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ORGANISATIONS OF DEPRESSED CLASSES IN LATE COLONIAL TAMIL NADU

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Abstract:-The Depressed Classes occupied the lowest stratum in the Tamil Society. They were segregated and confined to the outskirts of villages and they were denied the basic civic rights which were essential for their survival as dignified human beings. They were allowed to live in the society without rights. They were in the Hindu Society but out of the Society. Hence they were called 'Outcastes' or 'Fifth Varna'. Their frontline leaders Iyothee Thass, R.Srinivasan, M.C.Rajah, P.V.Subramaniam, V.G.Vasudeva Pillai, J. Shivashanmugam Pillai, R. Veeraiyan, Gurusami and others realised to form organizations in order to attain the civic rights necessary for the Depressed People. Before starting the organizations, the Depressed Class leaders integrated their people, brought awareness, provided representations to the Government, ventilated their grievances through humble petitions and were nominated to the Central and Madras Legislatures. The paper attempts to highlight the organizational attempts of the Depressed Class leaders in late colonial period of Tamil Nadu. Through their organisations, their leaders analysed the political issues of the days, started newspapers which awakened the people towards claiming their social, economic and political rights. Their efforts were successful to some extent because the British Government backed their cause by passing many laws, providing the basic amenities and opening the labour schools, nominating them to the legislative and local bodies.

Keywords:Depressed Classes, Rights, Organisation, Adi-Dravida, Paraiya, Panchama, Arundhatiyar, Valluva, Dravida, Sabha, Sangam

INTRODUCTION:

Advaidananda Sabha, 1870

The earliest organization associated with the Depressed Classes was Advaidananda Sabha, established by C.Iyothee Thass at Nigiris in 1870. He had two-fold objectives; one, opposition to the proselytizing activities of the Christian Missionaries and two, to explore the emancipatory potentials of Advaitic tradition by undermining varna and caste discriminations. Later in 1881, he sought to intervene in the census process and demanded that the Aboriginal and Depressed Communities be recorded as 'Original Tamils' or 'Adi-Tamils' or 'Poorva Tamizhrgal' and this was followed by a Declaration in 1886 that the original inhabitants of this area were not Hindus.

Adi- Dravida Mahajana Sabha

Some learned scholars, businessmen and social workers from the Depressed Class Community, formed an organization called "Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha" in Chennai on 22nd December 1892.²This organization was formally registered under Act XXI of 1860 as "The Madras Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha". This Sabha was the pioneer socio-political organization of Depressed Classes. It was organised to raise the social, moral and intellectual status of the Depressed Classes. It integrated all the Associations of the Depressed Classes, and registered on November 8, 1928 as "The All India Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha". The Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha was constituted on the basis of a constitution, which was drawn up on democratic lines.³The Sabha had hundreds of branches, located in the rural areas. Membership to the Sabha was open to individuals belonging to any Depressed Class and who had reached eighteen years of age. The Executive Committee took the responsibility of implementing the resolutions passed in the Conferences and forwarded them to the Government for

favourable action. The branches of the Sabha were affiliated to the Head Office and there were several units all over Tamil Nadu.⁶ The Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha maintained a Service Army and a Scout Wing for regulating its affairs. The Service Army was a special wing of the Sabha and the members were mostly young people. The Service Army was entrusted with the responsibility of safe-guarding the rights and interests of the Depressed Classes. It was also the task of this Army to arrange agitations and demonstrations. The Headquarters of the Sabha was at Nungambakkam in Chennai.

The major objectives of this Sabha were designed to develop the Depressed Classes. The Sabha was an eye-opener to the Depressed Classes. The Sabha decided to organise their own people and to educate them in proper manner. In order to uplift their people, the Sabha came forward to publish journals, books and pamphlets on various subjects such as political, social, scientific, and economic and literature. The Sabha encouraged the intellectuals and scholars to publish their works on various fields. The office bearers of the Sabha were entrusted with the work of organizing and holding public meetings at various places on many burning issues before the Depressed Classes. To make the illiterate Depressed Class aware of their own deplorable condition, the Sabha planned to open and maintain libraries and free reading rooms and night schools. With these objectives, the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha was organised to enable the members to participate in its activities.

The frontline leaders who worked for the formation and successful functioning of the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha were P.V. Subramaniam (1859-1936), R. Srinivasan (1860-1945), P.M. Madurai Pillai (1858-1913), M.C. Rajah (1863-1947), R. Veeraiyan (1882-1938), and J. Shiva Shanmugam Pillai (1901-1975).

P.V. Subramaniam was the Life President of the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha.⁹ The very desire of P.V. Subramaniam was that all the Depressed Class should have basic education. He encouraged them by offering financial assistance to go to schools. He himself started schools and underwrote the expenditure for conducting meetings and conferences to awaken the Depressed Classes. He attempted to remove the hurdles faced by the Depressed Classes in day to day activities by making appeals to the Governor and Viceroy. The next notable champion of the cause of the Depressed Classes was R. Srinivasan (1860-1945). He regularly visited the Settlements of the Depressed Classes and awakened them to realize the necessity of education, to be hygienic, wear clean dress and give up eating dead animals. In 1892, he started a newspaper, Paraiyan, to ventilate the grievances of his men. He suggested ways and means for their amelioration and fought for his people. In recognition of his selfless services, he was awarded the title of Rao Sahib on 20th February 1926.

R. Veeraiyan, another Leader of the Depressed Class from the Kongu Region, led his people inside the post offices and other public places to which they were forbidden entry by tradition. He laboured a lot for his people through the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha and participated in many of its activities. Equal to the services of R. Srinivasan, M.C. Rajah worked for the Depressed Classes. Since his early days, he rendered service as the Secretary of the State Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha. His book, 'Oppressed Hindus (1925),' ventilated the hardships of the Depressed Classes and prescribed ways for their elevation. He succeeded in persuading Paddison, the first Labour Commissioner, to preside over the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha Conference which was held at Chidambaram.¹² He was the first to put forward the suggestion for Separate Electorates for the Depressed Classes. Later he changed his stand in favour of Joint Electorates.

During the late Nineteenth and the early Twentieth Centuries, the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha served as a beacon of light to guide the Depressed Classes. The Sabha was an instrument which drew the attention of the Government towards the plight of the Depressed Classes. It fought against the social atrocities perpetrated on the Depressed Classes. It was a very popular organization representing a major portion of the Depressed Classes. The Sabha organized periodical Conferences in Madras as well as in the Districts. These Conferences were presided over by eminent public personalities who worked for the uplift of Depressed Classes. These personalities included not only leaders from the Depressed Class but also the public spirited leaders from other castes. The Sabha made frequent representation to the Government through their petitions and memoranda for the redress of their grievances.³

The Sabha demanded a legislation to punish those who ridiculed the Depressed Class by calling them by their caste name. As education was considered a key to the path of social progress, the Sabha vehemently opposed the indifferent attitude of the Caste Hindus towards the education of Depressed Classes and requested the Government to open schools at the settlements of Depressed Classes. The Sabha pleaded for the proper representation of the Depressed Classes in the Local Bodies like Village Panchayats and Municipalities. To protect the civic rights of the Depressed Classes, the Sabha demanded that the Depressed Class people should not be prevented from drawing water for drinking purpose from the public wells and tanks. These views, grievances, expectations and aspirations were published in different journals.¹⁴ The Sabha, while expressing its opinion on "The Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms" of 1918, observed that we should particularly protest against education being vested in the hands of Ministers who would look after only the interests of their respective communities.

The Leaders of Depressed Class like M.C. Rajah spearheaded the move to change the nomenclature of the Paraiyas into Adi-Dravidas. In fact, as early as 1892, the Depressed People had been agitating for this change. In 1917, a Deputation of the Leaders of Depressed Classes presented a Memorandum to E.S. Montagu and Chelmsford asking for a change in the name of Paraiyas. In 1922, M.C. Rajah, while moving a resolution for the change in the nomenclature of the Depressed Classes, made a forceful and powerful speech advancing valid arguments in support of his plea. 'Paraiya' and 'Panchama', the terms denoting the Depressed People, according to M.C. Rajah, were nothing but the references to denote the Outcaste People. He argued that the Depressed Class were the original inhabitants and the preservers of the original Adi-Dravidan Civilization.¹⁵ The Resolution was carried on 20 January 1922 and the Government issued an order on 25 March 1922 directing the use of the

term 'Adi-Dravida' in Tamil Districts and the term 'Adi-Andhra' in Telugu Districts in the place of names like Panchama and Paraiya.¹⁶ It was not fully enforced until 1924.

The Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha under the leadership of M.C.Rajah agitated for adequate representation for the Depressed Classes in the Legislative Council and Local Bodies. The Sabha vehemently opposed the principle of nomination of members to the Council. The Sabha demanded Communal Representation in the State Legislature, the Central Assembly, and the Council of States and requested the Governor to establish a Separate Department to look after the welfare of the Depressed Classes.

In May 1926, the Tenth Conference of the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha was held in Madras under the Presidentship of R.Veeraiyan and it urged the Governor of Madras to appoint a Commission to investigate the condition of the Depressed People. In the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha meeting held in Madras in 1928, a number of resolutions were passed by which the total attention of the Government was drawn towards the pathetic condition of the Depressed Classes. It reiterated its earlier demand that the term Adi-Dravida should be used and that more members of the Depressed Classes should be appointed by the Government. The Twelfth Conference of the Sabha was held at Madras in 1929 which appealed to the Government to appoint a member of the Depressed Class to represent the Indian Labour Conference. The Conference urged the Government to take immediate steps for the creation of Separate Departments in all the Provinces to implement the ameliorative measures for the welfare of the Depressed Classes. It also requested the Government to appoint a Separate Commission to look into the problems of Depressed Classes.¹⁷ Due to the vigorous activities of the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha, the Paraiyahs of Northern Tamil Nadu were intensely awakened. They co-operated with their leaders to gain political advantages.

Dravida Mahajana Sabha

C.Iyothee Thass, a Paraiyah by birth, was a great Tamil Scholar. His writings reveal him as a person well acquainted with Sanskrit, Pali and English. He was well versed in the philosophical thoughts of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity. He founded Dravida Mahajana Sabha in 1891 at Nilgiris. He emerged as the Leader of the Depressed Classes and worked strongly against the practice of caste system and the atrocities committed on the helpless Depressed People. The Sabha stressed equal treatment to the Subaltern People in public places, and demanded reservation in job opportunities and concessions and facilities in education for the upliftment of the Depressed Class. The Conference of the Dravida Mahajana Sabha was held on 1st December 1891 at Ooty. Ten resolutions were passed. They were as follows:

1. There is no basis to call this community the Paraiyahs. But still, they are addressed contemptuously as Paraiyah, offending their sentiments. Besides, illiterate and uncouth individuals, calling those rich in education, culture and wealth, contemptuously as Paraiyahs, causes deep hurt to the latter and actually degrades them. Therefore, a law should be enacted so that those who address them contemptuously as Paraiyahs would be brought within the ambit of crime of defamation/ slander.
2. In order to facilitate the poor of the community to progress, special schools for them may be organized, teachers from this community be appointed and the pupils' fee be reduced to half.
3. That three among the pupils of this community, who pass out of the Matriculation Entry Examination, be chosen for scholarship.
4. That those who pass out successfully be supported by employing them in the Government Offices of Tamil Nadu.
5. That there be no obstacle to their employment to any position, according to their education and good moral character.
6. That in Municipal Corporation and Village Associations, even though not capable of paying much tax, representatives be chosen by this community, on the basis of education and character and co-opted so that they could speak with knowledge about the communities' problems and difficulties.
7. That the present arrangement in jails, of making the Parayars do all the lowly jobs, according to rule 464 of Jail Code, be changed.
8. That this community be allowed access to all the common wells and tanks of this country without any obstacle.
9. That prohibitions against the members of this community to enter or sit in those offices and courts where Hindus are employed, be removed and that petitions they bring be received inside the offices and prompt justice be meted out to them.
10. That in those villages where the community is in majority, responsible persons be employed in Munsif and Manikaran Offices and when the Collector visits the villages, direct access to them be granted, for obtaining justice.

Thus the Ten Resolutions demanded civic rights, educational concessions, removal of certain objectionable rules in the Jail Manual, economic advancement of Depressed Classes, due share in the appointment in Government Services, including that of village offices.¹⁹ A copy of the Ten Resolutions was sent to M. Veera Raghava Achariyar who was then the General –Secretary of INC. The INC did not send any reply to the Dravida Mahajana Sabha.

To create awareness among the Depressed Classes, Iyothee Thass registered one weekly news magazine, Oru Paisa Tamizhan, under the number M.673, on 6 June 1907 at Rayapettah in Madras.²⁰ He launched it on 19 June 1907 and printed it at the Buddhist Press of one Adimoolam. Oru Paisa Tamizhan became simply Tamizhan and came to acquire its own printing press, the Gautama Press, through a generous contribution from the Marikuppam –Kolar Branch Society, on 26 August 1908.²¹

Iyothee Thass was involved in the educational efforts of the Depressed Classes. His meeting and association with

Henry Steele Olcott was indeed a happy coincidence and became instrumental in the organization of Olcott Free Panchama Schools in Madras.²² He invited Miss Mary Sarah and Palmor from America for the opening of the schools at Kodambakkam (1898), Teynampet (1899), Mylapore (1901) and Krishnampet (1901) in Madras. He preached Buddhism, morality and education among the Depressed Class. He strongly opposed the conversion of the tea estate labourers in Ooty.

After the demise of Iyothee Thass, John Ratnam and T.M. Nair looked after the entire works of the Dravida Mahajana Sabha between 1914 and 1917. This organization was the outcome of split in the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha. The split took place when the caste name, Paraiyah was changed to Adi-Dravida. The Sabha was organized from Madras, and it collected an admission fee of Rupees three from each member.²³ It was opened to all Depressed Classes with certain conditions. The members of the Sabha protested against calling one section of the Paraiyahs as Adi-Dravidas and they cited the Memorandum given by the Dravida Mahajana Sangam, Rangoon, formerly the Branch of the Paraiyah Mahajana Sabha, to the Viceroy in 1917,²⁴ claiming themselves to be Dravidians. It was V.G.Vasudeva Pillai, who submitted this Memorandum. A 'Signature Campaign' was organised in the South Arcot, North Arcot and Chengleput Districts, opposing the move to call the Panchamas as Adi-Dravidas in Tamil Districts and Adi-Andhras in Telugu Districts.²⁵ These men demanded that they may be called 'Dravidas'.²⁶ The Government's stand then was to call any person of the community by the name it preferred.

The Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha and the Dravida Mahajana Sabha were the two associations which actively conducted periodical meetings independently and protested against the granting of Home Rule. The two organizations were keen on Social Reform other than Constitutional Advancement.²⁷ The Leaders of the Sabha viewed that unless and until caste distinctions were removed and the Depressed Classes were treated better, India could not dream of either Self Government or Home Rule. In 1917, Sabha passed a Resolution stating that the immediate grant of Home Rule to India could be injurious to the masses of India in general and to the Depressed Classes in particular.²⁸

In 1917, the Leaders of the Dravida Mahajana Sabha decided to merge with the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha. The Amalgamation Meeting was held at Spur Tank Road, Chetput, Chennai. It was arranged by John Ratnam and M.C. Rajah. T.M.Nair, in his Special Address, noted the union between the Non Brahmins and Depressed People and recollected the ancient glory of the Depressed Classes.²⁹

On 24 October 1917, at a meeting held at Sambudass Street, Chennai, the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha and Paraiyah Mahajana Sabha were merged. The Editor of Dravida Pandian, John Ratnam, presided over the function to mark the union. In the meeting, leaders like M.C.Rajah, Madurai Pilai, Munisami Pillai and many others participated and expressed their happiness over the union of the two major organizations of the Depressed Classes and also spoke about various needs of the Depressed Classes, especially the entry of their pupils into various Hindu educational institutions and starting of new schools for the students of Depressed Class.³⁰

The Dravida Mahajana Sabha integrated with the Adi-Dravidas under the able guidance of C. Iyothee Thass and the Sabha also instilled among the Paraiyahs the feeling of the Adi-Dravidas, the early Dravidas and Adi-Tamils.

A.V.Panchama Charity Institution

In 1882, the A.V. Panchama Charity Institution was established. The objective of the Institution was to uplift Panchamas through the establishment of free educational institutions, co-operative societies, panchayats etc. O.Rajavelu Chetty was Secretary and Lady Hannah Arokianathan was the Superintendent of Panchama Charity Institution.³¹ This philanthropic institution gave timely monetary help to the needy Panchamas and paved the way for their elevation.

Paraiyar Mahajana Sangam

In 1891, Paraiyar Mahajana Sangam was founded. Rettaimalai Srinivasan was the founder of the Paraiyar Mahajana Sangam. The first meeting was held at Wesleyan Mission, Royapettai, on 2³ December 1893. The second meeting was held at Victoria Hall on 7th August 1895. These meetings claimed the historic rights of the Depressed Classes.³² The Sangam also worked for the emancipation of the Paraiyahs from many ills in the society. Its founder, by starting the Paper, Parayan, brought about political and civic awareness among the Depressed Classes.

DEPRESSED CLASS MISSION

Depressed Class Mission was established in Mangalore in 1907. The object of the Mission was to ameliorate the condition of the Panchama Classes and other Backward People. The object of the Mission was achieved through starting schools and other institutions for promoting education, industry, economy and temperance among the Depressed People and by helping them to build their own houses. The Mission was founded and organized by K.Ranga Rao who handed over the Management to the Servants of India Society. The Mission had under its Management nine free day schools for boys and girls; nine night schools for young men; a special English school for teachers and old students; a free boarding house; an industrial workshop; a co-operative credit society; nine centres for promoting temperance, economy and social service; and "colonies" for houseless families. V.S.Srinivasa Sastri, M.S.Ekambara Rao and A.B. Shetty acted as Secretary, Treasurer and Joint-Secretary respectively.³³ This Mission spread educational knowledge and moral values among the Depressed People and

brought about changes among them.

Depressed Class Mission Society

Depressed Class Mission Society was another organization established in 1909. It was located at 97, Anna Pillai Street, George Town, Madras. The object of this Mission was to elevate the social and moral condition of the Backward Classes by promoting education, providing work, remedying their social disabilities and preaching to them higher ideals of religion, morality, personal character and good citizenship. G. Narayanaswami Chetti was the Secretary of the Mission.³⁴ As a service oriented Society, it organized a lot of ameliorative works which raised the conditions of the Depressed Classes to a large extent.

Organizations of the Pallas

The issue of Caste Exclusiveness raised by the European Christian Missionaries and emigrants caught the imagination of 'polluting castes' of Tamil Nadu. The religious converts and repatriates awakened the Pallas, a division of Depressed Classes. Bhu Vaishya Indira Kula Sangam was the first organized effort of such awakened Pallas. The Founder of this Sangam was Perumal Peter who was an emigrant and organized the first Conference of the Pallas in 1922. Representatives from 150 villages of Ramanathapuram District met at Sengottaipatti in Muthukulathur Taluk. This Caste Conference urged the Subaltern Class to give up the caste related obligations such as drum beating, beating the breast by women from the Depressed Class in funerals arranged by Caste Hindus. The Sangam was formally registered in 1923.

In the Legislative Council, some nominated seats were reserved for the Depressed Classes, Adi-Dravida and Adi-Andhra. The Pallas lived in large number in Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu and they organized a Conference of Devendra Kula Mahajana Sabha on 23 April 1924 in Settidayanpatti, Ramnad District. They requested the Government for their representation in the Legislative Council.³⁶ In the Conference, they called their organization Devendra Kula Mahajana Sabha under the leadership of S. Subramaniya Moopnar, a member of Taluk Board, Tiruchirappalli and Palani Andi Havildar. This Sabha functioned for the welfare of the Pallas. The Sabha wanted the Government to provide separate wells for them as they were not beef eaters. Other demands were related to political, economic and social welfare of their community.

In the context of Great Economic Depression, the Pallas of Tirunelveli gave vent to their grievances through Indira Kulathiba Vellalar Aikya Sangam which was set up in 1933. The objectives of the Sangam were: (a) to protect their kinsmen from caste oppression; (b) to create awareness amongst them to pursue education; and (c) to motivate them to pursue trade and business and to lobby for basic physical facilities in Pallar Villages. The Sangam became defunct shortly after its birth. This was because of the repression let loose by oppressive Zamindars of Tirunelveli. The organizations of the Pallas brought their grievances to the Rulers and exposed their pathetic conditions. Their organizations worked for the cause and interest of the Pallas who lived in large number in Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu.

Arundhatiya Mahajana Sabha

Like the Paraiyahs and Pallas among the Depressed Classes, the Telugu Speaking Arundhatiyars of Madras City started their own association. Their leader, L.C. Gurusami, established Arundhatiya Mahajana Sabha in 1920 at Komaleeswaranpet, Madras, to cater to the needs of his people. Gurusami was a significant personality, and after his death, the Sabha lost its vital function because this community was unable to produce a capable leader like Gurusami.³⁹ The Sabha insisted that the Arundhatiyas were the Telugu Speaking minority people who were also Depressed Class, and hence they demanded special privileges to their people. It brought awakening among them about the basic civic necessities.

Madras Valluvar Mahajana Sangam 1935

This Sangam was started in 1935 and represented the cause of Valluvas. The field of specialisation of Valluvas was astrology and native medicine.⁴⁰ The first Provincial Conference was held on 15 September 1935. Resolutions were passed demanding representation in Local and Provincial Bodies and greater representation in public services and chances in educational field. In successive Conferences, they passed resolutions demanding preferential treatment and greater representation. The Sangam also requested opportunities in public services. In 1955, the name of this Sangam was changed as South India Valluvar Mahajana Sangam, Madras.⁴¹ This Sangam brought about unity among the Valluvas, a Priestly Class among the Depressed Classes. The scattered Valluvas in different Districts were brought together and it was a major achievement of this Sangam.

Thus a great awakening among the different sections of Depressed Classes has been recorded in history. The Non Brahmins also were awakened and received due recognition in the form of patronage extended by the British. The lukewarm attitude of the Indian National Congress (INC) towards the Depressed Classes, compelled them to shift their loyalty towards the British in whom they had found a Saviour and Protector. As their interest was well looked after by the Labour Department, a brain-child of the British Government, the jealous Justicites began to show their animosity towards every welfare activity of the Untouchables. As a consequence, the Untouchable Leaders openly criticized and launched virulent attack on the policies, manners and selfish motives of the Justice Party and its leaders. Even though the British were pre-occupied with imperialist designs, they did not neglect this oppressed section of the society. Due to the extension of the British Support, the political

movement of the Untouchables gradually detached itself from the Non Brahmin Movement, especially the Justice Party with which it was associated for years.

Depressed Class Service Army

The Depressed Class Service Army was organized on 25th October 1931 in Madras. Its President was T. Sundararao Naidu and the Secretary was S.P.I. Balagurusivam. The organisers were P. Selvanatham and J. Shivashanmugam Pillai. It organised a meeting at Chindaripet on 8 November 1931, in which the aims of the organization were clearly announced. They were as follows:

1. It was not an organization to promote the caste system.
2. It aimed at the attainment of liberty, liberation and reform measures from the Government through passive ways.
3. It was an organization to fight against those parties and organizations who worked against the interests of the Depressed Classes.
4. It was an organization to back the leaders who were interested in the promotion of the interests of the Depressed Classes.
5. It was an organization to fight against the leaders who, in the name of Depressed Classes, promoted their own interest.
6. This organization was determined to oppose any leader or organization that instigated division between the Depressed Classes and Caste-Hindus in the name of religion.
7. The other aim of this organization was to leave the religious people to their own ways of worship, and to prevent the Depressed People from entering the Temples of the Caste Hindus and Brahmanical Temples.
8. It did not like to involve itself in the issues of theists and atheists.
9. To attain the liberation of the Depressed Classes, the Organisation was determined to fight against the practice of varnashrama dharma, the orthodox Brahmins, and unjust religious leaders.
10. It aimed to create unity among the different sections of the Depressed Classes and to attain it to a larger extent.

On 28th February 1932, in a meeting of the Depressed Classes at Napiar Park, Chennai, B.R. Ambedkar delivered an address insisting on the liberation of the Depressed Classes from the social taboos. Shivashanmugam Pillai and S.P.I. Balagurusivam welcomed Ambedkar and viewed the arrival of Ambedkar to have given a new strength to the Depressed Classes.⁴³ In another meeting held under the auspices of Depressed Class Service Army on 14 July 1932, the services of J. Shivashanmugam Pillai for the Depressed Class, were appreciated. In the subsequent meetings, M.C. Rajah, N. Sivaraj and a host of other Depressed Class leaders participated and analysed the political situation which emerged following the Separate Electorate in the 1930s.⁴⁵ In the meetings of this organization, all the Depressed Class leaders of various political parties attended and mobilized their people towards their liberation.

Thus the Depressed Classes were awakened and guided by their leaders and organisations. The activities of these leaders were integrated through socio-political organizations. Iyothee Thass was a pioneer leader of the Depressed Classes, who attempted to elevate his people by founding the Dravida Mahajana Sabha and some Buddhist Associations. The role of R. Srinivasan and M.C. Rajah was equally important and they also worked for the elevation of the Depressed Classes, both in the legislative forum and in the public life.

END NOTES

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