CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, AND SUGGESTIONS

Caste as the subject of research has drawn the attention of scholars across disciplines. It has been a central theme of research for sociologists since many decades. Studies on caste in India gathered adequate evidences to show that in India caste continues to determine the socio-economic life chances of the people. A perusal of literature makes clear that changes occurring in the domain of caste are not shaking the very foundation of the social institution, ‘caste’. In other words, the changes that have occurred in the caste system are only peripheral. Such a view point holds good in the case of Tamil Nadu.

In Tamil Nadu, caste conflicts prevail in an endemic form. That is to say, caste conflicts prevail in select areas, and between certain rival caste groups. Considering the state as a whole, conflicts and tensions prevail between the Thevars and the Dalits in the southern districts, between the Vanniyars and the Dalits in northern districts and between the Gounders and the Dalits in the western districts.

In the last few decades, Tamil Nadu witnessed a wide spread occurrence of conflicts between the caste Hindus and the Dalits. A number of explanations have been putforth for the occurrence of caste conflicts in Tamil Nadu. Celebration of events such as temple festivals, birth anniversaries of caste leaders, social/ family functions, intercaste marriage, and eve-teasing lend air to caste feelings.
There have been enormous studies conducted on caste in Tamil Nadu but studies on intercaste tensions and conflicts are very rare. A few studies conducted on such a theme are available in the form of fact finding surveys or in abstract theoretical form. Caste conflicts being a sensitive issue, academicians show less enthusiasm in undertaking researches on such theme. Reports of newspapers do carry information about the occurrence of caste riots but they are not dependable as they may lack objectivity, because they are controlled by vested interest groups.

Whenever a caste conflict breaks out, the police is entrusted the role of combating the violence and they are expected to act in a judicious manner. The ground reality is that the law enforcement authorities are constrained to execute the authorities vested with them for obvious administrative and political reasons. As a result, in most cases, the perpetrators of violence go unpunished. Thus, the offenders take advantage of the situations, and cause repeated violence. The victims are invariably the innocent people.

A fresh research is needed to understand why and how do caste conflicts arise?, what are its implications?, How do different sections of population perceive the performance of police? How are caste conflicts resolved? The present study addresses to the above questions.

The study was undertaken with the following objectives

**Objectives**

1. To trace out the socio-historical roots of caste conflicts in Tamil Nadu.
2. To identify the exact causes of caste conflicts by ascertaining the views of accused, complainants, victims, and neutral persons belonging to various caste groups.

3. To analyse the impact of caste conflicts on the personal as well as the social life of the people belonging to the study area in general, and on the sample population in particular.

4. To assess the performance of police in handling the issues of caste conflicts in different stages such as prior to the eruption or manifestation of caste conflicts, in course of the conflict, and during the post conflict situations.

5. To draw up effective intervention strategies to resolve caste conflicts.

The distinctive features of the study are:

i) It seeks to explain the caste conflicts by ascertaining the views of the accused, victims and neutral persons.

ii) It besides examining the causes, tries to seek conflict resolutions.

iii) It covers the views of respondents belonging to three generations.

A perusal of literature leads to the conclusion that the dalits continue to be oppressed and exploited. The Amidst oppressive socio-economic condition, the dalits have increasingly become assertive and the contention holds true in the case of Tamil Nadu.

The present study is confined to four districts in Tamil Nadu. They are: Tirunelveli, Erode, Cuddalore, Thiruvallur. The main reasons behind the selection these districts for the study are:
1. These districts differ in their geographic, socio-economic and demographic characteristics.

2. These districts differ in their caste structure.

3. These four districts have been identified as sensitive districts in terms of inter caste conflicts and violence.

Further, the study was conducted on 800 sample respondents representing 200 from each of the four districts.


One third of the respondents in each of the districts belongs to female category.

Care was also taken to include sample respondents representing locally dominant caste groups as well as dalits.

The samples were recruited by using disproportionate stratified random sampling method.

The primary data were collected by holding detailed interviews with the respondents. For this purpose, a standard interview schedule was designed, and used.

The Secondary data were collected from such sources as books, journals, census records and documents maintained at the police stations fall under the jurisdiction of the police station.
Profile of the Respondents

The accused, complainants, victims and neutral persons form 38.1%, 17.1%, 16.1% and 28.6% respectively of the sample respondents.

The age of the youngest and the oldest respondents figured in the study are 21 years and 68 years respectively. The Mean age of the sample respondents has been calculated as 42 years. The statistical Mean average of Accused, Complainants, Victims and Neutral Persons have been calculated as 42.4 years, 42.6 years, 42.5 years and 42.1 years respectively. It has to be noted here that the study covers respondents belonging to almost three generations.

On the whole, the study covered twelve caste groups listed under nine categories.

The caste background of the respondents belonging to Forward, Backward, Most Backward and Scheduled Caste categories represent 9.4%, 26.3%, 21.9% and 42.5% percent respectively of the sample population.

In every caste group, there are accused and victims. The study has considered more number of accused from the scheduled caste category. There is not much variation with regard to the community background of the victims chosen as samples for the study.
The respondents in general have reasonably good educational background. Over fifty percent of the respondents have education upto Higher secondary level or more.

The available economic data show that there is not much difference in the economic background of respondents belonging to different social categories.

As for as the marital status is concerned, around three fourths of them are married. However, only 57 percent of them are living with their spouses.

As the study focuses on the rural areas, it is found that a majority of the respondents live in joint families. There is not much variations among the different caste groups in their familial arrangements.

The study has covered individuals belonging to various occupational categories including those in government and private sectors but in an unequal proportion. Analysis of occupational background reveals that the victims of caste conflicts are invariably from the categories of coolies and other such working class.

**Causes of Caste Conflicts**

With regard to observance of discriminatory practices in the study areas, one fourth of the respondents viewed that the condition has become worse than the past. And, twenty eight percent of them could see no change in the observance of customary discriminatory practices. However, around one fourth of the respondents stated that the conditions have become better now. The reasons for increase/decrease
in observance of caste based discrimination have also been obtained and ranked in the
textual presentation of the thesis.

Further, it is found that while Tirunelveli region is experiencing a rise in the
occurrence of caste based discriminatory practices, the region around Thiruvallur
district is witnessing a reduction in the occurrence of such inhuman practices.

Fifty four percent of the respondents in the study areas had experienced the
discrimination ranging from mild to severe form.

The respondents irrespective of place of dwelling pointed out that vested political
interests (22%), economic disparity (18%), prevailing educational climate (13%) as
the basic causes of conflict. Some others attributed it to customary civic and cultural
practices (9.5%) and social discrimination (10%).

The study has found out that less frequently, caste related matters are brought
in Panchayat meetings through caste leaders. Indepth interview with respondents
show that there lies caste prejudice with regard to allotment of fund for development
works. Likewise verbal exchanges take place on such matters as identification of
beneficiaries for welfare schemes.

The study probed the category of persons who induce caste conflicts.

The study yields the inference that the well educated, and youths who are
married rarely induce caste conflicts. But the youths who are uneducated and
unmarried are perceived to be problematic.
Implications

It is observed that by and large, the respondents irrespective of their caste background are found to be caste-centric in their attitude. They are expected to reveal caste sentiments and loyalty more during the crises occasions. Violations of caste rules are not viewed seriously on normal occasions in daily life.

The respondents experienced a variety of personal losses due to caste conflicts. The severity of personal loss ranges from personal humiliation to inclusion in legal/criminal proceedings. The three most hardships faced by the respondents include: mental agony, loss of economic livelihood, and disturbed routine life. A considerable number of neutral persons also undergo mental agony and loss of economic livelihood due to caste conflicts.

Several respondents in the study areas are disturbed due to violence or threats of violence, damage caused to assets. Several respondents belonging to scheduled castes meet disabilities associated with untouchability such as denial of rights, egoistic attitude, hatredness.

One of the implications of caste conflict is migration. In fact some studies suggest that it is also a solution to solve the problem of caste based inequality, and inter caste conflict. Hence the respondents were asked about their plan of migration in the event of occurrence of caste conflicts.

Twenty two percent of the respondents wish to migrate to places which are relatively peaceful, and unknown for issues such as inter caste rivalries and tensions.
As compared to all other communities, the respondents belonging to forward categories (57.3) have a tendency to move out of their present residential locality just to avert clashes with neighbouring rival caste groups.

The study has found out that in the study areas every caste has lost some families by way of migration due to caste conflicts. It is inferred from the study that caste conflicts aggravate the tendency to migrate. The most affected parties are those belonging to scheduled castes. In Tirunelveli alone, a duster of families belonging to scheduled caste migrated enmass after the outbreak of a major caste conflict that has spread among the villages.

Caste not only serves force, as a divisive force but also a factor responsible for social integration. Such a view has also been well brought out in this study.

The salient finding is that in the districts of Tirunelveli and Thiruvallur, as compared to the other two districts, economic ties override caste differences. In villages around Erode, leadership plays a key role in establishing inter-caste unity.

**Performance of Police**

One of the objectives of the study is to assess the performance of police before the eruption of caste conflict, in course of caste conflicts and during the post-conflict occasions. The findings on the above said objective assume significance in the study. The three most valuable responses categorised as positive and negative responses in each stage of the conflict as perceived by the respondents are presented below.
Stage I – Performance of Police Before the Occurrence of Caste Conflicts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank Order</th>
<th>Favourable (Positive) Responses</th>
<th>Rank Order</th>
<th>Unfavourable (Negative) Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Severe legal action while it is still under legal dispute</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Resented the complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Anticipating violence defensive measures are adopted</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Adequate/drastic action not taken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>They instill confidence among the public</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>No action after giving the complaints many times.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stage II – Performance of Police while Caste Conflict is in Progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank Order</th>
<th>Favourable (Positive) Responses</th>
<th>Rank Order</th>
<th>Unfavourable (Negative) Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Preventive arrests made</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Excessive action and frequent raids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Courageous enough to rise up to the occasion</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Hasty and improper decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Protects minority communities</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Do not go beyond controlling violence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stage III – Performance of Police during the Post – Conflict Situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank Order</th>
<th>Favourable (Positive) Responses</th>
<th>Rank Order</th>
<th>Unfavourable (Negative) Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Action taken after getting complaints</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Arrested the accused late</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Had dialogue with caste leaders</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>After getting complaints they registered case belatedly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Registered complaints immediately</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Gave protection only for name sake</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conflict Resolutions**

Many respondents perceived that police personnel consider the issue of inter caste conflicts as mere law and order problem. Thus, they are keen on solving the issue temporarily. Their strategies do not strike the root of the problem.

The respondents’ perception of encountering conflict has been probed. One third of the respondents would like to tackle the conflict situation by challenging it. As compared to the youth and the aged, more number of respondents belonging to the middle aged expressed the view that they would like to challenge the opponents.
The respondents were asked to choose the ideal source for settling caste conflicts among the limited choices such as advocates, police, caste leaders and politicians.

A great majority of the respondents (64%) cited police as the best option. Many of the illiterates among the sample respondents have faith on their caste leaders and politicians in times of caste troubles.

The views of respondents on compromise as a strategy for settlement of conflict have been elicited. Fifty five percent of the respondents do not have faith in compromise as they felt that it would not be a permanent remedial measure. Age wise, a majority of the elderly are in favour of compromise where as the younger ones in general are not optimistic in this regard. However, most of the female respondents wish to adopt a soft approach towards resolution of violence.

The police should at times look for causes beyond caste, the external factors. It is understood that caste violence reflects the general culture of violence. The police should play their role to monitor the sources that instigate the culture of violence at a wider level in society, especially the mass media.

Based on the qualitative insights gained from the study, atleast 10 to 15 percent of the accused can be termed as mere arrows. The real shooters, ie the culprits (The persons who induced them to commit offences) are yet to be brought before the legal machinery.
Many of the respondents stated that smooth resolution of conflicts requires a minor change in the mind set of Police. They should set aside their tendency of highhandedness, egoistic tendency and stop misusing of power.

**Suggestions**

- The Police should be more vigilant and act intelligently. They should keep vigil especially in caste prone districts even in normal situations/timings.
- The Police should not yield to the pressures of political and bureaucratic cadres.
- While recruiting police personnel, the involvement of the individuals in crimes in general, and caste related offences in particular be throughly investigated.
- The recommendation of the Enquiry Commissions be implemented in a serious manner.
- The reports of the Enquiry Commissions on caste related offences should be made available to the police at all lends. A copy of the reports should be kept in police stations for ready reference.
- Police Personnel should be imparted training in judging the merit of the case and take appropriate action against the real perpetrators of caste conflicts, without any fear or favour.
- The Psychology of mob behaviour in general, and behaviour distinctive to the communities and location in particular be gathered, updated and maintained by the police department.
- The Police should act as a bridge between potential rival groups especially while on occasions of social gatherings.
• The Police should win the confidence of the people by being emulating models for others by practising clean and impressive habits in their personal as well as professional life.

• Police, under no circumstance should side with vested interest groups in professional, political and public spheres.

• The judiciary system and the police work hand in hand in dealing with the crimes relating to caste issues, and they should work together in spotting, fixing and punishing the real culprits.

• The Police should nurture their talents to sense and predict the occurrence of caste conflicts. In several places, the respondents complained that they are not smart enough to gather tips of information about the sporadic caste related events.

• The Police should help the government in identifying the real victims and getting suitable monetary compensation for them, in proportion to the loss incurred.

• The Police should always value human rights in their dealings with people in general and offenders in particular.