



CONTRIBUTING FACTORS FOR THE GENESIS OF RESERVATION POLICY IN TAMIL NADU

Dr. S. Pushpalatha, Assistant Professor & Head (i/c), Department of History, DDE, Madurai Kamaraj
University, Madurai – 625 021

Abstract

Reservation policy is applied in India, Which is having a graded social structure popularly called Caste Institution. In this type of society, compartmentalized rigid social system prevailed. In which one man should live in the same social condition from birth to death. Upper castes enjoyed more privileges than the lower caste. To rectify this age old discrimination, reservation scheme came to existence. For this various factors contributed a lot and many efforts have been taken from the beginning of the nineteen century. In this research paper an attempt has been made to highlight the contributing factors for the genesis of reservation policy in Tamil Nadu.

Key Words: *Contributing Factors, Genesis, Reservation Policy, Proportional Representation, Communal G.O.*

Introduction

Reservation is one of the mechanism of protective discrimination for eradicating the present institutionalized effects of past discrimination, through positive governmental steps awarding preferential treatment in favour of certain sections of the society. Reservation is applied only in graded societies, where certain groups enjoyed more powers and privileges, in favour of certain weaker sections of the society. It involves encouragement in sharing of opportunities in the executive, legislative bodies, in educational institutions and in public services.¹ The demand by the unprivileged classes to enjoy the same opportunities of the privileged class resulted in social conflict in the earlier

stages. In course of time, the underprivileged section came to enjoy social, political and economic and other privileges on par with others in the name of reservation.² In this research paper an attempt has been made to analyse the circumstances and factors responsible for the genesis of reservation scheme in Tamil Nadu.

Caste Institution in Tamil Society

In ancient Tamil Nadu people were divided on the basis of their inhabited lands and occupations. When the caste system vertically and horizontally stratified the unit then secular society of the Tamils, during the medieval days, turned into a rigid compartmentalized society.³ Today, the Tamil society is comprised thousands of castes and sub-castes. The origin of caste system is a peculiar one. Consequent to the caste system there emerged the practice of untouchability. This evil became part and parcel of caste institution. Various factors were responsible for the rise and growth of untouchability. Birth determined the caste of a person. Again, occupation was another factor. Occupation of each caste was hereditary.⁴

Awakening and Social Changes

Social reforms mainly involved two aspects. The first was education and the other was the breaking of the rigidity of certain customs.⁵ Educational leaders, planners and politicians have laid great emphasis on the powers of education for social change in the country.⁶

British administration also encouraged and patronised the efforts of the Christian Missionaries through enactments. These attempts had a profound impact on obtaining English education at a larger level.⁷ When the British assumed the administrative powers of India⁸, there was seventeen *tahsildar* schools throughout the Madras Presidency.⁹ During this time, the medium of instruction was English in the District Schools and Vernacular in the Taluk Schools. As earlier, the Brahmins quickly imbibed the value of Western Education.¹⁰

Census Reports and its Subsequent Effects

The attempt of the British Government to bring out Census Report was a significant land mark in the social history of Tamil Nadu. Enumeration of persons and their household with their respective status at a particular time was the aim of the Census Report.¹¹ As the society in Tamil Nadu has been a caste ridden one, the first Census Report taken in 1871, clearly reveals the different caste divisions and their hierarchy in the Tamil society. With a view to control the domination of a single community the Census Report reported “Special measures are received to ensure that no single caste receives and undue advantage in the distribution of offices connected with the administration of the country”.¹² The subsequent Census Report of 1881, 1891 also emphasized this fact to a larger extent. These

Census Reports revealed the strength of each community in the State, a fact which was totally unknown to them previously. The Western education hitherto they had gained and the reported strength of their communities made them to compare and contrast with the advanced communities to fight for obtaining more opportunities.¹³ Indeed, the attempts of the British Government to bring out Census Reports for every ten years, commencing from 1871 was an eye opener to other communities the demand for reservation and more opportunities in the government.

Domination of Single Caste and the Existence of Social Discrimination

In 1833, the Board of College and Public Instruction, Madras, received an application from a Pariah boy. There started the dilemma of the administration. Even though the British desired to admit him, practically, they found it very difficult. The reasons were that the head of the institution happened to be a Brahmin and the students of the class were also Brahmins. In fact, the boy had full justice for education the government had already decreed to have removed all discriminations long before.¹⁴ But, in practice the Britishers realized the difficulty of implementing this principle.

Again in 1846, the Sheriff of Madras requested the Court to Directors of employ peons from the Pariah community, without any discrimination on the basis of caste. He was informed that the same principle was laid down in the Despatch of Court of Directors of 1931.¹⁵ By 1853, the British Government found the virtual monopoly of a single caste called Brahmins in public services. For instance, in the Madras Presidency the Revenue establishment of Nellor District was managed by forty nine Brahmins that was also all from the same family.¹⁶ They were the relatives of the Deputy Sheristadar, Gotoor Venkataramaniah. Lord Harris, the Governor of Madras, desired the Board of Revenue to take immediate steps to remedy this evil. Accordingly, in 1854 the Board of Revenue issued a standing order in which it is stated that “Collectors should be careful to see that the subordinate appointments in their districts are not monopolised by members of a few influential families. Endeavour should always be made to divide the principal appointments in each district among the several castes. A proportion of the Tahsildars in each district should belong to castes other than the Brahmins and it should be a standing rule that the two chief revenue servants in the Collector’s office should be of different castes”.¹⁷ When the order was circulated, they again found the same difficulties. It was quite evident that there was no suitable person for government employment opportunities from others communities. It was also too difficult for the Britishers to introduce some new social measures to transform the society.¹⁸

The orders, which were formerly issued by the Britishers did not have the idea of proportional representation based on population. However, it was good beginning for the future reservation in Tamil Nadu.¹⁹ In the Press Report of 1858, the British Government repeated that no person should be denied admission in the educational institutions on the ground of caste, creed and religion in the

government aided schools.²⁰ In 1871, W.R. Cornish, the Census Superintendent of Madras remarked. “The true policy of the State would be to limit their numbers in official service so as to allow no special prominence or preponderance of particular caste”. Thus, he exposed the presence of strong Brahmin elements in all respects. He stressed the importance of the representation of other communities.²¹

Educational Emancipation of Muslims by the Britishers

Britishers applied the principle of extending Western education among the Muslims. This was one of the measures to reduce the Brahmin domination.²² Hobart, the then Governor of Madras, remarked that the Muslim communities had once politically dominated in India. But they were reduced to the position of insignificance. Under the British rule, they did not undertake the English education and consequently become disqualified for the employment opportunities.²³

Application of the Term Backward Classes

In their attempt to elevate the Muslims, emphasis was given to Muslim education. The Muslims were the first category to be identified and treated as a backward class in the Madras Presidency in 1872.²⁴ The attempt of the administration in giving special treatment to the Muslims for education and employment opportunities became an important landmarks in the field of reservation. The Hunter Commission included a provision for the reservation of a certain proportion of free studentship for Muslims in all schools maintained from public funds. It also cautioned those institutions which had not reserved for special races.²⁵

The term backward classes properly first appeared in 1884. The remark was made by the Madras Government to the Government of India in the ninth chapter of the Education Commissioner’s Report on the Education of the classes requiring special treatment.²⁶ Subsequently, the term Backward Classes was found in 1886 in the School Fee Notification. Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy of India, expressed the necessity of the introduction of the representation by interests even in 1888. This was contemplated just to wean away the Mussalamans from the Congress which was established in 1885.²⁷

Demands of Non-Brahmin Communities

In 1892, in the name of Fair Play, two pamphlets entitled “The Non-Brahmin Races and Indian Public Service” and “The Ways and Means for the Amelioration of Non-Brahmin Races” were published in which they favoured a National Association should be formed for getting the due share and representation to other communities in government services.²⁸ Accordingly in 1887, the Viswakulakarma Association, Madras, submitted a memorial to the then Governor Sir Aurthur Elibank Havelock. Its “Kammala Condition Amelioration Bill” had observed that Kammalas were the

most backward in education. Their condition was deplorable. They demanded the Government to start separate schools for them and it asked the government to grant concessions in the qualification, age, school and college fees in order to compete with other candidates.²⁹

Negatively by 1899, 92 percent and in 1903, 93 percent of the seats in the colleges were occupied by the Brahmins. With the Brahmin preponderance in the educational fields, the college Principals and the officials of the Educational Department favoured reservation for non-Brahmin castes also. The government continued its efforts to curb the accumulations of Brahmin domination in public services. In 1904, in the superior services, the Brahmin and non-Brahmin ratio was 70:30. The Board of Revenue instructed the District Collectors to ensure fair distribution of seats in the services among the non-Brahmin. To bring uniformity in its rule, the Board of Revenue provided a column to show the caste or sect of each subordinate services in 1904. In enabled the Collectors to see how far the Standing Order of Board of Revenue was enforced.³⁰

British Efforts for Widest Representation

Before the passage of Morley-Minto Reforms, a Muhammadan deputation under the leadership of H.H. Aga Khan met the Executive Council and made certain demands viz. communal representation in Municipal Boards, Universality and Provincial Councils and the Mohammandan representation in the Imperial Legislative Council. This was the first Muhammadan claim for separate representation”.³¹

In 1907, the Department of Home, Government of India drafted a scheme for representative government intended to secure “the widest representation of classes, races and interests”. For the Madras Provincial Legislative Council, the draft recommended seventeen non-official seats to be filled by special electorates of communal interests and functional groups including Christians and Muhammadans. Hence, the Brahmin and Non-Brahmin group considered of various sections requiring representation in the legislature of Madras was officially acknowledged and accepted in 1907. The Brahmins, particularly in the Madras Presidency, criticized this kind of communal representation whereas, the Muslims and the Non-Brahmins supported it. However, the latter did not have any newspaper to mobilize the public opinion at that time. They did not have any uniform opinion. Each caste wanted separate representation. This kind of new trend was encouraged by the British administrators to prolong their rule.³²

Morley-Minto Reforms and Communal Representation

Lord Morley, the Secretary of State, in a Despatch of 27 November 1908, accepted the principle of securing adequate Muhammadan representation and after discussion he agreed for separate Muhammadan electorates.³³ Accordingly, the Indian Councils Act of 1909 granted separate

electorate to the Muslims. In 1910, the constituencies were bifurcated into Muslim constituencies and non-Muslims constituencies. In the Imperial Council, they obtained five seats, one each for the three Presidencies, one for the United Province and one each for Bihar and Orissa. For the Madras Provincial Council they got two seats.³⁴

Survey of the Britishers and the formation of the Idea of the Proportional Representation

In 1909, the Board of Revenue found that in the co-operative societies, the vacancies were mostly filled by the Brahmins and very less number of vacancies were filled by the non-Brahmin Hindus, Indian Christians, Muhammadans and Europeans. So, the Registrar of the Co-operative Societies was ordered to appoint fully qualified non-Brahmin in preferences to Brahmins.³⁵ In 1911, the government made investigations to know the implementation of government policies and its consequences regarding the representation of various communities in public services. It was found that in the name of the sub-divisions, Brahmins alone enjoyed the opportunities. Further, the government reiterated that though divisions had existed among the Brahmins, they all should be treated under the name of Brahmins".³⁶ In 1912, the Government of India appointed the Royal Commission to investigate the representation of various communities in the provincial services. The Commission held its inquiry the Madras from 8 January to 18 January 1913. It investigated 42 respondents. Among them there were nineteen Brahmins, seven non-Brahmin Hindus, two Muslims, three Christians and others were Europeans. Among them eight members fully supported the principle of class representations and seventeen of them rejected it.³⁷ Mr. Balaji Rao Naidu, a Revenue Divisional Officer stated before the Commission that proportional representation was the only way to protect the suppressed communities. In the meantime, the Vanniars and the Nadars formed communal organizations like Vannia Kula Sangam and Nadar Mahajana Sangam to show their unity and strength. The British government was also sympathetic towards the demands of these Sangams.³⁸

Sir P. Theagaraya Chetti remarked that it was not suitable to conduct open competitive examinations in India to select civil servants. In order to get a due share of different communities, he suggested communal representation.³⁹ Another Muslim Officer Mr. Yakub Khan was also in favour of the legitimate share of all communities.⁴⁰ Brahmins occupied majority of the places, and blocked the entry of other communities. Finally, the government contemplated on doing justice to other communities. Besides, the monopoly of one class would lead to corruption and affected the effective administration. So, the Commission recommended that the proportion of Brahmins should not exceed fifty percent.⁴¹ Sir Alexander Cardew, a member of the Madras Executive Council, submitted certain reports regarding the representation of various communities in various high posts and offices, before the Public Service Commission Department in 1913 in which he revealed that the seats reserved for the Hindus were monopolized only by the Brahmins.⁴² He also suggested for fixing percentage of

vacancies reserved for different communities.⁴³ These developments culminated in the genesis of reservation policy in Tamil Nadu.

Conclusion

Throughout the nineteenth century, the main thrust of the British administrative Madras appeared of non-interfering the socio-religious order of the Tamils. Even though their administration had extended large scale concessions to Christian Missionaries in meeting out the needs of the local population, they too wanted to implement a large number of reforms. In an attempt to extend the governmental benefits, particularly of educational and employment opportunities to different cross sections of the population, a few Governors of Madras attempted to initiate measures for the benefit of the ignored sections. In fact, the evolution of reservation policy was a kind of response to the predominance of Brahmins in public services and educational institutions. For the conceived form of reservation system or quota system many factors contributed their share throughout the 19th Century. Such factors are discussed above in this research paper. In which, social discrimination, Brahmin domination, social awakening, British administrative policies, native associations, demands of the natives and many other things are responsible for the evolution and growth of reservation system in Tamil Nadu. All these contributed for the implementation of first Communal G.O. and representation of various communities.

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