CHAPTER - IV

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS

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Conditions During the Early Twenties:

At the turn of the present century, the Depressed Classes constituted more than one-sixth of the total population of the Madras Presidency. These Depressed Classes included all those Untouchable classes which were socially, economically, politically and educationally backward. The Depressed Classes have been kept down by the so-called higher castes by systematic oppression. Social and religious traditions were in operation against the Depressed Classes for centuries. These classes were receiving extremely worse treatment at the hands of the caste Hindus. Even the breath of a member of the Depressed Classes was regarded as polluting the people of the higher castes. When a member of a higher caste permitted an individual
of a Depressed Class to speak to him, the latter was required to hold his hand in front of his mouth so as to prevent pollution by his breath. Members of the Depressed Classes did not have access to public wells, tanks and roads. They were denied entry into temples. They could not seek admission to certain schools and colleges run with the assistance of the State. Admission was denied to them into certain post offices. Choultries were closed to these unfortunate people, though such places were meant for the poor and the needy.

The life of the Depressed Classes was one of ignorance, misery and servitude. The daily life and the living conditions of the Depressed Classes were extremely pathetic. The place of their residence was called 'Céri' or slum. This was at a considerable distance from the habitations of upper class Hindus. The slums of the Depressed Classes did not have even the basic facilities and amenities. Words are not adequate to describe the unhygienic conditions in which they led their life.

Most of the people belonging to the Depressed Classes were employed as agricultural labourers. Some
were assigned menial tasks like scavenging. These people toiled for and lived at the mercy of the caste Hindus to whom most of the arable land belonged. Even their huss, if the ramshackle contraptions could be styled so, did not belong to them. Most horrifying of all, the Depressed Classes could not claim ownership even to their persons. Poverty drove them to the extent of pledging themselves to the land-lords for sums varying between forty and fifty rupees. There was no redemption for these people from this situation because they were never in a position to redeem themselves. Life-long servitude for a pittance was their lot.

Each member of the Depressed Classes who worked as an agricultural labourer, received daily wages at the rate of two ordinary measures of paddy which worked out to one Madras measure. This too was not given to them at the end of their day's toil. Several families of the Depressed Classes served the land-lords as bonded labour. Such families were assigned twenty-five cents of land for their own cultivation. The produce from this land and their daily earnings worked out to about forty-two Madras measures of paddy per annum. How could a family

*About one and a quarter Madras measure is equivalent to 2 Kgs.
subsist on this? Consequently, the Depressed Classes could never pacify the pangs of hunger. There was also no relaxation in the quantum of labour extracted from them. The land-lords were so crafty and unmindful of the sufferings of these unfortunate people, that they could always devise ways and means to delay or avoid payment. The Depressed Classes could never expect human treatment from their masters. It was quite common for the women of the Depressed Classes, even in an advanced state of pregnancy, to toil in the sweltering heat. They could not even nurse their infants without being subjected to the wrath of the land-lords. Both men and women had to work from sunrise till sunset.

The use of public wells, tanks and roads was prohibited to the Depressed Classes. They had to draw drinking water from stinking muddy unhygienic pools. Unkempt hair, rags for clothing, sickly and withered bodies - this was the general appearance of the Depressed Classes. They were not permitted to apply oil or comb their hair. The village barber's services were denied to the Depressed Classes. They were required to dress themselves only in rags. They were prohibited from christening their children with names commonly used by
the higher castes. They were forbidden to take up any profession or occupation other than scavenging and other menial tasks.

Communal Atrocities:

M.O. Rajah, in his, "The Oppressed Hindus," has given the following extract from Rev. T.B. Pandian's brochure "The Slaves of the Soil in Southern India."

"A poor Paraiah started from his native town in the Madras Presidency to one of the British Colonies in quest of fortune. He landed safe on colonial soil and was soon able to eke out an existence as a cooly (labourer) in the wharfs. His daily hire amounted to, on the whole, about twenty cents -- a little over six annas -- and this was ample to keep body and soul alive; but by economy - stern economy -- he soon piled up his exchequer. After a lapse of five years he set sail to India to see what he could do there. There was joy when he returned home and he enjoyed the quietness of home life for a few days. In course of time he set himself up in a petty trade. This alarmed the caste Hindus of the village and the petty shop became an eye-sore. Plans were set afoot to wreck the independence of the petty Paraiah. The poor man was hauled up before a tribunal for theft (which he never committed), convicted and thrown into the jail."1

From this and similar incidents it is easy to gauge the
amount of animosity the caste Hindus had towards the Depressed Classes at the beginning of this century.

From birth till death, a member of the Depressed Classes remained in debt to the landlord. Since the parents borrowed money from the landlord at the time of confinement, the child became indebted to the landlord. Indebtedness of the Depressed Classes to the landlords was steadily on the increase and they were perennially in debt.

Children of the Depressed Classes were denied the privilege of education. They were meant to tend herds of cattle only. If at all one or two managed to get primary education in the schools run by the public sector, such education was of no consequence. Tremendously, the Collector of Chingleput sums up the conditions of the Depressed Classes thus:

"always badly nourished, clad if at all in the vilest rags, eaten up with leprosy or other horrible disease; huddled like pigs; untaught, uncared for and unpitied...."
The Depressed Classes were also exploited by petty officials of the Government. Since the Depressed Classes were illiterate, it was comparatively easy for the petty officials, in collusion with people of the higher castes, to cheat the Depressed Classes. It had been the general practice to turn down, on frivolous grounds, the applications made by people of the Depressed Classes for allotment of Government wastelands. Invariably, the petty officials of Government were members of the higher castes and they had no sympathy towards the Depressed Classes. There were also instances when applications for allotment of wasteland were turned down on the plea that the applicant did not possess a pair of bullocks. It was common practice for the village official to collect excessive taxes from the Depressed Classes and also cheat them in many other ways. Those who failed to meet the unjust demands of the petty officials were subjected to much hardship. Even in the classification of waste lands caste distinctions played a decisive role. Better lands were reserved for high caste Hindus and marshy, barren, or rocky wasteland was assigned to the Depressed Classes.

There were also instances in which large scale
atrocities were committed by other communities on the Depressed Classes. Such instances were brought to the attention of the Government by the members of the Legislative Council. But the Government could not do anything concrete in this as there was lack of co-operation from the public.

In Government service also there was no proper encouragement to the Depressed Classes. This was particularly the case with the Police Department. The young men of the Depressed Classes who joined the police force as constables were often subjected to humiliating treatment by their superiors and were denied promotion to higher ranks. This was mainly due to the fact that the higher police officials were invariably caste Hindus. This has been often referred to by R. Veerai, a member of the Legislative Council.

Civic Rights:

Denial of basic civic rights was one of the major disabilities suffered by the Depressed Classes. An individual, if he should become a part of the society in
which he lives, should have opportunities to enjoy civic rights like any other man in that society. Denial of civic rights has been at the root of the problem of the Depressed Classes for ages. There are countless instances which show how these unfortunate people were prevented from using public highways, tanks, etc. The taboo of untouchability was inter-twined with the denial of civic rights. Even after the establishment of the British Raj there occurred several instances in different parts of the Presidency where the caste Hindus treated the Depressed Classes as sub-humans. They were segregated from the rest of the Hindu society.

The incident of a Magistrate in Kodaikanal imposing a fine of Rupee one on an Ādi-Dravida boy for singing a song on untouchability in the public road, was reported in the vernacular daily 'Dravidan', and the matter was also raised in the Legislative Council in 1921. From this and similar instances it may be inferred that the Depressed Classes were denied even the basic right of using public roads. Such instances were instrumental for the passing of a resolution demanding the right to use public roads, at the Ādi-Dravida Mahājana
Sabha, Chidambaram Taluk Conference at Pennathur on 23-3-1921. Inspite of the G.O. 37 Public (Misc.) dated 9-1-1925, the Depressed Classes were denied the right of way in Palghat town in Malabar. Nayadis and Pulaiyas were not permitted to go to the public markets and bazaars. This was brought to the attention of the Legislative Council by one of its members, R. Veerian, on 8-2-1926. Even though there was a G.O. granting the right of way to the Depressed Classes in public pathways, the caste Hindus had been preventing the Depressed Classes from using the pathways through Agraharams. It was alleged by R. Veerian in the Legislative Council that the Depressed Classes were prevented from using the Nellothchera tank in Calicut by caste Hindus. While answering the main and supplementary questions on this issue, the Raja of Panagal stated that the tank in question was a private one and that it was cleaned and desilted by the Calicut Municipal Council from its funds to prevent it from being a source of epidemicity. It is possible to infer from this that even the Government condoned the action of the Caste Hindus and the spending of public funds for cleaning an allegedly private tank. It was brought to the notice of the Legislative Council by R. Veerian that while giving
In 1927, during elections to local bodies in Walajapet, the voters belonging to the Depressed Classes were made to stand in a separate queue under the sun by the officers conducting the elections. This incident too was reported by R. Veerian in the Legislative Council.

The indifference of Government to settling the problems of segregation has been brought to light in an incident narrated by M.C. Rajah in his book, 'The Oppressed Hindus'. Rajah writes:

"The Minister for Local Self-Government, when asked about the non-appointment of an Adi-Dravida representative on the Chidambaram Taluk Board said that the owner of the rented house in which the Taluk Board Office is located has objected to the Adi-Dravida representative entering the premises. On this reply I asked the Minister a series of questions how a public office which, according to the Standing Orders of Government, should be located in a place to which all castes and communities ought to have access, came to be located under such adverse conditions and the Honourable Minister was sympathetic enough to give me the reply (for all my six questions bracketed together). 'The Government have no information.' These facts constitute the most tragic commentary on the attitude of these Ministers ...."
Even the police personnel were not exempt from humiliating treatment at the hands of the Caste Hindu superiors. Police constables belonging to the Depressed Classes were given no encouragement and they were neglected while deciding promotion to higher ranks. They were even harrassed and teased by the departmental superiors who were caste Hindus.\textsuperscript{11} It was alleged in the Legislative Council that barbers refused to shave the police constables belonging to the Depressed Classes.\textsuperscript{12} In answer to a question raised by R. Veerian, it was replied that no police personnel belonging to the Depressed Classes were posted for bandobust duty during Kalpathi Car Festival.\textsuperscript{13} Car Festival is something which takes place outside the temple precincts. If the Depressed Classes were not permitted to view the festival even from outside the temple precincts, it shows the magnitude of segregation. Government's policy of not posting Depressed Class police personnel even for bandobust duty goes to prove its collusion with caste Hindu forces. Another pathetic example of the treatment meted out to the Depressed Classes was cited by V.I. Munuswami Pillai in the Legislative Council. It was stated that patients belonging to the Adi-Dravida community were given separate wards in mean
It is disconcerting to note that even in jails, convicts belonging to the Depressed Classes were segregated. The practice of operating separate mess for the Depressed Class convicts in the District Civil Jail of Madurai was alleged in the Legislative Council.

In the Fourth Session of the Second Legislative Council, R. Veerian queried:

"Whether the delay in burying the dead body of an Adi-Dravida in Ellasmanoor, Villupuram Taluk, was due to the orders of the Health Inspector and the opposition of the caste people of the locality to the use by the Adi-Dravidas of their customary burial ground and the public pathway leading thereto?"

It was also alleged by R. Veerian that the Depressed Classes living in Madigapelliem in Walajah Taluk had to pass through the patta land of caste people while carrying dead bodies to their burial ground. It was also pointed out by him that the Depressed Classes in this area were suffering for want of a well. The reason for such
inhuman treatment of the Depressed Classes by the caste Hindus is not far to seek.

Obstruction to the Depressed Classes and destruction of their property took place in many parts of the Presidency. It was alleged in the Legislative Council that rioting and looting were caused by caste Hindus in the Thidumal Ādi-Dravida Chēri in Nāmakkal Taluk. It was also alleged that the caste Hindus destroyed a Mission Elementary School established by the Missionaries for the Depressed Classes. It was said that even women of the Ādi-Dravida community were molested by the caste Hindus.¹⁸

In March 1930, the Kallars of Ezhuvankōttai village in the Dēvakōttai Taluk of Ramnad District held a conference at which it was decided to impose eight prohibitions on the behaviour and general appearance of the Depressed Classes. The prohibitions thus imposed were absolutely inhuman. Members of the Depressed Classes who refused to observe these prohibitions were brutally assaulted and fines were imposed. The cattle of the Depressed Classes were forcibly taken away. The Kallars openly plundered the cēris and assaulted the inhabitants.
Huts and granaries of the Depressed Classes were set on fire. Even the thālis (mangalsutra) of women were forcibly wrenchd away from their necks. To add severity to the whole problem, eleven more prohibitions were added in 1931. (Appendix III) Atrocities continued unabated. The aggrieved Depressed Class people were prevented from reporting to the concerned authorities. The rules framed by the Kallar Saṅgam for the observance of the Depressed Classes were the most abject, base and inhuman. Based on these rules a reign of terror was unleashed over the unfortunate Depressed Classes. Women of the Depressed Classes were asked to sing naked during a religious festival of the Kallars. The Kallars behaved as though they were overlords of the Depressed Classes and the latter were treated as slaves. When the atrocities were reported to the District Magistrate, he stated that all the allegations were exaggerations and forwarded them to the police authorities. Nothing came out of this. As the atrocities continued unabated, the Ramnad branch of the Ādi-Dravida Mahājana Sabha presented a memorandum to Government in January 1931. Till August 1931 Government had not taken any action on the memorandum. A resolution on this tabled before the Legislative Council in January
1931 was taken up for discussion in August of the same year.

Many members of the Council were vigorous in extending their support to the resolution. M. Devadasan termed the atrocities as a reign of terror. He alleged that the barbarities were committed by the Kallars 'with the knowledge, if not with the connivance of the authorities concerned.' He said, that the Government was not taking any action to safeguard the interests of the Depressed Classes. He was of the opinion that "there is evidence of an organized conspiracy of Kallars against the Depressed Classes." Devadasan implored:

"what we want is not so much of political liberty or civil liberty but elementary citizenship. We want to be treated as human beings."

He asked for the appointment of an impartial committee to probe the matter.

Swami A.S. Sahajānandam was of the view that because of the inaction of Government such atrocities were multiplying and spreading throughout the Presidency.
Swami Venkatachalam Chetti stated:

"there is not the slightest doubt that the Government have failed to discharge their fundamental duty of protecting the interests and safety of people."

The view of M.T.C. Srimivasa Ayyahgar was that "there does not appear to be any want of vigilance on the part of the police or the magistracy of the District." N. Siva Raj was vehement in his attack on Congress and Government. He said:

"both the Congress and the Government profess to act in the interests of the Depressed Classes and both profess to do a lot for the Depressed Classes. Whereas the Congress merely mentions the disabilities of the Depressed Classes, makes promises and does not keep its promise; the Government does a little, though only just a little, and acts up to its promise, however tardily."

Abdul Hameed Khan said, "the Government is responsible for the continuance of this state of affairs for a period of three or four months." V.T. Arasu wondered why the Government remained inactive for over eight months. He said:

"if the Government think that these allegations are false then why not they prosecute the
people who were responsible for submitting the memorandum to the Government on the ground of preferring a false complaint?"

J.A. Davis asked the Government "to institute a searching enquiry by an independent body of people."

At the conclusion of the debate, the resolution demanding the appointment of a committee of enquiry was put to vote and was carried. The motion read:

"This Council recommends to the Government to make immediately an enquiry and if necessary, to appoint a committee of both officials and non-officials to investigate into and report on the ill-treatment of the Depressed Classes in the Dévakōttai sub-division of Ramnad District as alleged in the memorandum submitted to Government by the President of the Ramnad District Adi-Dravida Mahājana Sabha."19

Even after the adoption of this resolution Government did not take any steps to appoint a committee of enquiry. Hence, another resolution was tabled in 1932. The resolution read:

"This Council recommends to the Government to appoint a committee of both officials and non-officials not exceeding five in number, to
enquire into the report on the alleged atrocities committed by the Nattars of Devakottai sub-division of the Ramnad District on the Depressed Classes in June and July 1932."

At the instance of the Home Minister, Messrs. Munuswamy Pillai, Daniel Thomas, and Devadasan toured the areas and submitted a forty-page report to Government, the receipt of which was not even acknowledged by the Government. V.I. Munuswamy Pillai stated in the Legislative Council that the atrocities and dacoities took place on July 5, 1932 and the Labour Commissioner visited the spot only in the month of September. He was of the opinion that the Labour Department was ill-suited to tackle this problem. Devadasan recounted the extensive damage caused to property and spoke of the prevalence of a fear-complex in the affected areas. He said:

"the Depressed Classes of the Ramnad District are more economically independent than their brethren of other districts. The Kallars inflict ill-treatment upon the Depressed Classes for no justification whatsoever."

He claimed that the Kallars "do not belong to the Depressed Classes at all."
Mohamed Usman Sahib Bahadur, the Home Minister, was not for the appointment of a committee to conduct the enquiry and he stated that the cause of the trouble was the arrival of a party of American Missionaries and their work of evangelism. The resolution was put to vote and was carried.20

It is indeed difficult to understand the logic behind Government's slackness in dealing with this problem, and it is also difficult to attribute any motive to this attitude of Government. Even if the contention of the Government regarding the Adi-Dravidas and Kallars as kindred communities among the Depressed Classes is to be accepted, should the Government be totally blind to the developments? The theory of the Home Minister that the trouble was caused by the presence of Missionaries cannot be accepted because the presence of Missionaries elsewhere in the Presidency did not cause such widespread arson, looting, burning and killings. Inaction of the Government in this connection is inexplicable.
In the matter of education, the Depressed Classes were far in the background. In 1881, the population of the Depressed Classes in the Madras Presidency was 4,439,233. By 1891 this had increased to 5,162,036. The general plight of these people was extremely bad. In 1891, Government took several measures to improve the lot of the Depressed Classes. Steps were taken to afford educational facilities to the children of these unfortunate people. The Educational Report of 1891 said that the:  

"agencies and means available for the spread of education among the aboriginal and backward races are few and small and even where agencies and means are available the extreme indifference of those races to the institutions and the aversion they display to any change in their modes of life are insurmountable barriers in the way of schoolmasters."

Separate primary schools were established for the Depressed Classes. Information regarding caste-wise strength of pupils was provided by the Presidency Administration Reports. The starting of separate schools for the Depressed Classes met with general approval. The trend
of the times was reflected in this approval. The Hindu, a leading English daily, published from Madras, wrote in 1891:

"it is impossible to expect caste Hindu children and these classes to study together in the same school. Nor can much be expected from local boards... Government is perfectly justified in showing special consideration to a class, whose conditions must be a blot on any civilised social system."22

Starting of separate schools for the Depressed Classes did not solve the problem of education. The caste prejudices of the officers were a stumbling block which could not be easily overcome. Most of the inspecting officials of the Department of Education belonged to the higher castes and they were unwilling to enter the slums and inspect the schools of the Depressed Classes. In 1905 an instance was brought to the attention of the Government by the Christian Missionary Society. The caste conscious Inspector was unwilling to enter the village of the Depressed Classes and hence he called the whole school well beyond the village and conducted his inspection. The Inspector examined the answer papers of the pupils from a distance of ten feet. Touched by the pitiable plight of these unfortunate children, the
Missionary wrote:

"If India's conditions are understood, it would be readily admitted that the Brâhmin or other high caste Inspector can never as a rule bring himself to do justice, much less to treat with sympathy the pupils who are untouchable out-castes."23

"Members of the higher castes who were officials of government pursued their caste prejudices even while performing their official duties. Consequently, David Duncan, the Director of Public Instruction in 1893, instructed his subordinate inspecting officers that their caste taboos will not be recognised."24

It must be observed that the orders of Government could not remove the caste prejudices. It was commented by the Madras Mail (August 13, 1908) that the officials of Government belonging to the higher castes displayed a hostile attitude towards the education of the lower classes.

Since the caste Hindus resented the admission of Depressed Class children in schools where their wards were receiving education, Government evolved the practice of establishing separate schools for the Depressed Classes. Government did not make any separate financial allotment for the education of the Depressed Classes until 1920.
A perusal of the records concerning the educational statistics for the years 1901-1921 reveal startling facts. In the year 1901, there were none from among the Chakkilis and Holeyas who had received English education though in the same year less than one per 1000 had received ordinary education. Of all the Depressed Classes, the Pallas seem to have fared better than the rest. Next to the Pallas were the Paraiyas. When compared to the literacy rates among the Brāhmins and the Indian Christians, the Depressed Classes were certainly in a deplorable condition as far as education was concerned. (Vide Table-VI).

Occupation:

In the early days, the Depressed Classes were engaged in agricultural work, weaving and drum-beating. According to the Census Report of 1921, the different Depressed Classes were engaged in the undermentioned occupations. The Paraiyas were engaged as cultivators, agricultural labourers, masons, plantation workers, herdsmen, and as coolies. The Pallas were mostly agricultural labourers. They also worked as rice pounders.
and shepherds. The Chakkilis worked as agricultural labourers, leather workers and as scavengers. Most of the Cherumans were agricultural labourers, while some engaged themselves as basket-makers. Among the Holeyas, there were agricultural labourers, basket-makers, stone-cutters, masons and wood-workers. The Mādigas were listed as agricultural labourers, leather workers and as miscellaneous labourers. The Malas occupied themselves as agricultural labourers, weavers and as cattle raisers (For statistics about occupation by caste, Vide Table - VII).

Status of a Leading Depressed Class Community : Religious Status of the Paraiyas :

In almost all the Māriamman temples in Tamil Nadu, during the annual festival, the Paraiyas act as the bride-groom of the goddess. The ceremony connected with this is referred to as Kāppu Kattu. It may be inferred that originally the Paraiyas were the priests of Goddess Māriamman and when they were replaced by the Brāhmīns or
non-Brahmin priests, an attempt at propitiating them was made by permitting them to tie the tāli (mangala Sutra) around the neck of the Goddess once a year.

In the legends concerning the origin of the Goddess Māriamman, there are references to the association of the Paraiyas with the Goddess. It is mentioned in Bhāgavatapurāṇam that Maharishi Jamadagni had five sons by his wife Renuka. Once when Renuka went to fetch water from the river she lost count of time by watching the love play of Citrārtha, the king of Gandharvas, with Apsaras and failed to bring water in time for the Puja.

When the Maharishi realised the reason for Renuka's delay in fetching water he ordered his sons to kill her. One of the sons, Parāsurāma killed his mother and her Paraiya maidservant. When told by the Maharishi to ask for a wish, Parāsurāma wanted his mother and her maid to be revived. When the wish was granted Parāsurāma, in a hurry, joined the severed head of his mother to the body of the Paraiya maidservant and vice versa.
Jamadagni accepted the lady with his wife's head as his consort and granted the other the status of an inferior goddess called Mātangi. The Mādigas, the Depressed Classes of Āndhra Pradesh, regarded themselves as children of Mātangi and worship her as Gaṅgammā or Ellammā.

In Tamil Nadu the lady with the Brāhmin head and Paraiya body is worshipped as Māriamman. Buffaloes are sacrificed to Ellammā and goats and fowls are sacrificed to Māriamman. Mr. Whitehead considers this as a fusion of Āryan and Dravidian cults. From the fact that buffaloes were sacrificed to the lady with the Paraiyas head we may infer that the buffalo must have been the totem of the Paraiyas.

Legends are plenty in Tamil Nadu, Kamātaka, Kērala, and Āndhra Pradēsh regarding the manner in which the Paraiyas came to be associated with different gods and goddesses and temples. From all this it is easy to infer that at one time the Paraiyas must have acted as priests. By some misfortune they were dislodged from their position by the Brāhmins or by the Brāhmanised Hindus.
Socio-Political Status of the Paraiyas:

There is no evidence to support the claim of the Paraiyas that they were rulers of the Tamil region years back. One has to infer this from their legends only. They claim to be the descendants of Rāvana who resisted the Āryan cultural expansion in the South. Mabali, the great legendary emperor of the Tamils, is also claimed to be their ancestor. They say that their ancestor, king Vīravāhu, is wrongly depicted in the Brāhmanical Purānas as the guardian of the cremation ground. In support of their former kingly status they point to their marriage ceremonies. On festive occasions they claim eighteen marks of royal honour. In Gnānavetti, a medieval Tamil work, it is said that the Paraiyas had a right to wear the sacred thread, to control the senses and to adopt royal and divine insignia such as white umbrella, white fan, ear-rings studded with precious stones and shields.

The Paraiyas recite the following in praise of their caste during the festival of the village goddess.
They recite as follows:

"The Paraiyas were the first creation, the first who wore the sacred thread, the uppermost in the social scale, the differentiators of castes, the wearers of laurels. They have been seated on the white elephant, the Vira Cãmpavãns who beat the victorious drum."  

The names of the various sub-divisions of the Paraiya caste also reveal the ancestral greatness of this caste in the political field. Kôttai Paraiyan indicates those who had forts for themselves. Kôttakkârar means those who had stables. Muracu Paraiyans indicates those who beat the victory drum in the battlefield. A section of the Paraiyas called Cãmpãns traces its descent to Cãmpavan, the great general of God Nârayân. Cãmpavan was also the chief justice of Nârayan and was called Mahâtïkâri. This term, in course of time, came to be pronounced as Mâdiga. This is the caste name of the Depressed Classes in Andhra Pradesh.

The Paraiyas might have been rulers in the Tamil region before the coming of the Cûra, Gûla, and Pûndya kings. It is said that the whole of South India was
was ruled by the Nagas, the ancestors of the Paraiyas. Naga cult is widespread in Tamil Nadu. In the Mahabharata mention is made of Arjuna marrying a Naga princess. Tentaiman Ilantiraiyan who is purported to have founded the Pallava dynasty, is said to be the son of a Naga princess, Pilivalai. It is said that Mahārāṣṭra, Andradēsa and Ceylon were under Naga rule for quite some time. Among the Satavahana kings of Andradēsa we find such names as Skandanagā and Sivaskandä Naga. These Nagas are regarded as the ancient Dravidians, the progenitors of the Ādi-Dravidas of Tamil Nadu and other Tamil tribes like the Maravar, Eyinar, Oliar, Aruvālar and Paratavar. It was the Nagas who deforested Dandakāranya forest and converted it into cultivable land. The probability is that the defeated Nagas were assigned menial tasks by the Aryanised Cēra, Cōla and Pāṇḍya kings and Depressed in every walk of life. It may be surmised that political subjugation led to economic depression and cultural deterioration and the combination of all these resulted in segregation.
Economic Status of the Paraiyas:

The ancient Paraiyas seem to be the original owners of much of the cultivable land. When this was confiscated by the victorious kings, the Paraiyas went to distant lands and established independent Oeris of their own.

In disputes regarding the boundaries of lands, the decision of the Paraiyas was deemed to be final. It may also be surmised that after their lands were confiscated from them, they continued their association with the land as farm labourers. They were also granted certain privileges on occasions.

"These privileges are remarkable instances of survivals from an extinct order of society, shadows of long departed supremacy bearing witness to a period when the present haughty high caste races were supplicants before the ancestors of the Depressed Classes whose touch is now regarded as pollution." 43

Conclusion:

A survey of the social, economic, political and
religious conditions of the Depressed Classes shows a very gloomy picture. Though these people formed the backbone of society as far as its economy was concerned they were totally denied the fruits of their labour. Though they were termed as Hindus, yet they did not have free access to the temples. The caste Hindus put as many obstacles as possible in the path of the Depressed Classes. They were subdued and subjugated in every walk of life. In their miserable plight no community among the Depressed Classes was better off than the other. It is surprising to note that even among the Depressed Classes themselves there were caste distinctions. Since these classes were totally denied even the basic necessities of life, for many years they could not rise up.
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7. Residential area of the Brāhmins.


17. Ibid.
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27. Quoted by K.A.Milakanta Sastri in his Development of Religion in South India, p.25.
29. Ibid., p.64.
30. Ibid., p.89.
31. Ibid., p.89.
33. Quoted Ibid., p.22.


42. A.R.E., No. 112 of 1910, Part-II, para. 29.


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