



SOCIO-POLITICAL CHANGES FOR DEPRESSED CLASSES IN COLONIAL ERA

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Abstract: *The paper examines the temporal dimension of the 'cause-effect relationship' of socio-political changes which have taken place during different successive periods during colonial rule. The main thrust areas of this study has been impact of western education and culture, laws and policies during British rule, social movements and the notions of various contemporary thinkers who have been associated with this change.*

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INTRODUCTION

Colonial rule brought some important change in both the social and economic share for depressed classes. In ancient time and in medieval period the conditions of depressed classes were very critical. Then social status was at low level and their economic conditions were very critical because in this period brahminism, caste system, and Hinduism is at the very high level. So the social and economic position of the depressed society is at the low level in the society. And it was continued in various forms till the 18th century.

During the 19th century during British rule the condition of depressed class was not as worse as it was in ancient time and during Bhakti period. The emergence of British power made a lot of difference for down trodden people. They brought a sense of Liberty for the marginalized communities. The British strongly opposed the rituals as Sati Partha and unsociability. During this period, the depressed were known as untouchables and they were officially called as scheduled Castes. After independence the position of dalits has improved considerably due to constitutional provisions and after undertaken by the government spread of education and awareness. In colonial rule it led to some opportunities for education including English education for the lower caste it led to access to historical writings and to their own history but the efforts of the radical Bahujan and Dalit reformers from phule to periyar and Ambedkar remained a subordinate one.

EFFECTS FOR SOCIAL-POLITICAL UP LIFTMENT IN BRITISH RULE

Renaissance in India appeared during the beginning of nineteenth century. During this period, several efforts were made to liberate the people from the clutches of religious orthodoxy and to eradicate social and cultural evils. Several movements were launched especially by those who got western liberal education. Besides, the British government also undertook several measures to remove the prevailing evil practices. They also introduced the western education system which was based on western democratic ideas. Several of these efforts were directly aimed at improving the lot of the *dalits* while several others had indirectly contributed to improve their condition. Some of the important efforts during the pre-independence period are discussed in this section.



IMPACT OF WESTERN EDUCATION AND CULTURE

In 19th century, English education which was imparted with the view to popularize the western way of living and thinking transformed the mind of Indians. The spread of western liberal education triggered the process of social and cultural reforms and helped develop scientific and rational attitude, which was due to the study of English literature, philosophy and science. The British observed that in India *brahmins* alone were the custodians of imparting education, learning and knowledge and that the system of education in this country had become redundant. Therefore, they introduced the Western system of education in India. Although amongst the untouchables education came very late, but the spread of education changed their way of living and thinking. It also changed their socio-economic conditions.

In the earlier 19th century Raja Ram Mohan Roy founded the *Brahmo Samaj* and acknowledged the virtues of Western education, liberal outlook and legal institutions. Dr. Ambedkar also admired the English education and held that “Untouchability can be removed by education alone, yet he was greatly committed to the cause of education. He founded the people’s Education Society at Bombay in July 1945. He started the Siddharth College, Bombay in 1946. Hence English education and Western values benefited all parts of the Indian society and it improved the socio-cultural, economic condition of untouchable or *dalits* also.

LAWS AND POLICIES DURING BRITISH RULE

During the British rule in India, downtrodden people started getting some relief and it brought a sense of liberty for the marginalized communities. The main source of the socio-cultural oppress of scheduled castes is the practice of untouchability. The first governmental step to legislate against untouchability was taken in 1858 when an untouchable boy was refused admission in a government school in Dharwar, a small town in the then Mysore state southern India. In 1858 Government of India declared that educational institutions of government will be open to all classes. From 1858 in theory all government schools and colleges were open to untouchables but in practice, admission was often refused to them in rural areas. But over the period of time, the situation was changed and untouchables also got admission in schools and colleges.



After 1920 the non-*Brahmin* movement took a political colour. The political reforms announced by the Montague-Chelmsford Commission of British Government in 1918 and the subsequent grant of adult suffrage brought the non-*Brahmins* movement in to political arena. During the elections held in 1920, 1923, and 1926, several Non-*Brahmins* were elected to provincial councils and a separate Non-*Brahmin* political party was constituted. In 1930, Gandhi viewed the *dalit* problem as social one, whereas Ambedkar saw it a political and economic problem created by upper castes. When Dr. Ambedkar becomes the first law minister in colonial India, he brought some legal reforms, which later on got incorporated into the Constitution.

It is critical to see that constitutional reservation for the *dalits* was not an idea of equality, but was a historic compromise. The British Government announced in 1932, the creation of communal electorates, i.e., separate seats and extra votes for Dalits and Muslims. An agitated Gandhi went on a fast unto death against separate electorates for Dalits. Faced with intense pressure from popular sympathy for an ailing Gandhi, Ambedkar compromised, giving up on the demand that Dalit voters be kept separate, but gaining reserved constituencies for the depressed classes. This Poona Pact of 1932 became the basis for providing reservations to the depressed classes in the Government of India Act, 1935 which in turn, became the template for the Constitution of India.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

In terms of this paradigm the anti-caste social movements were began in the 19th century under the inspiration of Jyotiba-Phule and was carried on during 1920s by the Non-*Brahmins* movements in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu and then developed under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar. Jotiba Phule (1826-1890) was himself not a *dalit*, but a man of backward classes, a *malis* (gardener) by occupation and classed with the Maratha *kunbes* as people of middle status. While he developed a strong *dalit* movement, his main organizational work was in fact among the middle to low. Non-*Brahmin* castes of Maharashtra, traditionally classed as *sudra* and known till today as the Bahun Samaj. He began as a first social reformers who established schools for both girls and untouchable boys. Mahatma Jotiba Phule founded first Non-*Brahmin* organization named *Satya Shodhak Samaj* in 1873 at Pune. The early *Satya Shodhak Samaj* movement stressed only two things, first education of the masses and second was reduction of rituals power. Phule himself was a creative pioneer in education.



After Jotiba Phule, Shahu Ji Maharaj of Kohlapur kept the movement alive from the turn of the century until his death in 1923. He was first King of India, who implemented reservation policy in his province. He constructed many schools and colleges for the *dalit* people. He opposed caste system and untouchability.

By the 1920s a new militant mass oriented movement arose in Tamil Nadu. Its leader was E.V. Rama Sawami Periyar from a merchant family. In the early 1920s, he took part in the *Vaikom Temple Satyagrah*, reportedly clashing with Gandhi while taking a militant position. In 1925 Periyar left the Congress and formed the Self-Respect League in 1926 and its focus was similar to that of Phule for the abolition of caste and supporting the liberation of women. He attacked all religions more than Phule did. In 1944 he revived the Justice Party and changed its name to Dravida Kazhagham (DK). He launched a number of vigorous anti-untouchability movements that not only claimed a higher social, economic and political recognition to the untouchables, but also some sort of reverse adverse treatment to the hitherto dominant upper caste communities.

Some *Brahmins* also took up the work of educating the untouchables. Pandurang Mahadeo, Bapat (1880-1967) popularly known as Senapati Bapat, a revolutionary who was the first Indian to study in Paris. In August 1913, he began teaching children of untouchables at Partner, a small Town in the Ahmadnagar district. He gave them books and taught them how to read and write. He regularly visited the hutments of the untouchables and to persuade them to send their children to his school. Bapat invited the untouchables for dinner at his house when he celebrated the birth of his son Vaman.

Bhauro Paigonda Patil who dropped out education from the Raja Ram High school while he was studying in matriculation, followed the ideas of Shahu Chhatrapati in the field of education. He established a study center at Dudhgaon in Satara District of Maharashtra. Education, Bhaurao believed, was a way to the solution of many of the problems of poor depressed class people in the rural areas. He made it a mission of his life.

A significant anti-untouchability movement appeared in Punjab during this time known as *Adi-dharam* movement. It was led by a prominent untouchable of the state named Mangoo Ram, with the aim of throwing out the customs and rituals of untouchables in the state. The *Adi-dharam* movement under the direction and leadership of Mangoo Ram also sought to uplift scheduled castes. The *Adi-dharam* movement began with the belief that the



untouchables in Punjab existed as a distinct socio-religious entity or *quam* like those of Hindu, Muslims or Sikhs since ages and with a conviction to remove it.

They should, therefore demand for distinct set of patterns of treatment which may lead to the amelioration of their socio-religious and political condition in the society. Hence, many social activists of the 19th century and in the early 20th century made efforts to organize the non-*Brahmin* movements and *dalits* were drawn to an anti-caste, anti-*Brahmin* and anti-Hindu ideology of the kind that Phule formulate. The non-*brahmin* movements in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Karnataka, all argued in terms of the Aryan conquest and *brahmin* exploitation through religion.

Drawing his descent from the untouchable caste of *mahar*, Dr. Ambedkar began the *Mahar* movement in 1926 with the aim of eradicating untouchability from Maharashtra. Though the *Mahar* movement attained fair degree of success, its experiences convinced Ambedkar that for the holistic advancement of the plight of his fellow brethren, the movement must be rooted in the political mould.

Dr. Ambedkar made efforts to transform the hierarchical structure of Indian society for the restoration of equal rights and justice to the neglected lot by building up a critique from within the structure of Indian society. His was not a theoretical attempt but a practical approach to the problems of untouchability. Ambedkar took as his basic goal the ending of exploitation and oppression and the achievement of equality, liberty and fraternity.

CONCLUSION

After independence the position of dalits has improved considerably due to constitutional provisions and after undertaken by the government spread of education and awareness. In colonial rule it led to some opportunities for education including English education for the lower caste it led to access to historical writings and to their own history but the efforts of the radical Bahujan and Dalit reformers from Phule to Periyar and Ambedkar remained a subordinate one. Hence the study reflect that the social and political condition of the Dalits was very critical before colonial rule. The emergence of British power made many attempts and create many rules and regulations for improvement and upliftment their social condition and political upliftment.



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