

**SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND UPLIFTMENT OF DEPRESSED CLASSES
IN THE 20th CENTURY IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY**

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During the 20th century the Hindu society its social customs and convention and religious practices and thoughts underwent a great transformation due to the efforts of various socio religious reforms movements. The introduction of western education development of knowledge and scientific rational approach caused for the social transformation. In the name of religion the sudras and chandalas treated as untouchables and useable and subjected to many restrictions and humiliations. The common people of India have suffered for a very long period under religious influences and social institutions that were unfriendly to their freedom and advancement. The society divided into four fold according to the Vedic Varna Sharma dharm. Those who outside the Varna fold are known as avarnas, panchamas, chandalas and called as untouchables. They have been continually denied educational and other facilities and moral statue. They were made to believe by the principles of theory of karma and that they were born in a low caste because of their misdeeds in the previous birth. The sudras and panchamas forming more than 80% of the population were made to a lead and a wretched life for several centuries. According to the Hindu codes of conduct laid down in the Ramayana, mahabharatha and manudharma and various religious scriptures condemned these people as sinners by birth. In order to remove the social and social disabilities and to reform the socio religious practices a number of social movements were started to uplift the depressed classes in which the role of depressed class leaders and non-Brahmans and Brahmans are significant

The depressed class movement for uplifting the untouchables initiated and sustained by not only by the depressed class but also by the others.¹ The depressed class people organized themselves in order to embrace equality, justice, dignity but failed to eliminate anti caste feelings among the depressed class². During the 19th century the depressed classes had formed organization and struggled for their liberation from the oppression of the dominant castes. During the beginning of 20th century it become a movement. In the beginning the Christian missionaries and British government played crucial role in the elevation of the depressed classes.³ The British established native army, introduced western education, developed the communication which were the regenerating effects of British government which brought conscious among the depressed classes. During the 18th century many of the depressed class people moved into hill areas for the tea plantation work where the demand for menial services was expanding in the towns like Madras. The caste Hindus were declined to perform such work and leaving employment in those areas open for the untouchables. In the towns the depressed class people worked as a municipal employees or domestic servants of the British and at times in factories. This paved the way for the getting education in the town side. The social activist British officials and missionaries contributed to some extent for the outbreak of the depressed class movement.

The earliest organization associated with the depressed classes was advaidananda sabha established by C. Iyothee thass at Nilagiri in 1870 to emancipate the depressed class on the advaitic

tradition.⁵ The other organization namely the Madras Adidravida mahajana sabha started at Chennai December 1892 by the educated persons, business man and social workers.⁶ This association integrated all the association of the depressed classes on the name of All India adidravida mahajana sabha. The sabha maintained a service army and a scout wing entrusted with responsibility of safe guarding the rights and interest of the depressed classes. As an eye opener to the depressed class the sabha published journals, books and pamphlets in various fields and organized and hold public meetings at various places and started libraries and night schools. The important leaders of the sabha were P.V subramaniam , R Srinivasan , P.M. Madurai pillai, M.C Raja .R. Veeriyam and J. Siva Shanmugam pillai⁷

P.V. Subrahmaniam , was the president of the Adidravida Mahajana Sabha .He himself started schools and bore the expenditure for conducting meetings and conferences to awaken the depressed classes and appeal to governor and viceroy to remove the hurdles of the depressedes classes. Rattamalai Srinivasan regularly visited depressed class settlement and awakened them and emphasized hygienic, wear clean dress and gives up eating dead animals. R.Veeraiyan, another depressed class leader from Kongu region led in people inside the post offices and their public places to which they were forbidden entry by tradition. M.C Raja worked for the depressed classes as the secretary of the state Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha .The leaders also requested the government to appoint to separate commission to look into the problems of depressed classes.⁸ C. Iyathesha, a paraya by birth was a great Tamil scholar. He was well versed in Sanskrit, Pali, and English also philosophical thoughts of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity. He founded Dravida Mahajana Sabha in 1891 at Nilagiris. To create awareness among the depressed classes, Iyathesha registered one weekly magazine called Oru Paisa Tamizhan at Madras.⁹ He preached Buddhism, morality and education among the depressed classes. This organization was the outcome of a split in the Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha. These sabha members claiming themselves as Dravidian.¹⁰ The sabha opposed to call the Panchamas as Adhi dravida in Tamil district and Adi Andras in Telegu district. In 1917 Dravida Mahajana Sabha amalgamated with various organisation by the jahon Ratnam, M.C.Raja and T. M.Nair.

The other organization for the depressed class welfare were A.V. Panchami charity institution,¹¹ Pariyar mahajana sabha ,¹² Depressed class mission,, Depressed class mission society, ¹³ Bhuvasisya Indira kula sangam¹⁴ of perumalpeter for upliftment of Pallas in 1923, ¹⁵ Indira kulathiba vellalar Aikya sangam,¹⁶ Madras Valluvar Mahajana Sangam, which founded in Madras in 1935. ¹⁷ The leaders of these organizations were learned western education worked in foreign countries and well versed in English language .¹⁸ Rattamalai Srinivasan, the founder of the parayar mahajana sabha worked with Gandhi in South Africa. H.M jahajanathan, L.C .Gurusamy, the president and general secretary of Arunthathiyar maha jana sabha worked under British.¹⁹ M.C Raja, the depressed class leader studied in Madras Christian College and worked in weslyen mission college. In 1923 he was nominated as the members of the madras legislative assembly. He also occupied important post in the justice party in 1925. Perumal peter the founder of poovaisya Indira kula sangam also educated leaders who lived in Pinangu and Rangoon before his settlement in India. Each and every organization had been functioning separately and the leaders mobilized the funds for holding conferences, meetings, writing petitions and visiting people. ²⁰ In addition to this the non Brahmin leaders also donated funds for elevating the depressed class poor students.²¹ The non depressed class leaders were sympathized and attended the meeting of the depressed class and appealed to the British government to ameliorate their deplorable condition.²² The depressed class leaders designed flag and hoisted with slogans of equality, fraternity, liberty and development. The leaders of the non

Brahmin movement (self respect movement) also extended their full support to the depressed classes and preached the self respect ideas.²³ All the conferences of the depressed class association passed the resolution for the elementary rights of the depressed classes and asked the British government for the employment opportunities in the village level and for seeking remedial measures of their grievances. ²⁴The British government recognized the demand of the political representation and lord wellington nominated a depressed class representative in the Madras legislative assembly.²⁵ The delegates of the depressed classes presented a memorandum regarding the deplorable condition of depressed class and demanded education, housing, employment to improve the downtrodden condition of the depressed classes. They demanded not only abolish the labour department because it was the first and only one department established especially for the benefit of depressed classes.

During the colonial period the English and vernacular dailies and periodicals published news regarding the British imperialism and national movement in particular. The press media have given less importance to the social issue. The attitude of the press media creating awareness among the depressed class people to publish some magazines in Tamil such as Suryodayam, , Panchamar, Dravida Pandiyan, Antor mitran, Maha vikada thuthan, Paryan, Illara ollukam, Bogloka vysam, Tamilan, Dravida kokilan and Tamilpen.²⁶Tamilan and Parayan were published by the Iyothee thasar and Rattamalai srinivasan respectively and documented .R. Veeriyar published a magazine namely Adi Dravidakavalan. These press media played important role in mobilizing the depressed class people.

The depressed class leaders realized the need for education as the one of the important tools up lifting the depressed classes from their oppressed condition and they addressed to the British government for the getting admission in the depressed class children in schools .M.C Raja and Rattamalai Srinivasan requested before the Lee commission regarding the admission of depressed classes in the schools and award of scholarship.²⁷

Swami shajanandam and M.C Raja demanded in the legislative council to grant scholarship and asked for mid day meal scheme for depressed class children. The matter was discussed the cabinet and the scheme was introduced Tanjore and east Godavari district.²⁸ In 1921, L.C. Gurusamy the leader of Arunthathiya Mahasabha established night schools in Madras depressed class laborers.²⁹ The leaders also demanded for admission of depressed class students in the public school after completion of 4th and 5th standard which was oppsed by the caste Hindus.³⁰In order to rectify this difficulties, M.C Raja demanded the representation of the depressed class leaders in the District educational council , District secondary education Boards and senate of the Madras university. M.C Raja also demanded enough representation in the government services, Army and navy to help the progress and self respect of the community. ³¹ In 1932, representaives of Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha met madras governor and asked him to rise age of the depressed class to 30 years of government services.³²

In the beginning of the 20 the century E.V.R (Thanthai periyar) become the champion of the non Brahmin movement and depressed class movement .He has the opinion that the concept of god, soul sin, heaven and hell was unreal. He opined that Man created god. He argued against the existence of of god. Periyar accepted religion as a way of life. He was fully against superstition elements and super natural dimension of religion. He felt that religion is the cause of all evils particularly caste in the society and source of exploitation. He stressed the doctrines and dogmas are mere human constructs. He emphasized self respect, right perception of religion and issues, serving humanity. He accepted religion as a way of life for human development and progress. He wants to

stop blind faith in fate, destiny religion and god in the minds of people . He advocated high regard for morality and demanded in morality in religious exercises. He was eager to accept religion if offered morality and harmony of life.³³ E.V.R rationalized the depressed class people through his self respect movement and his ideas.

Many women leaders like Moovaloor Ramirtham, R.S Subblakshmi. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy, Sarojini Varadappan and Krishnammal Jaganathan joined hands with EVR and fought against the social evils .They fought for the right for the women section. They want to eradicate the Devadasi system, caste rigidity in the rural areas. They enlightened the women folk for upliftment of the society.³⁴

Gandhi started a weekly journal namely Harijan. The All India Anti untouchability league was started in Delhi.³⁵Rajaji played a significant role for the upliftment of the depressed class people in 1920's.³⁶As chair person of Salem municipality Rajaji introduced a number of reforms for the depressed class section. He admitted Harijan boys in the municipal schools.³⁷He created employment opportunities for the Harijans .Rajaji convened a state level anti untouchability conference at Trichy on 20 th November 1932.³⁸He formed the association namely Tamilnadu servants of untouchables society with T.S.S Rajan as its president.³⁹ The leaders like G.Ramachandran, V. Halasiyam played a significant role in the upliftment of Harijans.⁴⁰ The Harijans Sevak Sangh worked for the eradication of untouchability, beef eating , intoxicating liquors. The leaders namely G. Ramachandran of Madras ,A.Vaidynatha Iyer, N,M.R. Subbaraman were from Madurai, T.S Avinashilingam chettiyar of Coimbatore , Sardar vedarathinam pillai of Vedaranyam , P.S Krishnasamy Iyengar of Madras worked along with T.S.S. Rajan for the removal of untouchability and for the upliftment of depressed classes.⁴¹

The Harijan sevak sangh were periodically sent members to wardha Asramam to get training in the field of sanitation, scavenging etc. The sevaks were also trained for importing religious knowledge ,providing education, economic development and eradicate the untouchability in the depressed class people.Harijan sevak sangh stated new schools in Madras , Madurai and Trichirapalli.A. Vaidyanatha Iyer and N.M.R Subbraman were pioneering leaders of theharijan sevak in Tamilnadu.The Haraijan sevak sangh stated cooperative societies for the scavengers in vellore.Rajaji showed special interest in the anti alcoholic propaganda in Tamilnadu.After assuming office Rajaji introduced the prohibition bill in the Madras legislative assembly in the Madras presidency.⁴²

The imperial legislative council in Madras in Madras Presidency considered the problems of depressed class was national significance .The provincial government for the first time revealed the magnitude and gravity of the problem.⁴³ The board of revenue recommended lot of measures to improve the condition of the depressed classes in the Madras presidency.⁴⁴In 1919 the government of Madras presidency appointed commissioner of labour for the welfare of the depressed classes. A labour advisor board was composed of one European Gilbert slater one, Brahmin K.Ramanjuachariar and one Adhidravidar, namely M.C Raja in the same year. The department mostly concerned with the administration of the factories Act.⁴⁵ The board taken steps to improve the condition of the depressed class laborers in Madras presidency.

The depressed class movements started in the 19th century and gained its momentum in the first half of the 20th century. The leaders who worked for the depressed class section were Christian missionaries, Britishers, non brahamans and Brahmans. The depressed class people able to get support from the Self respect movement leaders. The depressed class leaders followed mostly the

ideas of the E.V.R. Periyar to uplift themselves. The justice party ministry implemented number of reforms for the upliftment of depressed classes.

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