CHAPTER - 3
CHAPTER 3
Caste Consciousness and the Identity Formation among Dalits

This chapter focuses on the socio-historical perspective of the various factors responsible for the emergence of caste consciousness and identity formation among the Dalits which have resulted into contemporary phase of caste conflicts between them and the caste Hindus, especially Thevars and other castes and classes in Tamil Nadu. This also examines the growing amount of caste consciousness and initiation of identity formation among our respondents selected from the two studied villages located in the southern part of the state. We have also analysed in this chapter, the sources of generation of caste consciousness and inspiration for identity formation among the Dalits of state as well as of the studied areas or villages. Since these sources are rooted largely in the historicity of the Dalits and Backward Class or non-Brahmin movements in the state, we shall look first into that and then analyse data extracted from our field study. We have taken colonial period as our starting point for looking at caste consciousness because it was during this period Census also helped in creating consciousness for raising rank or status of caste in the local caste hierarchy.

The first phase of caste conflicts was predominantly between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins. The political manifestation of such conflicts appeared in the formation of the Justice Party, and organization of Self Respect Movement or the Dravida Kazhagam Party during the early 1920s, 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). The conflicts in the first phase had created a class amongst the non-Brahmins, which largely displaced the Brahmins from the position of power. In the second phase, the struggle was predominantly between the elite non-Brahmins and backward non-Brahmins. As the upper non-Brahmins did not allow the power to percolate down the lower non-Brahmins started to organise them independently. Hence they formed Toilers Party, Forward Block Party, etc. Moreover, this chapter also focuses on the attacks on Dalits by the caste Hindus and redressal mechanism of pre and post-independent periods. But before discussing these phases of assertions of different collectivities the chapter analyzes the contemporary factors responsible for caste conflicts in Tamil Nadu.
Creation of the Provincial Assemblies and launching of the western educational system had far-reaching influences on the various sections of the population in India. These political and educational institutions brought about far-reaching changes in the hierarchical caste system. The Brahmins by virtue of their superior socio-economic status were the first to take western education and enter the professions and services in large numbers. The Brahmins monopolized these institutions and the non-Brahmins were deliberately left out. For instance, between 1882 and 1904, out of 16 successful candidates for the ICS (Indian Civil Service), 15 were Brahmins. Similarly, 93 out of 128 permanent districts Munsifs in 1913 were Brahmins; Similarly, 452 out of the 650 registered graduates at the Madras University in 1914 were Brahmins. According Sadasivan, of the 292 judicial and executives posts made available to Indians in the Madras Presidency, the Brahmins occupied as many as 202 as early as 1877. Of fourteen persons elected to the Central Assembly from the Presidency in 1927, thirteen were Brahmins. It simply shows that the Brahmins of the Madras Presidency had almost monopolized the formal institutions during the later half of the nineteenth and the early first few decades of the twentieth centuries. This was well supported by their full control over land. The non-Brahmins—the Backward Castes or Classes and the Dalits were totally marginalized. Not only that, but they were left entirely on the mercy of the Brahmins. Even the colonial rulers were somewhat indifferent in their concerns for the non-Brahmins as they were governed broadly their policy of non-interference in the internal matters of the native population. This left the non-Brahmins to adopt the course of recourse of retaliation or movement against the monopoly of the Brahmins in almost all walks of life.

**Dravidian movement and caste consciousness**

Rudolph and Rudolph have argued that the Brahmins, as the only true Aryan twice-born caste were very conspicuous in the south. In the north, there were several non-Brahmin twice-born castes, like Kshatryas and Vaishyas, who competed successfully with Brahmins in securing a good share of government jobs and places in the learned

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professions. The Brahmins lost their dominance in the north after the advent of the Muslim conquerors. Even after the arrival of the British, the Brahmins did not rise in north to any commanding positions. Sundaralingam claims that Brahmins in the south were ritually dominant and they also controlled the institution of religion. During the medieval period, they had "to share the religious leadership with the Bhakti movement along with other major non-Brahmin groups, chiefly the Vellalas." Sundaralingam has shown further that the high caste non-Brahmins also were active in the Hindu revivalism in new and important forms of religious association towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Though non-Brahmin movement has a long history in south India but it was influenced more by the European reformatory ideas in the 20th century. Further, a number of policies pursued by the British rule in India, which induced a competitive relation among the different castes, also raised a context of competition and conflicts between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins. Irshick writes that the drive for political power, for administration and for economic security had produced a serious breach in relations between Brahmins and non-Brahmins by 1913. Between 1916 and 1929, a group of non-Brahmins, who had recently begun an active participation in the politics of Madras Presidency, challenged the Brahminic hegemony. The non-Brahmins in this period argued that the interests of people, especially those of the 'backward' non-Brahmins, of Madras Presidency were but poorly served.

The Dravidian movement of this period traced its ideological genesis to a tiny group of highly educated and capable Vellalas such as P. Sundaram Pillai, J.M. Nallaswami Pillai, V. Kanakasabhai and Maraimalai Adigal. These were protagonists of the 'Dravidian Ideology'. Their stress was on the past glories of the Dravidians, the suspicion about the outsider, especially the Brahmins. However, the early formulations of the Dravidian ideology was developed by the Vellalas as mentioned above, and south-Indian forward caste elites and was represented by the Justice Party. The Self-Respect Movement into "a new arsenal with which the ruling elite was attacked" later transformed it. It is important to understand the context in which the

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5 Ibid., p.282.
early version of ideology of the Justice Party was formulated, and the specific ways in which the Self-Respect Movement appropriated and transformed it.

The Dravidian movement in south India was the first ever-political movement upholding an ideology of regionalism in the 20th century. It was not only the first but also, as Banerjee claims, the "strongest" movement. The Dravidian consciousness seems to have been in the making for years even centuries before the birth of the Dravidian movement. It was, however, only in 1916, when the non-Brahmins' Justice Party came into existence, that this Dravidian consciousness assumed a political form. Since then, there have been many changes in the understanding and expression of this consciousness.

The forward non-Brahmin castes such as the Vellalas, Reddis, Kammas and Nairs were second only to the Brahmins in terms of economic power and ritual status, as stated earlier. The formation of the Justice Party and the greatest support to its agitation came from the elite of the non-Brahmin caste Hindus from the trading groups such as the Beri-Chettis and particularly the Baluja Naidus in the Madras Presidency. In the later period, when the Dravida Kazhagam came into existence, the movement narrowed culturally to include only the Tamil-speaking people, leaving aside the other linguistic groups viz., the Malayalees, Telugus and Kannadigas. Moreover, the Justice Party also received assistance from the British administration, because the later wanted to perpetuate social imbalances in the Madras Presidency.

The Justice Party claimed to expose the cause of the Dravidians, a concept used as a synonym to all the non-Brahmin castes. The social side of the Justice Party was represented by what is called Self-Respect Movement. It is interesting to note in this context that because of the social movement, the Justice Party captured political power in the 1920s and dominated the Madras Legislative Council.

Poised to make inroads to power-base of the Brahmins, the Justice Party ministry brought about the following reforms: (1) The Religious Endowment Act dealing with the Temple; (2) The State Aid to Industries; (3) Indianisation of Civil

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10 E.F. Irshick, op. cit., p.176.
12 E.F. Irshick, E.F., op.cit., p.353.
Services; (4) Advances in Education; (5) Co-operative movement; (6) Extension of the adult-franchise to women on the same basis as to men, i.e. a property qualification; (7) Communal recruitment to the Civil Services, and (8) Legal guarantees for the non-Brahmin representation in the Council. But as the time passed the educational, administrative and political institutions, which were earlier monopolised by the Brahmins, came to be dominated by the forward castes from the non-Brahmin castes. Though the backward non-Brahmin castes did benefit from the reservation policy started by Justice Party, yet the elite from the non-Brahmin castes largely maintained their dominance over the Justice Party itself. Their dominance was so complete that they resisted E.V. Ramasamy's ideas going through social reform that have destroyed the traditional status of superiority of the non-Brahmin castes over the untouchables. Hence, the Justice Party came to be increasingly identified by the aspiration only the higher non-Brahmin caste Hindus. Faced with this situation, E.V. Ramaswamy started the Self Respect Movement in 1925, as stated earlier, with the aim to establish a casteless/classless society. However, E.V. Ramasamy's impact on the villages was negligible and only the backward non-Brahmin castes or sub-castes, who were small landholders, and labourers benefited from it.

The important aspect of the ideology of the Non-Brahmin Movement of that period was "Suya Mariyadai" (Self-Respect). Although explicitly formulated by E.V. Ramasamy Naicker in 1925, as mentioned above, its seeds go back to the 'Satya Shodhak Samaj' founded in 1873 by Jyotirao Phule, a leader from the Mali caste of Poona in Maharashtra. The main objective of the Self-Respect Movement in the early years was communal representation of the non-Brahmins in all spheres of public life. Subsequently, it later added the non-Brahmins sense of pride based on the Dravidian past, which also implied denial of superiority of the Brahmins. Moreover, the Self Respect Movement created a broad base for the ideology of the movement by working for social reform in all spheres of social life of the non-Brahmins. The over-dominance of the upper non-Brahmins and marginalisation of the lower non-

14 Ibid., pp. 125-154.
17 James Waltch, op. cit, p.160.
Brahmins and Dalits led to the decline of the Justice Party which began in 1926, kept on functioning until 1937.\textsuperscript{18}

After 1937 the members of Justice party, which was routed in elections, joined the Self Respect Movement with Ramaswamy as its leader. A significant demand of this period, by Ramaswamy Naicker was that of Dravidanadu on the lines of the Muslim League's demand of separate state in the 1940's. Nevertheless, the social mobilization and awareness generated by the non-Brahmin movement discussed above led to the formation of the Dravida Kazhagam in 1942. But the tussle between its leaders divided the movement soon and after a rift with E.V. Ramaswamy, C. N. Annadurai founded the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in 1949. The Tamil politics was dominated by D.M.K. from 1949 onwards which overthrew the Brahmins from political institutions after independence. The DMK's politics led by Karunanithi was unable to find any method to change the caste oppression. The D.M.K. politics espoused mainly the anti-Brahmin, anti-Sanskrit, anti-Hindi, or pro-Tamil nationalism or Dravidianism without implementing any structural and social change. Yet, it continued to retain power but M.G.Ramachandran's AIADMK took over the state power up to 1976\textsuperscript{19} and it retains power till date, though the DMK did come back in 1989 to rule for sometimes the state of Tamil Nadu.

**Adi-Dravidas and the Non-Brahmin Movement**

It is interesting to note that the Tamil society had experienced anti-caste movement led by Dalit leaders even before the origin of the non-Brahmin movement. In fact, it was the anti-caste movement of Dalits which made Shudras conscious enough to lead non-Brahmin movement.\textsuperscript{20} Historically, leaders such as, Iyothee Doss Pandit, Rettaimali Srinivasan, Rev.John Ratnam Rao Bahadur, L.C. Gunaswamy, M.C. Raj, Peter Perumal, Immanuvel Sekharan, Vedanayagam Aasan N.Sivaraj, Appadurai etc. led this movement. The complete annihilation of caste, total abolition of untouchability, denouncement of rituals, development of education, etc. were some of the main demands of this movement. The Montague-Chelmsford reforms during the second decade of the twentieth century further helped in the development of this


movement. The earliest non-Brahmin movement of the untouchables leaders which had begun in Madras, swept the entire Presidency and opened new social and political avenues for untouchable castes, including the minorities. This movement challenged the monopoly of power exercised by traditional Brahmins and Vellalas and other intermediary castes. The leaders of this movement also asserted for the emancipation of the untouchable castes from the rigidity of the ascribed casteism and degraded occupational status of the ex-untouchables. Pandit Iyothee Doss who had started educational institutions for the untouchables in 1870, aimed for sharing political and administrative power by the untouchables through legislation. The leaders not only raised the issue at the community and society levels but also represented the case of the untouchables of the Presidency British government. But the Justice Party did not take up their issues honestly with regard to scheduled caste. Also noteworthy that these leaders made the Dalits the Depressed classes, as they were known then, conscious enough about the hypocrisy of the Justice Party. They highlighted how the non-Brahmin movement led by upper non-Brahmins had used the numerical strength of the Dalits for their benefit, leaving the Dalits in wreck. The whole process helped Dalits to strengthen their ties with the Justice Party and start their independent organisation. This marked a new beginning in the history of the Dalit movement in the Madras Presidency. In fact, the Adi-Dravida leader M.C. Raj was nominated to Legislative Council from Madras.

Emergence of non-Brahmin caste politics after Independence

Politicization of caste is not a new phenomenon in Tamil politics, but it existed during the non-Brahmin movement itself. In the process, many caste associations were established which assumed political importance, as the time passed, creating inter-caste competition for power and also casteism. Encouraged by political leaders, caste consciousness became very strong both in rural and urban areas of Tamil Nadu. Hardgrave has pointed out that the caste politics in India is competitive, which gives us a model of social dynamics on the whole in India and specially in Tamil Nadu. The role and effectiveness of a caste in politics, however, is necessarily dependent on the solidarity of the group and the degree to which its members share a common political culture. He says, "The degree to which any group may be said to
possess a common political culture will be a function of the elaboration of caste ranking and an internal differentiation within the caste itself.\textsuperscript{21}

The above discussion is very much relevant in the context of political mobilization of two of the most organised non-Brahmin castes in Tamil Nadu - Vanniyars and Thevars. During the past seven decades, the Dravidian movement has been splintered periodically with newer and newer parties emerging on the political scene of the State. Its changing leadership has switched ideological tracks quite often for mere electoral gains. However, the movement's most important achievement is that it has succeeded, to a considerable degree in ending the Brahmin hegemony in the Tamil public sphere. The castes like Vanniyars and Thevars have organised themselves politically to compete the dominant upper non-Brahmin castes like Chettiyars, Gounders, Naidus, Vellalas etc. Further, their mobilization has also led to the divisions of non-Brahmin political power into the backward non-Brahmins and the forward non-Brahmins. We have not to forget that non-Brahmins had initially organised themselves against the monopoly and domination of the Brahmins.

As stated earlier, the rise and fall of the Dravidian movement has altered the Tamil social milieu and gave rise to distinct sections of the forward non-Brahmins and the backward non-Brahmins. This distinction has led to an uneven development leaving behind the backward non-Brahmins such as Vanniyars, Maravars, etc. The elite non-Brahmin castes such as Chettiyars, Gounders, Naidus, Vellalas, etc. have tried to guard their political and economic privileges by completely identifying themselves with the outright Hindu nationalist parties. Their loyalties have now swung from the Congress Party to the Hindutva forces. Hence, the elite sections of the Nadars, Kallars, Gounders and others are actively participating in the present phase of the Brahminical revival in Tamil Nadu. Further, the Vanniyakula Kshatriya Maha Sangam through the Tamil Nadu Toiler Party, effectively demonstrated the mobilisation of political support by caste associations, of the Thevars and Nadars at the behest of the Forward Block and the Congress Party respectively. At present, the Vanniyars have started their own political party called Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), and the Thevars have joined the AIADMK for gaining political power.

The Vanniyakula Kshatriya Maha Sangam, the association of one of the numerically largest castes in the state - the Vanniyars, established in 1888 had

demonstrated its caste consciousness by uniting members of the Gounder, Padayachis, Vanniyar and Naicker, castes. It has been organizing caste meetings and acting as a leader of the movement of the backward classes in the state. Not only that but the Maha Sangam became politically powerful at the time when the Government of India Act 1935 came into force. The idea of share of power in the public bodies and government services to the numerical strength of a caste in the total population had come to be passed as a conception of social justice. The Sangam, therefore, felt that it was unreasonable to deny separate representation for the Vanniyakula Kshatriyas, especially when the Brahmins and the Christians had 'separate representation.' It prayed also for raising the age limit for their caste men from 25 to 28 years for their appointment in services. Despite the dismissal of their demands, the Kshatriyas insisted in their statement that the term 'non-Brahmin' was loose and was used by politicians to suit their convenience. With the prospect of the 1952 elections before them, they convened in 1951, a statewide major conference of the Vanniyakula Kshatriyas. The conference resolved that the Vanniyars should contest the elections, in co-operation with the toiling masses. Consequently, a political party called the Tamil Nadu Toilers Party was formed, as mentioned above. Two of the most significant leading personalities in the conference were M.A. Manikavelu Naicker and S.S. Ramasamy Padayachi. The conference also represented a milestone in the expansion of Vanniyars caste association.

In their struggle for status and fulfillment of their share in job opportunities in the Tamil society, the Vanniyars started alliances with different political parties on various occasions. For instance, in the 1952 elections, the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) supported 'amil Nadu Toilers' Party and the 'Common Wealth Party' for being a non-Brahmin political party. In 1954, Kamaraj Nadar, a competent but less cosmopolitan politician, from the successful mobile Nadar caste, became the new Chief Minister. The Tamil Nadu Toiler Party supported the ministry of Kamaraj and a Padayachi was given a cabinet rank in the ministry.

22 Saraswathi, Minorities in Madras State: Group Interest in Modern Politics, Irnlex India, Delhi, 1974, p. 129.
23 Ibid., p.130.
The 1967 elections witnessed the complete collapse of the Vanniyar caste's capacity to operate as a political party. From 1967 to 1988, the Vanniyar leaders merged themselves with one or the other of the major Dravidian political parties. But the Vanniyar caste saw resurrection in the political arena again in 1980 under the Vanniyar Sangam. Dr. Ramadass recognised Vanniyars Sangam into a political outfit called Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK). Since then, the Vanniyars have started mass struggle for their privileges. For instance, the Vanniyars 'road roko' (road blockade) agitation for compartmental reservation in jobs and education in favour of their caste people turned into a communal clash with the DMK workers. This sort of violence always becomes caste based and ends with conflict between two or more castes. At another stage, the Vannayars have not only engaged themselves for getting their rights and privileges but have also attacked Dalits to maintain their dominance on them. For instance, in a clash between Vanniyars and Dalits in more over 1000 huts of Dalits were set burnt. The continued violence led to the death of about a dozen Vanniyar and Dalit youth in clashes resulting in police firings.

What is significant about the PMK is that it believes in establishing an Ambedkarite, Periyarite and Marxian type of society. More precisely, its ideology is anchored on the Ambedkarite ideal of annihilating the Hindu caste system completely, the Periyarite ideal of eradication of Brahmanism and the Marxist ideal of eliminating class distinction. It believes in establishing a casteless and classless society. But much has not been achieved at the gross roots, rather the PMK has been a saga of political opportunism in which it has entered alliance with political parties like DMK, AIADMK, BJP and Congress in a short period after its inception in 1989. The Southern district of Ramnad has been a stronghold of the Forward Block, dominated by the Thevar caste, which is generally referred to as the Thevar Party. The Thevars under the Forward Block have tried to align with parties like CPI, DK and Congress to usurp political power in the region. They have dominated from local bodies to Parliament since the independence. But after 1990 the Thevars have crossed to AIADMK because the charismatic personality of Jayalalitha has helped the group move into political power. Once the Thevars have organised themselves politically

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they sponsored perpetual conflict with the Dalits because the latter have not voted for them. It is also observed that the Dalits did not vote for AIADMK as this party is also dominated by Thevars as well.

Caste consciousness and regional deliberations

Historically, in comparison to other districts, Ramnad district in Southern Tamil Nadu was found highest cases of caste discriminations. As already mentioned, the 'Mukulathore' or 'Maravas', Kallars, and Agamudaiyars or Thevars dominate in this district. They call themselves as Nattars and behave like superior caste Hindus. In the past, the Pallars, mostly landless agricultural labourers, formed the majority among the depressed classes. The Nattars wanted to establish their socio-economic domination over the depressed classes. In addition to that they also imposed many social restrictions which were not liked by the Dalits. For instance, Hantton has portrayed the restrictions imposed by the caste Hindus on the Adi-Dravidas particularly on Pallars or Devendrakula Vellars in Ramnad district of Tamil Nadu during the 1930s. These restrictions were especially at the time of temple festivals or any social or communitarian festivals. Beteille also has stated that the issue of civic rights plays a major role in politicization of the Adi-Dravidas in Tamil Nadu. Traditionally, Dalits had accepted their disabilities as a matter of curse. As these disabilities came to be removed by law and as the Adi-Dravidas became conscious of new laws, they started asserting their rights, which was opposed by the non-Brahmins, and the conflicts between Dalits and non-Brahmins became a regular feature of Ramnad district. The similar trend could also be observed in most of the regions of Tamil Nadu.

In December 1930 the Kallars in Ramnad district propounded eight prohibitions, the disregard of which led to the use of violence by the Kallars against the exterior castes. The restrictions imposed on the Pallars were:-

(i) That the Adi-Dravidas shall not wear ornament of gold and silver; (ii) That the males should not be allowed to wear their clothes below their knees or above the hips; (iii) That their males should not wear coats or shirts or baniyans; (iv) No Adi-Dravida should be allowed to have his hair cropped. (v) That the Adi-Dravidas should not use

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29 Dharmalingam. C., Pamphlet on “Mudukulathur Kalavaram – Kaaranam”, (Tamil), Madurai, 1998, p. 3.
31 G.O. No.611, Public (Police) dated 8th December, 1932.
other than earthenware vessels in their homes; (vi) Their women shall not be allowed to cover the upper portion of their bodies by clothes or Ravukais or Thavanies; (vii) Their women shall not be allowed to use flowers or saffron paste; and (viii) The men shall not use umbrellas for protection against sun and rain nor should they wear sandals".\(^{32}\)

Again, in June 1931, as aforesaid prohibitions were not satisfactorily observed, the Kallars framed eleven more prohibitions.\(^{33}\)

'(i) The Adi-Dravidas and Devendrakul Vellalars should not wear clothes below their knees. (ii) The men and women of the above said depresses classes should not wear gold jewels. (iii) The women should carry water only in mud pots and not in copper or brass vessels. They should use straw only to carry the water pots and no clothes should be used for that purpose. (iv) Their children should not read and get themselves literate or educated. (v) The children should be asked only to tend the cattle of the Mirasdars. (vi) Their men and women should work, as slaves of the Mirasdars, in their respective Pannais. (vii) They should not cultivate the land either on waram or lease from the Mirasdars. (viii) They must sell away their own lands to Mirasdars of the village at very cheap rates, and if they failed do so, no water will be allowed to them for irrigation their lands. Even if the help of rainwater grows something, the crops should be robbed away, when they are ripe for harvest. (ix) They must work as coolies from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. under the Mirasdars and their wages shall be for men Rs four per day and for women Rs. Two per day. (x) The above said communities should not use Indian Music (melam etc.) in their marriages and other celebrations. (xi) They must stop their habit of going on a horse in procession before tying the Thali thread in marriage and they must use their house doors as palanquins for the marriage procession, and no vehicle should be used by them for any purpose'.

Ambedkar compared these above mentioned prohibitions laid down by the caste Hindus (Shudras communities like Kallar or Thevar) of Ramnad district with Manu’s codification of Hindu laws and called it a Adharma than Dharma or law.\(^{34}\)

The Pallars resisted and protested against these imposed restrictions, which naturally resulted in caste conflicts mass violence between the Pallars and Thevars. The houses and other properties of the Pallars were destroyed by the caste Hindus. The Pallars


\(^{33}\) Ibid.,

\(^{34}\) Ambedkar, 1989, ibid., p.280.
registered their complaint through their independent organisation called Ramnad district Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha. And their protest was also discussed in Madras Legislative Assembly in 1931. In fact the legislature expressed its concern over the ill treatment of Depressed Classes, which had become a regular feature of Ramnad, Tiruchi and Virudhnagar districts. The members condemned the rules formulated by the 'Kallar Sangam' as wretched, grounders and inhuman and raised the issue of connivance of the local administration and the dominant non-Brahmin castes. Further, the Governor of the Council ordered an inquiry about the oppression of the Dalits in the said region. Yet exploitation and caste conflict went unabated not only before independence but it continues till date.

Another significant incidence of caste consciousness and resultant conflict between Dalits and non-Brahmins, which has far reaching consequences for the social relationship between the aforesaid two groups even today is Mudukulathur Caste Riots, again in the Ramnad district. Mudukulathur is one of the taluk headquarters of Ramnad district. Among the total population, the Maravars were majority in this taluk. Here, again the Pallars are largely agricultural labourers and Marvars or Thevars as landowners. Again, the Thevars wanted to maintain their traditional social domination over the rest of the people, particularly on Pallars.

Socio-economic mobility and political rivalry became the main cause of caste consciousness vis-à-vis caste conflict between Dalits and non-Brahmins. Christian missionaries for their education and also conversion helped the Dalits. Further, the Congress Party government also helped in implementing certain policies, which were pro-Dalits in the 1930s. As, the Dalits were pro-Congress and Thevars pro-Forward Block, this political rivalry between Pallars and Thevars came to fore in 1957 during a by-election of Mudhukulathoor constituency. Thevars tried to stop Pallars from casting their votes, which took an angry turn of caste conflict. Later on, Thevars murdered a young Dalit leader Immanuel, who was vocal and assertive Dalit. This incidence further escalated violence in approximately hundred villages of that region. The intensity of the consciousness and conflict or violence can be assessed by the fact that more than 40 people were killed and enormous property was destroyed. Further a
leader of the opposition in the house compared this violence with the 1919 Jalianwalabagh violence. It is interesting to note here that during this period, Kamaraj a Backward Nadar Caste person was Chief Minister in the Madras Presidency. All the political parties condemned Congress and this caste conflict between Pallars and Thevars, in 1950s, was also debated in the Madras Legislative Assembly. In fact, the Congress government had to face a no-confidence motion on the issue. But it is certain that the caste consciousness was increasing each day with the socio-economic and political development of the Dalits and the Thevars. Each caste group was defending the deeds of their caste especially the Thevar leaders. On the other hand Dalit leaders blamed not only Thevars for their oppression but also the Congress for not implementing of development programs for the Dalits.

Another incident occurred in the Keelvenmâni village, Tanjore district, which gave clear picture of the caste Hindus, caste consciousness and their merciless killing of Dalits. Demand for minimum wage by the landless agricultural Dalit (Pallar) laboureres in Keelavenmeni village of Tanjavur from Naidu landlords became the basis for this. The riots broke on 25\textsuperscript{th} December 1968 in which 13 men, 19 women and 20 children were charred to death\textsuperscript{39}. The earlier two caste conflicts or caste riots broke out under the Justice Party and the Congress Party governments respectively, but this time the riots broke under the DMK government led by C.N. Annadurai. Again as in two other incidences the political parties condemned the incidence. This time again the Communist Party moved the motion for discussion on the issue in the Assembly which was debated. However, an important point to mention here is that no political party went beyond the agriculture problems such as raising the minimum wages, this incidence to probe the heinous nature of caste conflict. This resulted into adoption of the ‘Minimum Wage Act’ 1969.\textsuperscript{40}

Hence, we can observe that the caste consciousness in Tamil Nadu has a linear development. It started with the socio-political mobilization of non-Brahmins under the banner of the Justice Party. This was specifically targeted to judicial and other institutions of governance. The caste consciousness among the non-Brahmins did succeed in overthrowing the dominance of the Brahmins in Tamil Nadu. But as the non-Brahmins achieved social mobility and political power, they themselves tried to


\textsuperscript{40} The Madras Legislative Assembly Debates, 1969, vol, XXII, op.cit., pp.347-349.
monopolize it without letting it percolate down to the lower caste within the Shudra and also to the ex-untouchables or Dalits. This factor led, firstly a division within the non-Hindus, i.e., on the lines of upper non-Brahmins and lower non-Brahmins and, Secondly, the Dalit castes got disillusioned with the non-Brahmin movement and left it. Another feature of caste consciousness in Tamil Nadu was following of different political parties by the different caste groups. Brahmins initially dominated the Congress. The upper Shudras followed the Justice Party. Later on, the Thevars the followed Forward Block. Dalits were seen in Congress, Communist Party of India and DMK. The third feature of the caste consciousness in certain regions of Tamil Nadu has been the caste conflicts. On the one hand, the Backward Castes wanted to dominate the Dalits and, on the other hand, socio-economic development and various democratic reforms taken place in the region helped Dalits to gain mobility. Christian Missionaries also played a significant part in the development of their education. Altogether, these factors were, responsible for the emergence of new caste consciousness among the different caste groups in Tamil Nadu.

Caste Consciousness among Dalits

Consciousness indicates awareness among the oppressed regarding the socio-economic structure and cultural reality, which keeps the group or collectivity subjugated. Consciousness develops hopes among the oppressed among the oppressed masses for their gradual internal transformation, cultural as well as economic, for their democratic organization and eventually for their taking possession of power. But a fact may be noted here that the Dalit consciousness essentially mixed with caste and class elements is qualitatively different from the proletarian/caste consciousness, which essentially has class character. That is why, Oommen has rightly pointed, "While the proletarian consciousness is essentially rooted in material deprivations, and caste consciousness is mainly anchored on status deprivations, Dalit consciousness encapsulates deprivation stemming from inhuman conditions of material existence, powerlessness and ideological hegemony."42

The consciousness of any kind brings about mobilisation. Moreover, when it is based on an ideology, it eventually becomes a social movement. A social movement,

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41 Ghanshyam Shah, Social Movements in India, Sage Publications, Delhi, 1990, p.112.
according to Rao, "is an organised attempt on the part of a section of society to bring about partial or total change in society through collective mobilization based on an ideology".\textsuperscript{43} The different elements of a social movement - collective mobilization, leadership, ideology, change-orientation, genesis and demise of the movement-are as pointed out by Rao well identifiable in Dalit movements, which are to be accepted as antecedent to as well as consequence of Dalit consciousness. More precisely, Shah has classified Dalit movements into (a) reformative and (b) alternative. The former tries to reform the caste system and solve the problem of untouchability, while the latter attempts to create an alternative socio-cultural structure by Dalits' conversion to some other religion or by acquiring education, economic status and political power. He has further divided the reformative type of movements into (a) Bhakti movements (b) neo-Vedantic movements, and (c) sanctification movements. Similarly, the alternative types of movements are divided into (a) conversion movements, and (b) the secular movements.\textsuperscript{44} Oommen also has stated that while the Bhakti movements tried to purify Hinduism, the neo-Vedantic movements were oriented to reinterpretation of Hinduism so as to cleanse it of its evil accreditations, whereas the conversion movements were aimed at rejecting Hinduism.\textsuperscript{45}

The initial Dalit consciousness began with the Buddhist revolt of the 6th century B.C., which was all geared to questioning the central ideology of the concept of purity and pollution and the Brahminical supremacy.\textsuperscript{46} In a sense, Buddha was the first social revolutionary who challenged the Vedanta philosophy, rejected the authority of the Vedas and revolted against the caste system.\textsuperscript{47} In fact, conversion to Buddhism provided an alternative for the Dalits to liberate themselves from the caste system. The Bhakti movements further activated the Dalit consciousness (roughly from 8th century to the 18th century). These Bakthi movement saints were Kabir, Ramanand and Ravidas in the north, Chaitanya in the east, Narsinh Mehta and Tukaram in the west, and Ramanuja and Basava in the south India. Thus, the Bhakti movements were primarily reformist, attempting to correct the evils of Hinduism and the practice of untouchability, without questioning the caste system. Secondly, clean caste Hindus initiated most of these. In the words of Oommen, "This eventually led to

\textsuperscript{44} Ghanshayam Shah, op.cit., p. 108.
\textsuperscript{45} T.K.Oommen, op.cit, p.258.
\textsuperscript{46} T.K. Oommen, op.cit., p.257.
\textsuperscript{47} Raj Kumar, "Dalit Culture: A Perspective from Below", \textit{Social Action}, Vol.50, No. 1, Jan-March 2000, p.23.
the dominance of the priestly class, the Brahmins, against whose orthodoxy the
protests were initiated." Thirdly, once castes with differing ritual ranks came to be
associated with the movements, the participants in these movements developed a dual
identity, i.e. a religious-ideological identity with the fellow participants in the
movements and a socio-cultural identity with the social collectivities or the castes to
which they belonged.

By middle of the 19th century, a new trend of protest began which
Vivekananda, Dayanand Saraswati and M.K. Gandhi initiated and they emphasized the
Varnashrama dharma as an essential pre-requisite for the preservation of harmony in
society and purity of the soul. These movements also left untouched the socio-cultural
and religious lives of the Dalits. In fact, these attempts were made as the Hindu
renaissance strengthened and politicized the caste Hindu culture and its dominance
vis-à-vis the Dalits' culture.48

Contrasting to the neo-Vedantic movements of this period were the efforts of
Phule, Periyar, Narayana Guru and Ambedkar, who fought against the caste system
and untouchability to create a new culture and a new religion based on the universal
ideas of "liberty, equality and fraternity". The contributions of Dr. Ambedkar proved
to be the most profound, and lasting in this regard. Dr. Ambedkar made a significant
contribution to the anti-caste movement. Being an untouchable (Mahar) himself, he
championed the cause of the 'broken men' or the untouchables and fought relentlessly
for social liberation, economic emancipation and political advancement of the
downtrodden millions-a task never undertaken by any high caste Hindu leader with so
much vigour and force. That is why, perhaps, Gandhi described him as "fierce and
fearless", and Nehru acclaimed him as a "symbol of revolt against all the oppressive
features of Hindu society".49

A radical reconstruction of the Indian society, as Ambedkarism imagined,
cannot come without the intensification of the caste/class struggle. Ambedkar also
realized that securing political power was must to completely wipe out all social, legal
and cultural disabilities from which the Dalits suffered. His slogan was "Be a ruling
race".50 Thus, the Ambedkar movement represents the efforts to construct a distinct
Dalit identity, critical not only of the oppressiveness of the dominant Hindu caste

48 Ibid., p.257.
50 D.K. Baisantry, Ambedkar: The Total Revolution, Segment Book Distributors, New Delhi,
1991, p.82.
society but also of its claims to antiquity and to its being the major Indian tradition. Dr. Ambedkar's ideas continue to have a dominant influence in shaping the Dalit consciousness and political mobilization even today.

The 19th and early 20th centuries also witnessed the emergence of a number of religious movements among Dalits in various parts of the country such as the Rajayogi and Narasaiah sects among the Malas and Madigas of Andhra Pradesh; Bhima Bai and the Mahirna Dharam among the Bauris of Orissa; the Mautua cult and other egalitarian incarnations of the popular Vaishnavism among the Namashudras, Rajbansis, Burimalis and Kaibartas of Bengal; the Mamorias, Doms and Keots movements, in the Brahmaputra and Surma valleys of Assam; the Satnami movement among the Chamars of central provinces; Ramdeo Panth and Naval Dharma among the Dheds and Bhangis of Rajasthan; the Adi-Dharm Movement of the Chamars of Punjab; and the generalised anti-Hindu movement, propagated by Swami Achchutanand in the urban centers of the United Province. At the other end of the spectrum of the religious movements of the oppressed in India were several mass conversions to Christianity and Islam. Standing between these two dominant forms of the religious movements of the oppressed was the revival of Buddhism in modern India. All these movements have been trying to build up a parallel cultural system by refusing to get absorbed into the mainstream of Hinduism.

Besides, the assertion of Dalit identity through the above-mentioned socio-religious movements, the formation of broad-based political parties to organize the Dalit masses, spread throughout the length and breadth of the country, has also been instrumental in shaping the Dalit consciousness and their mobilization. Beginning with the Republican Party of India, the Dalit Panthers of India, Bharatiya Republican Party, BahuJan Samaj Party, Pudiya Thamizhagam and Dalit Panthers of India (DPI) in Tamil Nadu, the Dalits leaders have actively been engaged in arousing political consciousness for the mobilization of the Dalit masses.

The Dalit writers, poets and activists have further activated the call for political reconstruction. Thus emerged the 'Dalit Literature', in the early seventies. Generally, Dalit writers are not against any group (individuals, castes or communal groups) but against the establishment, the exploitative social system, which, in their view, keeps them depressed and deprived. In other words, the search for identity is a basic dynamism of the Dalit culture, and the voices of the Dalit writers are basically forms of protest aimed at bringing social change through a revolution. Thus, the Dalit
consciousness in India has been triggered by the various socio-religious-political movements along with ethno-linguistically articulated movements to rouse the Dalit masses in every sphere of their activity. In addition, some non-governmental organizations have also been creating an awareness among consciousness among the Dalits which makes them to realize their existing conditions of socio-economic and political life of them. And, finally, the continuities of atrocities against Dalits and resultant caste conflicts would bound to amplify the consciousness and formation of Dalit identity is quiet evident as the recent social scenario of Tamil Nadu is concerned.

Caste consciousness and identity formation among Dalits of Tamil Nadu: A Brief Sociological profile

In the realm of sociological conceptualization, the word identity is construed as a social construct that refers to how the individual is perceived and labelled by self and by the society. The symbolic interactionists, as their name imply, place enormous emphasis on the capacity of humans to create and use symbols. Each and every symbol has a common meaning and motive for most of the people or groups. Thus, it helps the people to join the identity formation. Apart from the invisible symbols like language, words, names, etc., there are so many visible symbols that can be further divided into positive symbols and negative symbols. Former refers to the exalting or adoring the community as a whole. Otherwise, it means the symbols through which they identify themselves and which give them a sense of pride and self-respect. For Jayakumar, “Dalit is not a pejorative designation but rather a positive symbol of identity for the depressed classes which solves the questions of origin, roots and history of these people”\textsuperscript{51} For instance, the Buddha and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar have become popular symbols for Dalits at large. And the pictures of Dr. Ambedkar and Buddha are more common in the poster or pamphlet of any Dalit organization. Especially, the statue of Dr. Ambedkar in front of any institution or in the corner or middle of the village or town or at the crossroad is frequently visible. The image usually represents Dr. Ambedkar with an upraised arm teaching or declaring the message of courage and equality. It stands erect unmoving. Hence, the image represents the education, success, contribution to the political world of India, courage,

\textsuperscript{51} Samuel Jayakumar, 1999.
empowerment through reservation, and protection through a relationship to
government, 'one of us' who was not only important personally but was important to
India.52

The advent of the global trade and commerce and the integration of the
Tamilakam as a whole led to the plausibility of the emergence of a new social
structure based on a more egalitarian ideology. For instance, it was during these
periods that several groups of Paraiyars (weavers) became independent cultivators and
their caste moral was boosted up. They formed a number of organizations for their
protection and their bargaining on various counts became increasingly powerful. It is
not without reason that the century previous to the colonial rule has been termed as
the "golden age of Pariah. 53 This marginal empowerment certainly sharpened the Dalit
sensitivity, put them on the alert and made them take stock of their situation-past,
present and future. In short, the Parayar caste groups were becoming politically
conscious through the newly formed media articulation, organization and agitation.
Their relative deprivation was indeed edging the subalterns on to movement.54 The
collective expressions of Dalits through journals and newspapers like Suryodayam
(1869), Panchama (1871), Sugir Tavasani (1877), Dravida Pandyan (1885), Andror
Mitran (1886), Mahavikata Tuthan (1888), Parayan (1893), Tamil Penn (1916), etc.
captured the current social reality to reshape their own ideology. The Dravida
Mahajan Sabha was formed in 1891; the Parayar Mahasabha of R. Srinivasan in 1892
and Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha came up soon after that. In 1898, the Sakya
Buddhist Society was formed under the inspiration and guidance of Pandit Iyothee
Thass.

Iyothee Tass, Paraiyar, by caste, besides being a reputed doctor, devoted his
time to the study of Christianity, Jainism and Buddhism. In 1891, he along with his
followers met Col. H.S.Olcott and requested him to help to revive Buddhism in India.
Inspired by Col. Olcott, Madam Blavatsky and Ven Anagarika Dharampala, he began
his missionary work under the auspices of the 'South Indian Sakya Buddhist
Association'. He was instrumental in establishing a branch of the Association at

53 D.Washbrook, Land and Labour in Late 18th Century South India, OUP, Delhi, 1993, p.68.
Marikuppam in 1907 and another at Champion Reef Mine, Kolar Gold Field (now in Karnataka) in 1914.55

Further, the 'Swadeshi reforms' as has been termed in the 'Orupaisa Tamizhan', a weekly started by Iyothee Thass in the heyday of the Swadeshi radicalism in Madras Presidency, interrogated the politics of Brahmanism or casteism and the Brahminical terror of nationalism. He imagined civil society or the sphere of social and economic relationships and interaction as 'the people', and political society as the nation. He argued that the national reform and progress would only be achieved when people lives were transformed. Secondly, political liberty or the Swaraj was to be re-defined to signify not merely an ideal of self-government but a state of social and economic well-being as well. Thus, for Iyothee Thass, the ultimate truth laid in the fact that liberty could be possible only when differences based on caste and classes disappeared. He further stated that good governance was possible in India only under the benign outsiders.56

Apart from Iyothee Tass and P. Krishnaswamiyar, many other leaders contributed immensely to arouse the Dalit consciousness and urge for their formation of a new identity. For instance, M.C. Raja was one of the active organizers who contributed to the upliftment of Depressed Classes. He was the secretary of the state level “Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha” in 1916. He was the profounder of free and compulsory education to the Depressed Classes pupils and he considered British rule in India as liberator of the in Indian lower classes. He supported Dr. Ambedkar in favour of the separate electorate, and later on the Poona pact for the joint electorate and the reserved seats for the Depressed Classes or the Scheduled Castes. R. Srinivasan, yet another prominent Dalit leader, founded the 'Adi-Dravida Mahajansabha' in 1891 with the intention of organizing his brethren. He started a magazine named 'Parayan' in 1893.57

The backwards - Dalits association over the years has led to the success of the Dravidian politics in Tamil Nadu. But this association has also hampered to a great extent, the Dalit consciousness resulting in its slow growth. The antagonism between the Dalits like Pallars and Parayars, on the one hand, and the caste-Hindus such as Thevars and Vanniyar, on the other, in rural Tamil Nadu reflects both the caste and

55 Loganathan, Revival of Buddhism in South India in the 19th century Thirupathur 1985, p.71.
56 Ibid., p.259.
class interests of the backwards or the non-Brahmins who have become neo-Brahmins after acquiring economic and political dominance. They tend to clash with the landless Dalits in the rural areas in the State.\textsuperscript{58} The recent caste clashes in Kodiankulam, Melavalavu, Chidambaram, Madurai, Pudukottai, Theni, etc. in the southern and northern parts of Tamil Nadu show that it is the dominant non-Brahmin castes who are entering into conflict with and committing atrocities on Dalits. Thevars and Vanniyars, who are at the forefront, have become the privileged classes like the Yadavas of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and the Marathas in Maharashtra.

The popularity of these dominant non-Brahmin castes and their Dravidian parties, however, has declined in the 1990's. It is at this point that a new wave of consciousness has pervaded the entire Dalit castes in the state with a sense of identity and assertion. This has also left a dramatic impact on the political scenario in Tamil Nadu. The Dalits, who until the 1980s were scattered under different political parties, have made a step forward refusing to be simply vote banks controlled by others.\textsuperscript{59} The polarisation of the Dravidian parties has led to the emergence of a number of Dalit political parties namely the Ambedkar People's Liberation Front, which later became the "Puratchi Bharatham' led by Moorthy (Late) and now led by Mr. Jagan, the Ambedkar People's Federation led by Mr. Balasundaram, the Republican Party of India (RPI), the Dalit Sena led by Chandrakesan, Adhi-Thanizhar Peravai led by Adhiyaman, the Dalit Panthers of India (DPI) led by Thirumavalavan and the "Pudhiya Thamizhagam' led by Krishnaswamy. Some of these parties are concentrated in the northern and western parts, whereas others in the southern parts of the state. But the two political parties namely Dalit Panthers of India (DPI) and Pudhiya Thamizhagam have dominated the Tamil Nadu politics and have made significant contributions in the development of Dalit assertion and formation of new identity among the Dalits. Hence, we will discuss below the emergence, development and contributions of these two parties in detail.

The Role of Dalit Panthers of India (DPI) in Identity Formation

During the 1960's and 1970's, the Dalit Panthers and several other political groups, with a Marxist/Leninist or Maoist orientation, emerged outside the framework of the recognized political parties and the parliamentary politics to confront the

\textsuperscript{58} Pradeep Kumar, "Dalits and BSP in U.P", Economic and political weekly, April 13, 1999.
\textsuperscript{59} Gail Omvedt, Dalit Politics, The Hindu, 28th April 2000.
established power structure. As mentioned in the earlier chapter, the Dalit Panthers was formed in the state of Maharashtra in the early 1970’s and its leaders had drawn the ideological inspiration from the Black Panthers Movement in the United States. The determined stance of the Dalit Panthers served to arouse and unite many Dalits, particularly Dalit youths and students. They sought to wage an organized struggle against the Varna and the caste system.

Moreover, the Dalit Panthers was the contribution of Dalit writers who launched a literary movement in support of the social and cultural movements and for the formation of Dalit identity is quiet evident, especially from Maharashtra, Utter Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, etc. The movement concentrated on the issues like fighting back the atrocities and social inequality practiced against the Dalits. Their methods were both militant and democratic in nature. Through processions, demonstrations, meetings, rallies, distribution of movement literature, hunger strikes, etc., they brought consciousness among general mass and government about atrocities, injustice, landlessness and unemployment problem of Dalit youth. Their style of protest or agitation against the above mentioned problems helped to get favourable response from the government.

With the influence of Maharashtra’s Dalits Panthers of India, in the post 1980’s, an advocate Malaisamy, Pallar by caste, founded the same in Madurai district of Tamil Nadu. But at the same time Thirumalavan and Kalayanasundaram were also part of that movement and cooperated with it for some time. Though initially the movement was based in Madurai, but in due course of time it moved to the northern districts of Tamil Nadu. In fact, the movement has strong presence among Parayars in the northern districts of Tamil Nadu.

Later on, the Dalit Panthers of India (DPI) was renamed in Tamil as ‘Vidudali Siruthaigal’ meaning liberation panthers and was led exclusively by R. Thirummavalavan, a Parayar by caste. Under his able leadership, the party concentrated on the women’s rights, land issues, labour disputes and other discriminatory issues having a non-political dimension. Dalit Panthers’ activists visit the “atrocity” sites, organize marches and rallies, and raise slogans of direct militant action against the caste Hindu aggressors. The legitimate activities of the Panthers in

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asserting their rights have evoked panic reactions from the vested interests of the non-Dalits, particularly of the dominant non-Brahmin caste Hindus in the state. They attempt to depict the Dalit panthers of India as an extremist organization believing in violence. Thol. Tirumaavalavan, besides being a forceful orator, a literary writer, about the Dalits’ history and their grievances, has asserted that the principal objectives of the Dravidian movement included women’s liberation, social justice, annihilation of caste system, and struggle against Brahmin domination. In the last five decades, the movement has succeeded only in respect of ending the Brahmin domination in Tamil Nadu. Here, it is very much similar to Ram’s notion about the non-Brahmin movement of Maharastra and Tamil Nadu, which were focused on interest of non-Brahmins, not necessarily of ex-untouchables. He stated further: “In fact, the historical evidence of the Dalit movements organized earlier suggests that in the movements of Phule or Periyar the vital issues pertaining to the Untouchables were either ignored or relegated. It is, however, well accepted that the main focus of Ambedkar’s movement was to ameliorate the miseries of the Untouchables or the Scheduled castes or the Dalits as well as to prepare them to assert for their dignity and self-respect”.

Initially, the movement of the Dalit Panthers of India was against parliamentary democracy and in the 1991 elections it came up with a slogan in Tamil, ‘Ungalil yarum yokiyannillai, engalin vottu ungalukkillai’ (it means from you nobody is honest, our votes are not for you) and boycotted these. Since the mid-1990s, the movement has helped to promote a new Dalit political leadership in Tamil Nadu, unaligned with the mainstream political parties. The demands of DPI are related to lands to Dalits for living and for cultivation, inclusion of Dalits in government land auctions, and implementation of the Atrocities Act. It does not openly advocate violence but it does encourage Dalits to protest, by any means, against the injustices committed against them.

There have been cases of violence between the Vanniyars and the Parayars in the northern areas of Tamil Nadu. In the recent years, this had usually led to the harassment and murders of Dalits in the villages. However, the caste-Hindu men behind these clashes were often left scot-free. Instead, as Mr. Thirumaavalavan charged, the National Security Act as well as the State level Goondas Act was grossly

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62 Nandu Ram, Forward to Vivek Kumar’s, op.cit. pp.11-12.
misused against the Dalits by the State government, and several Dalits were kept in preventive custody for many days. On November 24, 1997 the Dalit Panthers of India marched again to urge the government to arrest those absconding in the cases of murders of Dalits and to demand an inquiry by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) into the cases of violence.

Recently, Thol. Thirumavalavan of Dalit Panthers of India in Tamil Nadu gave an interview to the Frontline about the manifestation of the political untouchability practiced by the Dravidian political parties in the elections. He lamented, “In the 1999 Lok Sabha elections too, Dalit organizations (PT and DPI) were taken into the Third Front only under unavoidable circumstances. When all the big parties in Tamil Nadu already allied themselves with either the DMK or the AIADMK, the TMC was compelled to launch a Third front”. And also in the 2001 Assembly elections, DMK faced same problem as the TMC, that time they invited these Dalit parties. In the 2004 Lok Sabha election the AIADMK had alliance with none other than BJP, since the pro-Thevar tilt of AIADMK prevented PT and DPI in their alliance. He criticized Karunanidhi (President of DMK) for his changing tones and political game and isolating the Dalits parities from the mainstream. Earlier Karunanidhi was left with no option but to ally with DPI and PT. “But now, because Karunanidhi has had the support of some much bigger parties, he has ditched Dalit parties. This is nothing but a manifestation of political untouchability, an extension of untouchability from the political to the social”. The dynamic nature and style of protest of the DPI will continue to be its strength to build up its political base as well as political identity in the coming years.

63 "Dalit Leader, Promises 'Peaceful' Procession", Indian Express, August 7, 1997.
65 Ibid., p.125.
The Role of Puthiya Thamizhagam (PT) in Identity Formation

Dr. K. Krishnaswamy, a Coimbatore based Cardiologist, gave up his practice to fight for the cause of Dalits and formed the Devendrakula Kula Vellalar Federation (DKVF) in 1995. It was basically a social movement to fight against the atrocities inflicted on the Dalits and to create awareness among them. Dalits in southern part of Tamil Nadu had to face weapons and arms, their houses were burned, they were beaten up and killed, their self-respect and their women’s self-respect were questioned by the Thevar or Maravar caste. So, the aim of the movement was not mere awakening but also to retaliate. Historically, the Pallars of southern parts of Tamil Nadu have taken part in struggle against the state and their caste Hindus counterparts since the time of Immanuel Shekaran who was indiscriminately killed by Thevars in 1957, for his assertive comment against caste Hindus domination, as stated earlier. Taking into consideration, the atrocities perpetuated by the caste Hindus and state machineries against Dalits, Dr. Krishnaswamy contested and won the elections in Ottapidaram (reserved constituency) in Tuticorin district in 1996. Unlike the earlier Dalit organizations in the state, which aligned themselves with the mainstream political parties for short-terms gains, the new organizations exhibit a higher degree of autonomy, aroused consciousness and work among rural youth, spurn the traditional mode of conflict resolution and employ a militant language of caste equality. Moreover, the DKVF movement became a full pledged political party called as Pudhiya Tamizhagam meaning New Tamil Nadu. According to Dr. Krishnaswamy the political agenda of Pudhiaya Thamizhagam is to bring equality among people of this caste and to form a new social order, through the acquisition of power, in which there is no possibility of exploitation. It is important to note that the Pudhiya Thamizhagam (PT) talked of social justice to satisfy the needs of all communities. And also following the strategy played by the BSP in Utter Pradesh, PT appeals to Parayars, Chakkuliars, Muslims, Christians, fishermen and other minority sections.

Presently, there is growth in the level of consciousness among the Dalits, who are confident of protecting themselves from atrocities inflicted on them by others. Moreover, the resurgence of Dalit consciousness and self-substantiating identity has

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enhanced their urge for equality and social dignity, which in turn have affected the existing inter caste relations between Dalits and caste Hindus in Tamil Nadu. We have seen through the preceding pages, the manifestation of caste consciousness in the form of assertion for social justice and finally the resultant caste conflict and commission of atrocities on the Dalits. This has been facilitated by a number of factors. For instance, facilitating factors like education, employment, and political mobilization have given the Dalit a growing level of caste consciousness and assertion. This is evident in the table given below.

**Table 3.1**  
**Education - wise views of Dalit respondents on causes of caste consciousness (assertion)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Level of Dalit respondents</th>
<th>Village I</th>
<th>Village II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Re-construction of past identity</td>
<td>Denial of imposed identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>3 (33.3)</td>
<td>4 (44.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to Metric</td>
<td>12 (27.9)</td>
<td>21 (48.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Metric</td>
<td>3 (16.7)</td>
<td>7 (38.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18 (25.7)</td>
<td>32 (45.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: figures in bracket are percentages*

The above table depicts educational level of Dalit respondent of both the villages with regard to causes of Dalit assertion. Here, the Dalit respondents belong to the village I have studied up to matriculation gave views on denial of imposed identity and reconstruction of past identity i.e. Devendrakula Velalar as already discussed in the previous chapter. Where as, the Dalit respondents who studied above matriculation had less in opinion as compared with illiterates as afore mentioned views. In the case of the village II Dalit respondent's views regarding the consciousness (assertion) is very less in compare with the village I. In addition those who studied up to matriculation have agreed this views as compared to above illiterate and above matriculation.
With regard to political consciousness and mobilization is the prime reason for Dalit assertion and identity resulted into caste conflicts from one region to another region as we have already witnessed conflicts that have been occurred during 1995, 1996, 1997. Thus, the middle level educated people who are having high level consciousness (assertion) in terms of denial of imposed identity, and reconstruction of past glory and recent past political consciousness is quiet evident, as compared to other educational background.

Table 3.2
Age-wise views of Dalit respondents on causes of caste consciousness (assertion)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Village I</th>
<th></th>
<th>Village II</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reconstruct Denial of Political Reconstruct Denial of Political ion of past imposed. ion of past imposed conscious conscious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>5 (18.5)</td>
<td>10 (37)</td>
<td>12 (44.4)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1 (3.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>5 (35.7)</td>
<td>7 (50)</td>
<td>2 (14.3)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4 (33.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>5 (22.7)</td>
<td>12 (54.5)</td>
<td>5 (22.7)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2 (15.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>2 (50)</td>
<td>2 (50)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 60</td>
<td>1 (33.3)</td>
<td>1 (33.3)</td>
<td>1 (33.3)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18 (25.7)</td>
<td>32 (45.7)</td>
<td>20 (28.6)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>9 (15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: figures in bracket are percentages

In case of age wise views of Dalits respondents regarding the causes of consciousness (assertion). The age group 31-40 of Dalits from the both the villages asserted for their original identity than other age groups. While the denial of imposed identity can be seen among the age group of 41-50 than other age groups who belonging to the both the villages. As far as political consciousness and political mobilization is concerned, the age group of 20 to 30 who are young and dynamic to mobilize under the able leadership of Dr. Krishnaswamy (leader of Pudhiya Tamizhagam) and some extent got involved in the during caste clashes. Thus consciousness (assertion) is very high not only during caste conflictual situation but also aftermath of caste clashes is quiet evident. Therefore the middle age group (i.e 41-50) are more conscious (assertive) not only in terms of denial of imposed identity
but also reconstruction of proclaiming past glory and having political consciousness is evident in above mentioned table. Moreover, this group not only had lived during old generation but also with the new generation and being experienced with caste conflicts situation.

Table 3.3
Income - wise views of Dalit respondents on causes of caste consciousness (assertion)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income level</th>
<th>Village I</th>
<th>Village II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reconstruc-</td>
<td>Denial of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tion of past</td>
<td>imposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 1500</td>
<td>4 (44.4)</td>
<td>4 (44.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1501-2000</td>
<td>4 (25)</td>
<td>8 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2500</td>
<td>9 (30)</td>
<td>12 (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3000 &amp; above</td>
<td>1 (6.7)</td>
<td>8 (53.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18 (25.7)</td>
<td>32 (45.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: figures in bracket are percentages

The income wise of Dalit respondents with regard to views on caste consciousness (assertion). The Dalits respondents from both the villages who are getting monthly income of Rs 1500 to Rs.2500 have claimed the past identity than imposed identity. While the above Rs.3000 income category group working in government, private sector like limited companies and own the petty business have the more political consciousness than botheration of identities whether its imposed or proclaimed identity. Thus, the real mediator or victims of caste conflicts are middle level income group than low and high level income group. Here, the former ought to depend upon caste Hindus for their livelihood, where as latter scare about their personal remarks in the government sectors.
Table 3.4
Education - wise views of caste Hindu respondents on causes of Dalit consciousness (assertion)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Village I</th>
<th>Village II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youth retaliation</td>
<td>Mobilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>1 (25)</td>
<td>2 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>7 (29.2)</td>
<td>12 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 11</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>9 (22.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8 (20)</td>
<td>23 (57.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: figures in bracket are percentages.

When asked whether Dalits assert for their rights and resist against the discriminatory behaviour of caste Hindus, 26.6 percent of the caste Hindu respondents from both the villages expressed that previously Dalits used to show their resistance towards Hindus latently. However, manifestation of resistance has started to be more visible these days by the emergence of youth mobilization among the Dalit community. This has been prevalent in the villages dominated by the Dalits themselves. Interestingly, more than 80 percent of the caste Hindu respondents have stated that Dalit’s struggle against the caste Hindus has become very powerful under the leadership of many Dalit leaders like Emmanuel Sekaran, Krishnaswamy, John Pandian, and Pasupathi Pandian. Reservation policies in favour of the Dalits was given some space for Dalit assertion, as has been stated by 26.6 percent of caste Hindus respondents. Above all, educational achievement and economic (specially employment and Income) and political mobilization among Dalits have paved the way for Dalit unity and assertion according to 53 percent of the caste Hindu respondents.
Table 3.5
Age-wise views of caste Hindu respondents on causes of Dalit consciousness (assertion)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Village I</th>
<th>Village II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Views of respondents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youth retaliation</td>
<td>Mobilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>2 (13.3)</td>
<td>10 (66.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>2 (20)</td>
<td>6 (60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>2 (25)</td>
<td>4 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>1 (20)</td>
<td>2 (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 60</td>
<td>1 (50)</td>
<td>1 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8 (20)</td>
<td>23 (57.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even the age group of 20-30 and 31-40 of caste Hindus respondents belong to both the villages have endorsed about the Dalit consciousness (assertion) precisely because of Dalit youth are having very much consciousness as compared to previous generation. For instance, latently the Dalits old generation used to show their resistance against the caste Hindus but the manifestation of existence shown by the younger generation against caste Hindus status quoism which includes, the all the spheres of social life. Similarly the same age group further revealed about the recent political mobilization under the leadership Dr. Krishnaswamy is one of the main instigator of caste consciousness and hatred against them and which in turn resulted into caste conflict as witnessed from 1995 onwards. Finally least number of caste Hindus respondents do endorsed that protective discrimination policies are basis for their caste consciousness and social tension among them. Thus 57 years of independence of continuous Dalits struggle generated the caste consciousness and identity formation but somehow the government positive discrimination policies have did influence on Dalit consciousness and resistance against caste Hindu domination is quiet remarkable above said views are concerned.
Table 3.6
Income-wise views of caste Hindu respondents on causes of Dalit consciousness
(assertion)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income level</th>
<th>Views of respondents</th>
<th>Village I</th>
<th>Village II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youth retaliation</td>
<td>Mobilization</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1501-2000</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2500</td>
<td>5 (29.4)</td>
<td>8 (47.1)</td>
<td>3 (17.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2501-3000</td>
<td>3 (13)</td>
<td>15 (65.2)</td>
<td>3 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 (20)</td>
<td>23 (57.5)</td>
<td>6 (15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, income-wise views of caste Hindu respondents falling under Rs 2000 and above Rs 3000 to the two villages have accepted that the youth retaliation and political mobilization are major causes for consciousness (assertion) among Dalits as compared to their old generation. This view is strongly endorsed by the village I of the caste Hindus respondents than village II. At the same time, the Dalit continuous struggle against the caste Hindus under the leadership of many people like Emmanuel Shekharan, John Pandian and presently Dr. Krishnaswamy might be one of the bases for the consciousness and resultant manifested conflicts among these two caste groups. This view was very much endorsed by the caste Hindu respondent belonging to the village II than Village I. Very small percent of respondents from both the village have gave their view that the protective discrimination policies are also one of the reasons for Dalit assertion. Hence, these aforementioned observations give inferences that recent assertive young Dalits and their political mobilization through the able Dalit leadership are main bases for Dalit consciousness (assertion) which in turn result into dynamics of caste conflicts between Dalits and caste Hindus which is quiet evident in the studied villages.

The caste consciousness and conflicts in the Southern districts of Tamil Nadu have largely been attributed to the increase in the economic and political autonomy of the Thevars and Pallars. Since the mid 1990's, the Pallars have begun to support a new
political leadership, unaligned to the mainstream political parties. This, in fact, prompted the formation of the Deverdra Kula Velalar Federation (DKVF) led by Dr. K. Krishnaswamy, a member of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. As stated earlier, his strategy is based on harnessing the collective strength of the scheduled castes as a whole and utilizing the existing law and order machinery to bring justice to the victims of the caste violence. In other words, he believes in the democratic means of protest and struggle, which in his opinion can solve the problems of the caste violence and atrocities committed on the Dalits. This has also been endorsed by a large majority of the Dalits respondents from both the studied villages.

Table No. 3.7
Views of Dalits respondents’ on the purpose of shift of caste organization into political organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Political Formation</th>
<th>Views of the respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Village 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Social reform alone cannot uplift Dalits</td>
<td>11 (15.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Dalit leaders tired of long struggle for social reform</td>
<td>6 (8.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Power hunger of Dalits leaders</td>
<td>8 (11.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Self confidence of Dalits leaders to form their own government</td>
<td>17 (24.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 1&amp;2</td>
<td>7 (10.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Any other</td>
<td>21 (30.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.8
Views of Dalits on Independent Political Organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Views of Dalit respondents on reasons for independent political organisation</th>
<th>Views on independent Dalit political organisation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Village I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receipt of emergence and progress of Dalit political parties by Dravidian parties</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(23.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalit representatives from reserve being puppets Hindus leaders and unable to take up Causes of Dalits</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(16.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The indifference of Dravidian political parties and their governments to the post 1990s case conflicts and Atrocities against the Dalits</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(20.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous Dalit consciousness and identity formation</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(26.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The upward mobility of few Dalits and marginality of other Dalits</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(11.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the above</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, about 50 per cent of respondents have expressed optimistic opinion on Dalit leaders and their confidence to form government. As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, the Dalit political movements vis-à-vis political parties have been playing, since the 1990s, vital roles with regard Dalit issues, either atrocities or conflict situation or developmental issues. Hence, the consolidation of different Dalit movements is coming together irrespective of their sub-caste differences to show their solidarity for
Dalit upliftment. From the current scenario, it may be expected that these Dalit political parties may capture power like BSP in Uttar Pradesh.

In addition the above Tables also demonstrates that Dalits need independent political organization for their socio-economic and political development. There are several reasons to have the aforesaid view. One reason is that that Dalits have been used as puppets or merely vote bank despite their huge population, which comes around more than 20 percent of the total population of the Tamil Nadu. Nearly one-third, (30.8 per cent) of Dalit respondents from both the villages have expressed that the emergence of consciousness and identity formation among Dalits has resulted into today’s formation of the independent Dalit political parties for their socio-economic and political equality. In addition, 24.3 percent Dalit respondents from both villages opined that the Dravidian political parties have been deceiving the progress of Dalits in the past.

Another reason is the inability of the Dalit representatives from the reserve constituencies to express the grievances of the Dalits and their being puppets in the hands of caste Hindu political parties resulting into their political marginalisation for several decades. This would be one of the reasons to establish their own political organization or parties. This is very much connected with the upward mobility of the Dalits, on the one hand, and their marginalisation on the other, which has led to increase of atrocities on the Dalits. Thus, it may be concluded that the emergence of contemporary independent Dalit political parties is an offshoot of the movements that had already been organised by the Dalit leaders during the end of the nineteenth century.

The number of deaths and loss of property suffered by the non-Brahmins, especially the Dalits, can prove the fact that there is growing defense of caste consciousness, assertion, identity formation and resistance among the Dalits in the region and in the villages covered in the present study. In the past, the victims of caste conflicts were mostly Dalits, but the situation has changed due to high level Dalit assertion and retaliation against the caste Hindus. In particular, the Pallars or Devendrakula Vellalars in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu, who had all along been silent victims of atrocities perpetrated by caste Hindus, especially Thevars, hit back with a vengeance in several areas. During caste conflict situations, the solidarity and identity formation of Dalits is higher compared to rest of the time as is evident.
from the following table. In fact, the views of the respondents given in the following table are on the specific issues of Dalits alone for fighting for Dalits cause.

**Table. 3.9**

**Views of Dalit respondents on Identity assertion during caste conflicts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.no</th>
<th>Dalit alone can fight for Dalit cause</th>
<th>Village-1</th>
<th>Village-2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Caste Identity</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(25.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cultural Identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Class Identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Political Identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Caste and Class identity</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(42.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(32.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Any other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that about 35 percent of the Dalit respondents from both the villages have given caste identity as main reason for identity assertion. Similarly, about 46.4 percent of respondents from village II, compared to 25 per cent such respondents from village I have opined about caste as the stake of identity assertion. But in the case of the rural society in India, both caste and class are intertwined as stated earlier. This is also supported by the responses given in this table. More precisely, 25.8 per cent Dalit respondents from both the studied villages have mentioned caste and class together as the basis for identity of the Dalits. In addition,
only a few respondents have mentioned about culture and political organisation or party as the basis or form of Dalit identity.

Further, with regard to degree of caste consciousness, which may not be the same for all the time, 36 percent of the Dalit respondents from both the villages were of the view that it used to rise high, especially during conflict situation. The caste consciousness manifested in the form of unity or solidarity was much higher than that of in normal times, for the reason that the sense of belongingness united the Dalits, irrespective of intra caste tension or conflict existing among them.

Again, about 32.7 percent of Dalit respondents from both the villages have given reasons like the dynamic nature of society for the shift of Dalit's collective mobilization from latent form to the manifest form during the conflict situation. But 44.3 percent of Dalit respondents from village I, expressing such view is much higher than such respondents (15 per cent) from village II. Again, a small percentage (9.83 per cent) of respondents from both the villages have been of the view that educational level, economic independence, political mobilization, protective discriminative policies and assertive leadership happen to be the basis of caste solidarity among the Dalits.

Finally, only 5.73 per cent respondents from the both the villages have mentioned about the social, economic, political and psychological deprivation faced by them for decades together as the main cause of caste consciousness along with caste solidarity among the Dalits not only during the conflict situation but rest of the time. Even then, feeling of solidarity during the conflictual situation is higher than in ordinary social situation. About 11.7 percent respondents from village II agreed with this view. Thus, the above reasons may be accepted as the basis and dimensions of the caste solidarity (fusion) existing among the Dalits during the conflict situation though there may be few other reasons also about which we have not probed here.

Actually, new resurgence and uprising of the caste consciousness and formation of caste identity among them is viewed as a social struggle to liberate themselves from the slavery imposed on them over period of thousands of years. The recent social tensions and social conflict are only symptoms of social transition, which can transform Dalits from slavery to bravery. Moreover, the government's actions, which are no better than palliatives, could only treat the symptoms by displaying large deployment of policemen in the disturbed areas and attempt to curtail violence, with the state violence, for a short period. Another interesting point about
social dynamics is that wherever the Dalits are numerically equal to other castes and are educationally better, economically independent, they assert for their identity and shake away the shackles imposed on them. It is not only the upward mobility of the Dalits which shows their resistance towards the caste Hindus but also the marginalized Dalits have started asserting for their rights due to prevalence of the Dalit movements at their rescue in the crisis situation.

Political movements of the Dalits have also provided them an organized platform for their growing resistance to the prevalent practices of "untouchability" in the state. As a result of their consciousness, the Dalits have been demanding equal treatment in temple festivals, and have refused to carry out ritually demeaning tasks. They also demand their access to the public water source and claim an equal share of public goods and village properties. The caste-Hindus have responded by "clinging more resolutely to their caste as a way of affirming their superiority." The People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), the country's largest civil rights organization had concluded in its 1997 report on the caste clashes in Tamil Nadu by saying that the "Dalits were the worst affected in terms of property loss and physical injuries sustained" and that the "increased political consciousness amongst the Dalits regarding their fundamental social, political and economic rights expressed in terms of demands for social equality and equitable distribution of resources played a major role in the attacks against them."

Conclusion

The emergence of Dalit consciousness along caste lines and assertive identity is not a new phenomenon in Tamil Nadu. Indeed, since Bhakti movement to twentieth century pre-independent and post independent periods, Dalit movements have played significant role that reinforces the recent emergence of upraising Dalit consciousness and formation of caste identity. Beginning with the socio-religious movements like Bhakti movement, Tamil Buddhist movement and Ambedkarite movement to the establishment of the Dalit political parities, all these have aimed at activating the Dalit masses in the self-assertion and collective consciousness towards their liberation. Iyothee Thass and later on Laxmi Narasu, Appadurai, N.Shivraj, etc. also brought in a

rational religious flavour to the Dalit movement. Moreover, the Dalit Movements really got tremendous development in India, precisely because of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and his contemporaries like Thatha Rettamalai Srinivasan, M.C. Raja and Thandhai N. Shivaraj etc. Among all the leaders, Dr. Ambedkar and Buddha have become positive symbol for the Dalit assertion against the inegalitarian system called caste. After independence, the Dalit assertion and protest against the prejudicial practice of caste inequality has been opposed by Immanuel Shekaran, Peter Perumal, Sundhararasanar, Ilaya Perumal, Dalit Ezhilmalai, Loganathan, Anbu Ponnoviyam, etc. Although earlier movements have paved the way for Dalit consciousness against atrocious system, but a crucial factor in dynamics of caste conflicts had been the growth of Dalit consciousness, which triggered a Dalit movement in the recent years.

The Pudhiya Thamizhagam (PT) and Dalit Panthers of India (DPI) have created self-awareness, a sense of self-respect and newfound confidence among the Dalits of Tamil Nadu. The protest movement waged by the Dalits has played a crucial role in mobilizing the people and developing confidence in them. The Dalit movement has also taught them to be self-reliant among them and thereby reject their dependence on others for the amelioration of their own conditions. This has been found in the studied areas as well as villages where the Dalit movement’s role and the protest of Dalits against practice of discriminations by caste Hindus. On top of it, a sense of self-respect and pride has come to occupy in the Dalit minds of the studied villages as they started realizing about their origin, social status, economic weakness and political sub-ordination in the existing social structure. Moreover, The number of deaths and loss of property suffered by the non-Brahmins and especially the Dalits, can prove the fact that there is growing defense of caste consciousness, assertion, identity formation and resistance among the Dalits in the region and in the villages covered in the present study. In the past, the victims of caste conflicts were mostly Dalits, but the situation has changed due to high level Dalit assertion and retaliation against the caste Hindus.