CHAPTER II

UNTOUCHABILITY: DEPRIVED THE DEPRESSED CLASSES

The theme untouchability has been a core deciding factor of the depressed classes status in the hierarchical caste system. Untouchability is an English word equivalent to the terms of Indian languages ‘asparsya’ in Sanskrit, ‘tittu’ in Tamil and ‘pula’ in Canarese and Malayalam all convey the meaning ‘pollution’.\(^1\) Tracing the history of untouchability when it appeared for the first time is a difficult task. There are differences of opinion regarding the origin of untouchability. According to Ghurye, “the ideas of untouchability and unapproachability arose out of the ideas of ceremonial purity first applied to the aboriginal shudras in connection with the sacrificial ritual and expanded and extended to other groups because of theoretical impurity of certain occupations”.\(^2\) Hanumanthan reveals that, “Social ostracism owing to the violation of caste rules and regulations, religious excommunication owing to heresy and wholesale exclusion of people performing certain occupations considered to be impure in one way or other seem to be the main causes of the phenomenon of

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\(^{1}\) Hanumanthan, K.R., *A Historical Study up to 1500 A.D.*, p.7.

untouchability”.\(^3\) This chapter describes the practices of untouchability that deprived the living conditions of the depressed classes. A. Aiyappan claims that “the socio-religious practice by which Hindus keep large numbers of the lower castes from touching or coming near their persons, houses, temples, tanks, and sometimes even public roads.”\(^4\)

Ambedkar argues that, “Not only has untouchability arrested the growth of their personality but also it comes in the way of their material well-being. It has also deprived them of certain civil rights….The untouchable is not even a citizen”.\(^5\) He again argues that, “The right of representation and right to hold office under the State are the two most important rights that make up citizenship. But the untouchability of the untouchables put these rights far beyond their reach”.\(^6\)

James Massey points out that unlike other communities, the depressed classes have lost everything such as land, culture, language, religion, political and social rights. Their story of oppression is also much longer than that of the others.\(^7\) Thus the dominant castes’ believe that pollution transmitted by proximity in a few cases sight as well have deprived the material well-being of the depressed classes.

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6 Ibid., p. 76.
7 James Massey, *Down Trodden: The Struggle of India’s Dalits*, p.63.
Continuity and Extension of Untouchability

Due to the belief on pollution the dominant castes in one hand maintained the traditional forms of untouchability and on the other they extended the same to the modern institutions which emerged during the colonial times. Depressed classes prevented from using the streets and roads habituated by the dominant castes. They were excluded from fetching the drinking water resources monopolized by dominant castes. Own land both for cultivation and habituation also were denied to them. Denial of access in the religious sphere was also continued. In addition the practice of untouchability extended to the modern institutions such as bus, train, post-office, courts, police station, and educational institutions by the dominant castes. The dominant castes have had the power to practice untouchability even in the administrative purpose established by the British. Unlike the traditional institutions, which have kept the depressed people in a long distance, the modern institutions brought closer the people of high and low castes, which enabled them to touch each other. But in order to prevent the touching of ‘touchables’ with ‘untouchables’ the dominant castes extended the untouchability practice to these modern institutions.

Continuing and extending the practice of untouchability both at traditional and modern institutions were easy task to the dominant castes because in the former they had monopoly and in the later they had considerable authority to control it. Though the British levied tax on agriculture they did not confiscate the land led by the dominant caste that continually practiced the traditional form of untouchability. Establishment of public offices such as post-office, court, school
etc were located in and around the dominant caste habituation enabled them to extend the untouchability in these modern institutions. Like this, though the government had control in giving licence for running motor vehicles, it was owned only by the dominant castes, the untouchables were prevented from travelling such vehicles. Thus the practice of untouchability in one hand excluded the depressed classes from accessing and using traditional and modern institutions on the other by depriving them it prevented their freedom and elevation. Here the continuity and extension of untouchability practice is explored.

**Agricultural Serfs and Menial Labours**

The depressed classes have been tied up both with the skilled and unskilled labour such as cultivation, handling leather, removing dead cattle etc. which were rejected and considered as impure by the dominant castes. The Collectors of the Madras Presidency in colonial times collected information on the slavery system and prepared a report which explores that the depressed classes, the Pallar and Parayar, were the agricultural serfs and cultivated the lands, owned by the dominant castes, in the districts of Tirunelveli, Thanjavur, Tiruchirappalli.\(^8\) The agricultural serfs were also called as Padiyal and Panniyal. In many districts the depressed classes’ field labourer was tied up by debt to his master that he was practically in the position of a serf.\(^9\) According to Gough, “…these agricultural serfs were collectively attached to the land lord. Along with

\(^9\) G.O. No. 559, Revenue (08 March 1920).
the land and cattle they were redistributed to landlord lineages and households every five years. Some families evidently became more permanently attached to particular lineage and households and were inherited in the male line. Such families were called as *kattu adimai alukal* (tied slaves) and became bound to a particular master through acceptance of loan and could be sold by him to another owner”.

According to Eugene Irschick “….these untouchables were agrestic or agrarian serfs of slaves. Some were the personal property of their owners and could be sold, mortgaged or rented out”. Gray, in his report on the condition of depressed classes in the Chingleput district pointed out that “the entire property of the labourer was mortgaged to the master so that the Panchama is completely at his master’s mercy.” The serfs mortgaged their own labour, or have had their labour mortgaged by their parents or grand-parents. They felt that they were under an obligation to serve their Indian masters, even though their parents or grand-parents received the money, which was got and spent before they were born. A more important and disastrous feature in the economic condition of the Cauvery delta region Panchama was the chronic indebtedness in which his master kept him.

By a system landholder advances lump amounts on the occasion of the Panchama first joining service, of his marriage or of purchase of bulls for

11 Eugene F Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, p.156.
12 G.O. No.559, Revenue (08 March 1920).
cultivation. A bond was executed but no interest was charged nor payment of the debt expected by the landholder, unless the Panchama changes masters or ceases to cultivate the land for any other reason. The deputy collector pointed out that the moral effects of the system on the panchama’s character must be disastrous, as all inducement to thrift is lost and he becomes callous and indifferent and loses all sense of independence or self-reliance.\(^\text{13}\) Moreover the labour mortgage debt register was kept by their masters, and added from time to time at their discretion. It therefore remains against the padiyals as a continued debt. Being illiterate and ignorant they cannot check the register, and no copy of it was ever furnished to them from time to time so that they may be kept informed of the entries made in it. It was stated that when the Padiyal absents himself from work, the amount of wages he would have been entitled if he had been at work, was added to the debt and when any urgent demand was made by the Padiyal to meet the expenses of a marriage, burial or any other object, it was readily granted by his master and added to the debt register.

They could neither repay the debt nor run away from their master because, they feared to take a leap in the dark with their wives and children, and get away out of their environment. They were destitute of any energy in this direction and of combining to press their claims for a proper subsistence wage.\(^\text{14}\) Another feature of the Padiyal labour system was the practice in certain villages of transferring a Padiyal from one master to another when land was sold. There

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\(^{13}\) G.O. No. 3559, Revenue (10 November 1917).

\(^{14}\) G.O. No. 875, Revenue Confidential (19 March 1916).
was no actual sale of the individual involved, but the labour mortgage debt was paid by the purchaser of the land along with the sale price of the land, and so the Padiyal passed in this way into the hands of the new master.¹⁵

**Low Wages**

The *padiyals* were poorly paid. The wages provided in the form of the poor mid-day meal of *ragi kanji*, or gruel.¹⁶ A cloth was given at the *pongal* feast, and in some village the *padiyals* got a small amount of grain. Some grains were also given in places at the harvest time. This, however, was clearly insufficient for the subsistence. In some places there was no fixed daily wage, because the rate changes as the demand for labour increases or decreases. The daily wages of the labourer ranges from 2 to 3 *anna* in rich Tanjore districts. In most villages from 1 to 2 *annas* only were given as daily wages to an adult labourer and in some villages from 2 to 3 *annas* were given for a full day work under a tropical sun. A *Padiyal* family of six persons had to be fed and clothed by the combined income of Rs. 8 a month. Thus the families were insufficiently fed and often had to go starving and that some days they got only one poor meal and on other days they had to starve.¹⁷

Faweett reported that “…wants of the south Indian labourer are few and his standard of comfort is low, but such as it is, he can satisfy it in this district. His evening meal is taken hot with curry and the morning and midday meals cold,  

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¹⁵ G.O. No. 875, Revenue Confidential (19 March 1916).
¹⁶ 16 anna = 1 Rupee.
¹⁷ G.O. No. 875, Revenue Confidential (19 March 1916).
with no condiment but salt; but he is able to thrive on this simple food and do hard work and is on the whole at least as well off as his representative in England. ‘Both live from hand to mouth labourers must in all countries or they would not be labourers-but the south Indian labourer is practically the better off of the two’.”

**Compulsory Labour and Corporal Punishment**

Regularly the men had to begin the work since early morning around 4.30 am to 7 or 8 pm and the women from the sun rise to sun set. Between the long lengths of works they usually were allowed to eat only at 12 noon and midnight. The works of the depressed classes were watched by some other assistants of the landlord. The male and female children of the serfs must attend to graze and feed the cattle of the landlord from the age of 10 and 12 years respectively. Every day work of the serfs was reported to landlord with their discipline and performance.

They had correlative duties. They had to give the manure collected in their hut to the owner of his house site, either free or for a small consideration. He had to labour for a certain number of days free for him and if he was a daily labourer, he had to work under him whenever called on to do so, for a wage which would be less than the market wage. Some masters prevented the Panchamas from engaging themselves as drummers, because they thought that

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18 G.O. No. 875, Revenue Confidential (19 March 1916).
20 G.O. No. 3559, Revenue (10 November 1917).
the prolonged absence of the labourers would be detrimental for their cultivation. In order to prevent the depressed classes from escaping the serfdom the dominant caste in the beginning of the 1930s proclaimed that the children of the depressed classes should be asked to tend the cattle of the landlord, their men and women should work as slaves of the landlords in their farms and they must sell away their own lands to the landlords at very cheap rates. The agricultural serfs had experienced corporal and other severe punishments. If a serf was unable to go to field due to illness he/she had to get prior permission. Otherwise he/she tied with a tree and badly beaten by his/her father or elder/younger brother or very close relatives as per the direction of their master. Alexander described the nature of corporal punishment that, “Forcible drinking of cow’s urine or a solution of cow dung or human excreta was practiced in Tamil Nadu. In extreme cases, labourers were evicted from their place of residence, serving his relation with the master and threatening his family’s very existence”. These cruel forms of punishments had continued until associations were formed with the initiative of Communists in the late 1930s.

**Refusal of Land Right**

Land is the prime need not only for agricultural production but also for establishing habituation. It has been one of the most cherished and precious form

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21 G.O. No.3559, Revenue (10 November 1917).
of wealth, thus having land has been considered as symbol of power and status in society. But the caste sanctions strictly prohibited the depressed classes from possessing land not only for agricultural production but also for habituation, water harvesting, burying or burning the deceased. Denial of land ownership forced them to subsist in small temporary huts in their master’s paddy fields. Landless and houseless condition also reacted on their wage-earning capacity owing to the depressed classes was bound to give their labour free for a certain number of days to the owner of the site where on they lived. The depressed people got lands from the government but it was confiscated by the dominant caste with official’s support. Some examples here are described.

A letter sent to the leaders of the depressed classes by Rev. Guru Manickam, Wesleyan Minister, Dharapuram, and Coimbatore District complained about an alleged glaring injustice done to the depressed classes of that place and an alleged high-handed act of the local officials. He stated that the Hindu Panchamas of a village about 18 miles from Dharapuram have been in possession of some lands, which they had obtained from government and worked at it day and night, and they had spent labour and money for making them fit for cultivation. After some days when the Revenue Inspector and the subordinate village officers – Kanakapillai, Karnam, etc., went to measure the land they had asked the Panchamas to leave certain portions of the field to six Gaundans separately and to enjoy the rest for themselves. So the Panchamas petitioned to

25 G.O. No. 3559, Revenue (10 November 1917).
the Revenue Divisional Officer Erode. It brought to the notice of the Government.\textsuperscript{27}

At first the Commissioner of Labour replied that there is no truth in the statements made by the Rev. Guru Manickam, Wesleyan Minister Dharapuram. Two months later the Collector of Coimbatore enquired the matter and he directed the Revenue Divisional Officer of Erode to enquire it. He visited Mudalipalaiyam on the 5\textsuperscript{th} February 1923. He stated there was absolutely no doubt that the prickly pear in all these four survey fields was removed by the Adi-Dravidas of Mudalipalaiyam and by them alone and even the Goundans who had subsequently encroached on the cleared portions of two survey fields reluctantly accepted this when he questioned them.

Further the Revenue Divisional Officer of Erode stated that “there has certainly being grave injustice in this case owing to the utter incompetency and extreme laziness of the present acting Deputy Tahsildar of Kangayam, Ramaswami Ayyar....” In addition to this enclosed a list of all 21 such cases complained by the Rev. Guru Manickam.\textsuperscript{28} It could be attested by British Official Palmer’s words that “the revenue member told us that the government is trying its level best to give lands to the landless when the landless people applied for lands, the darkhast ultimately reaches the hands of the Karnam and the Karnam very calmly says it is waste land and it cannot be given and he is the lord

\textsuperscript{27} G.O. No. 1206, Law General (Ordinary Series), (19 April 1923).

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
of the whole creation and there the matter ends. Now these landless people have been asking for lands but it is very difficult for them to get them”.

In 1920 Government decided to acquire 1.74 acres of land in Rayandur village, Tanjore taluk for granting 28 house sites to the Pallars of Sithayal village where 32 families residing in 20 huts. The Cheri was situated on patta land belonging to the Mirasdars. It was proposed to acquire the existing house-sites of 20 applicants and other lands adjoining the Cheri for providing house-sites for 8 more applicants. Notices were served on all the resident owners of the sites proposed for acquisition and registered notices issued to all Mirasdars. But some Mirasdars Ratnasami Nadar, Annasami Nadar, Muthusami Nadar, Vaithilinga Nadar, Swaminatha Nadar, Shunmuga Nadar and Muthukumara Moopanar objected to the acquisition of their sites on the following grounds

1. That the Panchamas will pollute the water of the channel adjoining the Cheri which supplies the village tank;

2. That the west of the Cheri may be selected for the provision of house-sites for Pallars

3. That some of the Panchamas own landed property and are cultivating lands on lease.

Regarding this objection government viewed that “Pallacheri has been in existence on that site for more than twenty years. West of the Cheri is not fit for habitation as one portion is saline and waterlogged and another portion used as thrashing floor. Moreover there is no necessity for shifting the present Pallacheri
to a new site.”

According to a government order passed in 1917, though the Panchamas own wet lands they are qualified to get house sites granted by the government, because they cannot buy house-sites. But due to severe opposition from land lords the government was unable to acquire the land.

**Denial of Drinking Water**

Drinking water, one of the basic needs for human survival, has been the foremost problems of depressed classes. They were absolutely forbidden to access public water resources nearly in every village in the Presidency. The depressed classes had not any drinking water resources thus they had depended on the dominant castes that monopolized common water resources such as well, bond, tank and river. They denied access to the depressed classes in the common water resources due to the belief that the physical proximity or touch could defile the natural resources. In order to prevent fetching water from public well there was a notice board put up to the effect that no depressed classes shall take water. The dominant caste allowed the animals to drink at common water resources but prohibited the depressed classes. A water dispute between depressed and dominant castes in Enadur where the District Magistrate enquired and noted that “I inspected two buffaloes were standing in it drinking.” It shows that in accessing common water resources prohibition was only to the depressed classes.

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29 G.O. No. 2240, Revenue (13 September 1920).
30 G.O. No. 3559, Revenue (10 December 1917).
31 G.O. No. 559, Revenue (08 March 1920).
33 G.O. No. 397, Public (09 May 1933).
depressed classes. The dominant caste also prohibited depressed classes to have own water resources. They proclaimed that the depressed classes should not have own water resources. For instance the dominant castes of Tharapuram Meenakshi Valavu village in Coimbatore district in 1924 announced that the depressed classes should not have own water resources.\(^{34}\)

The dominant caste of Perungalur village, Chidambaram circle in the then South Arcot district obstructed and attacked the depressed classes who took efforts with the support of the government to have own water resources.\(^{35}\) This prohibition prevailed not only in villages but also in government institutions. The water resources located at the government institutions; retiring rooms where a board fixed which announced that here depressed classes must not draw water.\(^{36}\) This situation forced the depressed classes to drink dirty water.\(^{37}\) According to Surinder, not only the habituation of the depressed classes was located far away from dominant caste but also they were far away from pure and protected water.\(^{38}\) Due to the drinking of impure water the depressed classes people were affected by contagious disease which was reported in the Madras Legislative Council in 1924.\(^{39}\)

\(^{34}\) *MLCD* (10 October 1924), pp. 46-47.


\(^{37}\) *MLCD* (10 October 1924), p. 47.


\(^{39}\) *MLCD* (22 August 1924), p. 827.
The Cheri: Residential Segregation

Residential segregation is one of the important symbols in expressing the condition of the each and every caste groups. Generally, the villages were divided into three categories such as *Agraharam/Gramam, Uur* and *Cheri* where Brahmin, non-Brahmin and depressed classes lived respectively. According to John P. Mencher, “there were normally separate quarter (*Cheri*) for the houses of lowest castes…”40 There was no much distance between the *Agraharam* and *Uur*. But the *Cheri*, the depressed classes habituation, detached from *Agraharam* and *Uur*. The Brahmins and caste-Hindus never thought of entering the *Cheri* which “…is described as being filthy, repugnant and stinking, in other words as slightly inhuman, at the extreme limit of humanness”, according to Robert Deliege.42

Many of the hamlets where depressed classes people lived, especially in delta districts, were extremely congested and insanitary. Many of them were cut off from access to the main village or the road except at the goodwill of the owner of the fields they must traverse.43 Rejecting to visit the *Cheri* and denying the depressed classes to pass through the *Agraharam* and *Uur* was constructed by the dominant castes in order to protect them from the impurity.

Prohibition in Passing Pathway

Generally there was no pathway to depressed classes to access main roads

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41 Brahmin settlement.
43 G.O. No. 559, Revenue (08 March 1920).
and to take on processions in marriages and corpse to the burial grounds. Traditionally the depressed classes were prohibited in passing through the streets habituated by the dominant castes. In order to prohibit the depressed classes from passing through the streets and roads in Agraharam and Uur there some boards were fixed which warned that the members of the depressed classes prohibited passing through this road.\textsuperscript{44} Even the streets occupied by the Brahmin and non-Brahmin where the depressed classes coolies were prohibited from executing the road repairing works they permitted the coolies of the high caste only.\textsuperscript{45} The depressed classes were not allowed to perform the sweeping work in the streets of dominant castes. Even the village servants who were the depressed classes not permitted to perform their legitimate duties at the dominant castes streets.\textsuperscript{46} It was reported that in 1925 at Rasipuram Agraharam, Watrap Agraharam\textsuperscript{47} and some other public pathway access was denied.

According to a petition of the depressed classes sent to the Chief Secretary that they were obstructed from passing through the village of Killanur, Thirukkoyilur taluk on 01 June 1926.\textsuperscript{48} In 1936 at Vilathikulam the non-Brahmin dominant castes denied the depressed classes to pass through the public pathway.\textsuperscript{49} This hardship was again tightened when modern institutions such as

\textsuperscript{44} MLCD (18 August 1924), p. 41.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. 41.
\textsuperscript{46} G.O. No. 291, Public (23 March 1931).
\textsuperscript{47} MLCD, Vol. XXX (10 July 1926), p. 18.
\textsuperscript{48} MLCD, Vol. XXXI (28 August 1926), p. 313.
\textsuperscript{49} MLCD, Vol. LXXXI (27 March 1936), p. 1035.
school, post offices, court etc. were established in and around the dominant castes habituations because of the lack of proper building. Accessing these modern institutions became inevitable to all including the depressed classes. But the prohibition in passing the streets and roads occupied by the dominant castes subsequently made some hurdles and excluded the depressed classes from accessing these modern institutions. If the dominant castes did not permit the depressed classes pass through these public streets they had to travel long distance and had to spend much time to reach the destination. Due to this denial the depressed classes’ children experienced much agony because they had to attend the classes regularly. If the depressed classes violated the caste rules and had gone through the Agraharam and Ur, they were subjected to heavy violence at the hands of the Brahmins and non-Brahmins.

**Traveling Restricted**

The depressed classes were excluded from traveling in the transport. Boat was one of the traditional vehicles used for carrying the people to cross canals. The depressed classes were prohibited from crossing the canals and rivers in boats earlier than the dominant castes reach the place.\(^{50}\) In the modern communicative system particularly in trains and buses which were introduced during the colonial times the depressed classes were prohibited from travelling. R. Srinivasan at the Madras Legislative Council on 22 August 1924 said that “In the railway carriages where caste men are sitting, the untouchables cannot get in;

\(^{50}\) *MLCD*, Vol. XXIII (23 March 1925), p. 547.
they object and ask them to go elsewhere”.

Similar to this in buses also they were excluded from travelling. In order to prevent the depressed classes from travelling in bus the owners had printed in the backside of the ticket that “there will be no accommodation for Panchamas and persons suffering from the contagious diseases”. The proprietors of bus had thus, by inserting the ‘Panchamas’ in the condition, made caste distinction in booking and carrying the passengers. For example the Nallipalayam Thandapani Motor service and other such motor services licensed by the Salem District Board refused to take the depressed classes into their buses.

Sreenivasa Lakshmi motor service in 1926 excluded the depressed classes from traveling in their buses. The buses which ply from Tharapuram to Thirupur, Erode to Tharapuram, Uthukuzhi to Tharapuram and Karur to Kangeyam denied the depressed classes from travelling. Generally this denial was practiced during 1920s and 1930s. The depressed classes had to face enormous difficulties in day today life in travelling.

**Prohibition in Post Offices**

The postal department, during colonial period, was one of the main modern communicative systems connected the people with one another. Contact could be made only through the post offices which were set up in the dominant

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51 *MLCD* (22 August 1924), p. 823.

52 *MLCD* (02 November 1925), p. 705.


caste peoples’ habituation hence the depressed classes were deprived in accessing the post offices. Depressed classes had to stand at the entrance of the street and shout for stamp, post cards and so on.\(^{56}\) They had to throw the money into the post office, and then post cards and stamps were thrown to them from a distance by the postal clerk.\(^{57}\) The following issue reveals the sufferings of the depressed classes regarding the access into post offices. Veeraian, Member of Madras Legislative Council belonged to a depressed class was prevented by the village Munsif of Kamalapuram village in the Salem district from getting access to the post office for posting letters and buying postage stamps.\(^{58}\)

The postmen refused to deliver the letters which sent to the depressed classes thus it affected them. In one incident Murugan, an Adi-Dravida, got refund money from the Sub-Collector of Thiruppatur for Rs 10/- with an order dated 28 March 1925. The order stated that if he did not obtain the money by 31 March 1925, the amount will lapse and returned to the government. The letter was received at the Thuthipattu post office on 30 March 1925. The concerned Post Master of the post office belonged to a Brahmin caste there was a post man also but they never go to the Adi-Dravida localities. Thus the letter was after all delivered to the Adi-Dravida only on 05 April 1925. The treasury at Thiruppatur refused to give him money, as he was late by 5 days owing to the delay in delivering the letter to him by the Brahmin Post Master. Murugan wrote this

\(^{56}\) G.O. No. 2596, Law General (18 August 1925).


\(^{58}\) G.O. No. 3464, Law General (05 December 1924).
matter to the Post Master General. A Postal Inspector was sent to enquire into the issue. He was also a Brahmin. From the beginning he sided with the Brahmin Post Master, and reported that the Post Master went every day to the Adi-Dravida Cheri and that the addressee was not present. In fact the Post Master never visited the Cheri. In this way the Adi-Dravida lost Rs10/-.

**Curtailment in Courts**

The depressed classes struggled for social justice through courts but the same courts curtailed their basic rights. They could not use even the verandah unless they were called wherever Brahmins were the president. This condition may be explained by the words of Special Deputy Tahsildar, Tanjore, to the District Labour Officer, Tanjore that, “...they have had no free admission into the Court in as much as they have to keep outside under the shade of trees in the court premises until called for by the court and that they cannot use even the verandah unless when they are called. During examination it is said that they are allowed to enter the witness box by the side door or made to stand near the doorway. They cannot enter the court hall and watch the proceedings and if they want to communicate to their vakil, they can do so only through the medium of caste men. It will be thus seen that the treatment of the Adi-Dravidas is different from that shown to the other people.”

The question was put to the man standing outside the court and the answer was transmitted by the Daffadar or Messenger to the Magistrate. There was no trouble where the Europeans presided over the

60 Ibid.
court. There chance was given to them for speaking and defending themselves.\(^6\) The following incident attests the fact.

Thumberi was a village located near Vaniyambadi. In Thumberi panchayat court while the panchayat people came to know the caste of opposite party as Adi-Dravida they annoyed and scolded him for his entry into the court and imposed Rs 7.50 fine on him for conducting purification ceremony.\(^6\) The depressed people who were working as Magistrate also tortured in many ways by the high caste Judges. Semmalai Pannadi was the depressed class Bench Magistrate of Omalur taluk, Salem district. He brought to the notice of the District Magistrate about the humiliating attitude of the Sub Magistrate towards him. On 26 May 1924, there was a nuisance case occurred while investigating the accused Pallaniyappa Goundan was answering to the Sub-Magistrate. At that time he pointed out to the Sub-Magistrate Mr. Ramashesh Ayyar that: “this man Semmalai who is now seated equally to you had set those police men to charge me against the case and I will not answer in front of him”. On hearing this, the Sub-Magistrate turned towards Semmalai and said “Semmalai you had better go out from the court as I cannot conduct the case in your presence because the accused is blaming you.” Finding such a harsh word of Sub-Magistrate, he made a move out from the court at once with broken heart. It seemed that he was being a high caste, did not wish to see the depressed classes seated equally with him.\(^6\) This incident clearly shows that the Sub-Magistrate respected the accused but

\(^6\) G.O. No. 382, Public Ordinary (27 April 1925).

\(^6\) *Dravidan* (13 May 1932), p.2.

\(^6\) G.O. No. 382, Public Ordinary (27 April 1925).
ridiculed the bench-Magistrate because former was touchable and later was untouchable. It is again shows that the judiciary itself has done injustice to the depressed classes.

**Exclusion and Discrimination in Education**

Education one of important tool for improving the downtrodden condition of the depressed classes but exclusion and discrimination infiltrated even into educational centres. Though in theory the schools which received government financial assistance were declared open to all classes without caste and religious discrimination, but in practice there had been great difficulties in giving effect to this policy. Generally the depressed classes’ children were denied admission both in government and aided schools. If they got admission, they were seated separately in schools and were badly beaten. It was reported by the *Kudiyarasu* which stated that the Head Master of Trichy government school, Sundaramaiyar allotted separate seats to Adi-Dravida students. Since the government and government aided schools were located in and around of the dominant castes habituation depressed class students were excluded from getting education. According to reports during 1921-22, 134 schools were conducted in Agraharams, Chavadies, Temples and other inaccessible places to the depressed classes. Some schools held in rented buildings but the owners of which objected

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64 G.O. No. 559, Revenue (08 March 1920).
66 *Kudiyarasu* (29 August 1926).
the admission of depressed classes students.\textsuperscript{67} Denial of admission to the depressed class students was being continued in 1925 the Singanallur Elementary Girls’s School and Singanallur Elementary Boy’s Schools in Coimbatore.\textsuperscript{68}

During 1928-29, around 1,875 schools managed out of public funds located at inaccessible places to pupils of the depressed classes.\textsuperscript{69} In Sankari Taluk Board School, Nadupatti village the depressed classes students were denied admission in 1928.\textsuperscript{70} This data expresses that not only in the beginning of the 1920s but also in the end of the same decade number of schools were functioning in inaccessible places hence admission were denied to depressed classes. Even if the school located in accessible places also admission denied to them.

Due to the detestation in studying along with the depressed classes’ students, the parents of dominant caste students refused to send their children to the schools where the depressed classes’ students were enrolled. If both students studied in a same school it would led them to mix and rub shoulders thus the dominant caste parents disliked it.\textsuperscript{71} If the depressed classes’ students sought admission or admitted in schools, the dominant caste students boycotted that school at once. In July 1926 around 50 depressed classes boys has sought for admission in the Kilathur Municipal Elementary Day Boy’s School near Tiruvannamalai hence the dominant caste boys boycotted the school.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{67} G.O. No. 87 (16 January 1923).
\textsuperscript{68} MLCD, Vol. XXVI (18 December 1925), pp. 473 – 474.
\textsuperscript{69} MLCD, Vol. LII (24 February 1930), p. 31.
\textsuperscript{70} MLCD, Vol. XLV (27 November 1928), p. 183.
\textsuperscript{71} MLCD, Vol. XXVII (10 July 1926), pp. 107 -108.
\textsuperscript{72} MLCD, Vol. XXXII (06 September 1926), p. 292.
In another case Board Elementary Boys’ Shool, at Vikravandi, Tindivanam Taluk denied admission to the depressed class student but on 10 November 1925 one depressed class student admitted in that school then around 155 dominant caste students boycotted the school.\(^73\) In Higher Elementary School at Srimushnam, Chidambaram taluk where in April 1933 due to the enrollment of five depressed class students the attendance of the dominant caste students drastically fell down.\(^74\) In such situation in order to conciliate the dominant caste parents’ untouchability was practiced in new forms. The depressed classes students were segregated from the dominant caste students and separate sheds were constructed to accommodate them.\(^75\) In that sheds junior and senior standard depressed classes students were ordered to sit together.

In the Achcharapakkam Board Elementary Boy’s School, Chingleput district the depressed classes’ students of second standard instead of being allowed to sit along with the same standard dominant caste students in the main building were made to sit in a separate shed along with the first standard depressed class students.\(^76\) In the colleges also admission was denied to the depressed classes students. Vellingiri depressed classes student was denied admission into the Coimbatore Government College when he sought admission on 09 June 1925.\(^77\) In some cases the caste-Hindus imposed fine on

\(^75\) *Ibid*.  
Adi-Dravidas those who sent their children to school. School teachers, school inspectors and other officials also practiced untouchability against the depressed classes’ students. Even during inspection in the schools meant for depressed classes the Inspectors practiced untouchability. They inspected the depressed classes’ students outside the school premises due to the fear of pollution.

In 1925 the Deputy Inspectors of Schools, Vellore range, when inspecting Moonjurpet Adi-Dravida School called the students outside the school premises. Like this there were number of instances in this regard. Denial of admission and untouchability practices of teachers and co-students against the depressed classes forced the government to set up separate schools for the depressed classes’ students.

Similar to depressed classes’ students the conditions of depressed classes’ teachers were also deplorable. Even though the depressed classes teachers possessed higher qualification than the dominant caste teachers promotions denied to them and they were compelled to stand before the high caste teachers. The Head Master of Vengaikurichi village Elementary School near Manapparai in Trichy passed only 4th standard received Rs 22 salary whereas Assistant Head Master who belonged to depressed class passed S.S.L.C received Rs 15 as salary. In addition he was humiliated by the higher castes.

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80 *Kudiyarasu* (29 August 1926).
Exclusion in Alternative Employment

The British imperialism had provided an alternative employment by introducing modern institutions. Getting appointment in these modern institutions depended upon the use of the modern communicative systems, education and other institutions but in which accession was denied to the depressed classes. Consequently the depressed classes were forced to experience exclusion in alternative employments. They could neither work as a porter nor as a domestic servant because of the untouchability. Due to these reasons the depressed classes couldn’t become modern clerks, school teachers, post men etc. In the Madras Legislative Council in 1921, L.C. Guruswami asked to state for the number of pensionable posts in Government service in the menial, subordinate and superior grades; and the number of such posts in each grade held by depressed classes as compared with the other communities in each district. The Commissioner of Labour answered that, I have no information as to the number of pensionable posts in government service in each district or as to the number of such posts held by depressed classes. This answer reveals that there were no depressed classes held pensionable posts in Madras Presidency in 1921.\textsuperscript{81} Regarding the employment in police department passing of jail test was necessary to the jailor or deputy jailor. Since these posts were appointed by the Inspector General which was completely occupied by the Brahmins and caste-Hindus hence there was no way to appoint the depressed classes man as jailor or deputy jailor. It could be attested by the reply of the government that “there is no information

\textsuperscript{81} G.O. No. 1699, Law General (21 October 1921).
about the number of Adi-Dravidas who are already in the service as jailors or
deputy jailors or clerks”\textsuperscript{82}

Regarding the wardens no educational qualifications were required. Men
of strong and brave and good character were entertained for the post preference
being given to ex-military men. But the dominated caste higher officials never
gave an opportunity to the depressed classes. Jail visitors in muffasil jails were
appointed by the district magistrate, while jails in the city visitors were appointed
by the government on the recommendation of the Commissioner of Police made
in consultation with the Chief Presidency Magistrate. From the I.G’s letter dated
13 October 1924 it was observed that there was only one non official visitor of
the depressed classes at the penitentiary Madras. Though majority police
department posts were recommended by the higher officials of that department
and most of them belonged to the dominated castes the depressed classes could
not enter into police department. Since they were experienced hardship in
entering a town or a village, no employment was available to them except that of
working in paddy-fields. Thus the depressed classes were only tied up with the
manual labour such agricultural serfs, scavenging, removing dead cattle, working
as village watchmen etc.

In some villages these people had been subjected to considerable hardship
by landlord. They made proclamations that no agricultural labourer of the place
should accept work outside the village or accept work at more than the rate fixed
by the villagers even if he was willing and desirous of doing so. Further, those

\textsuperscript{82}G.O. No.1804, Law General (04 June 1925).
who failed to comply with these rules would be punished by rendering heavy fine to the offending party, non-payment of which resulted in severe thrashing or expulsion from the village. Because of this high-handed action of these influential persons who had succeeded in instilling fear into the minds of agricultural labourers, the labourers unable to earn for their living. A petition was sent by the villagers of Vettakaranpudur and the surrounding villages in the Pollachi Taluk, Coimbatore District in 1922 regarding the prevention of depressed classes from rendering work outside the village for high wages to the member in charge of labour proves this fact.83 Similar to this in Thiruvallar Solai, a village located near Thiruvanaikaval, a depressed classes group, the Vettukarans, were tortured by the high caste Vellala Mirasidars (land owners) in way of preventing them to do work outside the village and insisted them to do work for the high caste people of that village for free of cost. Since few of them refused, the Mirasdars planned to driven out them from their native village and some were tied in tree and beaten by sandals.84 Even though the condition of depressed classes’ labourers was same everywhere it was too hard in the wet zone than the dry zone because the depressed classes were not formally bound to their pankalis (the owners of a share in the wealth of rural produce). And some depressed classes have owned land and their status in these dry areas was consequently higher than their fellows in the wet zone.85

83 G.O. No. 402, Law General (05 February 1923).
84 Nagarathuthan (08 July 1934), p. 9.
85 Eugene F Irschick, Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s, p.157.
Market Exclusion

The depressed classes had experienced in market in purchasing basic goods and selling their products. They had to place the mats, palm-leaf umbrellas and other things they made for sale on the highway and retire to the particular distance shouting from there to the passers-by. In the course of the special officer’s inquiries in Tanjore and other districts, it has been found that in many parts the depressed classes, whether labourer or small farmer, was continually a loser in buying the ordinary necessaries of life and in disposing of his produce through his inability to enter a shop or even to pass through many of the streets where the ordinary shop keeper lives. In many cases by actual testing it has been found that the depressed classes lose a large percentage on every deal. With such difficulties and such degrading conditions of life combined too often with wages which were distinctly low, it was not surprising that the depressed classes labourer frequently endeavours to forget his troubles in liquor. They were paid according to the fancy of the upper caste buyer, and dared not bargain. When they wanted to buy something they kept the money on a stone and retired. They could never have any direct dealings with the purchaser or seller.

Prohibition in Secular and Sacred Public Sphere

The public spheres, during the colonial times by commercialization process, such as saloon, coffee and tea shop, restaurant and so on were emerged.

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86 G.O. No. 559, Revenue (08 March 1920).
Since these were established and ran by the dominant castes, depressed classes were prohibited to enter in it. The Barber caste refused to do hair dressing to the depressed classes. The saloon owners hanged boards with the words ‘Panchamas are not allowed’. The hotels warned by hanging a board that ‘patients and panchamas not allowed’. For example, Anand Lodge near Tanjore Railway Station had been holding such a board. The depressed classes had no access in all Hindu temples.

**Symbols Expressing Inferior Status**

Since the depressed classes people do not have any distinctive physical traits differentiating them from the rest of the caste groups was not possible. According to Robert Deliege “…they cannot be recognized by some particular physical characteristic. It is true that high-caste people often claim to be able to pick out a Harijan on sight…” He argues that “… if society wanted to distinguish untouchables from the rest of the population, it had to impose cultural taboos.” Ambedkar explored this condition that “An untouchable must confirm to the status of an interior and he must wear the marks of his inferiority for the public to know and identify him such as – a) having a contemptible name b) not wearing clean clothes c) not having tiled roof and d) not wearing silver and gold

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88 *Dravidan* (18 December 1930), p. 5.
89 *Dravidan* (11 July 1931), p.2.
ornaments”. Thus the dominant caste constructed some socio-cultural markers on the depressed classes to express their low condition.

**Contemptible Name**

Ambedkar claims that “…names which are associated with a definite and fixed notion in mind of every Hindu. That notion is that of a hierarchy based on birth. So long as these names continue, Hindus will continue to think of the Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra as hierarchical divisions of high and low, based on birth, and act accordingly”. Depressed classes’ castes names and individuals’ names were expressed their oppressed condition. Generally they were called as *theenda saathi* means untouchables, and also called as Harijan after Mahatma Gandhi adorned it to the depressed classes. Their caste and individual names were ending with the suffix ‘n’ such as Parayan, Pallan, Chakkilian etc. Contrast to it the dominant caste names are ending with the letter ‘r’ for example Thevar, Goundar etc. They were prohibited from suffixing some titles in their name. For example the Parayar caste people suffixed the title ‘*Pillai*’ which was generally used by the dominant caste. The government also used such reproachful names, Paraya, Palla, Chuckkili etc. when sending letters,

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summons and so on.\textsuperscript{95} One post dated 21 February 1924 was addressed officially by the Sub-Registrar’s office, Coonoor to Sami Parayan son of Mara Parayan without adding Mr. before his name.\textsuperscript{96} It is clear that the depressed classes were oppressed by calling impudent names.

**Half-Nudity**

Costumes are one of the important symbols exploring the identity of the wearer. Nicholas B. Dirks says that, “…clothes in India (as also in England) were important markers of hierarchy and difference”.\textsuperscript{97} According to Sanal Mohan “…mode of dressing is capable of emitting messages of dominance and (in) subordination. In caste hierarchy, the mode of dressing and caste, as both were attached body, had an inverse relationship”.\textsuperscript{98} David Moose claimed that “…subordination was formerly expressed in the forms of dress”.\textsuperscript{99} Thus the depressed classes were prohibited from covering the upper portion of their body and their women had to appear with bare breasts and not allowed to wear clean and tidy cloths.

\textsuperscript{95} *MLCD*, Vol. XXX (13 July 1926), pp. 248 – 249.

\textsuperscript{96} *MLCD* (18 August 1924), p. 53.


Generally both the women and men of depressed classes were permitted to wear only a single piece of cloth around their waist which was given by landlords. Even the educated and economically sound persons also permitted to wear this mode of dress. The dominant caste of Ramnad district had proclaimed that in the early 1930s that the depressed classes should not wear clothes below their knees and above the hips and their males should not wear coat or shirt. In Erumanur a village near Viruthachalam where the Udaiyars were the dominant and land holding caste prohibited the depressed classes in wearing jackets and shirts. Restrictions were imposed on their life style such as use of bi-cycles, umbrellas, footwear, the wearing of gold and silver ornaments etc. Those who refused to follow these restrictions were ruthlessly tortured. These social-cultural markers supported the dominant castes to identify the depressed classes and excluding them to participate in the mainstream society.

**Unfavourable Public Opinion**

The unfavourable public opinion had played its crucial role in curtailments, denial, discrimination, prohibition, exclusion, segregation and so on which were experienced by depressed classes at the hands of dominant castes. The Special Deputy Tahsildar, Tanjore when he reporting the curtailments in courts experience of the depressed classes said that, “I however do not believe that this treatment is deliberately practiced or warranted by the Court and it is

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apparently the result of the public opinion and social convention…” In one case a resolution passed in 1933 at the Salem Municipal Council to the effect that permits for running coffee hotels in its area should be issued only to those who would allow access to depressed classes as freely as to other sections of the community was cancelled by the government due to the unfavourable public opinion. The Salem District Collector stated that “the resolution is opposed to a large of public opinion”. The public opinion was not the opinion of all caste groups but the fact was that it was the opinion of the dominant castes only. All the favourable actions and process to depressed classes was felt by the dominant castes as unfavourable to them. Thus the dominant castes were always expressed their unfavourable opinion to favourable actions and process which favoured the depressed classes.

In the hierarchical Hindu caste system the binary opposite ideology of pure and impure which divides the castes in to touchable and untouchable was one of the prime determining factors in having properties, using secular and sacred spaces, public spheres, socio-cultural symbols and so on. Since the depressed classes were considered and treated as untouchables they were denied from having land, accessing common water resources, prohibited from entering in religious and secular public spaces and spheres and allowed to use dirty socio-cultural symbols. These conditions of the depressed classes during the research period may be summed up by the words of M.C.Rajah, one of the leaders and nominated Members of the depressed classes clearly expressed at the Madras

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102 G.O. No. 712, Law (03 March 1925).
Legislative Council in 1919. According to him, “While the higher castes are indulging in transcendental politics and nation-building, we are denied the elementary rights of citizenship walking in the King’s high-way and drawing water from public wells, places to which every man and woman ought to have free access in virtue of their citizenship.” Relieving from such depressed conditions forced the depressed classes to form organizations and held struggles which will be discussed in the next chapter.

104 MLCD, 20th November 1919.