

Reservation Policy In Pre-Independence Period

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ABSTRACT

British Indian Society in the sense of the numerous social closures is operated by the caste system. These indigenous incarnations continued and some categories were introduced by the British. At the top of the hierarchy are the Brahmins, or priests, followed by the Kshatriyas, or warriors. The Vaisyas, the farmers and artisans, constitute the third class. At the bottom are the Shudras, the class responsible for serving the three higher groups. Christian missionaries took the lead in adopting the cause of the Depressed Classes seeking to provide welfare for them. By the 1850s, either inspired or shamed into action by the missionaries' example, Hindu reformers emerged. The Adi-Dravida leaders like B. R.

Ambedkar, R. Srinivasan and M.C. Rajah, the Justice leaders like Pangal Raja and Self - Respect leaders like E.V.Ramasamy appealed to the masses to extend all co-operation to the Simon Commission. Owing to the support received from the quarters of the Dravidans, the Simon Commission easily garnered oral and written evidences in Tamilnadu for a new constitutional experiment to the whole nation. The Indian Central Committee, which was constituted to co-operate with Simon Commission, entered into a general agreement and wanted to test the principle of communal electorate to the depressed classes in the Madras Presidency for a period of ten years. The British Government convened the Indian Round Table Conferences. The Justice Party urged the British Government to convene it at the earliest possible. B.R. Ambedkar claimed that as the British Government has not done anything to remove untouchability it should consider the views of the public. Ramsay Mac Donald, the Prime Minister announced, on the discussion over the Simon Commission's recommendations the Communal Award on August 17th, 1932 which favoured separate electorate. According to the Government of Act of 1935 reserved a number of seats to various communities and interests. In 1940s, E. V.Ramasamy Naicker struggled for exclusive reservation for Backward Classes (BCs). The Congress Government issued a G.O. in 1947.

Key Words:

Hindu Society, Restriction in Employment, Recommendations of the Simon Commission, Reservation Policy in Tamilnadu, Round Table Conferences and Reservation Policy, Communal Award of 1932, Government of India Act, Assembly Election of 1937, Cabinet Mission and Reservation Policy:

Introduction:

Social and political equality is imperative for realizing the democratic norms in any country, and is fundamental to the acceleration of economic equality and dignity. Discrimination against groups of citizens on grounds of race, religion, language, or national

origin has long been a problem with which societies have grappled. British Indian Society in the sense of the numerous social closures is operated by the caste system. These indigenous incarnations continued and some categories were introduced by the British. No doubt, a beginning with these categories was a continuation of the pre-British ones. That was only in keeping with the British Endeavour to create an over arching administrative machinery reflecting the established structure of the country and its related concern for incorporating into its colonial framework, the traditional well entrenched, and from its viewpoint, the strategically placed social groups as its compradors. In fact, the British attempts to go along with high castes long preceded its educational efforts.

Hindu Society:

Hindu society is divided into four varna, or classes, a convention which had its origins in the Rig Veda, the first and most important set of hymns in Hindu scripture which dates back to 1500-1000 B.C. As early as 1814 the Court of Directors had ordered exclusion of Indian Christians, then mostly of the 'untouchables' castes, from certain offices such as of 'munsiff', 'vakil', and law officer in Bengal Presidency, and also of 'sudder ameen' (civil judge), and cavalry in Madras Presidency. At the top of the hierarchy are the Brahmins, or priests, followed by the Kshatriyas, or warriors. The Vaisyas, the farmers and artisans, constitute the third class. At the bottom are the Shudras, the class responsible for serving the three higher groups. Finally, the Untouchables fall completely outside of this system. It is for this reason that the untouchables have also been termed avarna. Jati, or caste, is a second factor specifying rank in the Hindu social hierarchy. Christian missionaries took the lead in adopting the cause of the Depressed Classes seeking to provide welfare for them. By the 1850s, either inspired or shamed into action by the missionaries' example, Hindu reformers emerged. In 1890 while working out the Provincial Civil Service Scheme, the Madras government modified free competition for post of deputy collectors for enabling it to appoint

one-third of the vacancies by selection from persons of proved merit and ability. As this had no effects on the Brahmins, in 1896 it limited appointment of deputy collectors by open competition to per year for correcting their communal distribution.

Restriction in Employment

It was, however, continuing with its efforts to curb Brahmin monopoly in public service. Thus, in 1904 the Board of Revenue obtained from the collectors a statement in the castes of all employees in superior service, that is, on monthly salaries of Rs.15 and above, in the revenue offices in the districts. As the Brahmin, Non-Brahmin ratio was 70:30; it instructed the collectors to watch the recruitment of Non-Brahmins for ensuring fairer distribution of appointments. In 1909, the Board of Revenue informed the Registrar of Co-operative Societies that not more than one half of the total number of superior appointments in an office should ordinarily be held by Brahmins, the other half being at least the due share of Non-Brahmin Hindus, Indian Christians, Muslims and Europeans. Finding that the proportion of Brahmins did not show any substantial diminution, in the following year the Board of Revenue asked the registrar why he had not followed its instructions and why the power or making appointments shall not be withdrawn from him. Thus the Board of Revenue was exercising "constant vigilance", over the distribution or appointments. In the light of this preponderance the Board of Revenue again asked all the departments to adhere to the standing order: In view of the difficulty in getting qualified candidates, the chief presidency magistrate even proposed the creation of a recruitment bureau for different grades and classes of appointments, though the governments dropped it as unfeasible. Following the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909, the first major step towards Indianisation or the administration began in 1911. The government of India desired the provincial governments to secure in their services adequate representation or the various classes in public service. In that connection the Board of Revenue reported that it was scrutinizing the annual lists of persons

recommended by the Collectors for posts of Tahsildars and deputy Tahsildars to check the preponderance of Brahmins by securing suitable non- Brahmins from other districts if the district did not have a sufficient number of them. It also mentioned that having found in 1910 that Brahmin preponderance was marked in some districts, it informed the district authorities that it would decline to place any more Brahmins on the list of such districts, unless the Collectors had taken every possible means to find suitable non-Brahmins for inclusion in the lists. However, the government's scrutiny of the revenue establishment list corrected up to January 1st, 1911 revealed that in no less than 10 out of the 24 districts, the standing order was on that date apparently disregarded. Expressing its lack of confidence in the care taken by the Board of Revenue to avoid the dangers arising from the concentration of an undue number of posts in district in the hands of a single caste or a single family, it advised the Board of Revenue to institute an enquiry in all districts.

British Response on Reservation Policy:

In fact, from almost the beginning of British rule the non-Brahmin Hindus were protesting against Brahmin dominance. The 1840 petition by 32 Panchalar from Salem blamed the East India Company for succumbing to the willingness of Brahmins by, among other things, conferring on them all the responsible public offices, and prayed for employment of all classes of men alike without distinction. Similar petitions of the subsequent years, though sporadic to begin with, gathered momentum towards the close of the Nineteenth century. The education commission by exposing backwardness had observed that "the most efficacious of all encouragements to the spread of education is that supplied by the bestowal of public appointments upon educated candidates", and that "unfortunately no level for raising education is less systematically applied". This observation is also borne out by the statistics collected by the government in 1872, 1881, and 1886, in the context of Muslim employment. The representation of Non-Brahmin Hindus was only about 32 per cent

in 1881, and had increased only by 4 per cent since the preceding decade. In 1886 Non-Brahmin Hindus were 68.2 per cent of the total officials on salaries of Rs.10 or less, and 33 per cent on salaries exceeding Rs.10. Reviewing the statistics in 1887 the Board of Revenue noted that in the disproportionate distribution of employment non Brahmin Hindus were the worst sufferers.

One group, which has not figured in the discussion of non-Brahmin Hindus, is the "depressed classes", comprising mostly the Panchamas and partly the "hill tribes". Even as late as 1916, for a population of about 16.4 per cent their representation was virtually nil in higher education, only less than 1 per cent in secondary education, and about 8.8 per cent in primary education. With such educational backwardness they could not have had any significant representation in public service either. Nor could they have made any serious claim for such representation, as they were ill-equipped to fill important government posts. That probably explains the statistics on government employment. Meanwhile, most of the petitions for inclusion in the backward classes list for educational concessions, especially after the introduction of half-fee concession in 1892 had also urged for representation in public service. More often than not, the education department considered them favorable for inclusion in the list. Their claims for representation in public service were, however, overlooked. This could have been because either the petitions were not directly for such representation, or the petitioners were not articulate enough as pressure groups. However, this situation began to change since 1917 when a vocal and well organized pressure group appeared on the scene. In understanding of this change anticipates a close look at the Non-Brahmin movement. Though communal representation and reservations are often identified with the Non-Brahmin movement and the Indian Constitution respectively, the evolution of the Non-Brahmin movement itself was preceded by certain intricate and elaborate processes of over half a century. These processes had direct bearing on communal representation and

reservations at the ideational and pragmatic levels as functional imperatives of the colonial administration. The recurrent themes in such interface were inferior versus superior races, backward versus forward races, administrative stability, and distribution of government patronage. Each group was concerned with its own claims and reference to others was not for any concern for overall social justice or equality, but for only justifying its own claims. There was also no composite category of Non-Brahmins as used in the context of the subsequent Non-Brahmin movement. These made the Non-Brahmins and the British officials increasingly aware of the structural cleavages in South Indian Society of Brahmin versus Non-Brahmin, Hindus versus Muslims, and so on.

Simon Commission and Reservation Policy:

In keeping with the 1919 Government of India Act, the British government in 1927 appointed a commission to assess the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms and “whether, and to what extent it was desirable to establish the principle of responsible government, or to extend, modify, or restrict the degree of responsible government existing therein.” The seven-member commission was headed by John Simon, MP, and included MP Clement Attlee. Throughout the year 1928 the Congress boycotted the Simon Commission by organizing hartals and demonstrations in the major cities like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. On the other side, the Adi-Dravida leaders like B. R. Ambedkar, R. Srinivasan and M.C. Rajah, the Justice leaders like Pangal Raja and Self - Respect leaders like E.V.Ramasamy appealed to the masses to extend all co-operation to the Simon Commission. M.C. Rajah, as a member in the Indian Central Committee, was able to easily gather the support to the Simon Commission and influenced the British opinion for the cause of separate electorates. The Simon Commission arrived again at Madras on February 18th, 1929 to gather a full-fledged opinion from the people. The Non-Congress, particularly the Justice party, welcomed this move and ensured active co-operation to the Commission. The Congress condemned this

warm response given by the Justice ministry headed by P. Subbarayan on the advice of E.V.Ramasamy. On the other hand, the Congress, with political motivation, organized a hartal on the day of Commission's visit to Madras in order to express their resentment. The Justice Party presented a memorandum demanding special and separate electorates.

Recommendations of the Simon Commission

Owing to the support received from the quarters of the Dravidans, the Simon Commission easily garnered oral and written evidences in Tamilnadu for a new constitutional experiment to the whole nation. It submitted its recommendations to the British Parliament in 1929. It agreed that by nominations, the Adi-Dravida representatives would not receive training in politics, and at the same time it rejected the demand for separate electorate on the ground that it would create animosities between the Adi-Dravidas and caste-Hindus, besides leading to serious impediments to their ultimate political amalgamation. However, it accepted that in all eight provinces - Madras, Bombay, Bengal, United Provinces, Punjab, Bihar and Orissa, Central Provinces and Assam, there should be reservation for the depressed classes; and the number should be three quarters of the proportion of the depressed class population to the proportion of the electoral area of the province. In 1930, the alien government decided to enumerate the depressed classes in order to improve their social and economic conditions in a schedule. During the 1931 Census Survey, a special committee was appointed to draw up a 'Schedule' of the depressed classes who would be entitled to benefit in the future from Government's special schemes. Accordingly, in the Madras Legislative Council fourteen seats were proposed for the depressed classes, even though the Madras Government suggested only twelve seats for them, to the Commission. B.R.Ambedkar and R.Srinivasan who attended the Round Table Conference as the representatives of the depressed classes of India objected to use the term 'depressed classes as (degrading and contemptuous) and suggested terms like Protestant Hindus and non-conformist Hindus.⁴⁰ The British

Government, in course of time, discarded the use of such names as they evoked the sense of ill feelings and humiliation. The British showed enough interest in the problems of the untouchables. The British Indian Government appointed a State Committee to list out the depressed castes in a schedule.

Reservation Policy in Tamilnadu

The Indian Central Committee, which was constituted to co-operate with Simon Commission, entered into a general agreement and wanted to test the principle of communal electorate to the depressed classes in the Madras Presidency for a period of ten years. It considered them as educated, better organised and altogether politically more advanced than in any other part of India. M.C. Rajah, a member of Central Committee, however stressed that separate electorate for ten years should not be furnished to Madras alone, but should be applicable to all the provinces. On behalf of the Madras Provincial Depressed Class Federation, R. Srinivasan expressed satisfaction with separate electorate as a tentative and educative measure for ten years. However, he objected to the possibilities of the depressed classes being represented by members of other communities. He appreciated the idea of certification of candidates by the governor testifying their qualification in education and experience for election to the council. Thus the arrival of Simon Commission exposed the socio-political issues between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins on the one side. On the other side it revealed the ideological Dravidian organizations in Tamil Nadu.

Round Table Conferences and Reservation Policy:

The British Government convened the Indian Round Table Conferences. The Justice Party urged the British Government to convene it at the earliest possible. In the first session of the Round Table Conferences, met in London on 12th November, 1930, B.R.Ambedkar and R.Srinivasan projected ideas in favour of the welfare of the depressed classes. Communal and sectional interests were highly pronounced in the representation element of the Round

Table Conferences. The Madras Mahajana Sabha condemned the Round Table Conferences and questioned the representative character of the Round Table Conferences. The Tamils felt that the Round Table Conferences will carry out works for framing a constitution for Dominion Status. They stressed the importance of representing all interest and communities at the conference. While the Indian leaders and representatives sat along with the representatives of the British Government discussed the Indian problems, the INC did not take part in the first session of the Conference, but they discussed about a common concern. In the first session of the Round Table Conferences, the terrible practice of untouchability in India was discussed. Extension of political power and representation in the legislatures for them to obtain their deprived rights and privileges were stressed. He got the sympathy of the British during the first session of the Round Table Conferences. B.R. Ambedkar claimed that as the British Government has not done anything to remove untouchability it should consider the views of the public. The Minorities Sub-committee was formed to consider the claims of various Non-Brahmin groups. It was to consist of 39 members with Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald as its Chairman.

Communal Award of 1932

Ramsay Mac Donald, the Prime Minister announced, on the discussion over the Simon Commission's recommendations the Communal Award on August 17th, 1932 which favoured separate electorate. Even after the two Round Table Conferences the Indians could not arrive at an agreed resolution on the communal representation issue. The Communal Award gave the untouchables two benefits, viz., a fixed quota of seats to be elected by a separate electorate of untouchables and to be filled by the untouchables and a double vote, one to be used through separate electorate and the other to be used in general electorate. Communal Award was announced to save the depressed classes from the age-old disabilities and to substitute other electoral arrangements by an agreement of the communities

themselves. The attitude of Gandhi towards the claims of depressed classes for separate representation had far reaching effect in the Madras City. It resulted in open manifestations of Adi-Dravida hostility to the Congress. One clash ended in pelting stones at Congress picketers. Attempts were made to bum the petty shops and the figure of Gandhi made out of wood was hanged and burnt in an Adi Dravida's hamlet. Similar tension was reported in many parts of the Presidency.

The British Government accepted Ambedkar's demands. Gandhiji resisted the grant of separate electorate for the depressed classes on the ground that such an arrangement would make their lives miserable in villages which are the strongholds of Hindu orthodoxy. According to him, it is the upper class of Hindus who have to do penance for having neglected the untouchables for ages. That penance would be done by active social reforms but not by giving separate electorate. The other reasons which were placed against the demand for separate electorates are the untouchables were not minorities; they were Hindus and, therefore, they could not have separate electorates; the system of separate electorates was anti-national and would enable British imperialism to influence these communities having separate electorates to act against the interests of the country. Ambedkar said Gandhi could not give a logical and consistent defense of his opposition to the special representation for the untouchables. Gandhi told the British Government that if separate electorates for the depressed classes were not withdrawn, he would fast unto death. The British made it clear that they would not withdraw them or alter them of their own, but that they were ready to substitute them by a formula that might be agreed to by the caste-Hindus and the untouchables. The Communal Award had given reservation to the untouchables in the legislature under a separate electorate system, but the Poona Pact paved the way for more facilities, such a adult franchise, educational opportunities, representation in services, etc., besides representation in legislature. Ambedkar was unhappy about Gandhiji's opposition to

separate electorate for the untouchables; and, at the same time, Gandhi agreed for such provision for the Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, Europeans, Muslims and Sikhs. It is also important to note that even the untouchable leader of the south, M.C. Raja, opposed the Communal Award on two grounds, viz. i.e., the depressed classes would gain lesser number of seats than they were entitled to on the populations basis, and that the depressed classes would be separated from the Hindu fold.

Government of India Act:

According to the Government of Act of 1935 reserved a number of seats to various communities and interests. For the Province of Madras 37 seats were allocated. Among them, 19 were specified as general seats, of which 4 seats were reserved for the SCs exclusively, 8 seats were reserved for Muslims, 1 for Anglo-Indians, 1 for Europeans, 2 for Indian Christians, 2 for representatives of Commerce and Industry, 1 for landholders, 1 for representatives of labour and 2 seats were reserved for women.

Assembly Election of 1937:

After passing the Act of 1935, election was held in 1937. The Congress, the Justice Party and the Muslim League were the prominent political parties contested the election. It was an effective election campaign on the part of the Justice Party and the Congress in the Madras Presidency. Congress activity had been in considerable progress in respect of both the general election campaign and the local body elections. Many of the prominent Indian Congress leaders toured all over the country including the Madras Presidency. The Congress Party got majority victory. The main objective of the Justice Party was to capture power from the hands of the Brahmins. After assuming office, they never shared power with the other sections and failed to fulfill the needs of the masses. They failed to promote social changes. They showed little interest in the social reform works. The Justice Party lacked the dynamic leadership and well established organisation. The Justice Party was not able to compete with

the other two national level parties. Depressed people considered that the Brahmin dominated Congress Party was better than the Justice Party. Hence, the party got strengthened. The Justice Party failed to get the support of the Muslims. Further, disunity and disaffection among the justices brought disintegration in promulgating the policies of the party. This led to the defeat of the party.

Cabinet Mission and Reservation Policy:

The Cabinet Mission Plan decided that the Constituent Assembly was to be elected indirectly by the Provincial Legislatures. Madras Province came under the group A states. Each province was allotted seats on the basis of the population and distributed among the three communities namely the Muslims, the Sikhs and general including the Hindus and all others to their proportion in the total population. It advocated indirect elections by the Provincial Legislative Assemblies. Members were to be elected by the representatives of each community in their respective legislative assemblies. After the election, the Constituent Assembly was formed. In the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly out of the 296 members, 210 attended the meeting in the preliminary session. Among them, the Hindus constituted 155 members, 30 SC representatives and 14 Muslim representatives attended the sessions. Under the 3rd June, 1947 plan: due to the proposal of the partition of the country the membership was reduced to 324, of which 235 represented the Provinces and the Indian States.

Conclusion:

T.Prakasam, the Chief Minister of the Madras Presidency (1946-47), vehemently opposed the Reservation G.O. and stood for efficiency and intelligence. During his Chief Ministership, a G.O. was issued to reserve 20 per cent of seats in educational institutions and government jobs for "open competition" and this 20 per cent was filled up by the Brahmins. Hence, most of the seats in the medical and engineering colleges were occupied by the

Brahmin candidates. His successor O.P.Ramaswamy Reddiar (1947-49) supported the Communal G.O. Though, the Congress Party did not support the scheme of reservation and the Communal G.O., it took interest in allotting more number of seats for Depressed Classes. It believed that Communal G.O. differentiates the people of India into various caste groups and thereby causes the decline of communal harmony and national integrity. As Gandhi wished to eradicate untouchability and uplift the Harijans, the Congress Government took efforts to render justice to them. In 1940s, E. V.Ramasamy Naicker struggled for exclusive reservation for Backward Classes (BCs). The Backward Classes League, founded in 1933, by a memorandum in 1944 pointed out that the forward Non-Brahmins utilised all the opportunities in the name of BCs. So, they wanted to follow a revised scheme. The Congress Government issued a G.O. in 1947. This G.O. which continued up to 1950 was revised. The historical background reflects that it was introduced, directly or indirectly during the Colonial period also and the consequences of which were faced during independence too.

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