CHAPTER - V

INTEGRATED ANALYSIS
Dalits, as per the 1991 census, form 19.18% of the total Tamilnadu population. This is higher than the national average of 16.48%. The other Indian states with large Dalit populations are Punjab (28.31%), Himachal Pradesh (34%), West Bengal (23.62%), Uttar Pradesh (21.05%), and Haryana (19.7%). The Dalits in Tamilnadu are a significant section of the people of Tamilnadu. The Dalits of Tamilnadu are seriously affected due to the caste stigma. The caste system in Tamilnadu is basically of the same pattern as in the rest of India. But there are distinct variations. The Tamilnadu situation is historically very much isolated from that in the rest of India. It is generally considered that the South Indians were of Dravidian origin and Brahminism and its consequences were an imposition from the North. With the arrival of the Brahmins from North India, carrying Indo-Aryan culture in Sanskrit language, antipathy and opposition against them commenced in Tamilnadu. The Dalits started condemning capitalist and landlordly injustices practised against them.

In the case of the Dalits in Tamilnadu the majority of them are landless agricultural labourers. The land holdings of Dalits are restricted to a few cents and below one acre. How much of the lands distributed to Dalits as Depressed Classes are in the possession of Dalits and how much has been encroached upon and alienated from the Dalits, all these questions remain unanswered.

After Independence the Dravidian movement was started to uplift the non-Brahmins including Dalits in Tamilnadu. During the Dravidian rule
the Dalits were deprived and marginalized in all spheres of life. So the Dalit people wanted to organise themselves to put forth their grievances.

The Problem and its Background

The Dravidian parties approached Dalit issues as distinct from the Dravidian ideology. They maintained a separate identify for themselves. They considered Dalits an integral part of the non-Brahmin movement for all political purposes but not for social issues. Their approach did not vary from that of the Congress formula for betterment measures without disturbing the federal and capitalist structure. Even doubts were raised by some within the Dravidian political parties whether to include Dalits in the non-Brahmin fold or not. Some reforms executed by the Justice Party were opening of schools for Dalits, access to common areas in villages and reservation in government jobs, establishment of special schools, financial aid for health among Dalits, wells and burial grounds in colonies". In 1930 a riot occurred among the Kallars and Pallars in Devakottai, whereupon the Justice Party simply passed a resolution in the Assembly without even reprimanding the Kallars3.

The strategy was simple for the Justice Party. There was conflict between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins. The Justice Party would support the non-Brahmins when there was conflict between the non-Brahmins and the Dalits. The Party would keep absolute silence during the conflicts or seek a compromise and then launch a struggle after the incident was over1. During the Buckinghan and Carnatic Mills (B&C) workers' strike in 1922, Dalit workers under M.C.Raja did not support the strike. As a result the Dalits' huts were burnt. The Justice Party Ministry supported the strike and justified the incident. After that M.C.Raja came out from the Justice Party. In the elections of 1937, the Congress defeated the Justice Party' which moved towards its decline.
In the declining stage of the Justice Party, Periyar was persuaded to take over leadership of the Justice Party. Periyar reorganized the Justice Party into the Dravidian Kazhgam in 1944 at its Salem Conference, giving it the character of a militant mass organisation. The main aim of the Dravida Kazhagam was self-respect. It considered the caste system and untouchability indispensable constituents of the Hindu religion. It proposed economic reforms in favour of Dalits like distribution of surplus lands, reservation in government jobs, educational and other spheres. Periyar was in favour of communal representation. Periyar strongly advocated eliminating Brahminism and untouchability. With the rise of modern cities, the Brahmins migrated to cities selling off their lands to other dominant castes and Backward Classes. Thus a new dimension arose in the Dalit and non-Dalit social relations. The traditional conflict between the Dalits and the Brahmins now shifted to the Backward Classes and Dalits.

The suppression of Dalits would hereafter shift from Brahmins to Backward Castes. Though the writings and speeches of Periyar were in favour of anti-exclusive Dalit issues like twin glasses, separate wells, refusal to bury in a common burial ground in rural Tamilnadu he did not reprimand the Backward Castes.

The strategy was similar to Gandhi’s refusal to discuss untouchability as a separate issue as he felt that it would weaken the anti-imperialist forces. The Gandhian approach analyses the Dalit issues within the Hindu religious framework, which made the Dalits compromise with the caste Hindus, specially Brahmins. The Periyar approach analyzed the Dalit issues outside the Hindu religion. So the Scheduled Castes were forced either to compromise with or contradict the Backward Castes or non-Brahmins.
Failure of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam to accommodate the Dalits

The Dravida Kazhagam, in spite of its mass appeal, continued to retain its quasi-militant organisation and its basically elitist character. Within the ranks of the movement there arose a challenge to the virtually deified position of Periyar. The dissidents broke with the DK and formed a separate Party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam under the leadership of C.N. Annadurai.

Though a member of the upper Mudaliyar caste, Annadurai turned his movement toward the urban lower classes, the proletariat, the lower middle classes and students. He appealed to the masses, the lower castes of tin masses, the lower castes of the Nadar, Maravar and Adi-Dravida untouchables to join his movement. The DMK, which had started as a movement, turned to active politics and became a political entity, which, though working for the down-trodden, was subjected to the compulsions and compromises that are common to political parties. After the 1967 general elections the DMK came to power in Tamilnadu under the Chief Ministership of C.N. Annadurai. During his regime on 25 December 1968, 44 Dalits were burnt alive in Keezhvenmani of Nagapattinam District of Tamilnadu due to wage issues. Regarding this Annadurai, as Chief Minister, stated that this incident was like an electric shock and he died two months later,

Karunanidhi became Chief Minister of Tamilnadu after Annadurai’s death. During his regime, the case was under trial and judgment was given. The Tanjore District court gave the judgment and convicted the accused. But the convicted persons moved the High Court and it set free all the accused and nobody was punished for this mass murder. Gopalakrishna Naidu did not spend a single day in jail for this horrifying cruelty.
Chief Minister Annadurai had asked the people to forget it as though it were a bad dream, a flash of lightning. The Karunanidhi government did not take further steps to conduct the case in the Supreme Court. His main motive was to protect the accused caste Hindu landlords. He did not care for the landless agricultural Dalit labourers. He took a partisan stand in this regard though he described himself as a saviour of untouchables and contracted matrimonial alliance for members of his family with the Scheduled Caste people.

So the Dalit people automatically lost faith in the DMK and Karunanidhi. During his tenure as Chief Minister funds allotted for the upliftment of Dalits were diverted to other schemes. The Karunanidhi Ministry was dismissed in 1976 due to various reasons. After that M.G.Ramachandran became the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu in 1977. During his period the Villupuram riot occurred between the Vanniyars and the SCs in which 12 SC people were murdered. In 1980 the SC people of Meenakshipuram converted to Islam from Hinduism en masse.

During the Jayalalitha period (1991-96) the Kodiankulam incident occurred between Thevars and Pallars. The government supported the Thevars and suppressed the Pallars. After 1996 Karunanidhi became the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu again. During this period (1996-2001) various caste clashes occurred between caste Hindus and Dalits. In all the incidents, the government always sided with the caste Hindus. In Tamilnadu caste atrocities are rife. A few years ago in a village called Echur, near Thiruppur, a young woman who married a Dalit man was set on a funeral pyre and burnt alive by her caste-maniacal parents and siblings. This is the situation under the rule of the Dravidian movement which propagates a casteless society.

In another incident in 1978 a in the three-hundred-year-old Swarnhamoortheswar temple at Kandadevi of Sivagangai District,
the Dalits demanded their right to pull the ear of the temple during the ten-day temple festival. The Madras High Court, following a writ petition hied by Krishnaswamy, leader of the Pudhiya Thamizhagam, directed the State administration to take appropriate action according to the situation to avoid an explosive situation and ensure that peace loving citizens are able to participate in the rituals in a peaceful manner. Meanwhile, the Ambalams, the traditional caste leaders of the Kallars and hereditary heads of the four nadus (ancient caste-Hindu judicial system which imposes punishments, issues decrees and economically controls villages within its jurisdiction) hied a petition before the Joint Commissioner, Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Board of Sivagangai, seeking their traditional right of pulling the temple car to be established. The Joint Commissioner sent an order on 8 April 1999 stating that the Ambalams had the right to pull the vadam of the temple chariot after receiving the temple honours. This was challenged by Krishnasamy and every subsequent year the car could not be pulled and maintenance of law and order was cited as the reason. In 2001, the Ambalams refused to receive the honors at the temple and the car-pulling was not performed.

In 2002, the AIADMK government, which enjoys the full support of the Thevar vote bank, went ahead to somehow ensure that the car was pulled, because for four years the earlier DMK government had not been able to do so because of law and order considerations. On the day of the temple festival the Kallars pulled the car with heavy police protection and the Dalits did not have any space for participation.

From 1996 to 2002, the Panchayats of Pappapatti in Chellampatti Union and Keeripatti and Nattarmangalam in Usilampatti Union of Madurai District have had ten announcements of elections but nine times out of ten no Dalit could even file his or her nomination papers because the caste Hindus
the dominant oppressor castes in all these Panchayats objected to their being reserved for Dalits. The dominant caste are the Piramalai Kaliars, a subsect of Thevars. They have created a morbid sense of fear among the Dalits by issuing a decree that any Dalit who dares to file his/her nomination papers will be killed. On 15 September 2003, the State Government constituted a high level nine-member panel to visit Pappapatti, Keeripatti and Nattarmangalarn Villages and Kottakatchiyendal in Viruthunagar District in order to facilitate the Panchayat Presidents’ polls that were scheduled for 9 October 2003. As usual, due to threats from caste-Hindus, none of the Dalits would venture to file nominations. In the constituencies of Pappapatti, the Kallars put up a dummy candidate Azhagar, who won the election. He resigned soon after he was sworn in. The Viduthalai Chirithalaigal termed the whole exercise a murder of democracy perpetuated by the casteist forces to which the government also lent its support. Therefore, this year it announced its decision to boycott the bye-elections and dubbed the government’s move an ‘eye-wash’. The Viduthalai Chiruthaligal called for a bandh in the Madurai District on 3 November 2003 protesting against the murder of democracy in these reserved Panchayats.

One Murugesan, who was the President of Melavalavu Village of Madurai District was murdered by caste Hindus in 1997. When the State Election Commission announced its list of reserved constituencies, the Melavalavu Panchayat President’s post was allotted to Dalits. The dominant oppressor caste of the area, the Thevars, resented this because this change in status quo, apart from being an insult to their inherited superiority, would also signal Dalit power and put into Dalit hands the rights of all common village properties. So the caste Hindus threatened the Dalits not to contest in the election. The Dalits were warned of an economic embargo if they dared to contest. The elections scheduled for October 1996 had to be cancelled.
since the caste Hindu fanatics terrorized the three Dalit nominees, including Murugesan, into withdrawing their nominations. In February 1997 the Election Commission again ordered polls. This time Murugesan was elected President. But Murugesan was not allowed to function by the Thevars. He received many threatening letters and he took everything to the notice of the District Collector. Many times he pleaded about the threat to his life and requested protection.

On 30 June 1997, when he was returning in a Government bus after having submitted a memorandum to the District Collector, he was hacked to death along with six other Dalits. The murderers were arrested. Of the forty one Thevars who were charge-sheeted only seventeen persons have been awarded punishment. Tamilnadu is a witness to atrocities against the Dalits for the thirty five years of the Dravidian movement’s rule. The incidents at Keezhvenmani Unchanai, Villupuram, Kurinjakulam, Melavalavu and Puliangudi confirm that Tamilnadu is indeed the model for the nation in caste atrocities. It is a bitter truth that such casteist rampages and carnages are encouraged in anticipation of political benefit.

Marvkalampatti cheri in Dharmapuri District was entirely destroyed and plundered and now resembles a graveyard. The people of the cheri have left the place as refugees. The people of the general constituency did not allow them to vote. They were beaten and chased away and they have also quit as refugees. These have been listed for illustration. Many such incidents of violence have not come to light.

During the last parliamentary elections in 1999, in the reserved constituency of Chidambram, one and a half lakh Dalit voters were prevented from casting their votes and twenty one colonies were set on fire. Thousands of Dalit people were forced to leave their homes as refugees. But it did not come into the view of the political parties. The volunteers of the
DMK and its electoral allies ran riot and went on a rampage setting fire to more than twenty one Dalit' colonies. The ruling DMK government did not take any steps to prevent this kind of atrocities.

The labourers working in the Manjolai Tea Estate had been working as bonded labourers for extremely long hours and they were paid very low wages. Therefore a rally was organized to put forth their demand to free the bonded labourers and ensure that the workers were treated properly. They announced that the rally would be conducted on 23 July 1999 to demand, among other things, the release of imprisoned workers. In this rally the police attacked and 17 people drowned in the Tamiraparani river. But the Mohan Commission report simply stated that “Nothing happened like that and they drowned to death because they did not know how to swim’.

On 15 August 2003, India’s Independence Day, a Dalit Panchayat President Dura inis u of Sotlhalalai in Sivagangai District was beaten with a slipper by a caste fanatic who questioned a Pallar hoisting the national flag. A gruesome murder took place on 26 May 2000 in M.Puliangudi Village near Chidambaram of Cuddalore District. Three Dalits were murdered for having raised their voice against the sale of illicit arrack. Their throats were slit while they were fast asleep under a banyan tree.

A six-hundred policeman force attacked the all-Dalit Kodiyankulam Village in the Tuticorin District on 31 August 1995. The village was relatively well off, for, since the 1980s, the Dalits there had gained from the money that family members employed in the Gulf countries sent back home. All the properties of the Dalits were damaged and looted by the police. The caste Hindus poisoned the village well. Dalits in Tamilnadu have been facing various kinds of discrimination at the hands of Hindus for over 2000 years. These social stigmas are followed in a very strict sense and there are unwritten codes and procedures which are invariably followed by the people.
agonist Dalits. The caste discrimination is visibly seen in every village. Dalits are segregated in separate and isolated chens not well connected with the main villages and deprived of all basic civic amenities.

Atrocities against Dalits

The number of crimes against Dalits by others is one of the range of 16,000 to 18,000 in recent years, up from less than 10,000 per year before 1976. But in the 1990s, the rate witnessed a sudden spurt and crimes increased manifold. The decade of development during Indira Gandhi’s regime registered more than 40,000 cases of atrocity against the Dalits. According to a tentative report in the Deccan Herald of 29th July 1998, Mrs. Meneka Gandhi, then Union Minister of State, gave the following details to Parliament: despite the Constitutional mandate, untouchability is prevalent in 12 States, including Tamilnadu. The Dravidian parties have ruled for the past thirty-five years. Since 1967 this kind of atrocities are indulged in by the caste by the caste Hindus with the help of the Dravidian movement.

To remove this kind of atrocities the Dalits are fighting for their human rights in Tamilnadu today with more violence than in any other part of India. In a land which knows a powerful movement directed against Brahmanism, caste and superstition, it is shocking to read of some of these incidents of people being forced to eat excrement, massacred by the police, Dalit Panchayat Presidents being terrorized into giving up their positions, police slaughter of striking workers etc. Even though the DMK’s condemning of Brahmanism brought upper caste non-Brahmins to power they did nothing for the Dalits. Even now contradictions and conflicts occur between the non-Brahmin caste Hindus and Dalits in futal areas over power sharing and other things.
Compared with oilier parties the Dravidian movement has contributed more to the uplift of the non-Brahmins including Dalits. The DMK cleverly and cunningly utilised the Dalit youth and students to develop the party. In the beginning, in the 1960s, and the 1970s, most of the Dalit people, particularly teachers, youths and students, were associated with the DMK. After 1967 the DMK came to power and the trend changed, changing the social and economic conditions of the non-Brahmins. The Dravidian movement never attracted the SC communities to its fold earlier. The differences between the caste Hindus and the SCs is not a new phenomenon but goes back to the early years of this century. The eminent SC leader M.C.Raja said that the non-Brahmin caste Hindus in the local council, who pose as the guardians of the depressed classes have been arresting the progress of the community and crushing its hopes and aspirations.

The attitude of many of the SCs has not changed since the 1920s regarding the implications of the rule of the Dravidian castes. The primary contradiction in rural areas in particular is between the landowning caste Hindus and the SCs who are predominantly agricultural labourers. Thus while political and economic struggle is an important part of the SC movement, so far, it is the issue of practices and seclusion which pits them against the caste Hindus, who, despite internal differences in status, power and position come together to oppose and put down the SCs. It is for this reason that since the beginning, the SCs have largely kept out of participating fully or in large numbers in the DMK. There are other political reasons too: firstly, the main social base which the DMK mobilized effectively was the bourgeois, mercantile and financial interests belonging to the upper and middle class Hindu castes. In fact the DMK projected itself as the champion of the BCs, the same castes which were responsible for enforcing untouchability, seclusion and submissiveness on the part of the SCs. Clashes
repeatedly resulted between the caste Hindus and the SC’s. In all this the
DMK was perceived as supporting the caste Hindus.

The SC’s were not so opposed to the DMK upto 1967. C.N.Annadurai
managed to attract a large number of educated SC youths to participate in the
party. He was able to create an atmosphere of non-confrontation between
SCs and caste Hindus both within the Party and also in the Ministry. But this
situation changed after Karunanidhi became Chief Minister of Tamilnadu.
He took a partisan stand in favour of the caste Hindus\textsuperscript{11}. In contrast the main
support base for MGR’s AIADMK was the SCs. Many SC leaders have
stated that the AIADMK offered better opportunities for SC persons aspiring
for political participation and leadership.

During its second term, the DMK government increased the
reservation from 16\% to 18\% for SCs. Concrete houses were constructed for
SCs. enhanced scholarships were given to SC students etc. However, caste
Hindus’ dominance did rear its head. Two incidents took place which did
not help to create a good feeling towards the DMK. The first was the
Bodmayakkanoor riots which claimed over 20 lives. The other incident
involved the abrupt removal of the Minister of Adi-Dravida Welfare,
Ramakrishnan, owing to pressure on the party leadership from upper caste
landowners. The dismissed minister later joined the AIADMK and in fact
won a seat to the assembly. This incident in many ways offset a feeling of
sympathy created in the minds of many educated SC persons due to unfair
dismissal\textsuperscript{11} of the DMK Ministry in January 1991.

To remove this kind of atrocities the Dalits should know about the
political atmosphere and situation. How long will they be deprived by the
higher castes? Once Ambedkar said that the political rights must be shared
between the Hindus the Muslims and the depressed classes. The depressed
classes must have proper share in the government of the country along with
the Hindus and the Muslims. To achieve this the Dalits must all come
together under one flag and have only one organisation. If they have so far
not achieved the position which is due to them as per the constitution, it is
because they have not united. If they all unite and work under one
organisation, Ambedkar assured them that they will reach the position they
are entitled to. In Tamilnadu the Dalit movement was started before
Ambedkar to fight against caste Hindus. To oppose Brahman the non-
Brahmanin movement shed considerable impact on the Dalit movement. The
NBM, which was stronger in the south than in the North, brought non-
Brahmins and Dalits together to challenge and resist the dominance of the
Brahmins and higher castes.

However, the NBM activities were prejudiced and the Dalits wanted
to detach themselves from the non-Brahmin movement. So the Dalits were
motivated to organise themselves separately to put forth their demands. An
association is necessary to put forth the demands of the Dalits. So the
affected, suppressed Dalits have organised into political parties to put forth
their demands.

**Problems and the background**

The status of Dalits in India is characterized by their relative
deprivation and disabilities. The Dalits are the original inhabitants of India
though they have been treated as untouchables under the fourfold division of
the Varna system and the caste system. Untouchability is outside the
hierarchy of the Varna system, though the untouchables are considered to be
the lowest in the Hindu caste system.

The caste system in Tamilnadu is basically of the same pattern as in
the rest of India. With regard to caste rigours and discrimination, Tamilnadu
was as bad as anywhere in India. But on account of widespread education
in Tamilnadu, and the lack of a strongly hold for the Brahmans on the Tamil population, caste was not practised as staunched as in the North. Depending on economic independence of groups, the rigour of untouchability varied from place to place. In the Bliakti movement, there are three saints who were untouchables. In recent centuries, the Dravidian movement has helped water down the caste regiours in Tamilnadu. But there are areas where conditions are as bad as in North India if not worse.

In South India also the Brahmins hold strong political and bureaucratic power. The non-Brahmins were excluded from the government services. The untouchables were also in the non-Brahmins category. But the untouchables were not treated on par with the non-Brahmins, who are responsible for the suppression of the untouchables particularly in the rural setup. The untouchables were reviled as outcastes by the Brahmins’ interpretations of Hinduism. Their sense of stigma was both social and psychological, reinforced by the Hindu belief in Karma and rebirth, which encouraged the untouchables to accept their lot on earth.

During the period 1919-32, untouchable leaders rebelled against three aspects of their outcaste status and the economic deprivation suffered by the untouchables was due to illiteracy. During the period 1919-32 a series of clashes broke out between the untouchables and other castes regarding their respective social power and status. In the first conflict, the untouchables refused to accept the higher castes’ imposition of economic and social organisations in the name of labour unity in the B & C Mills strike. The Union membership was divided over supporting the strike action., really a division with caste loyalties between higher caste Hindus and Adi-Dravidians. The Adi-Dravidians supported the management to run the mill. Their failure to support the strikers caused a severe split between the caste Hindus and the Adi-Dravidians, which ended in violence on 29 June 1921.
A major part of Pulianthope cheri was burned, including hundreds of huts, most of which belonged to the Adi-Dravidians\(^\text{13}\).

**Conflict with the Brahmans**

The uncompromising ritualistic superiority of the Brahmans and the unanswered demands of the untouchables for basic rights led to another conflict during this period. In 1924, the Untouchables Council moved a resolution calling for the alleviation of discriminatory practices against them. It opposed issuing licences to bus owners who discriminated against untouchables. C.P.Ramasamy Iyer, the Law Member, ignored this resolution\(^\text{14}\).

From the Justice Party down to the AIADMK times the life condition and social status of the Dalits have not changed. The NBM’s fight against the Brahmanical order was not emancipatory in nature, because they had never greeted the continuity of pre-modern equalization, struggles of the untouchables, though the self-respect movement stood for the alleviation of the practice of hierarchism.

Gradual domination of backward communities over the self respect movement developed a sense of initiating the hierarchical approach towards caste groups below their line. This resulted in the integration of intermediary castes to override the vehicles of untouchables.

Meanwhile, the change of leadership and the change of political milieu provided no room for further enlargement of equalization services. The leaders of Dravidian parties spoke of the civil problems unsolved by the Congress government. The continuous failures of the Congress Party in many provinces led to a chaotic situation. Often the leaders like C.N.Annadurai and M.Karunanidhi in political meetings projected the dream of welfare as well as popular government in Tamilnadu. The DMK
prophesied a bright future for oppressed and other backward classes and sought their votes for the DMK. The DMK leaders promised the Dalit people to eradicate poverty and untouchability.

But they never raised their voice against the Keezhvenmani incident in which 44 Dalits were burnt alive. The movement (NBM) which was started against caste hierarchism lost its strength. In 1944 B.R. Ambedkar pointed out that the non-Brahmin movement was an important incident in the history of India, and that, likewise, its decline which could be kept in memory with pity. He pointed the cause for its decline: they could not understand the difference between their movement and the Brahmins. Though they were antagonistic towards Brahmins, they could never perceive the difference that they had with the Brahmins, because they were bundled up in Brahmanism and caste ideology, and they tightened their grip on the Brahmiric customs. Thus, their struggle with Brahmins or Brahmanism was long back withdrawn as they are still hand in glove with the inhuman project of the caste system.

The other important issue in Tamilnadu is the conflict among the Tamil speaking groups. The Dalit groups such as Paraiahs and Pallars are also Tamil speaking citizens of Tamilnadu, but they are deprived of their fundamental rights to live, to speak, to own and so on. Whether this oppression speaks some other truths such as that they are not Tamil groups or their original Tamil origin is appropriated by other dominant caste groups, Tamil nationalism never liberated the Dalits from caste oppression which is the basis for all other socio-economic oppressions.

**New Dalit movement**

The new Dalit movement in Tamilnadu is emerging out of its Dalit identity and its untouchability consciousness. It rises to symbolize a much
broader spectrum of the oppressed social strata. The Dalit expectation and strategy seem to be designed and engineered to challenge the dominant castes by means of education and ‘episteme’, employment and special rights, in short, fight against the system to begin with challenging injustices with it, thinking of the systematic struggle against imperialism and other such things like war with neighboring arrogant countries as of second order of importance. The systematic ideological and practical struggle against the injustices and discriminations and the sub-human treatment of the Dalits will redefine the means and meaning of the Dalit struggle.

The Dalit movement asserted the demand for self-respect, social dignity and equity and gave a new direction to liberation struggles in society. These movements did not depend on any kind of patronage from the dominant groups. The socio-economic and political deprivation left the Dalits as subordinates and slaves to the caste Hindus in Tamilnadu. The Dalit people thought that an organization and movement is needed to redress their grievances. This is the juncture to form the Dalit organization.

The phenomenon of mobilizing and organizing people on the lines of a particular caste group is not a new trend in Tamilnadu. The Dalit people, organization and movement never advocated a caste based society, but a casteless one. Mobilising and organizing Dalit people into different non-party political formations and people’s movements and working for realization of Dalit people’s rights with a long term vision of attainment of socio-economic, political and cultural transformation and development is also taking place in Tamilnadu. There are several conflicts in utilizing the common properties particularly land, water and forest produces and services and welfare measures. The Dalit people are completely neglected and marginalized and are not allowed to take part in public auctions by the caste Hindus with the help of the ruling Dravidian parties. The Dravidian
movement out and out favours the caste Hindus. The economic benefits are fully utilized by the caste Hindus whereas the Dalits are neglected.

The increasing awareness level among Dalits and the upcoming of Dalits on the economic front due to reservation and their labour intensive work culture as well as other economic activities have invariably formed the foundation and enabled them to seek social equality and dignity. However, this assertion of civil rights has had a negative impact. Atrocities are perpetrated on them to undermine the struggle for social equality. The increasing human rights violations, in turn, knocked at the consciousness of the Dalit people and made it a necessity to affiliate with any of the political formations.

So, a number of Dalit organizations have emerged to combat the atrocities and to enable the Dalit people to fight for their human rights, to enable them to assert their entitlement rights and to question the existing power equations. They need to do a lot more to become a force to reckon with. To put forth their grievances they are trying to consolidate Dalit votes. Having lost their faith in the Congress Party the Dalits turned to Dravidian political parties like the DMK and the AIADMK. Later they realized that these parties also inherited the legacy of the Justice Party. These parties cared very little for the empowerment of the Dalits. Incidents of atrocities on the Dalits increased along with their rule as indicated in the previous chapters. Along with the atrocities the official apathy and bureaucratic indifference were observed.

Therefore, the Dalits were on the lookout for new and fresh political outfits. Having found none, they went ahead with their own political and social outfits based on their needs and aspirations.
Vai. Balasundaram launched the Ambedkar People's Movement in 1974. Elayaperumal parted ways with the stale unit of the Congress Party and launched the All India Human Rights Party in 1980. Later John Pandian in the Nellai area formed the All India Devendra Kula Vellalar Sangam and tried to bring all the Devendra Kula Vellalars under one banner. His approach to the caste system and its protagonists was very militant and caused many conflicts with the caste Hindus, mainly the Thevars. There were precedents among the Devendra Kula Vellalars in their violent protest against the Thevars. Immanuel Shekaran of Mudhukulathur was the first Devendra Kula Vellalar leader to oppose the dreadful Muthuramalinga Thevar whom the Thevar community deified as the personification of virtue and valour. According to history the henchmen of Muthuramalinga Thevar ruthlessly murdered Immanuel Sekaran in 1957, That is why the Mudhukulathur riot occurred.

Though many criminal cases were pending against him, the Congress Party protected him initially and later all other parties including the Dravidian parties like the DMK and the AIADMK hailed him. Even today, the ruling Party, whichever it might be, sends its representatives every year to worship Thevar at his grave in Pasumpon Village. Krishnasamy, a physician by profession, shot into fame with the Kodiyankulam incident, which remains a black spot for the AIADMK rule under Jayalalitha. This incident was a reminder to the Devendra Kula Vellalars of their audacity to challenge the caste activities of the Thevars. Now his own community backs him to the hilt. He was elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1996. A respectable status is given to Devendra Kula Vellalars. To make hay while the sun shines Krishnasamy launched the Puthiya Tamilagam, a new Party for the all the Dalits, religious minorities etc.
Simultaneously in north Tamilnadu the old guard changed and new young leaders emerged among the Adi-Dravidar community. The old guard consisted of stalwarts like Sakthidasan, Vai. Balasundaram, Elayaperumal, Seppan Chandragesan and others. Young leaders like S.K. Tamilarasan (Republican Party of India-Gavai), Poovai Murthy, Puratchi Bharadhan and Thirumaavalavam (“Viduthalai Chiruthaigal-Liberation Panthers on the model of the Black Panthers and the Dalit Panthers of India) have emerged.

Some of the earliest stalwarts among the Dalits were Ayothidass Pandithar (1845-1914), Rettainalai Srinivasan (1859-1945) and M.C. Raja (1883-1947) to name a few. Among them Ayothidass Pandithar was a forerunner even to Ambedkar. He authored many books on the origin of the Dalits and vociferously fought for the political and social rights of Dalits. He published a magazine Oru Paisa Tamil an. Rettainalai Srinivasan was a contemporary of Ambedkar and participated with him in the Round Table Conferences in London twice. While in London for the Conference he refused to shake hands with Ring George V stating that it would pollute the king as he was an untouchable from India.

Among the current Dalit leaders Krishnasamy and Thirumaavalavan are leading figures within the Dalit movement. Krishnasaniy launched many agitations against the government and big industrialists to put forth the Dalit grievances. He conducted the agitation against the Manjolai Tea Estate administration to obtain higher wages for the estate workers. He condemned both the DMK and the AIADMK for their unruly behaviour towards Dalits. Thirumaavalavan launched many agitation? against the ruling government, as indicated in the previous chapters. The Dalits who were once blindly fanatic about voting for the Sun and the Two Leaves have been replaced by Dalits in their own right.
Notes and References


4. Ko.Kesavan. Ibid.pp.82-83

5. Ibid.p.82.


