

## CHAPTER - IV

### Education of the Depressed Classes from 1883 to 1904

#### Recommendations of the Indian Education Commission, for Promoting Education Among the Depressed Classes

In February 1882, the Government of India had appointed an Education Commission under the Chairmanship of W.W.Hunter with a view to enquiring into the working of the existing system of Public Instruction and to the further extension of that system on a popular basis. A number of persons were nominated on the Commission to secure the adequate and intelligent consideration of the facts that were to be laid before it.<sup>1</sup>

As soon as the appointment of the Commission was announced, different organisations submitted their memorandums to it. Jotirao Phooley, who had earned a repute by this time and was also the Chairman of the Satya Shodhak Samaj submitted a memorandum regarding the education of the Depressed classes.<sup>2</sup>

As the first measure, Jotirao Phooley wanted the enforcement of compulsory education upto a certain age, say atleast 12 years. He further observed on the existing

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<sup>1</sup>Nurullah and Naik, 'A History of Education in India, London, MacMillan and Co., 1951, p.225(quoted)

<sup>2</sup>Keer, D., Mahatma Jotirao Phooley, the Father of Our Social Revolution, Bombay, Popular Parkashan: 1964, p.169.

state of affairs in the country and held the view that the Mahars, Mangs and other lower castes were practically excluded from all schools owing to caste prejudices as they were not allowed to sit by the side of the children of the higher castes. Consequently, special schools for these classes had to be opened but they existed only in large towns. He, therefore, urged the Commission to recommend for opening a large number of separate schools in the different parts. Thirdly, Jotirao Phooley raised an objection against the system of making payment to the teachers on the basis of the results. He viewed that payment by results was not suitable for the promotion of education among the poor and ignorant people as no taste had then been created among them for education. He argued that no teacher would come forward to open schools on his own account among such pupils as he would not be able to make a living by it. Government schools and special inducements were necessary until such a taste was created among them.<sup>3</sup> It is not known whether the Commission gave a personal hearing to Mr. Phooley or not but from the recommendations made by it, it appears that the Commission had given a due thought to the educational problems of the Depressed classes.

The Commission had attempted a comprehensive study of the educational scene in India. It had located that there were a few classes in India which could be identified as special classes and it would be necessary to take some

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

additional steps for the promotion of education among them. Whereas the native chiefs and noble men would require special schools for they would not send their children to the common schools, there were certain classes which were comparatively educationally backward and which required a special treatment for one reason or the other. These classes were

- i) the Muhammadans
- ii) the aboriginal races
- iii) the low castes (i.e. the Depressed Classes)

In addition, education of the girls was also considered as a special problem area because the incidence of education in the girls was too low. The Commission had recommended several measures that would accelerate the development of education in these educationally backward classes. In fact, the report of the Indian Education Commission, 1882 is the first official document taking into consideration the education of the Depressed classes. The Commission had suggested some measures with regard to the treatment to be given to these classes under the various heads such as Indigenous education, Primary education, External Relations of the Departments etc. The main points regarding the provision of the educational facilities for the Depressed classes under these heads have been summarized below with a view to sketch a panorama of the thinking of the Indian Education Commission on this aspect.

As would be seen, the various elementary education institutions in the country in 1882 could broadly be classified in two categories i.e. the Indigenous institutions being managed largely by private enterprise and aided by the government under the scheme of grants-in-aid and the vernacular schools established by the British Government on the lines of the British system of Education. The Education Commission, 1882, had dealt with these two categories of Institutions separately. Under the subhead - Indigenous education, the following recommendations made by the Commission, had their relevance to the education of the Depressed classes.<sup>4</sup>

'That all Indigenous schools, whether high or low, be recognised and encouraged, if they serve any purpose of secular education whatever.

That Aided Indigenous schools, not registered as special schools be understood to be open to all classes and castes of the community. Special aid being, if necessary, assignable on account of low caste pupils.

That such a proportion between special and other elementary indigenous schools be maintained in each town and district as to ensure a proportionate provision for the education of all the classes.

That the officers of the education departments keep a list of all elementary indigenous schools and assist the boards in selecting schools to be registered for aid and in securing a proportionate provision of education for all classes of the community.'

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<sup>4</sup>Report, The Educational Policy of the State in India, (Madras, Satakopachari & Co., 1900, Pp.97-98, quoted from the Commission).

The following recommendations made under the subhead -  
Primary Education applied to the specific problems concerning  
 the Education of the Depressed Classes.<sup>5</sup>

'That in all board schools, a certain proportion of pupils be admissible as free students on the ground of poverty; and in the case of special schools, established for the benefit of poorer classes, a general or larger exemption from payment of fees be allowed under proper authority for special reasons.

That all primary school wholly maintained at the cost of the school boards and all primary schools that are aided from the same fund and are not registered as special schools should be understood to be open to all castes and classes of the community.

That such a proportion between special and other primary schools be maintained in each district as to ensure a proportionate provision for the education of all castes.

The Commission, had also outlined some broad policies under which the Departments of Public Instruction could act. These features were put under the subhead 'External Relations of the Department'. The Commission had made specific recommendations with regard to the Educational Policy for the Backward areas and Backward classes. These were:<sup>6</sup>

That it be a general principle that grants-in-aid should depend,

(a) on locality, i.e. that larger proportionate grants be given to schools in backward districts;

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

- (b) on the class of Institutions i.e. that greater proportionate aid be given to those in which a large amount of self support cannot be expected as for example, girls schools and schools for lower castes and backward races.

The following policy statement was made specifically to clarify the thinking of the Commission on the education of the Depressed classes.<sup>7</sup>

'It is impossible to overlook the objections which are felt to the association of low caste children with those of other classes. The principle, however, of their right to receive education in the state schools has been asserted; and at the present time, when the control over primary schools is likely to devolve less upon the Department and more upon the numerous local fund and Municipal Boards scattered throughout the country, it is desirable to reaffirm that principle. We, therefore, recommend that the principle laid down in the Court of Directors' letter of May 5th, 1854 and again in their reply to the letter of the Government of India dated 20th May, 1857, that no boy be refused admission to a Government College or school merely on the ground of caste and repeated by the Secretary of State in 1863, be now reaffirmed as a principle and be applied with due caution to every institution, not reserved for special races, which is wholly maintained at the cost of public funds, whether provincial, municipal or local. We are fully alive of the fact that no principle, however sound, can be forced upon an unwilling society in defiance of their social and religious sentiments.....But all schools that are wholly maintained at the cost of public funds be regarded as open to all taxpayers and to all classes of the community, and if any of those classes object to association with the children who are assembled in the board or municipal or government school, they should be encouraged to set up a 'special school' and apply for grants-in-aid. In that way it is open to all classes of the community to secure their proper share of the school fund to which they may be compelled by the legislature to contribute, The grants-in-aid rules afford them a sufficient remedy.....But even in the case of Government or

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<sup>7</sup>Nurullah and Naik, op.cit.,1, Pp.423-24 (quoted from the Report of the Education Commission, 1882.Pp.516-17.

board schools, the principle affirmed by us must be applied with caution. It is not desirable for masters or inspectors to endeavour to force on a social change, which with judicious treatment, will gradually be accepted by society. If the low-caste community seek an entrance into the Cess school, their right must be firmly maintained, especially in the secondary institutions where there is no alternative of a special school for them to attend. It is, however, undesirable to urge them to claim a right about which they are themselves indifferent. Still less the school masters relax in their case those rules regarding the decency of dress and conversation which should be enforced in every case. In order, however, to facilitate the public recognition of the claims of the lowest classes by evidence on their part that they desire education and that they can conduct themselves with propriety at school, we consider that every encouragement should be given to special schools for the education of such classes. We, therefore, recommend that the establishment of special schools or classes for children of low castes be literally encouraged in places where there are a sufficient number of such children to form separate schools or classes and where the schools already maintained from public funds do not sufficiently provide for their education. In our discussions on this subject it was brought to our notice that in some parts of the Central Provinces and in Bombay, special objections were entertained by the rural communities to the instructions of low castes on the ground that education would advance them in life and induce them to seek emancipation from their present servile condition. It is, therefore, clear that in some parts of India at least this class of society requires special help, and we consider that such help can often be best afforded without giving offence to other castes by the establishment of special schools.'

The Govt. of India had issued detailed orders to the provinces on the recommendations of the Indian Education Commission as a resolution dated 23rd October, 1884. Endorsing the policy enunciated by the Commission for the education of the Depressed classes, the Govt. of India had hoped,<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Resolution of the Govt. of India over the Recommendations of Education Commission, 1882, Simla, House Department (Edu.), Appendix B, No.10/309, p.130.

'such a policy would stimulate the admission of low caste pupils by requiring institutions wishing to exclude them to register themselves as separate schools, by favouring schools which do not so register and by requiring the maintenance of a due proportion between special and other primary schools.....There are, doubtless, many parts of India even at the present day where much tact will have to be shown by the officers of Government in leading the managers of aided schools to throw their institutions open to low caste children. It has been above explained that no compulsion is to be used but it is hoped that by the exercise of that due caution on which the Commission rightly insists and through the example set by Government and other schools supported by public funds, progress may be made in rendering the aided schools of the country available for all classes of the community'.

The Commission had paved the way for the provision of education for the Depressed Classes. Its main emphasis was on facilitating admission of Depressed class pupils in elementary schools. It as well envisaged provisions for their education at the secondary stage but it was quiet silent over certain other aspects of educational development among these classes, such as creating special facilities for facilitating female education, university education, technical education etc. among the Depressed classes.

Steps Envisaged by the Provincial Governments for the Extension of Education to the Depressed Classes.

The Provincial departments of education were supposed to pursue the recommendations of the Education Commission, 1882 and develop the system of education within their jurisdictions according to the guidelines made by the Commission. The activities of the Provincial departments of education have been reviewed in the Quinquennial Reviews published every five years, beginning from 1886.



For the period 1882-1904, these Quinquennial Reviews on the 'Progress of Education<sup>in</sup> India' are perhaps the best official sources of information and present a consolidated account of educational activity of the Government of India and also the various provincial Governments. As a matter of policy, the provincial departments of education were supposed to send the detailed information on the progress made by them on the various educational aspects. A study of these Reviews would show that only a few provincial departments supplied information on the educational progress of the Depressed Classes in spirit while some of them ignored it altogether. As such, a total picture of the progress of the education on all India basis cannot be made out.

One of the impediments for collecting information with regard to the educational progress of the Depressed classes and consolidating it on an all India basis had always been the problem of the identification of the low caste pupils. The subcastes included as Depressed classes differed from one region to another and sometimes even differed within the same region or province. India being a multilingual country, the same subcaste was called by different names in the different provinces. There was no uniformity of occurrence of the same subcastes in all the provinces. A subcaste pursuing a menial occupation in one province was sometimes altogether missing in the other.

Moreover, the intensity of the stigma of untouchability labelled to a subcaste also differed from area to area. Further, a general tendency of the Depressed classes had been that if a person belonging to these classes could improve his economic position, or even manage to leave ancestral occupations, he would try to escape from his real caste and assume another surname. It appears that such factors must have made it difficult to develop a criterion of identification of the Depressed Classes. In fact, the caste system in India though pervasive all over the country, is a local institution and its evidence is oral. It can be identified only because of the practice of endogamy in the Hindus and therefore, it must have been quite difficult for teachers and other education officers to probe into minute details to know the caste status of many a pupils. Whatever statistics is available in the educational documents has, perhaps, been collected on some applied criterion such as 'a child might be said to belong to a Depressed class if his or her presence in the common school was resented by respectable parents.'

The provinces that constituted the territories of British India during the period under review were Presidency of Bombay in the West; Central Provinces and Berar in the Centre; North-Western provinces and Punjab in the North-west; United Provinces, Oudh and Bihar in the Northern regions and Bengal, Orissa, and Assam in the

Eastern parts of the country. The steps taken by the different provinces for promoting education among the Depressed classes for the period 1882-1904 were as the following:

a) Madras and Coorg:

The Presidency of Madras ranked atop in its endeavours for the expansion<sup>of</sup> education among the Depressed classes. Reports for the period 1882 to 1886 reveal that children of the Depressed classes were allowed admission to some of the indigenous schools, especially the aided indigenous institutions but they were not allowed admission in such institutions which were located either in the temples or in the vicinity of religious institutions. The policy of the Government of Madras towards the unaided indigenous schools refusing admission to the Depressed classes appeared to be mild. The government held the opinion that the enforcement of the proposed recommendations of the Education Commission on granting aid to indigenous schools of secular character only would deal a severe blow at the popularity of supervised instruction and would lead many masters to withdraw their schools from instruction.<sup>9</sup> Apparently, the doctrine of equality of opportunity had still a good deal of way to make in the Presidency. Due to the persistent efforts of the education officers, the position of the

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<sup>9</sup> Croft Alfred, Review of Education in India in 1886, Calcutta, Suptd. of Govt. Printing, 1888, Pp.226-31.

education of the Depressed classes had improved in between the period 1886-1891 and by the year 1891-92, the number of pupils coming from Pariahs and other kindered castes (included as Depressed Classes) rose to 22,888, their percentage to the total school-going population being 4.5 for boys and .77 for girls.<sup>10</sup> The special measures taken by the Government of Madras in this direction included special instructions to the inspecting officers to pay more attention to the educational facilities for these classes and urging the local boards and municipal councils to open special schools for the Depressed class pupils in different places. The government of Madras had also been considering to grant special concessions in the matter of aid to these special schools.

The Theosophical Society established by Col.Olcott had already taken up the cause of education of the Depressed classes. Col.Olcott had established the 'Panchma Schools' as the special institutions for the Depressed classes. The term 'Panchma' was used as another connotation for the Depressed classes. 'Panchma' means the fifth and by Panchma classes was meant 'the fifth Varna'. In other words, it propounded that there were five divisions (Varnas) in the Hindu social order, the fifth being the Panchmas. Such a term was considered to be less degraded and more respectable than terms such as 'untouchable', 'Pariah', 'Dhed', etc.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

It appears that the Government of Madras had adopted this term from the Theosophical Society since it has been used as the official nomenclature for these classes by the Government of Madras ever since.

In 1893, the government of Madras had sanctioned a series of eight proposals to accelerate the development of education in the Depressed classes. These proposals were called the 'Magna Charta' of Panchma education by missionaries and other philanthropic organisations working for the elevation of the Depressed classes. The proposals were as the following.

1. Panchma students in training schools under public management should be given an additional stipend of Rs.2/- a month.
2. Panchma students who seek admission into training schools under private management should be granted higher rate of stipendary grants under the grants-in-aid code.
3. Local boards and municipalities should be required to open special schools for these classes in all large panchma villages and suburbs where these schools do not exist.
4. Government waste land should be granted free as sites for Panchma schools.
5. For Panchma pupils attending 'Salary Result Schools', result stipends should be paid at the maximum rates.

6. The night school system, which is eminently suited for the education of these and other labouring classes, should be especially developed and encouraged.
7. Result grants for Panchma pupils in result schools should be paid at 50 per cent in excess of the standard rates.
8. Refund of building grants should not be claimed if the buildings have been used for school purposes for six years.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the sanctioning of the above proposals, the government of Madras had also reserved 19 scholarships for boys and 15 scholarship for girls of the Depressed classes on the results of the prescribed examinations and also a preference was announced for them in awarding the F.A. (Intermediate) scholarships. A training school for Panchma students had also been established.<sup>12</sup>

During the period 1892-1897, the number of Institutions wholly or chiefly intended for Panchmas rose from 1437 to 2468 i.e., by 72 per cent and the number of pupils from 31659 to 57894 i.e. by 83 per cent. In 1897, the percentage of Depressed class pupils to the population of school going age was 8.3 per cent for boys, and 1.1 per cent for girls. These figures for the Panchma pupils did not include the Indian Christians, among whom

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<sup>11</sup>Cotton, J.S., Progress of Education in India from 1892-93 to 1896-97, London, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1898, Pp.350-456.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

a large number were Panchmas by race. The total expenditure on Panchma schools in 1897 had amounted to Rs.2,27,870 of which 39 per cent was borne by Public funds.<sup>13</sup>

By 1902, the proposals popularly called as 'Magna Charta', had been implemented in all parts of the Presidency and had proved to be quite successful in attracting the Depressed class pupils. The number of Panchma institutions had risen to nearly 3000. Of these Institutions 425 institutions were under departmental management and about 2473 were under private management. The majority of the privately managed schools belonged to the missionary societies and about two third of them were being aided on the basis of grants-in-aid rules. In many of the institutions, boys and girls studied together and there were only 20 schools exclusively meant for girls. The statistics as obtained for the period ending 31st March, 1902, show that there were 44150 Panchma boys and 8328 Panchma Girls; these figures give percentages of 15.7 for boys and 2.6 for girls of the total school going population.<sup>14</sup>

A comparison of the position of education among these classes in 1892-93 and 1901-1902 would show that the enrolment of pupils, both for boys and girls, had more than doubled. Due to the incentives created by the proposals sanctioned in 1893, there was a sharp rise in

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Nathan R. 'Progress of Education in India, 1897-98 to 1901-02, Calcutta, Director General of India, p.392.

the enrolment of boys between 1893 and 1896, but even after 1896 the progress was maintained though not with the same impetus. There was an additional enrolment of about 10,000 male pupils during the period 1897-1902. The number of Depressed class girls also showed a continuous increase of enrolments.

From the reports it appears that a small number of Depressed class pupils studied beyond primary stage of education and within the primary stage itself, the bulk of them dropped out in the earlier grades. The incidence of drop outs was so great that out of about 52000 pupils studying in the different Panchma schools, only 403 boys and 61 girls appeared in 1901-02 for the examination which comes at the end of the Primary Course. This shows that the great mass of the pupils were registered at the Lower Primary stage only. In the absence of class-wise enrolment data and other facts, it is difficult to draw any inferences regarding the age and the stage when the children were withdrawn, but the remarks of the Director of Public Instruction, Madras, that 'Most of the Panchma pupils do not advance beyond the lower primary stage,'<sup>15</sup> show that the Depressed class pupils generally did not study beyond two or three grades.

Since most of the Depressed class pupils did not continue their education beyond lower primary stage of

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.



education and a fairly good number of the remaining pupils dropped out at the higher primary stage of education, the number of Depressed classes in the second<sup>ary</sup> schools was infinitesimal.<sup>16</sup> The number of secondary institutions for Depressed classes has been reported to be very low. The Director of Education, Madras was of the opinion that the low number of such secondary schools might be 'partly due to the more ready admission of Panchmas to ordinary schools',<sup>17</sup> The report also mentions the presence of a certain number of panchmas in the colleges. In 1902, there were 4 panchma boys in arts colleges and one in the agricultural college.<sup>18</sup>

The territory of Coorg was in close proximity of Madras than any other British province. It was comparatively a much smaller geographical unit. From the different reports it appears that there was not much of activity for the education of the Depressed classes during the period 1882 to 1902. It was reported in 1886 that in Coorg caste prejudices had been existing in full strength.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Cotton, Op.Cit, 11

<sup>17</sup>Nathen, Op.Cit., 14.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Croft, Op.Cit., 9.

In the year 1886-87 only one special school for the Depressed classes with 17 pupils was functioning and in 1891-92, this school had 18 pupils on its rolls. The report mentions that another school for the Depressed classes had been sanctioned in the year 1892. The total number of Depressed classes studying in other schools (common schools) was returned as 32 at the end of 1892.

b) Bombay

The Reports for the period ending 1886 indicate that in Bombay the strict enforcement of the rules prescribed by the Education Department according to the recommendations of the Education Commission did not create any difficulties.<sup>21</sup> The public schools were generally opened to all castes and the special schools for the low castes were also permitted. The Director of Public Instruction was of the opinion that the strict enforcement of the departmental rules over the admission of the Depressed class pupils should be regarded as a matter of pious opinion and not pushed too far or acted on too hastily.<sup>22</sup> The Education department, therefore, did not force upon the people the consideration of a

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<sup>20</sup>Naah A.M., Progress of Education, India from 1887-88 to 1891-92, Calcutta, Office of the Suptd., Govt. Printing of India, 1893, Pp.184-85.

<sup>21</sup>Croft, Op.Cit. 9.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

question as to which its powers were uncertain. The report for the period 1892-93 to 1896-97 explains how hasty action on the part of the local offices of the Kaira district in requiring the admission of low caste pupils led to five or six large schools being closed for years and to the huts and crops of the low caste people being burnt in one village.<sup>23</sup> But such an incident could be regarded as a singular event as neither its reoccurrence there nor its repurcussion elsewhere has been reported. A principle generally accepted by the local boards of the Presidency of Bombay during the period 1892-97 was that the 'children of the Depressed classes shall be so placed as to have shelter from sun, rain, and cold and that they shall receive a due share of the teaching of the schools'.<sup>24</sup> It resulted, therefore, into a practice of seating the Depressed Class pupils in the varandahs or the porches near the door of the class room so that they could peep in and have their share of class room instruction, but such a practice did not persist for long. Instead, the conditions improved gradually and some incentives for the education of the Depressed Classes were also created.

The official policy adopted by the Government of Bombay for the promotion of education of the Depressed Classes

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<sup>23</sup>Cotton, op.cit.11.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

was to admit the Depressed class pupils in all public institutions and encourage them by granting special scholarships, remission of fees, and ancilliary services like free gift of slates, books etc.<sup>25</sup> As a result thereof, there was an increase in the enrolments of Depressed class pupils. There were about 12583 pupils of these classes enrolled in 1902<sup>26</sup> as against about 10,000 pupils in 1892.<sup>27</sup> The report for the period ending 1902 mentions that even in the face of a famine, some progress in the enrolments was made in the Central division<sup>28</sup> of the Presidency of Bombay. There were forty eight special schools for low caste pupils in the Central division. Some of these schools were maintained by district and municipal boards and others by missionaries. The mission schools were aided by the Government. The mission schools of Poona, Sholapur, Ahmednagar and Nasik were chiefly attended by low caste children. It is reported that at Ahmednagar, the mission schools were scattered all over the district. In the Northern division of the Presidency there were special board schools for the low castes and also a number of aided mission school. In the Southern division, there

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<sup>25</sup>Nathan, Op.cit., 14.

<sup>26</sup>Nathan, Op.Cit., 14.

<sup>27</sup>Nash, Op.cit., 20.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

were 32 special board schools.<sup>29</sup>

The teachers of the low caste special schools either belonged to low castes or were Mohammadans since it was generally difficult to procure high caste teachers for these schools. Most of them were untrained but pursued their duty with a zeal. The Director of Public Instruction, had appreciated that the masters put to these schools were untrained but the work being done by these teachers was creditable. The Director of Public Instruction was against conducting surveys on the caste-wise distribution of pupils at the secondary stage. He held the opinion,<sup>30</sup>

'I would depreciate any special enquiry into the number of children in secondary schools. It is not always convenient to have our antecedents traced and especially if we have changed our religion or altered our social habits with the view of rising to a higher stage of civilization. I may add that too minute enquiries are to be depreciated even in the case of primary schools, as such enquiries are likely to result in the enumeration of doubtful cases, who otherwise pass muster with the bulk of the community.'

In view of such a policy, the enrolment figures of Depressed class pupils at the secondary stage have not been returned but an account of the progress reported from the various division of the Presidency show that at the end of 1901-02, 12 pupils were returned as studying at the secondary stage out of a total number of 7304

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Nash, Op.Cit., 20.

pupils in the Central Division of the Presidency; a Mahar pupil was undergoing training in the Poona Training College; 17 Mahar pupils were studying in the Christian Society's Normal school at Ahmedabad; and about 200 pupils were being taught in the industrial schools in the Central Division, chiefly in the mission schools at Ahmednagar.<sup>31</sup>

The social reform movement launched by Mahatma Jotirao Phoolley and his colleagues in the Presidency of Bombay has already been referred to in the previous chapter. The activities of the Satya Shodhak Samaj had spurred a feeling for ameliorating the conditions of the Depressed classes. In addition, some small societies for the welfare of the Depressed classes had also been established in the various parts of the Presidency of Bombay during this period. For example, the Wangi Village Education Society was formed in 1889. It had men of learning and local eminence as its members. In 1896 there were seven institutions under its control at different places in Poona district. Its special features were that the students were not exposed to the temptations of a city life and education was imparted free to pupils belonging to low castes and backward classes. In the year 1899, its offices were transferred to Baramati and so it came to be called as the Maharashtra Village education society. In the same year, the following

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<sup>31</sup> Nathan, op. cit., 14

institutions were functioning under its auspices.<sup>32</sup>

- (i) Baramati Boarding English School,
- (ii) Baramati Technical School,
- (iii) Baramati Low Caste School,
- (iv) Kalas low caste school,
- (v) Mekhali Low Caste School,
- (vi) Kazad Marathi School,
- (vii) Akola Low Caste School,
- (viii) Katphal Low Caste School, and
- (ix) Society's Library.

In 1900, two more institutions i.e. Ruce Marathi School and Paravadi Marathi School were added to the existing Institutions.<sup>33</sup>

#### c) Central Provinces and Berar

Central Provinces and Berar have geographically been difficult and obscure areas. They appear to have remained largely unaffected from the influence of the social reform movements of the Nineteenth century. The general public of these areas had not been awakened to the changing social situation. The Chief Commissioner of the Central provinces made the following observation in 1886 with regard to the education of the Depressed classes.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Singh S.R., Nationalism and Social Reform in India, Delhi, Ranjit Printers and Publishers, 1968, p.253.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Croft, op.cit.9.

'It is impossible to run counter to the feelings of the people in a matter of this kind. We must wait until caste prejudices are weakened and until these low castes become less barbarious in their habits by some improvement in their material condition. They must cease to eat carrion and be able to afford themselves proper food. Until there is a radical change in their condition and habits, it is impossible to be accepted by the better castes, who it must be remembered are also the better classes to associate with them willingly in our schools.

The Chief Commissioner considered the principle of admitting children irrespective of caste to public institutions as an excellent one but in his opinion it was necessary to wink at its infraction. He felt that 'the difficulties imposed by the national instinct for ceremonial purity are very great and upto a short time ago, Hindu and Mohammandan boys would not sit on the same bench.'<sup>35</sup>

The traditional caste and religious prejudices in Central Provinces had <sup>been</sup> persisting and under the prevalent social inequalities the Depressed classes could not be encouraged to send their children to the schools. It appears that the state of affairs reported in 1886 must have continued for a longer period because there is no reference to the progress of education of Depressedes classes in Central Provinces for the period 1887-88 to 1891-92. The reports for the period 1892-93 to 1897-98 mention of the presence of a few low caste boys in some public schools.

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.



The number of special schools opened for the Depressed classes was very low. There existed sharp caste prejudices. Explaining the absence of the low castes from the schools, it was reported: 'The degradation of their position, and the fact that they are not allowed to live in the village but are quarantiled in little hamlets of their own, form a bar to their progress.'<sup>36</sup> The customary social segregation in the village life was also practised in the schools. Wherever the low caste boys attended the ordinary schools, they were made to sit in the varandahs and were not taught. From the subsequent reports it appears that with the passage of time the intensity of orthodoxy also declined. Mr. Nathan has contrasted the changing scene by quoting an example whereas in 1832 the Chander High School had to be broken up on account of the admission of a few Dhar boys, the masters resigned and strange to say, the sweeper also resigned'<sup>37</sup> the position had changed to the other direction in 1902 as 'in Sangur where it was proposed to open a separate school for Chamars, the people stated that there was no necessity for this as they would not object to allowing their children to sit with the Chamar boys.'<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Cotton, op.cit., 11

<sup>37</sup> Nathan, op.cit., 14.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

In 1901-02, the official policy of the Central Provinces regarding the admission of the Depressed classes had been to give a preference for their admission in the common schools than to open special schools for them, since opening of separate schools 'seemed to accentuate caste distinctions and to keep the lower castes lower' whereas the admission of lower castes in ordinary schools 'seemed to raise their social status'.<sup>39</sup>

The territories of Berar were much smaller in area than the Central provinces. In Berar, the Depressed classes pupils were admitted to ordinary schools. The officials of the Education Department made efforts to stop the practice of separating them from other scholars. It appears that the Depressed classes of Berar had also become a little conscious of educating their children. In 1892, there were only 4 special schools for the Depressed classes, one of them being in a very unsatisfactory condition. Orders were given to wind up the same but on a 'petition by the Mahar community promising every help and praying for the continuance of the schools, it was not closed'.<sup>40</sup> But later on, the situation had improved and the opposition to the low caste pupils' admission in ordinary schools

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Nash, op.cit., 20.

was lessened. Therefore three out of the four special schools in Berar had been closed by 1901-02.

Regarding the progress in the enrolment of the pupils, it may be said that by the end of 1891-92, there were <sup>2410</sup> Depressed class pupils enrolled in the public and private institutions in Berar.<sup>41</sup> In 1902, the total enrolment of the pupils belonging to these classes has been returned as 2552.<sup>42</sup> This shows that there was almost no progress of education of the Depressed classes during the period. Probably, all these pupils were studying at the elementary level since there is no mention of any Secondary or University education for these classes in the reports.

d) North-West Provinces and Punjab:

At the time when the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay were making hectic activities to enthuse the Depressed classes for education and to provide them with administrative facilities and financial amenities, other provinces in the British India were perhaps wondering at the possibilities of spreading education in the Depressed classes. The opposition of the upper caste Hindus to the education of the low caste Hindus had created attitudes

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Nathan, op.cit., 14.

of resistance and passivity in the officials and instead of paying attention to improving the backward state of these classes, these officials found pretexts to elude the issues. The educational authorities of North-West Provinces considered the recommendations of the Education Commission for allowing the admission of the children of the Depressed classes in common schools as, "Unobjectionable in principle but the special declaration of it unnecessary. So long as the prejudice is against them, low caste children are not likely to attempt to force themselves into schools where they were not welcome."<sup>43</sup> Such an official attitude seems to have persisted quite for some time. For the period ending 1891-92, the report on the progress of education repeats its objection to the public declaration that low caste children should not be refused admission to the schools. It appears that such an indifferent policy of the government of the North Western Provinces was noticed by Home Department of the Government of India (vide their letter No.297, dated the 9th August, 1888)<sup>44</sup> but no follow up has been reported. It is possible that such an official attitude of indifference towards the education of the Depressed classes might have continued upto 1902 or even beyond this period because in no report

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<sup>43</sup>Croft, op.cit., 9.

<sup>44</sup>Nash, op.cit., 20.

there is any mention of opening of separate schools for the Depressed classes or any statistics of their enrolment in ordinary schools have been returned. The reports are rather silent on the education of the Depressed classes while there are reports on the education of other special classes.

Compared to North Western Provinces, the position was slightly better in Panjab. Caste prejudices had started lessening as an impact of the Arya Samaj movement. Even then the government of Punjab had felt reluctant to publicise the policy regarding the admission of Depressed class children in ordinary schools as recommended by the Education Commission, 1882. The Government of Panjab held the view that the 'admission of Depressed classes in ordinary schools was a matter of practical policies, the application of it might wait on circumstances. The social attitudes in Panjab to the admission of these classes in ordinary schools, were reported as:<sup>45</sup>

"The lower caste pupils are freely admissible to all schools under public management and are sometimes found in abundance, but as a general rule, however, public opinion keeps them out. Wanting as they are in all desire for education, it is not to be expected that they should intrude into schools, where they would be shunned and looked down upon by the other boys."

The Depressed classes were awakening to the need of educating their children and that there was a mixed reaction

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<sup>45</sup>Croft, op.cit., 9.

to their enthusiasm. In some places, they were welcomed to schools while in others, the old social prejudices still persisted. The situation seemed to have improved a little by 1892 as the report for that period mentions that,<sup>46</sup>

'No child of any caste is debarred from attending the ordinary public schools and throughout the province instances occur of sweeper and chamar boys attending the board and aided schools, and passing the examinations. But they have to sit outside the class-line, frequently in the doorway; and this school boy social ostracism forbids the hope of educational progress, among this class of people by the ordinary means'.

The reports for the periods ending 1896-97 mention that the government of Panjab had helped in the establishment of special schools for the Depressed classes in almost all the circles of the province and their number exceeded hundred. Mostly managed by the mission societies, these schools were aided either under the ordinary rules or on the same conditions as indigenous schools. The public attitudes had undergone remarkable changes in the sense that in the missionary schools chiefly intended for the low castes, children from other castes had also started seeking admission and the attendance was becoming more mixed.<sup>47</sup>

Delhi used to be a part of the Province of Panjab during the period under review. In the Delhi Circle, separate schools for the lower castes were run by the

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<sup>46</sup>Nash, op.cit.,20.

<sup>47</sup>Cotton, op.cit.,11.

'Society for the Propagation of the Gospel' and the 'Baptist Mission'. During the period 1892-93 to 1896-97, the number of separate schools in Delhi rose from 10 to 21 and the enrolment of the Depressed classes increased from 276 to 548. In the Jullender Circle, four schools for the Depressed classes were opened during the period 1887-88 to 1891-92 by the American missionaries and 130 Depressed class pupils were on the rolls. In the Lahore Circle, the number of special schools for the Depressed classes fell from 35 to 18 and the consequent decrease in enrolment in special schools were from 531 to 287.<sup>48</sup> The fall in the enrolment was stated to be due to the reason that the ordinary aided elementary schools did not object to the admission of low caste pupils. In the Rawalpindi circle, the educational institutions especially meant for the Depressed classes comprised of a native Christian Training Institution at Sialkot with 149 pupils which was raised to a high school towards the end of 1891-92. In addition, there were 14 special schools with 205 Depressed class pupils on rolls. In the Gujarat (Punjab) circle, there were three special schools with 52 pupils on rolls.<sup>49</sup> The reports on the progress of education for the period 1897-98 to 1901-02 did not mention any account of the educational progress of the

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

Depressed classes but on the basis of the trends as available upto 1897-98 and the period beyond 1904, it can be inferred that the education in these classes had progressed during this period. There is no information regarding the provision of high or higher education for these classes except for the account of the Christian Training Institution at Sialkot.

e) Upper Provinces and Oudh:

The Reports on the Progress of education from 1882 to 1902 do not contain any statistics on the number of special institutions as also enrolment of the Depressed classes during the period in these provinces. This may, perhaps, be due to the thin attendance of such pupils in the ordinary schools. The report for the period ending 1886 contains a few interesting case studies conducted by Mr. Nesfield, the Inspector of Schools of Oudh with the purpose to illustrate his views on education of the Depressed classes. Mr. Nesfield was of the opinion that the question of the provision of educational opportunities to the Depressed classes should not be viewed in the light of their social and political rights rather it should be looked from the utilitarian point of view.<sup>50</sup>

'It is disappointing after all the trouble that is taken to make them what they are, to find how little

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<sup>50</sup> Croft, op.cit.9.



use many of the students are able to make of the knowledge that they have gained after leaving school. This remark applies specially to those whose position in life, as determined by the caste and occupation in which they were born is below that of priest, landlord, writer, and trader. In one of the schools there was a boy of the Kurmi caste, which is one of the most industrious agricultural castes in upper India. He had passed a very good examination in the third highest standard of village schools; and after telling him that he had now completed all that the village could give to him, I enquired what occupation he intended to follow. His answer at once was "Service, what else?". I advised him to revert to agriculture and as there was scarcely any chance of his getting literary employment; but at this piece of advice, he seemed to be surprised and even angry..... In another school I met a Pasi, a semi hunting caste, much lower in every respect than that of Kurmi, the agriculturist. He was a boy of quick understanding and had completed the village school course in Nagri as well as Urdu and could read and write both characters with equal facility. He asked me what he has to do next. I could hardly tell him to go back to pig rearing, trapping birds, and digging vermin out of the earth for food; and yet I scarcely saw what other opening was in store for him..... At another school, there was the son of 'Chuhra' a village sweeper, a caste even lower than that of Pasi, in fact the lowest of all the castes properly so called. He was asked with others to write an original composition on the comparative advantages of trade and service as a career. Very naturally considering the caste to which he belonged, he expressed a decided preference for trade yet who would enter into mercantile transactions with a sweeper even if a man of that caste could be started in that calling? Everything that he touches would be considered as polluted; and no one would buy grain or cloth from his shop, if he could buy them from another. There seems to be no opening in store for this very intelligent youth but that of scavenging, mat-making, trapping etc. all of which are far below the more cultivated tastes that he has acquired by attending schools, and in such pursuits he is not likely to evince the same degree of skill or enjoy the same content as one who has grown up wholly illiterate..... In these and such like ways, the attempts made by the state to raise the condition of the masses and place new facilities of self advancement within their reach are thwarted by the absence of opportunities and by the caste prejudices of the country.'

The examples quoted by Mr. Nesfield genuinely touch the core problem i.e. low placement of the Depressed classes in the occupational hierarchy of the Hindu society and that general education could hardly contribute to the enrichment of the occupations of these classes. In view of caste monopolies on various occupations, it was difficult for a low caste man to change to higher caste occupations. The only scope of a change of vocation could be to seek a government job. But the entrance in lucrative government jobs required further education or education atleast upto the secondary stage for which the children had to be sent to towns or cities. It was, of course, beyond the means of the Depressed classes to afford secondary education, and therefore, their children did not study beyond lower primary level or class III onwards in most of the cases. With elementary education, they could enter services as peons, attendants, chowkidars, etc. at best. Some of the Depressed classes might have even yearned for these jobs and preferred them to their hereditary occupations. Even in such jobs, the prejudices of untouchability demerited their appointments since anything touched by them would pollute the upper castes. For services akin to their own occupations viz. Sweepers, Bhishti's jobs, the low castes had no need for any formal or informal education. Secondly the Depressed classes could hardly insist upon their rights to admission to common schools and amenities for higher

education at the cost of displeasure of the senior castes of their respective localities. The arguments raised by Mr. Nesfield appear to be logistical in view of the social, political, and economic conditions prevalent in the country at that time. But a few issues remain unanswered. Was the system of British education, considered as unsuitable to the vocational openings for the Depressed classes, suited to the vocational requirements of other castes? And if education was not suited to the societal needs of the Depressed classes in Upper provinces, how was the same system of education attracting greater number of Depressed class pupils in the Presidency of Madras? Thirdly, if this type of education could not contribute to the growth and development of Depressed classes, did the education Department of Oudh try or experiment any other system that could have been suited to their needs? Had the Department of Education made some efforts to develop a system of education particularly suited to the needs of the Depressed classes, it would have been a genuine reasoning but merely ignoring a cause on a pretext could never help in developing education among these classes.

f) Bengal, Orissa and Assam

In Bengal special schools for the Depressed classes were established as early as 1886. In addition, the Missionaries had also been running special schools for the Depressed classes. In between the period 1886 and

1897-98, the education reports from Bengal do not contain any statistics of enrolment of the Depressed Class pupils nor do they mention the steps taken by the Presidency of Bengal to spread education among these classes. The report for the period ending 1901-02 mentions that the number of children of the indigent classes of non-aboriginal Indians to be 249434 and that nearly 95 per cent of them were in public institutions but these enrolment figures also included such pupils of other religions. According to the report, about 62.5 per cent of these pupils i.e. approximately 1,60,000 pupils belonged to the Depressed Classes.<sup>51</sup>

The provinces of Orissa and Assam did not make any reference to the education of the Depressed classes in their reports for the entire period 1882-1902. It may either be due to the absence of any problems in extending education to these classes or a neglect of these classes by the Education Department itself. In so far as Assam was concerned, future reports reveal that there were no Depressed classes inhabiting in that province.

A Review of the Educational Progress of the  
Depressed Classes in British India During  
1882-1904

The period 1882-1904 marks a significant period for the educational development of the Depressed classes in some respects. It was for the first time in the history of India in general and Depressed classes in particular

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<sup>51</sup>Nathan, op.cit., 14.

that an all India Commission had made special recommendations for the educational development of these classes. The greatest incentive to the education of these classes was the policy of enhanced rate of grants-in-aid for the institutions admitting Depressed class pupils or working largely for their cause. Such a generous attitude of the Government proved to be encouraging to missionaries and other philanthropic organisations who had stepped into the field. Credit is also due to the Provincial departments of education that had started paying special attention to the educational problems of the Depressed classes. The provincial departments of education afforded special encouragement by way of maintaining special schools in some places where the prejudice of higher castes was intense; by aiding privately managed schools on liberal terms; by remitting fees, awarding scholarships; by providing ancilliary services such as free gift of books, slates etc.

The impediments in the growth and development of the education of the Depressed classes were, of course, many. A large part of their backwardness was the inevitable result of their poverty.<sup>52</sup> The prejudices of the higher castes were deep seated against the admission of low

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<sup>52</sup>Nathan, op.cit.,14.

caste children to public schools, which sprang partly from fear of caste pollution, and partly from dislike of comparatively well to do people in the sense that their children should not mix with others who might often be of lower habits and morals.<sup>53</sup> But the social prejudice had started lessening by 1904, and although children of Depressed classes were made to sit apart, the educational reports for 1904 did not show that there was any strong feeling against the admission of low caste children to schools.<sup>54</sup> Another hinderance to the educational progress of these castes was the dissuading attitudes of the teachers, majority of whom belonged to the Brahminic class of the society. Teachers in schools would not receive homework done by low caste pupils personally. Rather, the Depressed class pupil would throw the slate at the feet of the teacher from a distance. Besides the difficulty, the low caste men faced in receiving their education, they had greater difficulties in store for them in matters of appointment. Education was of little avail in many a case and this created a feeling of futility for education. Even British officers would not incur the displeasure of their subordinates by appointing members of the Depressed classes.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>S.R.Singh, op.cit.,33, p.260.

The steep fall in the enrolments of the Depressed classes beyond the initial grades of Primary education thwarted the efforts of the government officials, missionaries and other philanthropic organisations to spread education in the Depressed classes as with so little a education it was but obvious that these pupils would lapse back into illiteracy. The reasons for their backwardness in class to class progress were not far to seek. It has almost been repeatedly mentioned in all the reports that the Depressed classes lived in extreme poverty. As soon as a child became capable of earning a livelihood or contributing to the family economy, he was withdrawn from the school. The caste apathy for the Depressed classes was also returned as a recurring discouraging factor. Another important reason for their withdrawal from the school might have been the absence of vocational openings at the village and town level for these classes. The new job opportunities were available only in big cities or 'out of home and village situations.' The Indians in general and the Depressed classes in particular being prone to social mobility, the parents of many a children would have not understood the fruitfulness of continuing their education. Costliness of education, the absence of high or middle schools in the village, the absence of hostels for the Depressed class in the towns and such other factors would have been other

discouraging <sup>factories</sup> to the Depressed class parents to continue the education of their children.

To sum up, by 1904, the Depressed classes had, undoubtedly, progressed in matters educational and they were extended due moral and material support by the state and social agencies in improving their conditions. The educational progress, attained so far, could not be considered as a sufficient means for the elevation of social and educational status of these people. What was required for their amelioration was not merely a machinery of education but dynamic organisations that could energise these caste groups on the one hand and mobilise the opinion of other castes in favour of them on the other. Essentially, some organisations of indigenous character, that could bring an evolution in social life were the need of the day and the changing social and political events were favourably precipitating the emergence of the same.

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