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Educational Developments of Backward Communities in Maharashtra**Dr. Dhanaji B. Masal,**

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Introduction:

Through the ages, backward communities mainly consisted of untouchables. Also, the castes and creeds consisted in the fourth Varna supposed to be backward communities. All Adivasi communities also supposed to be backward communities in Maharashtra. In Vedic period, the Arya community who were came from outside the country, the society was divided into four *Varnas*, namely Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra, which were based on their occupation. In the primary stage of this society the classification was based on the occupation, but later on this classification became by birth. In the later Vedic period developed into rigid caste system. This system decided the duties and authorities of each Varna. The fourth Varna, Shudra was supposed to be lowest category that means backward and refused all the facilities like education and participation in public affairs. Especially the *Varnashram* system imposed many restrictions on the untouchables. During the ancient and medieval period the condition was of the backward communities not much more developed. In the modern times the British government and missionaries took efforts for the all-round development of the backward communities. Their social disabilities were specific, severe and numerous. In spite of the Government directive in the matter of admission, children of the depressed classes were refused admission to schools. As they were illiterate, ill treated and untouchables for ages, all public services were closed to them. Many socio-educational thinkers gave stress on the education was the only alternative for their upliftment. Mahatma Phule, Karmveer Vitthal Ramaji Shinde, Abasaheb Gaikwad, Rajrshi Shahu Maharaj, Maharaja Syajirao Gaikwad, Dr. Ambedkar were the leaders of Maharashtra, who fought for their socio-educational upliftment. In 1951, out of 3,59,56,150 total population 1,08, 51,923 was the number of Backward Community population in the Presidency, which was unequally distributed like, in Surat District it was higher – 12,59,150, in Dang district it was lowest 42,177 and in Solapur district that 3,37,390 in number.¹ This Research Paper will focus on the educational developments of backward communities by the government and private agencies in Maharashtra.

Educational Developments of Backward Communities

During the Peshwa period, caste rigidity was a prime factor in the social life of Maharashtra. In the beginning of 19th century indigenous schools were under the control of Brahmin community and did nothing for the education of the Backward Communities. Due to the social taboos, children from the Backward Communities were not permitted to attend the local schools and therefore they were deprived of education.² The Peshwa rule came an end in 1818. The British Government introduced the modern system of education.

Macaulay's Minute:

Thomas Babington Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education" of 1833 recommended that higher education in India should be devoted to western learning and that English should be the medium of instruction. This ruling determined the character of Indian Education for the ensuing

century. Primary education did not enter the discussion as both Orientalists and Anglicists alike were concerned only with using funds for higher education.³ He put up his **Downward Filtration** theory. This theory of 'Downward Filtration' took responsibility of education of upper classes. Thereby the education of Backward Communities became neglected during the British period for a long time.⁴

Woods Despatch:

The declaration of 'Woods Despatch' (1854), which was came to be known as the 'Magna Charta' of English education in India. By its recommendation 'Department of Public Instruction' came into existence. The creation of the 'Department of Public Instruction,' (1855), brought into focus the problem of Education of Backward Communities. By the Government order of 28th April, 1858, all the Government schools had thrown open to Backward Communities.⁵ But in practice it was not so they could not get admission in schools easily. This question did not arise at the higher level because there was no demand for admission at colleges during this period. But this problem was acute at the primary and secondary level. In some places pressure was exerted on Backward Communities for not sending their children in common schools.⁶ Therefore the Government took the decision of establishment of 'special primary schools' in their localities. In 1881-82, there were sixteen schools of that type in the Presidency with 564 students. The special primary schools completed their need of education at some areas, but the social problem was not solved. Therefore the social workers played an important role for the socio-educational development of the backward communities.

Hunter Commission:

The 'Hunter Commission' of 1882 recommended that no child shall be refused admission in any institution conducted and maintained at the cost of public funds. The establishment of special schools for children of Backward Communities is liberally encouraged. These recommendations were not so much new, but an importance lies mainly in the fact that it awakened the conscience of the Government to make more extensive attempts for the development of Backward Communities education.⁷ Also these suggestions created awareness among the Backward Communities.

Awareness among the Backward Communities:

In 1893, by the petition submitted to the Department of Public Instruction, Backward Communities of Dapoli, district Ratnagiri got judgment in their favour for admissions in primary school. Likewise, the same demand was made by Shivram Januba Kamble and 1500 Mahars of the Deccan and Kokan in 1903.⁸ The social organisation of Bombay 'Maratha Aikyeccha Sabha' submitted a memorandum to the Government for making of primary education as free for Backward Communities. Also in this connection 300 people consisting of *Sarpanchs* and *Chairmen* of various school committees including Solapur district gave their support to this demand. But the **Director of Public Instruction Mr. Selby** pointed out that making education free was not the solution for the educational development of Backward Communities unless it was made compulsory.⁹ The people were satisfied with the efforts made by the Government. In his letter of 22nd December 1909, the Secretary of 'Depressed Class Mission,' noted that, *"the Government should be pleased to give special facilities to these low castes to avail of education which no doubt, it is the British Government alone who have in the history of this country been trying to impart education to all people without any distinction of caste or creed. The untouchables have however, as yet lagged behind and hence the Revenue and Education Departments make special provision for awarding scholarships and for opening night schools for these classes."*¹⁰ Though the Government had provided central grants and educational facilities for Backward Communities education between the years 1901 to 1920, they

were criticised by the social and political leaders. Because of social consciousness efforts were fell short in comparison with their population and demand.

Developments During 1921 to 1937:

With the transfer of education to the control of Indian ministers, the education of Backward Communities began to receive greater attention than before. During 1921 to 1937, inspite of financial stringency, larger funds were allocated to this cause than at any other in the past.¹¹ As early as in 1923, the Government ordered that *"any aided school that discriminates against depressed class children shall on that account be penalised in respect of the amount of grant earned."*¹²

Strate Commission:

The Government appointed 'Strate Commission,' to enquire into the socio-economic and educational conditions of Backward Communities under the chairmanship of Mr. C. H. B. Strate, I.C.S. Officer, Criminal Tribes Settlement. Its report, which was first of its type, is very important document. It made several recommendations. Some of them as following: (1) Reaffirmation of the Government policy that there should be equality of treatment for all classes of children in publicly managed educational institutions. (2) Encouragement of common schools as opposed to separate schools for Backward Communities. (3) Desirability of a more frequent interchange of teachers between the common schools and separate schools. (4) Abandonment of the practice of labeling schools as "Depressed Classes Schools," etc. (5) Recruitment of teachers belonging to the aboriginal tribes to training colleges for the children of these classes. (6) Grant of special promotions to teachers taking special interest in the education of Backward Communities children. (7) Increasing the number of Backward Communities teachers in primary schools.

Backward Community Department:

The Government accepted its recommendations and created a separate 'Backward Community Department,' and appointed a special Backward Community officer as its head in 1930.¹³ Also the Government adopted a new policy of declining of special schools and classes and encouraged backward Communities students for joining the ordinary or common schools. Thus it paved the way of eradicating the still lingering prejudice against these classes. During this period (1921-37), some seats on local bodies, in the legislature and in all the Government Departments were reserved for them.¹⁴

Developments During 1937 to 1947:

In 1937, a new chapter opened in the history of education of the Backward Communities. Because the Popular Ministry, which had been pledged to eradicate untouchability and to improve the lot of these neglected social groups came into power. Also the last seventeen years (1947-1964), formed most eventful period in the education of Backward Communities in this state. In 1942, the caretaker Government appointed an ad hoc committee under the chairmanship of Mr. MacLauchlan, I. C. S. and according to its recommendations, provided additional educational facilities to them such as opening of new schools and expansion of the existing hostels, conversion of primary schools into agriculture based schools, the institution of free studentship, scholarships, mid-day meals to children, award of prizes to students and allowances and bonuses to teachers.¹⁵

Epilogue:

Also after independence, due to the recommendations of 'Elbin Committee' (1959) and 'Dhebar Commission' (1960), the education of Backward Communities greatly progressed. The Kothari Commission (1964) also recommended that the schemes and plans which were going on previously should be continued in the future.¹⁶ Also during this period the Backward Community

Department was organised, expanded and made more powerful agency. During this period the Central Government began to sanction grants for the welfare of these Communities and due to it several of the schemes prepared by the State Government became possible to expand the work of ameliorating the general conditions of Backward Communities to a very great extent. Also the organisation of an intensive programme for the socio-political and economic development of Backward Communities was a significant development of this period.¹⁷ Due to the favourable conditions and the Government policy education of Backward Communities greatly progressed during 1937 to 64 in Maharashtra.

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