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## Services Of Rao Bahadur R.srinivasan To The Depressed Class Society –A Bird's View

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### Abstract:

*The paper aims to highlight the contribution and services of R.Srinivasan to the elevation, enhancement, emancipation and empowerment of the Depressed Classes in the first half of the Twentieth Century Tamil Nadu. Rattaimali R.Srinivasan was one of the remarkable Depressed Class Leaders of Tamil Nadu. Throughout his political career from 1923 to 1945 till his last breath, he well utilized his political power to get proper safeguards with equality in social and political life. Because of his tireless services, the Depressed Class people achieved the political power such as representation in legislatures, representation in Government Offices, and representation in the services like Military, Navy and Civil.*

### KEYWORD:

R.Srinivasan, Rattaimali, Srinivasan, Paraiyan.

### FAMILY BACKGROUND

R.Srinivasan was born Rettamalai and Adthiammal on 7 July 1859 in a village called Kozhialam near Mathurantagam in Chengleput District<sup>1</sup>. His father Rettaimalai was an ordinary labourer in Thanjavur. He took the name of his father along with his name and was known as Rattaimali Srinivasan. He lost his mother at his tender age. He was the first Adi-Dravida young man to have college education in Madras. He was educated at the Government Arts College of Coimbatore. Then he served as an accountant in the service of the East India Company at Nilgiris. In 1887 at the age of 28, he married Aranganayaki and had six children. His family belonged to Sambava Community and they migrated from Thanjavur to Madras for survival. When he was a young boy, there was rigid caste system. He always felt inferior to reveal his caste and family. Srinivasan attended the class only for class hours. He was greatly dejected as he could not play with his friends who were supposed to be the Caste Hindus. In the beginning he had connections with Theosophical Society. This helped him very much when he started work for the betterment of his people from 1884.<sup>2</sup> He was particularly interested in inculcating civic behavior and cleanliness among his people.

### PARAIYAR MAHAJANA SABHA

In Madras, he strove hard for three years to uplift the Paraiyahs and made them enjoy the equal rights which were hitherto enjoyed by the other communities and also to give them a respectable position in the society.<sup>3</sup> In 1891, the Paraiyar Mahajana Sabha was started by him. It was aimed to integrate the Paraiya Community members. He wanted to represent all the depressed class people. For that he wanted a common depressed class organization. In order to find a common Organisation, Paraiyar Mahajana Sabha was integrated with All India Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha in 1929.

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### PARAIYAN -JOURNAL

In the year 1892 Rattaimali Srinivasan started one magazine with the investment of Rs.15/- only. This journal was called, Paraiyan. It was started as a Monthly , with four pages , for four annas. The first issue saw the printing of 400 copies, which were sold out in just two days. The total cost, including the advertisement was Rs.10/.<sup>5</sup> Srinivasan made his intention of starting the magazine Paraiyan, very clear as follows: “Like the one who constantly contemplates about himself and realizes himself to become a prophet, the one who does not deny his origin but feels proud about it speaks the truth without fear or shame and upholds his own freedom will proudly declare himself as such , he can not achieve his own freedom , but will be subjected to degradation and poverty .It is therefore, I published journal crowning it with name, Paraiyan”<sup>6</sup>He encountered violent criticism for this magazine. In his newspaper Paraiyan, he declared that the original inhabitants of Bharatvarsa are the sons of the soil and they were not Panchamas or Fifth Varna. There is no Fifth Varna in Vedas and it is only Four Varnas. Therefore , the original inhabitants of the soil should be called as 'Adi-Dravidas'

Despite this he carried this work for many years. His magazine was devoted completely for the issues of Depressed Classes. The atrocities performed by the high castes, the requisitions of the Depressed Classes to the Government for privileges and the need of the strict discipline among the Depressed Classes were covered in his Journal. In 1893 he organized a Depressed Class Conference at Wesley High School at Royapattah.<sup>8</sup>

### IN SOUTH AFRICA

In 1895 he led the first deputation of the Adi-Dravidas to meet the Viceroy of India and appraised the Government of India about the deplorable economic condition and social disabilities of the Depressed Classes. On his departure to South Africa, his Journal, Parayan, was stopped. He was also first South India Adi-Dravida member to seek service abroad. He entered the service of the South African Government in 1904 and continued in that service till 1920. It was not known in what capacity he was employed by South African Government. No information is available from any source about the means through which he entered the foreign service. He also lived for two years in East Africa.

### MADRAS LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL MEMBER

In 1921 he returned to India.<sup>9</sup> In 1923 he was nominated as the member of the Madras Legislative Council. From that period he worked for the enhancement of the Depressed Classes. He also occupied an important post in the Non-Brahmin Justice Party. In 1924 on the request of his wife he brought about a resolution in the Law Committee Meeting that the Depressed Classes could use the public roads, wells ,public places, buildings etc. The resolution came into the force in 1925. R.Srinivasan worked for the welfare of the Depressed Class people for more than 35 years. In recognition of his tremendous services, he was awarded the title, 'Rao Sahib' on 20th February 1920 in the presence of R.C.Sitaramaiyar. In 1922 he represented the Depressed Classes in the Madras Legislature. In 1925 he wrote a book in Tamil, called, 'Alaya Pravesam' where in he chalked out a programme for the entry of Depressed Classes into the Brahmanical Temples of Tamil Nadu.<sup>11</sup>

### POLITICAL CARREER

R. Srinivasan was the renowned leader of the Depressed. Classes in the 19th and 20th Century Tamil Nadu. For a while, the Depressed Class Politics of Tamil Nadu mainly centered mainly around him. For a number of the years, the government had been carrying on the ameliorative works for the upliftment of the Depressed Classes by giving the free grants of lands, facilities for education etc. In 1919 the British Government created a separate department called, The Labour Department to look after the ameliorative works of the Depressed Classes. The Labour appointed District Labour Officers and these officers were almost like Deputy Collectors. As experienced revenue officials, they did remarkable services for the Depressed Classes.<sup>12</sup>

R. Srinivasan insisted the allotment of lands to the Depressed Classes. He mooted the land revenue motion in the Madras Legislature. He highlighted that among the 1,000 Depressed Class Members who applied for Revenue Inspectors post only two were appointed. The post of Revenue Inspector was an important one in the villages.

In spite of the recommendation of the Head of the Department, the Subordinate Officers of the

Government did not appoint Depressed Class members in the service. He advocated that the post of Revenue Inspectors should be given to Depressed Classes.<sup>13</sup>

R.Srinivasan demanded the Government to appoint honorary Sub -Registrars to a group of about 20 (or) 25 villages. He viewed that in the rural areas several poor people borrowed money from the money lenders or employers due to their poverty. The money lenders provided little money to the Depressed Class people but compelled the latter to sign documents for a larger sum under the security of their huts and other assets. They also compelled some of their friends as witness to sign the documents. In order to put an end to this ill, a bill entitled, 'Madras Illiterate Attestation Bill' was introduced. Because of the bill in about 20 (or) 25 villages honorary Sub-Registrars were appointed.<sup>14</sup>

The local body administration was strengthened to take care of the grants which was sanctioned for the Depressed Classes and the members of the Local Administration was expected to act as representatives of the Depressed Classes. But these representatives in practice, did not attend the interest of the Depressed Classes. He accused that there was no possibility of getting any sympathy of the Caste Hindus for the Depressed Classes. The demand of the Depressed Classes was to be considered by the Government.<sup>15</sup>

Srinivasan wanted the need of swaraj to remove the untouchability in India. There is no any punishment on earth worse than the practice of untouchability. He remarked thus: "A man may even be hanged and be done with but untouchability is intolerable. We all know that this is the crime in this country and we also know that equal rights and privileges are accorded to all communities in the other countries which enjoy self government . It is useless giving more responsibility without empowering the Depressed Classes."<sup>16</sup>

#### POONA PACT

The Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha demanded separate electorate for Depressed Classes in the Madras presidency. The plea for separate electorate for the Depressed Classes was turned down by the Simon Commission. B.R.Ambedkar and R.Srinivasan reopened the issue at the Round Table Conferences but the Congress and Gandhi were against. The Depressed Class Leaders insisted reservation of seats in the Madras Legislative Council and representation was to be given to them in proportion to their population.<sup>17</sup>

At the First Round Table Conference held on November 12, 1930 B.R.Ambedkar and R.Srinivasan represented the Depressed Classes. They laid down certain demands like equal citizenship, adequate representation in the cabinet and special departmental care of the Depressed Classes.<sup>18</sup>

Gandhi was against the demand of separate electorate to the Depressed Classes. On September 20, 1932 Gandhi commenced his fast unto death as a protest against the grant of separate electorate to the Depressed Classes. The problem arose about the life of Gandhi. Hence, Madhan Mohan Malaviya arranged a conference where the leaders of both the Caste Hindus and the Depressed Classes were invited. They met in Poona. R.Srinivasan and Ambedkar were invited to this conference. After lengthy talks, they arrived at and signed an agreement. The Poona Pact was signed between Gandhi and B.R.Ambedkar. In that Pact, the Depressed Classes got many privileges. By that, the Depressed Classes were given representation in the legislature and other demands were granted to them.<sup>19</sup>

The Poona Pact was a gift to the Depressed Classes with regard to their socio-economic and political upliftment. The Caste Hindus and the Congress advocated temple entry and eradication of untouchability . Gandhi started Harijan, newspaper, Harijan Sevak Sangh, and even made All India Harijan Tour. He called the Depressed Class People as 'Harijans' (children of Lord Hari) The Poona Pact of 1932 formed the basis for the Constitution of India incorporating some guarantees for the Depressed Class Section of society. The Pact also agreed the provide educational facilities and finance to every state to educate the Depressed Classes As a representative of the Madras Presidency Depressed Classes Federation, R.Srinivasan played an remarkable part in the making of the Poona Pact

#### As a Social Reformer

R. Srinivasan worked very hard for the improvement of the condition of the Adi-Dravidas, and also evinced keen interest in social service to their welfare activities. He dedicated his life for their cause.

The Colonial British Government took steps to remove untouchability .When the Untouchable Removable Bill was debated in the Council, R.Srinivasan said , that the removal of untouchability is not in the hands of the oppressed but is was on the oppressors, the Swarajists and the Congressmen, dominated by the Caste-Hindus.<sup>21</sup>

If they are earnest Srinivasan recommended to those great men such as Jayakar, Malaviya and other caste-Hindu Leaders, to introduce a bill in the Central Legislative Assembly and pass it into law that untouchability shall be a public offence punishable with rigorous imprisonment without option of fine and he challenged the Swarajists to do this. He always insisted upon education to the Depressed Classes.

#### Sufficient Facilities

R.Srinivasan questioned about the insufficient lighting facilities of the sheds and compound provided for the depots at Nagapatanam and Dhanushkodi. He viewed that the emigrants were suffering from Cholera and other epidemic diseases. He questioned about the cookery vessels and the ways they were cooked because he felt that the diseases spread through the improperly cooked rice.

### ROLE OF INDIANS IN AGRICULTURAL DEPARTMENT

R.Srinivasan demanded that the agricultural department should be in the hands of the Indians as the Indians are tillers and producers in their soil. The land owners sent their sons to agricultural colleges not with the object of gaining knowledge in agriculture and to improve their own lands and cultivation but to pass examinations and secure jobs under Government. He wanted a rule that should deny jobs to them in government service. The land owners, can afford, large sums on education of their sons. They should not compete with the landless poor classes and place them at a disadvantage. He felt that the disadvantages could be minimized and the unemployment problem solved if the land owning classes were denied government jobs.<sup>24</sup>

### SEPARATE SCHOOLS

R.Srinivasan recommended that the Government should start separate schools for the Depressed Classes. He stressed that the Government should not wait for untouchability to be removed because they can never be eradicated if separate schools are not provided at least upto the higher elementary standards. The Government can ameliorate the condition of the Depressed Classes. One of the objects of establishing the Labour Department was to open of separate schools for the Depressed Class pupils. Owing to want of proper supervision, the schools of the department were neglected and some hundreds of them had to be closed. Later on, the Government passed orders that these Depressed Class Pupils should be admitted in local board schools and all schools should be open for them.

### NEED OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

There were Christian Missionaries in the field to educate the Depressed Class children. They were there to propagate their religion. If the Government gave the Depressed Classes with proper facilities for their education, they would not depend upon the help of missionary bodies. Moreover, a number of Depressed Class pupils who went to mission schools were converted to the Christianity and the conversion of them increasing day by day. Srinivasan was not encouraging these missionary schools but he wanted only the government schools. He demanded free education to children of the Depressed Classes.<sup>25</sup>

### COMPULSORY EDUCATION

Srinivasan wanted the introduction of compulsory education and special aid to the Depressed Classes children in board elementary schools, private schools and aided schools. These children in schools be provided with one meal, midday meal. He also advocated the teachers in these school needed encouragement by way of increased pay. In aided schools the children who were kept in one and the same class for over a period of five years in order to show the numerical strength of school to gain grants. This sort of stagnation should be cleared and apathetic attitude towards the education of these unfortunate classes be ended.<sup>26</sup>

### TITLES

During his membership of the Madras Legislative Council from 1923 to 1938, he secured served amenities and educational facilities for the Depressed Class as a reward for his services to his community. He was conferred the title of 'Diwan Bahadur' by the British Government. <sup>27</sup> When Rajaji was the Chief-Minister of the Madras State, Thiru.Vi .Kalyasundaram awarded him the title of 'Dravidamani'. R.Srinivasan must be reckoned as a grant political, educational and social reformer of the Twentieth

Century Tamil Nadu. Having served the cause of the Depressed Classes, he passed away in the year 1945. He was undoubtedly a forerunner who strove for the human rights of the subaltern, subterranean and submerged people of the Tamil Nadu.

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