

Chapter 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CASTE SYSTEM AND CONCEPT OF ECONOMIC BACKWARD CLASSES

Chapter 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CASTE SYSTEM AND CONCEPT OF ECONOMIC BACKWARD CLASSES

- 2.1 Origin of Caste System
 - 2.1.1 Determinants of Untouchability
 - 2.1.2 Dr. Ambedkar's Entry to the march towards Reservation – 1917
 - 2.1.3 Before Simon Commission – 1930
 - 2.1.4 Franchise Committee and Communal Award – 1932
 - 2.1.5 Gandhiji's fast unto death and Reservation Policy
 - 2.1.6 Other Backward Classes

2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CASTE SYSTEM AND CONCEPT OF ECONOMIC BACKWARD CLASSES

2.1 Origin of Caste System

From early ancient time, India was dwelling place for the foreigners. Sociologist also agreed that before the advent of the Aryans, Dravidians who were sovereign in this country came to settle down in India from some other parts of the world. The Pre-Dravidian settlers were the natives of India.

After Dravidians, another major attack against India was made by the Aryans. They are from middle Asia. They came into India through Afghanistan, Tibet and Baluchistan etc. Being the inhabitants of the cold regions, the Aryans had whitish colour, high nose, white eyes and grey hair.¹⁰

Although the Dravidians and aboriginals resisted the Aryan attack as bravely as they could, yet being a small number, they were defeated by the Aryans. The defeated aboriginals made "Slaves" in the Aryans social order and given low status in society by allotting them the duties of serving other people. These slaves have taken into the fold of Hinduism by marking stand on the lowest ring of the social ladder.

Since then they have been living in such environment. Those who did not accept the offer of becoming slaves were driven away into forest and they remained aboriginals with their social, economic and

10 Sagar Sunderlal. Hindu Caste and Culture System in India: First Edition: New Delhi: Uppal Book Store; 1975

cultural distinctions. They could not mix with any other race. In the course of time these people were divided into two classes. Some became nomadic tribes and others adopted such vocation as kept them roaming from place to place. These roaming people called criminal tribes and they are still living in their original places forests and mountain sides.

In this way, the ancient Indian were divided into four parts:

- a) The Aryans**
- b) The Anaryans**
- c) The aboriginals and**
- d) The nomadic originals tribes**

In the early **Vedic age** there were only two classes:¹¹

- a) Aryans**
- b) Anaryans**

There were no big differences between mutual relationships although their cultures were different. The feelings of social superiority were present in the minds of Aryans because they had their own philosophy and religions. Being the rulers intentionally they had inclination towards exploitation from external view point they were different (a) was black and (b) other white.

In Rig-Vedic times there were two classes, the Aryans and the Anaryans. The Aryans were the enemies of Anaryans. The word 'Dasa' is found in Vedas along with "Naga". **According to Dr. Ambedkar, "Naga" is another name of "Dasa"**. Undoubtedly, the *Nagas* were Anaryas and before the Aryans invaded India, they

11 Tripathi Rebati Ballav: Dalits – A Sub-Human Society: First Edition: New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House; 1994

were efficient rulers their culture was advance and they used to rule major part of world.¹²

One may also find them Anarya and Asura were two different names of two classes. The Anaryans of North, whom we stated calling the Dravids of South had their origins in line age of Asuras. Those who are *Nagas*, are really *Dravids* and thus, are *Dasas*.

Those who are *Dasas* are *Nagas*. It means that in the most Ancient India there were only two classes.

The existing untouchables have been the *Nagas* or the *Dasas* in historical continuity. The defeated *Dravids* were taken as "*Dasas*" and at the time of the formation "*Varna-Vyavastha*" the "*Dasas*" were thrown into the *Shudra Varna*.

In Rig-Veda age, there was "*dasa-pratha*" (Slavery system). The *Dasas* were exchange like commodities of trade. It is true that the Aryans made *Dasas*. The aggressive Aryans were responsible for dividing the people into classes and the victory of Aryans over the Anaryas gave rise to caste system. The defeated Anaryas were declared as "*Shudra*" in the Aryan social order.

Some historians are of the opinion that the following 3 *Varnas* of Aryans had already been established.¹³

- a) **The *Brahmin***
- b) **The *Kshatriya* and**
- c) **The *Vaishya***

12 Rao N.J.Usha. Deprived Castes of India: First Edition: Allahabad: Chugh Publication; 1989

13 Wilson John. Indian Caste – Volume I: First Edition: New Delhi: Deep Publication; 1976

The *Shudras* probably were neither the vaishya nor the Aryas. The defeated aboriginals mixed with the *Dravids* were given the name of "Shudras".

The people who are called *Dasyas* or *Dasas* in Vedas are regarded as "Shudras" in *shastras* like *Manusmriti*. The word *Dasa* and *Shudras* are used in Hindu religious literature. The *Dasas* were considered to be property in Vedic age and therefore, they were included in category of property of animals like sheep and donkeys etc. They were mutually exchanged like property.

There were only two classes in the Vedic period (time):

a) **Aryas**

b) **Dasas**

As the **Rig-Veda** says, the *Dasas* were mostly of black complexion.

Even **Mahabharata** distinguished *Brahmins* from *Shudras* on the basis of colour.

In the beginning the defeated Anaryas were enlisted in *Shudra Varna* and were accordingly given work of serving the other three higher *Varnas*. The word 'Shudras' occurs in the Vedas at one place in **Rig-Veda** and seven times in **Atharva-Veda**.¹⁴

There were two sharp differences among four *Varnas*. Marriages were allowed and in the *swaymvar*, the bride could be won by any one excelling in required performances.

14 Prasad Rajendra Dr. Brahmin Through The Ages: First Edition: New Delhi: Ajanta Publications (India); 1977

Thus, in the Vedic period there was no established form of caste system by birth for *Shudras*. Any one could become a *Shudra* by attaining particular state of life. The castism were also visible but one could get rid of his own *Varna* and change into *Brahmin* and vice-versa. A *dasa* could become a priest.

After the end of the Vedic era, come age of *Brahmans*, *Upanishads* and then *sutras*. The *varna-vyavastha* in this age became a paramount social institution.

During the **Ramayana** age, the *varna-vyavastha* became more rigid and conditions of *Shudras* grew very miserable. The Brahman and *Kshatriya Varnas* were regarded to be superior.

Even in **Ramayana**, the four *Varnas* are said to have been born of four parts of *Brahma*:

- **The *Brahmins* from mouth**
- **The *Kshatriyas* from arms**
- **The *Vaishyas* from thighs**
- **The *Shudras* from feet**

The age of **Ramayana** did not allow the people to do the occupations which were not assigned to them according to their *Varnas*. The **Ramayana** age was bitter experience for *Shudras*. They were looking at with hatred. They had no right for "Tapasya".¹⁵

The **Shreemad Bhagwad Gita** also believes in Anagram Dharma which was based upon principle of *guna-karma*.

15 Yadav K.C. and Singh Rajbir. India's Unequal Citizens – A Study of OBC: First Edition: New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors; 1994

Out of the four *Varnas*, the *Shudra* was considered to be most degraded man. The each *Varna* had its own vocation. The *Shudras* had no rights to religious rites.

The *Shudra's* marriage should not be performed according to religious method. His marriage was not a sacrament but it should be understood as a means only for satisfying sexual desire.

The *Kshatriyas* had rights to arms. According to **Mahabharata**, the war-knowledge belongs to only *Kshatriyas*, when *Parshuram* came to know that the *Karna* was not *Kshatriya*, he did not allow him to learn military art.

The *Shudra* was not permitted to take milk which was served or brought for the purpose of "*Agni-hotr*". He could not drink that milk. The *Shudra* were not allowed to enter into place where a sacrifice was to be done.

In the **Buddhist age** there was also "*Dasa-Pratha*". Every one had its own *Dasas*. Both men and women included in *Dasa-pratha*.

During the *Dharma-Vyavastha*, the *varna-vyavastha* became hard and fast. The *Shudra* were made the most degraded people and *Brahmins* were declared "*Devatas*" of human society. The feelings of untouchability also grew in *varna-vyavastha* period.

According to **Manusmriti** the occupation or duties should be determined on the basis of Caste or *Varna*. The Muslim age was not a period of much tension. The feeling of the low and the high becomes so deeper in that age.¹⁶

16 Sagar Sunderlal. Hindu Caste and Culture System in India: First Edition: New Delhi: Uppal Book Store; 1975

During the **British rule**, there were no reform in the condition of Shudras and untouchables rather they were treated as sub-human, less as men as and worse than beasts all over India from Attak to Kattak, from Sindh to Sagar and from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, the *Shudras* were regarded as untouchables, the most degraded beings.

Even their shadows and sight were considered to be a source of pollution. The toe of a *Brahmin* shoe was regarded as more sacred than the head of a *Shudras* in religious functions. Punishments for the same crime were different, less for a *Brahmins* and more for *Shudras*.

2.1.1 Determinants of Untouchability

The real form of caste system is reflected in relations that we find between the Savarnas and the *Shudras*. Untouchability is the historical contribution of caste-system. The *Shudra* is the servant of *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, and *Vaishyas*, but the untouchable even have no ability to serve them.

Thus, broadly speaking, the following 3 were the determinants of untouchability.

1. The class incapable of being able to provide food and water to the Savarnas.
2. The class which does not deserve to enter into the religious places, temples and pilgrims.
3. The class having disability for entering public places like wells, roads, hotels.¹⁷

17 Andre Beteille. *Castes – Old & New*: First Edition: Bombay: Asian Publishing House; 1969

The entire responsibility for it lies on the structure of Hindu society. It is quite different from the other social organization in the world. The feeling of untouchability found among the Hindus, is considered to be unchanging. The act of pollution in other societies could be changed in sacredness, but the making **eight crores** human beings untouchables by birth is the phenomenon found in only the Hindu Society.

The person, who was born as untouchables, lived as untouchables and died as untouchables. The birds and animals were worshipped, but the human beings were made the degraded persons.

They were forced to live outside the villages and were kept away from the social amenities. They did not have houses. They were not allowed to wear clothes and ornaments. They could not eat good meals.

Whatever the religious texts prescribed for the *Shudras*, it was carried on in practice.

In every part of India, there are terrible forms of untouchability. The *Mahars* form the main untouchables' caste of Maharashtra. They were assigned the duty of protecting the villages. Food was collected for them from every family of the village. The only right which they were given was to pick up the dead bodies of animals.

The *Mahars* were called "Ati-*Shudras*" in the reign of Sawai Madhava Ram. They could not enter into the Hindu temples. Even today the doors of the temples in Maharashtra are closed for the untouchables.

The untouchables in Gujarat could not enter Hindu temples. They could not draw water from the wells of Hindus. Besides all ill-treatment meted out to the untouchables their sins were considered to be the cause of epidemics if it happens in village. The untouchables could not wear shoes. They were not allowed to bear caps and long clothes.

A *Shudra* could not spit on the road, because he was considered to be an unsacred human being. Mere seeing a *Shudra*, walking and talking with a *Shudra* caused pollution. The *Shudra* had no religion. All sort of entertainments were prohibited for *Shudras*. The doors of schools were closed for their children.

A *Shudra's* daily routine of work was to rise early in the morning, to go to the house of a *Brahmin* etc. where he was employed as *dasa*, to clean house, to collect dung, to tend the animal etc. In return, he was given the remnants (small part that remains) of food, torn clothes and abuses. In this way, a *Shudra* always lived in poverty. He was always compelled to look at food like dogs and cats.

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, popularly known as Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was the real architect of the whole, historic and comprehensive structure of the reservation. Hailing from a poor oppressed Mahar family, Dr. Ambedkar experienced the bitter taste of social discrimination at every footing of his whole life right from the tender childhood. It was perhaps this suffering great soul an instinct to fight lifetime in addressing the similar sufferings that his crores of caste fellows were enduring without even murmuring.

He faced the experience of physical untouchability not only in the primary school days, but also even after obtaining rare foreign education, when he joined a Defence Officer in the office of

Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad of Baroda. All this strengthened him to struggle for the cause of the downtrodden and producing in him a patriot presenting the world best constitution which inter-alia also brought the provisions for reservation changing the lives for one-fifth population of the nation living in almost a sub human life.

2.1.2 Dr. Ambedkar's entry to the march towards reservation - 1917¹⁸

Dr. Ambedkar's role as far as the journey of reservation is concerned, came on the forefront from the year 1917, when the idea of social and political rights to the untouchables was mooted out for the first time in the country. In this year, people from the depressed classes organized two separate meetings at Bombay and demanded for the free and compulsory education for their children and also certain other rights such as to elect their own legislatures. These two meetings of the depressed classes created a pressure in the Congress, which sought the help of Dr. Ambedkar.

In the meantime, Dr. Ambedkar was also called upon to give evidence before the South Borough Committee where he explained the wretched condition of the oppressed people and demanded 'Separate Electorate' with reserved seats in the central legislative assembly and provincial legislative assemblies for the oppressed Indians in proportion to percentage of their population. The South Borough Committee recognized separate political existence of the oppressed classes and strongly recommended that measures should be taken to protect their interests.

18 Rana Mulchand. Reservation in India – Myths and Realities: First Edition: New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company; 2008

The South Borough Committee recommendations gave birth to The Government of India Act 1919, which recognized for the first time in the Indian history the politico-constitutional existence of the people from the depressed classes. This made possible nomination of at least one depressed class representative out of 14 non-official members nominated by the Governor-General to the central legislative assembly. This was the maiden historic achievement of Dr. Ambedkar.

Dr. Ambedkar whole-heartedly wanted to initiate the political education amongst the backward classes who were mostly illiterate. Therefore, he argued for responsible legislatures. He wanted that there should be elected legislatures from the depressed classes instead of nominated one as provided in the Government of India Act of 1919.

However, the British Government and Congress refused to recognize the demands of special representation of the depressed classes through election.

But, in substance, the Government of India Act 1919 proved as the 'Mile Stone' in the history of reservation to depressed classes, because it provided representation to this community in the legislature for the first time through nomination.¹⁹

2.1.3 Before Simon Commission - 1930

Dr. Ambedkar appeared before the Simon Commission on 23 October 1928 in Pune for giving evidence. He pleaded that the

19 Atul Yogesh. The Changing Frontiers of Castes: First Edition: New Delhi: National Publishing; 1968

depressed classes had a separate and distinct entity quite different from other minorities. Hence, they require special protection.

He asserted, "The first point, therefore, I would stress before the conference is that we must be regarded as a distinct and independent minority. Secondly, I would like to submit that depressed class minority needs greater political protection than other minorities in British India, for the simple reason that it is educationally very backward and that it is economically poor, socially enslaved and it also suffers from certain political disabilities from which no other community suffers."

It was Dr. Ambedkar only who demanded for the first time reservation in services for the depressed classes on 8 August 1930 during the All India Depressed Classes conference held at Nagpur. He along with Rao Bahadur Srinivasan participated on behalf of the depressed classes in the first time historic round table conference.

Dr. Ambedkar clearly stated, "The problems of oppressed classes will never be solved unless they get political power in their own hand." While explaining the social condition of the depressed classes he stated that they were depressed by the government, suppressed by the Hindus, and disregarded by the Muslims. We are left in most intolerable position of utter helplessness to which I am sure there is no parallel and to which I was bound to call attention." Dr. Ambedkar was of the view that the orthodox people would not allow the depressed classes to have equality of status and equality of treatment.

Hence, he tried strenuously to secure representation of oppressed Indians i.e. scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other backward classes and other oppressed classes i.e. Buddhists, Jains, Muslims,

Sikhs, Christians, etc. in the cabinet and the decision-making agencies of the government.

The result of the first round table conference was that the whole world came to know that the fate of the *Shudras* and *Ati-Shudras* in India was worse than that of Negroes in America.²⁰

2.1.4 Franchise Committee and Communal Award 1932

The Franchise Committee visited India in 1932 as to ascertain the views of various parties and in respect of position and status of the 'oppressed classes'. Almost all the leaders of the Franchise Committee supported the scheme of "Separate Electorate."

Hence, Dr. Ambedkar also changed his earlier stand and exclusively demanded the policy of "Separate Electorate". On the report of the Committee, J. Mac Donald, the British Prime Minister declared communal award on the 17 August 1932 i.e. distribution of political power in proportion to the strength of the communities.

The award was based on the principle of communal representation that was embodied in the Government of India Act, 1919. The communal award gave 'separate electorate'. According to Dr. Ambedkar, the communal award gave two benefits to the depressed classes as under:

1. A fixed quota of seats to be elected by separate electorates of the scheduled castes to be filled by them only.

20 Rana Mulchand. *Reservations in India – Myths and Realities*: First Edition: New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company; 2008

2. Double vote one to be used through separate electorates to elect their own legislatures and the other to be used in the joint electorates to elect Hindu candidates.

2.1.5 Gandhiji's Fast unto Death and Reservation Policy

Though the communal award declared the principle of "separate electorate" to the depressed classes and other backward communities, i.e. the Sikhs, the Muslims, the Indian Christians and the Europeans, yet Mahatma Gandhi and his supporters objected to the policy of separate electorate relating to the depressed classes only. Mahatma Gandhi resented to "fast unto the death" to oppose the separate electorates of depressed classes.

While opposing separate electorates for depressed classes and others, Mahatma Gandhi argued, "Muslims and Sikhs are well organized, the "Untouchables" are not. There is little political consciousness among them and they are so horribly treated that I want to save them against themselves. If they had separate electorates, their lives would be miserable in villages, which are the strongholds of Hindu orthodoxy. You must understand that I can tolerate the proposal for special representation of the Muslims and Sikhs as a necessary evil."

He further explained, "Separate electorates" to the untouchables will ensure them bondage in perpetuity. The Muslims will never cease to be Muslim by having separate electorates. Do you want the "Untouchables" to remain "Untouchables" for ever?

Gandhiji fully agreed with Dr. Ambedkar's bitterness against Indian social system. In this regard, he stated, "I have the highest regard

for Dr. Ambedkar. He has every right to be bitter. That he does not break our heads is an act of self-restraint on his part. He is today so much saturated with suspicious that he cannot see anything else.

He sees in every Hindu a determined opponent of the "Untouchables" and it is quite natural. But the separate electorates that he seeks will not give him social reform.²¹

2.1.6 Other Backward Classes

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are clearly listed in the constitution (Schedule Castes) order, 1950 as amended by the SCs and STs (Amendment Act 1976 etc.) in the schedule to the order. The OBCs are not listed in the constitutional order. Backward classes are nothing but a collection of certain castes.²²

The SCs and STs do suffer but not OBCs. There is no denying fact that the lot of the OBCs is a shade better than that of the SCs and STs, for they are numerous (52 %) as compared to the SCs (15 %) and STs (7.33 %).

There are two categories of OBCs: (a) The peasant (farmer) and (b) The artisans etc.

The peasant are little land owner. The artisans etc. are worse off as their traditional craft and calling which kept their bellies warm is in ruined (collapsed) state because of the competition.

21 Rana Mulchand. Reservations in India – Myths and Realities: First Edition: New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company; 2008

22 Yadav and Rajbir Singh. India's Unequal Citizens – A Study of OBC: First Edition: New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors; 1994

The Commission for OBCs worked for about two years and submitted a three volume report to the President of India on 30 March 1955, making following recommendations:

1. The women and backward communities among Muslims, Christians etc. can be treated as OBCs.
2. To bring these people to the national mainstream, reserve 70 Per Cent seats in all technical and professional institution for their qualified sons and daughters to be made.

The mention of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes brings to the mind of many people thoughts of reservation, usually to the exclusion of everything else. As though there is nothing to the existence to SCs and STs other than reservation.

The problems of SCs and STs are much larger than can comprehend and resolved by the single policy of reservation in employment and even in education. Reservation was intended to be part of a multi-faceted package which is yet to be made available to the SCs and STs in its fullness, in the last five decades of India's independent existence.

Another fallacy, which can be ascribed to ignorance, is that the policy of reservation in employment was initiated for the SCs and STs. This is not true. In the Madras and Bombay Presidencies and the Princely States of Mysore and Travancore, reservation in public employment, as we understand it today, was initiated in the second and third decades of this century in order to reduce the near monopoly of a small section of the population and to give some share to the others, *Non-Brahmins* in the case of Madras, Mysore and Bombay and Avarnas in the case of Travancore.

This policy was a product of social movements of those who did not have a share in the near monopolies in their respective territories movements of *Non-Brahmins* in Madras and Mysore and the movements of the Avarnas led by the Ezhavas (not an SC at present because they were able to break themselves free from the prison of untouchability through their mobilization and movements before independence and about the time the lists of SCs on the basis of "untouchability" were prepared).²³

While SCs and STs also had some limited share in this early patterns of reservation, these operated largely in favour of what we now classify as Socially and Economically Backward classes or Other Backward Classes (SEBCs or OBCs) as in the Travancore pattern and for SEBCs/OBCs and other *Non-Brahmins* in the Madras, Mysore and Bombay patterned Reservation exclusively for the SCs and Depressed Classes (DCs) as they were designated earlier, was introduced only as late as 1943-44 shortly before India achieved independence, when Baba Saheb Ambedkar was a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council during the period of four years from July-1942 to June-1946, which saw a number of important reforms in the field of his interest and toil.

The concept of reservation for the depressed classes in Public Employment had its roots in the Yeravada Pact or Poona Pact of 1932, the outcome of intense negotiations among the number of Indian leaders in order to bring to an end the fast undertaken by Gandhiji on the 20th September 1932, demanding the withdrawal of the Communal Award, announced by Sir Ramsay Macdonald on August 17, 1932 which incorporated separate electorate for the

23 Sharma Rajendra Dr. Brahmin Through The Ages: First Edition: New Delhi: Ajanta Publications; 1977

depressed classes as part of proposed Constitutional reforms. Reservation for STs was introduced only in 1950.

Before we take note of the contents and the significance of the Yeravada Pact, it is necessary to broadly understand the position of SCs in the Indian Society and the traditional Indian Economy (which is very much alive notwithstanding the arrival of the age of computers and electronics).

A combination of Agro-Climatic characteristics and Socio-Economic factors resulted in the creation of a large class of agricultural labourers as an essential feature of the agricultural civilization that India embarked upon in the historical and pre-historical past. It was an essential aspect of India's social "Order" that those castes, which account for the overwhelming majority of the population of what in recent times came to be designated as the SCs, contributed the major shares of agricultural labourers. They were the agricultural castes of India. Their have been variations of their plight.

In some parts of the country, right up to the end of the 19th century, they were bought and sold as chattel-based system of slavery is the horror we today experience as bonded labour system whose dimensions are much larger than acknowledged and the existence of which is unknown to most of our educated urban and particularly metropolitan middle classes and of which a large majority belongs to the SCs and most of the rest belongs to the STs.

In some other parts of the country on account of the compulsions of the agricultural situation, while being agricultural labourers they were also given the privileges of being unrecorded crops sharing tenant-at-will.

The most serious inadequacy of our post independence development process is that SCs even today remained agricultural labour castes of India. True a small proportion of them are also engaged in occupation like a handloom weaving and other traditional crafts. For example certain SCs are the traditional weaver of some parts of the country like Gujarat who combined weaving with agricultural labour.

Many members of certain SCs are also engaged in occupations like fishing in some part of the country. But the bulk of the members of these castes are agricultural labourers. They are also numerically small castes included in the list of SCs as they are victims of untouchability, who are engaged in miscellaneous non-agricultural occupations like acrobatics and entertainments (*Nat*).

But the fact remains that the bulk of the members of those castes which constitute the vast majority of the population of SCs are forced to depend on the agricultural usage labour.

Some of them have managed to hang on to small pieces of land in defiance of formal laws in some part of the country and customs everywhere. But our pattered of planned development has not been able to make available to their lands the benefits of irrigation even where surface and/or ground water is profusely available.

As a result, even those SCs families which have some land are forced to remain essentially agricultural labourers. They are the main creators of the agricultural surplus of large land owners, a large part of which goes to feed the advanced urban classes.

As mentioned earlier, some members of the scheduled castes are engaged in weaving and other traditional crafts and in occupations like fishing.

In such occupation, in some cases they function in a manner analogous to that of tenant-at-will in agriculture, while in some instances they are self-employed. Where they are self-employed, they are much acted of the major part of their fruits of their labour by layers of non-functional middleman which intercept the supply line of raw-material and the flow of their finished goods to the market a distinct sections of SCs who belongs to certain specific castes in the case of North and East India and some members of different castes engaged in agricultural labour in the case of South India are engaged in maintenance of civic sanitation in Indian cities and towns.

These *Safai-Karmacharis* are dubbed as scavengers and subjected to the worst form of unsociability. One of the North Indian SCs engaged in scavenging in North India and even in some part of the Deccan also contributes to the bulk of the agricultural labourers of the Western Districts of Punjab.²⁴

Obviously this pattern of SC existence could not be remedied by the scheme of reservation in public employment only. It required a wide array of development policy, specifically directed towards the SCs, with the objective of transforming them from agricultural labourers into free self-employed cultivators on their own account; placing the self-employed weavers, other artisans and fisher-folks in full command of their raw material and their market, and liberating

24 Singh Hoshiar, Malik A.S. Socio-Economic Development of Scheduled Castes in India: First Edition: Jaipur: Aalekh Publishers; 2001

safai-karamacharis of civic sanitation workers ("Scavengers") without loss of employment or income.²⁵

Reservation as one item is such a full package; it would have transformed the SCs into free citizens of this country in the last 50 years. But such package was not made available to them.

The first systematic effort to formulate such a package had to wait till 1978, when the Special Component Plan (SCP) for Scheduled Castes was introduced. Its conceptual roots can be traced to clause 9 of the Yeravada Pact.

But in the last decade, the Special Component Plan was not allowed to develop into a powerful instrumentally that, at its very inception, it was envisaged to become. It is true that larger benefits flow to the SCs after the SCP was introduced, but is much smaller than what is justified, necessary and possible.

This is the reason why SCs have largely and essentially remained the agricultural labour castes of India as they have been through the centuries. This is not the result of "failure" of reservation as a policy concept.

In spite of the obvious weaknesses of the development effort, the reservation policy has been able to enable a limited number of SC families to avail themselves of the benefits of education and public employment.

It is within my personal knowledge that most of the beneficiaries of reservation policy come from the families of agricultural labourers,

25 Briggs G.W. *The Chamars*: First Edition: New Delhi: Low Price Publications; 1920

other labourers, small and marginal peasants, primary school teachers, Class-III and Class-IV employees and the like, though unfortunately some critics are able to see only the very small number who come from other types of families, whom they dub as the SC "elite".

With the weakness of the total development policy in respect of the SCs, forcing them to remain as India's agricultural labour castes to this day, it is no wonder that they also continue to be the victims of bondage (notwithstanding Article 23 of the Constitution, untouchability, notwithstanding Article 17 of the Constitution and the PCR, Act 1955) and atrocities (notwithstanding the IPC and The SCs and STs (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.²⁶

The STs who share the bottom rung of India's socio-economy with the SCs are exploited in a different way. In the context of the amalgam that has produced Indian society in most parts of the country, STs are those who have participated in this amalgam to a significantly lesser extent and the bulk of whom therefore maintain ethnic distinctiveness and identity in their relatively remote territories. As they have kept relatively aloof from the cast forming social process of India, they have not developed castes among themselves.

But wherever some of them have stepped out of the security of their remote territories, upper caste society has reduced them to SC like existence. Fortunately a good majority of them still continue to be free people, in a sense in which SCs are not, and have some control over their resources and are cultivators on their own account. But an insidious process of deprivation of the STs of their lands has been progress over time.

26 Diwan Paras Dr. Constitution of India: First Edition: Allahabad: Allahabad Law Agency; 1977

This process has acquired a terrifying momentum after independence with the expansion of the frontiers of India's agricultural civilization and more recently of a new type of "Commercial Civilization" and the progress of our development planning. While traditionally STs lived harmoniously in or close to forests and they and their forests protected each other, it was one of the contributions of British colonialism to unilaterally bring about a disjunction between the two, to the detriment of both and to the benefit of colonial revenues and commercial profits.

After Independence, we have continued with the essence of the colonial forest policy, with its insulting implication of dichotomy between tribal interests and national interest as though there can be any national interest which of variance and at loggerheads with tribal interests.²⁷

In addition, the developmental policy of recent decades has deprived large number of ST families and groups of their lands by locating irrigation, power, industrial and mining projects in their midst.

The cost of the policy has mostly been borne by the STs and the benefits have mostly gone to others. Thus through deprivations of their traditional lands, STs are gradually being pushed into agricultural servitude by the side of their SC brethren who have been agricultural servitors through denial of land for centuries.

Areas inhabited by the STs are the least developed even where they still have some control over land and other

27 Singh Hoshier and Malik A.S. Socio-Economic Development of Scheduled Castes in India: First Edition: Jaipur: Aalekh Publishers; 2001

resources. The effort for the systematic remedy of this situation started in the Fifth plan in the form of the Tribal sub-plan (TsP). As in the case of the SCP, the TsP has not been allowed to grow to its potential stature and effectiveness.

Reservation Policy has enabled certain numbers of STs to have a share of public employment and education, but both in the case of SCs and STs the numbers who could secure the benefits of reservation are much smaller than their proportion in the population.

Some critics wrongly blame the "elite" of the SCs and STs for this while the real cause is the failure of the developmental policy to help most of the SC and ST families and groups to become economically free enough to be capable of availing themselves of the benefits of education and public employment.

Even within these limits, the reservation policy would have produced better results if it had been sincerely implemented by all those in charge of its implementation. We have examples of better results wherever individuals have been in charge, which believe in and are serious about the Constitutional guarantees for SCs and STs.

It is not difficult to project the superior results that would have been achieved if, all along the line. Policy and its implementation had been equally sincere in Constitutional faith and serious about Constitutional implementation.

It is against this background that we have to take a second look (for many a first look) at the contents and the significance of the Yeravada Pact, which was a solemn agreement between two parts

of Indian Society, the depressed classes (i.e. SCs) and the Caste Hindus, Pyarelal, who was in constant attendance on Gandhiji during his fast against the Communal Award, has referred to the events preceding the pact as "the negotiations between the depressed classes representatives and Caste Hindu representatives".

The pact described itself as the "text of the agreement which was arrived at between the leaders acting on behalf of the deprived classes and the rest of the Hindu community regarding representation of the depressed classes in the legislatures and certain other matters affecting their welfare".

The first signature under the Pact was that of Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya. The significance of his signature is evident from Pyarelal's words that "the Caste Hindus were parties to it through the assent and signature of Pandit Malviya".

Tej Bahadur Sapru and M.R. Jayakar in their telegram to the British Government use the following terms: Caste Hindus, led by Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and the "Depressed Classes "representatives including Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and R.Srinivasan, both members of the RTC and many others from Madras and other provinces came to a settlement regarding the representation of Depressed Classes and protection of their rights.

Mahatma Gandhi agreed with the terms of settlement. "Baba Saheb Ambedkar and Srinivasan also show a similar perception in their cable to the British Prime Minister etc. that "an agreement had been reached between the representatives of Depressed Classes and Caste Hindus in regard to the questions involved in the

communal award ... this settlement has the support of all the Depressed Classes”.

There are many other telegrams and communications from leaders like Pandit Malviya, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Baba Saheb Ambedkar, N.C.Kelkar and resolutions from organisations like the Hindu Mahasabha etc. which bring out the perception of all India on the nature of the Pact as an agreement between two parts of the Indian Society, viz. the Depressed Classes (i.e. the SCs) and the Caste Hindus. It was an act of faith on both sides.

But while the SCs immediately fulfilled their faith on the spot by giving up separate electorate, other clauses of the Pact, which are solemn undertakings to the SCs, having either not been implemented at all or have been taken up after an unconscionably long interval and implemented half-heartedly and/or in a truncated manner. The educated classes of India must know and understand this if they are to understand the sense of the great let-down that the SCs feel.

It is extremely important that the educated classes of India who do not belong to SCs and STs apply themselves, shoulder to shoulder with our SC and ST brethren, even now seriously and un-reservedly to the totality of the comprehensive efforts required to bring to and the inhuman sufferings of the SCs and STs so that a humane and harmonious society may still become possible in India.²⁸

While one must hope that, before it is too late, the educated individuals belonging to the upper castes and upper classes, who occupy positions of influence and responsibility in all systems of

28 Sharma B.D. Dalit Betrayed: First Edition: New Delhi: Har Anand Publications; 1994

India's governance both in the governmental and quasi-governmental as well as private sectors, in the fields of plan formulation and plan implementation, financial allocations and expenditures, banking trade, commerce, industry, education etc. will apply themselves sincerely and seriously to the implementation of the Yeravada Pact, which morally binds us all and of the Constitution which morally as well as statutorily binds us all, it is necessary that reservation in public employment (which includes employment in the services of the Government, both Central as well as State, Public Undertakings, Banks, Universities, Cooperatives etc. all of which come within the definition of the term "State" under Article 12 of the Constitution) is taken up with a new vigour so that the first step of quantitative shares is completed at every level, and so that we could proceed towards qualitative fulfilment also.

The fact that there have been serious defaults in evolving and applying a comprehensive and adequate package of planned developmental assistance for the SCs and STs should not be ignorantly/ hypocritically used for questioning the reservation policy.

It is also to be remembered that the Indian scheme of reservation for SCs and STs has not been evolved as poverty alleviation programme. It has been evolved for giving their due share to the SCs and STs who have been deprived of any share. Even in the Yeravada Pact, there is no reference to denial of reservation to those members of the Depressed Classes who are above a certain economic level.

The Long delayed task of harmonious social restructuring will be facilitated by the educated classes finding their way to

concentrating on what needs to be done to fulfil the unfulfilled promises to SCs and unfulfilled Constitutional obligations to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.²⁹

29 Satyanaryan A. Dalit and Upper Castes: First Edition: New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers & Distributors; 2005