CHAPTER - II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Studies available on caste in India are of diverse in nature. Some of the prominent studies directly relevant to the present research have been reviewed, and they have been presented under the following headings:

Caste and Social Stratification

Social Discrimination and Deprivation

Dalit Assertion

Caste Conflicts

Report of Enquiry Committee

Concluding Remarks and Research Gaps

Caste and Social Stratification

Enormous literature exists on caste and its various parameters. The caste system, its nature and structure, has been elaborately studied by sociologists, anthropologists, and ethnographers. A great deal of survey on available literature has been done on the broader theme of caste in India, emphasizing on social stratification. In fact, social stratification is a topic dealt with both indigent and alien sociologists. This all has given rise to a harvest of literature on the issue of social stratification. The caste, class and power as major components of society, have also been studied by
different scholars in a variety of ways at national, and regional levels (Beteille, 1974; Singh, 1974; Mencher 1978; Pandit 1979; Singh; 1982). The changing nature of caste and social system has also been studied in-depth by Srinivas (1966) and Singh (1968).

Between 1951 and 1954, some British and American scholars found the Economic weekly as one of the important platforms for getting across their perceptions and observations on the Indian villages and its social structure. They studied the changing realities of village India. M.N. Srinivas, M. Marriot, S.C. Dube, and others were prominent among these scholars; their emphasis was on the integration of a number of castes which form a functioning local community, rather than on the ethnography of a single caste. Furthermore, they focused their attention on topics such as, inter-caste hierarchy, factionalism, Jajmani relationship, relationship between caste and class relationship between village and the large societies and trends of social change. Among the important sociologists and other social scientists who carried studies in caste and caste related areas at that time are; F.G. Bailey (1957, 1960), G.D. Berreman (1960), A. Beteille- (1965), B.R. Chauhan (1967), S.C Dube (1958), D.N. Majumdar (1958), T.N Madan (1965), K.S. Mathur (1165), R.K. Mukherjee (1957), and H. Orenstein (1965).

The contribution of Louis Dumont (1961) is clearly seen in his assertion / theory of Homo-Hierarchies. He explains that the whole structure of caste as arising from certain ideological predilections, which are religious in nature. It is clearly seen in Dumont’s assertion, that it is hierarchy which is pervasive principle of Hindu society and the caste system is only one expression of it. According to him, caste is
based on the principle of opposition between the pure and impure is a single true principle signifying hierarchy in terms of the superiority and inferiority of the pure over impure, and it is this principle of pure and impure that determines hierarchy. He contrasts the caste system as containing hierarchical view of man with the class system of the west. He analyzed caste system in terms of purity and pollution dichotomy and in terms of status and power dichotomy. In Hinduism, hierarchy is based upon ritual ideas of purity and pollution and this is quite different from the western with equality of opportunity. He further says that caste status is always determined by ritual ideas irrespective of power and wealth of the individual, e.g., in the traditional India society the priest (Brahmin), whose position is derived from hierarchy, had a higher status than the more powerful king (Kshatriya). He presumes that hierarchy and inequality are natural to man, and Indian consciously accepted the hierarchy based on status differences. In Hindu society, the primacy is given to the whole, and this whole is structured hierarchically.

The problem with Dumont’s work is that it does not explain the change in caste status which has taken place owing to change in power of a group. Nor does it explain the disputes about ranking that are there in the caste system. The disagreement with Dumont understands of Indian society as being completely determined by ritual ideas of purity and pollution and he asserts that caste is merely a type of stratification different in degrees but not in kind from other types of stratification as class. Thus, Dumont did not comprehend the situation that exists today, in terms of resilience of the caste system.
Victor D Souza’s study (1967) of caste and class in Chandigarh highlights significance of the continuum of the rigidity-fluidity dimensions. He clearly demonstrates a dividing line between caste and class. He maintains that caste and class systems stand for different patterns of distribution of properties of individuals in hereditary groups. He asserts that caste is not an exclusively cultural system. He finds caste and class are different forms of stratification. He observes groups (jati’s) are ranked in the caste system, whereas positions are ranked in social stratification (particularly with reference to class stratification). The ranking of endogamous groups and not the endogamy as the rule of marriage is the hallmark of caste system in Chandigarh. He further says that changes in the caste system have brought about changes in the properties of individual members. A hereditary group might continue in the caste system as a class. This explains similarity between caste and class. D’Souza decisively concludes that class is replacing caste, and the individual is replacing the group. D Souza’s basic assumption of formulation is that, a certain place for the individual as a unit of social status and a certain level of social mobility are that level.

Andre Beteille (1969) has contributed immensely in this field. Andre Beteille’s study of village Sripurum in Tamil Nadu is based on the assumption of a rational distinction between caste, class and power, changing relation of stratification in Tanjore District, brought to light the traditional caste structure as well as the forces of change that were making way into it. According to Beteille, Sripurum village is an agrarian village. The whole village is dominated by the king of the Brahmin to look after the temples and other building of the village. In Tanjore he finds caste system of the village to be more rigid and complex. The caste system, apart from determining
the unequal ritual status of villagers, also dominates their political and economic life. The social life of the village has also structured on caste lines. The settlement pattern of the village has also evolved on caste lines. The people of Sripurum divide the many castes of Hindu into three subdivisions- Brahmins, Non- Brahmins and the Adi-Dravidas are clearly segregated from one another in the village. The settlement pattern of the village continues to reflect the basic division of the traditional caste structure. The study finds that in Tanjore, the ownership of land is not only a source of wealth; it is also a source of prestige and power. The study also finds the class structure, which is largely vertical. The class system comprises of three economic units in the society, (1) Brahmins Landowner, (2) Non- Brahmins,( tenants of Brahmins) (3) and Adi-Dravidas, or original Dravidas (Sub-tenants or Agriculturalists or labour) and their mutual relations. In the social stratification system, Brahmins were at the top stratum of the society, Non-Brahmins were next to them, and Adi-dravidian was at the bottom of the social stratification. They were treated as untouchables. Caste, class and power, relate in different ways to the broader phenomenon of social stratification.

In the political sphere, or say in the village panchayats, Brahmins were occupying the power. They decided the dispute within the village. Before 1920, the Brahmin group was enjoying the political power. Non- Brahmins and Adi-Dravidians were having no say in the village panchayat. Andre Beteille calls it cumulative inequality. The study finds that in comparison to the rigidity of the institution of caste as well as stability of the traditional economic structure of the village, the distribution of political power has witnessed a radical change.
The study found that caste, class and power were closely interwoven in the village. They could be treated separately only by a process of abstraction, caste and power in Sripurum village referred in different ways to the same phenomenon of social stratification.

Yogendra Singh argued that the theoretical position of caste constituted both a structural unit of social stratification as well as a system. Sociologists who looked across the cultural view of caste associated it with an autonomous principle of stratification, which are, institutionalized inequality, social system of social mobility, an elementary level of division of labor legitimized on ritual bases of reciprocity, and emphasis on quality, (ritual purity or racial purity) rather than performance in other words, caste is associated with an autonomous form of cultural system or world view. In this regard, he quotes, A. Nesfield (1885), Max Webber (1952), A.L. Kroeber, (1930) and A Dubois, 1960 etc. Moreover, in the writings of Kingsley Davis, (1951) A.R. Desai, (1966) and N.K. Bose (1968) and others, caste was considered a structural reality which would disappear when the society in India reaches to a higher level. He made a distinction between sociologist who treat caste as a cultural phenomenon and those who define it as a structural phenomenon. So far as, the Indian system of social stratification was concerned, the structural particularistic treatment of caste stratification is considered the most dominant feature of stratification studies in India.

Caste is found as a persisting social reality by Dipankar Gupta (1980). He relates the Varna to Jati System of stratification of the India caste system, from the
Asiatic to the feudal mode of production respectively. The four fold division of society into Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishnu, and Shudra is a view from top of the hierarchy, but the view from the bottom is more varied and it may, in fact, appear less differentiated, because economic obligations were only directed vertically. Dipankar Gupta explains painstakingly, that Varna and jati are reflective of specific socio-economic formations and that the origins of the caste system should be sought in the material history of India and not in the empyrean recess of the Hindu mind. The caste system development in the feudal epoch and was characterized by localized exploitation, where as the Varna is a system in the epoch of Asiatic mode of production. A.M. Shah (1988) in his study on the Vanais and Rajupts of Gujarat has treated each caste has a separate entity without making any statement on the nature of hierarchy that might pertain between them.

D.N. Dhanagare (1987) in his study of Green Revolution and social in equalities in rural India poses the question Has the Green revolution succeeded in reducing socio – economic inequalities in rural India? He concluded that in general the findings of different studies show that the green revolution has had a contradictory impact on the rural development and agricultural wages. Green revolution technology has not proved to be a measure of poverty alleviation. On the contrary, there is evidence to show that greater and greater immiseration and pauperization has surfaced with a steady growth of socio-economic inequalities in rural India due to green revolution.
Pradeep Kumar Bose (1990) provides valuable insights about class structure in contemporary India. The main theme in his article is the capital-labour relation and conceptualizations of classes are basic problem in the understanding of the transformation of class structure. Any change in class structure involves class decomposition, class transformation, and class formation. He further says that there is a continuous dialectic between capitalism and the pre-existing social formation, class formation, class disintegration, and class conflict hence become important in the process of change in class structure. Bose identifies three approaches to the definition of agrarian classes (1) the indigenous (2) the distributional, and (3) The structural. On the basis of these approaches Bose identified, five classes, comprising of landlords, rich peasant, middle peasant, and agricultural laborers. A relationship between them is also made in terms of social status and mobility.

According to K.L.Sharma, caste incorporates the elements of class and class has a cultural style of functioning in Indian society. Caste has always inherited a class character as stated earlier. The phenomenon of caste has invariable elements of class and power, and class has the elements of caste and power, and power has the elements of caste and class. There is a need to keep the structural historical perspective, taking into account the particular normative and relational aspects of the Indian society.

**Social Discrimination and Deprivation**

Joseph Benjamin (1991) in his study expressed the view that the main problem of the Scheduled Castes was their very low status based on un-touchability which
suited the requirements of older politics and ideology of Hindu society operated in the name of religion. He found that most Scheduled Caste students gave up their studies due to lack of financial support from their poor parents. But some arts students pursued their higher studies in spite of financial problems by working part time to support themselves. But science students do not seem to pursue their studies in this manner. This would indicate that finance is not the only constraint. There seem to be many more constraints, particularly when it comes to studying science which would provide them access to better paid and higher status jobs.

Jain (1981) in his study found that the Scheduled Castes have little access to education which is the poor’s most potent weapon for self-advancement. High rate of illiteracy is existing among the Scheduled Castes women, which is one of the biggest obstacles in the race against poverty. Again, only a small proportion of those who are literate have had access to higher education and the drop-out rate for economic reasons was high. He further found that though there is an improvement in the ratio of the enrolment of the children of the scheduled castes in the schools, they are still significantly below the enrolment ratio of the general population.

Similarly, Parvathamma's analysis also shows the negative picture of the changes taking place among the Scheduled Castes. She reveals that the legal ban on untouchability has not served its purpose, as the practice is still common in villages. The welfare programmes for the Scheduled Castes are not properly implemented. Inter-personal relationships between the Scheduled Castes and the caste Hindus have deteriorated. Newspapers are replete with cases of loot, arson, destruction of crops, beating and murdering of the Scheduled Castes. Due to the above mentioned incidents
and their latent negative consequences, the conflicts between the caste Hindus and the scheduled castes have severely intensified especially in the countryside.

The suppression of Dalits by caste Hindus has been so overpowering that even the judicial system has failed to provide speedy justice to the former. This has happened precisely because majority of the caste Hindus are unwilling to change their attitude and value system towards the Dalits. On the contrary, the latter's aspirations and expectations have grown enormously due to the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity enshrined in the Indian Constitution and a number of measures and various schemes adopted for their welfare and upliftment. Since these programmes and policies are largely resented by the caste Hindus, these in turn have again given rise to tension and conflicts between both the caste groups in the country and more so in Tamil Nadu in the recent years, as stated earlier.

Sharma (1974) opined that the Scheduled Castes are suffering not only because of imposed social and cultural disabilities but perhaps much more because of the imbalances created by the emergence of structural differentiation within them which is a consequence of the policies and plans undertaken ostensibly for their uplift and welfare. The differential treatment given to the politically weaker and sometimes to the non-preponderant groups within the Scheduled Castes is a major reason for these continuing inequalities. In his study, he analyzed the factors such as enrolment, hostels and scholarships related to the education of the Scheduled Castes. He found that Scheduled Castes’ alarmingly backward condition is connected to the deprivation they suffer in relation to the higher status groups and to the differential treatment they
receive from the power elites among themselves. Broadly, the distributive disparities affecting the Scheduled Castes are at three levels, namely, between the Scheduled Castes and the general population, between the various Scheduled Castes, and among Scheduled Castes in a particular district or area.

Aloysius Irudayam et.al (2011), in their study on violence against Dalit women describe that in a study of 500 dalit women, 234 women were sexually harassed or assaulted, 116 survived rape or gang rape, 44 were sexually exploited and 24 were forcibly prostituted. They viewed that the sexual violence forms a common incident in the daily lives of so many dalit women and girls.

Further, according to them, Dalit women’s assertions of the right to say ‘no’ are frequently viewed by men a provocations, and lead to further sexual violence. The implications of this violence are: fear of dishonor and diminished social status given the overriding socio-cultural emphasis on female ‘purity’s and virginity, to poor marital prospects as a result of the violence becoming known to fear of conception leaving an imprint of the violence on her body, to the long term terror of further violence.

Dharma Kumar noted that the erstwhile district of South Arcot, which includes Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu, has long been known for the intensity of its caste oppression. She in her book Land and Caste in South India, provides considerable information about the district. The dalits, she writes, were treated like bonded agricultural laborers, noting how they were forced into lifetime slavery to repay
meager debts. The practice of selling the ‘collies along with the land was prevalent in
nine districts in Tamil Nadu.

Around 1947 in the Chidambaram area, writes L.Ilayaperumal (1924 -2005),
former state president of Congress Party, it was ruled that dalits should not have their
hair cut or grow a moustache; there were instances of dalits beaten up for growing
them. Dalit women were not supposed to wear blouses or anklets or possess copper or
brass vessel, he said. Elayaperumal and Swami Sahajananda (1890 -1959), a dalit
MLC of Congress, organized several agitations in protest against these restrictions. As
the land-owning Vellala caste migrated from the villages to the towns, Vanniyars
became the majority land-owners. Consequently, over time, Vanniyars and dalits
became fiercely opposed to each other.

**Dalit Assertion**

In the changing era of globalisation and internationalisation, the Dalit issue has
become very crucial to discuss the caste consciousness and identity formation of
Dalits. Shah has opined that the consciousness indicates awareness among the
oppressed regarding the socio-economic structure and cultural reality which keeps
them subjugated.

Oommen explains distinctive consciousness of Dalits when comparing with
the others. For him, Dalit consciousness is qualitatively different from the proletarian
consciousness. "While the proletarian/ caste consciousness is essentially rooted in
material deprivations and caste consciousness is mainly anchored on status depriva-
tion, Dalit consciousness encapsulates deprivation stemming from inhuman
conditions of material existence, powerlessness and ideological hegemony).

Radhika Ramaseshan in her paper on “Dalit Politics in Uttra Pradesh”
analyses the political ramification on caste lives over a period of 40 years since the
1960s and traces the struggle of the Dalits to outpour their pent up feelings by
aligning with many political parties in Uttra Pradesh, viz. the Congress, the Bahujan
Samaj Party, the Samajwadi Party and the Republican Party of India. The political
awakening of the Dalits who numerically accounted for 23.7 per cent of the total
population enabled them to exert their pressure in capturing power. The author makes
a cautious note that unless the Dalits acquire control over vital economic resources
they would not get the real strength to fight against social and political discrimination.

Several studies on Dalit consciousness and assertion in Tamil Nadu point out
that, though the Dalits constitute more than 19 percent of the total population in the
state, they have been denied access to the means of production by getting debarred
from holding the land. They have been socially oppressed, economically weakened
and politically marginalized. In spite of that, over the last five decades or so, there has
remained a low level of Dalit mobilisation in the state as compared to that of another
Indian state like Uttar Pradesh.

The studies also noted that the popularity of the dominant non-Brahmin castes
and the Dravidian parties has declined in the 1990's. It is at this point that a new wave
of consciousness has pervaded in the entire Dalit community in the state with a sense of identity formation and assertion. This has affected the political scenario in Tamil Nadu. The Dalits who until the 1990's were scattered under different political parties have started organising a number of Dalit political parties, i.e., the Ambedkar People's Liberation Front, which later became the 'Puratchi Bharatham' led by. Moorthy, the 'Ambedkar People's Federation' led by Balasundaram, the Republican Party of India (RPI), the 'Dalit Sena' led by Sundarakesan, the 'Adi-Thamizhar Peravai'(ATP), led by Adhiyaman, the 'Dalit Panthers of India' (DPI) led by Thirumavalavan and 'Pudhiya Tamhizhagam' led by Krishnaswamy. Some of these parties are concentrated in the northern districts, whereas others in the southern and western districts of Tamil Nadu. Their strategy is based on harnessing the collective strength of the Dalits and utilising the existing law and order machineries to bring justice to the victims of the caste violence. This democratic political mobilization and protest by the Dalits has also led to social tensions and conflicts between caste Hindus and Dalits in the contemporary Tamil Nadu.

Caste Conflicts

A few Indian sociologists have tried to conceptualise tension and conflict in course of their study. For instance, in the views of Bose, social tension, which includes inter-personal as well as inter-group tensions, is a cause or means. When social equilibrium is shaken by certain changes in the society, it may be due to ethnic, religious or linguistic differences, unequal educational opportunities and unfavourable environmental conditions. Such tensions are disruptive, but not violent
in nature. In other words, social tension is a state of mind, resulting mainly from deprivation of something, and causing depression or threatening to individual personality. On the other hand, Ghurye contends that tensions are both an index and a matter of conflict, for they precede an open conflict, whether accompanied by violence, hot words or more excited argument and followed by enmity, sabotage, non-cooperation or more sullenness.

Tension or social tension has been analysed from the socio-psychological point of view. For instance, K.K.Singh has done a socio-psychological study of social tension and conflicts in two U.P. villages. He has questioned the myth that intercaste conflicts primarily stem from discriminatory caste values and beliefs. He has analysed the tension and conflict as processes in an organic system.

Nandu Ram has explained that both tension and conflict may be closely related in which the former may function as an antecedent or complement to the latter, though it is not always a necessary condition for the rise of a conflict situation. Further, he says that tension may be released without resulting into conflict and it may prevail even after the conflict or social conflict is resolved.

While analysing the future of the backward classes, Beteille also argues that conflict between classes or castes or strata follow, to a large extent, from the contradictions between the normative and existential orders. In a harmonious society, these conflicts are likely to be limited and subdued. In a disharmonious society,
however, they are likely to be open and endemic. Conflicts take their most acute form in course of transition from a harmonious order to a disharmonious one.

Delineating a contrary fact to Beteille's view, Venkateswarlu has attempted an analysis of Harijan - Upper Class Conflict in Andhra Pradesh. He says that the conflict is "growing and open". It is in the nature of a class conflict rather than just a caste conflict. The traditional system built-in structural inequalities is being challenged by the imposition or gradual creeping of progressive values like modernization, westernization, democratisation, constitutional measures for depressed classes, etc. Hence, the conflict between the Harijans and the upper-class caste Hindus started erupting because of discontentment, dissatisfaction among the Harijans with their past status and disabilities, and frustration in their attempts to improve their status and conditions in the traditional set up. On the contrary, the caste Hindus, who had enjoyed not only a traditional superiority in the social sphere but also economic and political dominance, might oppose the Harijans in their efforts for their socioeconomic progress. When the Harijans continue to demand the rights given to them under the new value system and the upper-class caste Hindus make explicit efforts to oppose such special treatment to the Harijans and try to thwart their progress, the result is conflict between the upper class caste Hindus and the Harijans. Further, he has distinguished two types of conflicts. The one is psychological conflict and another is manifest conflict. The former need not be explicit in the form of open violence, rather it can exist at the mental level in the sense that an individual or a group may have thought totally different, antagonistic and in conflict with those of others. Whereas the latter explains the other offending methods are quarrels, rapes, raids, arsons, injuries by sharp weapons and so on. But a manifest conflict can be said
to have always passed through the psychological form of conflict. Western influence of status battle is entered upon. The Goyigama elite were not disposed to surrender their advantageous position and their widely acknowledged caste primacy. Therefore, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were marked by an escalation in the conflict between the Goyigama and Karva caste.

The caste conflicts have been studied in relations to agrarian social structure also, as stated earlier. For instances, K.C. Sharma has stated that agriculture is the main source of livelihood in rural India. The upper castes own most of the land, while the agricultural labourers belong mostly to the middle and lower castes. There is a high degree of correlation between the agrarian classes and the caste categories. The rifts between the upper and the lower castes, to a large extent, correspond with the conflicts between the landowners and sharecroppers or agricultural labourers.

In his analysis of caste and caste conflict in rural society, Mishra studied the changing nature of social relationship between higher and lower castes of some regions in Uttar Pradesh. He explains that the nature of conflict characterizing the different castes in the villages has grown out of life style woven around the scarce social values like power, prestige, influence and resources. Before Independence, there was no provision and hard-fast rule for the maintenance of socio-political equality. The power was in the hands of land owning higher castes like Brahmans and Kurmis. But independent India adopted different constitutional measures to remove social discrimination and bring equality. Meanwhile in the changing nature of liberal conditions, the higher caste people have high perception and hence most unfavourable
attitude towards lower caste and that leads to caste conflicts between higher and lower castes.

M.N. Srinivas has noted that the caste conflicts between caste Hindus and Dalits show the way in which the process of translating rights given in the Constitution to Dalits into reality at village level. As more and more Dalits become educated and seek the enforcement of constitutional rights, local clashes are likely to increase rather than to decrease.

Similarly, Karnath has opined that the attempts by the lower castes to carry out their urban status into their villages have resulted in inter-caste violence. Such outbursts of violence generally involve mass killings, physical assault and rape, and the economic and social boycott of the upwardly mobile lower castes by the dominant castes.

According to M. N. Srinivas, Damle and Lynch, whenever and wherever the scheduled castes have attempted to enrich and improve their socio-economic status in the caste hierarchy by sanskritising their rituals and life style in the direction of higher castes or by getting westernised or modernised and making higher castes or others as their reference groups, the higher castes have felt serious threats and created tensions and also have posed positive hurdles to the former's way of upward movements. The higher caste Hindus have also led violent attacks on the implementation of the constitutional provisions in the forms of special privileges and reservations for the Scheduled Castes.
Yet, another study by Mehta reveals that with the advancement of new economic forces and introduction of the modern form of political democracy, the traditional social institutions of the village like the joint family, the village caste Panchayat and the caste system as such have become dysfunctional. They are assuming new forms. Their underlying value system is operating in contradiction to new values introduced by political democracy. The result is widespread group conflicts and struggle for power.

But, Ram has analysed caste conflict in relation to social mobility among Scheduled Castes in some villages of Western, Central and Eastern Uttar Pradesh. He has examined the extent to which the changes in the status of Scheduled Castes have led to hostile attitudes among the caste Hindus who, in turn, have been committing atrocities on them. Such situation is created mainly due to the former's refusal to follow the age-old customs such as doing the traditional filthy jobs, paying respect to high caste people and non-utilisation of public places. However, the economic issues like refusal to perform bonded labour on nominal wage, dispossession of their land and houses, etc. have led to the conflicts between them and the non-scheduled castes.

Ambrose Pint discusses the agonizing conflict between the Dalits on the one hand and the non-Dalits on the other in Idapanur village in Karnataka. The election of a Dalit candidate for general category had led to harassment of the Dalits at the hands of non-Dalits. The non-Dalits laid siege to the Dalit habitations threatening to kill them and destroy their property. The situation became so tense that the police resorted to firing that resulted in the death of eight persons.
Gopal Guru in his article entitled “Understanding Violence against Dalits in Marathwada” analyses the reginol causes in the violence against the Dalits by the high castes and traces the course of events succeeding the renaming of the Marathwads University as the Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University in which violence was let loose in the Marathwada region.

Gopal Guru in his another article on “Gowari Tragedy Crisis of Maratha Hegemony” brings to light the apathy of the ruling Party(Congress) in Maharashtra to the grave incidence of violence on November 23, 1994 and the mindless destruction of the standing crops of Akola District that preceded the incident. About 30,000 Gowaris took out a protest march on November 23, 1994 against the evacuation of the Dalits from the pasture land and for re-allotting the land to them. There was a stampede caused by police intervention in which 113 Gowaris, mostly women and children, died. The author says that the Government adopted a coercive method to control the Dalits. Gopal Guru in an another article titled “Understanding Violence against Dalits in Marathwada” analyses the regional causes in the violence against the Dalits by the high castes and traces the course of events succeeding the renaming of the Marathwada University as the Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University in which violence was let loose in the Marathwada region.

Bela Bhatia explains a massacre at Bathani Tola, a hamlet in Bihar. Central Bihar had been the scene of frequent violent clashes between castes in which invariably the Dalits were subjected to untold miseries. The incidences of murders, desertion of villages, burning of houses and physical assaults on even woman and
children by the Rajputs and the Bhumihars were common phenomena in Central Bihar. To peak them all was the Bathani Tola massacre in the afternoon of 11 July 1996 in which 19 Dalit women and children were massacred. All details of the massacre and the socio-economic background against which the massacre occurred have been vividly presented by Bela Bhatia. The laxity on the part of the public administration in dealing with such violent incidents, that has given rise to a doubt of connivance, is also highlighted by him. The questions how the poor are even denied dignity in death? And how castes and classes haunt them till death? are highlighted by him. He claims that the Bathani Tola incident is the “worst massacre” in the recent history of Central Bihar.

Tilak Gupta in “Caste Complications in Agrarian Conflicts”, while tracing the incidents leading to the bara massacre in which 37 people were hacked to death in February 1992 points out how Caste and Class wars that have became a common feature in Bihar took a new turn in the form of agrarian conflict leading to extreme political adventurism. The target was the Bhumihars, who constitute an overwhelming majority in the Gaya-Jahanabad region but they are mostly small but absentee land owners. The attackers were the Maoist Communists.

Further, a perusal of literature on the history of caste conflicts in Tamil Nadu shows that the caste conflicts in Tamil Nadu in the past one hundred years have basically been manifested in the three consecutive phases:

(i) During the first phase, the conflicts were predominantly between the Brahmins and non Brahmins as two distinct blocks of castes. The political
manifestation of such conflicts appeared in the form of Justice Party and the Dravida Kazhagam, which organized and mobilized the non-Brahmins to challenge the all pervasive Brahminical dominance in socio-economic, bureaucratic and political structures of the state (then Madras presidency).

(ii) In the second phase, the struggle was predominantly between the elite non-Brahmins and backward non-Brahmins. The conflicts in the first phase had created a class amongst the non-Brahmins, which had largely displaced the Brahmins from the position of power but blocked the process of acquired power from percolating it further down. However, men like Muthuramalinga Thevar who founded the Forward Block (FB) and also the Vanniyakula Kshatriya Maha Sangam, (VKMS), or the Toiler Party (TP), by Ramasami Padayachi mobilized the backward non-Brahmins. They challenged the view of the non-Brahmin elite.

(iii) The third phase of struggle has emerged mainly between the non Brahmins and the Dalits in the state. This phase is still continuing and it also constitutes an important dimension of the emerging social conflicts in Tamil Nadu. The conflicts are very strong in certain regions such as southern districts of the state like Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Theni, Tirunelveli and Virudhunagar, etc. In the northern districts, these are prominent in Chidambaram, North Arcot, Vizhupuram, Cuddalore, etc., and in the western districts like Coimbatore, Namakkal, Erode, etc.

In all the aforesaid regions, the backward castes like Thevar, Vanniyar and Gounder have been pitched against the Dalits like Devendrakula Vellalars or Pallars, Paraiyars and Chakkuliars or Arunthadhiyars.
The increasing assertions of Dalits resulting into caste conflicts in the sensitive regions have a history. The stronger position of the Dalits in resisting the Thevars can be seen from the fact that their conflicts extended for 5 days in 1948; and for 15 days in 1957. On December 25, in 1968 a number of the Dalits were burnt alive by caste Hindus. In 1989 also the conflicts had continued for 23 days, while in the 1995-96 these continued for over 9 months. Further, the increasing self-confidence and assertive violence of the Devendrakula Velalars is also reflected in the growing toll of death and damages faced by the Thevars. For instance in 1957, the Dalits lost 17 lives and 2,735 houses, and 122 villages were affected, while the Thevars lost only 8 lives and 107 houses. But in 1985-86, the Thevars lost almost an equal number of lives despite the reported sympathy of the police force. More precisely, the period of the 1990's has been an important turning point in the caste politics and changing nature of caste conflicts between the caste Hindus and Dalits in the state. The available data on the caste conflicts in the state show the escalation of caste tensions. The caste conflicts had been started in a number of villages like Kodiyanukulam (1999), Mangapuram (1996-1997), Sivakasi (1997), Rengappaikkkanpatti (1996-1997), Melavalavu (1996-1999), Ramanathapuram (1998), Cuddalore (2000), Puliangudi (2000), Pudukottai (2000), etc.

These tensions and conflicts are, however, noteworthy because these symbolize the new assertiveness of the Dalit community and the resistance against the non-Brahmins. Moreover, the caste-based mobilization amongst all sections of the populace in the past 100 years or so means that the conflicts are no longer confined to particular localities but spread quickly affecting social and urban centres also. With relatively stronger organizations and better resources available to the Dalits, the
situation seems to be set for further struggle. For a researcher, the third phase of dynamics of caste conflicts is important, i.e., the pathological virility with which the Thevars have attacked the Pallars of Madurai and other southern districts have sent shocking waves across the spectrum of the society. Similarly, the land owning Gounders' atrocities committed against the Arunthathiyars, and the Vanniyars' grudge and violence against the Paraiyars are also cases to be studied to understand the contextual reality of caste conflicts in Tamil Nadu. Hence, it has become necessary to undertake a particular study on the caste conflicts of Tamil Nadu in order to rethink and reformulate our hypotheses and their applicability to the changing society in India, particularly in south India. But whatever social change vis-a-vis social mobility has occurred among the Dalits in different parts of the country, including the southern states, it has led to social tensions and conflicts between them and the other caste people especially those who are generally known as the Other Backward Castes or Classes.

Bjorn Alam’s article deals with some aspects of caste riots in Tamil Nadu. He discusses Cumbam Valley riot between the Kallars (a Backward Class) and the Pallars (a Scheduled Caste) in 1989 in Madurai District. These two castes are rivals to each other across this district. In a similar way, there was a conflict between the Vanniar (a Most Backward Caste) and the Pariyars (a Scheduled Caste) in 1988 across certain Northern Districts of Tamil Nadu. Conflicts are common in Tamil Nadu villages: within families, between families, between factions and between local caste groups, between landlords and between landlords and labourers. But according to him what is new in the Cumbum valley riots and Vanniyar riots is however the role of the state. He says castes, or rather mega categories, are made into interest groups as well as
political groups. The riots cannot then, in his view, be seen as conflicts between local
groups only. Riots are not only to settle local scores and grievance, but also to decide
its relation with the state, which not only acts as an arbitrator and pacifier in the
conflicts, but also the distributor of benefits and protections. The Vanniyar riots have
proved that it is possible to influence the state through rioting.

K.A. Manikumar in a paper entitled “Caste Clashes in South Tamil Nadu”
discusses the clashes between the Thevars, a dominant agricultural caste, and the
Pallars, a chronically oppressed Dalit caste. He attempts to trace the causes and
consequences of the conflict between these caste groups. He avers that the
governmental measures are not so effective in dealing with the caste conflicts. He
emphasizes that unless a basic structural transformation is attempted through drastic
land reforms thereby changing the production relations, violence will continue to
escalate across the State.

Report of Enquiry Committee

A Three Member Committee chaired by Justice Mohan, was constituted by the
Government of Tamil Nadu in 1999, to enquire into the grave incidents related to
caste which resulted in the loss of 17 lives in Tirunelveli in July 1999. The report of
Enquiry Commission that was submitted to the Government in June 2000 throws light
on delicate issues like caste rivalry, oppression of the Dalits, emotional outbursts of
innocent, rural and rustic people and the use of force by the police to restore order. It
traces the social history, the values, and the economic balance and describes the caste
hierarchy. It brings out the nexus between caste clashes and illicit liquor trade. It also
highlights the incidence of individual caste clashes which occurred in different places and provides a vivid description of the clashes between the Caste-Hindus and the Dalits. Corrective measures suggested in the report are very useful and helpful to the Government to formulate and implement appropriate policies.

**Solutions**

Scarlett Epstein (1959) points out how untouchability as a social evil can be eradicated only by facilitating migration of the untouchables to urban areas by giving them suitable employment. Problem of productivity of factories is linked up with absenteeism and which in its turn is linked up with stake in land. Untouchables hardly have any stake in land. Therefore, the solution to their problem lies in migration, This has been demonstrated with reference a study made near Mysore,

M.N.Srinivas (1959), in a research article entitled "The Case of the Potter and the Priest ", made an analysis of a dispute between a potter and a priest, seemingly based on monetary transactions which took place in a village near Mysore. On analysis it is found that the dispute was rooted in caste dissensions, ritualistic status of the priest being in danger due to the threat pronounced by the potter about polluting the priest by beating him with sandals and thus involving him in the process of purification and all that. Disputes are not personal but assume a group nature in terms of caste alignments. Of course the wider principle of affiliation in terms of a village enables people to overcome caste disputes.
Concluding Remarks and Research Gaps

A number of studies have been conducted by the social scientists, especially on Tamil Nadu and its social structure, peasantry and agrarian structure, and on the various socio-political movements organized by the people including Dalits in the state. But a very few studies, including case studies, have focussed exclusively on the frequent occurrence of caste conflicts in the state.

The above-mentioned studies refer to the problems pertaining to social conflict and tension and provide a general conceptual idea of the caste conflicts in different parts of the country. Most of the studies highlight mobility as an important factor coupled with the Western impact as a source of conflict between caste Hindus and the Dalits. Various socio-religious and political movements, and the post-Independent constitutional measures, which induce the oppressed to realize their past predicament in the Hindu-social hierarchy, have contributed to the rise of social conflict among them. Thus, the studies give the idea that the process of upward social mobility and marginality is bound to create social tension and conflict between upper and lower strata.

Very few studies have highlighted the real issues involving the conflict between the mobile scheduled castes and the caste Hindus. The relationships between marginalisation and atrocities committed on Dalits have also been ignored so far. Secondly, there is a very scant material available in the academic world that has evaluated the impact of positive affirmation or positive discrimination granted to the
Scheduled Castes, who are wholly dependent upon the caste-Hindus for their livelihood. With Dalit assertion and political mobilisation in various parts of the country, the caste Hindus have started to exercise their power with more determination. This makes the marginalized rural Dalits succumb to the phenomenally increased atrocities. The consequent resistance-retaliation from the Dalits is resulting into caste conflicts in rural areas, especially in the state of Tamil Nadu. The present study is a modest attempt to fill this gap as well as to serve as connection between the micro and macro-studies on social relations of caste Hindus and Dalits in terms of caste tension and conflicts in Tamil Nadu.