CHAPTER VI
CAUSES OF INTER-CASTE CONFLICTS

This chapter analyses various causes of major conflicts in the study area during the period, 1975-2000, in general and 1990-2000 in particular. Like the simple logic that there will not be any smoke without fire. In the same way, there will not be conflicts without certain specific reasons, probably charged with emotions and escalating enmities. There are minor and major causes that lead to conflict between two caste groups. It seems that these causes are the expression of constant controversies and instant emotions of human tempers propelled by torture or intolerance and a lack of social values.

The successive State Governments, Non-Governmental Organizations, God-fearing religious heads and right thinking individuals have toiled themselves to workout a suitable solution to the ever-recurring caste flare-ups in Tamil Nadu in general and its southern districts in particular. But nothing has happened fruitfully to overcome this problem. The scourge lies hidden somewhere in some potential corner in every village like a time bomb awaiting the spark to explode. The spark comes flying at the most unforeseen time and causes huge fire leaving the loss of life and properties. Curiously, it emanates from most unlikely quarters (may be from a school boy or a girl; from a well-educated man or woman least prone to mischief; from a marriage or funeral procession).
INHERENT ILL-WILL

Every individual, be he a Government employee or layman, knows that inherent ill-will prevails between two major castes in each village. The members of a major caste in a village learn early in their life to look upon the members of other major castes with suspicion. The members of the former as well as the latter caste groups would treat the members of minority caste groups in a humiliating and discriminating way. The members of such minority caste groups do not muster courage to rub shoulders with those of the majority caste groups. However, no one knows how this form of ill-will has crept into the minds of those people. It is perhaps due to their deep caste consciousness and caste loyalty.

FUELLED EMOTIONS

The causes which the Investigator identified would provide favorable grounds for caste conflict. Whenever people of a particular caste attack those from majority or minority caste groups on certain grounds and if the conflict lasts for more than a day, the causative factor does not remain alive till the end of the conflict. When an attack on first day gets momentum and reaches a high level, new dimensions are added to it. As a consequence, various factors are attributed to the outbreak, facilitating the participation of more people in the caste conflict.

While the Investigator visiting several villages in Tirunelveli District to interview the villagers and the police officers concerned, he could identify 38 causes,
which had driven the people from different castes frantically to seek the help of their neighbours who happened to be the members of other castes, for no fault of theirs.

The 38 causes can be grouped into the following five categories viz., social causes, criminal causes, religious causes, civil causes and political causes.

1. SOCIAL CAUSES

1.1 Inciting Slogans

Since a deep-rooted ill will persists between two castes, the members of one caste group try to provoke the members of their rival caste group in public places. The simplest way to provoke the rival caste members is to raise provocative and inciting slogans during processions, festivals and other congregations for social intercourse. As a matter of fact, several conflicts occurred in this way in Tamil-Nadu in general and a majority of such conflicts occurred in Tirunelveli District in particular.

For instance, about hundred young Dalits from Puliangudi in Tirunelveli District, who were incidentally the members of Samathuva Sahodarathuva Sangam (Organization of Equality and Fraternity), were on their way to Kadayanallur in the same district on June 8, 1982 in two tractors to attend a public meeting. While passing through the village Chokkampatti, they shouted a highly provocative slogan against the Thevars “Maravanai vettuvom, Marathiyaikettuvom”. This means: ‘Let us kill the Maravan and marry the Marathi’ (The term Maravan refers to Thevar and Marathi refers to Thevar’s wife). The Thevars of Chokkampatti in Tirunelveli District, who heard this provocative slogan, retaliated by throwing stones at the tractors. This
unexpected attack of them injured 15 Dalit youths. The tractors were driven fast to escape from the attack.

The Thevars did not stop with this attack on the Dalits, but they let loose an orgy of violence in the night of the same day. They attacked the transport corporation buses and caused injuries to the passengers and the crew. In response to this, the Muslims of Puliangudi in Tirunelveli District assaulted a Thevar mainly to show their protest against them for causing a law and order problem.

A Dalit youth drove to Kadayanallur with a group of his caste people in two tractors. While returning to Puliangudi in the next morning, they pulled down the arches erected by the Viswa Hindu Parishad (a radical Hindu organization) and damaged the buses, thereby creating a favourable condition for a riot. This tense situation led to the extent of police firing to quell the violence, resulting in two casualties from the Dalit side.¹

¹Puliangudi PS Crime No.97/1982 u/s 147, 148, 341, 427 IPC.  
Puliangudi PS Crime No.101/1982 u/s 147, 148, 341, 427, 332, r/w 34 IPC.  
Puliangudi PS Crime No.102/1982 u/s 147, 148, 336, 427, 436, 454, 380 IPC.  
Puliangudi PS Crime No.103/1982 u/s 147, 148, 332, 427, 436, r/w 139, 34 IPC.  
Puliangudi PS Crime No.104/1982 u/s 147, 148, 336, 427 @ 147, 376 IPC.  
Puliangudi PS Crime No.105/1982 u/s 307 IPC.  
Puliangudi PS Crime No.107/1982 u/s 147, 148, 336, 323, 324 r/w 149 IPC.  
Puliangudi PS Crime No. 108 u/s 147, 148, 323 IPC.  
Kadaianallur PS Crime No. 191/1982 u/s 147, 341, 323, 379 IPC.  
Kadaianallur PS Crime No. 212/1982 u/s 447, 427 IPC.
Besides shouting and inciting slogans, writing such slogans on public walls led to conflicts. For instance, on 1.8.1995 some Dalit miscreants wrote “maravanai vettuvom, marathi karpazippom” on the bus stand walls in Sivanthipatti village in Tirunelveli District. This means: ‘Let us kill the Maravan and rape the Marathi’. This trigged a prolonged conflict between the Thevars and the Dalits, which caused a havoc affecting the southern part of Tirunelveli region for three years\(^2\).

1.2 **Encroachment of Government land**

*Poramboku* lands (empty Government lands) are utilized for common purposes such as grazing, thrashing and the like by the people of the village. The Government has the power to give this land to private individuals for their personal use by issuing *pattas* (legal ownership) in their favour.

In many villages, a stretch of such land is located in the middle of the village which is commonly enjoyed by the villagers. In such places, they use them for playing, conducting marriages, celebrating temple festivals and the like. When certain caste people want to take away such lands exclusively for their personal use, thereby other caste people raise objection resulting in caste clashes. Kurinchankulam, a village in Sankarankoil taluk of Tirunelveli District, had a population of 4,000 Naickers, 500 Dalits and 300 Arundhatiar (lowest section of Dalits). There was a

\(^2\) Sivanthipatti PS Crime No.389/1995 u/s 147, 153 (A) IPC.  
patch of 33 cents of *poramboke* land near the Dalits’ colony. The *Naicker* and the *Dalits* had been using the land in common. In 1988, the *Naickers* proposed to build an overhead tank and a health centre on the land, but they abandoned their proposal as the *Dalits* opposed it. However, the *Dalits*’ practice of worshipping their Goddess *Gandharamman* on the plot continued. Therefore, they started building a temple for the Goddess in August 8, 1990. The *Naickers* thwarted their attempt in retaliation. This culminated in an alarming conflict between the *Naickers* and the *Dalits* which resulted in the murder of four *Dalits* on March 14, 1993.

1.3 **Posters, placards and banners denigrating castes**

When antisocial elements wish to bring about a conflict, they would provoke the people of other castes by some misdeeds. In one such instance, a poster with derogatory remarks about the *Thevars* pasted by the *Dalits* (*Pallars* who are otherwise known as *Devendra Kula Vellalars*) on the statue of *Muthuramalinga Thevar*, a revered leader of the *Thevar* people, on November 7, 1995 at Edaikal village in Thenkasi Taluk of Tirunelveli District. The aggrieved *Thevars* picketed and stopped the flow of all traffic in the State Highways from Thenkasi town to Madurai city. They also entered a *Dalit* colony and damaged 30 houses and injured a few *Dalits*. In retaliation, the *Dalits* set the houses and haystacks of the *Thevars in fire*. When the police entered the *Dalit* area of the village, they were assaulted and in this confrontation, four police personnel were injured. The *Thevars* and the *Dalits* in the village and in surrounding areas lived in tension following this incident. The unrest

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3 Thiruvangadam PS Crime No. 57/1992, u/s 147, 148, 354, 307, 302 IPC.
and blood-shed after the vandalism committed on the *Thevar* statue showed signs of subsiding. But after 45 days, another spell of turbulence was staged in Tenkasi town and a neighbouring place, Courtallam, a tourist-cum-pilgrimage centre. A *Thevar* damaged the statue of Dr. Ambedkar in the town with the help of five of his fellow caste men in mid November, 1995. The miscreants broke the right wrist of the statue and hung a leaflet consisting of filthy words about the *Pallars (Dalits)*.

As a result of this, a sizeable number of *Dalits* from the town and adjoining villages attacked the shops owned mostly by the *Thevars*. After damaging their shops, the angry *Dalit* mob moved to the residential area of the *Thevars* and damaged a few houses of them. Another group of *Dalits* from the town stopped a Parliamentarian’s car and burnt it.

In another instance, in 1994, there was a clash between the *Konars* and the *Thevars* in Kesavasamuthiram village in the Pathamadai police limit in Tirunelveli District owing to the reason that the former objected the latter’s attempt of posting their caste leader’s photo during a temple festival. In this conflict, a group of *Thevars* attacked two *Konars* with deadly weapons and injured them severely\(^4\).

1.4 **Bundh call by caste outfits**

The term *Bundh* refers to closure of shops and other business establishments to paralyze normal day to day activities. It is a common practice among the affected

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\(^4\) Pathamadai PS Crime No.101/1994 u/s 147, 148, 307, 323, 324, 336, 427, 12/L.W 109, 149 IPC.
people. If they have grievances, they normally place certain demands before the Government. If their demands are not conceded, they do organize agitations in the form of demonstration in front of Government offices or one day token fast or fast unto death in order to pressurize the Government to consider their demands. Some time they take out processions also. During such direct action they give a bundh call for the closure of shops and other business establishments. Such occurrences are frequent in Tirunelveli District.

The Thevars of Alwarthirunagari in Srivaikundam Taluk of Thoothukudi District under the banner of the Thevar Peravai called for a bundh on May 12, 1997 in order to protest against the damage caused to the statue of Muthuramalinga Thevar at a nearby village. As a protest, a Dalit who was a tailor, kept his shop open. The angry Thevars attacked the shop and damaged all belongings. In support of him, a large group of Dalits reacted to this with weapons and country bombs and let lose tension in the streets of Alwarthirunagari. As a consequence of this, tension prevailed in 10 kms. radius. Therefore police patrolling continued for six months.\footnote{Alwarthirunagari PS Crime No.209/1997
Alwarthirunagari PS Crime No.208/1997
Alwarthirunagari PS Crime No.210/1997
Alwarthirunagari PS Crime No.211/1997
Alwarthirunagari PS Crime No.219/1997
Alwarthirunagari PS Crime No.220/1997}
1.5 **Provocative speech by caste leaders**

It is common that provocative and obnoxious speeches of leaders cause serious trouble. They wish to keep the pot boiling with the ulterior motive of establishing their position as caste leaders. They do not want peace to prevail and hence resort to making provocative speeches.

A. Packiaraj @ Sathai Packiaraj, who lived in Bombay for a long time, came to Sathankulam town in Thoothukudi District on October 30, 1995, which happened to be the *Thevar Jayanthi* day (Birth day of Muthuramalinga Thevar). The same day he assumed charge as secretary of the Tamil Nadu unit of *Akila India Paraiyar Peravai*. He sought ways and means to get a niche for himself in the caste as its undisputed leader. He frequented the *Dalit* settlements with his followers to consolidate their power. During his visits he abused the other castes in foul language. On December 12, 1995, he made a provocative speech in Sathankulam town and abused the people of the other castes. Then he went to the house of Panchayat president, who happened to be a *Thevar* and threatened his family members in his absence. The relatives and well wishers of the Panchayat president retaliated and assaulted his brother, who escaped with a few blows⁶.

The angry *Dalit* leader went on a rampage and indulged in violence against the *Thevars*⁷ A large group of *Dalits* re-assembled with arms at the bus stand area and went mad, breaking tube lights and destroying shops. A group of 200 *Dalits* gathered on one side and 200 *non-Dalits* (mostly *Thevars*) gathered on the other side and

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attacked each other. This incident of conflict between the two caste groups led to a major struggle during June-August 1994. Pesum Tamilan, an associate of Packiaraj, set it in motion by assaulting two Thevers of Pannamparai and kidnapping another Thevar. Large scale violence ensued at the bus stand and the Dalits attacked all passersby and looted all the wayside shops. Police had to open fire to quell the deadly conflict unleashed by the Dalits, who mounted attacks on the Thevars repeatedly and the conflicts lasted for several months. In other incident, a Dalit man with his associates attached two Thevars with deadly weapons and inflicted bleeding injuries for which a case was registered. As a sequence, on 11 June, 1995. A group of Dalits attacked the same two Thevars and two of their caste associates with deadly weapons and country bombs. In this clash the two Thevars were killed and their associates got admitted in the hospital with serious injuries.

Another example of provocative speech by John Pandian, leader of the Devendra Kula Velalar Sangam, at B. Meenatchipuram in Bodi Taluk of Theni District during September 1989 is a case in point. The discussion on this is as follows

A Pillai caste man was the president of the Bodi village Panchayat which is inhabited by more or less an equal number of Dalits and Pillais. John Pandian, who visited the village to participate in Thiagi Immanual Memorial Day function, made a provocative speech, exhorting the Dalits to demand Pillai girls for marriage, if basic amenities like water, electricity, etc. are not provided to the Dalit colony by the

8 Sathankulam PS Crime No.655/1990.
9 Sathangulam PS Crime No.311/1994 u/s 147,148, 508 (1) IPC.
Sathangulam PS Crime No.313/1994 u/s 147,148, 507, 332, 336, 337, 427 IPC.
Sathangulam PS Crime No.314/1994 u/s 147, 148, 364, 506 (2) IPC.
Sathangulam PS Crime No.315/1994 u/s 147, 148, 419, 307, 427 IPC.
10 Sathangulam PS Crime No.419/1994 u/s 147,148, 307, 323, 324, 506 (2) IPC.
Panchayat president. Enraged by this speech the caste association of Pillais demanded the arrest of John Pandian and also it resolved to resort to bus picketing on August 15, 1989, if he is not arrested before that date. The non-Dalits, especially the Thevars, joined with the Pillais and rose against the Dalits. A Dalit woman of a neighbouring village was found dead under a suspicious circumstance. Hence the Dalits refused to receive her body after post-mortem and agitated for five hours by blocking the traffic on the Theni-Bodi road. The inconvenience thus caused by the Dalits infuriated the non-Dalits, mostly the Thevars who started attacking the Dalits. Such conflicts led to police firing resulting in death of four Thevars. In a neighbouring town, these caste groups fired at each other resulting in the death of three Thevars. In one of the villages in that region, the Thevars burnt two Dalits to death and also scorched their houses. In another village, a violent mob of about 1000 Dalits attacked the police station and this warranted the police to open fire. On the whole, 33 Dalits and the Thevars died in the conflict.

1.6 Erecting statue of a caste leader in Poramboke land

There is a Government land on the road side at Kasitharmam village in Shenkottai Taluk of Tirunelveli District where the Thevars and the Dalits are more or less equal in terms of their numerical strength. The Thevers proposed to erect a statue of Muthuramalinga Thevar on the land of the Highways department on April 22, 2001. Though this was objected by the Dalits and the other castes, the Thevars did not mind it and started building the podium in 2001. However, the police and revenue officials intervened in time and brought their work to halt. After six months, the Thevar youth installed the statue all on a sudden during night time, which surprised
every one. Even now this continues to be a cause for inter-caste conflict between the two caste groups\textsuperscript{12}.

1.7 Two tumbler system

The practice of serving the Dalits with drinks and beverages in a separate tumbler in hotels and tea liquor shops was not widespread in the period between 1975 and 2000, though it was a wide spread practice earlier. There were instances when the two tumbler system was practiced against the Dalits or they were sent away without providing drinks giving some false reasons. Thus the Dalits were in a precarious situation of not being able to drink tea or coffee in the tea stalls even within their villages, after their day’s hard toil and labour in the paddy fields. This was resented by the Dalits and was an important cause for conflicts between the Dalits and the Caste-Hindus.

In 1982, a Thevar caste man was running a tea stall at Kumanthapuram in Thenkasi taluk of Tirunelveli District. Since the Dalits were supplied tea in separate tumblers by the stall owner, they protested and demonstrated in front of the Government offices. Conflict arose between the Dalits and the Thevars. A case was registered against the stall owner and subsequently he was arrested. The two tumbler system is almost abandoned due to the intervention of the Government officials.

\textsuperscript{12} Achampudur PS. Cr.No.94/2001, u/s 147 and 447 IPC.
1.8 *Love affair between girls and boys of different castes*

In Tamil Nadu villages there is strict adherence to caste, sect and sub-sect, in the matter of matrimony. Though solemnizing a marriage between persons of two different castes has c it is a matter of rarity. When a boy and a girl from different castes love each other or ome into vogue, marry each other, it is firmly opposed not only by the parents but also by the people of both the castes. Often it leads to conflicts between the two caste groups.

A *Nadar* girl from Maruthamuthur village in Ambasamudram taluk of Tirunelveli District eloped with a *Konar* boy of Sivalarkulam in Thenkasi Taluk of the same district. The *Nadars*, who were agitated over this, damaged plantain groves and other properties of the *Konars*, worth about 5 lakhs. In retaliation the *Konars* murdered two *Nadars* from the same village. Country made bombs were hurled by the conflicting castes against each other. A police contingent was posted for about two months and afterwards the situation limped back to normalcy\(^{13}\).

1.9 *Arrest and release of Caste leaders*

Caste leaders champion the cause of their caste people and very often indulge in violent activities against the conflicting caste group to get a niche for them from their caste. They frequent their caste settlements and make exhilarating and abusing speeches against other castes, thereby causing caste conflagration. When such leaders are arrested, their people resort to violence demanding the release of their leader.

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\(^{13}\) Mukudal PS. Cr.No.137/1995 u/s 147 148, 341, 322,324,326,307, 302 IPC and 4 of IEA Act.
In 1995, Devendra Kula Velalar leader, John Pandian, was arrested in connection with some criminal cases. The Dalits demanded the immediate release of their leader, but their attempt became futile. The Dalits thereupon resorted to violence, damaging the Government buses and destroying the properties of other caste people. They assaulted the crew and bunt the Government buses causing a loss to the tune of ten lakhs.

The Devendra Kula Velalars conflicted with the Kallars in Kandamanoor village in Theni district. The Member of Legisratrative Assembly (MLA) from Kandamanoor constituency, who happened to be a Thevar, visited Kandamanoor in the morning hours of a day in May, 1997. The District Administration while allowing the visit of the MLA, ordered Dr. Krishnaswamy, leader of the Devendra Kula Velalar Federation, not to enter the village for security reasons. When he violated the order, he was arrested on May 1 1997 at Athipatti in Theni District. As a result, violence broke out in Tirunelveli District and adjoining districts, in which several buses were damaged with stones and fire. There was a police firing and lathi charge resulting in two causalities. Demanding his release the Dalits of Kovilpatti Taluk in Thoothukudi District resorted to violence and the town remained trouble-torn and

grim for about two weeks. In the violence, a few buses were damaged and burnt and two Thevars were murdered.

At Kadayanallur in Thenkasi taluk, the Dalits conducted road roko (blocking road to cause traffic) demanding the release of their leader and obstructed the total traffic on the Madurai-Thenkasi State highway. Suddenly the crowd turned violent, damaged several buses, burnt fifteen buses and assaulted the police. The police had to use force and resort to firing in order to quell the violence.\(^{15}\)

1.10 **Refusal of Dalits to work as agricultural labourers**

The Dalits have been at the lowest rung of the social ladder since distant post. In 1951, almost all Dalit children in the age group of above 7 years (22 per cent of the children) were working as agricultural labourers. In 1961, 5 per cent of the children aged 14 years were recorded as employed in agriculture. After 1976, only a few children could be seen in the paddy fields. As the Dalits improved educationally and

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\(^{15}\) Kovilpatti West PS Crime No.309/1997, 311/1997, 312/97, 313/97, 320/97, 324/97, 326/97 u/s 3 of TNPPD Act.
Kovilpatti West PS Crime No.310/97 u/s 147, 148, 452, 323, 506(2) IPC.
Kovilpatti West PS Crime No.314/1997 u/s 147, 341, 383, 332, 307 IPC.
Kovilpatti West PS Crime No.315/1997 u/s 147, 148, 341, IPC and Sec. 2, 3 of TNPPD Act.
Kovilpatti West PS Crime No.316/1997 u/s 147, 323, 506 (1) IPC.
Kovilpatti East PS Crime No.323/1997 u/s 143, 323 IPC.
Kovilpatti East PS Crime No.232/1997 u/s 302 IPC.
Kovilpatti West PS Crime No.334/1997 u/s 147, 148, 294(V), 307 IPC and 4, 5 of ES Act.
Kovilpatti West PS Crime No.335/1997 u/s 146, 148, 452, 307 IPC.
Kovipatti West PS Crime No.336/1997 u/s 147, 148, 448, 427 IPC.
Kovilpatti West PS Crime No.337/1997 u/s 397 IPC r/w 4, 5 of ES Act
Kovilpatti West PS Crime No.347/1997 u/s 341, 307 IPC and 3, 4, 5 of ES Act
economically by dint of their education and employment in gulf countries, the Thevars could not digest this growth in the life of their one-time tenants and coolies.

Due to the caste ill feelings the Dalit women of Anaithalayur Pacheri in Tirunelveli District refused to do the work of harvesting the paddy fields of the Thevars. The Thevar inhabitants of Anaithalayur Marakudi in turn blocked the buses bound for Anaithalayur Pacheri inhabited mostly by the Dalits. This paved the way for a caste flare up. 16

1.11 Dispute over rural sports

It is a common custom in villages of Tamilnadu to organize sports and games during important celebrations such as Deepavali, Pongal, Christmas, Independence Day, Republic Day and the like. Games such as Cricket, Kabadi and the like are played along with track and field events. Sports events like Jallikattu or Manjuvirattu 17 are also organized.

Normally a team from one village competes with a team from another village. There is a chance for the players of a team to be from one particular caste. When one of the teams wins, the defeated team makes false accusations and engages in a quarrel.

16 Gangai kondan PS Crime No.304/1990 u/s 302 IPC
Gangaikondan PS Crime No.310/1990 u/s 302 IPC.
17 Racing and chasing of bulls especially in festival occasions, which attracts a large crowd from surrounding villages mostly it is a kind of recreation sought by rural people.
In one such incident, a Kabadi team from Vasudevanallur village in Sivagiri taluk of Tirunelveli District competed with a team from Cudalur village in the same taluk. When the Cudalur team got defeated they accused the Vasudevanallur team of foul play and indulged in a quarrel.

As a result, the match came to a halt. This fight in the play-ground took the shape of a major conflict and spread over the adjoining Virudhunagar District also. Several incidents of violence necessitated posting of police for more than two months.

**Dispute over public roads and paths**

The Dalits from some villages in erstwhile Tirunelveli District have their grave yards, at the outskirts of the village. Even during rainy seasons and odd hours, the Dalits have to carry the dead body to the grave yard in head load, through a circuitous and narrow path of slippery and marshy nature, going through the paddy fields. The Dalits have been facing this hardship over generations. Since they wanted to have grave yards in places close to their villages, they secured places for this purpose. On a rainy day in the year 2001 when a Dalit man died, the Dalits wanted to take the dead body through the main road in the village to the new grave yard. The Caste – Hindus objected that the dead body should neither be buried in the new grave yard close to the village nor be taken through the main road. This made the Dalits keep the dead body unburied for two long days. When this was reported to the Police and Revenue officials, they interfered in the matter and arranged for cremation. Still the Dalits cremate the dead bodies in the old grave yard traversing the long distance.
### 1.12 Dispute over bathing place in temple ponds

In past, the Dalits were denied of taking bath in temple ponds all over India. In several places, still they suffer from this sort of caste discrimination. For a instance, in erstwhile Tirunelveli District, the Caste-Hindus prevented the Dalits from taking bath in public ponds and also taking drinking water from common wells situated in villages. Sometimes the former allowed the latter to take bath in separate bathing ghats.

### 1.14 Bonded labour

A Konar landlord from Sivalarkulam village in Alangulam taluk of Tirunelveli District had more than 200 acres of land and 1000 cattle. He amassed wealth by selling arrack and lending money to the Dalits at a high rate of interest. When the borrowers could not repay the loan, he took them with their family members to his village as bonded labourers and then to perform agricultural work and grazing of cattle. They were shut in huts close to the cattle sheds and treated as slaves. They were provided with limited food and inadequate clothing. As the situation grew worse, the Dalits made uproar and as a result, conflict followed. The police and revenue officials rescued the bonded labourers by resorting to deterrent action. The Konar money lender was detained under the provisions of the Maintenance of Internal Security Act, and thus pacified the conflict.
1.15 Unwillful/Accidental events

Accidents are unforeseen and unexpected. There is no criminal intention in the process of accidents except negligence and rashness on the part of either one or both parties involved in the accidents. When the parties that involved in the accidents happen to be from two different castes, their caste people join issue with the parties concerned and resort to violence against each other.

The ill-feeling among various caste groups in the in Tirunelveli District has gone to an extent that even a minor mishap on the road turns to be a potential cause for violent clash. This desperate situation rocked the people of two villages in Thenkasi taluk in January 1992. One was a Dalit-dominated village, whereas the other was a Thevar-dominated one. A young Thevar cyclist from Keezhapuliyoor dashed against a Dalit woman accidentally. Though the woman did not take it seriously, her caste men made it a serious issue and assaulted the cyclist. In response to it, the Thevars gathered with knives and choppers near the Government Hospital at Thenkasi town. As they could not come across the Dalit assailants, they destroyed the sugar cane bundles and damaged the crushing machine of a Dalit.

When other Dalits heard about it, they took it as an affront. Consequently, the next day about thirty Dalits went near the Government Hospital in Thenkasi town, got hold of a Thevar, who was a tea shop owner from Keelapuliyur village and gave vent to their anger. They also attacked a Muslim tea master and damaged the furniture and other articles in the shop. This took a diabolic turn and conflict between those caste groups continued at least for three months\(^{18}\).

\(^{18}\) Pathamadai PS Crime No. 66/2005 u/s 147, 148, 341, 307 & 302 IPC.
On 20.10.1998 a Dalit accidentally stamped on the feet of a Thevar. This ended up in conflict between the Dalit and the Thevar, which culminated into a caste conflict resulting in picketing of buses, hurling bombs, arson and assault.  

**Criminal Causes**

2.1. **Murder**

The murder of a person from one caste by the members of another caste can lead to clashes between the two caste groups. This has happened not only in Tirunelveli District but also in several parts of Tamil Nadu. Such a murder can be a result of unexpected provocation or be a planned one. However, skirmishes between the *Dalits* and the *Thevars* in a chain of villages in Tirunveleli District have been taking place since 1970.

For instance, the attack on transport buses by the members of rival caste groups is a case in point. Some *Dalits* from Nallammalpuram village in Tirunelveli District picketed a transport bus in 1995 to protest against the atrocities done to them by *Thevars*. The *Dalit* students of the Ambedkar Adi Dravidar Government High School in the village also joined their caste men in the conflict. This incident provoked the *Thevars* not only in the village but also in the neighbouring villages.

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Veeravanallur PS Crime No.207/98 u/s 147, 148, 435, 307 IPC.  
Veeravanallur PS Crime No.209/98 u/s 147, 148, 436 IPC.  
Veeravanallur PS Crime No.210/96 u/s 147, 148, 436, 302 IPC.  
Veeravanallur PS Crime No.211/98 u/s 147, 148, 436 IPC.  
Veeravanallur PS Crime No.212, 215, 217/98 u/s 435,436 IPC.  
Veeravanallur PS Crime No.216/98 u/s 147, 148, 307, 506 (2) IPC.  
Veeravanallur PS Crime No.161/99 u/s 302 IPC.
As a consequence, a group of Thevars murdered a Dalit man in the village in November, 1995. This murder provoked the Dalits of the surrounding villages. Six of them led by a Dalit leader came forward to mobilize their fellow-villagers to take revenge against the murderers. They abducted a young Thevar man from a neighbouring village in the same month and later hacked him to death at an isolated place. Two murders in quick succession set in motion a series of attacks involving the rival caste groups.

In another incident, the Dalits from Alwarkarkulam village and the Thevars of Manakkarai in Thoothukudi District were at loggerheads for quite some time. A Thevar advocate from Manakkarai village in Srivaikundam Taluk and a local Thevar leader from Vallanadu went to the Dalits area of Alwarkarkulam on December 14, 1997 to persuade them to resolve their differences with the Thevars and settle their dispute amicably. While they were talking to the Dalits, the former were butchered to death by the latter.

As a revenge for this double murder, the Thevars killed three Dalit women of Alwarkarkulam on February 8, 1998 while they were returning home in the evening after harvesting paddy. The killers cut off the head of a woman and threw it in the bush on the bed of Thamiraparani River near Kongarayankuruchi village. It took at least three months to end the conflict between the Thevars and the Dalits.

2.2 Disputes among students

Disputes among students have sparked off major clashes among different caste groups not only in Tirunelveli District but also other districts of the State as well.
A provocative slogan which the Dalits use against the Thevars has been “let us hack to death the Maravas and rape the Marathis”. It was found scribbled on the walls of boys’ lavatory in Shankar Higher Secondary School at Thalaiyuthu in Tirunelveli District on December 10, 1998. The Thevar students of the same school took offence. The Head Master got the slogan erased immediately. However things did not stop there. This handy work of some Dalit students resulted in street fights between the Thevar and the Dalit youths. The Dalits assaulted a Thevar student in Thalaiyuthu marketplace and in retaliation the Thevar boys assaulted the Dalit boys20.

In 1990 there was scuffle between the Thevar and the Dalit students in the Higher Secondary School in Gangaikondan. The Thevars took it as a challenge and informed the elders of their village, Anaithaiur Marakudi. As directed by the elders, the Thevar students boycotted the school and also obstructed the other caste students attending the school. Besides, during the harvest season the Dalit women of Anaithalaiur pacheri did not attend the field work of the Thevars. This paralyzed the harvesting of paddy in the fields of the Thevars. As a challenge, the Thevars stopped the buses plying to the Anaithalaiur pacheri where the Dalits live in large number. This resulted in 19 incidents of arson, looting murder etc. several cases were registered.21

21Gangaikondan P.S. Crime No. 267/1990, u/s 326 IPC.
Gangaikondan P.S. Crime No. 272/1990, u/s 147, 148, 427 IPC.
Gangaikondan P.S. Crime No. 273/1990, u/s 147, 148, 427 IPC.
Gangaikondan P.S. Crime No. 274/1990, u/s 147,148,427 IPC.
Gangaikondan P.S. Crime No. 275/1990, u/s 307 IPC.
Gangaikondan P.S. Crime No. 276/1990 to 283/1990 u/s 327, 427 IPC.
Gangaikondan P.S. Crime No. 304/1990, u/s 302 IPC.
Quarrel among the students of Puliara High School

The term ‘Marava’ is a widely used in Tamil Nadu to address to a man noted for his bravery. In this sense, when the Headmaster of a Government High School at Puliara in Shenkottai Taluk in Tirunelveli District was referring to the bravery of ancient Greeks on July 10, 1992, he mentioned that the Greeks were like Maravas. It is to be noted here that the term ‘Marava’ also refers to the Thevars. A Dalit student in the class took it as an offence and asked the teacher whether he meant that the Maravars, i.e. Thevars alone were brave and that the Dalits were not so. The Headmaster, who was neither a Dalit nor a Thevar, explained that by the term ‘Marava’ he meant only a brave man and not the Thevar man, but the Dalit students in the class were not convinced. When the school opened in the next morning, the Dalit students, who formed a majority among the students of the school, organized a strike. They blocked the vehicular traffic. In the violence that followed, both caste groups attacked each other and damaged houses. The entire village was entangled in a chaotic situation and returned to normalcy after a week. Nevertheless, the innocent Head Master was transferred for no fault of his own.22

22 Puliara PS. Cr.No. 124/1992 u/s 147, 123, 341 IPC
Puliara PS. Cr.No.125/1992 u/s 147, 379,427 IPC.
Puliara PS. Cr.No.126/1992 u/s 147, 427, 448, 506 (2) IPC.
Puliara PS. Cr.No.128,129/1992 u/s 147, 341, 323 IPC.
Clash between the Dalit Boys and the Thevar Boys in a Kabadi team at Gangaikondan

It all began during a Kabadi game played by the Dalit boys and the Thevar boys in a school premises in November, 1995 at Gangaikondan village in Tirunelveli District. The Dalit boys were in one team and the Thevar boys in the opponent team. There was a Dalit boy in the team of Thevar boys. When the latter team was defeated, the Thevar boys beat the Dalit boy in their team accusing him of not played well intentionally in order to help the Dalits in opponent team to win. This news of assault spread all over the village in the same night. As a result of this, in the next morning, some Dalits stopped a public transport and assaulted a Thevar student in the bus. As an immediate revenge, a group of Thevars from neighbouring villages attacked a Dalit worker of tea estate snatched his gold ring and chain. The provoked Dalits of that area killed a Thevar in the same day. The outraged Thevars was waiting for their turn to avenge those murderers. In December, 1995, a small group of Thevars from Gangaikondan murdered a Dalit. In the next morning, the Dalits took revenge on the Thevars for this murder. As planned, they stopped a Tirunelveli-bound bus and pulled out two Thevars from the bus and hacked them to death. In revenge for this double murder, the Thevars from the area murdered three Dalits. Besides, in the same day, some Thevars took deadly arms against the Dalits and killed one of them23.

23 Gangaikondan P.S. Crime No.326/1995 u/s 341,323, 506 (2) IPC.
   Gangaikondan P.S. Crime No.345/1995 u/s 341,506 (2) IPC.
   Gangaikondan P.S. Crime No.349/1995 u/s 303 IPC
   Gangaikondan P.S. Crime No.347/1995 u/s 147, 148, 302 IPC.
   Gangaikondan P.S. Crime No.348/1995 u/s 147,148, 341,427, 302 IPC.
   Gangaikondan P.S. Crime No.350/1995 u/s 147, 148, 302 IPC.
   Gangaikondan P.S. Crime No.351/1995 u/s 147,148, 341, 302 IPC.
2.3 Assault on caste leaders

During 1992, in Palayamkottai town in Tirunelveli District, the leader of the *Kamarajar Athithanar Kazhagam* (a local political party) with his associates murdered a *Thevar* alleging that the latter was harassing some *Nadars*. Consequently he was arrested and imprisoned in the Central Jail at Palayamkottai. In 1997, when he came out on bail, the *Thevers*, who were looking for a chance to avenge him, threw country bombs on his car and killed him and two others. As a leading caste leader was thus murdered, trouble erupted in the entire district. Transport services to interior places were suspended. All over the district tension lasted for about two weeks. Heavy police picketing continued for a month in sensitive areas. The *Nadars* in retaliation murdered a *Thevar* leader at Chennai in 2000, which almost brought to an end the simmering tension.\(^{24}\)

2.4 Damage to and destruction of agriculture

In November 1995, the conflict between the *Dalits* and *Thevars* in Puliangudi town and its neighbouring areas in Tirunelveli District was caused by uttering abusive slogans against each caste groups. The *Dalits* from Mela Kadayanallur destroyed the plantain grove of a *Thevar*, which resulted in a loss to the tune of Rs. 50,000. As a quick response, five *Thevars* damaged the pump set and destroyed the the paddy field of a *Dalit* during the night of the same day causing a loss to the tune of rupees one

\(^{24}\) Perumalpuram PS. Cr.No.79/97 u/s 302 IPC.
lakh. In the same night, five Dalits from a neighbouring village destroyed the vine yard, plantain and coconut groves of a Thevar, causing a grave loss of rupees two lakhs. This culminated in a series of conflicts between the two caste groups in and around Puliangudi town for six months.

2.5 Eve teasing

It is a common practice that some youngsters are crazy of eve teasing in public places such as temples, bus stands, railway stations, cinema theatres, marketplaces and the like. For the fear of further unwanted developments, many girls and women would not reveal it to others. Most of the time this has proved to be a major cause for conflict between two castes. During 1997, a Dalit girl was traveling by bus. At Keelapattam village in Tirunelveli taluk, a group of Thevar boys teased her. This resulted in great commotion and led to conflict between the Dalits and the Thevers, which lasted for more than a year. Police picket was posted in their for more than a year.

In a similar way, when a Dalit boy teased a Thevar girl in a tutorial college, a small group of Thevar boys jointly murdered the Dalit boy at Palayamkottai in December, 1998. Similarly, in Veeravanallur village in Ambasamuthiram Taluk, a caste conflict broke out for the reason that a Dalit boy teased a Thevar girl.

2.6 Rape of women from other castes

In villages, when a group of women are engaged in agricultural work, some men take advantage of their solitary moments and rape them. Many a time, due to the
stigma attached to a raped woman, such occurrences are kept secret. Some men take advantage of the poverty of women and entice them and also provided them with some economic assistances. It is found that, in such rape cases, the Dalit women outnumber their counterparts from all other castes.

In 2000, a Dalit girl from Sivanthipatti in Palayamkottai taluk of Tirunelveli District was kidnapped by a Thevar boy from the adjoining village and raped her at a far off place, which resulted in a major conflict.

2.7 Rumours

For instance, rumours spread in Sivagiri taluk of Tirunelveli District that three Thevars of Sivagiri town were murdered and that the statue of Muthuramalinga Thevar was damaged by the Rajus of Rajapalayam town on April 27, 1980. Agitated over this the Thevars of the town attacked the Rajus and their shops and looted articles to the tune of rupees ten lakhs. The shops of the Rajus remained closed for three months continuously and police pickets continued until then. 25

Some anti-social elements spread the rumor in Sivagiri that the Rajus of Rajapalayam have murdered three Thevars at Rajapalayam and also have damaged the Tevars statue at Rajapayam. The thevars of sivagiri took it seriously and violence erupted resulting in damage of properties of Rajus.

25 Sivagiri P.S. Crime No.161/1980 u/s 147,427 IPC.
Sivagiri P.S. Crime No.162/1980 u/s 147,454, 280, 427 IPC.
The loss was estimated to more than rupees 10 lakhs\textsuperscript{26}.

Similarly, rumours spread all over Tirunelveli District that, John Pandian, a Dalit leader of Devendrara Kula Velalar Federation, had been murdered by the Thevars. Consequently, in various places of the District, clashes occurred and intensified when a Dalit murdered a Thevar in Idaiyarthavanai in Alangulam police limit.

Some times rumours are wantonly spread by the perpetrators for their personal gain. For instance, an election announcement was made for the election to Sathankulam Milk Producers’ Association in December, 1990. According to records of the Association, there were 53 members in its governing body (25 of them were Dalits and 28 of them were non-Dalits). When the election process was progressing, candidates from both sides spread rumours that some of the candidates from their castes had been kidnapped and hence they sought the postponement of the election. This led to a conflict resulting in the damage of properties and the registration of many criminal cases.

2.8 Kidnapping

For instance, the Thevars and the Pillais in Vickramasingapuram village in Ambasamudram taluk of Tirunelveli District were at logger heads and ill feeling persisted between the two caste groups for a long time. The Thevars kidnapped a college student from the Pillai caste. His fate was unknown for a few days till his partially burnt body was found in a remote hill area. This led to a serious conflict

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{26} Sinagiri Crime No.161-168/80 u/s 147,427 IPC. Sinagiri Crime No.162/80 u/s 147, 454,380,427 IPC. Sinagiri Crime No.163/80 u/s 147, 380, 427 IPC.}
between these two caste groups leaving a great loss on both the sides. It took long
time to get the caste tension defused. 27.

2.9 **Illicit brewing of arrack**

The *Konars* of Sivalarkulam village in Alangulam taluk of Tirunelveli District
were manufacturing illicit arrack near Maruthamuthur, a *Nadar* dominated village in
Ambasamudram taluk of the same district. The *Nadars* destroyed the fermented wash
of the *Konars* and caused a loss to the tune of rupees three lakhs. This resulted in the
murder of a *Nadar* and triggered a conflict of alarming proportions which could be
finally quelled only by the use of fire arms by police.

During the night of August 24, 1999 five *Thevars* of Irumankulam transported
illicitly distilled arrack by a motor cycle through North Alangulam. The *Konars* of the
village stopped the vehicle and reported the matter to the police. Accordingly a police
case was registered against the *Thevars*. This resulted in an ill feeling of the *Thevars*
against the *Konars*. On August 28, 1999 nine *Thevars* of Irumankulam murdered a
*Konar* from Poigaimedu vilage and placed the dead body in the railway track at
Vadamalapuram. Subsequently on September 20, 1999 16 *Konars* of Alkondarkulam,
Nochikulam, Senthatti, North Alangulam, Thalavaipuram, Nainapuram, North Pudur,
Veeriruppu and sivalarkulam murdered a *thevar*, who is the proporitor of a brandy
shop. Afterwards on July 20, 2000 32 *thevars* of Irumankulam, committed a double
murder of sankarankoil panchayat union president and a man from Senthatti by using

27 Chinnakovilan village P.S. Crime No.239/99 u/s 147,148, 341,302 IPC.
Sankarankovil town P.S. Crime No.482/2000 u/s 147,148, 324,326, 307, 302 r/w 3, 4 of IES
Act.
knife and country made bombs at Sankarankoil south car street. On October 3, 2000 22 konars of North Alagulam Alkondarkulam, Senthetti Nochikulam and Sevalarkulam villages wayed 3 Thevar motor cyclists and inflected them with knife and attached with country made bombs near the railway gate of Puliyangudi. Out of the 3 injured Thevars, one died and two of them were badly wounded. Thus a small incident of illicit brewing of arrack took the shap of caste conflict which prevailed for more than a month from 24.8.1999 to 3.10.2000. Though a peace initiative was held by the Collector, DIG, SP, ADSP and RDO, it cast hovak in Alangulam, Thenkasi and Sankarankoil areas.  

2.10 Damage and sacrilege to statues

In July, 1995, a Dalit driver of a State transport bus chided the Thevar boys of Naduvakuruchi in Tirunelveli District for their playful walking on the road. The Thevars of Naduvakurichi armed with weapons had beaten the driver while returning. When the drivers’ compatriots heard of it, a gang of Dalits rushed to Thevars’ settlement in the night of the same day and went on a rampage. They caused damage to the statue of Muthuramalinga Thevar and retreated. The disfigurement of the Thevar statue caused furor among the Thevars. In retaliation, the Thevars damaged the statue of Dr. Ambedkar in a neighbouring township. This took a diabolic turn immediately and the ominous dimensions of caste were triggered off in several villages and towns not only in the district, but also in the whole of south Tamil Nadu.

In continuation of such senseless clashes, the statue of Dr. Ambedkar was damaged at Valliyoor town in Tirunelveli District, which also rendered the district trouble torn for a few months. In addition to this, some unknown troublemakers threw cow dung on the statue of Muthuramalinga Thevar at Thalaiyuthu. This renewed the conflict between the Dalits and the Thevars.

The statue of Dr. Ambedkar at Elangi in Thenkasi taluk was damaged by some troublemakers. The Dalits demanded the Government to provide them with a bronze statue as compensation. However, trouble broke out and spread in the whole of Thenkasi taluk. Thus statues, installed as a mark of respect, became a matter of concern and anxiety. At last it was put to an end by caging the statues on all sides with strong iron grills and making the local villagers responsible for their safety.

2.11 Drunken brawls

When the consumption of liquor exceeds a limit, the drunkards would start quarrelling with others. In November 1995, at Mela Neelithanallur village in Sankarankoil taluk of Tirunelveli District during a temple festival, an over drunken Thevar assaulted a Dalit. Consequently the temple festival had to be abruptly cancelled and in the ensuing conflict between the two caste groups, the public and private properties were damaged on a large scale, apart from causing injuries to the parties.²⁹

In Valliur, inhabited equally by the Dalits and the Konars there has been long standing enmity. On 2 July, 1999 the youth of above castes quarreled in an inebriated mood and caused bleeding injuries on both sides. This culminated into a severe conflict.

2.12   **Illegal intimacy with woman from another caste**

A Dalit building contractor from Sivanthipatti village in Palayamkottai Taluk of Tirunelveli District had illegal conduct with a Thever woman. Agitated over this, the Thevers murdered the Dalit in June 1996. This resulted in clashes between the Dalits and the Thevars.

2.13   **Mistaken identity (Transferred malice)**

One Thevar from Kansapuram Village in Ambasamudram Taluk of Tirunelveli District was a rowdy element, involved in a case of double murder of Dalits in 2003 at Pathamadai in Ambasamudram Taluk. The affected Dalits in this case planned to kill the Thevar after two years. When the Thevar came to Pathamadai avoiding a particular road where eight Dalit men were waiting for his arrival. At the same time, two other Thevars were coming on a motor cycle from Pathamadai to Kansapuram. The accused Dalit, who was waiting on road side, killed one and injured other one mistaking the motor cycle rider for the wanted Thevar. This resulted in caste violence and commotion for months together.

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30 Sivanthipatti P.S. Crime No.353/1996 u/s 302 IPC.
In response to the State banth call given by Devendra Kula Vella Sangam, the Dalits of Puliyangudi area resorted to road roko on 6 November, 1995. The agitation turned violent and seven public buses were gutted. A Thevar youth was murdered by a group of Dalits at Sankarankoil bus stand. Tension mounted when a Thevar of Thalaivankottai came to Puliyangudi for distribution of marriage invitation. He was assaulted by a group of Dalits as they felt that the Thevar is from Cholampatti village.

### 2.14 Hooliganism / Rowdyism

(Need local examples with footnote)

Some people are often keen on creating troubles that disturb peace. In one such incident, a Thevar who was riding a motor cycle assaulted a Dalit motor cyclist just because he overtook him in Thiruthangal Police station limit in Sivakasi Taluk of Virudhunagar District. The Dalits in retaliation went on a rampage that resulted in damage and destruction of property and thus led to criminal cases.

On 17.5.1998 two young Nadars were riding on separate bicycles to attend to their work in a spinning mill. At the time, two Thevar youths in a single cycle came in the opposite direction and accidentally hit on one of the Nadar cyclists. Immediately the Thevar youth assaulted both of the Nadar youth and snatched away their cycles. One village a respectable Nadar elder assisted the latter to prepare a police complaint against the Thevar youth and get their cycles back. An agitated group of Thevars of

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32 Puliyamkudi P.S. Crime No. 652/95 u/s 147, 341, 323 IPC.
Puliyamgudi P.S. Crime No. 653/95 u/s 147, 325, 341, 427 IPC
that locality cut the elder to death on the next day. This trigged the conflict between the two castes in and around the village.

### 3 RELIGIOUS CAUSE

#### 3.1 Dispute over right of pulling Temple Car

It is a customary practice among the villagers to take out the deities of Gods and Goddesses in procession through the streets of the village where the people worship. The deities may be either carried on the shoulders or placed in a car on wheels and pulled along. The Panguni festival of the Shenbagavalli Amman temple in Kovilpatti town of Thoothukudi District began on April 5, 1997 and lost for 10 days as it was in previous years in all cheerfulness. But unlike in the past, in this particular year, the festival ran into trouble on the 9th day that fell on April 13, 1997. The entire town of Kovilpatti and its surrounding areas remained tense for four days following a series of troubles. The claim put forth by the Dalits (Devendra Kula Vellalars) that they would conduct the 9th day celebration, which was usually vested with the Naickers (Kammavars) in the past.

The secretary of the Federation of Devendra Kula Vellalar Sangam in Kovilpatti taluk had led the members of his caste in order to materialize the claim. The Kammavars flatly turned down their claim and went ahead with their preparations to pull the car on the 9th day. When the Kammavars started pulling the car on that day, about 30 Devendra Kula Vellalars raised objection to the attempt of the Kammavars. They also injured a Kammavar man by beating him with a stick. They also threw

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33 Morappanadu P.S. c. no. 140/98 u/s 147, 148, 307, 324, 302 IPC
stones at a group of *Kammavars* indiscriminately. The latter responded to it in the same way and injured four *Dalits* by beating them with sticks. The problem occurred on the temple premises and spread immediately to other areas in and around the town and took four days to fall back the normalcy.  

### 3.2 Fixing flags on temple car

Inter-caste tension arose on September 9, 1977 at a festival of the *Palvannanathar Temple* at Karivalamvanthanallur in Tirunelveli District, but the police and revenue officials took timely action and prevented the incident from getting out of control. The *Aavani Thapasu* festival of the *Palvannanathar Temple* began at 4.30 a.m. on August 30, 1997 with the hoisting of flags.

The *Dalits* of Oppanaiyapuram had been playing a prominent role in pulling the temple car on the car festival day. They came to the temple in the morning of 9th September to make preliminary arrangements for pulling the car in the evening. They found a yellow flag with an *Om* mark on the top of the car. As the *Thevars’* caste flag was also in yellow colour, the *Dalits* could not tolerate this colour flag atop the car.

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34 Kovilpatti East P.S. Crime No. 186/1997 u/s 147,148,323, 336 IPC.
Kovilpatti East P.S. Crime No. 188/1997 u/s 147, 148, 323, 341 IPC.
Kovilpatti East P.S. Crime No. 189/1997 u/s 147, 148, 323, 427 IPC.
Kovilpatti East P.S. Crime No. 190/1997 u/s 147, 14e8, 323,436, 452 IPC.
Kovilpatti East P.S. Crime No. 191/1997 u/s 147, 148, 427 IPC.
Kovilpatti East P.S. Crime No. 192/1997 u/s 147, 148, 324, 427 IPC.
Kovilpatti East P.S. Crime No. 193/1997 u/s 147, 148, 427 IPC.
Kovilpatti East P.S. Crime No. 194/1997 u/s 147, 148, 427, 435 IPC.
Kovilpatti East P.S. Crime No. 201/1997 u/s 147, 148, 436, 506 (2) IPC.
Kovilpatti East P.S. Crime No. 208/1997 u/s 147, 148, 427, 506 (2) IPC.
Kovilpatti East P.S. Crime No. 214/1997 u/s 147, 148, 427, 506 (2) IPC.
Kovilpatti East P.S. Crime No. 232/1997 u/s 302 IPC.
Kovilpatti East P.S. Crime No. 233/1997 u/s 302 IPC.
Instead they persuaded the Executive Officer of the temple to remove it. When some Thevars questioned the Executive Officer as to why he had removed the flag, he said that there had been no convention of flying a flag atop the car. Though the Thevars did not make an issue with respect to this action, they felt humiliated by the instigation of the Dalits.

The car procession began around 5.00 p.m. As the boys of the local Government High School participated in large numbers in the procession, the car was pulled along the streets and brought to halt much earlier. However, when the car was approaching its halting place, a few young Dalits raised slogans in praise of their political party leader, Dr. Krishnaswamy. The youths of the Thevar community responded by raising slogans in praise of their organization, Thevar Peravai. As a sequence of this, on the birthday of the Thevars’ popular leader, Muthuramalinga Thevar, a group of Dalit students were shouting slogans against the Thevars and, as a result, they were assaulted by two Thevars. As a retaliatory measure, they attacked five Thevars of Karivalamvanthanallur while they were returning home in the next night after seeing a film. In another incident, as a retaliatory measure, a group of Thevars attacked a Dalit of Kuvalaikanni village while he was going to a shop.

In continuation of this chain of events, two Dalits were arrested. About 500 Dalit armed men and women from a neighbouring village obstructed police vehicles and threatened the police personnel with dire consequences, if they do not release the two Dalits. However, the police raided their village and arrested 11 Dalits.  

3.3 Exhibiting Photos of caste leaders and singing caste songs during temple festival

In January, 2004, at Kasimajorpuram village in Thenkasi taluk of Tirunelveli District, the Kurtralanangai Amman temple festivals commenced. The fifth day was the day of Thevars' mandagapadi, i.e., the turn of the Thevars to make offerings to Goddess. On that day the Thevars exhibited the photo of their leader, Muthuramalinga Thevar. In spite of the objection raised by all other castes, the Thevars refused to remove it. However they suggested the Mooppanars to exhibit the photo of their caste leader while celebrating the festival on the sixth day. As it was turned down by the latter, the former on one side and all the other opposing castes on other side quarreled with each other. This turned out to be a violent conflict and several criminal cases were registered against the conflicting groups. Police pickets were posted for more than a month to restore peace. Though the villagers were advised strictly not to exhibit the photos of their caste leaders during the festival time, it is observed more in breach. As a matter of fact, it is a possible threat to peace and tranquility even now.

In another occasion, during a temple festival on August 12, 1997 at Pananonkulam near Muntradaippu a song in praise of the Muthuramalinga Thevar was sung by a group of folk dancers. Immediately a Konar objected this and also stopped it. As a result of this, on August 20, 1997 five Thevars trespassed into the Konar’s house and murdered him in anguish.\(^{36}\)

\(^{36}\) Nanguneri P.S. Crime No.359/1997 u/s 324, 302 IPC.
3.4 Pasting of posters affecting the sentiments of others

One party functionary in Ottapidaram in Thoothukudi District had put up colourful posters depicting their party’s leader as the three major Goddesses of the Hindu Pantheon, Saraswathy, Lakhsmi and Parvathy. The party workers in Thoothukudi found yet another way to exalt their leader by putting up posters portraying their leader as Mother Virgin Mary. This hurt the religious sentiment of the Parathavas and they held the Nadars responsible for it. Both caste groups attacked each other and criminal cases were reported to police. The conflict prolonged for more than six months.

4. CIVIL CAUSES

4.1 Encroachment of Government land for agricultural purpose

Poramboke lands (Government lands) available in the villages are sometimes encroached by villagers illegally and used for various purposes. Frequently disputes arise over this issue. For instance, there is a pond in Kuppaikurichi village in Tirunelveli District. The Thevars live on the eastern side of the pond while the Dalits live on the northern side. Till 1999, the Thevars cultivated avari leaves in a dry pond which got them good revenue. Envious of this, the Dalits tried to plough the pond for cultivation, which resulted in clash between them and the Thevars. Timely police action prevented a major clash and now all castes have been prohibited from cultivating inside the pond. As a preventive measure, the police picketing continued for about a month.
4.2 Fishing in village ponds and rivers

The Thevars seem to have a tendency among that they want to enjoy the benefits of Government lands and water reservoirs more than other caste people enjoy those benefits. If the Dalits make any attempt to enjoy such benefits, the Thevars get agitated. For instance, in December 1997, a Dalit who was fishing in the Chitharu, a small river, near Seevalaperi village in Tirunelveli District was murdered by the Thevers. In retaliation, the Dalits joined together and damaged the houses and belongings of the Thevars of Madathupatti village of the same district. Due to this, 36 Thevar families left the village once for all and thereafter started living in the adjoining village. In the conflict that followed, a Thevar was murdered and a few Thevars were injured. 37

4.3 Dispute over using the water shed

On 10 June, 1982 a Thevar women drew water form a well in Muslim area. The Muslims objected it. About 1000 Muslims and Dalits of Puliyankudi indulged in violence. On 3 July, 1987 a Dalit was watering his cattle. This was opposed by a Thever. 38 Consequently there was a conflict between the Dalit and the Thevars.

37 Seevalaperi P.S. Crime No.178/1997 u/s 302 IPC.
Seevalaperi P.S. Crime No.179/1997 u/s 324 IPC.
Seevalaperi P.S. Crime No.180/1997 u/s 147, 148, 432, 436, 457, 380 IPC.
Seevalaperi P.S. Crime No.181/1997 u/s 147, 148, 323, 324, 307, 506 (2) IPC.
Seevalaperi P.S. Crime No.182/1997 u/s 147, 148, 302 IPC.

38 Puliyankudi P.S. Crime No.652/95, u/s 147, 341, 323 IPC.
Puliyankudi P.S. Crime No.653/95, u/s 147, 341, 423 IPC.
4.4. Sharing of Tank water for irrigation

There was a dispute between Konars and the Dalits of Valliur over sharing of tank water for agriculture. Consequently a Konar was assaulted by three dalits on April 2, 1995. As a retaliatory measure, seven Konars attacked a Dalit and destroyed the plantain grove besides setting a haystack in fire. All there culminated into murder of a Dalit. 39

5. POLITICAL CAUSES

5.1 Naming the public undertakings after caste leaders

If any wanton damage to the statue of a caste-leader is caused, especially to a popular and powerful leader of the Thevar caste, it could be disastrous to the State. It could also be the case if any public undertaking is named after a leader of any minority caste. When the State Government wanted to honour the memory of the late communist leader, Jeevanandam, by naming its transport corporation in Kanyakumari District after him, a strong opposition came from the Nadars, a majority caste in the district. The leaders of the Nadar caste wanted the corporation to be named after Marshal Nesamany who was considered to be the father of Kanyakumari District. Owing to heavy pressure, the Government dropped the idea of naming the corporation after Jeevanandam in order to meet the demand of the followers of Marshal Nesamany.

Nesamany. However, later it honoured the Communist leader by establishing another transport corporation named after him elsewhere in the State.

In 1997 the Government did not think that it would face a similar problem when it established a transport corporation at Virudhunagar (headquarters of Virudhunagar District) and named it after Veeran Sundaralingam, a Dalit who was a commander of the army of Veerapandiya Kattabomman (a local chieftain lived in the late 19th Century). As soon as the Government set up the transport corporation in May, 1997 the whole of south Tamil Nadu plunged into a bout of turmoil. The Thevars thought it was too great a bounty of the Government to the Dalits and so they rose in revolt. The miscreants among them threw stones on the corporation buses. Following this incident, the Thevar peravai called for a total banth. However, a Dalit man kept his shop open in Srivaikundam.

The Devendra Kula Vellalars welcomed the Government’s gesture as a great honour to their caste and to express their happiness. They decorated the buses of the corporation and received the crew of the buses with shawls. It so happened that the preventive arrest of the Dalit leader Dr. Krishnasamy at Theni in the night of 2 May, 1997 coincided with this event. Dr. Krishnasamy had to come to Theni earlier in the day on his way to Kandamanoor where the Devendra Kula Vellalars and the Kallars

41 Puliyankudi P.S. Crime No.652/95, u/s 147, 341, 323 IPC.

Puliyankudi P.S. Crime No.653/95, u/s 147, 341, 423 IPC.
(a sect of Mukkulathor) had clashed earlier. However, the district administration allowed a Thevar caste MLA earlier to visit the village. The Devendra Kula Vellalars had a twin problem: one is that the refusal of permission to Dr. Krishnasamy to proceed to Kandamanur and the other one is the opposition by the Thevars for the establishment of a transport corporation in the name of the Dalit hero. Kovilpatti was one of the most affected towns by the violence over these twin problems of the Dalits. The town remained trouble–torn and grim for 14 days from May 2, 1997. Though stone-throwing on buses and arson were the major disturbances on most of these days, there were two murders on May 8, 1997. Some unidentified men stabbed one shopkeeper and a beggar to death.

In this series of events, a group of Dalits hurled a country bomb on police, in which six police personnel including a DIG of Police were injured. In this incident, an unidentified man got mutilated.

5.2 Dalits contesting and winning elections

When Parliament enacted the Constitution (73rd) Amendment Act 1993, it was expected to bring about participatory democracy at the grass root level as a major shift in the process of development. It provided for statutory resolution to elect women for local bodies, besides the Scheduled Caste (Dalits) and Scheduled Tribes. When the Tamil Nadu Panchayats Act, 1994, was passed, Caste-Hindus challenged the reservation of elected offices in local bodies for the Dalits. In the election, the Dalits were prevented from nomination where panchayat presidencies had been reserved for them. In five such villages, election could not be held for the full 5 year term

\[42\] Kovilpatti West P.S. Crime .No. 236/1997 u/s 302 IPC
(1996 to 2001). The elections were held in two of them in 2002, but the elected panchayat presidents resigned within six days of assuming charge under pressure from the Caste-Hindus.  

When elections for the panchayats were declared in 1996, the Dalits were intimidated and prohibited from even filing their nominations. Nominations filed by three Dalits for the post of Melavalavu panchayat and nomination filed by a Dalit for the post of Union Council Member on September 10, 1996 had to be withdrawn because of the threat from the Caste-Hindus. But in 1997, the Caste-Hindu hostility led to the massacre of six Dalits, including the president of Melavalavu panchayat in Madurai District. This resulted in violence and caste clashes spread over several months. One Caste-Hindu Panchayat President who was sympathetic to the Dalits was hacked to death in Coimbatore District. In the Pappapatty Panchayat in Madurai District, the Dalit-Caste-Hindu hostility led to the resignation of the elected Dalit panchayat president for the fear of atrocities at the hands of the Thevars.

5.3 Caste processions

Dr. Krishnasamy, leader of a political party was coming in procession after filing nomination at Suthamalli. The procession turned to be unruly because of the crude behaviour of the Dalit participants and their attempt to damage the houses and shops of the Thevars. When they became violent, they gutted the houses and killed the cattle of the Thevars. The Thevars in retaliation damaged the houses of the Dalits.

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43 Front line, May 24, 2002.
44 Front line, June 25, 1997.
45 Front line, April 12, 1997.
Suthamalli P.S. Crime No. 212/1998 u/s 438 IPC.