CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION
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Introduction

One on the architects of the Indian Constitution, B.R. Ambedkar, declared: “On January 26, of 1950 we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics, we will have equality and in social and economic life we will not have equality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life we shall by reason of our social and economic structure continue to deny the principle of one man one value. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this assembly has so laboriously built up”.

All are born equal. But their lives are full of contradictions and conflicts because of caste, class and gender. Of them caste is the worst curse in the Indian context. Caste forms the steel framework of Hinduism. The four varunas of Hinduism segregate the people. Of them the untouchables, who are at the very bottom of both social and economic hierarchies, experience social degradation and impoverishment, which underlies the need for a radical transformation of Indian society and polity in order that their condition might improve. Inevitably Dalits are brought into direct confrontation with the caste Hindus. The caste Hindus have invariably responded to Dalit struggles with brutality.

Innumerable atrocities are committed by the caste Hindus on the Dalits striving for concrete economic and political aims. The leaders of leading political parties and elite caste Hindus succeeded in curtailing the
Dalit movement. Sometimes the Dalit movement has been suppressed for economic benefits. So some Dalit leaders decided to form associations and organizations to raise the upward mobility of the Dalit people. The Dalit movement’s initial focus was on temple entry, admission to schools and public places. After the Poona Pact the Depressed Classes (DC) were given joint electorates instead of the separate electorate advocated by Ambedkar.

Ambedkar himself was defeated by a Congress nominee because of the joint electorate. Ambedkar started a new political party named the Independent Labour Party, comprising the Scheduled Castes, peasants and labourers. The Independent Labour Party (ILP) won a few seats in the election to the Bombay Legislative Assembly. It existed mainly in the Bombay Presidency and in parts of the Central Provinces and Berar. However, in 1942, Ambedkar suddenly dissolved the ILP and formed the All India Scheduled Caste Federation (AISCF) as an all-India body.

The restricted character of the AISCF, which was essentially a caste-based association, left the non-SC leaders of the ILP disillusioned. The Dalit movement’s loss became the other parties’ gain. Ambedkar’s sudden death and the lack of second rung leaders brought the movement, which Ambedkar led for so long, to a grinding halt. In this situation the Republican Party of India (RPI) was formed in 1957 on the basis of an open letter 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 of one by another, freedom to each individual from fear and want and equality of opportunity.

The RPI won a few seats in the Bombay Legislative Assembly in the 1957 general elections. Soon after a number of splits occurred due to internal rivalries based on personal rather than political differences. The political betrayal of the Dalit leadership and its action in the face of an intensification
of atrocities committed by the upper caste elites against Dalit communities caused great anger and frustration amongst the younger generation of Dalits. Against this background the Dalit Panthers³ (DP) emerged as a militant movement with the aim of countering the atrocities unleashed by the caste Hindus against the DC. Ambedkar’s thoughts constituted the driving force of the movement.

The DP rapidly became popular. They mobilized Dalit youth and students. The DP eventually became an important political force, especially in the cities. However, the DP movement was not to escape the contagion of internal splits. The DP movement gave a new shape to Ambedkar’s thoughts. It challenged all the political parties and Brahminical forces. There were many contradictions within the DP movement due to personality clashes. Endemic factionalism, narrow sectarianism, unprincipled alliances with the ruling party, and a chronic inability to protect rural Dalits who had to contend with atrocities mounted by the upper caste and the caste Hindu rural elite resulted in the DP movement losing its thrust and momentum during the 1980s.

Prakash Ambedkar⁶, a grandson of B.R. Ambedkar, took efforts to unite the various Dalit groups. He founded a party named the Bharatiya Republican Party in 1984. The controversy over “the Riddles of Hinduism,” which arose in 1988 over the attempt of the Maharashtra Government to delete a portion of Ambedkar’s writings critical of Lord Rama hastened this process. The newly forged unity was reflected in a huge morcha of half a million people demonstrating against the government in the city of Bombay.

Towards the end of 1989, an ad hoc committee was formed to agree upon a constitution, programme, organizational structure and working methods for a unified Dalit party. This effort was, however, opposed by Ramdas Athawale⁷ of the DP who demanded that the DP should not be
dissolved but should be allowed to continue as a social organization. The story of factional infighting, intrigue, opportunism, personality differences, and dispute over electoral alliance was repeated yet again. A Dalit party emerged as the Bhahujan Samaj Party (BSP) under the leadership of Kansh Ram in 1980. The BSP consists of Scheduled Castes with other Backward Communities (OBCs) and minorities with a view to gaining electoral success. Kanshi Ram is believed to have entered politics for the first time in 1964 with the sole aim of uniting the SCs which were then facing a crisis of political organization because of the disintegration of the RPI. He expanded his strategy to include the minorities and Other Backward Classes to strengthen the party.

Working on the calculation that the SCs, STs, OBCs, and minorities together constitute about 85 percent of the population, the BSP has managed to make major inroads into electoral politics. This is evident from the fact that both the Uttar Pradesh and the Bihar Governments sought the support of the BSP in order to beat back the communal menace and ensuing violence during the Ramajanmaboomi crisis and the general elections that followed its eruption. The BSP, however, lacks a wider social, economic and political programme of action beyond uniting the SCs, STs, OBC and minorities. Caste and community based calculation, with the principal aim of winning elections, constitutes its main thrust. However, sound organizational structure spread over a wide area does contribute to the effectiveness of a political organization.

The Adi-Dravida Sabha came into existence in 1890. It was then named the Pariahar Mahajan Sabha. The Sabha sent a petition to the Madras Government in 1890 requesting some agrarian concessions to the pariahs. In 1898 the Sabha requested the government to lower the standard of the qualifying test prescribed for admission to subordinate medical services.
In the year 1928 Babu Jagjivan Ram formed the Ravidas Mahasabha\(^{10}\) at Calcutta with a view to uniting the Dalits under one banner and introducing social reforms among them. In 1934, in the annual conference of the Ravidass Mahasabha held at Calcutta, it was decided to establish the all India Depressed Class League. Accordingly a conference of the Dalits was organized at Kanpur in 1935, in which it was declared that the said organization had been formed with Rasiklal Biswas as its President and Babu Jagjivan Ram and P.N. Rajbhoj as its secretaries. It is still in existence. The Buddhist Society of India\(^{11}\) was founded in 1955 by B.R. Ambedkar. It was under the auspices of this society the he was initiated into Buddhism at Nagpur on 14 October 1956 along with his five lakh brethren.

The objectives of the society were:

1. To spread the knowledge of Buddhism in India
2. To build viharas at as many places as possible in order to strengthen the faith of the new converts.
3. To form a new work order in India. The movement for conversion of the Scheduled Castes to Buddhism was made active under the auspices of the society.

The Depressed Classes Association\(^{12}\) was founded in 1928. Rao Bahadur M.C. Rajah was the President and A.K. Gawai was its secretary. It was not popular due to its opposition to the Ambedkarite movement. However, it continued till 1942. In that year Shri.S.C. Rajah joined the AISCF at Nagpur. The Dravida Kazhagam\(^{13}\) (Association) was formed by John Ratnam at Madras in the year 1892. The main objective of this Association was to unite the Depressed Classes in Madras and to act as a pressure group to get the demands of the untouchables fulfilled.
John Ratnam was the editor of Dravida Pandian Magazine, which was started by Pandit Ayodhidoss. This movement requested the government to provide educational facilities and employment opportunities to the Scheduled Caste people. In 1887 John Ratnam started a school in the Thousand Lights area for Scheduled Caste people. In 1944 the South Indian Liberal Federation, under the leadership of E. V. Ramasamy at Salem, adopted the name Dravida Kazhagam in place of South Indian Liberal Federation. It is a leading non-Brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu. The real pioneer of the non-Brahmin organization was John Ratnam, an untouchable leader.

The South India Buddhist Association was founded by an untouchable leader, Pandit Ayodhidoss in 1902. It was primarily concerned with the betterment of the untouchables. On 21 November 1920, P. Lakshmi Narayan presided over a conference held at Mayo Hall, Bangalore. The conference requested the Government of India to initiate for the Depressed Classes political reforms and free compulsory education and facilities for higher education. The South India Buddhist Association strove to revive Buddhism in South India because of which a good many untouchables were attracted towards this religion.

Education is the main source of any community to develop in society, especially for the Dalits. Considering the importance of education in the liberation of the Dalits, B.R. Ambedkar founded the People's Education Society at Bombay in July 1945. The aims and objectives of the Society were as stated below:

1. To provide facilities for education—secondary, collegiate, technical, physical and the like.
2. To start, establish and conduct educational institutions such as schools, colleges, hostels, libraries, playgrounds etc. at suitable places.
3. To provide facilities for the poor.
4. To coordinate, amalgamate or affiliate the Society or any institutions run by the Society.

The eminent parliamentarian and former Central Minister Ramvilas Paswan started a movement named the Dalit Sena. He is closely associated with the Dalit people.

Dalit Movements in Tamil Nadu

The Justice Party was a non-Brahmin movement which excluded the Brahmans. It consisted of higher caste non-Brahmins, who were having a feudal character. The upper caste non-Brahmin consciousness was encouraged to share the economic benefits from the government. The untouchables were marginalized. In 1923, M.C. Rajah, the most prominent among the untouchables in the Justice Party, left the party with a large number of untouchables. After Periyar’s arrival in the Justice Party, N.Sivaraj and his wife Meenambal Sivaraj joined the Justice Party. The title Periyar was given to E.V.Ramasamy Naicker by Meenambal. Meenambal actively participated in the anti-Hindi agitation led by E.V.R. Periyar in 1937. The Dalit people actively participated in this movement. Most of the Dalit people joined the Dravida Munnetra Kahagam (DMK) because of Sathiyavani-muthu who was a prominent untouchable leader in the DMK. After the formation of the Republican Party of India the Dalit people joined that party. Gradually the Dalit people sided with the DMK due to a split in the RPI.

The DMK captured power in 1967 with the support of the Communist parties and the Dalit people. In 1968, 44 Dalits were burnt alive at Keezhvenmani near Nagapattinam of the unified Tanjore District. This incident created bitterness among the Dalits towards the DMK. During the early 1970s India faced a severe famine and unemployment. The youth were attracted towards the Naxalbari Movement (CPI M-L) to eradicate famine,
unemployment and landlordism. In Tamilnadu the Dalit youth and students closely associated with the C.P.I.M.L movement.

The government took action against the Naxalite Movement which the majority of the youth, particularly Dalits, actively supported. The Dalit youth protested against the Tamilnadu government. In this situation the RPI criticized the DMK government and the Dravidian movement. These were the main reasons for the exit of Dalit people from the DMK.

Ambedkar People’s Movement

The ruling DMK Government carefully watched the activities of the Dalits who were attracted by the Communist movement. V. Balasundaram, former Mayor and then MLA of the DMK, organized a conference in the name of Dr. Ambedkar for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. School teachers were invited to this conference and participated in it. A new social movement named the Ambedkar People’s Movement was started by V. Balasundram. The majority of the office-bearers of the movement were teachers. After the formation of the movement: V. Balasundram came out of the DMK. His activities always favoured the ruling party. The Dalit MLAs S.M. Durairaj and Soundirapandiyan were very closely associated with M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) who was expelled from the DMK. Sathiyavanimuthu who was constantly contradicting the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu and criticizing the government policies and programmes was dropped from the Cabinet. She started the Downtrodden Munnetra Kazhagam for Scheduled Caste development. After some time this movement merged with the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) launched by MGR. V. Balasundram started to support MGR. The AIADMK’s influence was growing in Tamilnadu. His relationship with it continued upto MGR’s death.
During the MGR regime, in 1978, thirteen Dalits were murdered by caste Hindus in Villupuram, South Arcot District of Tamil Nadu. It shook the Dalit people. In 1980 Meenakshipuram Dalits converted to Islam because of the atrocities committed by the caste Hindus and the Dravidian rule.

L. Elayaperumal, a former MP and former Congress Committee President of Tamil Nadu, founded the Human Rights Party. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India, appointed him the Untouchables Committee Chairman. Elayaperumal submitted a report about the condition of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in India. The Republican Party of India (RPI) was formed in 1957 on the basis of an open letter to the people written by Ambedkar and posthumously published. It was an alternative to the Congress Party. Its leaders were N.Sivaraj, Gaekwad, Kumbare and Kambly. In the early stages the RPI performance was good and it allied with other political parties for political gains. In later stages intra party conflicts arose among the leaders. Due to intra party conflicts the RPI was headed by Pallikonda Krishnaswamy after Sivaraj. Arya Sankaran, M.Sundararaj, and A.Sakthidhasan were prominent leaders in Tamil Nadu RPI wing. The RPI split into the Kakeward RPI and Gaekwad RPI.

In 1957 during the Congress regime Dalit people were tortured by the Mukkulathors in southern districts of Tamilnadu. The Dalit people were guided and headed by Immanuvel Shekaran to protest against Muthuramalingam Thevar and the Mukkulathors. Immanuvel was murdered by the Thevar group. In the southern parts of Tamilnadu the Devendra Kill a Vellalar Peravai was organized by Krishnaswamy. Later it was turned into a political party named the Pudhiya Tamilagham (New Tamilnadu). Its objectives are to organize Dalit communities in Tamilnadu and to obtain political rights. The Tamilnadu Dalit Panthers movement was started by Malaisamy, a lawyer from Madurai. Alter his death Thirumavalavan is the
convener of Tamilnadu Dalit Panthers of India (Tamil Nadu). Its main objectives are as follows;

1. To counter the aggression unleashed by caste Hindus against the Dalit community.

2. The question is why these leaders came out from the political parties and organized the Dalits. To answer this question an attempt is made here.

Statement of the Problem

This study makes an attempt to analyse the interlace between Dalit politics and the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu. The Dravidian movement has contributed much to the upliftment of the non-Brahmins. But though the people of the Dalit community belong to the non-Brahmin category they have been neglected within the movement continuously right from the Justice Party till today. During the regimes of the Dravidian parties the Dalits have been deprived of their socio-economic rights and political status. After three decades of Dravidian parties’ rule and despite their positive commitment to the Dalit cause, serious doubts and questions have been posited about the impact and implications of the policies and programmes of the Dravidian parties to change the Dalits’ condition. In the recent past Tamilnadu has raised a fundamental question as to what extent Tamils have been unified under one identity as Tamils or non-Brahmins. The emergence of the caste movement has questioned the very basis of the Dravidian movement. Against this background the present study attempts to analyse the outlook of the Dalits of Tamil Nadu towards the Dravidian movement. This study will answer the following questions:

1. What were the expectations of the Dalits from the Dravidian movement?
2. How do the Dalits maintain their relationship with the Dravidian movement?

3. Under what circumstances do they oppose the Dravidian movement?

4. Why did they move out of the fold of the Dravidian movement?

5. How do they perceive their role in the present context?

Review of Literature

There are a number of books and articles on the Dravidian movement and the Dalit movement but literature is not adequate on the interface between the Dalit movement and the Dravidian movement. This has been studied selectively by the various scholars dealing with Dalits and the Dravidian movement in Tamilnadu. Books and articles have been published in which scholars have dealt with the Dalit problem in Tamilnadu. Ko. Kesavan, in his Dalit Politics, has analysed the problems through the Marxist perspective and has touched upon the linkage between the land and the status of Dalits. The social mobilization of Dalits for their emancipation is essential. The Dalit movement has to work for equality and for economic empowerment.

Gail Omvedt, in her work, Dalits and the Democratic Revolution, elaborates the historical account of the origin and development of the caste system. She analyses the Dalit movement as part of the broader anti-caste movement, which remains a central democratic movement in Indian society. In this process the Dalits sought to transform the basic structure of the Indian social system while challenging Hindu nationalism.

R.K.Kshirsagar, in his book Dalit Movement in India and its Leaders, expounds the history of the Dalit movement and liberation with special emphasis on the Dalit organization and the role played by the leaders individually and collectively for the liberation of their brethren and their achievements. But he does not highlight the Dalit consciousness and the
Dalits’ political awareness. With regard to the development schemes for SCs carried out by the Tamilnadu Government, Sebastian’s Liberating the Caged Dalit Panther concentrates on the Dravidian movement in Tamilnadu. He compares what published data say and what the beneficiaries think and feel about the government. Anand Deldumbady’s Dalit Movements after Ambedkar critically studies the Dalit movement. He critically studies the Dalit leaders’ performance and their side track. He has given an alternative Ambedkarism for the Dalit movement. S.M. Michaers Dalits in Modern India deals with the origin and development of untouchability in Indian civilization. The second section discusses the manner in which Dalits have confronted Brahminic Hinduism, not just in its virulent from of “Hindutva” but also the more liberal forms which have provided the dominant interpretations of Indian society and history. The third section critiques the Brahminic sensibility which equates Indian tradition with Hinduism and locates within Aryan heritage the essence of Indian civilization. The last section is devoted to the economic dimension. The contributors discuss the impact on the Dalits of the recent trends towards liberalization and privatization and the consequent withdrawal of the state, particularly in the context of employment opportunities and the policy of reservation.

Comparing the number of studies on the Dalit problem with those on the Dravidian movement, it may be observed that numerous historical and sociological studies are available on the Dravidian movement. Some Indian and foreign writers paid attention to the study of the Dravidian movement due to its growing importance in the politics of Tamilnadu. Most of the studies available on the Dravidian movement are either historical narratives or biographies of E.V. Ramasamy, popularly called “Periyar,” the principal leader of the movement.
E.Sa.Viswanathan, in his book, “The Political Career of E.V. Ramasamy Naicker” elaborates on not only the political career of Periyar but also the general political history of the period. M.K.Subramanian’s *Periyar and Self Respect Philosophy* is a philosophical study and as such it helps to understand the ideology of Periyar. It treats the Dravidian ideology as cultural nationalism. He gives more importance to the political activities of the later organizations such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and ignores the activities of the Justice Party and the Self Respect League, whereas, Nambi Arooran traces the relationship between the Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian nationalism during the first four decades of the 20th century, in his book *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism*. It is to be noted that both the works give less importance to the social and psychological aspects of the Dravidian movement.

One other work by Washbrook analyse the economic and political history of Tamilnadu during the first four decades of the 20th century. But they do not highlight the Dravidian movement as a separate phenomenon. With regard to the origin and development of the Dravidian movement Eugene F. Irschick’s *Politics and Social Conflict in South India* can be regarded as one of the important works. While discussing the origin and development of the movement, Irschick concentrates more on the political than the social and psychological aspects of the movement, that too only in relation to the Justice Party.

Another scholar, Robert L. Hardgrave’s *Essays in the political Sociology of South India* studies the Dravidian movement from its beginnings, the language riots in Tamilnadu and the unique role of the cinema in Tamil politics. But he does not highlight the psychological aspect of the Dravidian movement. G.Palanithurai books and articles can be regarded as important works. While discussing the socio political economic
condition of Tamilnadu, Palanithurai concentrates more on the political and economic aspects of the Dravidian movement with regard to castes. Indhu Rajagopals The Tyranny of Caste™ highlights the issues such as oppression of the Scheduled Caste, control of temples, removal of untouchability and emergence of linguistic interests in colonial India, karthigesu Sivathamby's Understanding Dravidian Movement critically analyses the behaviour of the Dravidian movement. He highlights the policy deviation of the Dravidian movement. R. Thandavan's AH India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in traces the history of the AIADMK. He specifically argues that the positive role of Anniasm, the functioning of the premordialist and instrumentalist forces in a federal polity need not be antithetical but can be creatively ‘accommodative’. Gumi’s Tamizhar deals with the Tamil identity and explains the Dravidian movement's policy. He highlights the hurdles faced by the Tamils under the banner of the Dravidian movement.

As such there is no work analyzing the interface between the Dalit people and the Dravidian people and the Dravidian movement theoretically in all its aspects especially from the social and psychological perspectives. The present study attempts to analyze the interface between the Dalits and the Dravidian movement on the basis of a theoretical framework. Thus, it is an attempt to fill the gap in the existing body of literature on Dalits and the Dravidian movement, especially in a cross cultural setting.

Objectives

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To study the emergence of independent Dalit organizations in Tamil polity;
2. To analyze the perspective of the Dalit organizations on the Dravidian movement in Tamilnadu;
3. To analyse the performance of the Dravidian parties vis-a-vis the Dalits in Tamilnadu; and,
4. To examine the activities of the Dalit organizations to achieve their goal in Tamil polity.

Methodology

The historical method has been adopted to analyse the factors responsible for the emergence of the Dalit movement in Tamilnadu. The perspective developed by the Dalit organizations on the performance of the ethnic political parties (the DMK and the AIADMK) vis-a-vis the emancipation of the Dalits and the political activities of the Dalit organizations have been analysed. The present work fully relies on secondary data, comprising of books, reports, articles and political writeups.

Delimitation of the Study

The present study covers the period from 1967 to 2001 because the ethnic political parties, namely, the DMK and the AIADMK, were in power during this period and took a series of steps for Dalit upliftment and during the same period a number of Dalit organizations emerged as a vibrant force to challenge the Dravidian movement. This study is confined to Tamilnadu State where atrocities are perpetrated on the Dalits by caste Hindus despite the presence of the Dravidian political parties in the seat of power.

Chapterization

The first chapter forms the introduction to the study. The second chapter deals with the background of the emergence of the Dalit movement. The third chapter deals with the performance of the Dravidian movement vis-a-vis the Dalits. The fourth chapter explains the formation of the Dalit outfits and their outlook towards the Dravidian movement. The fifth chapter presents an integrated analysis. The sixth chapter presents the conclusion.
Notes and References


3. Ibid. p. 161

4. Ibid. p. 213


10. Ibid. p. 311

11. Ibid. p. 85

12. Ibid. p. 87

13. Ibid. p. 88

14. Ibid. p. 88

15. Ibid. p. 106
16. Ibid. p. 97
18. Ibid. p. 120
19. Ibid. p. 121
20. Ibid. p. 122
21. Ibid. p. 122
22. Ibid. p. 128
23. Ibid. p. 114


