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A Critical Historical Analysis

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### **Labour Welfare Measures in India up to 1947: A Critical Historical Analysis**

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#### **Abstract**

*During the early 20th century, Hindu society, especially that of the Madras Presidency, was greatly affected by the caste-based discrimination that targeted the Depressed Classes (now called Scheduled Castes). To alleviate their long-time suppression and enhance their socio-economic status, the Depressed Classes Elevation Society of South India was instituted in 1908. A milestone improvement came in 1920 with the creation of the Labour Department of the Madras Presidency. Led by G.F. Paddison, who was appointed the first "Protector of the Depressed Classes", the department introduced several welfare schemes aimed at education, mid-day meals, hostel facilities, and scholarships. The establishment of Labour Schools and the implementation of the Government Order of 1935 institutionalised further anti-caste educational discrimination efforts. These policies helped immensely in the improvement of the Depressed Classes under colonial India, paving the way for their social development in post-Independence India.*

**Keywords:** Depressed Classes, Madras Presidency, Labour Department, discrimination by caste, education, Labour Schools, scholarships, mid-day meals, hostels, colonial India, social reform, G.F. Paddison.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the caste system in India and the conflicts among the castes played a notable role in creating disturbances in the Hindu society. A mention has been made in the 90<sup>th</sup> hymn in the tenth book of the Rig Veda, namely "Purusha Sukta", about the social divisions<sup>1</sup>. People took up professions according to their mental and physical conditions, and this is how the Varnashrama Dharma evolved. Thus, traditional professions played an important role in creating the caste divisions in society. In the later medieval period, due to the strange menial activities, the fifth varna, the "Panchama", was placed in the lower rung of the social ladder. In modern times, they formed 15% of the total population in the Madras Presidency<sup>2</sup>. Their condition had always been miserable.

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As a result of centuries of oppression of the Depressed Classes, an association called “Depressed Classes Elevation Society of South India” was established in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which marked a milestone in the History of the Depressed Classes. This society was inaugurated on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1908. This society worked for the redressal of the grievances of the Depressed Classes in the Madras Presidency. To improve and uplift the depressed communities, the State Government also took a few measures with the instruction of the Government of India. Also, it was generally felt by the English officials that there should be a separate department for the upliftment of the Depressed Classes. Thus, the absence of a separate department for them was very much felt during the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This demand laid the foundation for a new department, namely the Labour Department, in the Madras Presidency.

## **FORMATION OF THE LABOUR DEPARTMENT**

The Government of India and the Government of the Madras Presidency jointly worked for the creation of the Labour Department during the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to alleviate the sufferings of the Depressed Classes. The modalities were worked out, and the formation of the Labour Department took place in 1920. The post of a Special Officer was created for the welfare of the Depressed Classes. G.F. Paddison, a senior member of the I.C.S. (Indian Civil Service), was appointed as the first Special Officer for the depressed communities. He assumed the charge of his office, and he was called as the “Protector of the Depressed Classes”. In 1920, he was designated as Commissioner of Labour, and thus the Labour Department began to function in the Madras Presidency<sup>3</sup>.

This Department, during its inception stages, gave much importance to the educational development of the Depressed Classes. Ancient Tamil Sangam classics like Purananoru and Tirukkural praise the importance of education. The following excerpts from the above classics allude to the great value of education, and they point out the respect that the intellectuals commanded in the ancient society.

Hence, in tune with the ancient traditions, the Labour Department focused much of its attention on the development of education among the Depressed Classes. The department had the following prime objectives for the Depressed Classes as well as for poor, downtrodden and criminal communities:

1. Promotion of elementary education through Labour Departmental Schools for the benefit of Depressed Classes.
2. Separate schools were to be started exclusively for the Depressed Classes.
3. Provisions of amelioration measures for them in the form of arrangements for house sites, water supply and health.
4. Provision of mid-day meals and hostels, and award of scholarships to them.
5. District-wise Co-operative societies were to be formed for their upliftment.
6. Formation of reclamation centres for the settlement of criminals.
7. Reclamation works to be started for the Kallars, Koravas and Yenadis.
8. Improving the socio-economic condition of the Aborigins, Hill tribes and Wandering tribes.
9. Provision of employment to the tribes in the cottage industries in the Madras Presidency.<sup>4</sup>

The Commissioner of Labour was the prime official to organise and direct the administration of the Labour Department. The Commissioner of Labour was deputed to work for the welfare of these classes, and he shouldered the full responsibilities vested in him. They were as follows:

- a) He was asked by the Government to fully estimate the economic condition of the Depressed Classes.
- b) He was asked to send periodically the reports of the various organisations and philanthropic agencies which rendered services to the Depressed Classes.
- c) For the educational facilities, he was deputed as the sole person to take measures for the benefit of pupils. He was responsible for the Labour schools, which were started with free boarding and lodging.
- d) He had to deal with the socio-economic and educational problems of the Depressed Classes.
- e) He had to improve the standard of living of the Depressed Classes by providing them with house-sites and wells and by encouraging co-operation among them.
- f) He had also to tackle the wages issue in the factories and to maintain the fairness in the payment of wages to them.
- g) Further, he had to provide employment to all these classes to the possible extent.
- h) Finally, he had to take care of the general question of the emigration of Labour, recruitment and matters relating to labour problems and labour unions and adopt measures for the proper implementation of the Factories Act and also the Acts pertaining to workmen's compensation<sup>5</sup>.

For these duties, the Commissioner of Labour was assisted by the Assistant Commissioner of Labour. He was also considered the key master of the whole administration of the Labour Department. Further, to assist and support the administration in each district, a District Labour Officer was appointed. He was in charge of amenities to the Depressed Classes, which had already been proposed and also to those which had to be provided.

The Assistant Commissioner was also given equal power as the Commissioner of Labour. The District Officer was bound to take measures for the provision of amenities in the district and to submit annual reports on the following:

- House-sites
- Supervision and organisation of the co-operative societies.
- Starting of Schools.
- Digging of wells and
- Distribution of loans to the needy, Depressed Classes and collecting the money from them after the stipulated periods.

District Annual Reports on the amenities, submitted by these officials, were analysed before sanctioning further amounts. These Annual Reports helped the higher authorities to plan for the succeeding year.

The Labour Department sorted out the amelioration work in the following manner:

- ❖ Acquisition of uncultivable and barren lands for the allotment of free house sites to the Depressed Classes.
- ❖ To minimise the congestion of cheries (Slums) which were the habitats of these classes.
- ❖ To avoid the animosity in the minds of the High caste people, separate pathways for the Depressed Classes were to be laid for the burial grounds, and other facilities were also to be provided for them.
- ❖ Provision of drinking water, starting of new primary schools and accommodation of pupils in the hostels with scholarships.
- ❖ Financial assistance to the private educational institutions which were to impart education to the Depressed Classes and

- ❖ Organisation of co-operative societies for the encouragement of thrift activities and for the rural credit purposes<sup>6</sup>.

After receiving the instructions from the Commissioner of Labour on the aspect of the amenities, a District survey was taken up by officials. The Report of the survey was sent for scrutiny by the Commissioner. After scrutiny, the District Labour Officers were made responsible for carrying on the amelioration work for the Depressed Classes. District Collectors were entrusted with the responsibility of supervising and coordinating the designed works of the Labour Commissioner.<sup>7</sup>

## WELFARE MEASURES

In the whole of Madras Presidency, the pupils belonging to the Depressed Classes did not have educational facilities. Through the Labour department, education was made available to them with the addition of amenities such as Mid-day meals, Hostel facilities and the grant of scholarships. Further, separate schools for the Depressed Classes, namely “Labour Schools”, were also opened in different places of the Madras Presidency. All these measures considerably improved the condition of the Depressed Classes during the later part of the colonial period.

## LABOUR SCHOOLS:

In continuation of the welfare measures, primary schools were started to educate the pupils belonging to the Depressed Classes. These Labour Schools were managed by the Labour Department. Gradually, the number of schools increased. Besides, the Labour department helped the pupils of the Depressed Classes to get admission in the public schools also. It is to be noted here that during this time also caste discrimination had also taken deep roots in the minds of the upper caste Hindus. They never allowed their children to sit and study with the low caste pupils. This social discrimination deeply hurt the feelings of the Depressed Classes, and this situation continued.

Since 1920, the Commissioner of Labour has been put in charge of the special duty for educating the Depressed Classes. To avoid caste conflicts, the Government started separate schools for the Depressed Classes. Further, additional schools were started when pupils of the Depressed Classes were refused admission in the schools where pupils belonging to the upper classes were found in larger numbers. The Provincial Government, however, took steps to admit boys and girls of the Depressed Classes in all educational institutions. Further, local bodies were warned that subsidies paid for the schools under their management would be withdrawn if they were situated in places inaccessible to the Depressed Classes<sup>8</sup>. The special schools, especially for the Depressed Classes, Criminal Tribes and Aborigines, were well managed by the Labour Department.

Few private institutions like the Panchaiyappa's College, Madras, Zamorine's College, Calicut and Hindu High School, Triplicane did not admit the pupils belonging to the Depressed Classes till 1919. The general causes given for excluding them were as follows:

- Prejudices on the part of the upper Castes.
- Location of Schools in inaccessible places like Agraharas, Chavadis and Temples.
- Objection of the orthodox Hindu owners of the buildings rented for school purposes.
- Unsympathetic attitude of the landlords in certain districts towards the education of the lower caste children, and
- The reluctance of the lower castes to assert themselves in society<sup>9</sup>.

These aspects revealed the attitude of the upper caste Hindus towards the Depressed Classes. However, the Government issued an order to admit all the Depressed class pupils to the educational

institutions. Further, it stated that, if the upper caste Hindu children were withdrawn from the schools as a protest against the admission of the Depressed Classes, the vacancies would be filled up by the other lower caste pupils<sup>10</sup>. The Government soon issued the Madras Elementary Education Act of 1920, with a Section 41(2) by which it enforced admission of pupils of all castes and communities in educational institutions. After that, the Panchama schools were opened to all classes, and they also rented suitable buildings for that purpose<sup>11</sup>.

Even though the Provincial Government had passed many orders and amendments and introduced legal measures for the betterment of the Depressed Classes, they were hardly met with any success. For example, in the North Arcot district, caste prejudices were strong. Upper caste people pulled down a school shed which was put up for the lower caste pupils, and in another place, a Taluk Board was forced to discontinue the employment of two lower caste teachers in an upper caste Hindu school due to the ill treatment by the upper caste Hindu students<sup>12</sup>. Hence, the Government, through the Labour Department, tried to open separate schools and common schools for the pupils of the Depressed Classes in a few areas. The Government strongly objected to the attitude of the private institutions for their segregation activities and for their policy of imparting education only to the upper caste Hindus. Further, the Government ordered that permission should not be accorded to separate schools unless a local body showed that they couldn't persuade the upper caste Hindus to admit the pupils of the Depressed Classes into the caste Hindu schools, despite the persistent propaganda<sup>13</sup>. The Government tried its best to change the mindset of the orthodox upper caste Hindus on the aspect of caste consciousness; yet, the dark aspect of casteism could not be obliterated from society.

Since 1919, the condition of the Depressed Classes was well understood by the British Government. As per record, on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1919, 1,48,654 pupils were reading in 5,242 institutions of which 14 were under the Government and 657 were under Municipalities or Local Boards. Special privileges were given to the Depressed Classes by exempting them from payment of fees in secondary schools under public management<sup>14</sup>. Until 1920, Elementary Education was left to Local boards, Municipal Council, Mission and Non-Mission agencies. To accelerate the growth of primary education on a statutory basis and to set the financial position on a secure and stable footing from the conflicting claims of other administrative needs, the Madras Elementary Education Act VIII of 1920 was passed<sup>15</sup>. This further facilitated the opening of more schools for depressed communities. It is to be noted here that from 1920 to 1947, the Labour Department's primary concern was to educate the Depressed Classes to the maximum extent, and it laid down measures as follows:

- ✓ Steps must be taken through the Education Department to get depressed pupils admitted in existing Local Boards or Aided schools, and where this is not practicable efforts may be taken for opening separate elementary schools in consultation with the District Educational Officers.
- ✓ Maintaining hostels for them by paying boarding grants.
- ✓ Sanctioning of scholarships and stipends to all of them, and
- ✓ Granting subsidies to philanthropic bodies working for the educational upliftment of the Depressed Classes, who were instrumental in starting schools or hostels.

With these objectives, the Labour Department carried on its work in the field of primary education. The strength of the Depressed class pupils rose from 480 to 6438, and thereafter, in a few years, it rose from 9776 to 174782<sup>16</sup>. In 1920-21, the total number of schools was 109 with 3037 pupils, while at the end of 1930-31 there were 1784 schools with 63604 pupils. Besides, the number of public institutions chiefly intended for these communities increased from 7,007 in 1920-21 to 11,324 in 1930-31 and their number of pupils from 1 93,260 to 3,54,248.<sup>17</sup> Nearly one decade of



progress in education for the Depressed Classes was satisfactory. The total number of pupils in the public schools also rose from 1,40,652 in 1920-21 to 3,01,917 in 1930-31<sup>18</sup>.

During 1931-32, the schools imparting education in the rural areas were generally opposed to the spread of education among the Depressed Classes. All the Taluk Boards and Aided schools also generally denied admission to the pupils of the Depressed Classes since many of the institutions were controlled by the upper castes.<sup>19</sup> The practice of untouchability still prevailed in the schools. Both the Education Department and Labour Department worked for the removal of the practice of untouchability. Yet, the attitude was in the minds of the children and parents of the upper caste Hindus. Nearly ten schools were leading in encouraging the feeling of casteism in 1934. This discrimination in the withdrawal of children from the common educational institutions came to the attention of the Government. To free them from the oppression, the Government issued an order in 1935, which, to some extent, reduced the spread of communal venom among the masses.

#### GOVERNMENT ORDER OF 1935:

1. Recognition shall not be granted to any school situated in a locality which is inaccessible to members of any Depressed class or community.
2. Recognition may be withdrawn from any school under Public or Private Management which refuses admission to any pupil merely on the ground of the caste or community to which he/she belongs. If no pupil belonging to Depressed community is actually attending a school it will be deemed that the school had refused admission to such pupils, within the meaning of this rule unless the management of the school shows that no such pupils are residing within a distance of one mile from the school or due to other satisfactory reasons for the absence of such pupils from the schools.
3. No grant shall be paid to any institution
  - a. Which is situated in a locality which is inaccessible to the members of any caste or community.
  - b. Which refuses admission to any pupil merely on the ground of the caste or community to which he belongs<sup>20</sup>.

Thus, the Government Order ensured the further enrolment of the pupils in the schools. The Government was also strict with the institutions which practised segregation. If any educational institution was inaccessible to any class or community, the government practised its precept by stopping Grant-in-Aid to schools which refused admission to any student on the grounds of caste or community<sup>21</sup>.

During the year 1935-36, a sum of Rs. 4,31,800 was granted to the labour schools for imparting education to Depressed Class pupils. Consequently, the annual strength of the boys and girls increased, and they were 30,555 and 7,916, respectively, in the next year. Totally 38,471 students studied in the labour schools<sup>22</sup>. Every year, the enrolment of students in the schools increases with the additional opening of new schools. For instance, in the year 1940-41, a total of 192 schools were opened in addition to the existing schools of 10,006 in 1935-36<sup>23</sup>. It is in this way that the number of Depressed class students studying in schools increased year by year, with the encouragement given by the government.

The progress of education in the depressed communities after the 1920s was entirely attributed to the Labour Department. The Commissioner of Labour was much interested in their welfare and he opened many number of schools for their elevation. During the year 1940-41, again,

eleven labour elementary schools were started. Schools were classified as day schools, night schools and combined day and night schools. A sum of 6,14,859 was spent on the total number of 1,198 schools to educate 38,848 boys and 13,229 girls.<sup>24</sup> In the Trichinopoly District, there were three schools run by the Labour Department with 109 pupils, while the North Arcot District had no school teachers. Due to the spread of malaria fever, the teachers declined to join duties in these schools.<sup>25</sup> Hence, only ten schools were newly started in the Madras Presidency, and 39 were closed. Totally 1,125 schools were working at the end of the year 1942, and of these, 1,121 schools were day schools, 2 were night schools and 2 were day and night schools.<sup>26</sup> Besides, a sum of Rs. 9,10,209 was spent to educate the total strength of 37,652 boys and 18,518 girls.<sup>27</sup> For the Kallar children in Madurai District, 247 schools were opened, with 9 more Kallar girls' schools in 1944. The total strength of the Kallar pupils was 14,701.

The total strength of the teachers was 489. In the same year, Ramnad District was also facilitated with two schools with 163 pupils on the rolls, of whom 47 were non-Kallars<sup>28</sup>.

Every year, a few districts are selected for the opening of new schools. Sometimes, some old schools were to be closed for want of pupils. With the support of the Government, the part played by the Labour Department was much appreciated. It never rested nor stopped its ameliorative measures, especially in the provision of all essential facilities to the schools. In 1945-46, there were 1,112 labour schools which imparted education to 68,845 pupils<sup>29</sup>. During the later years of the Independence struggle there were 1,119 labour schools which imparted education to 77,674 Depressed class pupils. At the end of 1946-47, a sum of Rs 1,44,245 was spent for the education of the Depressed class pupils, which was a commendable service of the Labour Department.

#### MID-DAY MEALS

It is to be pointed out here that during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Pupils among the Depressed Classes were not attending the schools regularly despite the efforts of the government. Few schools functioned with poor strength. To increase their strength, a survey was taken. The result of the survey showed that the parents of these pupils were poverty-stricken and hence they could not properly feed their children. They were surviving only with their children earning their bread. Whereas the Aboriginal and Hill tribes were bound to their traditional practices, and they never thought of their children's education. The ultimate result was that these Depressed Classes did not want to educate their children for the above reasons, and also, they were socially and economically very backwards.

The deplorable condition of the Depressed Classes was manifest in the Government Survey. So, to attract the parents of the Depressed class children towards education, the government adopted a new method of gradually introducing the mid-day meals scheme in the schools for poor children. Even private organisations provided mid-day meals to the children of their schools at Periamet and New Town in Madras. The Government of India sanctioned in 1918 a recurring grant of Rs 3,000 for the education of the poorer classes and a sum of Rs.. 11,250 for the provision of free meals to these children. The Government of Madras benefited by this Central Assistance. The system of providing mid-day meals was first introduced by the Madras Corporation successfully in three schools at Chetput, Thousand Lights and Mirsahipet in 1923. Since then, many schools were attached to this system of provision of mid-day meals. This greatly helped the regular attendance of the pupils in schools in later years<sup>30</sup>.

Many Depressed Class leaders also commended this scheme. As a Depressed Class leader, M.C.Rajah was often pleaded for the welfare of the Depressed Classes. He demanded in the Madras Legislative Council the immediate introduction of mid-day meals in schools in 1923. In the

beginning, the Government did not seriously listen to the grievances of the Depressed Classes. Despite its indifferent approach, M.C.Rajah brought a strong resolution to implement immediately the mid-day meal scheme and to increase the number of scholarships for the Depressed class children. After a long process, the supply of mid-day meals was approved and materialised with the provision of Rs. 45 lakhs<sup>31</sup>.

The Government, in the early stages of the implementation of the mid-day meal, was not in a position to meet its entire expenses. The Government initially felt that the financial burden was too heavy to execute the scheme of the mid-day meal. However, the Justice Party Government decided to the better and managed to implement the scheme. In 1928, a resolution was passed in the Madras Legislative Council recommending the extension of the mid-day meal scheme to different regions and for all poor children of all communities. Implementation of the scheme as inter-dining with the pupils of all communities created tension among the upper classes of society<sup>32</sup>. Though poor, certain upper-class parents did not like their children to dine with Depressed class pupils. This particular aspect posed a lot of problems in society.

When the Criminal Tribes Settlement Elevation School came under the Labour Department, this created much difficulty for the school. Very early by 8.00 a.m., the student came to school and returned home late in the evening. The whole day, they were without food. Consequently, they were slowly drifting from school and were staying at home. The authorities informed this and then requested the Government for help, and later received assistance from the Government. Since 1927, this school has developed in imparting education and getting the provision of mid-day meals. Initially, the Government had granted a meagre amount of Rs 240 per month in 1929<sup>33</sup>. With the assistance of the Government, the progress of education was accelerated by the private organisations. One such organisation, The Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha, passed the resolution of mid-day meals to poor Adi-Dravida pupils in the primary schools, secondary schools and colleges<sup>34</sup>. The member, T.J.Ramaswamy Iyer, pleaded in the Legislative Assembly on 19.03.1930 and brought about a motion to that effect and urged the government to provide mid-day meals to the pupils of poor parents<sup>35</sup>. The impact of the provision of mid-day meals was excellent as a large number of pupils attended classes in schools. As an experiment, the Government introduced the scheme of mid-day meals in Tanjore and East Godavari districts. To extend this scheme in other places few social leaders like Swami Sahajananda, Rao Sahib Abdul Hameed Khan, P.Sundram Chetti, V.G.Vasudeva Pillai and C.Basudev frequently stressed the need and importance of mid-day meals to the pupils of the Depressed Classes and brought about a resolution in the Legislative Council. But it lapsed due to the prorogation of the Council<sup>36</sup>. But due to their persistent demand, the mid-day meal scheme got an impetus again in 1940. After 20 years of demand, mid-day meal was provided in eight labour schools in five districts<sup>37</sup>. The provision of mid-day meals helped to increase the regular attendance of the children, who looked more cheerful and took great interest in their studies. At the end of the year 1940-41, a sum of Rs. 8,57,789 was spent by the government on education<sup>38</sup>. Gradually, the mid-day meal scheme was introduced in other parts of the Presidency also. This scheme covered 14 districts and was extended to 600 selected schools. The special labour staff worked on a Five-Year Programme at a total cost of Rs. 5,28,450<sup>39</sup>.

At the beginning of the Five-Year Term, eligible communities were listed for the implementation of the above scheme. In the first year, it covered 20% of the schools for Rs.. 1,09,000<sup>40</sup>. Financial assistance was raised by closing down single-teacher schools and ill-managed schools<sup>41</sup>. To encourage and improve the pupils' education, sufficient food and other facilities were offered. In 1943, there were 360 schools which provided mid-day meals to 15000 pupils. A sum of Rs. 2 lakhs was spent on this scheme in the province<sup>42</sup>. Again in 1944, a sum of Rs 8.04 lakhs was spent to feed the pupils of the depressed communities. Thus, there was an increase in the allotment



of funds for the mid-day meal scheme by the government. The total number of children benefited by the scheme was 64,000 in 760 schools. Since 1941, children's strength in schools has increased due to this scheme.<sup>43</sup> The parents of the poor pupils sent their children with the hope of getting at least one free meal, which they were unable to give to their children. This made a sufficient number of children attend the schools regularly.

It is to be noted that for the supply of mid-day meals, the assistance of private contractors was very much required. The schools that controlled the small schools with ten children were left out of this scheme because of their small size<sup>44</sup>. Moreover, the private contractors were also not interested in feeding the pupils of these centres, as it was not viable for them. To inspect and to report the condition of labour schools, a Revenue Inspector was appointed. The school was supervised by a Revenue Inspector with a jurisdiction of 50 schools under his control. His inspection and control helped the activities of the labour schools. The free meal scheme certainly helped to educate more pupils among the Depressed Classes. The impact of the scheme was very much manifest in the form of an increase in the pupils' attendance in the schools.

During 1946-47, a sum of Rs. 10.49 lakhs was spent for 781 schools which provided mid-day meals to 71,541 Depressed class children<sup>45</sup>. The Harijan Welfare Department, established in 1949 for amelioration work, was not involved in this work initially. The provision of mid-day meals was carried on only by the private contractors of the government<sup>46</sup>.

## HOSTELS

During the colonial period, Labour Schools were started with the moderate scheme of providing mid-day meals to the Depressed Class pupils. Since 1920, the strength of the pupils has increased annually. Few schools were situated in the semi-urban areas and towns. The pupils of the Depressed Classes were not well enough to bear the education expenditure, as indicated earlier. To initiate and to encourage them for studies, free hostels were opened and provided with three times meals and free accommodation. Because of the hostel facilities poor residents of the villages benefited very much, and hence they allowed their children to reside and study in schools situated far away from them.

During 1921-22, 383 hostels were opened for boys and 154 for girls with a total strength of 29191 boarders. As usual, in the beginning, the majority of these residents were Indian Christians<sup>47</sup>. This data reflects the Resident position of the hostels in the whole of the Presidency of Madras. But, special consideration to the pupils of Depressed Classes was felt in 1923. Consequently, the first hostel for the Depressed Classes was opened by the Government of Madras on 1.12.1923 with 34 pupils<sup>48</sup>. All the eligible pupils belonging to the Depressed communities were preferred for admission in the hostels. So, a total three hostels were opened for the pupils of the Depressed Classes, and the hostels were located at Madras, Masulipatnam and Calicut, which were maintained at the cost of the Government. The strength of the pupils residing there was 5550 in 1928-29<sup>49</sup>. The Commissioner of Labour was the sole authority for the ameliorative works in respect of the Depressed Classes. He used the power to form the hostel committee<sup>50</sup>. The hostels controlled by the Government were assisted and guided by an Advisory Committee. The committee was asked to report now and then the condition of each hostel. Different hostels were accommodating the pupils of different communities, like the Brahmins, non-Brahmins and the Christians. But separate hostels for upper caste and lower caste pupils irritated many people who had reformist ideals. Fortunately, the Ministry of Dr P.Subbarayan, who led the Justice Party's Government, welcomed the innovative step for the opening of common hostels suggested by a few members of the Legislative Council of the Madras

Presidency.<sup>51</sup> Certain private organisations also took a lead in this task with the emergence of Harijan Sevak Sangh, and free hostels were opened by the Sangh for the benefit of the Depressed Classes.<sup>52</sup>

## SCHOLARSHIPS

During the colonial era, the condition of the Depressed Classes was far from satisfactory. These classes had no proper education, and their children were also not sent to school due to social and financial constraints. It was for this reason, as indicated earlier, schemes were drafted by the government to provide mid-day meals for the Depressed class pupils to lure them to schools. Further, to encourage the pupils in their studies, financial assistance was also given in the form of Scholarships. During the period 1920-47 number of scholarships were provided to the Depressed class students. Earlier, in 1919, 16 scholarships were provided, and the government made fee remissions to the Depressed class boys, Aborigines and other eligible communities<sup>53</sup>. For the Christian Converts, scholarships were not given by the Labour Department since they were supported by Christian institutions<sup>54</sup>. The Scholarships and fee remissions were sanctioned by the Government for the greater benefit of Panchamas and other Depressed class boys. In the Madras Presidency as a whole, the total number of pupils belonging to the Aboriginal Classes was 9096, as against 8755 in the previous year<sup>55</sup>. The Provincial Government awarded several scholarships to all these pupils as per the recommendations of the Labour Commissioner. From the period 1923-24, a comprehensive scheme for granting scholarships was worked out by the government, and the scholarships awarded were Residential Scholarships, Ordinary Commercial Scholarships, Scholarships for Motor Mechanic Training and Teacher training<sup>56</sup>.

While providing the scholarships, the residential scholarships were granted to boarders of the hostels. The non-residential scholarships were provided to the regular students. During the period 1924-25, 385 scholarships were sanctioned, as against the 281 scholarships in 1923<sup>57</sup>. Educational concessions were given to the converts by the Education Department, and the Commissioner of Labour was not involved in this task<sup>58</sup>. However, his suggestions and recommendations were considered in the following year for the provision of Scholarships. Further, a sum of Rs 61,380 was spent to provide the scholarships to 1457 pupils in 1930-31. Annually, the number of scholarships has increased. Educational amenities were also provided to all pupils in the Madras Presidency. To improve the education of Depressed Classes in education, both the residential and non-residential scholarships were awarded to them.

During 1932-33, 48 residential scholarships were granted to pupils of the Depressed Classes<sup>59</sup>. The value of scholarships was Rs 18 per month for the school-going pupil and Rs. 25 for a pupil attending a college course. There were, in addition, 1,278 ordinary scholarships for general education and 6 for the special grade college education<sup>60</sup>. Scholarships for professional, technical and commercial courses were also sanctioned in a total of 190 scholarships<sup>61</sup>. Special consideration was also given to the Kallar community since the members of that community were mostly illiterate. Elementary education was supplemented in some cases with industrial training, which was generally imparted in the schools maintained for them. The education was usually free, and in some cases, the pupils were also supplied with free food, clothing and school accessories<sup>62</sup>. Later, in 1935-36, 51 residential scholarships were granted to the Depressed class pupils in the revised rates between Rs. 12 and Rs. 30<sup>63</sup>. The Commissioner of Labour recommended the scholarships in higher education also. In fact, his approval for the scholarships was final.

During the period 1935-36, 1,588 ordinary scholarships, which involved a lesser amount, were awarded for the general education, besides 7 Collegiate Scholarships, 153 Industrial scholarships and 12 for the general trainees<sup>64</sup>. In the training period, 12 scholarship holders were

given a bonus to the extent of Rs 522 to enable them to start their professional career as artisans<sup>65</sup>. Exemption was allowed for the payment of examination fees for all the Depressed Classes. For the Kallar boys, 152 ordinary, 5 residential and 12 Industrial scholarships were sanctioned in the district of Madura<sup>66</sup>. Through these scholarships, the pupils' knowledge and general awareness gradually increased. The number of increasing scholarships asserted their continuous attendance in the institutions. During the academic year of 1939-40, 4935 scholarships were provided in total<sup>67</sup>. To avail of the scholarships, rules were relaxed, and it was stipulated that the income certificate was to be produced even after the scholarships were granted<sup>68</sup>.

In the educational institutions, fee concessions were also offered to the eligible communities, which were very much backward. In special cases, the Government helped the pupils to pay the fees for the Indian Civil Service Examinations and for such other examinations. Mr G. Ganesamurthi, a Depressed caste student of Pachaiyappa's College, availed of such a fee concession in 1940 from the Labour Department<sup>69</sup>. During 1940-41, 65 residential scholarships, 5,484 non-residential scholarships for general education, 30 for professional and commercial courses and 110 Industrial scholarships were awarded by the Department<sup>70</sup>. In 1944-45, 166 scholarships were awarded for the pupils belonging to the Kallar community. For higher studies, a sum of Rs. 350 was sanctioned for a period of two years to a Kallar boy to continue his post-graduate study<sup>71</sup>. Additionally, 15 Kallar girls and 7 boys were given boarding grants in the vocational institutions. In 1945, 6473 ordinary scholarships and 369 scholarships were sanctioned for arts and professional courses. Though their number was very less in higher education, privileges and concessions were promptly offered to the pupils by the Government. Every year, new methods or new fields were chosen to improve the trainees, who were encouraged with the aid like scholarships, stipends and meals free of cost. In 1945, 31 scholarships for midwife trainees and two for the agricultural course students were also sanctioned<sup>72</sup>.

In later years, the Commissioner of Labour was more empowered to grant 10 scholarships for Compounder trainees, 6 for Sericultural studies and 3 for Bachelor of Teaching<sup>73</sup>. It is to be pointed out here that from 1920 to 1930, the amount granted for scholarships did not reach even one Lakh rupees for the award of scholarships to the Depressed Classes<sup>74</sup>. Thus, the response was not much from the Depressed Classes initially despite the encouragement from the government. Also, to encourage the students of the Law course, each year ten scholarships were awarded to the communities of Yerulula, Yendi and other Aboriginal Tribes<sup>75</sup>. Soon after 1947, a sum of Rs 2.70 lakhs was allotted for Harijan and other eligible communities, and Rs 55,600 for the Christian converts for the provision of 7,474 scholarships. A sum of Rs 6200/- was also granted by the Labour Department for the purchase of books and clothes for the pupils of the Depressed and other eligible backward communities<sup>76</sup>.

It was in this way that the Labour Department had been carrying on its activities assiduously for the welfare of the Depressed Classes. Their welfare schemes undoubtedly and gradually improved the conditions of the Depressed Classes, who in the post – post-Independence era began to rise in society with their educational background.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The pre-1947 era was a crucial time in the development of labour welfare initiatives in India, more so when it came to the Depressed Classes. The creation of the Labour Department in the Madras Presidency in 1920 was a trailblazing initiative towards state-sponsored welfare for marginalised groups. Led by the likes of G.F. Paddison, all these early interventions dealt with such essential issues as access to education, discrimination based on caste, and economic poverty. Activities like Labour Schools, hostels, mid-day meals, and scholarships played a crucial role in engaging the Depressed Class children in the educational process, thus initiating their socio-economic change.

The Government Order of 1935 also strengthened the state's resolve for inclusive education by penalising exclusion based on caste in schools. Though these interventions were modest in ambition and primarily limited to specific areas, they set the preliminary framework for post-Independence policies aimed at social justice and equality of education. In a way, the labour welfare measures of the colonial period, however limited and developing, initiated an organised approach towards the development of historically marginalised groups within India and provided the precursor to the more extensive reforms implemented after 1947.

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