CHAPTER - 1
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Indian social reality has been interpreted in terms of consensus model but contrary to this there is also a dialectical approach to study the same. Both these models or approaches deal with the co-operating as well as conflicting inter-relationship among the various caste groups who, on the one hand, have monopolized the scarce resources of power and privilege and, on the other, those who lack access to these resources. Hence, the role of conflict needs to be emphasized in studying Indian society in a comprehensive manner. In this regard, contemporary dynamics of changing relations among various castes need be paid special attention. The central feature of Hindu society and the resultant social inequality is the inherent source of conflict. Social mobility also entails perpetual conflict. The economic, political and social factors are responsible for conflict and, so also, are the aspirations of different caste groups for raising their rank equally to the others. With peripheral changes, the existence of caste is continuing to generate new dimensions of conflicts. The changes have, by and large been limited and have not addressed the positive intractable features of the caste system. Instead these have created new caste prejudices, which have resulted in caste conflicts and also have been subject to compromises at various levels.

Therefore, in the proposed study an attempt has been made to identify the factors like western impact, new institutional arrangements such as representative democracy, fundamental rights, technological improvements, land reforms, the government's protective discrimination policies, etc, that have led to the historical resurgence of the Dalit consciousness. It is proposed to find out how the present day Dalit consciousness moulded itself into a more militant and self-substantiating identity. The study also further examines the contributions made by the aforesaid changed socio-political realities which have made the Dalits as a strong political entity, against the inequalitarian domination and exploitation of the caste Hindus.

Perspectives on caste system in India

The perspectives on the study of caste system include indological or ideological, social anthropological and sociological perspectives. The indological or
ideological perspective takes its cue from the scriptures about the origin, purpose and future of the caste system, whereas the cultural perspective of the social anthropologist looks the origin and growth of the caste system(s), its development, and the process of change in its structure or social structural arrangements as well as in the cultural system also view caste system not only as unique phenomenon found in India, but also in ancient Egypt, medieval Europe, etc. But sociological perspective views caste system as a phenomenon of social inequality. Society especially, Hindus social system has certain structural aspects, which distribute members in different social positions. It also shows its concerns with growth of the caste system. However, each of the three perspectives has different kind of understanding of the society, particularly the institution called caste.

Apart from hierarchy, caste system also has its system of stratification. As the stratification system is not uni-dimensional, so is the concept of inequality. Rather, both involve three major components namely property, power and prestige, which are intertwined in complicated ways. In this context, the work of Davis may be cited, who has mentioned that inequality exists in a society due to unequal distribution of power, prestige and reward. But inequality in the caste system is unique, where it is not only based on unequal distribution of power but also such distribution itself is governed by birth of the persons in different castes. So also, the distribution of power among different castes is based on differential ranks in the traditional hierarchy of the caste system. The social stratification particularly in Indian society tends to appropriate a caste system. This is the system of ominous social strata, which tends to be mutually exclusive units (castes) and in which it is not possible for any individual to move out of his/ her caste and become a member of another caste. According to Ambedkar, "the fixity of occupations based on heredity is another principle of caste system. Caste system is not merely division of labour, it is also a division of labourers". Like untouchability, the social distance in the caste system is based on the notion of purity-pollution and it forms an indigenous part not only of every north but also of south Indian villages. As Gough points out, "The formal ranking of castes is defined in

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terms of the belief in ritual purity and pollution. Rules of social distance between castes stem primarily from this belief.

Hence, both the stratification system and inequality prevail in the Indian society. Dalits or the scheduled castes everywhere in the country usually live in a separate colony specifically meant for them. In the case of South India, especially in Tanjore area in Tamil Nadu, Beteille describes that “the untouchables” (contemporary Dalits) live in separate streets or quarters distinctively known as the ‘Cheri’. Further the system, which also shapes the behaviour and attitudes of the dominant castes towards Dalits, is often reflected through physical repression of the latter.

Dumont argued that in the caste system, status of a caste is determined not by the economic and the political privileges but by the ritualistic legitimation of authority, i.e., in the caste system, ritual norms encompass the norms of power and wealth. However, the hierarchical concept stems from the opposition between the pure and impure which are the organising principles of Indian society. But for Dumont, it is the organising concept. Thus, the application of these concepts of structural hierarchy and that of purity and pollution in network of transactions between distinct categories involves, as a concomitant, the concept of ‘social distance’ separating caste categories or cluster of such categories. In addition, Srinivas viewed that this network of relationships constitutes a structure or ‘structural distance’ between castes. Based on this ‘structural distance’, the caste categories had been identified and adhered to by the other categories. This is normally achieved through the principle of caste endogamy in marriage and through ceremonies and customs governing lifestyle. The successful penetration of these boundaries by individuals through convenient manipulations is very much evident in the past and even to some extent, in the present time.

In addition, Beteille has said that no social system is absolutely closed. There is always some scope, however limited, for alternative combinations. Further, he has referred to some changes in the caste system, for instance, changes in structural

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distance, in style of life, in commensal relations, in endogamy, etc. In the past, structural distance among castes was maintained not only through the pursuit of different life styles but, by interdictions, through prohibitions of various kinds on marriage, commensality and social interchange in general. Anyway, all these changes in the caste system, according to him, are the result of geographical mobility, western education, creation of new occupation to which recruitment is, based at least in principle on factors other than caste, like processes of modernisation and political participation.

Ambedkar, on his part described the implication of the religious sanctions which supported the caste system. He has quoted Durkheim’s theory that religion is considered to be sacred. A large number of people in India follow the religiously sanctified nature of caste system as sacred and social in nature. Further he has delineated that the Hindus are the only people in the world whose social order is such as, “That the relation of man to man is consecrated by religion and made sacred, eternal and inviolate... That is what has given caste its abiding strength to defy the ravages and ‘the onslaughts of time.’” In the Indian context the term ‘class’, as used by Ambedkar, exposes another level of differentiation within the caste hierarchy, and it has no indication of social mobility. In fact, Ambedkar’s stress was on underlining the inflexibility of and the absence of channels of social mobility in the Hindu social structure. Thus, unlike in the Marxist sense, the term ‘class’, in this context, serves to accent the relative proximity of bunches of castes in relation to caste groups above or below them. Therefore the caste Hindu is both caste consciousness and class conscious. For instance, “Whether he has caste consciousness or class consciousness depends upon the caste with which he comes into conflict. If the caste with which he comes into conflict is within the class to which he belongs he is caste conscious. If the caste is outside the class to which he belongs he is class conscious. Any one who needs evidence on this point may study the non-Brahman Movement in the Madras and Bombay presidency”.

Ambedkar was also intrigued by the question of the origin of the caste system. Indeed, after evaluating several intellectual interpretations on caste, he came to the conclusion that the emergence of a caste system was the result of the superimposition

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9 Ibid., pp.265-266.
of endogamy over exogamy. And he made an important point when he said that it was a mistake to try to define caste as an isolated unit by itself, rather than as a group with definite relations to the system of castes as a whole. Further, he viewed that the caste in the singular made no sense, and 'caste' can exist only in the plural number. Caste to be real can exist only by disintegrating a group. The genius of caste is to divide and disintegrate. Caste is apparent as a hereditary group with a fixed ritual status, whereas a class is a category of people who have similar economic conditions in the society. Caste system is characterised by 'cumulative inequality' but class system is characterised by 'dispersed inequality'. Caste and class are both 'status group' in Weber's phraseology. A 'status group' is a collection of persons who share a distinctive life style and a certain consciousness of kind. According to Weber, class, status groups, and parties are phenomena of distribution of power within a community. Power along with the 'economic interest', 'social honour' and 'prestige' should also be taken into account, because these dimensions may be basic to political or economic power. In other words, Weber distinguished between 'classes' and 'status groups'. For him, classes are stratified on the basis of their relation to production and acquisition of goods, whereas status groups are distinguished on the principle of consumption of goods, which represent their special life style.

Beteille, on the basis of his study of caste and class in Sripuram village in south India has found that class do not constitute a basis for communal and political action. Referring to this, Leach has viewed that while caste assumed economic and political functions and compete with other castes, it defies caste principles. Thus, caste is a social and cultural category but class and power are subdued in it. It is an identity, a label or more than that. In relational terms, Leach has stressed that caste does not exist by itself. Rather, a caste can only be recognised in contrast to other castes with which its members are closely involved in a network of relationships. These networks of relationships extend to economic, religious and political spheres.

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10 Ibid., pp. 268-269.
Bailey, however, does not accept Dumont’s statement that religious ideas rather than the economic values establish the rank of each caste. Further, he has argued that if we accept this statement, it would mean that changes in control over economic resources could take place without causing changes in rank. This is only partially true. It may be true for Brahmans and untouchables but not for the intermediate castes. In one of the studies conducted by Bailey in Bisipara, he has found that change in wealth is followed by change in rank.\(^\text{14}\) The conventional view given by Majumdar, explains caste as a closed class.\(^\text{15}\) Contrary to that, Srinivas has viewed that movement of people along with their caste status especially positional change is possible through the process of sanskritisation and westernisation but these do not bring structural change, i.e., change in the structure arrangement of caste system. Later, this view has been criticised by Lynch’s study on the politics of untouchability. He has explained that it is not always the lower caste adopting the process of sanskritisation for rather their political assertion through ideology of protest against the existing system which facilitate their social mobility.\(^\text{16}\)

In the ‘caste resilience’ (recovering the original condition) proposition, the spread of modernisation, westernisation, industrialisation or technological improvements and other democratisation processes tend to activate and enlarge rather than restrict the process of caste functions. These also contribute to the caste’s organisation, mobilisation and fusion of ranks contrary to the aforesaid view given by Bailey and others about adoption of caste resilience. In modern India, it takes the form of fusion of caste segments. In this process, the nature of caste no doubt undergoes some transformation. But opposed to ‘caste resilience’ proposition is the ‘structural adoption’ proposition, which holds that through formation of caste associations, caste federations and caste clusters, castes lose their original character and assume class like forms.\(^\text{17}\) For instance, Gould holds that adaptive structure of caste in India is evident not only in cities but in the villages too where the caste system continues to


perform functions of security, solidarity and preferential treatment to groupings of people. For him, caste functioning as adaptive structures in a modern Indian society can be examined at three levels such as political, economic and social. At the political level, both in cities and villages, caste, communalism and political factionalism are inextricably interwoven. Parliamentary democracy, linked to the secret ballot, means that the manipulation of numbers, resources and favours with successful election to offices now occupy an important place. Indeed, caste affects political issues and political decisions; and, no wonder, caste will continue to be exploited at all political levels. At the economic level, the position depends on pervasive caste structures and on inter-caste relations in villages particularly. And at the social level, caste continues to be important in terms of determining the style of living as well as the rank positions of its members in which marriages are to be settled. Though the old ritual and occupational functions of caste are rapidly disappearing, yet caste endogamy is still preserved, and the idea of the structure’s sanctity has been retained and adapted to the needs of modern social indexing.

According to 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. In addition, the class element in the social stratification in India is connected with the caste stratification. Singh has viewed that Indian sociologists have tried to associate caste stratification with the rural and class stratification with the urban situations. It is, however, overlooked that caste and class are two systems of stratification, which have persisted, in a dialectical relationship in the Indian social systems. Parvathamma in her study in Karnataka has found direct correlation between caste and land holding. The land holding pattern in Karnataka at the moment is that the dominant castes own much of the cultivatable lands in the villages. She has further argued that the most

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ambitious bill on land reforms is yet to be implemented and even when they are implemented the situation would not usher in radical changes. Moreover, she has mentioned that all those who are cultivating land on lease or sharecropping are mostly people from dominant castes. Once the policy of ‘tiller is the owner of the soil’ is given effect to, the all-pervasive control of dominant castes over others will naturally continue.

Omvedt in her study has described the historical aspect of land control its transfer and its impact on power of the agrarian classes in India.\textsuperscript{22} She has also mentioned that under the colonial rule, though the needs of capitalist development were laid and the feudal form of caste was given a decisive blow the correlation between class and caste by and large continued to exist with high castes, usually the so called ‘twice born’ continuing to be lords of the land, money lender merchants, bureaucrats and professionals, and middle and low castes mainly toilers. Nowadays, the development of capitalist agriculture in India has broken down this old correlation between class and caste and has reconstituted a new and more complex relationship between the two.

\textbf{Changes in the Caste System after Independence}

It is often said that numerous types of changes have taken place in the caste system, especially after Independence. These changes have been attributed to a number of factors which themselves may be regarded as both qualitative and quantitative. We have discussed below some of these factors that have brought changes in the caste system after Independence. After Independence, a number of avenues such as the spread of education, growth of industry, diversification of the occupational structure including growth in the white-collar jobs especially in urban areas, systematisation of census enumeration, etc. have brought about far-reaching changes in Indian society. Such a conclusion is also based on the rapid growth of cities and the developed means of transport and communications, resulting into more and more people migrating from villages to towns and cities.

Although all these processes have not yet produced desired changes in the society, yet it may be mentioned here that in the past the social hierarchy had been operating to a great extent. For example, due to the migration of Brahmins to the

\textsuperscript{22} Gail Omvedt (ed.), \textit{Land, Caste and Politics in Indian States}, Authors Guild Publishers, Delhi, 1982.
towns, the non-Brahmins and other castes have refused to show the same amount of respect to them, which they showed before. Another positive change that has occurred is weakening of the inter-caste dining and drinking taboos. Srinivas argues that the non-traditional avenues for achieving upward social mobility are thrown open to every sections of Indian society. Some of these are education, administration, judiciary and legislative measures. It has also been stated that through this process, the Indian society has moved, though to a marginal degree, “from a segmented and particularistic social order to a fluid and universalistic order”.  

Social mobility among the Dalits

In the backdrop of the mentioned changes, Dalits have also tried to gain mobility through different channels. In fact the Dalits have established a regular dialogue with the different institutions emerged at different intervals in the Indian society. They have also changed their strategies of struggle accordingly. In spite of that a fact may be stated here that the so-called lower castes groups including the untouchables or the scheduled castes were deliberately denied, in the past, of means for achieving social mobility especially through sanskritisation or westernisation. Hence, they resorted, especially since the second half of the nineteenth century, to the alternative means like collective mobilisation and politicisation for achieving successful upward social mobility in Indian society. Hardgrave Jr. has examined the solidarity, cohesion and integrated political culture among the Nadars of Tamil Nadu. In fact, their integrated political culture gave rise to the emergence of their strong caste association for social, economic and political upliftment of the community. Similarly, Lynch has observed the process of social mobility through political means among the Jatavs (Chamars) of Uttar Pradesh. Another example of the successful upward social mobility may be cited of the Mahars, an untouchable caste of Maharashtra. Though a number of Mahar leaders had tried since the middle of the nineteenth century to organise their brethren in different parts of the State, it was Dr. Ambedkar, the saviour of Dalits, who used politics for ameliorating their social

conditions. He organised them into a political force and first formed the Indian Labour Party and then All India Scheduled Caste Federation, which was ultimately used as a political means towards achieving the goal of social equality not only for Mahars but also for other Dalit communities in the country.  

In the case of South India particularly in Tamil Nadu, the history of conversion movement is relatively old. As stated earlier, the social restrictions and ill-treatment meted out to the Nadars by the Brahmins and other castes of Tamil Nadu would throw some more light on caste conflicts, in the state, continuing over more than one and half centuries. In the middle of the nineteenth century, a mass movement brought majority of the rural Nadars in the southern region. Not only that but also a few thousands of the so-called lower castes people had converted to Buddhism much before Ambedkar embraced Buddhism on 14th October 1956 in Nagpur, Maharashtra. They converted to Buddhism by accepting it as an egalitarian religion based on equality, liberty and fraternity. Similarly, the mass conversion in Meenakshipuram played a significant role in changing the history of Tamil Nadu. There are hundred Dalit families who converted to Islam in 1981. Indeed, the major reasons were humiliation and caste discrimination perpetuated by the caste Hindus against Dalits. Subsequently, this mobilization affected the entire social relationship between caste Hindus and Dalits. 

Side by side, a number of social legislations have been enacted, since independence, to ameliorate the conditions of the Scheduled Castes or Dalits. For instance, the Untouchability (Offences) Act 1955, which was enacted in pursuance of the provision of Article 17 of the Constitution, outlaws imposition of all forms of the disabilities of the Dalits on the ground of untouchability in virtually all fields of activity, except home life, private religious ceremonies and private employment. Similarly, to protect them from commission of the physical violence or the various forms of atrocities, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of the Atrocities) Act, 1989 has been adopted. Again, Articles 330 and 332 of the constitution provide the Dalits with political reservation in Lok Sabha and Vidhan

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27 Keer 1991, ibid.,

Sabha. The claims of Dalits in the government jobs have been secured through Article 335 of the Indian Constitution. They have also been provided reservation in educational institutions. It is not out of context to mention that some of the changes leading to even limited upward social mobility have occurred among the Scheduled Castes due to the above mentioned measures taken by the Government and also due to their own efforts.

Scope of the Study

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. In the present study, the researcher intends to analyse the forms and dynamic nature of the caste conflicts between the Dalits and the caste Hindus (the backward castes) in Tamil Nadu. The study also proposes to find out the nature and magnitude of atrocities committed on the former by the latter. The power structure in the state has shifted from Brahmins to non-Brahmins over a period of time and the resultant caste conflicts in the state have decisively influenced the prevailing complex socio-economic relations between the Dalits and the non-Brahmin caste Hindu landowners upon whom the landless and impoverished Dalits are dependent. Though the Dalits constitute more than 19 per cent 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.

It is significant to note that the popularity of these dominant non-Brahmin castes and their 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 Mr. Moorthy, the ‘Ambedkar People’s Federation’ led by
Mr. Balasundaram, the Republican Party of India (RPI), the 'Dalit Sena' led by Mr. Sundarakesan, the 'Adi-Thamizhar Peravai' (ATP), led by Mr. Adhiyaman, the 'Dalit Panthers of India' (DPI) led by Mr. Thirumavalavan and 'Pudhiya Tamhizhagam' led by Dr. 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, as mentioned above.

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.

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 three
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.29 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,30 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 Kodiyankulam (1999),
(2000), Pudukottai (2000), etc.

29 Andre Beteille quoted in J. Michael Mahar (ed.), The Untouchables in Contemporary India,
30 Report of the Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe 1957-58 and quoted in
R.C. Jiloha (ed.) The Native Indian, In Search of Identity, Blumoon Books, Delhi, 1995,
p.124.

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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-à-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.

In brief, the present study will unearth other important issues pertaining to the Dalits in the State, besides studying the caste conflicts. These include (1) How far the caste relation has been modified because of its changing character as it has lost most of its traditional attributes or still in the process of continuity? (2) Is caste the basis of social formation and conflicts or it infers class and power as well? Can these emerging social tensions be addressed only as law and order issue? or even as a class form of agrarian conflict? Or is it a politically motivated domination or is it a purely social and systematic domination over the weaker by the stronger? (3) Is it possible to look at the consolidation of Dalit sub-castes into the identity formation through political movement, which seeks to improve their socio-economic status ultimately against atrocious system? (4) What are the factors responsible for the change and shift in the level of mobilization in terms of atrocities and injustices perpetuated on them? (5) Does caste consciousness perpetuate inherited caste related inequalities and resultant conflicts?; In what way is the employment of violence as a means of caste
equality by the Dalits and its impact upon the state of the conflict? (6) Is it upward mobility of Dalits, on the one hand, and relative socio-economic and political deprivation (or) marginality of Dalits, on the other hand, which has created the resentment of the caste Hindus and has led to a complex series of caste conflicts and atrocities (7) Whether internal contradiction on conflicts of social relation is solved within it or some external influences are exercised on the people for the purpose?

Major objectives

- To explain the formation of region – specific Dalit consciousness and identity formation in the state of Tamil Nadu.
- To explain how the caste consciousness and the process of identity formation as well as socio-economic, political and ideological structure have influenced the Dalits against atrocious system.
- To analyse the changing relationship during a period of fundamental economic change and growing politicisation among the lowest sections of Tamil society.
- To study the role of organisations, especially caste organisations of the communities, in the escalation of tension and conflict.
- To analyse the socio-economic factors behind the increasing cases of caste conflicts.
- To find out the nature and dynamics of the conflicts between Dalits and caste Hindus in the state.
- To know about the degree of variation between upward social mobility and marginality of the Dalits succumb to the phenomenally increased atrocities and resistance resulting into conflicts.
- To investigate the nature and magnitude of atrocities committed on the Dalits by the caste Hindus, especially the dominant middle level castes like Thevar, Vanniyar, Gounder, etc.

And finally to inquire into the ways and means adopted by the government to deal with the cases of tensions and conflicts and also atrocities committed on Dalits in the state.
Conceptual explanations, Literature survey and Theoretical framework

The concepts like 'relative deprivation', 'reference group', and social conflict are inter related, and to social conflict. For instance, the very assumption of the former is that social conflicts emerge importantly when people or their group or community consider themselves relatively deprived viz-a-viz their expectation in comparison to the reference group. And also, the discontent caused by the objectivity as well as subjectively felt relative deprivation in the spheres of social, cultural, economic and political life of individuals ultimately lead to the emergence of social conflicts. To understand these familiar concepts, we have to acknowledge sociologists like Merton\(^\text{31}\) and Runciman\(^\text{32}\) who propounded the above mentioned concepts and later added refinement to them. Although the authors of the *American Soldier* (1949) were the first to use the notion of relative deprivation, it was Merton who systematically developed the concept in relation to reference group theory. Further he applied the concept to analyze social mobility. Later on, Runciman also developed the concept in relation to reference group and problems of inequalities and social justice. Indeed, he was able to demonstrate that political opinions and meanings attached to class membership were a function of reference groups and the associated feelings, possibly of relative deprivation. The pronounced attitudinal changes that can be brought by change in the relative positions of social groups have been shown to be a potent source of political upheaval and revolutionary change. Moreover, the theory of relative deprivation has developed on two lines such as social mobility and social conflict. Thus, in a relational term, the relative deprivation is made the basis of a study of social mobility as occurring through emulation of the positive reference group behaviour. It is important to note that sociologists like M.S.A. Rao applied this theory to delineate the rise of the social movement due to social conflicts among Backward Classes, Dalits, tribals, peasants, women, and religious or sectarian communities in India.\(^\text{33}\) For M.S.A. Rao, the theory of relative deprivation offers a more satisfactory explanation of the genesis of social movement as it is pivoted


\(^{33}\) M.S.A. Rao (ed.) Social Movements in India, Manohar publishers, New Delhi, 1984.
around conflict and cognitive change, motivating people and mobilizing them around certain interests and issues.\textsuperscript{34}

Generally speaking, conflict means the direct and conscious struggle between individuals or groups for the same goal. Defeat of the opponent is seen as vital for achieving the goal. Unlike competition, opponents in conflict are primarily oriented towards each other rather than toward the object they seek. The social process is viewed primarily not in terms of the cooperation of social groups but in terms of man’s aggressiveness. Emphasis is placed on conflict as a creative or at least an inevitable fact of social life rather than as merely a destructive and avoidable deviation. There have been many conflict theorists throughout history, including Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, George Simmel, Karl Marx, Dahrendorf and others who accept that conflict has got positive functions to re-establishing the social system. However, these conflict theorists did not claim to present any general theory of society but emphasized coercion rather than consensus as the cause of social order. Although conflict has always been central to sociological theory and analysis, conflict theory is the label generally attached to the sociological writings of opponents to the dominance of structural functionalism. Its proponents drew on Weber and Marx. Marx views conflict from the economic perspective, giving importance to economic conflict based on the modes-means of production. Collins opines that the conflict theory is distinguished by the fact that it is rooted in the micro-level concerns of individual actors. Indeed, he claims that theoretical root lies in phenomenology. Increasingly, during the 1980’s he turned to outlining a micro-sociological theory, which highlights the role of ‘interaction ritual chains’ as the basic unit in the ordering of societies.

The two main concepts used extensively in this study, are social conflict and social mobility. Hence, it will be pertinent for us to delineate the contours of these two concepts. Co-operation and conflict are the fundamental ways of human interaction. Co-operation is evident when human beings work together for the attainment of the common goals and values. When the goals and values vary and they may not be shared compatibly, human beings strive against one another for their differential attainments resulting into conflict or social conflict.\textsuperscript{35} Various scholars

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p.6.
\textsuperscript{35} P.N.Rastogi, \textit{The Nature and Dynamics of Factional Conflict}, The Macmillan Company of India, Delhi 1975.
have tended to view conflict as an unusual occurrence in the social system. They have also accepted it as an aberration or social disequilibrium that needs to be returned to a homeostatic state. But conflict is not a deviant, pathological or sick behaviour \textit{per se}. Rather, it is natural and inevitable part of all human social relationships. It occurs at all levels, i.e. interpersonal, intra-group and inter-group, and intra-national and inter-national. Thus, conflict is ubiquitous at all levels of human social society.

Marx has been regarded as the pioneering theorist of social conflict. For him, there always exists conflict between owning and non-owning classes in society. People belonging to working class become aware of their exploitation by the owners of the means of production. This sort of class-consciousness leads to class solidarity among them, and culminates into conflict between them and the bourgeoisie or the capitalist class. The conflict theory views society as containing basic inequalities in wealth, power and prestige. Feeling of injustice about rewards and conflict between unequally rewarded groups are the basis of the Marxian form of the conflict model. Marx’s theory of social change has described all human history as an outcome of conflict between opposing social classes.

Weber, on the other hand, has analysed conflict as the arena of power, status and social class. This multidimensional approach has become widespread since the 1950’s. Weber has further insisted that the Conflict cannot be excluded from social life and peace is nothing more than a change in the form of conflict or in the antagonists or in the objects of the conflict, or finally in the chances of selection. Anyway, a conflict theorist sees society as a hierarchy of layers or strata. Within each stratum, the elite shrink so as at the top only a few are able to dominate everyone else. A conflict perspective does not see social stratification as a harmonious one. Instead, the conflict theorist sees social stratification serving the sole purpose of maintaining advantages for those in the upper strata through oppression and exploitation of those in lower strata. As a result, social stratification is now equated with the study of social inequality that signifies that divisions in society are inherently unequal, and involves

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\item J.D. Sendite Dennis and Staroste Ingrid Samdic (eds.), \textit{Conflict Managements and Problem Seeking}. International Application Frances Pinter (Publishers), London. 1987.
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active domination and sub-ordination due to systemic inequalities in social processes and social relationship. Later on, the stress on the need for common values and harmony led a number of social theorists like Warner, Parsons, etc. to consider conflict as a kind of sickness of the social body or system. However, a number of theorists, partly under the influence of Marx and partly under Simmel, were opposed to the prevailing 'harmony model' and have endeavoured to develop a conflict model of society.

The works of Coser (1956), Dahrendorf (1957) and Gluckman (1956) are illustrative of the approach. For instance, Simmel has observed conflict in terms of a process being both internal and external to the individual and to the group. He has also considered it as a part of the dynamics by which some men are drawn together into a group. This inter-weaving of social circles is viewed as part of the dynamics, both of groups and of the individual personalities, which comprise them. He sees change not as a disturbance of a naturally stable thing called society, but stability itself as a temporary balance among forces in interaction. These forces are by definition to be described only in terms of change. Conflict, according to Simmel, is designed to resolve divergent dualism. It is a way of achieving some kind of unity, even if it is through the annihilation of one of the conflicting parties.

On the contrary, Coser attempts to incorporate the analysis of social conflict into structural-functionalism, seeing it as a process of tension management, or as part of a process of reintegration in response to social change. He also explicitly analysed the positive functions of conflict. He makes a distinction between two types of conflict-realistic and non-realistic. The former type is a means towards a specific end. It arises from frustration of specific demand within the relationships and from estimates of gains of the participants. It is directed at the presumed frustrating object. Yet, the functional alternative is possible in this category of conflict. But the latter type of conflict is an end in itself. Though it involves interaction between two or more persons, it is not only occasioned by end or complete elimination of one-the antagonists but also releases tension of at least one of them. Similarly, for MacIver, conflict is a mechanism for the adjustment of new norms. A flexible society in this

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41 Ibid., p.13.
way benefits from conflicts because such behaviour, by helping to create and modify norms, assures its continuance under the changed conditions. Conflict is disruptive also in social groups where. There exists a high frequency of interaction and high personality involvement of the members rather than it is in the groups comprising individuals who participate only segmentally. Finally, he concludes by saying that conflict functions to bring together those who unite against the common enemy and it leads to social solidarity.43

Although Dahrendorf was critical of Marxist's notions of class, he argued that classes in the advanced 'post-capitalist' societies of Britain, Germany and the United States of America were derived 'from positions in associations co-ordinated by authority', and that these societies were therefore characterised by disputes about 'participation in or exclusion from the exercise of authority'. The claims of conflict theory against functionalism were comparatively modest compared with later criticisms.44 For instance, Dahrendorf argued that structural-functionalism was not so much wrong as partial that power or authority within a social system was not simply integrative, something which emerges from the system in order to keep it together, but also divisive, and something which has to be imposed over conflicting interests. At the same time he argued, against Marx, that social conflict was multi-faceted and does not congeal around one central issue.

Thus, according to Dahrendorf, conflicts are based on power which divides the order givers who have an interest in maintaining the status quo and the order takers who have an interest in changing it. Conflict, he says, can be expected within any type of organizations including the socialist one. He further distinguishes between intensity of conflict and violence, and the two dimensions of conflict. The former refers to the degree of involvement of conflicting parties and the latter refers to its manifestation rather than to its causes.45 In the conflict model, different parts of the social systems are interdependent not because of common values, but because of the greater power of certain groups in society to achieve their ends at the expense of others. In the relations between individuals, groups or social classes, there is a dominant class and a subordinate class. Dahrendorf sees the conflict model, which emphasises change,

conflict, and constraint as a balance to the recent emphasis in sociology on the equilibrium or utopian model, which emphasises stability, harmony, and consensus in analysing societies. He has attempted to develop a coercion theory of social stratification. By substituting economic interests through a conception of power, he tried to develop a new conception of class system in which one class is vested with coercive power and they hold a dominant position while another class is denied of any power and hence occupies a subordinate position. He has argued that such forms of stratification are found in social, economic, political and cultural fields and these hierarchical systems and need not be interdependent. 46

Rex also criticizes the earlier conflict theorists for neglecting the large-scale disturbances in the society. In his view, the intensification of conflict might not lead to complete revolution but to compromise and reform, which again might be disturbed by any imbalance in the existing forces. 47 In his study, he subscribes to the view that conflict does not mean random disorder; rather, it refers to meaningful action in pursuit of goals. 48 Further, Gluckman, looking at conflict and social cohesion in an anthropological perspective, and has stated that men quarrel on their certain customary allegiances, but are restrained from violence through other conflicting allegiances, which are also enjoined on them by custom. 49 The result is that conflicts in one set of relationship lead to re-establishment of social cohesion. Thus, conflict in sociological literature has been viewed both as functional and dysfunctional in bringing change or maintaining equilibrium in society or social system.

A few Indian sociologists have also tried to conceptualise tension and conflict in course of their study. For instance, in view of Bose social tension, which includes inter-personal as well as inter-group tensions, is a cause or means. 50 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,

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49 Max Gluckman, Custom and Conflict in Africa, 1956, p.2.
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.\textsuperscript{51}

Tension or social tension has been analysed from the socio-psychological point of view. For instance, Singh has done a socio-psychological study of social tension and conflicts in two U.P. villages.\textsuperscript{52} He has questioned the myth that inter-caste conflicts primarily stem from discriminatory caste values and beliefs. He has analysed the tension and conflict as processes in an organic system. Contrary to this, Ram\textsuperscript{53} 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.\textsuperscript{54} 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.

This dialectical approach has been used by the social scientists to examine the agrarian social stratification within the framework of class structure. One among them is Desai. Combining the economic and historical data with the sociological findings, he has explained the social transformation of the society. Since he has analysed the problems of rural social stratification and class conflict in the framework of agrarian class structure, his findings are very much useful to understand the reality of the present agrarian situation through empirical observation. He is of the view that the

\textsuperscript{51} G.S. Ghurye, Social Tension in India, Popular Prakash, Bombay, 1968, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{53} Nandu Ram, “Social Mobility and Social Conflict in Rural Uttar Pradesh”, Indian Anthropologist, 1979, vol. 5. No. 2.
problem of agrarian system as well as the social structure of the rural society as such is basically a socio-structural problem.\(^55\)

Delineating a contrary fact to Beteille’s view, Venkateswarlu has attempted an analysis of Harijan – Upper Class Conflict in Andhra Pradesh.\(^56\) 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 socio-economic 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.\(^57\)

Michael gives a different analysis of caste conflict and the rise of a Karva elite formation in Sri Lanka.\(^58\) He states that the social status in the past, was not solely dependent on the norm of caste and caste related social distance. It has always been influenced by the differential control of resources, access to positions of authority and


\(^{57}\) Ibid. 106-146.

legislation by the state. 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, Sharma has stated that agriculture is the main source of livelihood in rural India.59 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 share croppers or agricultural labourers.

Accepting power and authority as elements of social stratification, Chitamber60 has pointed out that the social stratification may ‘set the stage’ for inter-stratum rivalry and conflict, which may take various forms but, in general, it results from an up thrust of the lower strata to share equal rights with the upper strata in their place. Such conflict frequently occurs when a stratification system is weakening or is in the process of disintegration and is being subjected to a variety of influential forces such as new ideologies, pressure groups, collective frustration of lower strata, and political and other interest groups within society.

In his analysis of caste and caste conflict in rural society, Mishra61 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.

One more term is violence, which is also useful to discuss the social conflict existing between the caste upper stratum and lower stratum, ‘Violence’ is the term that suffers from a surfeit of meaning because it is often related to, ‘force’, ‘coercion’, ‘aggression’ etc., which are quite different and are combined with purely physical force. Violence inflicting of damage is often intense, uncontrolled, excessive, furious, sudden or seemingly purposeless. Moreover, violence may be collective or individual, active or reactive, intentional or unintentional apparently just or unjust. On the one hand, violence is not a solo performance, but an interaction. It is an interaction that political authorities everywhere seek to monopolize or atleast contain. However, violence or act of atrocities has got close meaning in the contextual scenario. Ram opines, Atrocities against Dalits are rooted in the unequal material and non material opportunity structure in which the under-privileged try to improve their life chances whereas the privileged ones resist that and make all efforts to maintain the status quo. In fact, in contrast to the common belief that the frequency of occurrences of atrocities has decreased after Independence, the Dalits are facing wide-spread atrocities in Independent India, and the situation is deteriorating and violence against Dalits has increased in recent times. Thus earlier, the nature of atrocities was more psychological but now violence against them is more physical in nature as there is a systematic attack on Dalits.

There are other scholars who have seen violence in communitarian way. For instance Fanon in his book, The Wretched of the Earth asserts that, individuals and peoples could become whole again by participating in violent politics. In addition, Sorel comes to the same point of view on violence when he has proclaimed that a class could be resurrected through violence. However, the violence is aggression and coercion through physical assault by the state or upper stratum domination over the

63 In ‘Studying Atrocities on Dalits: Some Theoretico-Methological Explanations’ paper presented to Seminar on ‘Atrocities on SC’s and ST’s in India, Organised by Ambedkar Chair, CSSS/SSS, JNU, New Delhi, 2000, p.6.
66 Cited in Rasheeduddin Khan, op.cit., p.176.
suppressed masses or lower stratum. Here, Fanon remains as the most outspoken proponents of violence as a mechanism for enslaved people. He has discussed violence from the point of view of the oppressed to show why enslaved people do take violence as a means of liberation. In contemporary Indian situation where the oppressors are dominant castes or class or religious majoritarianism who use violent means to prevent social changes in the life of lower stratum, the oppressed too sometimes use violent methods to prevent those oppressions.

Another concept used in this study is Social Mobility. Sorokin\(^67\) observes social mobility as transition of an individual or social object or values or anything that has been created or modified by human activity from one social position to another. It is a continuous process. We have discussed social mobility, within the given context of social stratification, as it has significant implications for understanding conflict or social conflict. Sociologists distinguish broadly between two systems of stratification and two corresponding types of society. The first is the fluid system of stratification or the open society in which there is greater scope for movements along up and down the hierarchy (that is, social mobility). The second is the rigid system of stratification or the closed society in which the boundaries\(^7\) of various strata are rigid. The movement from one stratum to the other in such a society is extremely difficult, if not impossible. The desire for social mobility and the aspiration become interwoven with pre-existing rivalries between caste groups in the local arena. Srinivas\(^68\) 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. Indeed, the Dalits have been frequent targets of such violence.\(^69\)

\(^{67}\) P. Sorokin, Social Mobility, Harper and Raw, New York., 1927.
\(^{68}\) Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India, Orient Longman, Bombay, 1972, pp.: 90-93.
Intense conflicts can still emerge in ‘open’ societies when the prized opportunities are effectively available only through informal social networks and the like. On the other hand, the closed societies may dissipate the potentials for conflict, inherent in inequality, through ideology. But when an ideology of inequality or even hierarchy breaks down, the closed societies encounter intense conflicts pertaining to the structure of the existing relations.\(^70\) 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.\(^71\)

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.\(^72\) But, Ram\(^73\) 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

\(^73\) Nandu Ram, op.cit, 1979, p.121.
wage, dispossession of their land and houses, etc. have led to the conflicts between them and the non-scheduled castes.

The dynamic processes like industrialisation, urbanisation, occupational mobility, the special provision of reservation of seats to the scheduled castes including scheduled tribes and the backward classes, social security measures and the Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955 have made the Scheduled Caste people more conscious of their legitimate rights and assert for the same in an organised manner. Now, they have also awakened to fight against the injustices inflicted on them. They clearly put forth their legitimate demands and do not fear the higher castes. As a result, the social scenario in the country is such that it is ridden by factionalism, casteism and caste conflict in spite of some looseness in the caste system.74

Bose has analysed that the consolidation of Ahirs, Kurmis and Koeris has become a sizeable force with the membership of the Organisation. And this organisation had tried for its socio-economic and political upliftment. As we shall see below, the main perpetrators of violence against the Dalits in contemporary situation are these backward castes that have themselves followed a mobility course which includes violence. It is a section of the backward castes that have become economically and politically powerful. Since Independence, it is these who have become rich peasants from tenant farmers and had consolidated their economic position and have become most aggressive against the labour, especially Dalits.75 Beteille gives similar view76 in his analysis of the changing patterns of stratification in Tanjore village where he has discussed the shifting of land and power from Brahmins to non-Brahmins who subsequently attacked Dalit landless labourers in the past, and attack even in the contemporary period. Sharma, 77 in his analysis of social stratification and mobility has noted that the intermediate castes have gained the status of landowners, and the Dalits work on their fields as agricultural labourers. When the poor Dalits refuse to work due to some genuine reason including fewer wages, they become a target of the fury of the landlords. For instance, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan have this sort of conflicts between the Dalits and the intermediate castes.

76 Andre Beteille, 1969, op. cit.
77 K.L. Sharma, Social Stratification and Mobility, Rawat Publication, New Delhi, 1994, P.265.
The identity of caste is an inevitable factor and the formation of Dalit identity is not an exception. Even if Dalits embrace any of other religions, the casteism continues with them in the new religion. In the case of Punjab, the casteism is also being witnessed among different caste groups. Generally, the non-Scheduled Caste communities in all parts of the India subject the Dalits to various kinds of humiliations, ill treatment and physical abuse. The, practice of caste prejudices against Dalit is also common in Punjab, but less comparing to other parts of the country. The realisation of Dalits’ past predicaments, their present political assertion and the new formation of Dalit identity have started questioning the social, economic and political dominance (Gurudwara Management Committee etc.) of Jat Sikhs in respective areas, which have resulted in conflicts between these communities. 'This caste oppression shows its ugly head at different times. In the same vein, it needs to be stated that a careful reading into the Talhan incidence reveals that unlike in the past, at the present circumstances, injustice and atrocities cannot be perpetuated on the Dalits. They retort back and are ready to assert their rights and dignity. When the dominant castes do not tolerate resistance of the Dalits and downtrodden, conflict and violence becomes a common phenomenon".78

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. Shah79 has opined that the consciousness indicates awareness among the oppressed regarding the socio-economic structure and cultural reality which keeps them subjugated. In another way, Oommen80 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 deprivation, Dalit consciousness encapsulates deprivation stemming from inhuman conditions of material existence, powerlessness and ideological hegemony". The caste consciousness has increased rather than decreased. Education, and the protective discrimination policy have not resulted in emergence of

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harmonious relations between the caste Hindus and Dalits, which smacks of caste cleavages, its continuity and re-enforcement.\textsuperscript{81} In addition, Guru has argued in the language of Dalit political discourse that the Dalit identity not merely expresses who Dalits are, but also conveys their aspiration and struggle for change and revolution.\textsuperscript{82}

For Dalit writers, it is the role of ideology, which crystallizes and intensifies discontent and which leads to protest action. Protest is an attack on the prevailing system in an intellectual or organised way. Protest \textit{per se} is rather good or bad but it is a conflictual relation and an effective means of achieving social change and social mobility in contemporary society.\textsuperscript{83} Thus, the hierarchical discrepancies and relative deprivation lead to protest against the existing system not for their own domination but for egalitarianism.

In spite, of the Herculean efforts by the state, the Dalits still remain marginalized. Similarly, Parvathamma's\textsuperscript{84} 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.

As Sharma\textsuperscript{85} has rightly pointed out that the eminent economists such as K.N. Roj, V.K.R.V Rao, B.S. Minhas, V. M. Dandekar and R. Rath have shown that the planning has hit poor badly, and they have become, indeed poorer. The way in which modern education, technology and legislation have been initiated, these have led to the breeding of inequality. Most of the poor Dalits are beaten, their houses are burnt and their women-folk are molested and raped by the landlords and other caste Hindus.

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\item \textsuperscript{81} Rajendra Pandey, \textit{Social Inequality: Features, Forms and Functions}, Anju Publications, Lucknow, 1982.
\item \textsuperscript{82} Gopal Guru, quoted in Ghanshyam Shah, \textit{Dalit Identity and Politics: Cultural Sub-Ordination and Dalit Challenge} Vol-2, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2001.
\item \textsuperscript{83} R.Joseph Gusfield, \textit{Protest, Reform and Revolt}, John Wiley and Sons Ltd., New York, 1970.
\item \textsuperscript{84} C.Parvathamma, "The Case for the Indian Untouchable", \textit{United Asia}, Vol.20, 1968, pp. 279-286.
\item \textsuperscript{85} K.L.Sharma, 1994, op.cit., p. 268.
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Further he has stressed that the victims are not elite Dalits. In fact, the poor Dalits are the people who could not have proper education, could not escape the fury of the landed interests and who could not migrate to urban centers for better prospects. Therefore, it is crystal clear to say that the poorest sections of Dalits are victimised, dehumanised and oppressed by the caste Hindus. Similarly, Singh 86 also has described the marginality of the Dalits. That is to say that sharpness of the ideological schism increases as two-way contradictions are emerging in the Scheduled Caste social stratification. Firstly, the benefits earmarked for the Dalits are not as yet reaching most of the Dalits who are the to most needy amongst them. Secondly, the demonstration-effect of the status mobility by a few Dalits and that too in limited sectors of opportunities is being exaggerated by caste Hindus, creating larger than life negative images, and a backlash is rooted more in emotion than reason.

The poverty of their overall socio-cultural and economic conditions of the Dalits keeps them at the fringe of the development process despite the decades of planned efforts. For instance, the study conducted by Srinivas, has delineated the barriers in mobility. The Dalits whose members are landless labourers or tenants are many times exploited by the dominant castes. Sometimes the Dalits are also decided to give up performing service such as removing the dead animal from the houses of caste Hindus, beating drums at the festivals of village deities, and removing the leaf-plates on which the high castes have dined during festivals and weddings. The upper caste people become annoyed and beat up the Dalits and set fire to their huts. The attempt to dominate and the resistance to dominance, thus, lead to caste conflicts. 87 In the modern period, the conflict between the dominant castes and the lower castes has been well documented by Cohn, Nicholas, Gough, Beteille, Ram, Sharma, Deliege, etc. The causes of these conflicts are not only the challenges to the ritual positions (status quo) of the upper castes but also the attempts by the lower castes to have a share in the economy and to share power and developmental resources. The causes of origin of conflict, by and large are rooted in the practice of untouchability and discrimination of lower castes by higher castes in decision-making in the sharing of

86 Yogender Singh, Social Stratification and Change in India, Manohar, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 132-334.
the developmental resources, in the forceful wresting of lower castes lands by the upper castes and attempts at eviction of lower castes from common land.

Thus conflict existing between Dalits and caste Hindus is quiet evident in the present day social interaction of the caste groups due to the fact that the caste Hindus want to maintain their status quo in the village structure whereas the lower castes want to bring about structural change in the socio-economic and political orders. The above conceptual explanations and brief surveys of literature have enriched the understanding of Indian social stratification, social mobility and social conflict. These are also been helpful to study the existing dynamics of caste conflicts in Tamil Nadu.

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 there 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. The caste vis-à-vis caste conflict continues to be a major institutional force in the rural as well as urban areas, though it has assumed new forms especially in cities.

Yet, 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 a southern state of Tamil Nadu.
Methodology

The study adopts qualitative and quantitative methods as it intends to analyse the emergence of dynamics of caste conflicts between Dalits and caste Hindus in southern districts of Tamil Nadu. Due to the various constraints on the researcher, the study focuses on the dynamics of caste conflicts between Pallars (Dalits) and Thevars (non-Brahmin caste Hindus) in southern districts of Tamil Nadu, where the intensity of conflicts are much more vibrant than the northern and western districts of Tamil Nadu. The fieldwork has been conducted in two villages of Mangapuram, falling in Rajapalayam Taluk, Virudhunagar district and Urudaiyan Kudiruppu, falling in Tirunelveli taluk, Tirunelveli district. Each village is selected keeping in view the fact that they have a substantial population of both non-Brahmin and Dalit castes respectively. The study has included the the attitudinal change, mobility, marginality and the various kinds of differences between the two villages in the changing dynamic conflict relationship between the Dalits (Pallars) and the caste Hindus (Thevars). The selection of the above two villages enables the researcher to compare the basis, dimension, degree of assertion and identity with its problems of intensive dynamics of conflicts between caste Hindus and Dalits.

Sources of Data Collection

The study is based both on primary and secondary sources of data. For the primary data, an interview schedule has been administered on 200 respondents 130 Dalits and 70 non-Dalits selected purposefully. By focusing mainly on Dalits sample, the primary data has also been collected from the caste Hindus sample to analyse the data in comparative perspective, with regard to the dynamics of caste conflicts existing in between Dalits and caste Hindus in the aforesaid villages. These samples are distributed between the two villages according to their number of household. To have an in-depth and more qualitative data, we have also adopted the techniques of case study, non-participant observation and focused group discussions.

The secondary sources of data include Govt. Gazetteers, Census reports, besides the relevant books, articles, magazines, newspapers reports and clippings, to substantiate the analysis of primary data. The secondary data also include the data collected from the police records at the Government Administrative authority level, Tamil Nadu Adi-Dravidar Welfare Board (TNADWB), National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe (NCSCST) reports, etc.
Apart from interviewing the respondents, an effort has been made to take all the facts into consideration such as information from the office-bearers of several organisations such as panchayats, cooperatives etc., functioning in the villages. In addition, the community leaders, government officials, the block development officer, and police officials, the non-government organisations like human rights watch group, PUCL, and village social-workers have been in order to cross-check the respondent's versions.

**Scheme of Chapters**

The introductory chapter 1, as above, highlights the research problem and also presents the relevant theoretical perspective and specific methodology adopted to analyse the major issues covered in this study. Chapter 2 delineates the research setting which includes socio-economic profile of the Dalits of two districts in Tamil Nadu in general and of the Dalit respondents from the selected villages of Tamil Nadu in particular. Similarly, chapter 3 primarily deals with caste consciousness and identity formation among Dalits in general in the state of Tamil Nadu and in the studied villages. It locates caste consciousness and identity formation among Dalits in Tamil Nadu in the caste conflicts occurred in three phases. Firstly, it is predominantly between Brahmins and non-Brahmins, secondly between forward non-Brahmins and backward non-Brahmins, and finally, between backward non-Brahmins and Dalits in the Tamil Nadu state. Here, an attempt has also been made to analyse the political mobilization of several non-Brahmins against Brahmin's monopoly in socio-economic and political spheres and subsequent non-Brahmins emergence in the aforesaid spheres creating resentment among Other Backward and the consequent attacks on Dalits by the caste Hindus especially backward non-Brahmins. In addition, it also explains the growth and levels of caste consciousness and the responsible factors which have affected inter-caste relations, resurgence of the Dalit consciousness and formation of self-substantiating identity. It analyses the pre-independent Dalit socio-religious movement as well as recent Dalit movements against the atrocious caste system. Further, it also focuses on nature and style of protests resorted to by the Dalits.

Chapter 4 highlights the socio-economic and political disparities and the attitudinal differences between the Dalits and caste Hindus as they form the basis of conflicts between them. The second part in this chapter deals with the dimension of
conflicts in socio-economic, political and ritual aspects of social life of the Dalits and caste Hindus. Here, the actual causes, dynamic nature, extent and intensity of conflicts have been analysed in relation to the two studied villages in comparative perspective. Similarly, chapter 5 deals with socio, economic and political effects of atrocities faced by the Dalits during conflict situations and dynamics of change in the social structure of the selected villages in particular and Tamil Nadu in general.

Chapter 6 focuses on responses of the state machinery in curbing the atrocities committed on Dalits. Here, the government’s role in the redressal of Dalit grievances and its failures are also discussed. And, even the responses from the mainstream political parties and Dalit parties, non-governmental organizations like Human Rights Watch Group, PUCL, etc. are highlighted. Finally, the concluding chapter tries to summarize the findings the preceding chapters. It also indicates the implications of dynamic nature of caste conflicts in selected villages in particular and the wider society in general.