CHAPTER - IV

FORMATION OF THE DALIT OUTFITS AND THEIR OUTLOOK TOWARDS THE DRAVIDIAN MOVEMENT
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The Dravidian movement’s main objective is to establish a casteless society. From the inception of the Justice Party to the MDMK, the policy of caste eradication is being upheld. During the Congress regime in Tamil Nadu, particularly the Kamaraj period (1954-1963), in 1957, the Mudhukulathur riots occurred between Thevars and Scheduled Caste Pallars. The Pallars were suppressed by the Thevars. Chief Minister Kamaraj took steps to curtail the clashes and 9 Thevars were shot dead¹. At that time E.V.R.Periyar openly supported the action taken by Kamaraj. In this regard C.N. Annadurai and his party MLAs in the Legislative Assembly condemned Chief Minister Kamaraj’s initiatives to control the riots. But the functionaries of the Dravidian parties from grassroot level to district level clamoured to give equal status to the Dalits who are also in these parties. Moreover the Dalits, who support the Dravidian parties in the elections, expect these parties to improve their life style.

In 1967 the DMK came to power in Tamilnadu under the Chief Ministership of C.N.Annadurai. During his regime, in 1968, 44 Dalits were burnt to death and 25 huts were destroyed at Keezhvenmani. A case was registered against 23 accused. At the trial, 15 were acquitted. The remaining eight, who were convicted, were released by the High Court of Madras. It represents the level of atrocities which occur against Dalits and, more importantly, the total absence of any state response to such an atrocity. It provides us with some kind of comparison point, which allows us to judge whether the situation has improved at all after thirty years of rule by the
Dravidian movement. Are there any steps to prevent this kind of atrocities today? The Elayaperumal Committee issued a report in 1969 commenting on the poor implementation of the Act, citing as reasons the lack of awareness on the part of the guardians of the law and the backlog of cases.

The Dravidian movement absorbed all kinds of people, particularly Dalits, into its fold. The majority of the Dalits associated with the Dravidian parties. But their status was the same as in the Brahmin rule. The Dalits were killed, attacked and marginalized by the caste Hindus. They were not given due share in public properties. Fundamental rights were denied. The Goals and aims of the Dravidian parties were not realized. In recent years most atrocities against Dalits take place in Tamilnadu. There are many atrocities which go unreported? Many Dalits are used to a certain kind of treatment and perhaps recognize that it is a part of life as a Dalit. So they would never call it an atrocity.

After the Keelvenmani incident another incident occurred in Villupuram in 1978, between Dalits and Vanniyars. Villupuram is the wholesale market for some districts of Tamilnadu, especially for cash commodities like groundnuts. Here the Harijan are largely in the employment of commercial and grocery middle level merchant castes like the Vanniyars. In the 1978 clash in Villupuram, 12 Harijans were killed by the caste Hindus. The force behind this clash were the Vanniyars.

Another incident occurred at Meenakshipuram of Tirunelveli District. In February 1981, a thousand Harijans of Meenakshipuram embraced Islam. This revolt of the Dalits against centuries of oppression and indignities set off shock waves throughout Tamilnadu and the country. What is the reason for conversions? The answer is a story of frustrated expectations. It was not mere economic gain that drove the Harijans to embrace Islam; it was their craving for social status. The Harijans have not benefited by concessions in
education and jobs. Even if they make good with these concessions they are not treated as social equals by caste Hindus. Harijan militancy has been met with severe reprisals by the administration. The Hindus have got away with killing Harijans.

A Madras High Court judgment is revealing. Acquitting the landlords alleged to have burnt to death 44 Harijans including 2 children in December 1968 in Keezhvenmani (East Thanjavur), the court said: “Most of them are rich men with vast extents of land. It is difficult to believe that they themselves walked bodily to the scene and set fire to the houses”.

The Keezenmani incident occurred during the DMK period. Annadurai was the Chief Minister at that time. He declared that the incident was like an electric shock. After this incident how many electric shocks have occurred in the past thirty five years of Dravidian rule?

The Constitution of India pledges in its preamble “to secure to all its citizens justice, social, economic and political” and Article 39A ensures that “the operation of the legal system promotes justice”. According to the Hon’ble Justice K. Subha Rao, “Justice is the quality of being just and fair to all the individuals in the group. It seeks to give everyone what is due to him. The social structure of our society is based on caste and class inequalities, ignorance, illiteracy and untouchability. To remove this the state government should take necessary steps. The Ministry of Home Affairs is responsible for the welfare of the Scheduled Castes. As such it is the centre of coordination of the policies and programmes between the Centre and State governments”.

The Scheduled Castes section of Indian society constitutes a sizable portion of the country’s population. In Tamilnadu 20% of the people belong to the Scheduled Castes. The number of incidents affecting Scheduled Castes is a point of great concern to the political leaders and administrators.
Atrocities like murder, rape, violence, harassment etc. against Scheduled Castes are acquiring the proportions of a war. Atrocities on Scheduled Castes is a deep rooted country-wide phenomenon challenging varieties of Government measures. It is the result of socio-economic disparity, deprivation and the conservative attitude of the people resulting from ignorance. In Tamilnadu so many caste clashes occur between the caste Hindus and the Dalits. The Dalits are generally landless labourers, marginal farmers, bonded labourers and sharecroppers. They have a very low social status and are still treated as untouchables. The so-called caste Hindus of our rural society mainly employ the Scheduled Caste people as farm labourers or bonded labourers after lending a small amount of money and as servants for looking after their livestock and as sharecroppers.

The caste Hindus generally try to exploit their labour and money. Sometimes they terrorize and entrap them in various sorts of offences. When the Dalit people try to come out of their net and leave their service, the interests of the upper class people are hurt and they inflict severe atrocities on the poor Dalit people. Thus the feelings of retaliation, vengeance and mutual hostility develop and incidents of murder, rape, arson, etc. happen against the Dalit people. When Annadurai was the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, his government launched many programmes to uplift the Dalits in Tamilnadu. At that time there was a dispute between the caste Hindu landlords and Scheduled Caste agricultural labourers regarding wages. Due to this in December 1968 at Keezhvenmani Village of Tanjore District, 25 houses of SC labourers were set on at a fire. A Committee was constituted to enquire into the Keezhvenmani incident. The Chief Minister of Tamilnadu, Annadurai, described this incident as an electric shock. At that time there was no SC/ST Act, but a case was registered. Gopalakrishna Naidu was arrested with 22 persons who were accused in the incident. At the trial, 15 were acquitted. The remaining eight who were convicted were
released by the High Court of Madras. This represents the level of atrocity which occurs even today against Dalits.

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam under the Chief Ministership of Karunanidhi ruled Tamilnadu upto 1975. After that in 1977 the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam captured power under the Chief Ministership of M.G. Ramachandran. During the AIADMK period, in 1978, the Villupuram clash occurred. 12 Harijans were killed by the caste Hindu Vanniyars. The Government of Tamil Nadu constituted a Commission to inquire into the Villupuram killings of 12 Harijan under the chairmanship of HoiTble Sadasivam, a former High Court Judge. The Commission described the Harijan as “rowdies creating tension”?

Mass conversion at Meenakshipuram took place in the year 1981. One thousand Dalits embraced Islam. The revolt of the Dalits against centuries of oppression and indignities of the caste Hindus led to the conversion. It sent shock waves throughout Tamilnadu and India. The Harijans of Meenakshipuram were well educated and mainly in Government service. Economically they were better off than the Thevars. The Thevars, though socially, educationally and economically more backward in this area, exercised traditional caste supremacy. For all their education and prosperity the Harijan were treated as dirt. There was no let-up in social oppression. Their urge to be recognized as social equals was frustrated. It was these long years of harassment, humiliation and civil disability that compelled them to embrace Islam. Islam would offer them protection. One Thangaraj had committed an unforgivable crime. He had eloped with a Thevar girl from Mekkarai Village. To ward off retaliation, Thangaraaj embraced Islam when the Thevars came to beat him up so that he could hit back with the support of the Muslims. In the fight Pandi Thevar lost his leg. The police could do nothing. Thangaraj pleaded self-defence and there was overwhelming
evidence of it. The Thevars and the police held fire till the murder of two Thevars. Then the police raided the village and rounded up scores of Dalits. They wanted Thangaraj (now Mohamed Yusuf) and asked the villagers to find him. There could be more trouble, the police warned. It was the torture and large-scale harassment of some Dalits abetted by the Thevars that forced them to seek refuge in Islam.

A number of Dalits were arrested and detained for over a month. The police was supporting the Thevars. The Dalit people decided to convert to Islam and embraced Islam. This kind of conversion spread over Ramnad District also. Several thousand Harijans in ten villages planned to embrace Islam. In Ramnad District the Harijans were oppressed and attacked by the caste Hindus. Handbills and pamphlets were circulated. The Ramnad riots of April 1981 also became an issue and handbills demanded the arrest of the guilty Hindus. Conversion has emerged as a protest that can shake the very foundations of the Hindus faith. Threat of conversion, Dalits have learnt, can be a powerful lever to secure what they would be denied otherwise. This kind of threats in Tamilnadu is assuming epidemic proportions, particularly in the southern districts of the state. Conversion was found to be the cumulative effect of social injustice. Education, status and economic superiority did not restore the balance.

The Untouchability (offences) Act was passed in 1955, but its implementation was less than satisfactory. The Elayaperumal Committee issued a report in 1969 commenting on the poor implementation of the Act, citing as reasons the lack of awareness on the part of the guardians of the law and the backlog of cases. The Act is not implemented properly. Previous legislations concentrated on the ‘untouchability’ types of acts—two tumblers, temple entry, and services like hair dress, laundry. Now the SC/ST Act is significant and radical because it recognizes that atrocities against Dalits are
not just those that deal with untouchability. Elections, land disputes, rape and murder are often intimately connected to the power that caste Hindus wield over Dalits in villages.

For some time since the late 80s, tensions had been rising in Chennagarampatti Village of Madurai District. In Chennagarampatti there were nine acres of land that were annually leased by the Alagar Koil. Yearly, there was an ‘open’ auction in which the land was given to the highest bidder and the Dalits were prevented from participating in the auction, ensuring that they would never advance from their status as agricultural labourers. This was never seen as an atrocity, just a way of life. But under the SC/ST Act this would be considered an atrocity. In 1991 the situation changed and the Dalits decided to participate for the first time in the land auction. With their collective bid of 7,500 rupees, they gained the right to the land. The local caste Hindus did not accept the action. They immediately filed a civil suit against the Dalits, arguing that their leasing of the land was illegal. The courts issued a judgment in favour of the Dalits. The caste Hindus were annoyed. After that the caste Hindus destroyed the crops of the Dalits. Later, V. Suresh, a Dalit high school student, was attacked at the bus stand. He was unaware of the SC/ST Act and filed for attempted murder, which is still pending in the courts. Tensions were rising and, on 4th July 1992, four Dalits were stabbed. The Tahsildar planned a Peace Committee meeting to discuss what had occurred. The time was set for the following day-- July 5th - in the nearby town of Melur. The Dalits arrived there but no Thevars were to be found. So the Dalits got into a bus to return to their village. The bus was stopped and the Thevars boarded the bus and killed Ammasi and Vein. A case was filed and remains in the courts. In Melavalavu, Murugesan, a Dalit President, and six others were murdered in 1997. In this case the dispute was about Panchayat elections.
According to the Indian Constitution, Melavalavu Panchayat was declared a reserved constituency in which Dalit people alone could contest. More than one thousand families are living in that Panchayat. The caste Hindus could not tolerate a Dalit becoming the President. The caste Hindus tried to prevent the Dalits from contesting in the election. But Murugesan contested in the election and was elected President of Melavalavu. The caste Hindus were threatening the Dalits. Murugesan sent a petition to the District Collector and other authorities to save his life. But the authorities did not take any steps to prevent the atrocities.

But Murugesan did not bend to the caste Hindus and contested in the election. He was elected President of Melavalavu Panchayat. After assuming office as President of Melavalavu Murugesan was threatened by the caste Hindu Thevars. But he did not mind them. Murugesan was prevented from entering the Panchayat office to discharge his duties. In this regard Murugesan sent a petition to the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu and the Home Secretary of the state.

On the day of the murder, 30-06-1967, Murugesan and six Panchayat Ward Members went to meet the District Collector of Madurai about the position of the Panchayat administration. They gave a petition to the Collector reporting the threats from the caste Hindu people and requesting necessary steps to safeguard their lives. But the authorities did not take any preventive steps to check the atrocities going on. Murugesan and six others were returning to their native place by a bus. The bus was stopped by the caste Hindu Thevars. They murdered President Murugesan and the six members of the Panchayat.

A Dalit Panchayat President was murdered. What was behind this incident? In what way will this crime be proved? It all depends on how the question is coined. Was Murugesan killed because he was a Dalit? Was
Murugesan killed only because he was a Dalit. But, it is not that simple. Untouchability means a relationship of dependency. The SC/ST Act recognizes that there are so many underlying relationships. Murugesan was killed because he was a Dalit who wanted to become the Panchayat President. The caste Hindus in Melavalavu had done their best to ensure that no Dalit would contest the election. But Murugesan did not listen and contested in the election. So he was killed for it. And, while the judge was willing to admit that he was murdered, he could not find that the murder had anything to do with caste. The judge conveniently chose to ignore the fact that Murugesan had petitioned the SC/ST Commission long before and atrocity had occurred. The judge ignored the entire history of the caste clashes that had been occurring in Melavalavu and decided that although there was a brutal murder the Melavalavu case, there could be no conviction under the SC/ST Act.

Before the murder of Melavalavu Murugesan the Dalit people had gone to the police station to file a complaint. They thought that the police would protect them. But in vain. The police inefficiency and biased mentality led to the murder. The case was registered and the trial was going on. The witnesses were threatened. So the case was transferred to the Salem sessions court. The said court spelt out its judgment in the case. The punishment was merely on the ground of murder, not under the SC/ST Protection Act or PCR. Only 7 were convicted of the 41 accused.

Thinniam Incident

Thinniam is situated in Trichy District. One Karuappaiah belonging to the Scheduled Caste had requested the President of Thinniam Panchayat for a house for his sister. The President was responsible for the special house allotment for Scheduled Castes. Karuppaiah gave the President Rs.2,000 in exchange for the promise of a house, but the house was not provided.
Karuppaiah was upset and complained to the District Collector of Trichy but he did not receive any relief. So he thought that the matter should be published in the village. So he took a drum and tom-tommed the message throughout Thinniam. Karuppaiah was pointing out the wrong done to him by Subramanian the President. Now the matter went to the Village Panchayat wherein Karuppaiah was beaten and forced to drink human excreta. To condemn this kind of uncivilized and barbaric action a number of rallies and processions were held. The Dalit people gave many petitions to redress this kind of activities. It is very shameful in the modern age.

Pappapatti, Keeripatti, Nattermangalam Villages are situated in Madurai District. The said Village Panchayats were reserved for Scheduled Castes and Tribes under the Constitution. According to the Constitution only Scheduled Caste persons can contest in the election there. Upto 1986 these Panchayats were under the control of caste Hindu Kallars. After that they were changed to the Dalits. It is a question of status among the caste Hindus, who are unwilling to hand over any power to the Dalits. That is why consistently in these villages election has been not held, and a Special Officer appointed by the Government is in charge. The State Government may have decided to redistribute power but the local caste Hindus have decided that is not to be.

In Keeripatti and Pappapatti everyone is aware of the atrocity, but is too sacred to file a complaint. Poongodi, the Dalit candidate, was not allowed to canvass for votes. The village is unwilling to hand over the Panchayat administration to Dalit control. The Tamilnadu Government is willing to enact legislation that seemingly redistributes power, but then is unwilling to actually enforce it. There is no necessary support for the Dalit who decides to stand up for his rights. He is not challenging anything. But the Government is not willing to enforce its own law. When Poongodi was finally allowed to...
canvass, she was chased with chappals, stones with abuses. Could a complaint be filed here? It seems fairly clear that the answer is ‘yes’ given the way the law is written. But who is to file the complaint? The family of Poongodi left the village out of fear. The victims and the villagers are sacred. But then this is never documented. Ninety percent of the cases filed are ignored or deferred or rejected.

This kind of activities are indulged in by the caste Hindus regularly but the Government is not ready to take any steps to take action against the offenders. Everyone is aware of the Pappapatti and Keeripatti election. It is true that hundreds of atrocities must be occurring everyday. Raising one’s voice in this situation will also mean leaving the village. Without the support of the caste Hindus, the Dalits cannot stand in the election. About the situation the DPI general secretary Thirumavalavan accused the mainstream political parties of not ensuring that the Dalits got their due in Panchayat elections. The opposition parties did not hold out much hope for the Dalits. The recent election to the Pappapatti Panchayat was a farce. The Tamilnadu Government sent a delegation headed by the Public Works Department Minister, Panneerselvam, to talk with the villagers. But this visit was counter productive. This led to a demand for the resignation of K. Azhagar who was elected President. The opposition parties are not ready to ensure that the Dalits get elected to Pappapatti, Keeripatti, Natramangalam and Kothakachiyendhal Panchayats.

Another very important incident occurred in June 99 at Tirunelveli. The Nellai Mancholai Estate workers were going to submit a memorandum regarding their wages to the District Collector of Tirunelveli along with some leaders of Tamilnadu political parties such as K. Krishnasamy, Leader the Pudhia Tamilagam, Tamilnadu Legislative Assembly opposition party leader S. Balakrishnan and the district secretaries of the CPI, and the CPI(M). The
district police authorities brutally attacked the people and the leaders. The people tried to escape from the police lathi charge. They ran and jumped into the Tamiraparani river. The police higher authorities ordered the special police to attack the procession. In the process 17 people, including two children, were brutally killed. This tragedy was like the Jallianwala Bagh incident. The police pushed the aged and women into the river. They were trying to escape from the police attack, but they could not escape from death.

After this incident all the dead bodies were taken to the Government Hospital at Nellni for post-mortem. The Law Minister of Tamilnadu Mr. Aladi Aruna, talked about this incident, saying that nobody could be transferred from that place to anywhere. The former of Chief Minister of Tamilnadu, Karunanithi, justified the police action. He was favouring the police officials and the caste Hindus. A Commission was instituted to enquire into the Tamiraparani massacre by the Tamilnadu Government under the Hon’ble Justice Mohan, a former High Court judge of Madras. His judgement only favoured the police and the Government authority. In the procession the people raised their voice against the police and bureaucrats in an abusive manner and they tried to encircle the Collectorate with a mob. So the police had to charge. The Commission justified the police action against the Mancholai Tea Estate labourers and he added that it was merely an accident and not a planned massacre.

Kodiankulam Riots

The Southern districts of Tamilnadu have been witnessing caste clashes for the past several years. The clashes occurred between the caste Hindu Thevars and Scheduled Caste Pallars. The Dalits are exploited economically by the caste Hindus. In a casteist society all the family members follow the hereditary occupations and are confined to their own village. But now changes have taken place among the Scheduled Caste
people. The Dalit people of the southern districts of Tamilnadu migrated abroad to earn. So they don’t want any relationship with the caste Hindus who were responsible for atrocities. At the same time the caste Hindus still try to control the society. But gradually the situation has changed. The Dalit people have acquired political awareness and support the leading political parties. They support either the Dravidian parties or the Dalit political parties to channel their thoughts. They want to participate in the local affairs regarding temple entry, temple and auction and use of public properties. So the Dalit people condemn the practice of untouchability and refuse to adjust with the caste Hindus.

India’s annual report for 1996-97 indicates that in the case of the caste clashes between the caste Hindus and the Dalits in the southern districts of Tamilnadu there was a 34% increase in incidents compared with the report of 1995-96; of the 282 incidents that occurred 238 were between caste Hindus and Dalits; most of the incidents involved Thevars, Naidus and Vanniaris of the caste Hindus and Adi-Dravidars and Devendra Kula Vallalars of the Scheduled Caste. The Thevar community is closely attached to the police and the administration. The police and the administration always favour the Thevars. Due to that reason most of the Dalit people have migrated to other places.

The Dalits are arrested in the name of prevention of goondaism. In February 1998 Gundupatti Dalits were mercilessly attacked by police personnel. According to the state census report, upto August 1998, 251 people lost their lives. Upto 1990 the Devendra Kula Vallalars supported the mainstream political parties with the support of the Dalit people. Krishnasamy and Thirumavalavan are the key factors of vigilance among the Scheduled Castes. They have tried to achieve temple entry, access to shops, hairdressing and water facilities. They demand access to public property
along with the caste Hindus who monopolize the public properties. It was a milestone in the Dalit liberation movement. Between July 1995 and June 1996 caste clashes occurred between the Thevars and the Dalits. This led to the destruction of properties on both sides. Many lost their lives. Most of the Dalit youth were arrested under the Tamilnadu Goondas Act. Some were arrested under the National Security Act.

In April 1997 the Government of Tamilnadu announced that the Virudhunagar Transport Corporation would be named Veeran Sundaralingam Transport Corporation. The Thevar community people objected to the Government action of naming the transport corporation after Sundaralingam. They felt that it was a test of their potential. The Thevars would not board the buses of that corporation. Stones were pelted on the buses during the inauguration of the transport corporation. Krishnasamy was arrested on the ground of kindling emotions. Roads were blocked and law and order was affected due to the arrest of Krishnasamy, an MLA. The police lathi charged and shot to disperse the mass of Dalits. Two Dalits were shot dead by the police. Three members of the Thevar community were also shot dead by the police. Due to the clashes the Government decided to drop the names of leaders from the names of all the transport corporations. In this situation the Dalits started migrating to other places voluntarily and some were compulsorily sent away by the authorities. The police searched the Dalit villages to arrest the youth. Most of the victims were Dalit women only. The police registered false cases against Dalits. It created political awareness among the Dalits. They demanded socio, political, and economic rights on par with the caste Hindus.

Relations between the police and the Thevar castes are always close. Due to that relation the police always favour the Thevars. Ponparamaguru and Sethuraman are supports of the caste clashes. They belong to the Thevar
community. While Ponparamaguru was the DGP of Tamilnadu more numbers of Thevars were recruited to the uniformed services. This is the main reason for attacks on the Dalits in the southern districts of Tamilnadu.

The situation did not change again when the DMK came back to power in 1996. The attitude and behavior were the same as in the AIDMK period. The Dalit villages were deliberately attacked by the police under the leadership of Vijayakumar, Inspector General of Police. The District Collector of Virudhunagar, a Brahmin, also supported the Thevars. So the Dalits were attacked and compelled to migrate from their villages to other places. Dalit properties were damaged and occupied by Thevars. The government constructed new houses for those affected in the riots but nobody came to the village because of the threats of the Thevars and the police personnel.

Mangapuram is situated near Rajapalayam in Virudhunagar District, hi all 3000 Thevars and 250 Dalits resided in the village. 150 Dalits were burnt by the Thevars because they attended the Conference conducted by Kandhaswamy. Some of them were burnt alive. They demanded police protection. Again the riots were between the Thevars and the Dalits. On 9 June 1997 the Dalits met the Collector to seek police protection. On June 10 1997 the Deputy Superintendent of Police, who belonged to the Thevar community, compelled the Dalits to migrate from the village. On the same day the Thevars attacked the Dalit people and burnt their houses. So the Dalit people moved to adjoining villages for protection. The government failed to take any steps to control the situation but supported the caste Hindu activities.

Rangappa Naikkanpatty Incident

This village has 400 Thevar families and 30 Dalit families. The Dalits are having their own land and houses. This was the main reason for the
Thevars the attacking the Dalits. Krishnasamy visited the affected people and stones were thrown at Krishnasamy’s van. An Inspector of Police refused to register a case. On June 12, 1997 the Thevars of Rangappa Naikkanpatty, aided by neighbouring Thevars, attacked the Dalits and set fire to the Dalit houses. Crops were destroyed. Motor pumpsets were looted. The riots took place at least four hours. The government failed to take steps to control the situation. The police raided these villages in the name of maintaining law and order. The Dalit houses were searched, most of the Dalit women and men were arrested against the law.

Some of the police did not wear their name badge which will identify their name and number. The police have cautiously planned to attack the Dalits.

Kodiangulam incident

The Kodiangulam not occurred mainly on the basis of economic inequality between the Dalits and the Thevars. The Dalit people in Kodiangulam are in a good economic position, their sons and daughters being employed abroad. So they have changed their life style. On August 31, 1995 a police squad consisting of 600 members attacked Kodiangulam and the surrounding villages. The Dalits properties were damaged and looted. The Thevars poured poison into the Dalits’ well.

Gundupatti

Gundupatti village was attacked and looted by a police party consisting of 100 male police 30 female ones and ruling DMK members because the villagers boycotted the general elections of 1998. It was out and out a police and bureaucrat action, which was against Dalit interests. All the Dalits including women were severely beaten by the police. The Government of Tamil Nadu constituted a Commission to inquire into the
Gundupatti incident. The Commission recommended to the government that compensation be given to the victims of Gundupatti.

Desikapuram Village, situated in Virudhunagar District, was attacked by the police on June 1997 as in the case of Gundupatti Village. The Dalits of Desikapuram resorted to road blockade when Krishnasamy was arrested. To control the people 1000 police personnel entered the village and demolished the houses, looted ornaments and captured cash. Dalit women were arrested and confined in the raid. The women were tortured and raped by the policemen. To enquire into the incident the Government of Tamilnadu constituted a Commission under Hon’able Justice Gomathinayagam. The Gomathinayagam Commission also favoured the government and pronounced judgement against the Dalits.

Atrocities against Dalits in Cuddalore

Puliangudi is a village near Chidambaram of Cuddalore District where 150 Dalits are residing. Vanniyars also live there. Some anti-social Vanniyars produce and sell arrack. The raw materials for arrack production are dumped and stored in the Dalit houses of Puliangudi. Moreover Dalit women are exploited sexually by the Vanniyars. To free themselves from this fragile situation they enrolled their names with the Dalit Pandhers of India Party. The Dalit people removed all the raw materials for arrack production. This led to anger among Vanniyars. The caste Hindu Vanniyars called the Panchayat and punishment was given to the Dalits. The Dalit people could not tolerate this and moved to the police station to register a case. After that one Karthik belonging to the Vanniyar caste tried to rape a Dalit girl. The Dalit people demanded that Karthik many the girl. This news spread among the Vanniyars. They planned to attack the Dalits. Gandhi, Vellaiyan, Madhiyalagan, who were Dalit youth, were murdered. The news spread all over India but Karunanidhi did not respond to this incident.
The Chief Minister Karunanidhi, former Parliament member Ponnusamy, now Tamil Nadu Cabinet Minister did not respond. But opposition party leaders of the Tamil Manila Congress, the CPI, the CPI(M), the Congress (Secular), Janadal Dal and the Republican Party of India condemned this incident. The DPI General Secretary Thirumaavalavan rushed to the spot and condemned this incident. The DPI planned to rally and demonstrated to expose this incident. But the Tamil Nadu Government refused to permit the meetings and the rally.

Mudakkathan Pandian, a native of Mudakakathan near Madurai, was murdered by caste Hindus on 18.06.2001. He was the State Finance Secretary of the Dalit Panthers of Indin. He organized the DPI movement and preached the party principles of the DPI. He was against illegal arrack sellers and financiers. These were the main reasons for his murder. Fie went to every nook and corner of the Dalit village and lectured about the socio-political system. The State did not take any steps to identify the culprits of this murder. The DPI planned to organize a rally to urge a CBI enquiry. The government arrested the DPI General Secretary Thirumaavalan and other party functionaries.

Another atrocity was perpetrated by Chidambaram Ananmalai Nagar police. One Nandagopal was arrested by them on the ground of theft. Padmini, the wife of Nandagopal, went to Annamalai Nagar police station to see her husband who was in police custody. The police watched Padmini. Later Padmini was raped the presence of her husband Nandagopal. He condemned this activity. So he was brutally murdered in police custody. Judgment was passed. The policeman were punished with 10 years' imprisonment but the officers were punished with only 3 years' imprisonment.
The Unchanai massacre occurred on June 28, 1979. The Dalit people demanded their share of the public properties, which were monopolized by the caste Hindu people. Due to that reason 5 Dalits were murdered and 29 were injured. More than 1,500 caste Hindu people attacked the village.

Paaloorpakkiri was murdered in police custody on 21-6-1999. This incident was different from others. The DPI announced a road blockade to condemn the act. The police raided the Dalit residences and tortured the people. While the police were raiding Thiruvannamalai, Paaloorpakkiri was arrested by the police. He was not a member of the DPI. He sold arrack some years ago but no longer does so. But the police insisted that Paaloorpakkiri should sell arrack. But he refused. Due to this reason he was remanded. And then he was beaten to death in police custody.

One Gurumoorthy belonging to a Dalit community resides in Kurungulam of Tanjore District. His right thumb was cut by caste Hindus because he refused to play the drum in the festival. In Kurungulam the Dalits have been prevented from participating in any function in the village. Only the caste Hindus can do so.

The Tamil Nadu police shot dead two Dalits because they struggled to restore the Panchayat land which was encroached upon by the caste Hindu Vanniyars. The Dalits had decided to hold on to the land and continually struggled. So the police shot dead John Thomas and Ezhumalai.

In the 1999 parliamentary elections the DPI General Secretary contested from the Chidambaram parliamentary constituency. The Dalits were prevented from casting their votes by the caste Hindus. More than 100 Dalit people could not participate in the election. The Dalit votes were exercised by the caste Hindus for their interest. More than one block of votes were not registered in the booth. The Dalits were denied their right. The houses of Dalits were set afire by DMK people. The police also supported
the DMK candidate. According to the Cuddalore District Collector 504 houses were burnt. The Chidambaram constituency consists of 38% Dalits and 30% Vanniyars.

Atrocities have been occurring wherever there are thick populations of Vanniyars. One Pandian was shot dead during riots in Kurumangudi Village. In this village the two-tumbler system is being practised even now, Elayaperumal, former Congress leader, brought this to the notice of the higher authorities. But there was no response. On 5-9-1999 the problem started in Anukampatti Village near Kullanchavadi. The Dalit people were warned to cast their votes to Ramadoss’s party since otherwise there would be trouble. The Dalit people were prevented from voting in the beginning itself. Clashes started in these villages. The injured Dalits were admitted in Cuddalore and Chidambaram Hospitals. Due to clashes 500 Dalit houses were set afire and more than 1000 Dalits were injured, while 1000 were detained under the Goondas Act. The ruling DMK did not take any steps to prevent the atrocities, To put forth this to the President of India a delegation consisting of Thirumavalavan, the Congress leaders Peter Alponse, Jayathi Natarajan and Aalgiri gave a petition to conduct re-election in the Chidambaram parliamentary constituency. After 50 years of Independence the Dalit people cannot exercise their vote in this country.

Another incident occurred in Marukkaalampatti Village of Dharmapuri District. Marukkaalampatti Village is a general constituency in the local Panchayat election. The majority of the people are caste Hindu Vanniyar and the rest are Dalits. They are a minority in the village. A Dalit candidate from the DPI contested for the President’s post. The caste Hindus Vanniyar candidate also filed his nomination in the local body elections of 2001. So far caste Hindu Vanniyars had been President and monopolized the public properties of the Panchayat. This time there was a competition
between the Vanniyars and the Dalits to capture the President's post. The Dalit candidate canvassed the people to support him in the election. The Vanniyars attacked the Dalits and set fire to their houses. Their properties were looted and damaged. One Poovi, a Dalit woman, was attacked and died. The police did not take any steps to prevent the clash. But they supported caste Hindu Vanniyars. Immediately the DPI cadres resorted to road blockage and its leader warned the Government that compensation should be given to the Dalit victims and the culprits should be arrested.

The causes of atrocities on Dalits are deep rooted in the age-old caste based social structure and economic disparity. Social indignity to Dalits in India, lack of distributive justice, education and political awareness are the other causes of atrocities on Dalits. Social indignities emanating from the practice of untouchability and acute economic disparity arising out of landlessness, wage labour bondage etc., present a total picture of exploitation and injustice and any attempt to shake off any of these forms of exploitation under the impact of the awakening of the age or thanks to the benefits of the various measures launched to uplift them socially and economically, easily invites the wrath of the vested interests. The result is atrocity of any proportions. Atrocities on Dalits in Tamilnadu as compared to other parts are on high. This increase in number of atrocities demands solid and effective solution measures which may ensure a peaceful and secure life to the Dalit people.

To check atrocities on Dalit people, a joint endeavour of the State and Central Governments, bureaucrats and police, judiciary and social organizations is necessary. According to Article 46 of the Constitution it is the responsibility of the State to maintain law and order within it. The Central Government must intensive in matters of atrocities and protect the Dalits from social injustice. The Evidence Act and the Criminal Procedure
Code should be amended to protect the Scheduled Castes. Revenue, Police, Judiciary, Labour and other Development Departments should adopt an interdisciplinary approach in the conflict prone areas to redress the grievances of the Dalit people. The incident prone areas should be mapped and studied by the said departments and effective measures should be applied with the help of local bodies for the solution of economic problems.

The main task of the government and various departments is to raise the social and economic status of the deprived Dalit people. For that purpose the so-called Hindus will have to reorient their mental attitude and develop a sense of oneness and harmony.

Dalits as a Political Force

In August 1993, Dalit leaders belonging to the ruling Congress Party raised their voice against the neglect of the Dalits. It was evidence for the existence of the reality of the Dalit movement as a political force. The leaders of the Dalits in the ruling Congress Party raised their voice against the neglect of some sections of society and demanded firm measures to redress their grievances. This revealed the Dalit leaders’ place in a majority political party and also how the Dalit leaders belonging to the ruling party viewed the emergence of a Dalit-led political party. The Dalits had acquired some education and money, which led to group sense and political consciousness. The Dalits had begun to do things for themselves. They had become people stressing their own particular concerns just as better-off groups in India stressed their particular concerns.

The Dalit people who are struggling have lost rights, dignity or identity. According to V.S. Naipaul, during the British rule, India witnessed the Mutiny of 1857, but in the post-Independence era, he sees mutinies getting multiplied everywhere in India. Independence was once working only for people more or less at the top. The freedom it brought has not worked its
way down. People everywhere have ideas now of who they are and what they owe themselves. The liberation of spirit that has come to India can not come as a release alone.

The liberation of the spirit has touched Dalits also. Today perhaps they have left behind for the first time the deeply inner pain "of distress and cruelty", which they have suffered for centuries. This pain has taken the form of "rage and revolt" which in a real sense has become the basis of their emergence as a political force.

Factors Responsible for the Emergence

The emergence of the Dalit movement as a political force has over a hundred years of history behind it. This history began with the establishment of British rule after the mutiny of 1857 after which the political power of the East India Company was transferred to the English Crown. Almost at the same time started the beginning of mass conversion of the Dalits to the Christian faith. The establishment of British imperial rule held out the possibility of sharing in the decision making process by different sections of Indian society, including the Dalits. On the other hand mass conversion and Christian missionary teaching brought ideas of equality among all. The other factors which directly contributed to raising the consciousness of the Dalits was the politics of numbers.

The British introduced census in 1881 mainly for an administrative purpose, but it exposed several factors such as language, religion, race and even caste. The census tells clearly where each community stands numerically and with the figures one can easily guesses how much power or place one will have in a political system. But the politics of numbers helped the Dalits positively, because it helped in establishing their separate identity.
There are a number of factors and events which took place from the
time of Ambedkar’s entry into the struggle of the Dalits in 1919. Ambedkar’s beginning, with his testimony before the Southborough
Committee, reached the climax of Iris struggle through his conversion to
Buddhism on October 14, 1956 and with his idea of creating the Republican
Party.

The Dalit movement in Tamilnadu is emerging out of its Scheduled
Caste identity and its untouchability consciousness. Rev. John Ratnam was
one among the leaders who founded the Dravidar Kazhagam in 1892 before
Periyar started the Dravidar Kazhagam. Pandit Ayodhi Das founded The
Tamilan along with the publication of scores of pamphlets published for
wide circulation among the Tamils. There are two huge volumes of the
collection of the journal The Tamilnadu, edited by G. Alosius which attempt
to throw a flood of light on the Dalit movement led by Pandit Ayodhi Das
during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thus the Dalit movement
during the last part of nineteenth century itself contributed the Tamil
Dravidian identity to the world of Tamil nationalists and Dravidian groups.

In 1944, Ambedkar pointed out that the non-Brahmin movement was
an important incident in the history of India and likewise its decline which
could be kept in memory, a pity. According to Ambedkar the decline of the
non-Brahmin movement was mainly due to casteism. The non-Brahmins
could not understand the difference between their movement and that of the
Brahmins. Though they were antagonistic towards the Brahmins, they could
never fathom the difference that they had with the Brahmins, because they
had the same caste ideology arid Brahmanic culture, The caste Hindus have a
feeling of supremacy in society. Instead of giving up Brahmanic ideology,
they tightened the grip of their ties with the Brahmanic customs. The caste
Hindus often felt proud of their sub-sudra position. Their real anger was
always over their secondary position in the social strata in which the uppermost were the Brahmins. So, their struggle with Brahmins was long back withdrawn as they are still hand-in-glove with the inhuman project of the caste system. The other important issue of Tamil nationalism is the conflict among the Tamil-speaking groups. Caste is the enigmatic problem. The linguistic ethnic identity which is used for elections and other political purposes does not work for the annihilation of caste. The Dalit groups such as Paraiah, Pallar are also Tamil speaking citizens of Tamilnadu, but they are deprived of their fundamental rights to live, to speak, to worship, and so on. Whenever this oppression speaks some other truth they feel that they are not Tamil groups or that their original Tamil origin has been appropriated by the other dominant caste groups.

Neither Indian nationalism nor Tamil nationalism liberated the Dalit movement which started to realize the solidarity of the poor from caste oppression which is the basis for all other socio-economic oppressions. The discriminated classes of the people were long held back and felt frustrated. The movement is not just against the systematic and continuing onslaught by the rural upper castes and the deadly fear of a political kind held out by the emergent Hindutva party and its arrogant cultural expression in the form of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) which demolished the concept of securalism and humanism. The new Dalit movement is not aiming just to attain political power. It will not continue to remain weak to get merely job opportunities and positions, but to undertake the right transformation of civil society and thereby transform the nature of the state, and to attain an egalitarian human society. Tamilnadu will also see the movement in a different approach towards humanist changes and reconstruction of the civil system.
To establish an egalitarian society the Dalit leaders thought to free Dalit liberation from caste order. Thus, the aspiration of the new Dalit movement is not just for the eradication of various evils in Hindu society as leaders like Rajaram Mohan Ray to Gandhi did so far, but the real struggle, which begins from Ayodhi Das and extends to Ambedkar and to the present Dalit experts. Ambedkar was a man of action apart from being an academician, thinker and scholar. He studied deeply the social history of India. He worked all his life for the cause of the depressed classes. The aim of democracy to Ambedkar was essentially in the interests of the whole society and not of any class or community. He believed that real democracy is opposed to the suppression of minorities, the suppression of the spirit of democracy and humanism. On this basis he started the Independent Labour Party in 1934 to struggle for the Indian toiling community. It took up the talk of educating the masses in the methods of democracy and placed before them the correct ideology and organised them for political action through legislation. Ambedkar turned his party into the Scheduled Caste Federation thereby directly appealing to the Scheduled Castes to win power through unity. After that, considering the importance of education in the liberation of Dalits, Ambedkar founded the People’s Education Society.

At the all India level Ambedkar tried to educate the Dalits in the political field. He was a pioneer of the Dalit movement in India. Before that Jotirao Phule fought for the Dalits’ liberation from the Hindu social order. His aim was to reconstruct the social order on the basis of equality. His aim was to reconstruct the social order on the basis of social equality, justice and reason. He founded the Satyashodak Samaj to establish a casteless society in 1873. The Samaj set up the first school for girls and untouchables. These were Phule’s efforts to fight against the Brahmans’ hegemony and power.
In Tamilnadu, the Dalit movement was started before Jotirao Phule and Ambedkar. The Dalit movement in Tamilnadu has a history of more than a hundred years. The Dalits were denied space in the political field. They were merely puppets in the hands of caste Hindus. From grassroot level to state level they are marginalised and subordinated to the caste Hindus. Their talents, capacities and sacrifice are not treated on par with those of the caste Hindus. So the Dalit people thought of a separate movement for their people to focus their political grievances. According to Kesavair, “the Dalits are not recognised for what qualities, talent, efficiency and sacrifice they have possessed”. The Dalits are denied equal rights. The first and foremost struggle is that the Dalits should be recognised as human beings. This is the main duty of the Dalit organisation. In rural areas untouchability is practised very commonly due to the traditional outlook. But in urban settings the caste consciousness is decreasing due to the consniopolitan culture. The caste consciousness is not based on ideology alone basis but also on material basis. The poor high caste dominant group entertains a hatred towards the Dalits, Economic development is the main factor to determine the status of any individual or group. Depressed economic conditions lead to illiteracy, social immobility, loss of personal freedom and eventually affects the development of the personality.

The Dalits are mostly agricultural landless labourers, tenants etc. They have very meagre land, usually below 2 acres. But the caste Hindus have a monopoly over the land. “Out of 100% land the Dalits are farming only 1.3%. Of all the land owned in Tamilnadu, lands owned by Dalits form only 7.1% of the total area”\(^1\)\(^2\). So the Dalit people are largely landless labourers. To remove this kind of disparity the government should take all efforts to undertake a study to identify panchami land in all the districts of Tamilnadu and to hand over the lands to the Dalits. But the Dalits are denied their due share in ownership of land in Tamilnadu. Fifty five years of Independence
and more than three decades of Dravidian rule have been no different from the traditional Bhrahminic order, which had always denied Dalits the right to own land".

During the Congress period, Nehru had given the slogan of "self-reliance" but its growth oriented planning shifted away from the agenda of altering the social order. In 1967 Indira Gandhi offered a new slogan "Garibi Hatao". She introduced land ceiling and the 20 point programme to benefit the Dalits. In 1984, Rajiv Gandhi offered to take India into the 21st century and laid emphasis on modernising India. Yet practically no efforts were made to modernise the sanitary system, which left more than half a million sweepers condemned to live in inhuman conditions. In 1996, P.V. Narasimha Rao fought on the agenda of liberalisation and stability. He had nothing to offer to the Dalits. The non-Congress parties' political platforms have also not been very impressive. The Janata Party came to power in 1977. It had no agenda for Dalit upliftment. The Janata Dal under V.P. Singh formed the government at the Centre in 1989. It implemented the Mandal Commission recommendations. The left parties believed in class-based politics. But they were never in power. The BJP government had nothing to do to uplift the Dalits and end caste atrocities. The Dravidian parties are ruling for the past 35 years. The Dalits have been marginalised in the party structure and made voiceless within the government.

But have the Constitutional safeguards and reservations solved the problem? Surely not. Serious steps are needed to redress the grievances of the depressed classes and to make them educated and self-reliant. The Hindu society is based on four varunas, namely, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. Subsequently, innumerable castes and subcastes came into existence. The so-called untouchables who were originally outside the caste system came to be known as outcastes and formed the lowest caste. They were
deprived of education because of caste. To overcome this schools were opened for untouchables. The Christian missionaries were also engaged in educating Indian society, including the untouchables. In order to get rid of untouchability and the caste system the untouchables converted to Islam and Christianity but in vain.

Land Settlement

Before the advent of the British in India, there was no untouchable peasant proprietorship over the agricultural land. The landowning caste Hindus held a monopoly over the land. Thus there was a relationship between caste hierarchy and differential rights in the land. The untouchable landless labourers were available for hire or sale or transfer from place to place.

Lord Cornwallis, the Governor-General of Bengal, initiated the famous Permanent Land Settlement in the year 1793 for Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and extended it to North Madras. Under the system, landlords were appointed to collect land revenue. The purpose of this system was to create a new class of landlords. This system marked a departure from the traditional village hierarchy.

New industries are the agents of social change as people of different castes and communities got employment in the respective individual establishment's. The Dalit consciousness that had been brought about by various factors existing in the pre-Mutiny period could get a momentum in the post-Mutiny period. It was a proper institution allied and formed into a mass-based movement which could be reckoned with as a force. Underlying its study is the fundamental question why a separate movement of the Dalits was needed. The upper caste Hindus have dominated all the political parties and the Dalits are marginalised and subordinated in all. That
is why the Dalits think that a separate movement is needed to safeguard their rights and status.

By the end of the nineteenth century a number of protest movements had sprung up in different parts of India. The Satyashodak movement, under Puile’s leadership, was a forerunner to the later Mahar movement organised by Ambedkar in Maharashtra during the 20s. Amongst the earliest movements of similar affiliation were the Namashundra movement in Bengal, the Adi-dharm movement in the Punjab, the Ezhava movement in Kerala. These movements were influenced by social reformers and often assumed a socio-religious rather than a political hue. A variety of movements spearheading Dalit issues came into existence during the early decades of this century. A number of Dalit movements under the Dalit leadership, e.g. M.C.Raja of the Depressed classes Federation (DCF) in the Madras Presidency, Ayyankali in Travancore, Swami Sharadhanand and Ambedkar in Maharashtra.

Different phases of the Dalit movement before Independence can be identified. Its principal thrust during the initial phase was on temple entry, access to market places, removal of restrictions on admission to scholars, and free movement in public places such as roads, post offices etc. for Dalits. All this was based on an attempt to find a place for the Dalits within the broad structure of the Hindu religion. The Dalit movement was founded on the principle of equality. In the beginning stage the Dalit movement submitted petitions and held discussions. After that the Dalit leaders fought for legal rights and tried to detach themselves from Hindu society. They demanded a proportionate share in political power along with minority communities such as Mulsims. A delegation presented an address to the Viceroy pointing out the separate identities of untouchables etc.

In Tamilnadu the non-Brahmins claimed that the untouchables formed part of the Dravidian race, thus inflating their number in contrast to the

122
Brahmins who formed a tiny segment of the total population but covered a disproportionate number of jobs and places in educational institutions. The Indian National Congress leaders were prevailed upon by non-Brahmin leaders,

The emergence and the growth of the non-Brahmin movement did exercise a considerable impact on the Dalit movement, which was stronger in Tamilnadu than in the Northern states. The Dravidian movement supported the Dalits to uplift them in the socio-economic sphere, but did not succeed in integrating the Dalits into their fold. According to Washbrook, “the NBM did exert a positive influence on DC groups by providing the motivation for them to organise themselves separately. DC organisations have shown a preference for retention of their separate identities and to resist attempts to integrate them into broader political movements dominated by the Brahmins (chiefly the NC) or the caste Hindus (chiefly the NBM)”. 

After Independence the Dalit leaders thought about the basis on which the Dalit movement should be run. They were persuaded to go along with national parties and to join them, as Ambedkar did in the Nehru cabinet as the Law Minister of India. During his ministership he incorporated into the law of the land the fundamental rights, Untouchable Offences Act, and reservation system for the depressed classes. He resigned the ministership over the controversy over the Hindu Code Bill with Prime Minister Nehru and other Congress leaders. After his resignation he contested for the Lok sabha from the Bombay (North) parliamentary constituency and was defeated by a Congress opponent in the 1952 general elections. After that he was elected to the Rajya Sabha from the Bombay Legislature in 1952 March. He was a member of the Rajya sabha till the end of his life.
The Republican Party of India

The RPI was formed in 1957 on the basis of an open letter to the people written by Ambedkar and posthumously published. In it he outlined his concept of democracy and defined the role of the RPI. The RPI should aim at a society free from oppression and exploitation.

Emergence of the Dalit Panther Movement

The political bitterness among the Dalit leaders and the government’s inaction in the face of an intensification of atrocities committed by the upper caste elites against the Dalits caused great anger and frustration amongst the younger generation of Dalits. Against this background, the Dalit Panthers emerged as a militant movement with the aim of countering the caste Hindus’ atrocities against Dalits. Splits occurred in the DPI movement due to personal clashes among the leadership (Raja Dhale and Namdeo Dhasal). The DPI strongly favoured socio-economic transformation and the idea that Hindu Dalits should be in the movement along with neo-Buddhist Dalits. Factionalism and unprincipled alliance with ruling caste Hindus resulted in further splits in the DPI movement.

Prakash Ambedkar, grandson of B.R. Ambedkar, tried to unite all the Dalit leaders into one fold. He started a new political party named Bharatiya Republican Party in 1984. He organised a huge demonstration against the Maharashtra government. However this kind of activities could not unite the Dalit forces into one fold.

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)

Kanshiram approached different views to integrate the Dalits and other minority communities. A section of Dalit employees joined his movement. His party was known as the Bhahujan Samaj Party. The BSP originally claimed to mobilise the minorities in addition to all the “non-duija” castes.
But at no point of its growth could it ever seriously make a dent in the Backward classes votes, the OBCs, The BSP secured 2.2% more than the Congress votes in the Punjab State Assembly elections and 3% in the Lok Sabha elections in 1984. Similarly, in the 1989 elections, a few BSP candidates won their first victories to the UP and Bihar State Legislative Assemblies. Kanshiram tried to unite all the Dalit groups into one fold.

The various empowerment schemes and reformatory measures taken by the state over the years for the amelioration of the poor have brought the Dalit castes out of the electoral passivity which characterised their behaviour till the 1950s and the 1960s of tin’s century. Lack of development and education among the Dalits had earlier kept them as vote banks of various mainstream parties, where they could only be used as a junior partner of a broad Muslim-Brahmin social, economic or political programme of action beyond uniting the SCs, STs, OBCs and minorities. The BSP’s main thrust is winning the elections and uniting the SCs, STs and OBCs in the country”.

The Left and the Dalit movement

The Communist Party of India was formed in 1924. But Communists in Tamilnadu did not come into their own till 1936. In India M.M. Roy was a pioneer of the Communist movement. The Communist Party did not participate in the Quit India Movement. Because of this sudden change, the Communists lost their social base in Tamilnadu. Independence brought several ideological quarrels with regard to the problems of Indian Independence, Nehru’s government and Nehru’s foreign policy. In 1958, there was a split among the Communists. The Indo-Chinese conflict in 1962 again threw the Communists into turmoil. Eventually the split among occurred in 1964 and the CPI and the CPI(M) came into being. The Tamilnadu Communists did not participate in the ideological quarrels till
1962. However P. Ramamurthi split the party in 1964. The C'PJ and the new party CPI(M) had almost equal strength when the split had occurred.

In Tamilnadu most of the Dalits were members of the Communist parties. Their policies were based only on class not caste. So the Dalits relations with the Communists were unsatisfactory. Ambedkar also had differences of opinion with the leaders of the Communist Party of India. Caste issues and the question of untouchability were given only a place of secondary importance in the CPI’s programme. This was reflected in its deliberate underplaying of the problem of Dalit labourers. The Kisan Saba debates on the abolition of landlordism reveal that the main parties identified as cultivators of the soil were the tenant classes (often coincident with the intermediate caste Hindu communities which constituted the rich and middle peasant classes). The rights of the agricultural labourers (largely made up of Dalits) were not recognised to the same extent as those of the higher rural classes. As a consequence, the Dalits kept themselves aloof from the Kisan struggles. The Dalits’ specific needs were ignored by the Communist parties. The dominance of caste Hindu elements was not checked by the parties within their fold. For a long time the Congress party exploited the Dalits. The Left parties failed to integrate all the sections of the people.

The CPI(M) has shown a responsiveness to Dalit issues, especially the problems of rural landless agricultural labourers. The CPI(M-L) movement has integrated the Dalits and non-Dalits to establish a classless society. It rejected the path of parliamentary democracy to form the government. The state government suppressed the CPI(M-L) movement in the 1970s and 1980s. In Tamilnadu, the CPI, CPI(M), and the CPI(M-L) are all functioning today.
Dravidian movement and Dalits

A political party known as the South Indian Liberal Federation was founded in 1916, principally to oppose the economic power of the Brahmins. The party was later renamed the Justice Party and its stated goal was to render social justice to non-Brahmins.

In order to gain the support of the masses, non-Brahmin particulars began propagating an ideology of equality among all non-Brahmins, Brahminical priesthood and Sanskritic social class value hierarchy were blamed for the existence of inequalities among non-Brahmin groups. Therefore the non-Brahmins entered into a social controversy with the Brahmins and they did not hesitate to employ political means to solve that conflict. Among the non-Brahmins the Scheduled Castes were marginalised in the Justice Party. The upper caste non-Brahmins shared the economic benefits from the government. The contention of the Dalits was the major accusation that the party had worked neither for all non-Brahmins nor for all Dravidians. It worked only for the upper caste non-Brahmins of the four regions. In 1923, M.C.Rajah, the most prominent among the untouchables in the Justice Party, departed with a large number of untouchables.

Among the non-Brahmins the caste and class consciousness was not removed. The non-Brahmin communities were exploited by the Brahmin community. But the non-Brahmins had no close relationship with others. So the NBM did not succeed in integrating the DCs into their fold. The Dalits did not trust the caste Hindus who subjected them to past indignities and continuing atrocities. At the same time, the NBM’s general ideological orientation was federal in character. Thus, for instance, in Tamil society many of the upper caste Vellalas, Gownders, and others who occupied dominant positions in the movement were also landlords, big farmers, traders and financiers. So the Dalit organisation complained to the Indian Statutory
Commission that NBM leaders did not belong to the Depressed Classes, but were representing the Depressed Classes. The members of Legislative Councils were sympathetic only to those demands, issues and problems of the DCs that did not clash with those of their communities. The Justice Party reasserted itself and the untouchables were pushed out gradually from the party.

However the NBM did exert a positive influence on DC groups by providing the motivation for them to organise themselves separately. The Depressed Classes did not like to associate with either the Brahmins or the non-Brahmins. They were attacked by the caste Hindus during the B & C Mills strike. That is why M.C. Rajah and other members of the Justice Party who belonged to the Depressed Classes moved out from this party and organised the Dalit movement, called the All India Adi-Dravida Mahajan Sabha (AIADMS), which attempted to bring all the Dalit groups together. Generally the Dalit leaders distrusted the Indian National Congress because of its negation of Dalit interests. They also opposed the NBM because of its upper caste rural domination.

The Justice Party weakened in the absence of mass support and Periyar took over the leadership of the party. Under his presidentship the party developed but almost all of the party’s conservative members, most of whom were rich and educated, withdrew from active participation. Though the Justice party prior to E.Y.R.’s leadership, opposed the Brahmins only on the political front, they did not oppose them on the social front, though they paid lip service to social reforms. The immediate consequence of E.V.R.’s leadership of the party was the revival of Non-Brahminism as the cardinal principle of the party. The principle of self-respect had been incorporated in the Justice Party programmes. The Justice Party became more militant and virulent in its attack against Brahmins. The revolutionary social programmes
of E.V.R. were opposed by a section the party which consisted of R.K. Shanmugam Chettiar, P.T. Rajan, A.P. Patro and P. Balasubramanian. They wanted a change in the leadership of the party. In the Salem Conference of the Justice Party in 1944, E.V.R. and his colleagues like C.N. Annadurai were instrumental in changing the name of the Justice Party to the Dravidar Kazhagam. Those who opposed the change of name walked out of the conference and convened a meeting and declared themselves members of the Justice Party.

The DK movement against religion and god culminated in the form of a campaign to enter the “Garbagraha” or sanctum sanctorum of Hindu temples in 1969, to remove the untouchability and the caste distinction observed in temples. Periyar rejected the Brahminical supremacy of the Hindu caste system, but also advocated a new social order based on social justice, without any caste hierarchy. Periyar supported the Dalits wholehearted by. He said, “The Dravidian movement will have to fight for an egalitarian society without any caste distinction. The Dalit people will join either the Scheduled Caste Federation or the Dravidar Kazhagam. But they have the right to utilise the Dravidian movement’s efforts”. Periyar also agitated against Rajaji’s casteist Education Plan (Kula Kalvi Thittam). Rajaji was the Chief Minister of Madras State for a second time between 1952 and 1954. He introduced the scheme of conducting classes in the schools in the forenoon and asking the students to learn the traditional jobs of their parents in the afternoon. The Dravidian leaders asserted that the scheme was a clever device to keep the sudra and panchama castes as illiterates or semi-literate. Periyar began to agitate for its withdrawal. As a consequence, the Chief Minister had to resign in March 1954 and Kamaraj assumed office on 14th April. In August 1956, the Dravidar Kazhagam undertook an agitation of burning the portrait of Lord Rama as he symbolised the preservation of vama dharma. Periyar was placed under preventive arrest on this occasion. Periyar
burnt the Constitution that helped to safeguard casteism and was sentenced to rigorous imprisonment.

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and Dalit Politics

In 1949, E.V.R. Periyar, who was then 72, announced his marriage with 28 year old Maniammai and nominated her as his successor. C.N. Annadurai opposed this marriage. Protesting against this C.N. Annadurai founded the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. The DMK contested the elections for the first time in 1957. It secured 15 seats in the Assembly and 2 seats in the Parliament. In 1962 in the third general elections the DMK won 50 seats in the Assembly and 7 in Parliament. In the fourth general election in 1967 the DMK came to power under the Chief Ministership of C.N. Annadurai. After the sudden demise of Annadurai, Karunanidhi became the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu. During Annadurai’s and Karunanidhi’s periods several welfare measures were implemented to uplift the downtrodden, particularly the Scheduled Caste people in the socio, political and economic spheres.

In the wide span of human life, a time, a stage comes when perhaps every individual, for reasons known or unknown, begins to identify himself with either one or with some other group of individuals.

The Dravidian movement has done much to uplift the Dalits in Tamilnadu for the past thirty five years. Both Central and State governments allocated thousands of crores of rupees for the upliftment of Dalits in Tamilnadu. Yet the benefits hardly reached the people for whom they were intended, nor effected a significant change in the lives of the majority of Dalits. During the period the Dalits have been marginalised in party structures and thereby made voiceless within the government. But have the Constitutional safeguards and reservation solved their problem? Surely not. Serious steps are needed to redress the grievances of the Depressed Classes.
and to make them educated and self-reliant. The concept of freedom and democracy are meaningless till such time as we are able to destroy caste oppression.

What has the Dravidian movement done for Dalits constructively? They are now inheritors of the Brahmans’ power and domination. Dalits decided that Karunanidhi is not the man to look to the interests of the Dalits and the poor. Had the DMK been a revolutionary body, the Dalits would have joined it. The DMK is not courageous enough to proclaim the ideal of social and economic equality empowering the common man. The DMK came into power in 1967. During the Annadurai period (1967-1969) the Kalvenmani Dalits were burnt alive. There was no serious step taken to arrest the culprits. So the Dalit people thought a separate movement was needed to redress their grievances.

After the death of Annadurai, Karunanithi became the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu. Sathiavanimuthu, a Dalit leader of the DMK, was a Minister in Karunanithi’s cabinet up to 1974. On the eve of the Chief Minister’s election, Karunanidhi’s name was purposed by K.A. Madhiazhagan and seconded by Sathiavanimuthu. She became the Minister for Adi-Dravidar and Tribal Welfare and Information and Publicity of Tamilnadu. She has explained how Karunanidhi was against: the Scheduled Castes and how her demands were rejected by Karunanidhi.

Upto Annadurai’s death the Backward Class department was attached to the Harijan Welfare Department. But it was bifurcated during Karunanidhi’s regime and N.V. Natarajan was nominated Minister for Backward Classes Welfare.

According to Sathiavanimuthu the DMK government and Karunanidhi are out and out against Scheduled Caste welfare. He diverted the Scheduled Caste development fund to Backward Classes. The Untouchability
(abolition) Act was not properly implemented. During Annadurai’s period, in 1968, 44 Dalits were burned to death by caste Hindu landlords. The accused were sentenced by the District and Sessions Judge of Thanjavur. The accused appealed and broke the case. Due to police inefficiency and government indifference the case was not properly prosecuted. That is why a Division Bench of the High Court dismissed the case. It was not taken to the Supreme Court by the Tamilnadu government. Chief Minister Karunanidhi refused, to file a case in the Supreme Court. Karunanidhi is always with caste Hindus and not for Dalits. During the British regime the lands given to Depressed Classes were called panchami land. It was encroached upon by the caste Hindus. The government did not take any steps to prevent such encroachments. So the Dalits’ demands were not implemented by the Tamilnadu Government.

The Tamilnadu Government instituted Boards and Corporations to discharge the government function. Karunanidhi appointed many Chairmen from caste Hindu DMK men but none from the Scheduled Castes. Due to this kind of activities many Dalit legislators of the DMK were vexed. The dissident Dalit legislators organised into one organisation and presented their grievances to Chief Minister Karunanidhi. But he did not respond to the Dalit legislators. They organised themselves under the leadership of Sathiavanimuthu, who was dropped from the Karunanidhi Cabinet due to differences with the latter. After that Sathiavanimuthu started an organization, Thalthapattor Munnetra Kazhagam, to put forth the demands of the Scheduled Castes. She submitted a complaint against Karunanidhi to the Governor of Tamilnadu, K.K.Shah. Due to corruption and misappropriation the Karunanidhi Ministry was dismissed from power. The late Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi said during her election canvassing in February 1997 at Madurai that the Tamilnadu Government was dismissed due to the DMK’s injustices to the Scheduled Castes.
Ambedkar People’s Movement

In the 1960s the DMK attracted the educated youth and Dalit people into its organisation. During the anti-Hindi agitation in 1965 Tamilnadu was burning. Many youths were involved in the agitation. One Rajendran was shot dead by the Tamilnadu police at Annamalai University. The DMK supported the agitation. Due to the anti-Hindi agitation the DMK came to power in 1967. The Dalit youths continued to be attracted even now by the DMK. After the Kilvenmanu incident the trend has been changing. The DMK slowly sided with caste Hindus and marginalised the Scheduled Caste people. At that time former mayor of Chennai City and former MLA V. Balasundaram organised a conference in the name of Ambedkar to look at the condition of SCs/STs. Invitations were sent to the all Scheduled Caste teachers to participate in the conference. V. Balasundaram himself was declared leader of the Scheduled Castes and formed a movement called the Ambedkar People’s Movement. Soon after he disassociated himself from the DMK but his activities continued to favour the ruling DMK, After M.G.Ramachandran was expelled from the DMK Vai.Balasundaram and S.M.Durairaj, former MLA, Soundarapandiyan and Sakthidhasan of the Republican Party of India also supported MGR and condemned Karunanidhi’s administration which was against the Dalits. Vai. Balasundaram supported MGR from 1974 onwards. During the AIADMK period in 1978, 13 Dalits were killed in Villupuram. The Dalits of Meenakshipuram village were converted to Islam in 1980. This was published throughout India.

Scheduled Castes Liberation Movement

The Vanniyar Sangam was supported by the various political members belonging to the Vanniyar community to revive renovate the said organisation. The Vanniyar Sangam was revived by Dr. Ramadass, who
kindled the Vanniyars to unite into one forum. Ramadass compared the status and the job opportunities of the Scheduled Castes and the Vanniyars. He demanded more concessions to the Vanniyars in government organisations. This kind of propaganda was presented to the Vanniyars. The Vanniyars organised a road blockade in 1987 for one week in Tamilnadu.

The Vanmyar Sangam attacked the Dalit villagers where they were in the majority and dominant. A large number of Dalit houses were burnt and damaged by the Vanniyar Sangam. This kind of activities incited the Dalits to assert their rights. The Dalit leaders planned to organise into one forum and agitate against caste atrocities against the Dalits. The Dalit leaders were M. Sundarajarajn of the Tamilnadu Republic an Party of India, A. Sakthidhasan, Dr. Seppan and L. Elayaperumal, V, Balasundaram had discussed the need for a Dalit unified organisation to fight against caste oppression. Of them Mr. Sundarajan, Dr, Seppan and V. Balasundaram later withdrew their support to organising the association. Finally, the rest of the leaders L. Elayaperumal and A. Sakthidhasan started the organisation called it the Scheduled Caste Liberation Federation.

The Human Rights Party⁴⁶ was formed by L, Elayaperumal, a former M.P. and Congress leader of Tamilnadu. He ran the Nandanar Education Society to impart education to Dalit people after Swami Sagajanandhes. Former Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi nominated L. Elayaperumal to investigate the Dalit problem throughout India. Fie submitted his report to Parliament but it was not published. The quit the Congress Party due differences with Indira Gandhi. His party contested in the Assembly elections and won 2 seats.

To view the Constitutional provisions to uplift the Dalits, the state government has nodal agencies to implement the said provisions. Art. 38 and 39 (a), (BC) and (c) of the Constitution have set up a Planning Commission.
which has been entrusted with the task of extending all round economic
development with emphasis on social justice.

With these aims and objectives, the planners provided separate outlays
and programmes for the Scheduled Castes. The government has undertaken
several measures under the Five Year Plans to improve the economic
conditions of the Scheduled Castes. But the benefits have neither reached the
Dalits not effected a significant change in the Dalits’ life style.

The Tamilnadu Government usually takes pride in claiming that it
stands very high in the field of social development vis-a-vis the rest of the
country. Often, figures are cited to show how Tamilnadu is far better in the
field of social development than many other States in the country. Leaving
aside the legitimacy of such claims, what is significant is the increasingly
tragic situation of the Dalits in Tamilnadu as well as the continuing gaps in
standards of social development between Dalits and non-Dalit sections of the
Tamilnadu population.

The following survey takes stock of the social development of Dalits
vis-a-vis non-Dalits in Tamilnadu. Compared with the non-Dalits, the Dalits
have very meagre land, generally below 2 acres. Most Dalits are agricultural
landless labourers. They are mostly living in the rural setup. Table 1 presents
the member of operational land holdings and facilitates a comparison of the
land holdings of the Dalits with those of others.
### Table 1

**Number (and Area in hectares) of Operational Holdings 1990-91**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Class size</th>
<th>Dalits</th>
<th>Tribal s</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Marginal (Below 1 acre)</td>
<td>7,54,526 (2,50,598)</td>
<td>36,703 (16,600)</td>
<td>50,56,867 (18,50,628)</td>
<td>58,48,096 (21,17,826)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Small 1-2 acres</td>
<td>1,07,578 (1,48,169)</td>
<td>17,370 (24,275)</td>
<td>11,49,567 (16,22,027)</td>
<td>12,74,515 (17,94,471)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Semi Medium 2-4 acres</td>
<td>34,042 (89,788)</td>
<td>9,416 (25,657)</td>
<td>5,74,147 (15,71,069)</td>
<td>6,17,605 (16,86,514)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Medium 4-10 acres</td>
<td>6,958 (38,217)</td>
<td>2,548 (16,477)</td>
<td>2,17,688 (12,46,430)</td>
<td>2,27,594 (13,01,124)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Large Above 10 acres</td>
<td>480 (7,222)</td>
<td>240 (3,685)</td>
<td>30,402 (5,62,835)</td>
<td>31,122 (573,742)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>All sizes</td>
<td>9,03,584 (5,33,994)</td>
<td>66,677 (86,694)</td>
<td>70,28,671 (68,52,989)</td>
<td>79,98,932 (784,73,67)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistical Handbook of Tamilnadu, 1997 (pp.94.101)

Out of all those who own land of all sizes in Tamilnadu (79,98,932 persons), Dalits owning land (9,03,584 persons) constitute only 11.3% the and the lands owned by Dalits form only 7.1% of the total area. Out of all those who own large farms (10 acres and above) in Tamilnadu, a mere 1.5% are Dalits. Among the Dalits who own land (9,03,584 persons) nearly 45% own lands of less than 2 acres each, which is highly non-economical and non-profitable.
During the past 35 years’ rule the Dravidan movement did not give equal status to the Dalits. The election manifestoes of the Dravidan parties assured that the Dalits would be provided lands. The DMK regime did not take serious steps to distribute lands. During the AIADMK period in 1993 two Dalit youths were fired upon by the police in Kaaranai Village of Chengulpat district over the issue of panchami lands. Though most of the manifestoes highlighted the issue, no genuine efforts have been taken even to identify such lands, much less to make sure that these are returned to the Dalits. But most of the Dalits are denied a share in the land in Tamilnadu. In 55 years of Independence the thirty five years of Dravidan rule have been no different from the rule of the traditional Brahminical order which had always denied Dalits the right to own land. The government efforts to appropriate the surplus lands did not affect the big landowners. All the Dalit or panchami lands are in the hands of caste Hindus in Tamilnadu. The Dravidan parties have not taken any concrete steps to distribute the panchami lands to the Dalits.

There are myriad contradictions and controversies between the Dalits and the non-Dalits to consume / utilize the common properties in Tamilnadu. In the last few years there have been increasing number of instances of Dalits and Dalit movements forcefully demanding that they should be given their due share in common and village resources owned or auctioned by the government. Waste lands are leased to the landowners and mirasdars, but not to Dalits by the government itself. The government thereby denies the Dalits’ right to own land. Automatically the Dalits are concerned and their economic status is degraded and they have to depend the caste Hindus for their livelihood. The Revenue Department regularly leases out, through auction, vast resources of trees, grazing lands, ponds and lakes for fishing etc. Even though these are supposed to be open auctions, where everyone has equal rights no Dalit ever can bid for them or get them on auction.
In Chennagarampatti, there were nine acres of land that were annually leased by the Alagarkoil administration. Yearly there was an open auction in which the land was leased to the highest bidder and yearly the Dalits were prevented from participating in the auction, ensuring that they would never advance from their status as agricultural labourers. In 1991 the Dalits directly participated in the auction and the local Thevars approached the court against the Dalits. The court issued a judgment in favour of the Dalits. So that land was leased to the Dalits. Due to this two Dalits, Ammasi and Velu, were killed. Usually all the auctions go to the caste Hindus. The governmental machinery also always supports the non-Dalits. Even though these are supposed to be open auctions where everyone has equal rights, Dalits are rarely allowed to exercise their right to these properties in auctions. The Dalits are prevented from participating in the auction and generally the dominant groups attack them. The violent clashes between Dalits and others at Naraingapatti, Madurai, in 1992, and at Vaghadavur, Villupuram, recently were around the issue of Dalits' right to take part in the auctioning of tamarind trees etc. According to government statistics there are 4,91,417 acres of land coming under the purview of the Hindu Religious Endowment Department. Of these almost 4 lakh acres are said to be in illegal possession and only about 1 lakh acres of land come to the public auction processes. In 1992, the Dalits were attacked at Chennagarampatti, Madurai for having claimed their right to bid in the auction of temple lands. Besides lakhs of acres of land bearing cashew, mango, guava and eucalyptus trees, belonging to the Forest Department, come into the process of public auctioning. Here again the Dalits are kept out of the process. The Public Works Department contracts are grabbed by the caste Hindus and closed to the Dalits.

In all walks of life the Dalits are legally or illegally prevented from taking part in public affairs. Their legitimate rights are denied and the
government does not take any concrete steps to prevent the injustices clone by the caste Hindus to the Dalits in Tamilnadu.

Dalits and Employment in Tamilnadu

Already the Dalits are faced with unemployment and underemployment. Now the trend has worsened after the implementation of globalization, privatization and liberalization.

Representation in State Services

The low levels of representation of Dalits in state service commissions have been regularly acknowledged in Parliament-the reservation quota for Dalits is never filled in the higher categories for one reason or the other.

In government services alone, in Tamilnadu, there are about 13 lakh employees. Given the 19% reservation for the Dalits, there should be more than 2.5 lakh Dalit employees at all the levels and services of the government. Where are they? Apart from that, in the case of state public sector undertakings and in municipalities, the Dalits are marginal in number.

It is generally accepted that about 80% of the revenue budget of any particular year is spent on salaries. Out of a total revenue budget of Rs. 18,000 crores, salaries come to almost Rs. 14,400 crores. Of this amount, about 2736 crores will reach the Dalits if all their posts are held by them.

Given the fact that not more than one-third of their legitimate posts are filled by Dalits a vast amount of about Rs. 1600 crores per year, which is their statutory entitlement, is denied the Dalits on the salaries front alone.

Dalits and College Teachers

The total number of posts of teachers in the government colleges in Tamilnadu alone is about 6000. Out of this, a minimum of 1000 teachers
should have been from among the Dalits. But the actual number of Dalit teachers in Tamilnadu Government colleges is just 350. Only recently the government has come out with a policy decision of recruiting 595 college teachers from among the Dalits in the course of the next 4 years. The total number of college teachers in Government, Government-aided and self-financing colleges in Tamilnadu for the year 1997-98 was 20133. Of this, the Dalits, as per their proportional right, should get at least 4000 seats. In practice, the number is not even 500.

Under the Indian Constitution, the Scheduled Castes have safeguards and rights to employment in governments and public sector undertakings. The state governmental also have the responsibility to look after the Scheduled Castes' welfare, as seen in the preamble, fundamental rights and the directive principles of state policy. While analyzing the activities of the government vis-a-vis the upliftment of the Dalits it is observed that the Dalits are getting very meager level of benefits.

Dalits and Education in Tamilnadu

The Scheduled Castes, most of whom had been subjected to various social disabilities of extreme forms, were exploited because of illiteracy. The Scheduled Castes' illiteracy was imposed by the caste Hindus. Education is required by the Scheduled Castes to remove their obstacles in the social and economic spheres. Introduction of compulsory elementary education as per the Constitutional provisions is essential. In spite several schemes introduced to impart education to Dalit students, because of their family background, they did not get proper education. Tamilnadu, in spite of its great strides in general literacy, has to solve the basic problem of the Dalits' right to education.
Table 2 contrasts the literacy levels of Dalits and non-Dalits in Tamilnadu.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dalits</td>
<td>21.82</td>
<td>29.67</td>
<td>39.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tribals</td>
<td>9.02</td>
<td>20.46</td>
<td>23.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Non-SC/ST</td>
<td>43.58</td>
<td>51.01</td>
<td>58.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tamilnadu peoples forum for Social Development, p.21

While in Tamilnadu in general about 40% of the people remain illiterate, as high as 60% of Dalits remain illiterate. The Dalits in Tamilnadu in 1991 have still to reach the literacy levels achieved by other sections of Tamilnadu way back in 1971.

The situation is even more tragic in the case of Dalit women as compared to non-Dalit women. Table 3 compares the literacy rates of Dalit women as compared to non-Dalit women.
Table 3

Literacy Rates of Dalit and Non-Dalit Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dalits (SC) Women</td>
<td>11.32</td>
<td>18.47</td>
<td>29.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tribal (ST) Women</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>16.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Non-Sc-St-Women</td>
<td>30.47</td>
<td>39.04</td>
<td>48.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Non-Sc/St-Men</td>
<td>56.40</td>
<td>62.69</td>
<td>67.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tamilnadu peoples forum for Social Development, p.21

Compared to the literacy rate of nearly 70% for non-SC/ST men and nearly 50% for non-SC/ST women in Tamilnadu, not even 30% of Dalit women have become literate.

Several welfare measures were undertaken to uplift the Dalits, but they did not fulfil even basic needs. So the Central Government introduced the Special Component Plan for he Dalits for their welfare. The SCP has been in operation both at the Centre and in Tamilnadu State for almost twenty years. What have been the concrete achievements of the programme? Regarding this the Tamilnadu Working Group on SCs and STs (IX Five Year Plan) gives a clear answer.

“A major area of failure is in the implementation of the Special Component Plan (S.C.P.), While, in principle, it has been agreed to allocate funds for the scheme, the observation of the Ministry of Welfare, Government of India is; it is disheartening to note that out of the total 62
Union Ministries/Departments, only had actually formulated the SCP so far. It is needless to mention further about the performance of state government departments of various states in this regard. This only establishes the fact that while the finance is available what is required is to activate the government agencies and departments to properly plan and channelise the resources for the welfare of the SCs and STs.

The Tamilnadu Working Group on SCs and STs (IX Five Year Plan) seriously analyzed the SCP. The following points were observed:

Fund allocation—wrong and inadequate

As per the requirement of the Special Component Plan 19-18% of the Plan funds are to be allocated to Dalit welfare. In 1997-98, Tamilnadu should have allocated Rs. 729.46 crores. But the amount mentioned in the Budget Plan of 1997-98 in only Rs. 168.46 crores; in 1998-99 the amount should have been Rs. 810.22 crores, while the actual amount mentioned is only Rs. 267.83 crores; in 1999-2000, the amount should have been Rs. 933.0 crores, while the actual amount mentioned is only Rs. 348 crores.

At a time when false implications such as “there in too much money allocated for Dalit welfare” and “money allotted to Dalits are increasing in a big way” etc, are widely prevalent, the above figures raise indeed very serious questions.

As mentioned above, the Special Component Plan, as operative in Tamilnadu is built around the two basic aims of helping Dalits to rise above the poverty line and providing basic needs to them. It is obvious that this limited perspective is not only contrary to the very spirit of the Special Component plan, as envisaged originally, it is also very faulty. Such an approach can never pave the way for the integrated social development of the Dalit community.
Even though the Special Component Plan demands strict criteria for working out the schemes under it, many departments simply claim that clue benefits reach the Scheduled Castes and Tribes from out of their general programmes. Apart from such notional allocations and explanations they have failed to work out special plans under the SCP.

It is demanded that all the departments of the government incorporate the Special Component Plan in their budget proposals. But, few sectors take note of this demand. A study of the budget proposals reveals that only five sectors of the government have Special Component Plan for Dalits in their budget proposals. These sectors are Education, Welfare of SCs/STs and OBC, Roads and Bridges, Agriculture and Family Welfare. Even those sectors show mere symbolic allocation rather than a substantial one.

After 55 years of failure of planning and as even well designed programmes like the Special Component Plan have not made any major impact on the socio-economic status of Dalits, it is obvious that very fundamental and radical changes need to be brought about in the approach to budgeting for Dalits.

The following simple exercise, using the entries in the Budget Link Book of the Tamilnadu Government Budget 1998-99, has been undertaken by the State Adi-Dravida Welfare Study Group. The group brings out clearly the scale of discrepancy between what is allocated and the due right of the Scheduled Castes in Tamilnadu. The difference between the figures in column (3) and those in column (4) in Table 4 is the difference between the amount that is claimed to be allocated and the amount that has been actually allocated.
Table 4

Annual Plan outlay for 1998-99 under Special Component Plan

(Rs. In Lakhs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SI No.</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Plan Allocation (2)</th>
<th>Due as per SCP (3)</th>
<th>As per Budget Link Book (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Agriculture &amp; Related fields</td>
<td>5,05,97.00</td>
<td>1,17,37.11</td>
<td>43,00.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Irrigation &amp; Flood Control</td>
<td>9,03,92.00</td>
<td>1,71,64.79</td>
<td>14,42.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Industry &amp; Minerals</td>
<td>1,04,70.00</td>
<td>16.70</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Transport &amp; communications</td>
<td>6,94,63.00</td>
<td>88,65.90</td>
<td>16,20.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Seven i.e., Technology &amp; Environment</td>
<td>6,61.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>General Economic Services</td>
<td>7,89.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Education, Sports, Arts</td>
<td>2,21,91.00</td>
<td>38,32.38</td>
<td>1,4,70.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>1,16,51.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Water supply, Housing &amp; urban Development</td>
<td>8,64,34.00</td>
<td>1,62,32.46</td>
<td>39,33.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Information &amp; Publicity</td>
<td>1,39.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Welfare of SC/ST and Classes</td>
<td>1,60,34.00</td>
<td>1,00,96.00</td>
<td>10096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Labour and Labour Welfare</td>
<td>9,41.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Social Welfare &amp; Nutrition</td>
<td>1,35,55.00</td>
<td>29,13.25</td>
<td>83.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Other social and community services</td>
<td>4,17.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>General services</td>
<td>49,00.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>45,00,09.00</td>
<td>8,21,72.91</td>
<td>242,83,12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the Justice Party down to the AIADMK all parties have claimed that the Dalits got their due share in the public properties to develop their social and economic status. Have the Dravidan parties really taken all steps to develop the Dalits’ status? Certainly not. Most of the Dalits enrolled their names as members of the DMK in the 50s and the 60s. They had good faith in the DMK. The DMK leaders cunningly cheated the Dalit people after capturing power in 1967. The Dalit youth and students were attracted by the attractive speeches of the DMK leaders. That is why the majority of the Dalits helped the DMK to capture power in Tamilnadu.

After assuming power the DMK sided with the caste Hindus. The Dalits were cornered and subordinated. During the DMK period 1967-76 controversies arose between Chief Minister Karunanidhi and his Cabinet colleague Mrs. Sathiavanimuthu who was a Dalit leader of the said party on the question of fund allocations. Finally she was dropped from Karunanidhi’s Cabinet. After that Sathiavanimuthu stalled a political party named Thazhappattor Munnetra Kazhagam. Most of the Dalit MLAs joined hands with Sathiavanimuthu and raised their voice against Karunanidhi.

Sativanumuthu clearly described Karunanidhi’s attitude to Dalit upliftment in Tamilnadu, in her book entitled Enathu Porattam (My Struggle). In December 1968, 44 Dalit agriculturists were burnt alive in the village of Keezhvenmani of Tanjore District by the local mirasdaris. The district court convicted those who were responsible for the incident. But the Madras High Court released the convicted persons. The Karunanidhi Government did not take any steps to challenge the judgment in the Supreme Court, he favoured the caste Hindus. The Tamilnadu Government formed many Boards and Corporations to improve the social conditions of the people, The Directors and Presidents were only caste Hindus, none of them
from the Scheduled Castes. So the Dalit people who belonged to DMK were upset at the attitude of Chief Minister Karunanidhi.

The Indian Constitution Art-339(2) specifies that the allocated funds are to be properly spent on Scheduled Caste development. The Central Government has the right to take necessary action against the state governments which violated the Constitutional provisions. The Rajamannar Committee was appointed to investigate the Center-State relations. The Committee recommended that Art. 339 (2) of the Constitution should be deleted. This was debated in the DMK General Council. But Sattriyavanimuthu, then Minister of Adi-Dravida and Tribal Welfare, opposed the move. Economically, politically and socially the Dalits were cheated by the DMK during its regime (1967-76; 1989-91; 1996-2001). Most of the Dalits were attacked during that period. Economically the DMK government did not take any concrete steps to develop the Dalits. The funds allocated by the Central Government to the Dalits were diverted and misused by the DMK government. This was one of the reasons for the dismissal of the DMK government by Indira Gandhi in 1976.

Dalits Relationship with the DMK

Originally most of the Dalits were in either the DMK or the AIADMK. The youth, students and school teachers had faith in these parties, particularly the DMK. All the district secretaries of the DMK were caste Hindus. They controlled the district administration. From village level to district level all the party posts were vested with the caste Hindus. Only deputy secretary’s and additional secretary’s posts were given to Dalits. They could not move any resolution against the caste Hindus.

The DMK office bearers also were prejudiced against the Dalits. Even though the Dravidan parties propagated caste abolition, egalitarianism, self-respect and rationalism, they did not practise it in real life. Hardly any caste
Hindus belonging to Dravidan parties intermarried with the Dalits. The atrocities of the caste Hindus against Dalits continue in the rural setup. There is no solution to the caste clashes. The DMK has no concrete policy to improve the Dalits' life style on par with that of the other caste Hindus. The Dalit youth can not expect any kind of remedies from the DMK.

The Dalits and the AIADMK

After his expulsion from the DMK M.C. Ramachandran formed a new party named the AIADMK. He was a powerful leader in the DMK. He was always close to the masses and poor people. Most of the Dalit people gradually shifted their support to MGR and the AIADMK after his expulsion from the DMK.

The period of the AIADMK also witnessed caste clashes between caste Hindus and Scheduled Castes in various parts of Tamilnadu, for example in Villuppuram and Unchanai. Thousands of Dalits converted to Islam in Meenakshipuram in the year 1980. The RSS was strongly rooted in Tamilnadu. MGR himself was projected as a member of the Manradiyar Dynasty of the Konguvellars. After the death of MGR Jayalalitha became the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu. She was supported by the Brahim people. Jayalalitha was proud of calling her self a Brahmin, though she was the General Secretary of a Dravidan party. Jayalalitha’s government failed to prevent the caste clashes which occured in southern parts of Tamilnadu in 1995.

Both the DMK and the AIADMK have failed to protect the Dalit rights which are given by the Constitution. Ambedkar, the first Law Minister of India, had enshrined in the Constitution of India special protection to the Dalits in the form of reservation in educational institutions and government jobs. Reservation was required for the Dalits not because of poverty but because of social stigma and caste discrimination. Tamilnadu has been the
pioneer in formulating the reservation policy, The Tamilnadu Government in implementing the reservation policy (SC-18%, ST-1%, MBC-20%, totally 69%). But the Dalit people did not get their due share in government employment as guaranteed by the Indian Constitution. The employment opportunities have been denied by both the Central Government and the State governments. Many number of SC/ST vacancies have not been filled due to prejudiced minds. Due to privatization employment opportunities are now closed.

The low level of representation for Dalits in the State's services has become a serious point of contention of late. The higher the levels, the lower and more insignificant are their share, as compared to their rightful due. The Dalit movement in the State has raised the demand for a white paper on the actual situation. The Tamilnadu Government has also published a white paper which shows the Dalits' employment position. Many SC/ST vacancies have not been filled by the government.

Government order No.44 deals with the promotion of and reservation for the SCs/STs. This order was not properly implemented. Backlog vacancies of the SCs/STs must be filled up as per this order. But the Tamilnadu Government has not properly filled the SC/ST vacancies. To implement the GO No. 44, the Dalit movement urged the DMK government to publish a white paper about the SC/ST vacancy position. Due to that pressure the DMK government published a white paper. The information on backlog vacancies provided by the white paper is presented in Table 5.
Table 5

Backlog SC/ST Vacancies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Group of Post</th>
<th>Standing Committees Statistics</th>
<th>Government Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>4522</td>
<td>1545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>1,1929</td>
<td>2,537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>17,314</td>
<td>4,907</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. SC/ST Standing Committee Report. 08-08-2998)

Already in 1969 the DMK Ministry government under the Chief Ministership of Karunanidhi did injustice to the Dalit people in the matter of employment opportunities. The Karunanidhi Ministry always favoured the BCs’ welfare and not the SCs’. The DMK was always proud of calling itself the champion of downtrodden people. In reality its behaviour was different from what it said.

According to the 72nd and the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution reservation is given to the Scheduled Castes and women in the local body elections. In the past seven years in Pappapathi and Keeripatti of Madurai District the Panchayat President’s election was not held because of caste atrocity. One Poongodi, the Dalit DPI candidate, was not allowed to canvas for votes. The village caste Hindus were not willing to hand over the
Panchayat to Dalit control, The Tamilnadu Government is willing to enact legislation that seemingly redistributes power, but then is unwilling to actually enforce it. When Poongudi was finally allowed to canvass, she was chased away with slippers, stones and abuses. So far the election has not been conducted.

On Independence day a Dalit Panchayt President, K, Rasu of Chottathatti Village in Sivaganga District was prevented from unfurling the national flag and publicly beaten with slippers by a person of a higher caste. Two months later, another Dalit, K. Azhagar, a puppet Panchayat President, was forced by the Thevars of Pappathi, to resign immediately after being elected. The reserved seat would remain vacant as it has for seven years, thus allowing the continued de facto rule of the Thevars in the village. Two Dalits of Tiruchi District had human excrement stuffed into their mouths when they demanded repayment of loans. Often, the crimes also involve sexual assault, molestations and rape. A physical instructor in a school raped a 14 year-old Dalit girl in Tiruvannamalai.

In most of the villages in Tamilnadu the Dalits may not wear chappals on the main street, ride on bicycles, drink from the same tumblers in the tea shops, get their hair cut in the barber shop etc.

Most of the Dalits are coolies, the majority being landless, others holding meagre lands. They are engaged in agricultural work. They work on land owned by others and this constitutes the basis of economic and social ties between the different classes, the tenants and the agricultural labourers. Sometimes quarrels occur between castc Hindu tenants and Dalit labourers regarding wage/tenant system. These are many such situations in Tamilnadu. Even though for the past thirty five years Tamilnadu has been ruled by the Dravidan parties the Dalits’ status remains unchanged. The Dalit people and leaders thought that a movement was needed to overcome this kind of
atrocities. So most of the Dalit people and leaders decided to come out from the DMK and organized their own political parties to uplift the Dalits.

The prominent leaders among the Dalits are the Pudhiya Tamilagain leader Krishnasamy, the Dalit Panthers leader Thirumaavalavan and V. Balasundaram of the Ambedkar People’s Movement. They have strongly condemned the prejudiced mind of the caste Hindus and the Dravidan parties in Tamilnadu which have been ruling in Tamilnadu for the past 35 years. During that period what has the Dravidan movement done for Dalits constructively? Nothing. The Dalits have been marginalized in the party structure and thereby made voiceless within the government.

In this context the Dalits have a right to ask the Dravidan movement leaders what they propose to do for the Dalits under their rule. The Dalits do not place any trust in vague promises and platitudes. They want concrete proof of the Dravidan parties’ sincerity to deal with them justly and fairly. The Dalits have confirmed that Karunaidhi and other Dravidan movement leaders are not the persons to look to the interests of the Dalits. Had the Dravidan parties been a really revolutionary bodies, the Dalits would have joined them. These parties are not courageous enough to proclaim the ideal of social and economic equality, empowering the Dalits.
Notes and References

2. Article 39H has been inserted by the Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976.
4. Ibid, 31-12-98.
8. Ibid. pp.92-95.
10. Ibid. pp.96-98
17. July 2001, ThaifVlan (MotherLand), Chennai:
24. Ibid, p. 151
25. Ibid, p. 152
27. People Revival Centre, Dhamma-1, Chennai: published by People Revival Centre, p. 18
32. Ibid, p.51.
38. Ibid, pp.369-70.
40. The Viduthalai (Tamil daily) dated: 8-7-1947.
42. Ibid, p.93
43. P. Moorthy (et.al), Dalit Sarnoogaiyal, Pudhucherry: Jaibeem Publication, 1994, p. 120.
44. Ibid, p. 122.
45. Ibid, p. 127.
46. Ibid, p. 128.
49. Ibid, p. 19
50. The Hindu, 16th November, 2003, p. IV.
51. Ibid, p.4.
52. Ibid, p.4.