

CHAPTER - I

Introduction

The Depressed Classes, presently known as the 'Scheduled Castes' and 'Harijans', constitute a group of castes of the Hindus in India. The population of these classes was around 64.5 millions i.e. about 15 per cent of the country's population in 1961.¹ These classes have been recognised as the weaker sections of the Indian society in view of their economic and educational backwardness. To remove the disparities between them and the general population, special provisions for their educational development have been stipulated in the Constitution of India. There have been peculiar reasons for the educational backwardness of these classes and special steps have continuously been taken for more than a century to cause education among them. The present study aims at tracing the development of education among these classes upto 1947.

The causes of the educational backwardness of the Depressed classes had their roots in the social placement of these classes. The Hindu society in India has been caste based. The Institution of Caste having been very old, it dominated social decisions in the ancient and medieval periods to a very large extent. The Depressed

¹Census of India, 1961.

classes were placed at the lowest strata in the caste hierarchy, and people of other strata were advised to shun any type of social intercourse with these classes. The social prejudices against these classes were interpreted to the society as the natural differences caused by birth in a caste or a clan. The Hindu philosophy of 'Karma' propounded that the penances of the present life have a relationship with previous or future births, and, therefore, are a matter of Providence. The grim poverty of these classes, their educational and cultural backwardness, and the social disabilities faced by them were interpreted as having been a result of their own doings in previous birth. In such a context, one of the social disabilities imposed upon the Depressed classes had been the denial of education to them and their progeny.

The traditional practices of despising the Depressed classes and abhorring them in matters of education continued for a very long time, upto the end of the Eighteenth century. Even in the Nineteenth century, the incidence of education in these classes had been negligibly small. For a very long time, these classes were deprived of availing any benefits of the educational facilities available in their neighbourhood because of their social stigma. The early attempts to spread education among them were resisted by other sections of the society. 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. The conditions of these classes could only be improved through a multi-dimensional approach i.e., by aiming simultaneously at reforming the social traditions, de-emphasizing the practice of untouchability, creating healthier climate for the economic and educational advancement of these classes and such other factors. These classes had, therefore, to mark time until the emergence of such an opportune period when the Government and the general public would come forward to lend them a hand for their amelioration.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy ushered an era of social change in India by opposing the continuance of certain evil social practices. He was followed by a stream of social reformers. Many of these reformers had established societies, associations, organisations to take up social reform work. The emanation of socio-political issues from such social institutions had its tremendous value for mobilising public opinion in favour of social elevation of the Depressed classes. In addition, the indifference of the British Government to the institution of caste and the religious neutrality practised by them in respect of the Indian subjects; the proselytisation activities of the christian missionaries and the conversion of some of the Depressed classes into Christianity; the changes in the occupational structure of the Indian society by way of

openings in the government and military services on one hand and the growth of industries on the other; the developments in the means of transport and communications, etc., were some of the factors that precipitated change in the social outlook for these classes. Partly as a result of these developments as also the political atmosphere in the country, these classes gained political consciousness and started demanding equality of status with other sections of the society. The programmes of the social organisations working for the uplift of the Depressed classes and the political demands of the Depressed classes included development of education in these classes as a means of their social elevation and economic amelioration. Therefore, the various social and political events concerning the welfare of the Depressed classes also played a significant role in the creation of educational facilities for the Depressed classes.

The origin as also the development of education in the Depressed classes has been a part of the history of Education in India during the British period. Whereas the expansion of education in these classes was facilitated by the general expansion of education in the masses, several other challenges had to be met for expanding education in them. For example, special schools for the Depressed class children had to be opened in places where the social stigma against them was strong; some economic

incentives which could reduce the cost of education to the parents had to be provided in view of the general poverty of these classes; residential hostels had to be established for encouraging secondary and collegiate education among these classes. Industrial and vocational schools were opened for equipping these classes with better skills in their own occupations. In addition, special steps had to be taken for popularising education among these classes. Above all, efforts were made to frame the educational policies in a way so as to discourage the practices of social discrimination against the Depressed classes. This required active participation of the various official and non-official agencies on the one hand and the treatment to 'Education of the Depressed classes', as a special problem area on the other.

Several studies have been conducted to trace the development of Education in India during the British period. These studies have brought to light the position of educational progress at different points of time as also the major educational policies adopted from time to time. The emphasis in these studies have been on the study of the developments at the various stages of education viz., Primary Education, Secondary Education, University education even though some references to the progress among the educationally backward classes have also been made at places. The area 'Education of the Depressed classes', has comparatively remained unexplored.

The Depressed classes continue to be educationally backward and the Government of India as also the people of India are anxious to remove the educational disparity between the general population and the Depressed classes. A retrospective study into the development of education among these classes could be helpful in knowing the policies which led to the expansion of education among these classes. The developments in the education of these classes were very often marked with certain political and social events and, therefore, a study on the educational development among these classes would show the inter-linkage of the various events with the educational programmes and policies especially framed for them. The pace of development of education among the Depressed classes differed from province to province. Such a study would bring to light the reasons for the same, and it would also reveal as to how education progressed in some areas rapidly. Since the efforts for expanding education among these classes have continuously been made for a long period, it is just possible that some aspects of educational development that had remained neglected during the British period might have continued to be in the background even in the post-independence period. The identification of these aspects could be useful for the future planning of education for these classes. Further, such a study would have its intrinsic value as an investigation reflecting the social struggle of the people of India for elevating the status of the Depressed classes through means of education. In view of

the above considerations it was envisaged to conduct the present study entitled 'Education of the Depressed Classes in India during the British Period'.

In view of the nature of the work, the data for the study have been collected from both the primary as well as the secondary sources. These sources include compilations of the educational records, proceedings of the Departments of Home and Education, reports on the progress of education for different intervals, reports of the various commissions and committees on Education, etc. Quinquennial Reviews on the 'Progress of Educationⁱⁿ India' have been quite informative on the subject. A number of books, doctoral theses and journals have also been studied to know the efforts of the non-official organisations in developing education among the Depressed Classes. Journals such as 'The Young India', 'The Harijan', had been giving a good publicity to the efforts of the voluntary agencies in this direction. References have also been drawn from the biographies of eminent workers to examine their viewpoints on the problems concerning the welfare of the Depressed classes and also to assess their contributions for developing education among them.

In view of the non-availability of certain cardinal information, some delimitations had to be self imposed for framing the design of the study. No particular definition of the term 'Depressed Classes' was obtainable in the different periods even though the term was used to identify

a group of castes. The criterion for the identification of the Depressed classes had largely been the social stigma of untouchability assigned to certain castes in different areas. (A list of such castes for various areas as obtainable in 1950 has been appended.) Because of the cultural and linguistic diversity in the country, the names of the castes included as Depressed classes have been different in the various places and as such it has not been possible to study the variations in the educational development among the different caste groups included as the Depressed classes.

In majority of the cases, the efforts for causing education among the Depressed classes did not go beyond provisions of elementary education. Further, separate statistics for the stage-wise development of education among these classes were generally not compiled for most of the periods. It has, therefore, not been possible to trace the development of education in them at particular stages of education. But the available statistical data for the intermittent periods have been examined to study the trends of educational development among these classes.

The geographical areas of the various provinces and territories of the British Empire have been taken to mean as they were named from time to time. The princely states have generally not been covered under this study. Presently, the areas covered by this study include such parts of India, Pakistan and Bangla Desh which had constituted British Empire and wherein the Depressed classes

resided in large population.

Generally the roots of the British system of education in India are traced to the Educational Clause of the Charter Act of 1813. The educational development among the Depressed classes took place after 1813. This study, therefore, covers the period from 1813 to 1947.

The break up of the present work into the various chapters has been based on the chronological classification followed in the history of education in India, except that the period 1922-1937 has been divided in two chapters i.e. 1922-1932 and 1933-1937. This has been done to study the impact of Gandhian Movement for the uplift of the Depressed classes. In view of the nature of the problem, it was necessary to study the social evolution of the Depressed classes and also their major handicaps during the Ancient and the Medieval periods. These have briefly been reviewed in one chapter. The major social and political events that had their impact on the educational development among the Depressed classes, the educational policies of the provincial governments and the government of India, the contributions made by non-official agencies to the educational cause of these classes and such other happenings have been examined in relation to the expansion of education in these classes at different periods in the last chapter. In the light of these discussions, the following conclusions have been drawn as the findings of the study.

(i) During the Pre-British period, the Depressed classes were deprived of equality of opportunity in social, political, economic and educational matters. This had led to a state of general backwardness among these classes.

(ii) The social reform movements initiated in the 19th century were instrumental for awakening consciousness for the uplift of the Depressed classes. Education was considered as a means of social elevation and economic welfare of these classes and as such most of the social organisations included expansion of education in the Depressed classes as a necessary aspect of their programmes.

(iii) Political consciousness in any class or community leads to consciousness for education as well. The Depressed classes conferences and other organisations of the Depressed classes, though primarily worked for earning political privileges to the Depressed classes, had included the provisions for the development of education among these classes in their programmes.

(iv) The role played by the non-official agencies was crucial in strengthening the efforts of the government for the promotion of education among the Depressed classes.

(v) The religious neutrality practised by the British government and the establishment of government schools which were secular in character helped the promotion of education among the Depressed classes.

(vi) The contribution of Mahatma Jotirao Phoolley, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi and their co-workers was significant for promoting education among the Depressed classes.

(vii) Provision of special facilities; creation of monetary incentives in the shape of freeships, stipends, scholarships; reservation of seats in educational institutions; and reservation of posts in services were considered as the motivational forces necessary for the promotion of education among these classes. There was a considerable impact of such provisions on the educational development among these classes.

(viii) Creation of hostel facilities was considered to be an important step for promoting secondary and higher education among these classes.

(ix) The education of girls of the Depressed classes comparatively remained ignored during the British period.

Since the Depressed classes continue to be educationally backward, the findings of the present study can have their implications for the planning of schemes and programmes for developing education among them at a faster rate. A few suggestions for enriching the existing programmes have been given towards the end of the present study.
