

Neglecting the Depressed Class as a Class of Humans in Indian Society

N. Ilakkiya

School of Excellence in Law, TNDALU, Chennai
TamilNadu, India

I. INTRODUCTION

It can be very much seen that 'these people – depressed class' exists in all the parts of India. They are not only prevailing in India. They are prevailing in every part of the world but majorly can be seen in India. Depressed class? Why they got a new name like the depressed class? They too are human's rights? And they too have absolute rights to live in their own country. They too have the rights (both constitutional as well as other rights) like other citizens. But we and the other so-called upper-class status people are neglecting these people to a greater extent. We the citizens of India are also not giving a damn to these issues. Yes, the citizens are not giving due consideration to these issues and blaming the Government to a greater extent. Most of them are not even considering them as humans and also not giving them the respect which they deserve. Can't we people give proper respect and protection to them? Is the Government is the only body to protect them? We citizens are not responsible for their status in our country even in recent times? Even we are responsible for their status in our country because we are the one who is neglecting them the most. When you ask how in the sense the neglecting is through many ways, we are not even ready to give them the other rights and respect which they deserve. Even when they face any problems we are not ready to give our voice for them and we are thinking that it's their problem and hence they should strive and not us and also we blame government is responsible for this and not us. Like on all these things either we blame a third party or a Government, but what about us? So we too are neglecting them right?

Who are these depressed classes? It does not include the persons who are in the poverty line because any person from any caste can be in the poverty line. Then who is this the depressed class? It is the 'Dalits' who are termed as the depressed class. Categorizing them as a depressed class is not a wrong one? Dalits and depressed classes are interchangeably used terms in ancient India till today. This term was used and popularized by our Honourable Statesman, Dr. Ambedkar. While talking about the Dalits we cannot forget to mention the name of Dr. Ambedkar since Indians all of us knows the contributions made by him to the society as well as to these sects of people. 'Dalit' is a Sanskrit word, literally translating to, 'suppressed' and this term very well takes us to next thought that the suppressed people are the depressed people to a greater extent.

Now the depressed classes are currently known as 'scheduled castes' and it also includes the 'scheduled tribes'. The population of these people was around 64.5 million i.e. about 15% of the country's population in 1961.¹ In this article, the author tries to trace about the hurdles faced by them from ancient India till today. The people are facing hurdles in education, in employment and also they even struggle to live and to get shelter for their living. Hence the author tries to elaborate on these issues. And the author also tries to highlight the provisions and welfares brought in our Indian Constitution for the upcoming of these sects. The author finally ends up with the conclusion and a few suggestions.

II. HISTORY

There arises a question of why these people have attained a backward position in society? It is because of our Indian Hindu system. Earlier there were four castes majorly prevailing in our society like the Brahmins (priestly people), kshatriyas (also called Rajanyas, who were rulers, administrators, and warriors), the Vaishyas (artisans, merchants, tradesmen, and farmers), and sudras (labouring classes). The Sudras was the one who is in depressed classes and they were not in positions like the other castes and still behind them. Even the worst part is the other caste people call the Sudras as untouchables. Is this the right way to term them as untouchables? The ancient institutions of caste have been very old, but it dominated the social as well as the political decisions in the ancient and medieval periods to a very large extent. At the same time on those days the Sudras were treated like slaves and also they were not allowed to attain a higher position in any fields in the Indian society. Also, the social prejudices against these classes were interpreted to the society as the natural differences caused by birth in a caste or a clan.

According to our Indian society they are relating this caste system to 'Karma' that if a person facing the grim of poverty, backward position in education and in culture, and the social disabilities faced by them were interpreted as having been a result of their own doings in previous birth i.e. the person born in this caste in the sense he has done sins in this previous birth.

The above-said history is not only was prevailing in ancient to Medieval India. It is also present in recent times. Even till date, it was present. The major obstacles faced by them was already mentioned above and as earlier said by the author, she tries to elaborate about those issues to a certain extent.

III. VARIOUS CHALLENGES FACED BY THEM FROM ANCIENT INDIA TILL TODAY

The things did not stop yet. Yes, it still continues. They were not given many rights and the major one is the education for their children, a shelter for the living, employment etc. I'm going to elaborate on the above-specified headings to some extent from the ancient perspective till recent conditions.

¹ Census of India, 1961.

- **Education**

They were neglected in all the parts of the sectors and education sector is not an exception to it. These classes of people were not allowed to study itself. Then some of the things changed to a little extent but still, the condition was the same. Like these sects of children were provided with education but with greater variations. The respect shown to other caste children was not the same as these sects of children. These children were ill-treated very much in their schools.

Due to the traditional practices, the depressed classes are depressed to matters of education until the eighteenth century. For many years these people are not provided with proper education. They were not even allowed to attain their educational facilities available to them. The other castes in the society resisted spreading education to these sects. In fact, the admixture of various social, political, economic and cultural factors causing backwardness among these classes made it difficult to extricate education from them even though education was considered as a means for the removal of their backwardness.

There were special schools commenced for the welfare of these children so that they can also come with strong educational values without any difference of castes. These schools also didn't impose higher fees for the children because many people belonging to these sects are mostly in poverty line because even the employment for the parents of these children was a big question mark on those times. They are not in a position to afford their children with education. Another big sad part is that they don't even have money to live their daily living and they won't even have food to eat.

Above all the efforts of social reformers and other leaders of the society are much appreciable since the framers of educational policies are so much in a positive way in order to avoid the practices of social discrimination against these depressed classes. All the political leaders treated this problem in one hand and their main aim was also to provide them the necessary things they are eligible for. Hence they thought to bring the change from the education. Later the time the system again changed a little bit. The special schools were abolished to some extent and instead, the Government brought a new change. The change is all the primary schools, secondary schools as well as college and universities have to allow these sects of people and also to provide them a certain number of seats. This was done in order to remove the educational disparity between the general population and the depressed classes. This is the system prevailing even now.

Hence these classes of people had, therefore, to mark time until the emergence of Government to lend them opportunities along with other class of people. Now the situation changed too greater extent. These sects of people are provided with education but still, there are certain difficulties faced by them. But now the Government make certain schemes for them hence some of the hurdles can be overcome by them. But some hurdles are still going to prevail and for these impediments, it is not the government can help out because it is

us who have to help them for their other impediments to overcome. Even the programmes of various social organisations have resulted in the uplifting of these classes through the education which acted as a means to their social elevations and also economic betterment.

- **Employment**

Earlier they were treated as slaves in various situations. Firstly in the institution of caste system prevailing in India, these sects of people were engaged as slaves for the other castes. They have engaged in works like menial servants in the household and the diggers in the field. Bit by bit they were imposed with unpleasant works like sweepers and scavengers to the towns and villages, the flayers of dead animals, and the leather workers in general.

Secondly, these people were treated as slaves for the Britishers also. But later there was preaching towards these people by the Britishers Christian Missionaries and by this conversion into Christianity by some people led them to have employment in various industries and other things because the Britishers promised them with certain privileges due to this conversion. But this time there was one-step forwardness in their position like they started to earn and hence they were now eligible to meet some of their need. Still, they were ill-treated to a greater extent by not providing the said wages and permanency in jobs etc. All these things are prevailing hurdles in their society on the part of employment.

After the Britisher's entry, there were many employments in society for these people. Like jobs in the military services and the growth of industries, the coming up of new factories, transport and communication led these people to employment to a certain extent. Hence these factors precipitated a change in social outlook for these classes. Now there was a rise in these sections. The rise is a very need change in the society; this rise partly resulted in the political atmosphere in the country, because these classes gained political consciousness and started to demand 'equality of status' with the other sections of the society.

Now the employment opportunities are reduced in our country to a greater extent and hence not only the depressed classes face the unemployment even the other sects of people are unemployed in many parts of our country due to various reasons.

- **Shelter:**

Everyone is telling that shelter is our right and everyone has those rights. But the situation is not so for the depressed class people. The depressed class people are deprived to get homes in their own country. The majority of the people live in platforms, the next set of people live in huts or in slums, a few live in some concrete homes and a very few in compact home or in apartments or in bungalows. It is to be noted that the people of these sects who live in bungalows are very few in number. The majority of these populations live in

either platform or in huts. But still many of the people don't even have homes to live and hence they are pushed to live in platforms.

Earlier these people are not allowed to live with the other caste people because as far as the other castes meaning they are untouchables and hence they don't deserve any rights to reside along with them. This was the mindset of other caste peoples. Hence for these things the depressed class thought to construct homes by themselves. Hence they lived in a separate village mostly in huts.

In recent times the Government provided land for some of the people belonging to a depressed class. Again only few can be accommodated in those places. And here the special rule is no person can get the land from these people fraudulently. If anyone wants to take those places in the sense it should be only for public necessity and it should be proposed only by the government and not by any other third party. And the compensation should be paid more for these people than the other people if their land is taken from them for public necessity.²

IV. PROVISIONS UNDER INDIAN CONSTITUTION FOR THE WELFARE OF THE DEPRESSED CLASSES:

Our Indian Constitution says that no person should be deprived. Likewise, there are also special statutes are enacted for the welfare of these people. Due to the leader's teachings as well as through these enactments there is little much up-gradation of their level. Not every person of these sects attained a big position. But still, there are few in number where they have attained a good position in this Country. But again we cannot stop here because only a few have attained some benefits and not all. What is the position of others? Again as said earlier we cannot every time blame the Government for their position in the society. It is the mindset of the people to change to a greater extent. The people should not think that they are a depressed class rather they too are to be considered as brothers and sisters of us.

There are many welfare schemes developed for the depressed class and the Constitution of India is a great example of it. The major provisions enacted for the welfare of depressed class people are Article 14, Article 15,16,17, Article 46, part XVI, Fifth Schedule. All the above provisions are enacted for the welfare of these people. Our Indian Constitution has accepted the ideals of equality and justice both in the social and political field. As every one of us knows that our constitution abolishes any discrimination to any class of persons on the grounds like religion, caste, race, or place of birth. Thus our Constitution, therefore, provides certain

²Example in Tamil Nadu through LARR ACT,2013 the Government gave free lands to the landless people to some extent.

measures which are temporary in nature in order to help these depressed classes to come up with the same level as the rest of the nation.³ Some of the provisions enacted for the welfare of these people are:

1. Article 46 of the Directive Principles enjoins the state to take special care in promoting the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and in particular Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and to protect them from social injustice. Any such provisions made by the State cannot be challenged on the ground of being discriminatory.⁴
2. Part III of the Constitution Guaranteeing fundamental rights contains many protecting these sects of people.
 - a) Article 14 – every person has the right not to be denied equality before the law or the equal protection of laws.⁵
 - b) Article 15 – prohibits discrimination by State on the grounds of religion, race, caste etc., with regard to access to public places. Nothing in this article shall prevent from making any special provisions for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes or for the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes.⁶
 - c) Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. It also prohibits discrimination in respect of public employment on grounds of religion, race, caste, etc. with an exception that the state can make a reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens not adequately represented in the service under the State.⁷
 - d) Article 17 – abolishes untouchability.⁸
 - e) Article 19(6) authorises the state to impose reasonable restrictions on the fundamental rights guaranteed under the clauses of 19 (d), (e), and (f) for the protection of interests of Scheduled Tribes.⁹
3. Article 275 provides legal aids for promoting the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes.¹⁰
4. Article 330-342 make special provisions for safeguarding the interest of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes etc.¹¹

³ Basu, D.D.- Introduction to the Constitution of India, 327 (6th Edn.).

⁴ INDIA CONST. Art. 46.

⁵ Ibid, Art. 14.

⁶ Ibid, Art. 15.

⁷ Ibid, Art. 16.

⁸ Ibid, Art. 17.

⁹ Ibid, Art. 19.

¹⁰ Ibid, Art. 275.

¹¹ Ibid, Art. 330-342.

These are the certain provisions dealt under the Indian Constitution for the welfare of these depressed classes. There are many enactments and welfare schemes are brought for them but still, the depressed class is depressed to a greater extent. Hence it is the duty of the Government, Judiciary, the lawyers, and also the citizens to change their position in the society. Even now they are in depressed positions only. If few have attained good positions in the sense it does not mean that the country is striving towards welfare society. A country is called as welfare society only when a country can take care of its citizens without any issues to them. But our country is still striving for it. Still good and appreciable measures are also brought to these people by the Government but the problem is it not reaching all the people due to the huge population in these sects. Hence it is our responsible duty to take all these measures to the concerned people.

V. CONCLUSION:

In many parts of India, the depressed class is not only depressed but they are considered as untouchables. Some are simply untouchables, other unapproachable and other even unseeable. They faced so much of things in society. They are not one or two in numbers but they are so many they faced. Some of the main hurdles is that they are not allowed to worship God in the temples; not allowed to fetch water from the wells; not allowed to take bath near the tank; always have to bow their head when other caste members are going on the road and then they are not allowed to live in the same locality where the other caste members are residing. Hence for these issues, they themselves constructed new villages for their living. They were not even given proper respect by other castes. They are ill-treated lower than dogs and Donkeys. Even the sacred cows are treated well but not these depressed class people.

Dr. Ambedkar, renowned person who is known by each and every Indian due to his contributions made in the society. The contribution made by him is endless. He is the person who started to bring changes in many means for the welfare of this depressed class. He is also one who is responsible for their children to send to school and also to use the public wells, to worship in temples etc. The Hindus are hypocrites who give sugar to ants but refuse to give water to the dying people (i.e. the depressed class).¹² Even Dr. Ambedkar paints a sad picture during his own school days that *“you can imagine how much I could learn when I tell you that I had to sit with boys of my community outside the schoolhouse. Depressed classes boys of all standards had to sit together; no one dared to teach them; the teacher would simply ask if we had read our lessons. Here I had to sit on a separate bench. Fain would I have studied Sanskrit, but the Sanskrit teacher would not have me”*.¹³

¹² The Depressed classes. A Chronological Documentation p. 94. In order to gain religious merit, pious Hindus feed certain animals like cows, snakes, monkeys, ants, etc. On the other hand, their superstition forbids them to give water to a dying person (i.e. the depressed class).

¹³ Apostles, sept., 1936, p.7.

The depressed class people hold one-fifth of the total population of our country. But they did not think to post their problems and discriminations faced by them in the public for centuries because they thought it was useless and hence they remained silent and were suffering victims of tyranny and superstition. They didn't want to come out of this institutional caste system because they thought it is sinful. These dumb millions are nearly representing the state of volcanic eruption. Their side of representations is not only made from their own caste people but also from other recognized castes, for example, Gandhi Ji and Rabindranath Tagore. Every one of us knows how Mahatma Gandhi was discriminated in South Africa. This was the prior reason for him to give a voice against these classes of people. Mahatma realised that a country bearing the stigma of Untouchability could not claim a place of honour among the other nations of the world. Gandhi was in a swing where he wanted the system to be abolished to a greater extent but still, it cannot be done fully but still, he wanted the Hindus to take the other edge off it by rendering the intercourse of various castes.

Hence the various social, as well as, political events concerning the welfare of the depressed class played a significant role in attaining good positions in various sectors. But to be reminded again not everyone has attained a good position in our society. Still, there are people who strive for their education, for shelter, and for the employment and other sought. These sects of people are neglected to a greater extent. They are also deprived of their basic rights. They did not get proper recognition in their own country. In earlier period they were treated as untouchables but now according to Mahatma Gandhi

*“Untouchability is a sin,
Untouchability is a crime,
Untouchability is inhuman”*

Hence the author tried to elaborate on certain issues faced by them. Now it is our time to raise our voice for them. Now there are a lot of changes in the country and hence there is a freedom of living in our democratic world. But it is not so for the depressed class they didn't get their right properly. Hence we the citizens have to help them to get their rights and also should strive to change their standard of living. It cannot be done in a single day but there can be many changes done in a single day. Hence all the citizens are requested to show due considerations for these people because they too are Indians and they too are our 'brothers and sisters'. I'm not asking to help someone I'm asking to help our own brothers and sisters. Even as a student of law it is our duty to bring some awareness to the other people about their situation. Towards the depressed class, it is our duty to tell them about their rights and eligibilities. It is our duty to do all these things. If we do this surely in future and in upcoming years India will be recognised as a welfare nation very soon.