CHAPTER I

THE TAMIL SOCIETY: A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Geographically, India is a sub-continent, having the Himalayas on the North, Northwest and Northeast; the Indian Ocean on the South, the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea on the East and the West respectively. Historically, India has been one of the centres of civilization, traceable from the days of the Indus Valley Civilization. Ethnically, India is a land of multi-racial museum, where the Proto-Australoids, the Caucasians, the Polynesians, the Mongoloids, the Negritos and the Melanesians live losing their separate identities by mixing with one another. Religiously, India has been the home of many revolting religions against the Vedic doctrines, systems of thought and many margas, both atheistic and theistic, worship of Pre-Aryan, Non-Aryan and Aryan gods and goddesses as revealed in the Indus Valley excavations and the Vedic scriptures. Regionally, India is welded together by the Northern, the Eastern, the Western, the Central and the Southern regions, with varying degrees of climate and environment. Linguistically, India is a home of multi-linguistic groups, of which some having scripts and others being only spoken languages. Culturally, India is not uniform; cultural diversity is its characteristic feature. Nature has also endowed India with diverse fauna and flora, natural resources and human potentials. However, the one historical curse to Indian culture is the caste system and its attendant evils, which vivisected the Indian people into higher and lower. This hierarchical stratification of people into castes, sub-castes, creeds and communities divided India into water-tight compartments, where inter-marriage, inter-dining and inter-mingling were all unethical and uncompromising. Social mobility was thus lost, leaving certain people at the centre, others at the margin, some with power and others with nothing. Such an artificial segmentation of Indian
people led to the loss of unity and force, resulting in caste wars, communal violence, religious obscurantism, linguistic chauvinism and cultural separation. In such a situation, it is very difficult for an ideal politician to integrate the diverse elements, unless he or she has the foresight and futuristic perspectives. In such a situation was born the concept of Samathuvapuram.

The Indian caste system appears to have evolved from the Chatur-Varna or Varnashrama dharma of the Aryans, who are said to have come from the Central Asian steppies and occupied the Gangetic Valley region, while it was on its path of decline. They settled down there and gradually moved into the heart of India and transplanted some of their cultural features.\(^1\)

In the Varnashrama system each Varna\(^2\) is attributed a specific occupation. The Brahmins (the learned priests) were the preservers and protectors of eternal laws of the land (dharma) the Kshatriyas (Protectors i.e. rulers and warriors) were the defenders and the guarantors of the safety and security of the community; the Vaisyas (business men; the wealthy merchants) were the conservers and distributors of the wealth and the Sudras (agriculturists-labourers) were the labouring caste mainly involved in the production of essential commodities and were also meant for serving the other three communities\(^3\). On further elaboration of the Varna system, a new system of society was born out of the illegal relations of the upper caste men with the lower caste women and sparsely in the other way also, and gave rise to a new category of untouchable caste called the Panchamas\(^4\). However, the status of the Sudras was actually higher than that of the Panchamas\(^5\).

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2. Varna means colour. It would have been used to distinguish the Aryan Brahmins (white) and the aboriginal inhabitants (Black). Later on it became the backbone of Casteism.
5. Braj Ranjan Mani, Debrahmanising History, New Delhi, 2005, p.86.
Caste system became very rigid in the Later Vedic Age. Scriptures were written to enhance rigidity\(^6\). The concept of purity and pollution took effect; violation of caste was not tolerated. It was all because of the myth of the creation described in the **Purusha Suktha**- the 10\(^{th}\) Mandala of the Rig Veda. The **Sruti** states that the four hierarchical social divisions known as **Varnas** arose from different parts of the sacrificial body of **Purusha**, the primordial being. Among the four castes, the **Brahmins** occupy the top position in the social ladder because they are said to have been born from the forehead of the Brahma; the **Kshatriyas** from the shoulders of Brahma, the **Vaisyas** from the thighs of Brahma, and the **Sudras** from the feet of the Brahma\(^7\). Those who are not included in any of these four **varnas** are **Avarnas** (the casteless).\(^8\)

In reality, there is a clear separation between the first three castes, which are ritually pure and socio-economically dominant. The fourth caste is the labouring caste, which is ritually suspect and socio-economically dominated and marginalized by the other three castes. The last one is the servile caste to the **Sarvvarnas**. In due course, the **Varnashramadharma** segmented into watertight compartments of caste and creed, leading to inequality in status, income and in sharing wealth and power\(^9\). The landless servile and the labouring castes the **Panchama** and the **Sudras** respectively were exploited and improvised. They were the illiterate, ignorant, the powerless section, which was prone to attendant evils of the caste system. They were segregated, denied all necessities of life and their womenfolk were at the mercy of the landed gentry. Their modesty and chastity were at stake; forced to cohabit and beget children, but these were denied status to the women and the newly-born children. The **Panchamas** as the

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polluting class have to settle at the pale of the city or in the outskirts of villages\textsuperscript{10}; to announce by a typical sound of their approach; their huts would not have passages, should not have storeys and roofings\textsuperscript{11}. They were called the ‘carrion eaters’ and the heathens and kept aloof for a supposed stench smell emanating from their bodies\textsuperscript{12}. Centuries of illiteracy, ignorance, powerlessness and ill - treatment made them so. But for them the society would have remained unclean and all kinds of diseases would have spread from the filthy and unhygienic conditions. They were thus at the bottom of the society.

Just above them were the fourth castes the **Sudras**, the agricultural labourers, the only once born. They were the food producing caste, living and labouring for the betterment of the other three upper castes. If food was not produced how could the higher castes eat and live. They thus produced the daily requirements of the society. But their social status was pitiable. They were at the beck and call of the other three castes\textsuperscript{13}. In fact the **Panchamas** and the **Sudras** formed the basic structure, which bore the weight of the other three castes, which were at the mercy of the **Sudras** and the **Panchamas**.

Caste system seems to be a human endeavour to maintain the supposed to be pure blood of the Aryans, which started to mix up the native blood and created a new mixed race. Thus to prevent further mix up, the caste was originated, scripturally sanctified and strictly followed\textsuperscript{14}. Thus the concept of purity and pollution, caste rigidity and discrimination came into existence. Therefore, restrictions in human relations and the codification of the eight forms of marriages, punishment to violations were scripturally sanctioned. Reciting the Vedas, learning the recitation of the Vedas, the seeing the

recitation of the Vedas and hearing the Vedas were considered unlawful and consequent punishment of cutting the tongue, pouring of (hot) melting iyam into the ears, bleeding and cutting the hands of the supposed to be violators were the legally sanctioned punishments\textsuperscript{15}. In such a rigid caste system, there was every doubt, whether there is a change of the basic structure to survive for the chances were very limited. The duties of the ruler were to accord punishments to the supposed to be violators\textsuperscript{16}.

Caste is a socio-religious mechanism by which the inhabitants of a country were stratified into higher, lower and the lowest layers for preventing upward mobility and downward thrust., so that the established order may not be disturbed. In reality, the lowest layer or stratum alone has very limited chance of no survival. Therefore, it was the basic structure, which is burdened for the purpose of maintaining the purity of the rest of the structures. This stratification was said to provide order and stability to society.

A cursory reading of the early layers of the Sangam Classics will betray the fact that the Tamil Society was not left out from the purview of the caste system governed by birth. There is a view that the Tamil society comprised of the Panar (bards), Paraiyar (drummers), Thudiyar (another kind of drummers) and Kadamban (worshipper of the Kadambu tree or sea pirates)\textsuperscript{17}. But this society was later overpowered by the occupational groups in a physiographic setting. They were the Vedan-Veduvan-Kuravan-Villavan of the Kurinchi (foresttract), the Ayan, Idaiyar of the Mullai (hilly tract.) the Ulavan-Uran of the Marudam (agricultural tract) and the Paratavar-Minavar of the Neithal (littoral tract)\textsuperscript{18}. Though they lived in the naturally demarcated land setting, there was much interchange and intermingling. Usually, love affairs

\textsuperscript{15} Manusmriti, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1982, P. 35.
\textsuperscript{16} Pillai, K.K., The Caste System in Tamil Nadu, Chennai, 2007, p. 38
\textsuperscript{17} Purananuru (TI), verse 335, 7-8.
\textsuperscript{18} MaduraiKanchi (TI), verse 238-326.
happened among these people who moved out to other regions for purposes of exchange of their products. This first form of love called Kalavu materialized into family life, i.e. Karpu. The Ayar-Idaiyar of the Mullai region came down to the Marudam region with milk, and milk products and exchanged them for paddy\textsuperscript{19}. Similarly the people of the Neithal region exchanged their salt for paddy\textsuperscript{20}. Thus there was exchange of products, people and culture. The barter system of economy made the possibility of mobility between the different social groups of the ancient Tamil Society.

But, at a later time, mostly after the first century A.D, a society that was simple was made complex and confused by the penetration of the caste system based on birth, purity and pollution concepts with its attendant evils of untouchability, prevention of inter-dining and inter-marriage. Society became radically changed.

Tolkappiyam, the ancient extant Tamil grammar clearly reveals the influence of Vedic ideas of Varnashrama Dharma on Tamil society. It mentions the existence of the four castes of the society namely, Antanar (bramins), Arasar (rulers), Vanikar (traders), and Vellalar (Agriculturist).\textsuperscript{21} They are almost identical with the four Varnas of the Vedic period. The order in which they are referred to is also the same as in Vedic period. The mention of Antanar first and the Vellalar last implies the recognition of the procedures of one caste over the other. Antanar seems to have enjoyed a status higher than that of kings in the same way as the Brahmins established their superiority over the other castes.

This division is absolutely in contrast to the social classes of the Panar (bards), Paraiyar (drummers), Thudiyian (another kind of drummers) and Kadamban.

\textsuperscript{19} Karunthokai, verse 221. \textsuperscript{20} Ahananuru, verse 390. \textsuperscript{21} Tolkappiyam Porul, 625, 626, 632, 635.
(worshipper of Kadambu tree or sea pirates). A later poem in the Purananuru-
collection says that there are no other people than these four divisions\textsuperscript{22}. This
classification is more occupational based rather than birth based.

This simple, nature-based Tamil Society thus became a victim of the birth-based
caste system, which assured the dominance of one caste over the other and thus
marginalized the lower castes. For maintaining the superiority of the higher castes, they
invented new ideas of purity of blood, pollution by touch and inter-dining and inter-
marrriage as taboos\textsuperscript{23}. It is common knowledge, that when these so-called higher castes
came into contact with their small number of women, how they could have maintained
the purity of their blood. They certainly intermingled with the inhabitants and brought
into existence a mixed people. Therefore, the Indian Society had already become
polluted by the Dravidian-Aryan mix. There is nothing remaining yet to be polluted and
therefore to be purified.

The small number of Brahmins, among whom there were three grades i.e. the
educators (wise men), the priestly class (ritualists) and those who performed witchcraft
(Atharvavedins)\textsuperscript{24}, who fled from their homes in North India as a result of the reactions
of the revolutionary Jaina-Buddhist revolts, seeking better pastures for their sacrificial
and ritualistic Vedic religion, entered the South Indian Society, which was until then
unadulterated and unsophisticated\textsuperscript{25}. The Jains and the Buddhists who followed them to
the South, tried to free the South from the Brahmanic hegemony and rituals. They tried
to mitigate the severity of the caste system by stressing morality and education as the
criteria to superiority\textsuperscript{26}. For some time, these revolting religions kept them on check.
The Vedic Brahmins, who had already penetrated and permeated the simple society,

\textsuperscript{22} Cāmpāna, \textit{Cāmpānappāram}, Purananuru, verse 183.
\textsuperscript{26} Anaimuthu, V., \textit{Thoughts of Periyar E.V.R.}, Vol. I (Tl.), Trichy, 1974, P. XIX.
transplanted their castes, caste-based birth and other considerations. The Jain and the Buddhistic, humanistic, non-violent ideas tried to replace the Brahmanic ideologies. But the revolting religions could not make much head way in changing the Brahmanic social structure, because of their too much puritanism and austere penances. Gradually, the sacrificial, ritualistic, caste-based Brahmanism gained an upperhand in the South and the Tamil Society became stratified and segmented with all ritual considerations.

The Brahmins emerged as the learned, the law-givers and propounded the Sastras, which placed them at the apex of the system with all privileges. The remaining bulk of the non-caste Hindus were treated as lower to them. Though these people formed the principal labouring class in the society, they were subjected to severe social disabilities. They lived in perpetual fear and poverty and were not even permitted to move through the public roads. They were not allowed to enter the public places, touch the water bodies and approach the places of worship. Severe restrictions were put on building houses, using footwear and umbrellas and drawing water from public wells27.

In this background one has to analyse the evolution of the concept of equality in Tamil Nadu. Generally in India, the concept of equality is mainly referred to in the context of the disparities created by the caste system28.

Reaction to Brahmin domination in the Tamil Society is known even from the Sangam period. The feeling of universalism was stressed by poet Kanian Poonkundran, who said: **Every village is my village and all are my kith and kin.** Thiruvalluvar, the torch-bearer of social justice, lays emphasis on the equality of birth. However, ups and downs existed in the other sense, that every one’s effort small or big makes them humble or great accordingly29. Likewise, poetess Avvaiyar has stated that there are only two

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castes in the world: those who contributed positively and those who contributed negatively. There is also another definition to the two castes, i.e., the males and the females. From this it is inferred that the caste system was not to the likeness of all.

During the post-Sangam period, the Pallava, Pandya, Chola and the Vijayanagara rule caste system was given an official acceptance and status. As a result the low castes were tabooed in many aspects in their daily life.

Untouchability reached its peak during the rule of the Imperial Cholas. It brought about, among other things, basic changes in the Tamil social structure and land relations. In fact, the effective Brahamanization of the Tamil country started under the Cholas, large sections of the original inhabitants like Paraiyars and Pallars were evacuated from their lands. Large scale distribution of their lands was done as gifts or tax-free lands to the Bramhans in the form of Brahmadeya, Chathurvedimangalas and Agraharas. The Pallava, the Chola and the Pandya rulers introduced the practice of granting lands (tax-free) to the temples and the priestly Bramhins from the seventh to the twelfth century. This practice made these people of the lower stratum a landless class. The land owners, in fact became tenants and servants.

As a consequence, the practices of social segregation or untouchability and unapproachability became entrenched in the Tamil Society. The Hindus have been taught that the lowest among them were born to serve their masters and that, to aspire to attain the rightful privileges of another caste is a sin against the basic tenet of their religion.

The disabilities varied from region to region and from sub-caste to sub-caste among the lower groups. Oppression and isolation of these people pushed them to the bottom of social hierarchy. To safeguard the rights of the untouchables against the

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30. Verse 2.
discriminatory system was a Herculian task. To make amends to this social evil, protests resistance and movements were started by the saints of the medieval and early modern periods.

The Alwars and the Nayanmars, though more flexible and liberal than the orthodox Hindus, confined themselves to the abolition of the disparities based on caste rather than the abolition of caste system. Religious leadership and status of God men were accorded even to low-born people. Instances of such are found in abundance in both the Saivite and the Vaishnavite religious literature (e.g.) Thirunalaipovar Nandanar from the Pulayar\textsuperscript{33} community among the Nayanmars and Thiruppanalvar from the Paanar\textsuperscript{34} community among the Alwars\textsuperscript{35}.

St.Ramanuja the founder of Vishishtadvaita was the predecessor and forerunner of the Temple - Entry Movement in Tamil Nadu / South India. A striking quality of St.Ramanuja was his intense humanism, compassion, charity and utter contempt for caste superiority. A Brahman by birth, he accepted Periyanambi a Sudra by birth as his guru.\textsuperscript{36}

St.Ramanuja converted a number of untouchable Sudras as Vaishnavites and named them as Thirukkulathar\textsuperscript{37} meaning the “people of sacred caste” similar to Gandhi’s conception of Harijans, meaning the “Children of God”. In his later days, he always kept by his side one Uranga Villi Dasar, an untouchable as his body guard and assistant. He used to go to the Cauvery river for his daily bath, supporting himself on the arms of a Brahman disciple and return from the river supporting himself on the arms of Uranga Villi Dasar\textsuperscript{38}.

\textsuperscript{33} Pulayas were an untouchable, unseeable and unapproachable caste.
\textsuperscript{34} Paanar were of the Panchama caste, who were devoted to singing and dancing even from the very early days.
\textsuperscript{35} But in the codification of the Tirumurais, the three Tirumurais of Thirugnanasambandar have been given the primary position though Tirunavukkarasrar was elder to Sambandar the former was a Brahmin and the latter was a Vellala by birth. The preeminence given to the caste system seems to be the reason for this priority.
\textsuperscript{37} Economic and Political Weekly, February 3, 1996, P. 295.
It is said that he mounted over a temple tower at Thirukoshtiyur, near SriRangam and broadcast to all, who rushed to the base of the temple, the Secret Mantra that was divulged to him by a sage named Goshtipurna. He did it even though he had been warned by the latter that he would go to hell in case he revealed the holy mantra to others\(^{39}\).

He threw open the doors of the Krishna (Chellapillai) temple, Melkota, in Mandya District in Karnataka to the untouchables on the day of the important chariot festival\(^{40}\) and initiated them to the Vaishnava fold by giving them diksha. The striking similarity of this event is the inauguration of the First Samathuvapuram (‘equality habitat’) Melakkottai in Madurai District by Chief Minister M.Karunanidhi, to eradicate caste discrimination and to bring about equality among the people\(^{41}\).

**The Siddhars**

In the medieval times in Tamil Nadu the unorthodox Siddhars raised their voice against the caste discrimination and called for social equality. A Siddha was a person who had attained Siddhi, a magical occult power\(^{42}\) Kamil Zvelebil, a Czech Tamil scholar of great standing, writes that Siddhars are characterized by their opposition to idol worship and temples, their emphasis on knowledge, practice of yoga, right conduct and their protest against caste\(^{43}\).

The Siddhars who hailed from subaltern groups and sang subversive songs, cast aside the dreary externalia of religion and embraced brotherhood. Love and compassion, extolling these human expressions and as the intrinsic worth of religion\(^{44}\).

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40. Ibid., P. 295.
43. Quoted in the Ibid., P. 83.
Saint Tirumular was the earliest and greatest of the Tamil Siddhars\(^45\). He is considered to be the **Father of Tamil Siddhars**. His proclamation: **There is one God and one community**\(^46\) had played a vital role in the field of social reform in the Tamil Country. It marked the beginning of the **Siddha Marga** in Tamil Nadu. The concept of one caste and one God reveals universalism and equalitarianism. It also records the disapproval of the fight for supremacy among the religions that prevailed during Tirumular’s time. Caste system and difference based on race do not find support in Tirumular’s songs. He openly denounced Brahmins and priesthood\(^47\). He even questioned the caste marks of the Brahmins\(^48\). Among the Siddhas, Sivavakkiar was the best known for his scathing attacks against casteism. He composed songs questioning the religious orthodoxies of the general population and also those of the **Saiva** community. He ridiculed the recitation of Sanskrit **slokas** from the **Sastras**\(^49\).

He questioned: who is an untouchable woman and who is a Brahman woman? Is there any mark on their flesh, skin or bone? The difference between an untouchable woman and a Brahman woman is only in your mind\(^50\). To him temple worship, idolatry, pilgrimage, holy bathing and the rituals of the Brahmin priests are all devoid of use and meaning.

\(^{45}\) He said to have lived in the 4\(^{th}\)–5\(^{th}\) century A.D. A great mystic, Tirumular is known for his transfiguration and transmigration of soul.

\(^{46}\) \(\text{Tirumanthiram, verse 2104.}\)

\(^{47}\) \(\text{Tirumanthiram, verse 231.}\)

\(^{48}\) \(\text{Tirumanthiram, verse 230.}\)

\(^{49}\) \(\text{Siddhar Patalkal, ( Tl ) Chennai, 1995, V. 40. P.3.}\)

\(^{50}\) \(\text{Ibid., V. 40, P. 7.}\)

\(^{51}\) \(\text{Ibid., V. 35, P. 6.}\)
Pampatti Siddhar, another vehement critic of caste and casteism, condemned that the Vedas, Sastras, Tantras, Puranas and Agamas are all useless and declared ‘we will set fire to the caste discrimination’.

Pathirahiriar another Siddhar made an appeal to burn the Sastras and to dispense with Varnashrama. He was also against the concept of Sudrahood. He yearned for the day when casteism would vanish. Though the Siddhars were all ardent devotees of Siva, they were great rationalists and revolutionaries. They were intolerable to rituals and all sacrifices, pujas and festivals. They advised all to invoke God in their minds. But their effort to break the social inequality based on caste system did not bring about that amount of expected change.

When all these doings and undoings were going on endlessly, the new religion Islam forced its entry into the Indian soil. The egalitarian social practice of Islam never kindled the conscience of the Hindu religious heads and led them to enact a few counter measures. The fear of forced conversions, holy war (jihad), and strict religious adherents made the Hindu Society more strict and rigid. A supposed to be an egalitarian religious order, Islam also felt into the Hindu trap of the caste system. Pathans, Sayyids, Marakkayar, Lebbai, etc, may be cited for instance. However, the concept of universal brotherhood laid down in Islam continued to influence the Tamil Society. When the Muslims attempt to foster the ideals of a universal religion, they resorted to unhealthy practices, which damaged the reputation of the practitioners of egalitarianism and universal brotherhood.

52. Pampatti Siddhar Patalkal, (TI) 98
53. Ibid., 123.
54. Pathirahiriyar Patalkal, (TI) 156.
55. Ibid., 126.
56. Subramanian, P., Social History of the Tamils, New Delhi, 1999, P. 47.
By the end of the Muslim rule, the Europeans - the colonists, commercial men and missionaries made their advent in Tamil Country. They brought with them the religion of charity, compassion and humanism. They, in addition, brought with them the liberal thoughts, secular ideals and faith in emancipation. Revolutionary ideals such as individual freedom, social justice, equality before law and equality in opportunity, humanitarianism, dignity of human person, respect of labour, etc. were the tenets which they spread in India through their language and writings. The missionaries and administrators criticized the evil of caste, religion and their attendant evils, resulting in reforms. The increasing awareness among the depressed castes is mainly due to the missionary activities and education\(^{57}\).

The missionary education system comprised of religion, history, geography and the sciences. The English education, though laid more emphasis on Western literature, sciences, history and political theories, opened vistas of new knowledge; which created a conducive atmosphere for the rise of social reform movements in India\(^{58}\). Negatively, the Britishers, followed the policy of racial discrimination against the inhabitants of the land\(^{59}\). They felt proud of the white race, which they felt, was to rule the blakes. They refused to share the administrative powers with the Tamils (Indians). Moreover, taking advantage of the internal contradictions that existed in the society, Christian missionaries established churches, devised a liberal system of education open to all, irrespective of caste or religion and providing free feeding facilities to the students in the schools. As a result, they could increase the converts to Christianity\(^{60}\). They extended their helping hands to the converts during times of vexatious taxation and famines.

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Indians who came under the influence of the new values and practices became aware of the existing social evils like child marriage, Sati, untouchability, social inequality, etc. The awareness led to revolt against tradition and that trumpeted the first voice for reform in social, religious and political sphere\(^61\).

The works of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Fr.Carey, the Serampore Missionary, Lord William Bentinck, the Viceroy, who was trained in the liberal school in England, Veerasalingam Pandulu, an architect of widow remarriage, G.Subramaniya Aiyar, the bold Brahmin who conducted the remarriage of the widowed daughter amidst strong opposition of his family members, Bharathiyar, the revolutionary bard, Ayoti Dasa Panditar, the journalist of Oru Paisa Tamilan, Venkataratnam Naidu, the great advocate of temperance, Malabari, etc. acted as catalysts of social regeneration. However, the economic exploitation, administrative mismanagement and vexatious taxation also brought about changes in the people’s minds. These reformers thought that unless some concrete steps were taken, the Hindu fold could not be redeemed of its evils and could not prevent its followers falling into the trap of the Christian missionaries\(^62\). However, caustic critics like Catherine Mayo, Abbe Dubois and others attacked the evils of Devadasi System, child marriage, dowry practice, Sati and untouchability, which had an electric impact on the Hindu orthodoxy, which began to think positively for reforms. Their words: all are equal before God and law brought about radical changes in the minds of the Tamils. Under such a situation, a similar voice reverberated from South Travancore. It was Muthukutti Swamigal of Swamithoppu otherwise called Vaikuntha Swamigal. Besides him, St.Ramalinga Adigal of North Tamil Nadu and Jothi Rao Phule of Maharastra, in fact, were the forerunners of radical social change in Tamil country and Maharastra respectively.

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\(^{62}\) Ibid, p. 305.
Vaikuntha Swamigal (1809-1851) : Samathuva Samajam

By the beginning of the 19th century, the Tamil Society comprised of a number of social groups in the name of caste. Moreover, the society was feudalistic in nature by which land was owned by a few landlords, who employed tenants, sub-tenants and peasants to cultivate the lands. These servants of land were just coolies. Besides the lands of tenants could easily be confiscated and evicted on unreasonable grounds.

The government of Travancore strictly enforced caste rules. The caste system divided the Travancore Society into two major compartments (i.e.) the Savarnas or the upper class represented by the Brahmmins, Nairs and Vellalar and the Avarnas lower class represented in Nadars, Ezhavas, Pariahs, Pulayas, Tiyas, Chowns, etc. who were untouchables to the Savarnas.

In South Travancore the lands were in the hands of Nanchilnattu Vellalas (Pillaimars) or Nairs, who got these lands in lieu of their military service. They kept the tenants and tillers under perpetual servitude and did not allow their womenfolk wear the upper garments. Even the male members of these low castes were not allowed to wear upper cloths except a towel, which they wore, as a rule, to wear round their hip on seeing their masters. Worse still is that they were not allowed temple - entry and forced to worship their folk gods and goddesses or minor gods and goddesses. For slightest mistakes, or mistakes not done by them, they were punished severely. These wretched people were the untouchables, unapproachables and the unseeables. Their womenfolk were ill-treated, whipped, molested and their chastity rebuked and modesty tested. In some places, if these women refused to obey these Nairs, they were ill-treated in mock

64. Ibid, P. 7.
trials; severe punishments meted out to them\textsuperscript{68}. Their men folk could not resist this; if resisted they were beaten, whipped and even killed. They were worse than chattels and commodities to be bought and sold; denied of their birth rights, treated as worse than slaves\textsuperscript{69}. If the Nairs allowed their women to cohabit with the Brahmin vagabonds, they wanted the Ezhava and Nadar women to share the beds of the Nairs. It was because of the simple reason that the Brahmin Namboodiris wrote and spread the idea that insemination of Brahmin blood is meritorious\textsuperscript{70}. This could happen in the Nair family, because the menfolk were all the times engaged in warfare and they were absent at home. But, it was just contrary in the Ezhava and Nadar families. Their menfolk were usually with their wives and children. For none of their faults, the menfolk were given severe punishments of cutting limbs, \textit{kaimukku} (Putting hands in the hot oil) etc.

The \textbf{Avarnas} were not permitted to walk in the streets where dogs could roam easily. They were expected to pay more than one hundred and ten different kinds of taxes. The taxes included poll tax, tax on palmyrah trees, kuppa tax on houses, etc\textsuperscript{71}.

It was in this social context that Vaikuntha Swamigal, a socio-religious revolutionary emerged in South India to liberate the oppressed and the suppressed people, to inculcate the feeling of self-respect and to create awareness among the Avarnas about their rights.

Vaikuntha Swamigal was born in A.D 1808 in a poor Nadar family at Sasthankoil vilai, the present Samithoppu, a village five miles Northwest of Kaniyakumari. He was the second son of Ponnumadan and Veilal. Originally, he was named as Mudisoodum

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\item \textsuperscript{68} Ponnu, R. \textit{Sri Vaikunda Swamigal and the Struggle for Social Equality in South India}, Madurai, 2000, P.17.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Ibid, P. 37.
\item \textsuperscript{70} William Logan, \textit{Malabar}, Vol. 1, Chennai, 1953, PP. 221-224.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Vivekanandan, N., \textit{Ahilat tirattu Ammanai}, Part I, Vivekanand Publications, Nagercoil, 2003, PP.276–282. Herein after this ballad will be mentioned as \textit{Ahilat tirattu}.
\end{itemize}
Perumal. The name with the suffix Perumal was used by the caste - Hindus alone. So the caste - Hindus instigated that he might be a threat to the throne. Objection was registered to call him as Perumal. Hence, he was renamed as Muthukutti. The arrogant and dictatorial Travancore government and the caste - Hindus wounded the feelings of young Muthukutti.

To begin with, he had his education from the local teachers. With their help he studied the **Puranas** and **Itihasas** of the Hindu religion and also other literatures of various faiths and moral works like **Nalvazhi** and **Tirukkural**. He learnt the **Bible** and understood the essence of Christianity. Like his parents he was also a Vishnu devotee.

At the age of seventeen, he married Paradevathai, a native of Poovaloor village near Thamaraikulam. In 1833 he took a pilgrimage with his parents to Lord Muruga Temple at Thiruchendur, a famous Hindu pilgrim centre for a holy dip in the Bay of Bengal on the occasion of Masi festival (February-March). This brought out a turning point in his life.

While taking the sacred bath on the second day of the Masi festival, a miracle happened in his life. Muthukutti was found missing and he could not be traced for three days. After three days he revealed himself and said to his mother, ‘since now I am not your son, but the son of Lord Narayana’ and informed the people that Lord Vishnu had given him a rebirth as Vaikuntha and deputed him to South India for the upliftment and unification of the lower caste people and also to establish the reign of **dharma**. He

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73. At that time it was seen that ‘the greater number of those maladies were caused by the unhealthy condition or poverty of the blood, owing to excessive perspiration’, and the salutary efforts of the bath was finally considered as a sovereign remedy for all complaints. Abbe Dubois, J.A., *Op. cit.*, 1973, P.200.
74. Bala Ramachandran (ed.), *Arul Nul*, (TL)Samithoppu, n.d. P. 21. Herein after this will be mentioned as *Arul Nul*.
75. *Ahilat tirattu*, Part II, P. 100.
assumed the title Sri Vaikuntha Swamigal and started preaching the message of love, equality, oneness of God and universal brotherhood.

He was the pioneer revolutionary in the 19th century to raise the voice of protest against the Brahminical-Nair exploitation, misrepresentation and misinterpretation of Hinduism. Vaikuntha Swamigal tirelessly strived hard to remove the inequality based on birth and thereby to establish a casteless society. He condemned those who divided the society into many groups and considered them as Nisas (heartless people).

To unite the people of all castes, Vaikuntha Swamigal established the Samathuva Samajam in 1833. This was the first voice of an organization to bring about universal brotherhood, unmindful of caste, creed, religion, economic status, learning, occupation or social status. It simply means an organization of equality of all in every respect. Irrespective of caste, thousands of people, including women, joined as members of this Samajam. In it he assumed the status of Lord Krishna and treated his five prime disciples as Pancha Pandavas (‘the five Pandava brothers of Mahabharata’). They were Sivanandi (Dharuman) of Mylaudy, Pandaram (Biman) of Kailasapuram, Arjunan (Arjunan) of Pillaiyarkudyiruppu, Subbiah (Nahulan) of Colachel and Hari Gopalan (Sahadevan) of Thamaraikulam. He also had many female disciples. He instructed his trained disciples to go to different places and preach his principles of equality and fraternity to the willing hearers. Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi, who is well aware of Muthukutti Swamigal, was influenced by this concept.

77. Ahilat Tirattu, P. 408.
79. Ahilat Tirattu, P. 315.
80. Ibid, P. 51.
Another of his important reforms, to abolish\textsuperscript{81} untouchability was \textbf{Samapanthi Bojanam} (interdining). The followers of Vaikuntha Swamigal, irrespective of caste, brought food materials, took water in the Mutthiri Kinaru (“sacred well”) and cooked food and shared and ate together with the Swamigal\textsuperscript{82}. Even now, the people continue the practice of inter-dinning in the Pathis or Nizhalthankals (“shadowy groves” or “shades”).

Vaikuntha Swamigal advised his followers to observe personal hygiene. In those days, the lower caste people were not accustomed to regular bath and they rarely washed their clothes because of their incessant work. Another inability that prevented them from doing so was the taboo in practice in drawing water from common water ponds, rivers and reservoirs. He only advised them to break the taboos and wash their clothes and keep this change in tact. The Swamigal led his followers to do tapas (meditation) at Muttapati, (Plate 1) a coastal village near Kaniyakumari and conducted Thuvyal Pandi\textsuperscript{83}. Seven hundred families of different castes from different parts participated in the meditation\textsuperscript{84}. Through this organization the Swamigal trained his people to inculcate purity of thought and action.

In those days, the low castes were not allowed to build any stone house and for long not permitted to build their houses on the road side. Their dwellings were miserable huts made of sticks with walls of mud and mostly thatched roofs only\textsuperscript{85}.

The Swamigal wanted to make his followers live in cluster houses. So he asked them build compound ventilated houses with enough and more rooms, close to each other and also directed them to construct their houses in a regular order and to provide

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., P. 241.
\textsuperscript{82} Ahilat tirattu., Part II, P. 457.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, P. 283.
\textsuperscript{84} Personal Interview with Narayana Vadivoo Nadar, R., Muttapathi, April, 14, 2008.
each house with doors on four directions. This is called the Samathuva Kudiyiruppu (“equality habitat”). Regarding this, Prof. K.Sadasivan, the then editor of the Proceedings of the Tamil Nadu History Congress considers this an anticipation of the present day concept of Samathuvapuram launched by Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi.

The members of the Samathuva Kudiyiruppu stayed there for one year in that settlement and got training in the principles of the Swamigal. This changed the lifestyle of the participants, particularly in their outlook, social views and visions.

Realizing the social disabilities of the Backward Communities, the Swamigal took measures in removing the inequality based on birth. As a first step, he raised his voice against the Brahminical rituals. Almost all his teachings were anti-Brahminical. He felt that social justice and equality could be established if any Brahmin supremacy was effectively checked. This was the beginning of the anti-Brahmin Movement in South India, especially in Tamil Nadu.

Vaikuntha Swamigal established Nizhalthankals (‘shadowy groves or shades’) to provide shelter, supply food and to instill spiritual confidence among his followers. Nizhalthankals are nothing but small hut like resting places which give nizhal or shadow to the people. The people consider these Nizhalthankals as the abode of Dharma. He founded these Nizhalthankals mainly for the cause of Dharma Paripalanam (‘administration of righteous deeds’). Vaikuntha Swamigal established the Nizhalthankals at Chettikudiyiruppu, Agastheesvaram, Paloor, Sundavillai,

86. Ahilat Tirattu, Part II, PP. 248-250.
88. Personal Interview with Bala Prajapathi Adigal, Swaminthoppu, April 29, 2008.
89. Ahilat Tirattu, Part II, P. 104.
90. Arul Nul, P. 68.
92. Ibid., P.57.
Vadalivillai in Kanyakumari district and Kadambankulam and Pambankulam in Tirunelveli district\(^3\). Following this, many **Nizhalthankals** were established by his followers at various places. The commoners call these **Nizhalthankals** as **Narayana Swamipathies** or **Narayana Swami Koils**. Even now, the **Nizhalthankals** are managed by different caste people in different places:

- Seevalapperi Pathi - Maravar
- Papanasam Pathi - Dalit
- Ambasamudram Pathi - Yadava

Vaikuntha Swamigal assumed the status of **Ayya** to all his followers. His followers are generally called **Ayya Vazhi Makkal** (‘those followers of Ayya’) or **Anbukodi Makkal** after the name of the flag adopted by Vaikuntha Swamigal for his movement. He emphasized the concept of “One God, One religion and One Caste”.

In those days, the idea of impurity was linked to the very sight and touch of the non-Brahmins. To reject this practice Vaikuntha Swamigal used to put **tiruman** (‘sacred soil’) on the forehead of his devotees irrespective of caste. Even today, unlike the **Saivite** Hindu temples where the priests put the **Vibhuthi** or **tiruneer** (‘sacred ash’) in the palm of the devotees without touching, the head of the **Pathi** or **Nizhalthankal** puts the **tiruman** on the forehead of the devotees, indicating that touching the head or any part of the body does not pollute a person\(^4\).

The devotees of Vaikuntha Swamigal utter The words: “Ayya Siva Siva, Hara Hara” five times at the time of worship. This proves the unity of **Saivism** and Vaishnavism of Hinduism. In short, Vaikuntha Swamigal echoed the concept of “One God” (may be Siva and Vishnu) i.e. ‘Unity of God’.

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\(^3\) _Arul Nul_, P. 41.

Vaikuntha Swamigal believed in self-respect. He aroused his disciple to fight against social disabilities and restrictions even on dressing. He made his followers to wear head **turban** at the time of worship\(^95\). This, of course, created a sense of confidence in their minds. **Turban** is a symbol of self-respect and courage; head **turban** being a mark of caste superiority. He said that his disciples are not slaves to any humans but only to God. Though the Swamigal was subjected to various kinds of ordeals by the rulers and ruling class of Travancore, the Swamigal came out of them without any pains, but with redoubled vigour. Having won them all, he rose as a whirlwind which swept the seat of royal powers and had shaken the Travancore Kingdom. His **Samathuva Samajam, Samabandhi Bojanaam, Samathuva Kudiyiruppu** and **Nizhalthankals** have become models for the creation of a casteless society of “One God, One religion, and One caste”. This certainly served as an inspiration to ‘Periyar’, C.N.Annadurai and Chief Minister M.Karunanidhi.

**St.Ramalingar (1823-1874): Samarasa Sanmargam**

In North Tamil Nadu, St. Ramalingar (1823-1874), the contemporary of Vaikuntha Swamigal, too emphasized the concept of human equality. He was a great mystic saint of the 19\(^{th}\) century\(^96\). Born on October 5, 1923 as the son of Ramayya Pillai and Chinnammal at Maruthur,. Ramalingam was moved by the sufferings of humans and animals and even trees. Due to poverty the family shifted to Chennai. There he spent most of his times in the temples. At Chennai he noticed social evils like untouchability and caste hierarchy blinding human minds. Dissatisfied with the worldly life, he thought of renouncing the world. He attacked the caste system more vehemently than any other religionist or spiritualist of the previous ages\(^97\).

\(^95\). Wearing head turban was a highest privilege but a denied privilege to the lower castes at that time.  
He condemned the books that sanctified and advocated many subdivisions within the caste and religions\(^98\) as rubbish. He refused to accept the theory of high and low castes\(^99\). He said that the Lord revealed to him that there is nothing like high caste, that high caste is not distinguished by the colour of the skin and that all distinctions of caste and modes of life are childish plays\(^100\). His basic philosophy is compassions to all creatures. He grieved for the seedlings that were withered\(^101\).

To create awakening among the people about religion, caste, unity and integration, he started the \textbf{Samarasa Veda Sanmarga Sangam} popularly known as \textbf{Samarasa Sudhha Sanmarga Sangam} in 1865, at Karunguli, a small village in South Arcot district. The word \textbf{Samarasa} indicates the universality of its nature and the society was open to everyone irrespective of caste, creed, colour, language and nationality. Two years later, it was shifted to Vadaloor near Neyveli in South Arcot District. The aim of the Sangam was to feed the poor, to impart education and to promote universal brotherhood without any distinction of race, colour or sex. He also preached the oneness of God, Who should be worshipped in the form of effulgence of light with true love and condemned the worship of images and rituals\(^102\). He also conducted self-respect marriages and encouraged female education\(^103\). He prohibited the habit of meat eating and advocated burial of the dead body\(^104\). In fact, he sought to inculcate in mankind the virtue of charity and generosity.
St. Ramalingar was the first person who waged a war against poverty. He grieved at the poverty prevalent in the society\textsuperscript{105}. Hence he launched Satya Dharma Sala in 1867 to eradicate hunger from the Tamil Society.

For conducting religious meetings and prayers he established a Satya Gnana Sabha on 1872. The method of worship laid down by St. Ramalingar was unique. No distinction based on caste is evinced in offering worship and even the person who is to officiate the worship inside the Sanctum of the Saba is selected not on the basis of caste but on the basis of his pure life. He has to give up meat eating and killing of animals. Playing musical instruments, offering of edibles are not in practice\textsuperscript{106}.

His mission did not succeed as he expected. The main reason for this is that the members of the Sangam violated his principles. They began to worship him as God and began to eat meat. And there was no dynamic disciple like Vivekananda to Ramakrishna to carry his message far and wide\textsuperscript{107}.

It is not gain to say that St. Ramalingar’s principles like self-respect marriage, abolition of caste distinctions, eradication of untouchability and welfare to the poor had salutary impact on the Tamils. They were upheld by ‘Periyar’ E.V.R. and his Self-Respect Movement and Chief Minister M.Karunanidhi continue to feel agitated over the wretched condition of the poor and at his ripe age he is very much moved by the idea of compassion of the Saint though he was not much concerned about it earlier.

**Mahatma Jyothi Bao Phule (1827-1890): Sathya Shodak Samaj**

In this context, it is very pertinent to study about the Non-Brahmin Movement launched by Mahatma Jothi Bao Phule of Maharastra. He pioneered to mobilize the

\textsuperscript{107} Though offering to be simple, his method of worship and austre penance and purity of word and deed is very difficult to follow. His basic principle of compassion, charity, unity and enlightenment was not strictly adhered to; worship became ritualistic, mind became impure and body became decayed.
Sudras and untouchables to fight against social inequalities and Brahminic exploitation in the name of Hindu religion\(^\text{108}\).

Called the ‘Mahatma’, he belonged to a Mali family near Pune in Maharasthra. He was a pioneer to launch a movement for the liberation of India’s long suppressed humanity. He identified the untouchables as the representatives of the indigenous population\(^\text{109}\).

Phule struggled hard for the restoration of the dignity of human person and human rights as he considered all Indians equal. As early as 1848, Phule had set up a school for untouchable girls, making it clear that education would be the foundation of a cultural reconstruction. Throughout his life, Phule stressed the necessity of modern education and scientific knowledge\(^\text{110}\).

In 1873 he also founded the Satya Shodak Samaj. It influenced all those areas where Brahmin domination was felt. It sought to liberate the Sudras and Adi-Sudras from the mental and religious slavery and the hypocrisy of the Brahmins and their opportunistic scriptures\(^\text{111}\).

Throughout his life time Jothi Bao Phule strived hard to promote a sense of common collective identity as Sudras and Adi - Sudras among the agrarian majority explicitly including the Dalits. In hind sight, this attempt failed even within Phule’s life time, because of opposing vested interests. The Marathi elites for most part saw no advantage in uniting their claim for Kshatriya status with Sudra identity in Phule’s sense\(^\text{112}\).


\(^{111}\) Manickam, S. Facets of History; A Spectrum of Thought, Madurai, 1998. PP. 102-103.

\(^{112}\) Michael Bergender, Op. cit., P. 64.
Pandit Ayothidass (1845-1914): One Paisa Tamilan

Pandit Ayothidass was another great thinker, writer and fighter for the rights and dignity of human beings. He was born on May 20, 1845 in Coimbatore, grew up in the Nilgris and later lived in Chennai. He was a Siddha doctor by profession. He was well versed in Pali, Sanskrit, and English and, of course in Tamil as well. He used all his potentials in attacking caste and untouchability. He vehemently criticized the Brahmins and believed that the Brahmins were the real culprits behind the caste system and the practice of untouchability. Brahmins, in fact, prevented caste mobility and communal harmony.

The increasing Brahmanization of the colonial society, at the end of the 19th century, began to restrict the social advancement of the Paraiya elites and thereby counteracted the interests of the small Paraiyar middle class. These people struggled for survival and sustenance. They were exploited by their landlords and paid pittance wages for their daily chores. Their life was one of misery and poverty. Dignity of labour was denied to them. They lived in ignorance and illiteracy. Among them, a few as the one like Ayothidass and Rattamalai Srinivasan or M.C. Raja got some education.

Ayothidass founded the Advaitananda Sabha in 1870 in the Nilgris and the Dravida Mahajana Sangam in 1881. A conference of the Sangam was held on December 1, 1891 at Ooty. Ten resolutions were passed demanding civil rights, educational concessions, economic advancements of the depressed castes, due share in government services and access to public wells and ponds. In 1898 he and a large number of those who shared his conviction converted to Buddhism and founded the Sakya Buddhist Society. He used religion for acquiring emancipation identity having socio-political and religico-cultural bearings. He was not an orthodox rather a pragmatic

Buddhist who attempted to radicalize the religion of the oppressed\textsuperscript{115}. He wanted Dalits to get away from the clutches of Hinduism.

Ayothidass did much for the reconstruction of the history and culture of the Adi-Dravidas through intensive research and study. His research findings made him convinced that the Paraiyars of Tamil Nadu are the original inhabitants of this region. Their ancestral religion was the compassionate, rational and egalitarian creed of the Buddha. The historical defeat of Buddhism has created the society of Paraiyars\textsuperscript{116}. Like the later day non-Brahmin or Dravidian ideologies, Ayothidass clearly saw in Brahmin power and hegemony a great threat to the interests of the non-Brahmins. Hence his exhortation to the later not to hate the Adi-Dravidar who would always constitute an important and decisive flank of the non-Brahmin Community. Ayothidass thus left behind him a legacy of learning and a tradition of critical political hermeneutics that was put to good use by those who came after him. This legacy and tradition proved inspiring not only to other Panchama intellectuals but also to the self-respectors\textsuperscript{117}.

Another striking observance of Ayothidass was on the denial of temple-entry to Dalits. He argued that the important temples which were then in the hands of Brahmins once belonged to the Dalits and were served by Dalit priests. The reason for the permanent enmity between the Dalits and the Brahmins is nothing but the struggle for the rights of temple priesthood\textsuperscript{118}. The Brahmins defeated the Dalits by manipulation and force and captured their temples. So Brahmins feared that if the Dalits were allowed entry into temples they would identify their deity and claim their right over it and as a

\textsuperscript{115} Aloysuis, (e.d) \textit{Ayothidass Chintanaikal}, Vol. II,(Tl.) Folklore Resources and Research Centre, St. Xaviers College, Palayamkottai, PP. 184-185.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., P. 2095
result they may have to lose their jobs, income and the social status enjoyed so far\textsuperscript{119}. In due course, the Brahmins have renamed the deity, tampered with the original structure and renamed a number of deities in the temples. The Hindutva promotees are claiming rights over a number of mosques in India. If Buddhists begin to claim their rights over their temples, many Hindu temples would come under despiction and become a cause for blood shed\textsuperscript{120}.

To express his ideas and thoughts Ayothidass started a weekly, magazine namely, \textbf{Oru Paisa Tamilan} in 1907, which was later renamed as \textbf{Tamilan} on August 26, 1908 under heavy pressure and advice. He named the journal so only to awaken the minds of the affected and deal a blow to the vested interests of a few. It is a kind of punning or a mockery or the ridicule the folly of the Tamil society. The name means that the Tamilian is worth one paisa, a scathing attack on the self-respect of every Tamilian.

Long before the formation of the \textbf{Self-Respect Movement} and the \textbf{Dravidian Parties}, such as the \textbf{Justice Party}, the \textbf{Dravidar Kazhagam} and the \textbf{Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam}, the Dalit intellectuals and leaders of Tamil Nadu in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century itself had raised their political voice for social justice.

\textbf{Sri Narayana Guru (1854-1928): Ezhava Siva}

The Travancore (Kerala) Society in the 19\textsuperscript{th} and the first quarter of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century was not based on social justice and equality. At that time Kerala was a peculiar state with all kinds of outmoded practices and customs. The non-caste Hindus were groaning under the weight of social, economic, religious and political oppression of the caste-Hindus\textsuperscript{121}. Not only temple worship but also temples of learning were shut against them. The caste-Hindus enforced social apartheid on them by the twin weapons of

\textsuperscript{119} Even today Dalits act as priests in many temples of minor deities.
\textsuperscript{121} O. Sreethara Menon, \textit{A Kerala History and Its Makers}, Trivandrum, 1987, PP. 19-21.
untouchability and unapproachability\textsuperscript{122}. The Ezhava Community (\textit{Avarnas}), which form a major chunk of the state population, was included in the list of \textit{Savarnas}. At the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, its members were considered no better than untouchables. Like other depressed untouchable castes, they suffered from social, cultural disabilities\textsuperscript{123}. It was at about this time that Sri Narayana Guru belonging to the Ezhava Community appeared on the scene.

Unity of mankind, oneness of God and equality of justice were the prime ideals of Sri Narayana Guru. He had a religion; it was a \textbf{Religion of Humanism}. He started a crusade against caste system and inequality by consecrating a Siva idol at Aruvipuram in South Travancore on February 10, 1888. He just picked up a stone from a nearby stream and installed it as a Siva idol\textsuperscript{124} called it \textbf{Ezhava Siva}. He wanted a common place of worship where all could come and offer their worship with no distinction of caste, sex or religion.

This act of Sri Narayana Guru was a challenge to the age old custom and conviction that only a Brahmon had the right to install an idol and consecrate a temple. When a scholar questioned the validity of his act, Sri Narayana Guru gave a sharp reply “I have installed only the \textbf{Ezhava Siva}”\textsuperscript{125}. The ultimate goal of Narayana Guru was to establish a society in which everyone accepted the principle, \textbf{One God, One religion and One caste} for mankind. “\textit{ஒன்று கடவுள் ஒன்று வணிகம் ஒன்று வார்த்தை}”, “What may be the religion, man should become good”, is his clarion call.

The motto he gave to his followers was “Educate that you may be free and organize that you may be strong”.

\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Ibid.}, PP.19-21.  
A brilliant organizer and institution builder, Sri Narayana Guru felt the need for a powerful secular body to reach out to the masses. So a society called the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, popularly known as SNDP was founded in 1903. It was open to all without any caste distinction. He advised his followers not to ask another’s caste and not even to think of it. He did not appreciate the government procedure of seeking caste identification in official documents. He always made it a point to mingle and live with the downtrodden masses. His movement did pay a major role in the transformation of Kerala today.

**Justice Party: Political Decisions**

Led by a host of civic reformers like Pandit Ayyothidass, the people of South India began a battle for the recovery of their past as well as the establishment of their rights in the present. This led to the emergence of a powerful political non-Brahman awakening in the then Madras Presidency consisting of the present Tamil Nadu, part of Karnataka, Andhra and the Malabar region in Kerala with the exception of Native States. The South Indian Liberal Federation named later as the Justice Party, was founded in 1916 by Pitti Theagaraya Chetti and T.M. Nair as an anti-Congress, anti-Brahmanical plank with the objective of radical redistribution of socio-political power to all castes.

“Equal opportunities for all and injustice to none” was the watchword of the Justice Party. The South Indian People’s Association issued a manifesto in December, 1916 on behalf of all non-Brahmins. It suggested four lines of action for putting democratic principles into practice. Firstly, non-Brahmins were to educate themselves in large numbers. Secondly, they were to work for their and the country’s economic development. Thirdly, they were to come together and work to ensure proportional representation for all communities in the administrative and in the legislative bodies.

Lastly, they were to make efforts through their unified interaction to build a casteless fraternity of people that abided by modern values and ethos\textsuperscript{129}.

The Justice Party government issued the first \textit{Communal Government Order} on September 16, 1921 extending the principle of the distribution of appointments among various castes and communities that was already observed in the revenue department to all other departments\textsuperscript{130}.

During its tenure the Justice Party also brought legislation relating to inter-marriage, franchise for the common man, abolition of the \textit{Devadasi System}, throwing open the temples to the depressed classes, regulating temple administration and bringing it under the control of the state, educational facilities and starting of Universities and priority to Siddha system of Medicine and reduction of fees for weaker sections. The Justice Party also introduced a scheme to feed the depressed children in schools to bring down the number of dropouts. It also paid attention to the spread of education among \textit{Adi-Dravidas} and insisted that all public \textit{Adi-Dravida} students were also given concession in fees, besides other facilities\textsuperscript{131}.

\textit{‘Periyar’ E.V.Ramasami (1879-1973): Self-Respect Movement}

In the first quarter of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, a radical reformer with missionary zeal and devotion appeared at Erode in Tamil Nadu. He was none other than the great self-respector E.V.Ramasami Naicker. He was a great crusader against social inequalities and injustice and a known and confirmed heretic. Never content with some political slices offered by the Justice Party and the Congress, he thundered that a caste-based

\textsuperscript{130} The Communal Government Order was the expansion of the 1851 Standing Order (No. 128 (2), Clause 2) of the Revenue Board of Madras instructing all District Collectors to be careful to see that subordinate appointments in their districts were not monopolized by a few influential families (Eugene, F. Irschick; \textit{Op cit.}, P. 52.
\textsuperscript{131} Geetha, V. and Rajadurai. S.V., \textit{Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium from Jyotheethas to Periyar}, Kolkata, 1998, P. 134.
hierarchical system is a social anachronism and dinosaur of a by-gone Vedic age that deserves to perish.

This revolutionary, who all through his life fought for social change for the better, guaranteeing the upward mobility of the depressed classes was “Thanthai Peiryar”, the founder of the **Self-Respect Movement** and the **Dravidar Kazhagam**.

Born of a well-to-do trading community at Erode, E.V. Ramasami saw his home the visiting places of **sanyasis, zamindars, politicians** and **intellectuals**. From his early childhood he imbibed in his mind a sense of atheistic-rationalistic thoughts and a questioning mind about the ritual practices that went on in his house\(^1\).\(^{132}\)

Having learnt the art of questioning odd practices, untestable beliefs from his own experience and from his family members’ adherence to irrational deeds, Ramasami entered national politics in 1917; he actively participated in Gandhi’s **Non-Cooperation Movement**. On his involvement in the agitation against the sale of liquor in Erode, the daily **The Hindu** wrote, ‘Not even a coffee house or betel shop was open. No car or bus ran. The crowd must have been at least 12,000. EVR and his able volunteers were working day and night and credit is due to them for Erode turning days\(^2\).\(^{133}\)

From the beginning of his career, he joined the Congress activities. His plea for communal representation for non-Brahmins, the majority community, in the legislatives failed and he stayed only to see his proposals postponed, evaded or rejected by the Congress\(^3\).\(^{134}\). The worst experience he had at the hands of Tamil Nadu Congress leaders and Gandhi at Vaikom in 1924, the political conspiracy hatched against him at Cheranmahadevi Gurukulam event in 1925 and the refusal to include his resolutions asking for communal representation at the Canjeevaram Congress Pradesh Committee

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134. Pandian, M.S., *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin*, Delhi, 2007, P. 190
Meeting in 1925. This finally made him to break links with the Congress in November, 1925\textsuperscript{135}.

The social thoughts of ‘Periyar’ reflect his immediate concern for the welfare of his socially backward people, who had been objects of illtreatment and neglect. His thoughts also were influenced by the ideas of social thinkers, such as ‘Mahatma’ Phule in India and Ingersoll, Shaw, Lenin, Marx and Engles in abroad. The social thoughts of ‘Periyar’ deserve special attention, because his social ideas brought about a social revolution in the conservative and orthodox society of India in general and Tamil Nadu in particular.

‘Periyar’ felt that as far as India is concerned, caste is the worst evil; it is based on \textbf{Varnashrama} system, devised by the Aryans for their own benefits\textsuperscript{136}. Many sociologists and historians including Prof. K.A.Nilakanta Sastri advocated that the caste system gave an identity and stability to Indian social, fabric. However, in the opinion of ‘Periyar’ the evils of the system are more than the benefits. In order to achieve progress by economic freedom, a merciless fight against the Aryans, who have made the non-Brahmins pitiable \textbf{Sudras}, is inevitable. He felt that the non-Brahmin can never come up in his life if they were passive spectators and careless\textsuperscript{137}. Like Phule, ‘Periyar’ felt an egalitarian society was the need of the hour. He advocates only by getting rid of the caste system others can live in dignity. ‘Periyar’’s viewed that only by doing away with the \textbf{Varnashrama Dharma} hindered the equitable distribution of nation’s wealth among the citizens could be possible. The \textbf{Varna} system classifies the society into different categories with specific occupations with limited rights on the basis of lives\textsuperscript{138}.

\textsuperscript{135} Kudi Arasu, December 6, 1925.
\textsuperscript{136} The Justice, (The Rationalist English Weekly), Erode, December 30, 1944.
\textsuperscript{137} Kudi Arasu, June 28, 1931
‘Periyar’ pointed out the need for a conducive atmosphere for the emergence of egalitarianism. He remarked that if distinction between the capitalists and the workers and between the Mirasdars and the peasants are preserved in the name of god, fate, karma, etc., whatever is paid to the workers by way of wages; their miseries could never be mitigated. The stratification of people as the workers, capitalists, peasants and zamindars are all quite akin to the differences embodied in the Varnashnama Dharma. If at all man has to attain real equality in society, he has to cross the stratification based on birth and occupation. To ‘Periyar’ “egalitarianism is that state in which caste stratifications are burned”.

To remove inequalities prevalent in the Hindu Society and to establish an equalitarian society, he started the Self-Respect Movement in 1925. It formed by ‘Periyar’ bore a striking similarity in its objectives to that of Phule’s Sathya Sodhak Samaj, calling for annihilation of caste, a halt to Brahmanical hegemony and championing the cause of the liberation of subjugated classes and women. One goal of the Self-Respect Movement was natives to get rid of foreign Brahmins. The other goal was revivalist to restore Tamil society to its pristine state of equality.

In the beginning, the party started by ‘Periyar’ was known as the party of the untouchables. Because of his close association with Rettamalai Srinivasan and a host of others who were in the vanguard of ‘Periyar’s’ Movement, were from the Scheduled Castes, his association came to be known as a party of untouchables.

142. John, D.C., Subjectivism in Modern Indian History, with Special Reference to Tamil Nadu, Madras University (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis), P. 123.
While the **Self-Respect Movement** strove for equality of status, the Justice Party worked for the Communal G.O. for conferring equality of opportunity. These were the two fronts organized by ‘Periyar’ to start the battle for social justice in Tamil Nadu\(^\text{143}\).

Since the Justice Party was dominated by the high caste Hindus, it could achieve very little. It could not enlist the support of the Dalits. Therefore ‘Periyar’ reorganized and renamed the Justice Party as **Self-Respect Movement** to establish an equalitarian society.

To ‘Periyar’ the first base of social justice is equality of status. He sought to achieve it through his **Self-Respect Movement**. The first salvo for social justice was fired in Kerala, when ‘Periyar’ staged a Satyagraha in front of the Mahadeva Temple at Vaikom (near Sherttalai in the erstwhile Travancore State)\(^\text{144}\) in 1924, seeking rights for lower castes only to enter the temple streets\(^\text{145}\). The Vaikom Mahadeva Temple was chosen by the Kerala agitators for social justice of getting the right to enter the temple street, which was closed for centuries to the untouchables and unapproachables. Though God is for all, God was denied to the larger majority. For the reason that Lord Siva was the God of high caste Hindus’, being a major God, his accessibility to the downtrodden was denied\(^\text{146}\). Even the streets leading to the temple was closed; the entry to them to the court and its office, to the police station, the Revenue Department Office, which were housed in the temple streets were thus denied. Since everyday one **Satyagrahi** courted arrest, the **Satyagraha** appeared to fizzle away\(^\text{147}\). However, ‘Periyar’s’ arrival, electrified the movement; the **Satyagrahis** regained confidence and vigour. ‘Periyar’ by

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144. Vaikom is a beautiful village in the Travancore State. In the first half of the twentieth century the social reformers highly felt that temple-entry movement was primary importance in the agitation against eradication of inequality among the people in the name of caste system.
his speeches, agitations, and tours made it a mass-based movement. His scathing attacks on the castles of castes, his joining hands with the mass and his steadfastedness terrified the rulers and the ruling class. He courted arrest and from jail he issued notices, tracts and pamphlets. Meanwhile, Rajaji and T.S.S. Rajan made Gandhi to write to ‘Periyar’ to withdraw his agitation, come to Tamil Nadu and continue his work. Gandhi, in the meantime, reprimanded ‘Periyar’ for having attacked the high castes and their religious sentiments and questioned his rights to interfere in the affairs of another state\textsuperscript{148}. Had he not gone and taken up the morale of the agitators, the Satyagraha would have fizzled out into a high sounding nothing. It was not Gandhi, but ‘Periyar’, who took up the tempo of the agitation and suffered heavily. But he made it at least partially successful, for the reason that a new street was laid through which entry of the untouchables was allowed; but not through the main street\textsuperscript{149}. This earned him two jail terms and the honorific ‘Vaikom Veerar’ (‘Hero of Vaikom’), a title coined by Thiru.Vi.Kalyana sundaranar, an erudite Tamil scholar, a selfless Congress leader and a pioneer in labour movement. ‘Periyar’\textquotesingle s’ vigorous and spirited role in the Vaikom Satyagraha contributed in no mean measure for the triumph of the first historic social struggle in the history of modern India\textsuperscript{150}. This paved the way for the untouchables to use public roads without any inhibition and for other prospective social measures.

‘Periyar’ showed his deep concern for the non-Brahmin cause in the Cheranmahadevi Gurukulam event. Cheranmahadevi Gurukulam was started in 1922 as a national training school, as an alternative to those run under the control of the British government\textsuperscript{151}. Its aim was to train youths in nationalism and patriotism\textsuperscript{152}. It was funded by the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee and by other non-Brahmin

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid, P. 6
\textsuperscript{150} Periyar E.V.Ramasamy- Op. cit, P. 8.
\textsuperscript{151} Kudi Arasu, May 17, 1925.
\textsuperscript{152} Government Order No. 2829, Public Department, Madras, October, 4, 1957, P. 2.
philanthropists and was managed by V.V.S.Iyer. It was open to all youths irrespective of caste and creed. But discrimination was shown between the Brahmin and non-Brahmin students. Brahmin boys were treated in a better way than the others with regard to food, shelter and the curriculum. ‘Periyar’ and the Congress Committee strongly condemned the discriminatory practice and put an end to it\(^{153}\). It showed the hegemonic mind of the high caste Brahmins towards the marginalized. Though arguments in favour of the discriminatory treatment were put forward, the agitators too argued in such a treatment how could there emerge nationalists and patriots. It was nothing but a symbolic representation of caste domination, orthodoxy and mental make up of the Brahmins.

The agitation against separate dining halls and separate pots for drinking water, for Brahmins and non-Brahmins in hotels and other places was nothing but different manifestations of the battle for social justice\(^{154}\).

The first Provincial Self-Respect Conference was convened in Chengalpattu on February 17, 1929 in collaboration with the Justice Party. It was at this conference ‘Periyar’ announced the deletion of his caste title ‘Naicker’ from his name\(^{155}\). This conference resolved that all suffixes and terminologies connoting caste should be given up and words denoting any specific caste or sect should not be worn on any part of the body\(^{156}\).

‘Periyar’ felt that, on account of casteism, the spirit of brotherhood and feeling of oneness was lost in the society. That is the reason why the Tamils had not developed community spirit and the spirit of comradeship. Casteism has made them lose respect for human dignity and values\(^{157}\). ‘Periyar’ saw casteism as the main impediment to unity and progress and firmly believed that social uplift is possible only when the caste system


\(^{155}\) Kudi Arasu, February 3, 1929.


\(^{157}\) Kudi Arasu, December 11, 1948.
is eradicated. In his opinion, the problem of the high and low castes grows in dimension without any foundation supported by God and religion.\(^{158}\)

To achieve the socialist aim ‘Periyar’ founded the **Samadharma Party of South India** in 1933, as a political wing within the **Self-Respect Movement**. The main objectives of this party was to obtain the removal of all caste distinctions among all castes, sects and classes of the Indian Society, by removing all caste titles, from all public records and making such retention of such caste titles as disability to hold any kind of public service.\(^{159}\)

For **Self-Respecter** radicals, the term **Samadharma** was not merely the Tamil equivalent of socialism, but it meant equality amongst men and between men and women as a give and take policy.\(^{160}\) As such, the principle of **Samadharma** stood not only for a new age of economic equality and public ownership of property, but for the realization of a millennium dream whereby caste society in its entirety and in all its complex ways of being would be transformed.\(^{161}\)

In order to eradicate the pernicious caste system prevalent in Tamil society, he encouraged inter-caste marriages. In order to claim legal recognition, an association called the **Tamil Nadu Purohita Maruppu Sangam** (‘Tamil Nadu Anti-Brahmanical Priest Association’) was formed at Trichy in 1935.\(^{162}\) Like Phule, to ‘Periyar’ the abolition of untouchability required nothing more than the abolition of the caste system itself.\(^{163}\) Thus ‘Periyar’ has instilled a spirit of humanism, liberty, equality, fraternity and self-respect among the non-Brahmins. A disciple of ‘Periyar’ and an advocate of a casteless society and universal brotherhood, Chief Minister M.Karunanidhi wanted to

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158. **Viduthalai**, September 29, 1925.
159. **KudiArasu**, January 1, 1933.
create a society of humanism and brotherhood by demolishing the caste structure. ‘Periyar’s’ dream of an egalitarian society by assuring the dignity of humans seems to have come true in the way of establishing Samathuvapurams.

**Bharathithi (1882-1921): A Poet-Thinker of Social Emancipation: A Brahmin Rebel**

Bharati, hailing from an orthodox Brahmin family of Ettayapuram in the Tuticorin region of the erstwhile Tirunelveli district, was bold enough to fight against caste system. He was a born rebel who openly revolted against unreasonable conventions and unjust social laws. He believed all Tamils and all Indians are one humanity. His poems are radical, revolutionary and anti-Brahminical. The conscience of Bharati revolted against the superiority based on birth. According to him, the only superiority is that which is based on intellectual and moral acquisitions.\(^\text{164}\)

In many of his articles, Bharati has urged and waged wars against the caste system. He clearly stated that the two maladies of India are its poverty and the confusion of caste.\(^\text{165}\) He considered that by educating the low-caste people equality is possible.\(^\text{166}\) He also believed that the low-caste people could be transformed into Brahmins by giving them Vedic training and by making them wear the scared thread. These ideas prompted him to have a Harijan boy namely Kanakalingam for initiation into the Gayathiri mantras and made him wear a sacred thread.\(^\text{167}\) In this St.Ramanuja and Swami Vivekananda were his predecessors.

Bharati believed that by encouraging inter-dining and inter-caste marriages, there is possibility for getting rid of the caste system.\(^\text{168}\) He wanted India to be a Common Wealth of all people in which the untouchables would be given a place of pride. He was

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\(^{164}\) Bharathiar Kavithaikal, P. 15.
\(^{165}\) Ibid, P. 336.
\(^{166}\) Ibid, P. 339.
\(^{167}\) Pandian, T., Bharathiyarum Jathi Olippum, Chennai, 2003, P. 54.
for getting total liberation to the untouchables. To him the low-born Pariah as the country man has every right and privilege as the privileged and the entitled\(^{169}\).

Bharati opposed the **Non-Brahmin Movement** because he felt that it would perpetuate further divisions in society rather than integrate the people and that it would also impede the nationalist movement. He hoped that the **Non-Brahmin Movement** would die soon because there was no such caste or class as non-Brahmin in the Tamil Society and hence the entire movement was built on a false proposition\(^{170}\).

**Bharathi Dasan (1891-1964) : The Enlightened non-Brahmin Rebel**

Bharati Dasan, a revolutionary bard influenced by Bharathi and 'Periyar', became an uncompromising crusader against all social evils and injustice, particularly the caste system; in many of his poems he not only denounced caste system, but advocated its total abolition\(^{171}\). To be precise, he was the Tamil poet of the **Dravidian Movement** and an ardent advocate of self-respect\(^{172}\). A lover of Tamil language and its literature, he could demonstrate the Tamilian values in his writings. The supreme value of social equality is the keynote of most of the poems\(^{173}\). He was considered the conscience of the **Tamil Renaissance** and women’s liberation. A pathfinder of socio-religious reforms, his writings echoed the thoughts of freedom, dignity of labour and social values. He has


\(^{170}\) Ibid., P. 557.

\(^{171}\) Ibid., P. 225.

\(^{172}\) Ibid., P. 523.
been the spirit behind the demand for social equality, religious freedom and economic decentralization. He could influence the ruling elites of the Dravidain Parties in ushering in an era of reforms.

**Kamaraj (1903-1975): The Illiterate Wiseman: Intellectual**

Kamaraj, the ‘illiterate intellectual’ and ‘the kingmaker’ after Nehru in Indian politics was a progressive-minded Congress man, who could understand the evils of Brahmin domination. He was a man of the masses and known for frugality. He was a cool and calm person, but having his eyes and mind on the regeneration of the marginalized subalterns. He with Dr.P.Varadarajulu Naidu, mounted an attack on the traditional education policy of Rajaji and initiated an era of reforms, constructive programmes and progressive measures of reconstruction. A selfless crusader, Kamaraj did not content himself in words but only in deeds. A man of limited words but of great achievements. What he spoke, he put to practice. A man of high principles in life, Kamaraj was also responsible for the evolution of the noon meal scheme.

Kamaraj was thoroughly convinced that ‘Periyar’ was only demanding justice for the non-Brahmins who had been neglected and exploited by certain sections of the society for hundreds of years. He, therefore, readily accepted ‘Periyar’s’ suggestion that all poor people should have free education. When Kamaraj became the Chief Minister of the Madras State, he allowed all children to have free education up to standard eleventh. He also clearly understood that education is the only panacea for the ills of the society. People used to tell that Kamaraj knew every village, every man and his social standing and economic condition. Inspired by ‘Periyar’s’ spirit of social service, Kamaraj introduced the Free Mid-Day Meal scheme for school children and later

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granted free books and free uniforms to school children to prevent dropouts from schools. Tamil Nadu had the fortune of industrialization, agricultural development, besides scientific advancement and social mobility. His life is an example of mass leadership.

**Annadurai (1909-1969): The Learned Elder Brother**

Annadurai commonly called *Arignar Anna* was the first lieutenant of ‘Periyar’ and his movements. A model speaker, a great parliamentarian and a prolific writer, Annadurai was the ‘elder brother’ to the Dravidian people. A modern thinker, Annadurai was a socialist and a reformer. He believed that the Indus Valley Civilization was genuinely Dravidian. According to him with the Dravidian culture had been in full bloom throughout India and was distinguished above all cultures of India by the attributes of equality and fraternity. According to him, only after the arrival of the Aryans, only the caste differences, religious segmentation and enmity developed in the Tamil land, after which the present misery emerged. Arignar Anna was a great humanist, a secularist and a rationalist. He would speak hours together citing evidences and anecdotes from world history. Through his plays he could spread ideas of modernity, social change, and social mobility, he was able to blend all disgrumled elements and mould them into a great force of Tamil Nadu.

On assumption of office as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu in 1967, he took all efforts to form a casteless and classless society. He passed a law in 1967 by which all marriages conducted without the intervention of the priests became lawful marriages. Moreover he announced that a gold medal would be presented to the newly married...

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179. Ibid., P. 72.
inter-caste couple\textsuperscript{182}. His short tenure in office was momentous for he was able to mould the conscience and spirit of the Tamils.

**Karunanidhi (1924-): A Speaker-Writer Statesman Par Excellence**

Born at Thirukuvalai in the Tiruvarur District in 1924, Kalaigarn M.Karunanidhi’s evolution in Tamil politics is phenomenal. He is a great lover of Tamil language, literature and culture and Tamil renaissance. An incessant reader on instant commentator,a prolific writer, Karunanidhi is a man of instant wit and statemanly rebuttals. He has developed his own style of speaking and writing, which are known for their deep thoughts, idioms and phrases, old sayings and “praise of folly”, wit and humour.

Enticed by the ideas of ‘Periyar’ he became the sub-editor of **Kudi Arasu** a journal published from Erode. Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi is perhaps the only example in Tamil political arena wherein an ordinary man from a deprived class has come to the height of glory by sheer hard work and statesmanship. His humanistic appeal and universal ideals have helped him earn the honour as a “machine with a matchless heart” by Valampuri John in his book **Varalatril Kalaigarn**\textsuperscript{183}.

Since independence both the union and state governments have initiated several measures to establish social equality among the different social groups or communities. These measures could be classified into two categories: protective and promotive.

The protective measures include several constitutional safeguards, acts and ordinances. The Constitution of independent India, which was profoundly influenced by Dr.Ambedkar’s ideologies, guaranteed same rights to every Indian citizen, irrespective of caste, gender and religion. Dr.Ambedkar was influenced by the French clarion call of

liberty, equality and fraternity and the American principles of liberty, right to property and pursuit of happiness. He gave significance to these ideals in the Indian Constitution.

Article 14 of the Indian Constitution declares that the state shall not deny to any person equality before the law or equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.

Article 15 reads:

1. The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth or any of them.

2. No citizen shall, on grounds, further, on the basis of any of these grounds be denied access to shops, public restaurants or the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resorts maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of general public

Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of public employment.

Article 17 abolishes untouchability, and its practice in any from is made an offence punishable under the law. 184.

Following the encouragement given by C.N.Annadurai to inter-caste marriage, Chief Minister M.Karunanidhi’s government has announced the Anjugam Ammaiyyar Memorial Inter-Caste Marriage Assistance Scheme 185 with an allocation of `.5000 per beneficiary in 1989. Later in 1996, it was increased to `.10,000 per beneficiary, out of which `.7,000 will be given as National Savings Certificate and the remaining as cheque 186.

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185. Anjugam Ammaiyyar was the mother of Chief Minister M.Karunanidhi. He renamed the Inter-Caste Marriage Assistance Scheme in her name. Dinakaran, March 8, 2004.
By another measure `.20,000 is given to the couple. In it `.10,000 is given in the form a cheque\textsuperscript{187} ant the remaining will be given as National Savings Certificate. It is possible only if any one of the spouse belongs to a scheduled castes or a scheduled tribes.

Another forward looking and a very radical measure taken by the Government of Tamil Nadu to ensure social equality is the abolition of manual scavenging by a particular community. The Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry latrine Act of 1993 prohibits the employment of manual scavengers\textsuperscript{188}.

The Government of Tamil Nadu declared the year 1999 as the year of Abolition of Untouchability, the Promotion of Communal Harmony and Social Justice. Many propaganda movements and publicity works were carried out at the cost of `.One crore in order to sustain the feeling of humanism among the people. ‘Human Chains’ were arranged in each District to stress the ideals of communal harmony and secularism. A documentary film Sathigal Illaiyadi Pappa (‘no caste, loving child’) was produced in this connection. Oratorical and music competitions were organized among college and school students and prizes were distributed. Further, to bring about awareness on social justice among the school going children, an oath on the eradication of untouchability is being administered to the school students on every Monday\textsuperscript{189}.

At Uthapuram, a wall was erected to demark the boundaries of the caste-Hindus and the scheduled castes. The wall which that symbolized caste discrimination, oppression and division among the people for more than eighteen years was partially demolished on May, 6, 2008, providing access to the Dalits to a public thoroughfare. Thus steps were taken to resolve the problem and subsequently it was renamed as Uthamapuram\textsuperscript{190}.

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{188} Tamilarasu, January 2008, P. 28
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{190} The Hindu, June 22, 2005. Since the wall is not totally demolished the Communist Parties still continue their agitations for creating a society without man-made barriers.
Moreover, steps were taken for the total eradication of discriminatory treatment in supplying tea in separate tumblers to the members of Adi - Dravida community and Scheduled Tribes,191 stern action is pursued in co-ordination with the Inspector General of Police (Human Rights and Social Justice) and District Collectors. Still the Chief Minister is hopeful of changing the structure of the Tamil Society.

**Caste and Casteism Continue**

Even though many a radical thinkers like Buddha, Dr.Ambedkar and ’Periyar’ sacrificed their wholetime, energy and intellect and even money for the eradication of caste system, it could not be achieved. After every measure, caste takes a different form and reappears on Indian scene. It runs in the blood of every Indian and the flesh of every Indian has its element.

However, it is true that soon after the death of some of these leaders, the vigour of the movements started by them fades away and makes the movements only in namesake. Even the measures such as the Communal representation, reservation in government jobs and educational opportunities have helped to elevate the position of the non-Brahmins and the hegemony of the Brahmins came to an end. But, rivalries against one another among the non-Brahmin castes, particularly among the caste - Hindus and the Dalits are not uncommon. Such ill-treatment of the Dalits by the higher castes including the Christians came to surface and the anti-Dalit stance became pervasive.

Even after centuries of opposition, the caste system could not be done away with. It persists in one way or the other. Caste - Hindus derive some pleasure in perpetuating it. So every state faces some caste conflagration or communal violence. After independence the deaths caused by caste conflicts and communal violence are greater

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191. Still the practice could not be totally eradicated. In same places in southern Tamil Nadu near Madurai, Virudhunagar, Tirunelveli and Tuticorin District and near Vilupuram, the practice is reported to exist caste Hindus perpetuate this practice and show their caste domination. Even a Dalit woman panchayat president could not have her own house and get patta very securely. Dinamalar, August 2, 2010
than the death caused by other reasons. In fact, caste has influenced every section of Indian and foreign societies. They, for some reason, call it classes on economic grounds. Wherever Indian culture has penetrated, the rudiments of caste have also gone and found a strong footing there. Even among the Muslims, who are supposed to treat all as brothers, the pernicious pains of the caste system is felt. Indian Hinduism has that power to synthesize Buddhism and Jainism, the two revolting religions of the yester years, to assimilate them and make them lose their separate identities. Even among those unorthodox religious organizations, caste is said to exist. What a wonder that is India!

**Causes of Caste Conflict**

Western education somehow helped to create awakening among the marginalized. The missionaries in those days took it their duty to spread the seeds of education. Education not only brought pupils of different castes together but provided them the opportunities to grow academically and economically.\(^{192}\) The process of industrialization, urbanization and modernization has brought new changes among the Dalits. Liberalization and universalization of education and the consequent attitudes of both the old guards and new guards opened the flood gates of opportunities which were until then enjoyed by the old guards.\(^{193}\)

Economic vulnerability of Dalits due to their dependence on the more well-to-do upper and backward castes added to the conflicts. The statutory reservation regimes to Dalits added fuel to the already simmering fire and conflicts between backward castes and Dalits began to appear. As a result, every denomination of the backward caste has started demanding benefits such as reservation.

Reservation in education frees Dalits from land-based occupation. The relationship between the landlord and the labourers, has given way to urban-based

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Various land reforms and sharing the lands by the Dalits until then opposed by the Mirasdars, Mittadars, Zamindars and other landlords engineered the feelings of ill-will between the hegemonic and the marginalized. Handing away the Porampoke lands to the landless labouring class further aggravated the master slave relations.

Until the accessions to power by the Justice Party, the Congress and the Dravidian Parties, the temples were the private properties of the caste-Brahmins and high caste non-Brahmins. They enjoyed the benefits of temple lands, outmoded practices and priestly and trusteeship privileges. Temple administrative reforms brought about by successive governments dealt severe blows to the religious powers, functions and privileges of the caste-Hindus. This could not be easily tolerated by the caste-Hindus, who had to last their traditional rights, but attempted to regain them by using force and power.

The uprooting of traditional village structure by modern and education and the migration to the urban centres created among the Dalits a new literate generation which was no longer prepared to accept being discriminated as untouchables. Many Dalits have been recruited by the Gulf Countries to do manual and intellectual services. They send their proceeds home and their families are also able to acquire land through this process. So, feudal dependence has very much lessened.

The Dalit communities for their part have realized the political potential of organized demands and agitations. This helped them resist their traditional ill treatment politically. Awareness is making them contest elections and often physically responds violence with violence.

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195. Political changes in Indian politics make in politicians take some measures to give the marginalized their share otherwise it would be very difficult to pull on. Some times, out of force or fear of losing the vote bank, parties heed to the demands of the until now suppressed section.
Government Measures of Accommodation

Under such a situation to prevent the escalation of caste and communal clashes, the Government of Tamil Nadu has taken some long and short term measures.

The government conducted three All Party Meetings in May, 1997, June 1997 and October 1998 to discuss the ways and means to maintain communal harmony and to avoid caste tensions in the state. An appeal was made in these meetings to the leaders of various parties to keep peace and communal harmony. The government on its part took action as per the resolutions arrived at in the meetings.

Based on one of the decisions taken at one of the meeting held on May 14, 1997 all the district collectors were instructed to constitute Peace Committees at the District level and to conduct regular monthly meetings to sort out issues between different sections of the people.\textsuperscript{196}

After examining the deliberations at the All Party Meeting held in June 1997, the government ordered to remove the names of caste, communal and political leaders from the names of the districts and transport corporations in the state with effect from July 01, 1997 as a measure to reduce caste friction.\textsuperscript{197}

As per the decision taken at the meeting held on October, 1998, the government ordered to constitute a Peace Committee in every village with the Panchayat president as chairman to curb untouchability.\textsuperscript{198} The government also formed a separate department in the name of Social Reform as a permanent measure for promoting equality and social renaissance.\textsuperscript{199}

On July 16, 1997 the government appointed a high level Committee with Justice S.Mohan (Rtd.Supreme Court Judge), as chairman to find out the causes of the caste

\textsuperscript{197.} Ibid., P.16.  
\textsuperscript{198.} Ibid., P.16.  
\textsuperscript{199.} Ibid., P.16.
clashes and also to suggest measures to prevent such violence in future. The Committee submitted its report to government on January, 31 1998.\textsuperscript{200}

The important recommendations made by the Justice Mohan Committee are the removal of the statues of community leaders, desecration of which has touched off many a case of mob-violence, at least to safer places.\textsuperscript{201}

It also suggested bringing amendments to the electoral laws for rotation of constituencies reserved for Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes.\textsuperscript{202} Further, it sought a rapid industrialization of the southern districts and more schemes on the lines of Samathuvapuram, where people belonging to all castes and communities could live together in harmony.\textsuperscript{203}

Many scholars are thinking that caste differences are responsible for the lacunae in the society. For the sake of social harmony, it was suggested to forget caste affiliations.

In fact, a number of leaders of the country have struggled hard to wipe out the caste discriminations. In spite of all these efforts, caste clashes have increased in the recent past. This may be one of the major reasons for the reorganization and reformation of the society. For the eradication of such violence, caste mobility, recognition of the rights of every individual dignity of his and her person, dignity of labour, social gatherings, common religious festivals, breaking away the age old barriers of walls, change in mental and psychological make ups, tolerance and broad mindedness should be instilled in the minds of every caste leaders and communal representatives. Realization of this goal is the major inspiration for the launching of the Samathuvapuram scheme. The earlier historical instances of the starting of the

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., p16.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., pp. 115-116.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid., pp. 28-30.
Samathuva Samajam of Vaikuntha Swamigal, the Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Sangam of Ramalinga Swamigal, the Satya Shodak Samajam of ‘Mahatma’ Jyothibao Phule, the Dravida Mahajana Sangam of Pandit Ayothidass, Dharma Paripalana Yogam of Sri Narayana Guru, the Self- Respect Movement of ‘Periyar’ and, above all, the unprecedented radical measures of St.Ramanujar seems to have made their impressions in the mind of Chief Minister M.Karunanidhi, who has the matured mind to launch a historic measure, the Samathuvapuram. In addition to these, the rapid industrialization and introduction of various schemes, the liberalization of education and the consequent opportunities may be suggested as the reasons for the launching of the Samathuvapuram Scheme in Tamil Nadu, whereby people belonging to all castes and communities could be brought under a common canopy aiming at total harmony.