

The Origin And Growth Of Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha

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ABSTRACT

Manu also holds that the four varnas proceeded from the limbs of the creator. According to Manu Smrti, the four varnas are Brahmanas, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras.” As far as history is concerned they are born to suffer socially, economically and politically. They were treated worse than animals. Their miseries were enhanced by the code of the devilish Manu Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, one of India’s prodigies has said, “He (Manu) prescribes such heavy sentences as cutting off the tongue or pouring. They just existed physically and it is not an exaggeration to say that even their breathing was controlled by the so called high class people. Narayana Guru, born as Ezhava founded the Travancore Ezhava Sabha. The untouchables created the Pulaya Maha Sabha. The Nambudiris created the Yoga kshema Sabha. Since this dissertation deals with the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha during 1892-1947 the facts and figures fall within this period. The castes were grouped into the Brahmin, the Sudra and the Panchama.” The Census Report of 1931 contained an exhaustive list of eighty six castes among the Untouchable Panchamas. The British rule also made the so called caste Hindus, The depressed class people envied the dog like animals for they were very close to the so called high caste Hindu.

KEY WORDS: Manusmrti, Four Varnas, Depressed class, Sudra, Pachama, Dravida Maha Sabha, Munsif Maniyakaran, Dr.Ambedkar, Untouchability, English Education.

Before analyzing the origin and growth and Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha it is essential and inevitable to know the real condition of the Adi-Dravidas in the Indian civilization. According to the Varna Dharma there are four classes in the society. Shyam Sunder Nigam Says that “the social regulation of Varnasramadharma was so compact that the origin of varnas was dedicated to divine origin. In Purusha Sukta of Rig Veda, Brahmanas are represented the mouth of Purusha, the Rajaayas his arms, the Vaisya his thighs and Sudra his feet. Manu also holds that the four varnas proceeded from the limbs of the creator.

According to Manu Smrti, the four varnas are Brahmanas, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras.” But where does the depressed class stand in the social hierarchy. Is it below the ‘feet. The answer is ‘yes’ according to J. Siva shanmugam Pillai. He says: “The lines of division which mark off the depressed classes from the rest of the Hindus are clear and unmistakable. Roughly, all those Hindus who are outside the pale of the four varnas, or castes whose touch or proximity carries pollution and those whose occupations are considered unclean and impure, constitute the depressed classes.”

History is impartial and is replete with facts about the atrocities the depressed class has undergone in the Hindu society. As far as history is concerned they are born to suffer socially, economically and politically. Their social status has landed them in illiteracy and ignorance comparatively speaking.

The depressed class is worse than the Sudras. One cannot bear the miseries the Sudras has borne in the Varna system. They were treated worse than animals. Their miseries were enhanced by the code of the devilish Manu. Speaking about

the code of Manu, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, one of India's prodigies has said, "He (Manu) prescribes such heavy sentences as cutting off the tongue or pouring of molten lead in the ears of the Sudra, who recites or hears the Veda." If such was the condition of the Sudra what would have been the condition of the depressed class. It is unimaginable! They just existed physically and it is not an exaggeration to say that even their breathing was controlled by the so called high class people.

The condition that prevailed in Malabar would bring before us the inhuman treatment the untouchables has undergone. Even their shade should not pollute the so called caste-Hindus. A particular distance as prescribed to stand or to walk among the caste hierarchy. "A Nair must keep 16 feet from a Nambudiri, and Ezhava 16 feet from a Nair and 32 feet from a Nambudiri and a Pulaiya 32 feet from the Ezhava, 48 feet from a Nair and 64 feet from a Nambudiri. Nayadis were unseeable." This naturally made each subordinate class to form its caste association to get social justice.

Narayana Guru, born as Ezhava founded the Travancore Ezhava Sabha. Following this the Nair Service Society was founded by Mannath Padmanabhan "not only to further the interests of the caste it represented but also to reform within by breaking down the divisions between sub-castes, thus welding it into a single community." The untouchables created the Pulaya Maha Sabha. The Nambudiris created the Yoga kshema Sabha.

Castes other than the depressed class did have many privileges socially, economically and politically and in spite of all these things they have started their associations to ventilate their 'grievance'. Depressed class which is grievance incarnate and woes incarnate after much suffering had thought of an organisation or association to make others realise that they are also human beings and that

they too have problems. Since this dissertation deals with the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha during 1892-1947 the facts and figures fall within this period.

“In the Madras Presidency, the castes were grouped into the Brahmin, the Sudra and the Panchama.” The term ‘Panchama’ denotes the ‘exterior castes’ or the depressed classes. The panchamas, who were a minority group at the lowest level of the social hierarchy were subjected to intolerable servitude. Originally panchamas were casteless, but unfortunately in course of time, they too developed their own castes. There was segregation even among these castes. The Census Report of 1931 contained an exhaustive list of eighty six castes among the Untouchable Panchamas. Since 1900, the Panchamas of the Madras Presidency have been known by different names like depressed classes, Adi-Dravidas, Scheduled Castes and Harijans.

Civilization abhors servitude of any kind. But India’s servitude was a blessing in disguise for the depressed class people since the British had brought some ‘hope’ for them to free themselves from the perennial social servitude and inhuman treatment. The British rule also made the so called caste Hindus, understand what humiliation and servitude were. The depressed class people envied the dog like animals for they were very close to the so called high caste Hindu. But they did not lose hope. They were gaining momentum to strike the social atrocity and as a first step the depressed class had started an organization called the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha in 1857 to face the problems.

It was formally registered in 1892 as the Madras Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha. Before starting this association the depressed classes ventilated their grievances through the humble petitions of 1779 and 1810 presented to the Administrator of Fort St. George, Madras. In the year 1891 the Dalits of the Madras Presidency formed an organization called “Dravida Maha Jana Sabha” and

a conference was held on 1st December 1891 at Ooty. Ten resolutions were passed demanding civil rights, educational concessions, removal of certain rules in the Jail Manual, economic advancement, share in the appointment in government service including the village officers and political rights.

Dravida Mahajana Sabha placed the following demands:

1. An Act may be enacted with provisions to punish that whoever expresses or addresses as 'Paraiyah' to ridicule the depressed classes should be deterently punished.
2. To ameliorate the depressed classes, eduction is most important. Hence separate schools may be established in every village with teachers belonging to depressed class. Half fee concession must be given to these students.
3. Three students among the students who passed the Matriculation may be selected and given scholarships for graduate studies.
4. All those students who have passed Matriculation may be halped by giving appointments in government offices.
5. There should not be any obstruction in giving appointments in various government offices according to the education and good conduct.
6. Proper representatives of the depressed classes may be appointed to make representation of the grievances of the depressed classes, in the village panchayats and the Municipal Councils in all the districts. Depressed class persons may be appointed irrespective of qualification of tax paying to the above posts, but they may be selected on the basis of educational qualifications and good conduct of the person. Equal respect and treatment should be given to the depressed class members in running the administration of the panchayats and municipalitie.
7. Rule 464 of the Jail Manual of the present days empowering authorities to make the 'paraiahs' to discharge all the menial jobs in the jails should be repealed.
8. Without any obstruction the depressed classes should be allowed to take water for drinking purposes from all the public wells and tanks.

9. The existing restrictions preventing the depressed classes from entering or sitting near the premises of the courts and offices where Hindus were employed should be abolished. These restrictions are not enforced where Englishmen are holding posts.
10. The depressed class persons who are having good conduct may be appointed in the post of village 'Munsif' and 'Mania Karan' in the villages which are predominantly occupied by the depressed classes. Further whenever the collectors visit the village, they must meet the depressed class people directly and hear their grievances and do justice.

Dalit leader Pandit C. Iyothi Dass lamented, "A copy of the resolutions was passed and sent to the National Congress for inclusion along with the Swatantra claims. The then General Secretary M. Veera Raghavachary acknowledge receipt of the same and intimated that details would be sent on a later date; but no reply was received by the 'Dravida Maha Jana Sabha' even after a lapse of 17 years. Instead of calling National Congress, they could be called as Bengalis' Caste Congress or Brahmin Congress.⁸

The demands put forth by the depressed class people did not fetch them the results they expected. So, more vigorous steps were taken by the depressed class people to force their views. They formally registered the Adi-Dravida Maha Jana Sabha in December 1892 under the XXI of 1860 as "The Madras Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha." But this Association was originally founded in 1857 and the name of the association was "Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha". The Madras Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha integrated all the associations of the depressed classes and registered on November 8, 1928 as "The All-India Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha". The Sabha had hundreds of branches located in the rural areas. Membership of the Sabha was open to individuals belonging to the depressed

classes who were above 18 years of age. The membership fee was one anna per head. The permanent organ of the Sabha was the Executive Committee which was elected at the meeting of the General Body of the Sabha which was held once in three years. The day-to-day work of the Sabha was carried on by the Secretaries, Treasurer and the General Secretary.

The depressed class felt the need of the following things to make others identify them and their problems.

1. To maintain and subsidise journals;
2. To publish books and pamphlets on political, social, scientific, economic and literary subjects;
3. To organise and hold public meetings; and
4. To start and maintain libraries from reading rooms, night schools and ritual meetings.

This organisation was an eye opener to the depressed class people. The aim of this organisation was “to organise their own people and to educate them in proper manner.” The leading figures behind the formation and functioning of this association were P.V. Subramaniam Pillai, M.C. Chinnathambi Pillai, M.C. Raja, R. Srinivasan, M.C. Madurai Pillai, R. Veeraian and J. Sivashanmugam Pillai. Associations similar to the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha were in existence in other parts of India also, particularly in Bengal and Malabar. In the Madras Presidency besides the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha, there were also such associations as the Madras Provincial Depressed Class Federation, Adi-Andha Mahasabha, Arunthathiyar Maha Sabha and Kerala Depressed Association. In addition to this certain labour unions also contained mostly people of the depressed classes.

Apart from the initiative taken by the depressed classes leaders, popular figures like G.A. Nathesan also contributed their service to bring light to the

gloomy condition of the depressed class people. G.A. Natesan, the Editor of the Indian Review delivered at the second session of the depressed classes conference held at Madras on July 8, 1911. He in his speech picturised the pathetic condition of the of the 50 million unfortunate depressed class people who were owning ignorance and poverty and branded as untouchables or unapproachables and who had been treated with contempt for the past one thousand years.

He also said that “without them agriculture would be impossible, the economy of Indian life would be most seriously upset and anything like an organised revolt by them on western lines will undoubtedly mean ruin to Indian society, and yet these people so useful, so serviceable, so indispensable, who toil day and night for the enrichment and the aggrandisement of the classes above them are regarded as untouchables.

They toil hard, sweat under the sun the whole day, and they rightly complain in these days of increased wages and prices, they get, more or less, the same wages which they obtained fifty years ago. “Hinduism which says with one breath that they belong to its fold, still seems to tell them that they are out of it. No wonder, therefore, that the active Christian Missionaries have succeeded in dragging to their fold several thousands of the depressed classes.

British rule and English Education have roused in us new aim, news aspirations and all those who are actively engaged in the great task of uplifting India are deeply alive to the fact that there can be no true uplift for the Indian nation unless and until the so called depressed classes rise with them". Natesan advised the depressed classes to resort to agitation on constitutional lines constantly.

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