



# A STUDY OF INDIA'S BACKWARD CLASS MOVEMENT

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper attempts to analyse the backward class movement in India and its effects on Indian society. Due to the negative effects of the caste system, a backward class movement arises. It also includes the Dravidian, SNDP, and Mahar movements. People in other countries are not divided like this. The caste system in India creates a bundle of social problems because some castes deliberately outnumber others. Social differences on the foundation of the caste system have remained constant due to the long tradition of giving importance to castes. Violence and terrorism take place when people from one caste attack people from another caste. With the expansion of the national movement, backward caste/class movements emerged among the depressed castes and the marginalised sections of the society in different parts of India. The difference between the religious and caste movements is that while the former attacked the evil practices of Hinduism, the latter encouraged its supporters to find solutions to their problems in the contours of Hinduism, i.e., rejected their religion.*

**Keywords:** Backward Class, Movement and Discrimination.

## INTRODUCTION

The backward class movement in India took place in the early 20th century. The British government introduced English-medium schools, colleges, and Western education here, which were exploited by upper castes such as the Brahmins. Therefore, they were able to easily get jobs in government services and increase their reputation. This further increased the cultural, social and economic detachment between them and the lower castes. Now the lower castes have understood the situation even more. The lower castes feel that mere Sanskritisation is not enough, as described by M.N. Srinivas. It did not help them much for social mobility.

They are more determined to embrace a Western education to qualify for recent administrative jobs and new careers such as law, medicine, engineering, etc. Thus, the supremacy of the upper castes in higher education and new occupations provided the conditions for a backward class movement, which, as M.N. Srinivas points out, was to be expected in India, as only one caste, the Brahmins, enjoyed prevalence in higher education, occupations, and government employment. At this moment, the cultural openness between Brahmins and others has become very different.

The very characteristic of this movement is that it is based on caste. In the Indian context, "backward classes" form extended or "closed" position groups or castes. Caste associations emerged in different parts of the country to reinforce their demands for new names and professions. Many published journals devoted to the welfare of castes, raised funds for scholarship giving and building hostels for students from certain castes and undertook reforms of caste customs.

The skilled youth of the lower castes soon realised that it was difficult to get admitted to professional and postgraduate courses. They were unable to compete with the youth of the upper caste, such as Brahmins. Therefore, they could not get a job in the government. They felt discriminated against by caste, which led to an anti-Brahminical belief.

The desire for consciousness among the backward castes came from the census process. The caste 'sabhas' submitted their representations to the census authorities that certain castes should belong to a particular 'varna' and not to a lower class. In Tamil Nadu, for example, the two castes, the Vellalas and the Padaiyachis were to be registered as 'Vaishyas' and 'Vaniya caste Kshatriyas', respectively, and not as Shudras.

Many such claims were made in the 1931 census. The 'Sabhas' also changed the lifestyle of castes in the direction of Sanskritisation. This includes giving up meat (pork and meat beef) and alcohol, wearing a sacred thread, and shortening the period of mourning like the Brahmins. In most 'lower caste' cases, there are instances of not performing a traditional humiliating duty like 'Carvee' or beating 'tom-tom' in their ceremonial events. The upper castes have different opinions on these tendencies. On various occasions, they used power to enforce their traditional customs on the lower castes.

Now, the lower castes also requested for a separate electorate. Dr. Ambedkar fought for it. This made the backward class movement political. The Justice Party in the Madras Presidency was formed to preserve the interests of the dominating non-Brahmin castes. Its newspapers in English and other languages attempt to educate non-Brahmins and their case. Caste organisations also introduced various magazines in different parts of India. The notion-Brahmin Movement had two objectives:

1. To demand that more concessions and benefits (leading to discrimination against Brahmins) be accepted so as to outperform the Brahmins in terms of education and social status.
2. Achieving 'Swayam Maryada' or self-respect. E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker founded the self-respect movement in Tamil Nadu. This campaign was against Brahmin, North, Hindi, Sanskrit and anti-God. Ramaswamy Naicker founded the Dravida Kazhagam -DK (Dravida Federation) in 1945.

In 1949, his supporter Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam-D.M.K C. formed by Annadurai, which wiped out the Brahmin's stronghold in Tamil Nadu politics. But now they are not so much anti-Brahmin. In the Tamil cinema business, the penetration of DMK was more.

Therefore, at this stage, the aim of the backward classes movement was to bind them in the field of education and appointments in government jobs were a monopoly of the Brahmins. The resistance to Brahmin supremacy did not emerge from the low and the disadvantaged castes. These were socially close to the Brahmins, high-caste groups. They absorbed not only the Hindus but also the Muslims, Christians, and other communities who also suffered from the same societal disadvantage. Therefore, it is crucial to use the phrase "Backward Classes", not "Backward Castes".

Each society is classed, but it differs from society to society. The classification of Indian Hindu society is based on a caste system. The most prominent characteristic of Hindu society is a caste system. In certain categories, this system is based on the principle of attainment, while in other civilisations, it is based on the ascription principle. However, the caste system in India is completely based on the notion of attribution.

### **Positive and Negative Effects of the Caste System in India**

However, the caste system initially performed its optimistic duties well. Over time, it has deteriorated and caused much harm to society instead of doing social good. The caste system has instilled a unique sense of humour and has created unnecessary awareness among the people about their castes. Many times, caste interests were given more priority than national interests.

Thus, the entire system stood up against national integration. Democracy requires human equality, but the caste system has thought of inequalities.

So, while the Brahmins are at the top, the Shudras are at the bottom of the stepmother.

The lower castes in the caste system were dormant and oppressed by the upper castes. The Shudras behaved in the most vicious manner and were not allowed in public places. Even their shadows were considered impure by the people of the upper castes.

Interdining and inter-mixing with the lower castes are not permitted. Thus, the system was entirely based on the exploitation of the lower castes. All sections of the society should contribute to social welfare in the national interest, but the marginalised sections have no voice in the development and progress of the country.

In a traditional caste-based society, the Shudras are well aware that they cannot succeed in Hindu society. As a result, many of them revealed planned secrets during the invasion. They also helped the invaders. Their treachery eventually led to the death of the Hindus. Brahmanism's supremacy on behalf of the shudras, the most neglected of Hindu society, became inaccessible. They effortlessly drew on the ideas of Islam, philosophy and Christianity. Many of them accept new beliefs. In this sense the caste system led to the expansion of Christianity and Islam in India.

Birth itself, caste system, status, and role are fixed, and aptitude, personal effort, and diligence become meaningless to bring about any transformation. Acceptance of hereditary status became mandatory. The upper classes felt that they possessed exclusive wisdom. They expected all other castes to consult with them and work for them, which established a wide gap between the upper and lower castes.

Brahmins teach religion because they occupy the highest position in the caste system, which is expected of them. However, as time went on, individuals became indifferent to the profession they chose and neglected to take responsibility for this duty. They knew that they could not escape from their castes despite their hypocritical behaviour. As a result, they begin to rely on the labour of other castes without making any meaningful contribution to the society. Consequently, a class of worthless individuals emerged in the Hindu social order.

Untouchables are the worst aspect of the caste system. Untouchables afflict social, economic, political and religious obstacles. By taking advantage of religion, they were exploited in the most inhumane way. The untouchables were classified into lower castes. Children were not allowed to receive education and were forced to work in unclean professions. Sudra women were not allowed to wear presses like Brahmin women wore. Public wells, ponds, places of worship, etc., are not allowed. The wrath of God and the fear of religious practices forced the lower castes to follow all religious prescriptions and prescriptions. Women were completely ignored within the caste system and enjoyed a very conservative and traditional position. They were denied the benefits of higher education. They were not allowed to express their opinions in public.

The women of the upper castes faced precarious circumstances because they practiced child marriage and forbade widow remarriage. The desire for men forced women to produce more and more children, which affected their physical and mental health. Upper-caste men were sometimes sexually harassed by lower-caste women. However, they could not protest against it because of the prevailing social pattern. In short, the status of women in the caste system is very low. Under these circumstances, the backward class movement in India has emerged.

### **History of Backward Class Movements in India**

Important backward class movements in India have humiliated Satya Shodhak Samaj and Shri Narayana Dharma, thus fighting against caste injustice. He vehemently opposes Brahminical domination in the name of religion. He was also an opponent of the Indian National Congress for ignoring the weaker classes.

His organization wanted to achieve social justice for vulnerable parts of the community. He opened all the closets, schools, and orphanages for the children and mothers. In the year 1876 he was elected a member of the Municipal Committee of Pune. His works include Dharma Tritiya Ratna, Ishara, Life of Shivaji, etc. In the year 1888 he was given the title of Mahatma. In the Indian National Movement, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar took up the mantle of fighting for the cause of the impoverished castes of the twentieth century. His efforts come to a head in the form of approval of the reservation system for socially needy sections in the Constitution of India.

## Shri Narayan Guru Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Movement in India:

It was found that the non-Brahmin movement belonging to the backward Ezava caste was reflected in Kerala under the leadership of Sri Narayana Guru. He founded SNDP Yogam and all branches outside of Kerala. He initiated two programs for the improvement of the Ezavas in order to eradicate the practices of the untouchables.

As the second step, Narayana Guru established a temple open to all castes. The rituals governing marriage, religious worship, and burial were streamlined. Narayana Guru made the mark of transforming a group of untouchables into a backward class. Gandhi's trust in Chaturvarna was questioned, and he saw the caste system as the parent of the untouchables. His slogan was "One religion, one caste, one god for humanity."

### Justice Party:

In contrast to the rudimentary nationalist movements symbolized by Hindu revivalism in the 19th century, this Brahmin caste elevated its status. The non-Brahmins of the Madras presidency aspired to ally with the colonial authorities, hoping that foreign rule would secure their jobs and partially balance the power gap.

### The Self-respect Movement:

To improve the living conditions of the Dravidian people, the Self-Respect Movement was founded in 1925 by Ramaswamy Naicker. It was intended to denounce the Brahmanical autocracy and the dubious means by which they controlled all sectors of Hindu life. "Dravida Nadu Conference" was convened for the promotion of a separate and independent "Dravida Nation". The demand was reaffirmed the following year in response to the Muslim League's Lahore resolution calling for the formation of Pakistan. Naicker was in favour of the formation of Pakistan.

The main assumption in the pursuit of a separate nation was that the Dravidian non-Brahman peoples had a different genetic tribe and culture than the Aryan Brahman.

Naicker created the Dravida Kazagham in 1944 and wore black shirts like their fellow members. It was meant to embody the terrible situation of today's Dravidians.

Due to the break with Annadurai who established the Dravida Munnetra Kazagam with the active support of Karunanidhi, Natarajan and Sampath, the movement weakened. In order to establish itself as a people's party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazagam organizes conferences.

Some of the big backward-class movement which grew in the early 20th century were:

1. Dravidian Movement
2. Mahar Movement
3. SNDP Movement

MSA Rao describes these backward class movements as transformative.

### Dravidian Movement:

Due to the advancement of Christianity and Western education, non-Brahmins in the Madras presidency developed a new consciousness, and among them bitterness began to grow against the dominance of Brahmins and other upper castes in the profession and politics, especially the Congress Party. They believed that if they wanted to forge a successful career, the domination of Brahmins in professional and political life had to be abolished first.

By 1914, this confrontation between the emerging non-Brahmin urban middle class and the predominantly Brahmin middle and upper-class establishment had taken a sharp turn. The non-Brahmin castes organized themselves, and the South India Society was formed in 1917 following the publication of

The Non-Brahmin Manifesto in 1916. After the Montague-Chelmsford reforms, the "South India Association" was renamed the Justice Party to counter the political influence of Congress.

### **Mahar Movement in Maharashtra (India):**

Mahar is a statistically significant caste of Maharashtra that was originally considered untouchable. Normally, they were assigned everyday jobs such as sweeping, digging out bushes, removing carcasses from dead animals, chopping wood, and providing music on special occasions in the hamlet. They were denied access to civil facilities such as wells, schools, and even the services of Brahmins and barbers. In the early 20th century, the Mahars began to organise themselves in the fight against discrimination and affirmation of their status. At the 1902 meeting, they urged recruitment for military and police service.

The ideology of the Mahar movement was different from that of the SNDP movement. While the former rests on a total rejection of Hinduism, the latter is in the interpretation of Hinduism. The reason for joining Buddhism was the egalitarian ideal. Consequently, Mahars would be able to escape the stigma of untouchables and other types of prejudice.

Moreover, the collective mobilisation of Mahars during the social movement created a new consciousness among them regarding their educational, economic, and political rights. They received modern education in large numbers, which allowed them to secure new occupations in the urban areas. Thus, the general social status of the Mahars was raised.

### **Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Movement:**

Their leader, Narayan Guru, started this movement among the Izhavas of Kerala. Traditionally, the Izhavas were a caste of untouchables of Toddy trappers, and they, for example, had to stay 34 feet away from Namboothiri. Brahmins suffered from several disadvantages, both socially and ceremonially. Access to Hindu temples and bathing tanks for Hindus was denied. Women were not allowed to cover their breasts, wear footwear, and were not allowed to build pukka houses. In the second half of the 19th century, with the growth of modern humanistic and secular ideals and the spread of egalitarianism through Christianity, Izhava came to perceive their status as one of deprivation and exploitation. Under the inspired leadership of Shri Narayan Guru, they opposed the domination of Brahmanism and the formation of a new vision of Hinduism. In turn, according to MSA Rao, they embraced a policy of secession and self-organization. The new ideology was based on the principle of an individual's self-respect, honour, and worth.

Later, T.V. Madhavan led the Vaikum Temple Road Entry Movement in 1927, with the patronage of Mahatma Gandhi. After two years of prolonged Satyagraha, the Izhavas were given permission to use the road that ran past the Vaikum Temple, which was owned by the upper caste. This was a major victory over traditional views on pollution. Thus, the Izhavas community effectively increased their status in society.

### **CONCLUSION:**

After analysing and interpreting the Constitution of India, it can be ascertained that it is in accordance with democratic principles by striving to provide social, economic and political justice to all. India is a diverse society with significant differences in economic, social and cultural aspects. Those who drafted the Constitution were aware of the social injustice and economic inequalities faced by certain castes and communities. They were often forced to follow the family business or profession and were restricted from pursuing education. Therefore, the Constitution has provisions that serve as an exception to the general provisions of equality to help the "backward classes" and to help them engage with the rest of the society.

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