlike that of voluntary associations and of classes, was determined not by selection but by birth”.³ It is very clearly illustrated that since birth is an important factor to determine the caste of the people there is no other means to change the caste by conversion similar to the religious conversion. It reveals that in Indian society everybody could ever change their religious affiliation but never change their caste identity. Regarding the ordering of the castes there are two important controversial theories.

Louis Dumont says that “the caste system is a hierarchical system which is linked with the binary opposition between the pure and the impure. The

Brahmin who is at the top of the system is considered as pure and the depressed classes who are at the bottom are considered as impure”.\textsuperscript{4} He asserts that the Brahmin and the pure impure ideology is important factor in the formation of caste. Contrast to him, Nicholas B. Dirks claims that “…the king –both as a historical figure and as a trope for the complex political dynamics underlying the Indian social order- was a central ordering factor in the social organization of caste”.\textsuperscript{5} It shows that scholars have given importance to the Brahmans and their ideology and the king but they failed to explain the role played by the non-Brahmins and depressed classes in the formation of British caste categorization.

This chapter explores that the economic and political interests of the British which pushed them to introduce several modern institutions, demands of the caste groups to receive material benefits and political rights and Brahmans suggestions in placing caste groups in particular category. These were important factors responsible for the transfer of Brahmin social category into British political category.

**Caste: Brahmin Social Division**

Rigid social exclusion is one of the basic features of the caste system. Since the purity is affiliated to the Brahmin body, they were not only possessed the superior status in the society but also enjoyed material benefits. Contrary to this, the impurity associated with the untouchables they were denied to access


places of basic amenities such as water resources, and prohibited from holding movable and immovable properties. In addition they were denied to enter into secular and sacred public sphere which is described in chapter II. It is notable that there are some other castes placed between ‘pure Brahmin’ and ‘impure untouchable’ called as caste Hindus or middle castes. They were neither pure nor impure. In one hand they experienced some kind of oppressions at the hands of Brahmins and on the other they were the oppressors against the ‘untouchables’ and excluded them from using the secular and sacred public sphere and other resources. Hence, as stated by Sukhadeo Thorat and Narendra Kumar, exclusion and discrimination are thus obvious negative consequence of the caste system and the most and worst sufferer of this system is the depressed classes. As far as the origin of caste system is concerned there is no dispute of its invention and foundation. Panikkar in his article agree that the caste system invented and founded by the Brahmin and justified by the law-givers Manu, Yajnavalkya, Narada and other Smritis. Hence it could be defined as the Brahmin social division. It is very clear that before the advent of the Europeans the Indians have been divided and lived on caste lines. The Brahmin social categories have got an alteration by the British India census enumeration process during the colonial times.

**Castes Became Categories**

Sources related to caste played a vital role in understanding the caste

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system and its function in society. Lacking of indigenous secular sources to study the caste forced the scholars to depend the accounts of foreigners such as the Greeks, Romans, Portuguese, Danish, French, British, Jews, Chinese etc. who have visited India as travellers, traders, pilgrims, and invaders recorded the peculiarity of caste system. Megasthenes described the Indian society as being divided into seven classes and also noted that these classes were endogamous and that one could not change his occupation or profession. He understood that castes were unchangeable occupational and professional divisions. The Portuguese who landed at Malabar Coast in the present Kerala state recorded a detailed account of caste and its functioning. Durate Barbosa, early Portuguese, have direct experience with castes and accounted important cultural features of the caste system which are recognized as central ideology of caste even today: the high level of the Brahmins and the low rank of the untouchables in a binary opposite relation with pure and impure.  

This ideology could be seen in the studies of Louis Dumont who gave importance to the binary opposition between the pure and impure. Here a point should be noted that the term caste was originally derived from the Portuguese term ‘casta’. After Durate Barbosa the orientalist and the missionaries showed keen interest in recording the practices and functions of caste. The studies and records of Orientalists, missionaries and British are differ from one another and are polar opposites in assessing the Indian caste and culture.

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The British East India Company by defeating other European traders such as the French, Dutch, and Portuguese, became the ruler of India attempted to study the caste system. There were some factors forced the British East India Company to pay much and expensive attention in studying the caste system. Some scholars explained and argued about the intention of the British in studying the Indian castes. According to Bernard S. Cohn, “It was felt by many British officials in the middle of the nineteenth century that caste and religion were the sociological keys to understandings the Indian people. If they were to be governed well, then it was natural that information should be systematically collected about caste and religion”.

Eugene F. Irschick claimed that “When the British were confronted by Indian society, they felt they needed to categorize the Indians for tax and administrative purposes and for census taking. For this purpose they made lists of sub-castes in hierarchical order”. Sheth claims that the British commenced this categorization for their administrative purpose and it protected the British political economy from the incursions of the emerging national movement.

The British India administrators began to take census about caste from 1780s. Every census went a step ahead than the previous one in terms of its classification and content. It has categorized the castes, its numerical strength and their habituations in various regions. Through that various unknown castes

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brought to light. History of districts, leading families and their customs, land holding details were collected for the perusal of supervisors who involved in preparing census report. In 1814 the supervisors were directed to the question of functioning of the courts but incidentally called for information of the population. In the beginning there were vast gaps in the census hence steps were taken in 1861 to make a complete and consecutive census. In the census of 1871-72 attempts were made to collect more information on caste. In addition, efforts were taken to categorize the caste rather than simply accounting and enumerating all castes. There were differences of opinion among the scholars in terms of the methods in collecting and arranging the castes for census. Cohn says that, “The principle of the organization was to try to place castes (jatis) in the four varnas or in categories of Outcastes and Aborigines”. But Irschick observed that, “…developed dichotomous categories such as Brahman/non-Brahmans or Muslim/non-Muslim”. The same was repeated in the 1872-73 categories.

To know about the different castes and their people, the Census Commission of 1881 recommended that with the lists of castes their occupations should be recorded. In this census, the Commissioner of India, W.C. Plowden, decided that caste should be arranged in five categories: 1) Brahmins, 2) Rajputs, 3) castes of good social position, 4) inferior castes and 5) non-Hindus or aboriginal castes. In arranging the hierarchical order he found difficulty in

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separating ‘castes of good social position’ and ‘inferior castes’. In this census in order to raise their social status some caste groups attempted to register their caste at the top of the social ladder. In order to satisfy or refuse the demands of the caste groups the Census Commissioner sought the help of Brahmins. They insisted that while collecting census the textbooks of Hindus should be followed there by the demands of the castes groups for higher status could be considered.\textsuperscript{15}

But in the southern India the Brahmin and non-Brahmin categories came in by the turn of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{16} J.H. Nelson in his work on Hindu law published in 1881 has contributed to the idea of non-Brahman category.\textsuperscript{17}

The 1891 census went up a step ahead than the previous census in terms of classification. It adopted another kind of classification of castes according to the occupation assigned to each by tradition. Thus within such occupational categories field labourers, leather-workers, scavengers, watch man and village menials were included in the depressed classes’ category. One important classification was developed by H.H. Risley who reduced 2000-odd castes which the census had found in India to seven types: tribal, functional and sectarian, castes formed by crossing, national castes, castes formed by migration and castes formed by changing customs.\textsuperscript{18} In the 1901 census, H.H. Risley, who was the Census Superintendent, classified castes on the basis of ‘social precedence as

\textsuperscript{15} Bernard S. Cohn, \textit{An Anthropologist among the Historians}, p. 245.


\textsuperscript{17} as cited in Eugene F. Irschick, \textit{Tamil Revivalism}, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{18} Bernard S. Cohn, \textit{An Anthropologist among the Historians}, p. 155.
recognized by the native public opinion'. Efforts were made to an ethnographic survey which was justified that “for the purpose of legislation, of judicial procedure, of famine relief, of sanitation and dealings with epidemic disease, and almost every form of executive action, an ethnographic survey of India and a record of the customs of the people is as necessary an incident of good administration.” From 1901 the colonial state began caste wise census and it was not only updated by every 10 years but also categorized and gave them name. It is very clear that the political and economical necessity of the British pushed them to study the Indian caste system. It expresses that like the Brahmins, the British also had tried to categorize the caste in hierarchical order.

**Indians Role in Shaping Categories**

There is a general belief particularly among the nationalist historians that the British were followed the policy of divide and rule. But in the British process of categorizing the caste, Brahmin and Hindu religious texts played a crucial role which is described above. Not only the British, Brahmin and non-Brahmin caste-Hindus who were very next to the Brahmins played a crucial role in shaping the caste as categories, but also depressed classes. All of them demanded the census enumerators to include them in some particular categories to achieve three important targets:

1) to get higher status in social hierarchy

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19 Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians*, p. 158.

2) to receive educational privileges and employments at the colonial administration and
3) to obtain the political representation.

Strengthening, extending and continuing the political supremacy forced the British to introduce the modern institutional systems such as western education, transport, postal, telephone, military, judiciary, police etc. These modern institutions required a number of employees who couldn’t bring from England because of its high expense. In order to reduce the expenditure the British determined to introduce modern education to educate and employ the Indians in their administration. These modern institutions on the one hand provided an opportunity to the Indians to become employees of the British India and on the other hand it slowly affected the traditional caste structure i.e. the Brahmin social division. In short, the British inclusion process affected the Brahmin’s rigid social exclusion.

Initially the Brahmins occupied major educational and employment opportunities provided by the British to Indians in administration. The fact was that the Brahmins who comprised 3 percent in the population in the Madras presidency but 72 percent of the graduates of Madras university. In the competitive examination for the Provincial Civil Service, which were held between 1892 and 1904, out of 16 successful candidates 15 were Brahmins, giving a ratio of 95 percent of Brahmin success. In the competition for the appointment of Assistant Engineers in Madras, the number of successful

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candidates, during the same period was 17 Brahmins and 4 non-Brahmins. Similar results were produced by the competitive examination for the accounts departments. Out of 140 Deputy Collectors in Madras at that time, 77 were Brahmins, 30 non-Brahmin Hindus and the rest Muhammadans, Indian Christians, Europeans and Anglo Indians. The above facts reveal that the non-Brahmins got a little opportunity in education and employments. So they demanded the colonial government to reduce the Brahmins and recruit the non-Brahmins in government services.

It compelled the non-Brahmins to demand their share in government services. Subsequently the British undertook various measures to grant opportunity to the non-Brahmins. Thus the non-Brahmins demands’ also have contributed much in making the non-Brahmin category. Regarding the evolution of non-Brahmin category here another important point should be considered. Since the Brahmins perpetuated oppression in all level against the non-Brahmins some people who belonged to the later caste groups struggled against the former. Gail Omvedt argues that, “…Hindu culture and the caste system rested upon Brahmanism; hence Phule, who aimed for the complete destruction of caste, superstition and inequality within Indian tradition, linked his thought with a movement of opposition to the Brahman elite. ‘Non-Brahmanism’ in India, therefore, represents not simply communalism or a result of British divide-and-rule policies; it traces its origins to the Indian renaissances and represents the first


expression of social revolution in India”. Due to the untouchability the depressed classes were denied modern education hence they could not compete with the non-Brahmins. This situation forced the depressed classes to demand separate category for themselves for getting education and employment. As a result British Indian government carried out steps to create another category, the depressed classes. The above descriptions clearly explore that not only British, Brahmins, Hindu texts, non-Brahmins and depressed classes also have contributed in the categorization process. The caste groups paid their role in the categorization process on account of getting material benefits from the British India. Thus both the British and the Indians were responsible in evolving these caste categories and both were beneficiaries too. Hence non-Brahmin and depressed classes categories may be called as British political category.

Since the British caste categorization process has consulted the Brahmins and referred the Hindu texts notable difference couldn’t be found in the Brahmin social division and British political categories. They followed the policy of non-intervention in religious and social affairs of Indians and wanted to sustain traditional Hindu and Muslim laws. But as the days rolled by, the administrative compulsions and pressures from Hindu social reformers forced the British rulers to take steps that ‘disclosed the ‘closed’ Hindu society.’ After that there were remarkable difference between the Brahmin social category and British political category.

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25 Narendra Kumar, *Dalit Policies, Politics and Parliament*, p. 34.
The Brahmin social division denied the depressed classes from accessing and using public secular space, sphere and resources such as well, road, train, bus etc. and also the public religious sphere. Contrast to it, the British political category permitted the depressed classes to access both religious and secular public spheres and natural resources. So it may be called as British political inclusion category. In other words the people those who were excluded by the Brahmin social category were included by the British political category. Thus the Brahmin social category was an oppressing category and the British political category was an uplifting category. Since this categorization accrued social and economic advantages to some castes others demanded some special recognition for receiving educational and occupational benefits as well as political representation. These demand forced the British to formulate a category which exclude the socially depressed people from the privileged Hindu community. For that a new term depressed classes came into vogue. Within this context the evolution process of depressed classes category will be discussed.

**Depressed Classes Evolution Process**

There has been a number of terms and names adorned to depressed classes. Manu, the ancient law giver has used the terms ‘Melechha’ and ‘Chandala’. The terms ‘Panchama’, the fifth class, ‘Avarna’, outside the four varnas, ‘Nishada Paulkasa’, ‘Antyaja’, ‘Atishudra’, etc was used. ‘Harijans’, a term coined by Narasimha Mehta, adorned to them by Mahatma Gandhi hence it became a popular name. J.H.Hutton used the term exterior caste and the British
officials used ‘Pariah’ (Paraya), ‘depressed classes’ and ‘scheduled caste’.²⁶ By
the Indian Act of 1935 the categorical name Scheduled Caste became in use in
the government official records instead of the name depressed classes. The term
‘untouchable’, ‘ex-untouchable’ are used by some scholars. Now a days, both the
central and state governments are using the category scheduled caste but in Tamil
Nadu when writing in English they use scheduled caste and in Tamil they use the
name Adi-Dravida. Besides, the welfare department also named as Adi-Dravida.
Though there are number of names and terms the term depressed classes is used
in this thesis due to some reasons. Since the term depressed clearly expresses
socio, economic and political condition of some particular castes and also during
the selected period the British official records mentioned them as depressed
classes hence in this thesis the term depresses classes is used. Tracing the usages
of the term depressed classes in history is essential here before discussing the
evolution of the depressed classes’ category. It always represents a deeper
content. The content is dependent on specific historical contexts in social and
political. It has implications for not only clarity of thought but also for political
actions, including the issues to be taken up, the forms of organization, the forms
of struggle, the choice of allies and the recognition of enemies.²⁷

The term depressed classes was used by the British officials sometimes in
the late 19th century to refer the people who were considered and treated as

²⁶ Michel, S.M. (Ed.), Dalits in Modern India, (New Delhi: Vistar Publications,

²⁷ Gopal Guru, ‘Understanding the Category ‘Dalit’, In Gopal Guru (Ed.),
untouchables in the caste system.\textsuperscript{28} The term depressed classes can be seen in the first volumes of the \textit{Bombay Gazetteer} published in 1877.\textsuperscript{29} It has been also found in the official records between the years 1920 and 1935. It was freely used during round table conferences and in all commission’s report.\textsuperscript{30} The British categorized and called them as depressed classes due to their social, economic and political oppressed condition in the caste system. Of the total population of Madras Presidency in 1921 the depressed classes population was about 18 percent.\textsuperscript{31} In 1931 Census Report the depressed classes were identified and enumerated that 15.5 percent of the population of Madras Presidency was found to belong to this category.\textsuperscript{32}

In this evolving process census officials, administrative officers and the Commissioner of Labour were involved. The process was very tough task because who should be included and excluded and what criterion should be adopted for inclusion and exclusion became very problematic to the British India census enumerators. When the British officials started to prepare the depressed classes’ category list, they began to face some criticism. In the beginning some communities showed aversion against their inclusion in the depressed classes’


category. As soon as the communal representation introduced by the British on account of getting material benefits such as education, educational scholarship and employment some touchable castes stressed the British officials to include them in the depressed classes category.

At the same time few untouchable castes demanded to exclude from this category. In short in the depressed classes category evolution process some touchable castes demanded inclusion and some untouchable castes demanded exclusion though the category was created for the untouchables. The Brahmans criticized this categorization that in the name of communal classification the government technically enforce the policy of divide and rule among various communities and imparting some concessions to the untouchables is for getting the support of them against the high caste people. The confusions prevailed in this evolution process forced the British bureaucrats to frame some criteria for inclusion and exclusion of castes in the depressed classes category. Some statements of British bureaucrats reveal that they were in extreme confusion regarding this category.

Commissioner of Labour in his note on the depressed classes said that “the first difficulty that presents itself in discussing the past and still more in considering what has to be done in future with regard to these classes is that it is by no means easy to discover exactly what tribes and castes should be placed

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33 Madras Legislative Council Debate (Hereafter abbreviated as MLCD), Vol. LXVI, P.301.

34 Criminal tribes fought for the repeal of Criminal Tribes Act. Hence they showed aversion to register them under Criminal Tribes Act, one among the criterions for including depressed classes category.
under each or any of these categories”. However the government asked the Commissioner of Labour to state what classes of the community should in his opinion be held as constituting “depressed classes” as the term appears in the various statutory rules.

The Commissioner in his reply pointed out that no statutory criterion had yet been arrived at for determining which class of the community should come within the activities of the department and suggested for adoption for the purpose of representation in the public services a list of depressed classes prepared under the three categories of

(1) Untouchables
(2) Criminal Tribes and
(3) Hill and Aboriginal Tribes.

One of the important purposes of this broad depressed classes category was providing material benefits and employment at British India public services. Besides the caste and tribes which included in this broad category was not homogenous but heterogeneous and complex groups. There was nothing common between them. But the fact was that some castes that have identified as criminal tribes were one of the oppressors against the untouchables and some criminal tribes. The Aboriginal or Hill Tribes had not been tied up with the caste system because of their isolated habitation in the hilly region. However some

35 G.O. No.559, Revenue (08 March 1920).
36 G.O. No.440, Public (22 May 1933).
37 Ibid.
Criminal Tribes had tied up with caste system and some had not tied up. But these oppressed and oppressors were included in the same depressed classes list. It shows that in the depressed classes category evolution process H.H. Risley’s idea of ‘social precedence as recognized by the native public opinion’ was not followed while including the Criminal Tribes in this category. But the British wanted to improve the condition of Hill Tribes and to reform Criminal Tribes because the later was one of the threats to the colonial rule.\textsuperscript{38} Even before 1920 the British took measures to include the Hill and Aboriginal Tribes and Criminal Tribes in the depressed classes category. In 1925 these tribes were included. Consequently depressed classes list was first issued in 1930.

The revised list was published in 1931. When this list was revised in 1931 some officials objected to criminal tribes being referred to as such in the list, as it might imply that criminal propensity gave way a qualification for government service. Untouchables and criminal tribes were therefore put together in the list under the head “others”.\textsuperscript{39} The revised list consisted of 35 Hill and Aboriginal Tribes and 110 Others.\textsuperscript{40} Even after the final list was issued inclusion of some touchable caste that was notified as criminal tribe category created confusions. Furthermore some touchable castes also demanded to include them in the depressed classes category. Thus filtering became inevitable to the British India administrators in depressed classes category evolution process.

\textsuperscript{38} G.O. No. 440, Public (22 May 1933).
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} G.O. No. 719, Public (02 July 1931).
Filtering Process

In evolving the depressed classes category the British India had not had any statutory rules. But they had some clear idea which was expressed by them whenever disputes arose with respect to the inclusion in this category by different caste groups. In the filtering process they had faced two crucial issues. 1. Excluding the unwanted caste groups from the depressed classes category, 2. Including the appropriate caste groups in the depressed classes category. It necessitates the British to select a common criterion which is suitable for all depressed classes people. Since they could not find a common criterion they grouped depressed classes under three criteria, namely, hill habituation, criminality of the touchable castes and untouchability of the depressed classes. Poverty, illiteracy and religious conversion were not considered for inclusion in depressed classes category.

Poverty, Illiteracy Rejected

The communities which were socially, educationally and economically identical with any depressed classes required to include them in the depressed classes category. In addition these communities were also most backward in its representation in the public services. Due to their worse and most pitiable condition than that of the depressed classes the South Indian Maruthuva Sangam wrote a letter to the Governor of Madras Presidency for including their caste in the depressed classes list. But their demand was rejected by the government.41

41 G.O. No. 719, Public (02 July 1931).
According to the reliable sources in certain communities there was only one or two persons held public service in the whole Presidency. This fact alone spoke the most inadequate representation of such communities in public service and to the great need for the sympathetic consideration of uplift. They demanded the inclusion of their community in the depressed classes category so that they may have foster the care of the government till its members are adequately represented in all public departments. Besides, the people of several communities were illiterate and some lived by begging, not falling under untouchables. Hence, the District Collectors recommended that the people of such community may be put at depressed classes’ category under the heading ‘others’.  

In these cases the Commissioner of Labour asked the District Collectors to report on the social and economic conditions of the community in order to see whether the community will come under either Untouchables or Criminal Tribes. The Collector’s reports show that several communities were no doubt backward and illiterate but they were neither untouchables nor criminal tribes. Thus the government refused to include in this category by the following reply: “the economic condition of the community may be very low, but socially they are not very low as they are ‘temple admitted’ Hindus though very poor. There is no case to bring the community under depressed classes”. This position of government confused the authorities of various departments. They raised the question that if subjection to social disability the sole criterion for classifying a community

42 G.O. No. 440, Public (22 May 1933).
43 Ibid.
depressed, whether the Tanjore Kallars suffer in that respect. Some castes which were notified as criminal tribes were not tribes and socially not depressed the fact is that they were particularly the Kallar, Maravar, Oddar and Washer men were not untouchables but they were touchable and placed above the untouchables in the caste structure. They were one of the social oppressors against the untouchables. Though the Washer men are the service caste to the Kallar, Maravar, etc. they refused to do the same service to untouchables and claim superior status over them. Though the British Indian government was very cautious in filtration of depressed classes category, by mistake they have included some socially and economically very sound castes. Admission of Reddis in depressed list was the best example for this. Regarding Reddis, the largest caste in the presidency- “the great landholding body of the Telugu districts who are held in much respect as substantial steady going yeoman and next to the Brahmins as the leaders of Hindu society”. Yet of these no less than 6,400 were shown as animists in the census report of 1911. In the following census they were omitted. Thus the poverty and illiteracy of the touchable castes were not considered as criteria for inclusion in the depressed classes’ category.

Religious Converts Excluded

Regarding Indian Christians, they were also excluded from the depressed classes category. In order to escape from the social oppression some people including the untouchables took conversion particularly to Christianity hence

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44 G.O. No. 440, Public (22 May 1933).
45 G.O. No. 559, Revenue (08 March 1920).
they were not considered as untouchables. Consequently, they were excluded from the list of depressed classes category.\textsuperscript{46} However, in 1925 government announced that “the educational concession sanctioned to the depressed classes was applicable to the Indian Christian pupils who or whose parents belong to one of the depressed classes mentioned in the list. In the educational department no differentiation is made between touchable and untouchables among the depressed classes.”\textsuperscript{47} Thus filtration was one important method adopted by the British India administrators in evolving depressed classes category. In this process they filtered the non-criminal and poor touchable castes and religious converts. Above description clearly explores that though the touchable castes were social oppressors, criminality was the only criteria adopted to include them in the depressed classes category. Now this chapter turns to look at the other criteria for inclusion in the depressed classes category.

**Criminality Criterion**

The process of preparing criminal tribes list under depressed classes was a prolonged process. In the depressed classes evolution process some touchable castes, as already noted, demanded the British India government to include them in the depressed classes category because of their caste members in certain regions were included in that category. For example Piramalai Kallars of Madurai and Ramnad alone included in the list.\textsuperscript{48} Thus the people of same caste

\textsuperscript{46} G.O. No. 559, Revenue (08 March 1920).
\textsuperscript{47} G.O. No.195, Law Education (08 February 1926).
\textsuperscript{48} G.O. No. 719, Public (02 July 1931).
in other regions demanded the government to consider their poor economy, illiteracy and very low representation in the government services for including them in the depressed class category. But in this process even some notable criminal tribes were omitted.

The British administration could not come to a conclusion. The Commissioner of Labour in his letter to the Government Secretary dated 12th March 1931 mentioned that “I have not been able to ascertain why some notified criminal tribes were omitted in the previous lists”. The list was varied from time to time because as tribes were notified under the criminal tribes act or removed from the operations of the act. The necessary alterations were to be carried out with reference to the amendments made from time to time. Consequently the most logical plan adopted to include under the heading “Criminal Tribes” in the list of depressed classes was all criminal tribes which had been notified under section 3 of the Criminal Tribes Act. Hence certain castes were omitted. Further if all included in the depressed classes category hence it would become meaningless and it would lead to the inclusion of a large number of people who are not really depressed either socially or economically.

For instance, Maravas, Kallars, Ambalagars, Valaiyars and Padayachis were not depressed classes in all districts and first four castes were formed in a very large portion of the population of the southern districts. Their economic condition in most districts compares very favourably with other caste people therefore the government could not entitle them to be put into the category of depressed classes.

\[49\] G.O. No. 719, Public (02 July 1931).
depressed classes.\textsuperscript{50} In this case their caste names were entered against the district names\textsuperscript{51} in order to mention such criminal tribes had been notified as depressed classes only in these districts. The social and economic disadvantages of the castes were limited to these districts. In the other districts their position is not materially different from that of the other castes.\textsuperscript{52}

Another interesting case was the Oddars. The Oddars of North Arcot alone were classified as depressed classes and included under the heading ‘others’\textsuperscript{53} and the Oddars who lived other than North Arcot was not included in the depressed classes category. The Oddars resided in other Tamil areas also equally backward as the Oddars of North Arcot district was excluded. So officials recommended their inclusion in the depressed classes list.\textsuperscript{54} There were some factors behind this exclusion. The Oddars were divided into two: Kallu (Stone) Oddars and Mannu (Earth) Oddars.

Frederick S Mullaly noted about them is that “Those of the tribe who have adopted criminal habits are skillful burglars and inveterate robbers: they are chiefly to be found among the Stone Wudders class, who, beside their occupation of building walls, are also skillful stone-cutters. By going about under the pretence of mending grindstones, they obtain much useful information as to the

\textsuperscript{50} G.O. No. 293, Public (07 April 1933).
\textsuperscript{51} See annexure
\textsuperscript{52} G.O. No. 293, Public (07 April 1933).
\textsuperscript{53} G.O. No. 719, Public (02 July 1931).
\textsuperscript{54} G.O. No. 293, Public (07 April 1933).
houses to be looted or parties of travellers to be attacked”. Since majority of the Stone Oddars in the North Arcot district had been notified as criminal tribes and hence they were included in the list of depressed classes. The Oddars in other Tamil districts were not notified as criminal tribes hence they excluded from the depressed classes category. This criterion was applied in the case of washer men caste also. Chaklas was the washer men caste in the Telugu districts and in Guntur they had been notified as a criminal tribe therefore they had been included in the depressed classes category only in that particular district. But the washer men in Tamil speaking areas were not categorized as depressed classes. The government viewed that washer men in all the districts of Madras presidency couldn’t be considered as depressed classes because their social and economic condition was not par with the depressed classes. The Commissioner of Labour informed the position of the government that wherever the communities were registered as criminal tribe there only they could be included in the category of ‘depressed class’ for purposes of the public service. Thus this inclusion process very clearly reveals that the criminality of notified castes in some located regions was one of the criteria for the inclusion in the depressed classes category.

**Hill Habituation: A Criterion**

As far as Aboriginal and Hill Tribes were concerned, their habitat at hill

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56 G.O. No. 293, Public (07 April 1933).

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.
station was considered as a criterion for their inclusion in the depressed classes category. But in these cases some hill tribes were included and some others were excluded. Some castes showed distinct criminal tendencies are out-caste and it was doubtful whether they should not be classed as a hill tribe if not as aboriginal. They were not included in the collectors report whereas the same people under another name were included as a hill tribe but not as an untouchable. Malayalis,\(^5^9\) a tribal group, was included as hill tribes whereas some well-known aborigines were not included at all. The Irulas were included under hill tribes in Coimbatore and North Arcot. The total population of Irulas for the Presidency is over 100,000, but of these, only 2,300 were shown in the 1911 census as speaking the Irulas language and only 5400 were entered as animists. The Irulas of Chingleput were far more civilized than the forest dwellers of Nilgris.

The same problem prevailed in the case of Kurumbas. Out of 144,000 only 3,000 spoke the Kurumba language, and only 700 were shown as animists. Thus the government found it very difficult to discover exactly which tribes and castes should be placed under each or any of these categories. This measure was carried out by the government step by step. During this process some were included and some were excluded. This work was initiated even before 1920. Initially they divided the hill and aboriginal category into three tables 1. The aboriginals and hill tribes in the Presidency whose claim to the title is undoubted 2. Those tribes or castes of which some may undoubtedly be included but perhaps not all 3. Those whose claim to be included at all is uncertain. Even though the

\(^{59}\) The people of Kerala whose language is Malayalam is also called as Malayalis.
list was prepared at a considerable extend there was a lack of detailed explanation in the reports of collectors and officials. Because the wild track was extremely malarial and infested with wild beasts and most of the hill-men carry battle-axes with them which might be used by them on provocation, the census enumerators afraid. It was not therefore surprising that service in these tracts was extremely unpopular with subordinate officials of the plains. Further this would of course involve a considerably increased expenditure which could not be met by any equivalent increase in land revenue as the greater part of the area was comprised in permanently settled zamindars.

Despite various difficulties interrupted the work of British officials, they were keen in preparing the list of tribes who were residing at interior forests. Because, there is a possibility of discovering valuable minerals, there were great possibilities of hydraulic power, and the forests which ought to conserve the head waters of the streams on which the plains rely for their irrigation might be saved from destruction. This was of the greatest importance, as the rivers are rapidly being silted up to an alarming extent and nothing but the personal influence of a man who was in continual contact with these wild tribes and thus gains their confidence can have effect in inducing them to refrain from the wanton destruction of the forests. Consequently in 1925 all the aboriginal and hill tribes and all members of criminal tribes were brought under the term “Depressed Classes”.

60 G.O. No. 559, Revenue (08 March 1920).
61 G.O. No. 195, Law Education (08 February 1926).
Untouchability: Core Criterion for Inclusion

In the beginning the British used the term depressed classes to refer the castes which were considered and treated as untouchables. Among the untouchable castes there were a number of castes but the Parayan, Pallan and Chakkiliyan were numerically dominant in the north, south and west districts respectively. The important point is that they are not the homogeneous but heterogeneous groups. Marriages between them were forbidden. They have the separate habituations, gods etc. But though they were heterogeneous their social, economic and political conditions were homogeneous. But in the beginning the census officials were unaware this nature. Hence they included all the untouchable castes in the name of Parayas and realized this mistake very soon. Nicholson said, “In the Census Report of 1881, 130, 386 Madigas i.e. Chuklers (Chakkiliar), have been included amongst; this is certainly incorrect, as the two classes wholly distinct; … the Pallars are also included, which equally incorrect…” 62 Hence in the following Census they corrected this mistake. But after that they were all included in the depressed classes category. The communal based political representation which was introduced by the Minto-Marley Act of 1909 was one of the prime factors in the evolution of the depressed classes and other categories. Numerical strength was one of the determining factors in receiving the political representation hence every caste and religious groups wanted an exclusive category for them. The Muslims and Brahmins by knowing their low numerical strength the former group attempted to prevent the

depressed classes and tribal from including at the Hindu category and the later
group wanted to include the non-Brahmin caste Hindus, depressed classes and
tribal among them. Sathis Saberwal clearly explored this situation that, ‘untouchables generally were being subjected to strong pressures by Muslims,
Hindus and others, each community seeking to pull them into its own fold, at
least for the day of the census: it was common then to seek to influence census
results as a prelude to political claims’. 63 The Muslims thought that if the
depressed classes included in Hindus their number would be raised considerably
and subsequently it would affect their representation. Hence in 1909 the Muslims
suggested to Lord Minto, the then Viceroy of India, that a large number of people
who were Tribal, Animists and Untouchables should not be enumerated among
Hindus. 64 This made the Census Commissioner of India to think and probe about
these categories of suppressed people. He had laid down the following ten
criteria to determine whether any particular caste or tribe was Hindu or not:

1. Denying the supremacy of the Brahmins.

2. Not receiving the Mantra from a Brahmin or other
   recognized Hindu Guru.

3. Denying the authority of the Vedas.

4. Not served by Brahmins as Family Priests.


64 Ronki Ram, Mangoo Ram, Ad Dharm & The Dalit Movement in Punjab, (New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2008), p.10.
6. Having no Brahmin Priests at all

7. Denial of access to the interior of Hindu Temples.

8. Cause pollution by touch or within a certain distance.


10. Eating beef and showing no reverence to cow.

The depressed classes were fell under criteria of 2, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 while rest of the criteria covered the tribal and animists. These criteria had played a crucial role in evolving the categories. By applying these criteria the 1911 census was enumerated and the castes were categorized under

(1) Hindus

(2) Animists and Tribal and

(3) Depressed classes or untouchables.\(^65\)

It was further explained that depressed castes are the castes, contact with whom entrails impure on the part of a caste-Hindu.\(^66\) It reveals the fact that introduction of communal representation was one of the main factors responsible for evolving depressed classes category by separating them from Hindu category. In order to demand more representation the Brahmins and caste Hindus wanted to enumerate depressed classes with them. But their desire was not fulfilled with the

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intervention of Muslims. Thus the Brahmins criticized that this categorization is a diplomatic divide and rule policy of British India.

The non-Brahmin caste Hindus showed aversion against the depressed classes even during the days of the British, who were in general sympathetic to the cause of depressed classes. They wanted to be placed on par with the Brahmins but not with the depressed classes. Keeping this political situation in mind the depressed classes showed high resistance to the term non-Brahmin used by the Justice Party to indicate all castes except Brahmin. In fact this conception of non-Brahmin was first opposed by Viswa Brahmins (an artisan caste) and subsequently some other castes too raised their hands against the non-Brahmin identity. The depressed classes demanded exclusive category for them and justified it by their arguments. They argued that in the non-Brahmin category there were two divisions among them: 1) the high caste Hindus and 2) the low classes. If the reservations were made, only the non-Brahmin higher castes will be gainers and the non-Brahmin low castes will be the losers, they argued.

M.C. Rajah, one of the notable depressed classes leaders, clearly explained their position and defended it. According to him, “The term “Depressed Classes” should not be confused with the term “Backward Classes”. Backward Classes are those communities that are only educationally backward but are really high up in

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the social, economic and religious scale. On the other hand, communities that are called “Untouchable Classes are educationally, economically and socially backward and come under the term “Depressed Classes”. These people have been kept down by the caste-Hindus, through the ages, by systematic tyranny and social oppression”. ⁷⁰

In 1921 Census Report the word ‘Depressed Classes’ was used and the following nine castes treated as untouchables were brought under the Depressed Classes category. They were as follows: 1. Adi-Dravida 2. Chakkiliyan 3. Cheruman 4. Holeya 5. Madiga 6. Mala 7. Pallan 8. Paraiyan and 9. Semman. ⁷¹


⁷⁰ Rajah, M.C., *The Oppressed Hindus*, p. 4.
⁷¹ Census of India, Vol. XIII (1921), p. 158.
⁷² G.O. No. 855, Law Education (19 May 1925).
and hill tribes and all members of criminal tribes were brought under the term depressed classes. An important point here is to be noted that in this list the castes, the Fishermen and Settibalijas, who were not treated as untouchables were included.\textsuperscript{73} So an important question again aroused that what was the criteria for the inclusion in the depressed classes category. The Census Commissioner felt a certain distaste for it and commented that ‘So far as I am aware the term has no final definition nor is it certain exactly whom it covers’. Yet official interest in it had been mounting and lists of Depressed Classes had long been prepared. The 1931 census proved the swan song of the term Depressed Classes.\textsuperscript{74} Even though the preparation of depressed class list was over, the problem regarding criteria continued. Thus after a prolonged discussion once again government decided to adopt untouchability as a sole criteria. It stipulated to define untouchability. The Franchise Committee had laid down two tests for determining what communities could be considered as untouchables and they were

(a) Denial of access to the interior of ordinary Hindu temples and

(b) Pollution by touch or within a distance.\textsuperscript{75}

The untouchability was the main criteria adopted for the inclusion of communities among depressed classes in the Census Table of 1931.\textsuperscript{76} As several communities did not satisfy any of these tests and 86 untouchable communities

\textsuperscript{73} G.O. No. 195, Law Education (08 February 1926).
\textsuperscript{75} G.O. No. 440, Public (22 May 1933).
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{MLCD}, Vol. LXXIV (21 January 1935), p.41.
were thus included among “Depressed Classes”. However, some touchable castes that already notified as Aboriginal Tribes and Criminal Tribes were also included in the depressed classes category of 1931 census though untouchability was the main criteria for the inclusion in the list. Though the government took much effort for preparing the depressed classes list, it created discontentment among various communities. While they demanded for the inclusion of their caste in the depressed classes category for getting concessions from the government, the district collector’s reports does not allowed them to enter into the list. But in fact some untouchable castes were excluded some touchable castes were included, though the untouchability was the criterion to identify the depressed classes. For instance a peculiar sect of people in Tirunelveli district called Porada Vannan has experienced untouchability and unseeability was not included in the list. For touchable caste Nayudu caste is a best example.

According to a question raised by Devadason in the Legislative Council regarding the inclusion of Nayudu caste in the scheduled communities notes that certain touchable communities also included in the scheduled caste list. Such communities were clubbed with certain untouchable communities for the purposes of application of the communal rule. Exclusion of untouchable Porada Vannan and inclusion of touchable castes in the depressed classes category was happened because of the unawareness of the government. Mr. C.A. Souter’s answered to Devadason in the Legislative Council regarding the inclusion of

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78 Pillay, K.K., *Studies in the History of India with Special Reference to Tamil Nadu*, (Madras: Published by the Author, 1979), p.383.
Nayudu that “I am not aware that there is any particular caste called the ‘Nayudu’ caste” is proving this unawareness.\(^7^9\) Regarding the exclusion of Porada Vannan absence of caste organizations and lack of leadership to demand the colonial government for including them in the depressed class category was also one of the reasons for their exclusion.

**Scheduled Castes Substituted Depressed Classes**

The government officials were not satisfied with the term criminal tribes and untouchables, because in the communal returns the depressed classes and others have always been shown separately. They thought that the communities should be shown in the communal returns in the same way as in the communal rule. Subsequently there was a necessity to change the term depressed classes again. Hence special efforts were made in the 1931 census and by a special committee to draw up a ‘Schedule’ of the castes entitled to benefit from these various special arrangements.\(^8^0\) In this situation the British Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald announced his Communal Award on 16\(^{th}\) August 1932 for the electoral representation of different communities. In lieu of the depressed classes, the Communal Award indirectly gave the term Scheduled Castes.\(^8^1\)

In 1934 the government directed that the term ‘Scheduled Classes’ be substituted for “Depressed Classes” in the communal returns submitted to them in


\(^8^0\) Horald R. Issacs, *India’s Untouchables*, p. 69.

future.\textsuperscript{82} In the White Paper this classification was adopted and the 86 untouchable communities which comprised the “Depressed Classes of the Census Table of 1931 (see appendix) were designated for franchise purposes as “Scheduled Castes”\textsuperscript{83}. For purpose of employment in public services and the application of the communal rotation rule, “Depressed Classes included the 147 communities.\textsuperscript{84} It consisted of 36 hill and aboriginal tribes, 39 untouchable communities and 72 other communities including certain criminal tribes. These were designated as “Scheduled Classes” in the revised service rules. But all the communities included in this list were not untouchables.

However it was proposed to reconsider and to substitute for the “Scheduled Classes” the communities included in the “Scheduled Castes” of the White Paper.\textsuperscript{85} Thus all the untouchable communities in the various provinces were grouped together in separate lists and they were attached to the orders in council issued under the Government of India Act, 1935. The special schedule attached to the orders in council contained all the provincial lists and therefore the untouchables were termed as Scheduled Castes.\textsuperscript{86} Indeed, the term was first coined by the Simon Commission.\textsuperscript{87} It is very clear that at first the British India administrators used the term depressed classes to identify the untouchables. But

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{82} G.O. No. 223, Public (08 March 1934).
\item \textsuperscript{83} \textit{MLCD}, Vol. LXXIV (21 January 1935).
\item \textsuperscript{84} G.O. No. 719, Public (02 July 1931).
\item \textsuperscript{85} \textit{MLCD}, Vol. LXXIV (21 January 1935), pp.41-42.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Hanumanthan, K.R., \textit{A Historical Study up to 1500 A.D. (with special reference to Tamil Nadu)}, Madurai: Koodal Publishers, 1979), p.12.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Pillay, K.K., \textit{Studies in the History of India with Special Reference to Tamil Nadu}, p.374.
\end{itemize}
with the intention of uplifting the hill tribes and reforming the criminal tribes they
were included in the same category.

In this chapter two categories 1) Brahmin social division and 2) British
political categories are described. And the evolving of the depressed classes
category is also vividly expressed. The Brahmin social category branded some
people as untouchables who were labeled as depressed classes by the British
political category. Both the Brahmin and British have created these categories to
protect and maintain their supremacy at social, cultural level and economic and
political level respectively. But there is a crucial difference between these two
categories in terms of exclusion and inclusion. The Brahmin social division
excluded the depressed classes castes from accessing basic needs, prohibited to
learn, walk in public roads and worship at temples, denied to possess properties
etc. Contrast to it the British political category included them in administration,
gave education, permitted them to access the public resources and sphere etc. In
other words, the materials that were prohibited to the depressed classes in the
name of untouchability by the Brahmin social division but that was permitted to
them in the same name by British political category. This was one of the very
crucial projects in evolving the depressed classes category. It was the first time
in Indian history the heterogeneous untouchable castes were categorized as
homogenous for the purpose of inclusion. Despite there were number of
grievances on the part of the people belonged to some communities, the long
process of evolving depressed classes category was a land mark in the British
Indian history.