CHAPTER - 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION
1.2 THE BACKGROUND
1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
1.4 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY
1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY
1.6 METHODOLOGY
1.7 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS
1.8 PROFILES OF CASE STUDIES
1.8.1 PROFILE OF CASE STUDY 1: COVERAGE OF TIRUNELVELI MASSACRE
1.8.2 PROFILE OF CASE STUDY 2: COVERAGE OF PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS IN TAMIL NEWSPAPERS
1.8.3 PROFILE OF CASE STUDY 3: COVERAGE OF DALIT ISSUES IN TAMIL NEWSPAPERS
1.8.4 PROFILE OF CASE STUDY 4: COVERAGE OF DALIT POLITICAL PARTICIPATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO 14TH LOK SABHA ELECTIONS IN TAMIL NEWSPAPERS
1.9 PROFILES OF THE SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS
1.9.1 DINA THANTHI
1.9.2 DINAMANI
1.9.3 DINAMALAR
1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study attempts to examine the coverage of the Dalit issues in Tamil Press. According to Vilanilam, the socioeconomic environment is an important determinant of mass communication activities and media institutions. The media enforce as well as reinforce social norms. The socio-economic, religious and communal interests of media controllers may cause them to emphasize certain norms in the media and enforce them through repetition which can be a dysfunction.

The Indian media reflects the tendency of the Indian society. "The social aspects of journalism can be approached within the twin perspective of the social structure and its effects on the media, and the social effects of the media on society. The caste and class structure of the Indian society have its influence on Indian media. The media prefer to highlight all the caste agitations but ignore the root economic causes. Media ignores development issues and welcomes sensational issues. The Indian media love controversy and indulge in statement journalism. They print or broadcast opposing statements without attempting to investigate and bring out the truth. The Indian media are owned by the affluent and run by people whose major interest is in capturing the advertisement market" (Vilanilam, 2005). Starting with a brief account of the coverage of minorities in media, and then going from a global perspective and giving it a national outlook, will be the major focus of the study.

1.2 THE BACKGROUND

Cultural, social and economic factors contribute to a high ratio of discrimination against minorities all over the world. Inequality and oppressiveness particularly towards
minorities in multi-cultural societies have made minorities a poor and vulnerable community while keeping majority in a disproportionate number of positions of power and influence. The media closely watch the society and reflect what is happening in the society. Thus media reinforce the societal norms and also strengthen the existing societal norms.

Although UNDHR abolished all kinds of discrimination, it is still in practice in the society. However discrimination is still in practice in the media coverage also. The coverage of minorities is scarce and limited. The problems of the minorities are distorted or ill treated by the media. The minorities are subjected to stereotyping predominantly negative stereotyping.

Mahtani employed the term *minorities* in his study to encompass a wide rubrick of racial, cultural and ethnic and linguistic groups, including “visible minorities,” “cultural groups,” “racialized peoples,” “non-whites,” “religious minorities” and “people of colour” (Mahtani, 2001), “groups do not have enough power to publicly oppose biased reporting” (Van Dijk, 1989). In this thesis the word *minority* refers ‘a group that is associated with a lack of power’ (Lisa & Andrew, 1999). The word *power* implies the ability to influence people or events.

In the United States of America, the minorities include the Blacks, the Latino Americans, the Hispanics, the Native Americans, and the Native Red Indians. These groups were singled out in the name of racial discrimination. They were characterized as third rated criminals, sexists and drug smugglers by the media. The minorities were excluded, seen as threatening and stereotyped by the mainstream media (Wilson & Gutierrez, 1985).

In Europe, the immigrants were discriminated by the majority society. The immigrants were portrayed as a threat by the media in Netherlands. The immigration of Tamil refugees to Western Europe, and in particular to the Netherlands, sparked a special type
of media coverage that is usually described as a panic. At all levels the Tamil refugees were characterized negatively and their immigration represented as a threat to the nation and the social status quo. There was also the emphasis on illegal entry and residence, the allusions to crime and drugs, on the one hand, and the assumed profiting from welfare, on the other hand.

The Tamil refugees were depicted as economic refugees rather than political refugees. The immigration is misrepresented as illegal and moreover as an invasion. The Press made it easy for prejudiced readers simply to apply such existing prejudices in their own evaluation of the new immigrants (Van Dijk, 1988).

A study by Palmer on the representation of the Albanian immigrants in the Italian Press revealed that the immigrants were portrayed as primitive people. “Immigration was depicted as an invasion or war and in terms of military terminology. The newspapers created a panic by reporting refugee landings as a causing alarm. The Albanians were represented as a mass of people particularly young males. These young males were depicted as criminals and violent. The newspapers constructed the image of the Albanians as others and excluded from the majority Italian society” (Palmer, 2002).

One of the Arturas Tereskinas studies focused on how ethnic and sexual minorities were portrayed by the Lithuanian mass media. “There was a lack of in-depth reporting on ethnic and sexual groups in the mass media of Lithuania, and minority groups share relative invisibility and one-sided stereotypical representations. Sexual minorities remained a difficult topic of discussion and an extremely sensitive issue involving societal values, norms and sexuality. Homosexuality was frequently described as a scandal, and homosexuals are still portrayed as an underworld group. Homosexuality was still strongly associated with sexual promiscuity and deviance.
With regard to the coverage of the ethnic minorities, the low visibility of the Roma, the Jews, the Russians and the Poles in the press and on television was also critical. A close reading of the most popular dailies and television programs revealed the undercurrent xenophobia in a large part of news reports and broadcasts focusing on these minorities. Most of the newspapers’ reports and television channels focused on minorities who committed a crime. Much less attention was paid to the stories about the minorities experiencing problems, prejudice, racism or unemployment” (Tereskinas, 2003).

Wolfsfeld & et al. study on the Hebrew press coverage of Land Day provided a graphic illustration of how cultural and political assumptions were translated into the routine production of negative news about Arabs. The Land Day protest of the Arab minorities was seen as a threat to the law and order.

“Media stories about Land Day can be understood by looking at four major news routines: (a) the use of exclusively Jewish journalists who usually come from law and order beats, (b) the over use of military sources and the under use of Arab sources, (c) writing exclusively for the Jewish majority, and (d) linking the Land Day protest to what is happening in the occupied territories. The first two routines shape the collection of information, and the latter two influences the way the stories are constructed. All of these factors combine to ensure that Land Day protests will be seen as a serious threat to the Jewish majority regardless of what actually happens in the field” (Wolsfeld & et al, 2000).

These studies were relevant in the Indian context too. In India, the term minorities refer to the religious minorities and the sexual minorities. The Dalits are not considered as minorities but they experience similar discrimination than the minorities (Jeffrey, 1996). Ambedkar indicted that the Dalits were not acknowledged as minorities by the majority. According to him, “Dalits are more suitable for the meaning of minority people. Though
they could claim all the rights and protection of minorities, it is not complete for them. The condition of Dalits in social, economic and education sectors is more backward than the minorities. Dalits need special attention than other minorities to protect themselves from the cruelty of majorities and the social exclusion” (Ambedkar, 1947). The coverage of the Dalits faces similar circumstances resembling other minorities’ world-wide. This study adapted the ideas, literatures and methodology concerning the coverage of minorities in the media.

On December 27, 2006 Dr. Manmohan Singh became the first sitting Indian Prime Minister to honestly admit the prevalence of untouchability in India. He noted that the untouchability is a unique form of oppression and it can be compared only with the apartheid. Singh described “untouchability” as a “blot on humanity” adding that “even after 60 years of constitutional and legal protection and state support, there is still social discrimination against Dalits in many parts of our country” (Manmohan Singh, 2006).

“Traditionally, in the Hindu social order the Dalits are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. They are mentioned as Ati-shudras or Avarna, and are treated as untouchables. However, in day-to-day usage in political discourse, the term is so far mainly confined to Scheduled Castes (SCs). The terms ‘Untouchables’, ‘Panchamas’, ‘Scheduled Castes’, ‘Depressed classes’ and ‘Harijan’ (the term used by Gandhi) denote the Dalits” (Shah, 2001). “The Dalits are those described in Hindu religious scriptures as Chandala, Ati-Shudra, Antyaja or Namashudra, Panchama and Avarnas. They are those treated, even today in many parts of India, as untouchables. They were the Broken Men and Protestant Hindus to B.R. Ambedkar, and Harijans to Mahatma Gandhi. They have

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1 Untouchability was a typically Indian phenomenon. It derived from the pure/impure ideology connected with caste. According to Dumont, the opposition between pure and impure forms the basis of the system and serves as the fundamental criterion of rank. The opposition between pure and impure provide the actual foundation of the religious and social system of the Hindus. Maintaining a certain degree of purity is a constant concern for Indians, and division into endogamous castes is one way of preserving the relative purity of a group. The Indian obsession with purity culminates in Untouchability. According to Dumont, the relegation of Untouchables to the bottom of the social ladder is therefore religious in nature, and stems from their association with impure tasks.
been recognised as Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the Constitution of India. The term or label or nomenclature 'Dalit' is not a euphemism to a series of labels attributed to this section of population, but is a term which they very strongly associate themselves with. The conscientious individuals belonging to this category feel proud of identifying themselves as the Dalits since the literal meaning of this term does not imply any notion of caste, but aptly depicts the oppressed and powerless state of this community"(Ramaiah, 1998). The term ‘Dalit’ is a derivation from the Sanskrit word Dalita which means fissure, crack and break (Padmanabhan, 2000).

“The word Dalit has its origin in Pali, a pre-Sanskrit language and it means the deprived. This term is used as an act of confident assertion, rejecting nomenclature of Harijan, the ‘children of God’. Dalit Panthers, a radical movement of Dalit youth in the seventies used this term for the first time for those who were Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Neo-Buddhist, the working-people, the land-less and poor peasants, women, and all those who are being exploited politically, socially, economically, and in the name of religion. The term Dalit does not refer to a caste. It symbolises unity of all those who suffered at the hands of iniquitous Brahmanism, which is the basis of Hindutva. It is a symbol of change and revolution. Dalits believe in humanism. They reject the existence of god, rebirth and soul, sacred books that teach discrimination, fate, and the concepts of hell and heaven, because all these made them slaves. However, the term is usually seen today in a much narrower context of referring only to Untouchables (socially excluded) and Adivasis (geographically excluded) communities of the past.

In 2001, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes constituted 24.4 percent of India’s population (16.2% Scheduled Castes and 8.2% Scheduled Tribes). The population of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (excluding the state of Jammu and Kashmir) as
per the 2001 census was 166.67 million and 84.32 million respectively” (NACDOR, 2006).

The report titled “Hidden Apartheid- Caste Discrimination Against India’s Untouchables” documented the social exclusion of the Dalits. According to Gorringe, the exclusion of the Dalits from the main body of society is symbolised on many fronts. Physically the cheris are located outside the main village; semantically they are referred to as 'Untouchables'; spiritually, Dalits are denied access to temples, told that they are impure... ; materially Dalits are alienated from resources and land; culturally their skills are demeaned; and socially they are served in different receptacles in restaurants" (Gorringe, 2005).

The Dalits live in segregated housing colonies. The Cheris are the place where the Dalits live. The cheris are ostracized from the Oor. The oppression of the Dalits is materially manifested in the physical isolation of Dalit Cheris (quarters). Here Oor directly reveals the place where the dominant castes are living. In towns too, the Government programs maintain the existing spatial segregation.

A recent study on untouchability in rural India, covering 565 villages in 11 States, found that public health workers refused to visit Dalit homes in 33% of villages, Dalits were prevented from entering police stations in 27.6% of villages, Dalit children had to sit separately while eating in 37.8% of government schools, Dalits did not get mail delivered to their homes in 23.5% of villages, and Dalits were denied access to water sources in 48.4% of villages because of segregation and untouchability practices.

Statistics compiled by India's National Crime Records Bureau indicated that in 2004, every twenty minutes a crime is committed against the SCs. In the year 2004 alone,

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2 The 113-page report, "Hidden Apartheid: Caste Discrimination against India’s ‘Untouchables,’" was produced as a “shadow report” in response to India’s submission to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), which monitors implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).
26,887 crimes were committed against the Dalits. A total of 1,157 cases of rape of Scheduled Castes women were reported in 2004. The Dalits were denied access to land, forced to work in degrading conditions, and routinely abused at the hands of the police and of higher-caste groups that enjoy the state’s protection.

Narula and Macwan’s study on the economic exclusion of the Dalits revealed the hard life faced by the Dalits. According to Narula and Macwan, “Many ‘untouchable’ community members, for example, continue to work as leather workers, disposers of dead animals, and manual scavengers. As part of village custom, Dalits are made to render free services in times of death, marriage, or any village function. The cleaning of the whole village, the digging of graves, the carrying of firewood, and the disposal of dead animals are also tasks that Dalits are made to perform. A majority of the Dalit rural workforce subsists on the menial wages of landless agricultural labourers, earning less than US$1 a day. Those in urban areas, work mostly in the unorganised sector. India’s much touted system of affirmative action or reservations for scheduled castes assists less than 1 percent of the Dalit population. In all forms of labour, women are consistently paid less than men, compounding the dual discrimination of caste and gender. Most Dalit victims of abuse are landless agricultural labourers who form the backbone of India’s agrarian economy. Despite a host of land reform legislation, today over eighty-six per cent of Dalit households are landless or near landless. Those who own land often fall into the category of marginal landowners. Land is the prime asset in rural areas that determines an individual’s standard of living and social status” (Narula & Macwan, 2001).

Media reports revealed the frequent violations of the political rights of the Dalits. Their right to vote, right to contest and right to campaign are always ignored and dishonoured from time to time. During the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, the Dalits were denied to exercise their vote in Chidambaram Constituency in Tamil Nadu. The Dalit houses were
burnt and were attacked by the dominant castes. In 1997, a Dalit Panchayat President and five of his associates were brutally murdered by the dominant caste men for contesting and won in the reserved seat Melavalavu Panchayat near Madurai in Tamil Nadu. Dalit political parties are also given less prominence. They are not considered as a political force and they called it political untouchability (Viswanathan, 2005).

The collected literature confirmed the discrimination of the Dalits in each and every sphere of the social life. The existing literature gave adequate evidences for under representation of the Dalits in Indian media. The Dalit issues were ignored by the Press similar to the Indian societal set up which abandon Dalits. “The press in India has rarely documented, in any detail and with any sensitivity, the grinding poverty, the day-to-day deprivations and discriminations and the all too frequent atrocities faced by the Dalits in this country” (Nagaraj, 2005). Robin Jeffrey, in his well-known book called India’s Newspaper Revolution, pointed out that the poor coverage of the Dalits in the newspapers and the invisibility of the Dalits in the news rooms (Jeffrey, 1996). The Dalit leaders too acquired little space in national media. Anand, correspondent of Outlook magazine examines the connections between the absence of the Dalits in the print media and the structure and nature of ‘coverage of caste issues’ by such exclusionist media (Anand, 2005).

The observers on the media coverage of the Dalits argue that the minimum space is devoted for the Dalits issues. Even that the coverage of the Dalits issues is uniform, similar and stereotyped. The other side of the Dalits is not discussed in the media. The positive qualities, their demands and the background of the Dalit’s problems are often absent in the media ((Prasad, 2005) (Thankappan 2007) (Gorringe, 2005)).

On 25 October 1996, news reports emerged from Uttar Pradesh suggested that Bahujan Samaj Party Leader, Kanshi Ram, and his supporters had assaulted at least five journalists.
outside the BSP leader’s house. While the exact sequence and severity of the event was disputed, the incident at the press conference prompted Kenneth Cooper, a foreign correspondent for *The Washington Post*, to ask his friends in the Indian media fraternity for the contact details of a Dalit journalist. The query sparked off a chain of events that began with the publishing of an editorial by B.N. Uniyal titled *In Search of A Dalit Journalist*, in which Uniyal concluded "Suddenly, I realized that in all the thirty years I had worked as a journalist I had never met a fellow journalist who was a Dalit; no not one. And worse still was the thought that... it had never occurred to me that there was something so seriously amiss in the profession…"

Uniyal’s article and findings were condensed into a memorandum by Chandra Bhan Prasad, President of the Dalit Shiksha Andolan and Dr Sheoraj Singh Bechain, Convener of the Dalit Writers Forum, and was submitted, with no avail, to the Editors Guild of India and the Press Council of India. Jeffrey, Anand and Prasad too had pointed out the absence of Dalit journalists in the Indian newsrooms. Hence it is inevitable to study the coverage of the Dalits in Tamil dailies. The present study intended to study whether the discrimination of Dalits was followed in the coverage of Tamil dailies.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of the current study was to examine the coverage of the Dalit news in Tamil Press. The focal objective of the study was to explore the coverage of the participation of the Dalits in politics in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu. The aims of the study were to:

- Examine the coverage of the Dalits political participation by the Tamil Press.
• Explore the perceptions of the Dalit scholars and journalists regarding the coverage of the Dalit issues in Tamil newspapers.

• Analyze the perceptions of Dalit politicians, newspaper reporters and editors about the Tamil press coverage of Dalits political participation.

Research question 1: The Extent of coverage given to the Participation of Dalits in Politics in Tamil Dailies

1. What is the extent of the Dalit news coverage in Tamil Press?
2. What are the various types of the Dalit news being covered and neglected?
3. What kind of placement is accorded to the news pertaining to the Dalits?
4. What are the various types of news on the political participation of the Dalits being covered?
5. How are the vocabulary and lexical choice used in the text?

Research question 2: The Perceptions of the Dalit scholars and Journalists regarding the coverage of Dalit news in Tamil newspapers.

a. Which of the Dalit news are covered and which are neglected by the Tamil Press?
b. Are the Dalits stereotyped in the coverage of Tamil Press?
c. Do the newspapers attempt to uncover the Dalit news?
d. How are the Dalit political parties and Dalit politicians are portrayed in the Tamil press?

Research question 3: Point of view of the Dalit politicians, newspaper reporters and editors about the Tamil dailies coverage of Dalit political participation

a. Whether Dalit issues need special space in the newspapers?
b. What are the major issues of the Dalits political participation are covered in Tamil newspapers?
c. What about the portrayal of the Dalit political participation during election campaigns in Tamil newspapers?

d. What is the status quo of the Dalit journalists in Tamil Press?

1.4 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

India's newspaper industry was one of the fastest growing in the world only next to China. Though newspapers show a declining readership throughout the world, India is emerging as the largest newspaper industry in the world, according to the World Association of Newspapers. A research report by the World Association of Newspapers declared that the growing literacy and new technology have resulted in India emerging as the second largest newspaper market in the world. Indian newspaper sales increased 11.2 per cent in 2007 and 35.51 per cent in the five-year period. Newspaper advertising revenues in India were up 64.8 per cent over the previous five years. The population is also going up with the declining of illiteracy rate.

According to NRS 2006 (National Readership Survey 2006), there were an estimated 204 million readers of daily newspapers and an estimated 222 million readers of all publications in India. An important feature is the rising profile of 'rural' readers who constitute nearly 50% of all daily newspaper readers; this is in striking contrast to the composition of newspaper readership in India 20 years ago. The number of readers in rural India (110 million) is now roughly equal to that in urban India (112 million). Literacy as measured in the NRS has risen from 69.9% to 71.1% over the last year. The rate of growth has been marginally lower urban areas (84.4% to 85.3%) than in rural areas (63.6% to 64.8%). One would expect this to boost the market for the press medium. Newspaper reach in villages rises from 23 to 24 %. At present, the print media
particularly the regional press reach is more when compared to other media (National Readership Survey, 2006).

The Indian language press has played a historic and memorable role not only in the development of Indian journalism but also in the struggle for freedom. After the internal emergency in India, there is a major newspaper revolution. The regional language newspaper circulation surpassed the English newspapers. The language newspapers faced a tremendous change in printing technologies, ownership patterns and content categories. Local area news became the heart of the language newspapers (Jeffrey, 1996).

As the study was conducted in Tamil Nadu, it was decided to analyze the content of Tamil newspapers as they served as the main sources of investigation for the Commissions on the Dalit issues and for earlier research studies. It was decided to study the content of Tamil newspapers as they served as the main sources of investigation for the Commission on the Tirunelveli Massacre and for earlier researchers. “I heard various accounts from movement activists but none of them were actually present in Nellai. In what follows, therefore, I shall draw upon the newspaper accounts and articles that they also draw on” (Gorringe, 2000). Mohan Commission on Tirunelveli Massacre also extensively referred to newspaper headlines published in its report. This medium remains as the permanent distributors of information.

Hence it is very essential to study the newspaper coverage of the Dalit news and Dalits participation in politics in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The debates on the media coverage of the Dalits in India are ongoing. There were only a few studies concerning the coverage of the Dalits participation in politics in Tamil
newspapers. The present study will strive to strengthen the debates with its empirical approach. It will further the research problem with a global perspective. Also this study will document the views and perspectives of the Dalit scholars, the Dalit politicians regarding the coverage of the Dalits participation in politics in Tamil newspapers. Moreover it will help to understand the attitude of the media persons towards the coverage of the Dalit issues and the Dalit political participation. This study will add to the body of literature on Media and Dalits as there are only a few scholarly research works on the coverage of the Dalits’ political participation, particularly in Tamil dailies.

1.6 METHODOLOGY

In order to address the purpose and aims of the study effectively, triangulation design incorporating both qualitative and quantitative was decided upon. The research design comprises (1) content analysis, (2) focus group study, and (3) In-depth interviews. In this study, the content analysis technique was employed primarily in studying the coverage of the Dalits in the media. Four case studies were chosen and studied utilizing content analysis technique. The case studies were selected on the basis of significance and relevance to the study. The issues for the case studies were selected from the southern districts since the research was done in the context of Dalit issues and Dalit political participation in the southern districts. They were case study 1- the coverage of Tirunelveli massacre in Tamil dailies, case study 2 - the coverage of Dalits political participation in the panchayat elections in Tamil dailies, case study 3 - the coverage of everyday reporting of Dalits in Tamil dailies and the case study 4 - the coverage of Dalits’ participation in 14th Lok Sabha elections in Tamil dailies.
Focus group study was conducted to understand the perceptions of Dalit scholars and journalists. The in-depth interviews were also carried out to know the points of view of the Dalit politicians, Dalit journalists, editors and journalists of sample newspapers.

1.7 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

The researcher has explained the background of the research topic, the research problem, the scope of the study, the methodology and outline of thesis in chapter 1.

The researcher has presented the literature review which consists of four categories enabling better understanding of the role of media in the society, the coverage of media minorities in the media and the status of the Dalits in Indian media in chapter 2. The evidences of the coverage of minorities who faced discrimination like the Dalits are explored. It further analyses the relationship between the media and the Dalits. The coverage of the Dalits in the media, the coverage of the Dalit political participation in the media, their position in the newsroom, and the media run by the Dalits are also documented in this chapter. It also discusses the media portrayal of Ambedkar, his newspapers and his views on media. Also the media initiatives of the Dalits in Tamil Nadu were documented.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to address the three research questions. The justification for the employment of research design, the method and the sample selection is given in this chapter. The content categories and the operational definitions are explained briefly. It also enlists the data analysis method which is used in the study.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the research conducted as described in the methodology chapter. It also presents the results of the case studies, focus group discussion and the in-depth interview with structured scale.
Chapter 5 is a discussion of the results in the light of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. It contains conclusions from the thesis and recommendations for further research.

1.8 PROFILES OF CASE STUDIES

1.8.1 PROFILE OF CASE STUDY 1: THE COVERAGE OF TIRUNELVELI MASSACRE IN TAMIL DAILIES

This case study reveals the print media coverage of Dalit issues with special reference to the coverage of the Tirunelveli Massacre (as quoted in *Frontline* & Nakkeeran) in Tamil Newspapers. Manjolai tea estate workers demonstrated before the Tirunelveli district Collectorate on the banks of the river Thamirabarani with the support of political parties on July 23, 1999 which ended with the loss of 17 lives.

The tea and coffee plantations at Manjolai are situated in the Western Ghats in Ambasamudram taluk in Tirunelveli district. Spread over forestland measuring about 3,500 hectares at altitudes ranging from 100 meters to 1,867 meters, the plantations are owned by the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation (formerly the Bombay Burmah Trading Company) henceforth BBTC. They consist of a group of tea estates - Singampatti Group -, which are divided into three units: Manjolai estate (three divisions), Manimuthar estate (two divisions) and Oothu estate (two divisions). The three units account for a total workforce of 2,386, of whom 743 are temporary workers. Over 80 percent of the workers are Dalits (Viswanathan, 1999).

BBTC acquired these estates in 1929 on a 99-year lease from Singampatti Zamin. On February 19, 1952, the land was taken over from the ownership of the zamindar and vested with the Government under the Madras Estates Abolition Act, 1948. The

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3 Tirunelveli is also called Nellai.
government continued the lease to BBTC with some conditions. But those were violated by BBTC on several occasions and few cases filed against the company are pending in the courts (Viswanathan, 1999).

Manjolai coffee and tea estate workers have been involved in a prolonged struggle against their employers since August 1998. They demanded minimum wages and better working and living conditions. The main grievance of the Manjolai estate workers relates to the non-implementation of the Plantations Labour Act (1951) in its true spirit. The wages paid to the workers were not linked with the cost of living index. According to Hemachandran “if the Government had accepted in 1956 the recommendation of a tribunal it had appointed to revise the plantation workers' wages that a daily wage of Rs.2.25 linked to the cost of living index be paid, the workers would now been entitled to a daily wage of Rs.98. But the Government modified the recommendation and fixed the wage at Rs.1.72; it further did not link the wages to the cost of living index” (Seetharaman, 1999).

“The wages are not linked with the cost of living index. Barely 50 percent of the workers had been provided houses. Most of the houses were dilapidated and unfit to live during monsoons. The medical facilities are inadequate. Temporary workers are not eligible for Medicare facilities. The workers children are studying by staying in their relative’s homes or hostels in the plains. The children lack care and support of their parents. These are not focused by the newspapers. Workers complained that many of their "customary rights" - for instance, the right to have kitchen gardens, rear cattle and build small annexes to their houses when their families expanded - were gradually withdrawn. In addition, the workload had increased over the years in all four plantation operations - plucking, pruning, applying fertilizers, manures and pesticides and processing” (Seetharaman, 1999).
The workers struck work—demanding restoration of the cut in their wages. When they attempted to stage a demonstration before the Tirunelveli Collectorate on June 6 and 7, 652 of them were arrested and prisoned in the Tiruchi jail. To demand their release that the procession was organized in Tirunelveli on July 23.

The workers demanded an early solution to the long-pending wage related disputes and the release of 652 estate workers who were lodged in Trichy jail. They also requested the State Government to take over the administration of the tea estate, run by the BBTC. *The Puthiya Tamilagam* (PT), *Tamil Maanila Congress* (TMC), Communist Party of India Marxist (CPI (M)), Communist Party of India (CPI), the Thamizhaga Muslim Aikkiya Jamaath along with four MLAs – M.Appavu, J.M.Haroon, P.Velthurai and R.Easwaran - besides Balakrishnan, leader of TMC and Krishnaswamy, leader of PT participated in the procession. Approximately 5000 people took part in the procession. The Police security was alerted and tight security ensured. About 700 personnel drawn from the Swift Action Force (SAF), the men’s and women’s companies of the Tamil Nadu Special Police Force (TSP), the striking force, the Armed Reserve Police and the local police had been posted at important places.

The procession which started from Tirunelveli railway station was peaceful and it reached the district Collectorate road. The procession was blocked by the police officials about 50 metres from the gate of Collectorate. The leaders in an open jeep insisted on the police officials to allow them to meet the District Collector and present a petition. When the discussion was in progress, about 150 persons, who formed the tail of the procession, got down on the river bed, and moved closer to the main gate. They stood behind the police force that was blocking the procession.

When the protestors raised slogans demanding that the leaders be allowed to meet the District collector, the SAF men suddenly swung into action by trying to chase them away.
using force. Observing this, another section of the processionists, who were standing on the river bed, began throwing stones at the police (Viswanathan, 1999). Soon the SAF men and the TSP women rushed inside the collectorate and hurled stones at the crowd. As the situation was becoming worse, the police once again ordered to a Lathi-charge and opened two rounds of fire in the air. The protestors were scared and to escape from the police blows they ran towards the river. Noticing this, the police were still chasing them and they jumped into the river. The policemen did not withdraw, even at this stage. Some of them jumped into the river and hit on the heads of the protestors with Lathis (see Dinamani, July 25, 26, 1999). Witnessing women and few others getting drowned, some people attempted to rescue them, but they too were attacked by policemen. Some policemen managed to reach the opposite bank of the river and continued their attack. Those who jumped into the river were attacked by the policemen from both banks. The police men attacked the reporters too. The operation that lasted 35 minutes ended with the loss of 17 lives. The report of Public Inquest accused that 'the Police force brutally Lathi charged with 6 feet long Lathis; this was the main reason for the death of 17 people and injuries of many' (Public Inquest, 1999). The post-mortem verdict was that the death of all the victims had been caused by "asphyxia" following drowning (Mohan Commission report, 1999).

4 The report of public inquest denied that there is no evidence to show that the group from protestors hurled stones. The "jury" of the "public inquest" comprised Justice H. Suresh, former Judge of the Bombay High Court; V.R. Lakshminarayanan, a former Director-General of Police, Tamil Nadu; V. Vasanthi Devi, a former Vice-Chancellor of the Manonmaniam Sundaranar University in Tirunelveli; and V. Karuppan, a retired IAS officer.
Democracy starts from the grass-root level. The introduction of Panchayat Raj Institutions in India leads to multi-federalism. The constitution (73rd Amendment) Act gave more power, authority and functions to the Panchayats. Panchayats enable the local level participation of grass roots. The 73rd constitution amendment’s importance was that it aimed at achieving grassroots democracy guaranteeing adequate representation to the marginalized groups like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women.

In India, there are nearly 600 district panchayats, about 6000 block panchayats, at the intermediate level and 2,50,000 gram panchayats in rural India where 72.2% of India’s population lives (George Mathew, 2003). The democratic process at the village has not fulfilled its ideals for which it was formed. Elections could not be held in four gram panchayats reserved for the Dalits in Tamil Nadu. They are Pappapatti, Keeripatti, Kottachiyenthal and Nattarmangalam where the Dalits are not even allowed to file their nomination due to the oppression by the dominant castes (The Hindu online edition, 2002). This reveals the bond which binds the democracy and caste system.

A single Dalit could not be a panchayat president because of the existence of the caste system. From 1996 to 2005, 16 elections were held in these panchayats. But till 2007, no one was able to be in the seat. Even if any one gets elected, he is forced to resign his post within a few days. Although untouchability is prohibited in the Indian constitution, it took various new forms now. One of the well-known forms of untouchability is the boycott of election by the dominant castes in the reserved seats of Dalits.

Sections of the majority caste-Hindu people in these villages - Pappapatti, Keeripatti and Nattarmangalam in Madurai district and Kottakachiyenthal in the adjoining Virudhunagar
district - who had been monopolising panchayat posts for long, were adamantly refusing to accept Dalits as their panchayat presidents under the reservation system introduced in 1996. They either did not allow any Dalit to file nomination papers or fielded a candidate of their choice and forced him to quit soon after he took charge or did not allow him to complete his term. In the past 10 years elections and by-elections were held more than 15 times and every time caste-Hindus adopted the same strategy. They remained insensitive to protests from progressive and democratic sections.

Caste Hindus of 12 villages covered by these panchayats, together accounting for less than 30,000 people, have succeeded for 10 years in stalling the election of Dalits to the posts of presidents reserved for them under the rotational system of reservation under the Tamil Nadu Panchayats Act, 1994.

Two rounds of elections were held statewide between 1996 and 2006 to fill 1.17 lakh positions in the three-tier panchayati raj institutions (and about 15,000 posts in municipal and corporation councils). There were 15 by-elections and also "casual elections" to fill the posts that became vacant subsequent to these. Still the electoral process could not be completed in the real sense of the term in these four panchayats, with no Dalit being allowed to file his/her nomination, or with the successful candidate, if one managed to contest, resigning the post subsequently under pressure from caste Hindus or as part of a prior understanding with them (Frontline, May 24, 2002).

At Melavalavu panchayat, reserved for Dalits, in Madurai district, caste Hindus let loose a reign of terror when two persons managed to file nominations with police protection. As a result this election was cancelled. In the re-election held two months later, Murugesan, who contested again, won the president seat. Although he daringly faced all the hurdles from caste Hindus to his functioning as the panchayat president, he and five of his supporters were murdered in less than a year. Since then the "Melavalavu massacre" has
been used by caste Hindus to frighten potential Dalit candidates. In several places Dalits are in a minority and they depend on the caste Hindus for their livelihood. In that places, the informal "oor panchayats" dominated by caste-Hindu groups would nominate Dalits of their own choice for the election. They help them win and keep them under their monopoly.

A similar tactic was followed in Pappapatti and Keeripatti for the byelections but with a difference: the elected Dalits were forced to quit their posts as soon as they assumed charge. (The only Dalit president who refused to oblige lost the post after a case of alleged misappropriation of funds was filed against him.) Nattarmangalam, which had an elected Dalit panchayat president between 1996 and 2001, joined the "rebel" panchayats in 2001.

Elected Dalit presidents of villages in several districts of Tamil Nadu are prevented from conducting their roles with dignity. In Tirunelveli district, two Dalit presidents were murdered for exercising their democratic right. Jaggaiyan from Nakkalamuthanpatti village Panchayat and Servaran from Maruthankinaru village Panchayat were murdered on November, 2006 and February, 2007 respectively. Both of them resisted the upper-caste vice president who tried to keep them dummy. At least 10 other Dalit panchayat presidents in Tirunelveli district, all Arunthathiyyars, have complained that their lives are under threat from caste-Hindu opponents, who are allegedly resisting Dalit presidents' exercise of power.

The first general election to the Panchayats was held in 1996. No one could be elected in Pappapatti, Keeripatti and Kottakachiyenthal panchayats. Yosanai was elected in Nattarmangalam and remained in seat until 2001. Between 1996-2001, nine by-elections were held in those panchayats excluding Nattarmangalam. Tenth and eleventh by-elections were held in 2002. In the Tenth by-election, no nomination was filed in
In 2002 eleventh by-election was held. In this election too, no nomination was filed in Kottakachiyenthal and Nattarmangalam. In keeripatti and pappapatti, two Dalits filed their nominations by the pressure of dominant castes. But they withdrew their nomination on the last day. So no election was held. Two Dalits were elected in pappapatti and keeripatti with the support of dominant castes. But they resigned soon after their victory. In 2004, 14th and 15th by elections were held. As no nomination was filed, no election was held in this year too.

1.8.3 PROFILE OF CASE STUDY 3: THE COVERAGE OF EVERYDAY REPORTING OF DALITS IN TAMIL DAILIES

The case study on “everyday reporting” was used to observe the nature and extent of the coverage of the Dalit news in Tamil newspapers.

1.8.4 PROFILE OF CASE STUDY 4: THE COVERAGE OF DALITS PARTICIPATION IN 14TH LOK SABHA ELECTIONS IN TAMIL DAILIES

The remarkable aspect of Elections in 2004 in Tamil Nadu is the failure of two major Dalit political organisations to get into the Democratic Progressive Alliance (DPA) led by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). DMK president M. Karunanidhi refused to allot seats to Viduthalai Siruthaigal (Dalit Panthers of India or DPI) and Puthiya Tamilagam (P.T), but appealed to them to work for the success of the alliance. He promised them that he would consider their case at the time of the next Assembly elections (Viswanthan, 2004).
Thirumavalavan and Krishnasamy sought the Dalit political solidarity built by them over the last five years to be preserved at any cost. They bonded together and formed an alliance of their own, the People's Alliance. The *Makkal Tamil Desam*, founded by former State Minister S. Kannappan and the Indian National League, a Muslim outfit and Union Minister George Fernandes' Janata Dal (U) were in the alliance. This alliance contested 28 seats in all. Thirumavalavan and Krishnasamy are contesting elections from Chidambaram and Tenkasi constituencies respectively. The Dalit politicians termed this as “Political untouchability”. Viduthalai Siruthaikal leader Thol. Thirumavalavan called this as “a manifestation of political untouchability, an extension of untouchability from the political to the social.”

1.9 \textbf{PROFILES OF THE SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS}

1.9.1 *DINA THANTHI*

*Dina Thanthi* has got largest readership in Tamil Nadu. Here the readership refers the tea shop readers. *Dina Thanthi* forms the public sphere and it influences the readers. S.B. Adityan a barrister and a staunch Congressman started *Dina Thanthi* in 1942 in Madurai. It's the only newspaper run by the trust ownership in Tamil Nadu. *Dina Thanthi* targeted lower class and semi-literate population. The paper indulged in sensationalism and its four pages were filled with stories of crime, violence and the cinema in colloquial style and language which does not require much effort to understand. Adityan’s great service to Tamil journalism was that he took the newspaper to the doorstep of the poor and downtrodden, the rickshawwallah and the factory labourer and inculcated the newspaper reading habit in them. Their supreme success was inculcating the newspaper
reading habit among the village people. It’s famous for its big headlines and simple colloquial language style.

1.9.2 Dinamalar

Dinamalar, a largest circulating daily in Tamil Nadu was established by T.V. Ramasubbu Aiyer, a congressman of Tirunelveli. It was started in 1951 in Thiruvananthapuram and played an active role in the agitation for the merger of Tamil areas in Travancore with Tamil Nadu and was very popular for that reason. At one stage the paper’s office was raided by the police and its copies were seized. This happened when Pattom Thanu Pillai was the Chief Minister of the state. After the success of the agitation and when Nagercoil and Kanyakumari were merged with Tamil Nadu in the reorganization of the states, the paper was moved to Tirunelveli in 1960. Dinamalar is a family run newspaper. Dinamalar concentrated on problems of the local people and getting the people’s grievances redressed. Dinamalar introduced offset printing in 1981 and adopted other modern techniques of printing. The photographic coverage of Dinamalar gives it a unique place in Tamil Journalism. Dinamalar concentrates on problems of local people. It is famous for its beautiful catchy headlines and development news.

1.9.3 Dinamani

When the Dinamani, sponsored by the Express group, made its appearance in 1934 it electrified the atmosphere of Tamil journalism. It was an inexpensive newspaper, its price being only six paise but it was a different newspaper from its rivals in presentation of
news and views. Within a month of its inception its circulation shot up and it was greater than the combined circulation of all the other Tamil papers. *Dinamani* was originally started by Sadanand who purchased the Indian Express from Varadarajulu Naidu. Both the papers later came into the possession of Ramnath Goenka. The first editor of *Dinamani* was T.S.Chockalingam, an ardent Congressman and a powerful writer. With him as joint editor was A.N.Sivaraman who was later to set up new records in Tamil journalism. Chockalingam left the *Dinamani* in 1943 and A.N.Sivaram became the editor of *Dinamani*. 