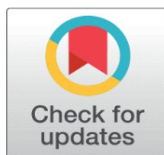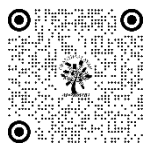# TRACING THE EVOLUTION OF CASTE IN INDIA AND TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

Caste is a configuration of social stratification, through which communities are divided by numerous endogamous hereditary groups called 'Jatis'. Caste principally operates on descent and hereditary. And its characteristics and features are determined by the individual's birth. Caste stratifications in India are mainly administered in marriage, employment, housing, and general social interaction. These are reinforced through socioeconomic oppression, the threat of social exclusion, and physical violence. Many sociologists, orientalists, anthropologists, and historians have extensively studied the Indian caste system. This article tries to trace the evolution of caste in India and Tamil Nadu during different periods. It discusses how caste evolved from the ancient period and how it becomes rigid in the kings' period and how it functions along with politics in modern times.

Keywords: Caste, Brahmin, Kings, Ambedkar, Constitution

1. INTRODUCTION

Ghurye observes the caste system as a Brahmanic child of the Indo-Aryan culture, comprised in the land of the Ganges and the Jamna and hence transferred to other parts of the country (1991). Risley (1999) points out that the caste system came into existence as a result of the clash between cultures and the contact of races. He says that the Aryans as conquerors approached India and placed themselves as a dominant race over the non-Aryans. And the irregular mixture between races in later stages evolved as the caste system. Ketkar (1909) identifies the origin of caste emanated from early tribes and the psychologically detrimental tendencies of human beings. Nesfield (1885) observes caste as an outcome of the occupational segmentation of the Hindu Society. On the contrary, Ambedkar (2013) argues that the definitions of castes submitted by Risley (1999), Nesfield (1885), and Ketkar (1909) as deficient or imprecise by themselves. He refutes that all these scholars have neglected to understand the fundamental mechanism of the caste. Ambedkar believed that the origin of caste is synonymous with the origin of the mechanism for endogamy. He affirms that the patriarch of the institution of caste could be Brahmins who espoused severe endogamous matrimonial regime, leading other groups to do similar to imitate this self-proclaimed elite. Morris (1950) observes caste as a genetic and an endogamous phenomenon, which regulates social communication. Further caste is graded through rank which has a gathering or administering body that regulates its internal concerns. Scholars have different perspectives on defining caste.

To understand how caste functions in society, the observations of Human rights organizations will be significant. Reports submitted by 'The Centre for Human & Global Justice' to the UN. The committee defines caste as follows. Caste is based on descent and hereditary, while its features are determined by one's birth into a particular caste—irrespective of the faith practiced by the individual. Caste denotes a traditional system of rigid social construction into ranked groups defined by ancestry and profession. Caste divisions in India are governed by housing, wedding, employment, and common social interaction. They are reinforced through the practice and intimidation of social ostracism, economic obstruction, and physical brutality (Centre for Human & Global Justice, 2007).

2. CASTE IN ANCIENT INDIA

Caste was prominently studied from three perspectives Indological, socio-anthropological, and sociological. Ghurye (1991) describes the existence of caste in ancient India in four preliminary periods: The Vedic period, the post-Vedic period, the period of Dharma-shastra, modern period. The Vedic period ending about B.C 600 holds the literary data of Vedic Samhitas and Brahmanas. The post-Vedic period extends up to the third century of the Christian era. In this period, the caste system and practices could be studied from three prominent pieces of literature: the sacred law of Aryans provides the orthodox practices of caste; the epics describe the contemporary practices, and the Buddhist literature offers a glimpse of the caste institution and the rebel against the system. The period of Dharma-shastra is assumed to end around the tenth and eleventh century A.D.

Further, Ghurye (1991) testifies that this age was accountable for the intensification of the principal promoters of social ideals like Manu, Yajnalvalkya, and Vishnu. The modern period denotes the beginning of the nineteenth century. Here, the customs and beliefs of contemporary Hindus are fixed and classified by the writers of this period. Ghurye asserts that the early representation of varna can be found in Purusha sukta. It is a verse in the ancient Sanskrit literature, Rig Veda. Scholars observe that varna denotes the color by which their members of classes are supposed to be stratified. Ram (1999) asserts that the Brahmana, Kshatriya, and Vaishya are the three prominent castes divisions that the society of the Rig Veda principally acknowledged. Ghurye affirms that the Shudra caste didn't exist in the the initial period of Rig Veda. Kamble (1979) observes that the caste system was prolifically developed during this period. And its structure was made inflexible, leading to several social barriers. Ram declares the later stages of the Vedic period—the end of the Rig Vedic period, as the Brahminical period. During this period, the hierarchical system of four varnas was firmly established   Caste during Kings Period

During the period of kings, the ramification of the caste system can be strongly witnessed. Ghurye (1991) observes the functions of the varna system in kings' administration. He contends that the profound duty of kings is to supervise whether every community follows their caste-based rules and regulations. A strong casteist society was functioning full-fledged during this period. However, this long-existing scenario was reversed during the Mauryan dynasty. This empire was a landmark in the history of the caste system in India. Because it endeavored to obliterate the caste system. The two imperative rulers in the Maurya period responsible for this anti-caste movement were Chandragupta Maurya (322 BC-298 BC) and Ashoka (273 to 233 BC). Ambedkar (2016) affirms that the Mauryan Empire is not just focused on the liberation of the Shudra caste. But it has struggled for the liberation of the nation itself. He asserts that the Mauryan period was an era during which chaturvarnya (varna system) was eradicated. And the Shudras who represent the working-class population became the rulers of the country.

Unfortunately, the Mauryan period soon encountered descend, when the Sunga dynasty established power. Ram (1999) describes that the last Mauryan leader was assassinated by his Brahmin commander-in-chief, Pushyamitra Sunga in 184 BC. During this time, Brahmanism and the caste system gained endurance and thus, began to spread once again. It is noticeable in the successive periods of Kanvas and Harsh Vardhana. In the medieval period, there were two two prominent phases: the Rajput period, 700 to 1200 AD, and the Muslim period, 1200 to 1757 AD. During the Rajput period, the caste system became rigid. Brahmins began to solidify the caste bonds. In the Muslim period, there is not much transformation. As Muslims were not part of Hinduism, they let Brahmins enforce their hegemony on Hindus. Caste during British rule

The British brought with them a casteless culture and literature full of views on individual liberation. Ghurye (1991) observes that during British rule, the advent of modern industrial organization and the expansion of industrial cities have let massive people accumulate in cities of mingled populations. This essentially kept them away from the influence of their homes and unnoticed by their caste or village people. The British rule didn't completely abolish caste. The

invasion of the new culture and industrialization has gradually contributed to the reduction of the prolonged intensity of caste pre-eminence. The British administration passed a few Acts to create socioeconomic reforms. Imperative among them are The Caste Disabilities Removal Act of 1850, The Widow Remarriage Act-1856 and The Special Marriage Act-1872. Though separate amendments are made by the British government to deal with the practices of caste, the issues related to caste didn't reduce. The actions of the British Government in resolving caste issues were dictated to management and not with an intention to dilute the solidity of caste. Ghurye, observes that the British Government was ineffectual to set aside the customs of a caste in matters of civil law unless they were opposed to public policy.

3. CASTE IN THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Though British rule created changes in culture, occupation, education, and enactment of the law, its involvement in the vision of caste obliteration is insignificant. It is essential to account for the important leaders who revolted against caste discrimination in the pre-independence period. Notable among them were, Jyotirao Phule, Gopal Ganesh, and B.R. Ambedkar. The preliminary aspect of Phule's revolt was to liberate the depressed caste people from Brahminical supremacy. Phule is credited to introduce the Marathi word Dalit, which means broken or crushed. It represents the people who were outside the traditional varna system. Phule's revolt is widely perceived as one of the successful anti-caste movements in India. It serves as the reason for diverse political upliftment among the depressed class. The Dalit Panthers' political party during the 1970s was much notable among them. The doctrine of Dalit Panther was also strongly influenced by the notions of Ambedkar. Contrary to Ambedkar, M.K Gandhi incorporated the issues of untouchability in his national movement. He represented the depressed class as Harijans. The most prominent Dalit (Depressed class) movement was commenced by Ambedkar during the 1920s and 1930s. He campaigned for the social, cultural, and political rights of Dalits. Ambedkar believed that economic and political advancement could liberate the depressed class from caste dominance. He strictly insisted the depressed class people achieve political power. And this serves as the reason for his constant struggle for a separate electorate for the oppressed. A reading of the Simon commission would shed light on this understanding. In 1927, the British government appointed a seven-member commission headed by John Simon. Despite all recommendations from various depressed class associations, the Simon commission rejected the idea of separate electorates. But the commission declared to retain the concept of reserving seats. In the second round table conference organized after a few months both Ambedkar and Gandhi participated. In this conference, Gandhi was very particular to record his disinterest toward separate electorates. Due to differences of opinion, the conference failed to consider minority rights. Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, who chaired the committee, informed to adjudicate on the situation later. Then, based on the findings of the Indian franchise committee and Lothian committee, MacDonald, announced the communal award on August 1932. This communal award acknowledged separate electorates, with an inclusion of the depressed classes granting seventy-eight reserved seats. The long-awaited aspiration of the 'Depressed class association' and Ambedkar was almost achieved. But, Gandhi was against the communal award. Thus, as a manner of opposition, he declared a hunger strike unto death. The ramification of this strike turned into a national concern and thus, pressured Ambedkar to agree and make alterations in the communal award suitable to Gandhi. The agreement replaced separate electorates for the depressed class with joint electorates with caste Hindu majority.

The term scheduled caste mainly appeared in the pre-Independence period as a need for the reservation process. The provisions of the Government of India Act 1935 incorporated reservation seats for the depressed classes and this Act is the reason behind the coinage of the term 'scheduled caste'. The scheduled caste generally represents the people of the low social order who were: the depressed class in the pre-Independence period, untouchables in the previous period, panchamas or chandalas, or Shudras in the ancient period.

4. CASTE AND INDIAN CONSTITUTION

The constitution to address the caste disabilities endeavored to provide political, economic, and social justice to all its citizens. It has assured every to provide every citizen with equality in status and opportunity. Various provisions of the constitutions that are specifically related to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes are as follows: Article 15, forbids any discrimination on terms of race, caste, religion sex or place of birth. Article 15 (4) permits special provisions for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Article 29 (2) ensures education for SC/ST which has been denied for them for centuries by the caste elites. One

of the most imperative provisions in the law which directly insists eradication of caste is Article 17. It states the abolition of untouchability, making it a prohibited practice and a punishable offense. Grinsell (2010) observes that India for about sixty years through a policy called reservations has challenged to terminate its ancient caste system through provisions of quotas. It guarantees that traditionally underprivileged groups achieve political space, access to education, and opportunities for government employment. The article related to reservation for SC/ST in state assemblies and the house of people are seen in Part XVI- Special provisions relating to certain classes. The prominent features of Article 330 speak about provisions for the reservation of seats for SCs and ST"s in the House of People. Article 332 allows provisions for the preservation of seats in state assemblies for SC"s and ST"s. The most essential and obligatory law enactments in the Indian constitution are the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955. It deals with the provisions of punishment for preaching and practicing of untouchability. The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (prevention of atrocities) Act, 1989 helps in preventing atrocities against SC/ST. The constitution has provided various rights to the depressed classes to eradicate various forms of caste discrimination.

Caste in present socio-political realms

Gupta (2000) asserts that India's struggle against British colonialism was directed by Congress. And relatively, this party also controlled the government uninterruptedly for twenty years after independence. Also, in the post-Independence period, the ideologies of Ambedkar have powerfully influenced scheduled-caste (Dalits) participation in politics. As a result of the Dalit movement in the political arena, various political associations have been formed. Scholars observe that no Dalit leader after Ambedkar focused on the economic issues of scheduled caste.

However, while considering the Vedic, post-Vedic, and the British period, the present developments can be seen as positive in dealing with caste-related problems. Nevertheless, such observations could be superficial, because to date the heinous caste system and untouchability are persisting in the contemporary situation. It still has its impact on the social, economic, and political life of the people. It is essential to collect the incidents based on caste violence and Dalit resistance, to comprehend the contemporary status and characteristics of caste supremacy. India is unsuccessful to protect Dalits from discrimination. It is ineffective to sincerely employ constitutional and legislative laws (CERD, 2007). The following cases and incidents would substantiate the proclamation.

Bant Singh, a Dalit agricultural worker in Jabar village, Punjab. His minor daughter was raped by a group of dominant caste village men. He dared to take the perpetrator to the court for which he was brutally ambushed and left almost to death. Yet, he retaliated against the dominant caste atrocities by turning himself into a revolutionary singer. His songs focus on demanding justice for Dalits and revealing the misconduct of landlords (Ashraf, 2017). In Bihar, the conditions of casteism seem even more severe. There exists a separate militant group. They are enforced by the dominant landlords to deal with the Dalit agricultural laborers and the CPI (M-L) who supports the laborers. The Ranveer-Sena incidents of Bihar are like a caste battle, between Ranveer-Sena, Dalits, and CPI(M-L). In the cruel events, twenty-one Dalits were massacred by the Ranveer-Sena. In Karamchedu, Andhra in 1991, eight scheduled caste men were slayed and by the Reddy and Telaga caste groups belonging to the Tsundur villages in the Guntur district. In 1997 a homicidal incident occurred at Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar, Dalit populated urban colony in Bombay. The police constables opened fire on pedestrians in front of the colony and s. The firing lasted for ten to fifteen minutes and killed almost ten people and many were injured. The Ramabai incident led to significant unrest throughout the state of Maharashtra, including rioting and social boycotts by Dalits protestors (Narula, 1999).

Similar to the previous occurrence, the Muthanga incident in Kerala, refers to an event of police firing on the Adivasis (Dalits) in the Muthanga village of Wayanad district. The incident ended with many deaths and causalities. Another infamous caste violence was the Khairlanji massacre which also raises the question of the affirmative constitutional policies and legislative provisions promised for the protection of the scheduled caste (Dalits). Four members of the Bhotmange family, belonging to the scheduled caste (Dalits) community were raped and assassinated by members of a politically dominant caste (Roy, 2014). The incident become sensational thus it has drawn the attention of of social justice institutions like BARTI (Babasaheb Ambedkar Research and Training Institute) and Centre for Equity and Social Justice (YASHADA) They conducted a commissioned study on the issue. Gupta (2005) argues that caste and politics are interconnected, but the relationships were manifested differently at diverse periods. The incident has raised too many allegations and finally resulted in massive protests in Maharashtra. In 2006 almost over four thousand

scheduled caste citizens gathered and protested at the Azad Maidan and in the nearby district of Chandrapur. The Khairlanji murders have influenced many scholars to study the socio-political and cultural phenomenon behind the issue.

It is essential to observe that the outcome of the caste—which proposes the theory of one dominance over the other, reaches its peak as caste violence and massacre. In the contemporary scenario, caste develops into various dimensions thus it becomes a challenge. Thus, the origin of caste in India can be summarized as Caste evolved during the Vedic period and its origins can be found in the Vedic literature and epics. Caste thus tuned more stringent as a penal system in society during this period. It successfully establishes its dominance in the Kings period. Though many supported the practices of caste, rulers like Ashoka practiced Buddhism and eradicated the caste system. Not too long, till the Sunga dynasty takes over the regime with the hegemony of Brahmins. The strength of caste was reduced in the British period, but not completely abolished. In the pre-Independence period, various movements were run by M.K Gandhi and Ambedkar, and other social justice reformers. In post-Independence, despite constitutional provisions and various socio-political struggles, caste still exists in all spheres of India.

5. RISE AND GROWTH OF CASTE SYSTEM IN TAMIL NADU

Caste representations in the Sangam Literature The most prominent literature of the Sangam age is Tholkappiam, Aganaanuru, Purananuru, Kurunthogai, Madurai Kanji, Tirumurugarrupadai, Ettutogai, Padinenkilkanakku. Beginning with Madurai Kanchi. Here, reference to social structure could be identical in Madurai Kanchi literature. The literature shows a fivefold classification of social structure which is opposite to the usual Vedic structure of caste. The classifications are Kurinchi, Mulllai, Marudam, Neithal, and Pallai. People who are lived in these topographies performed varied occupations. And they are named kudi (classes). This social order of categorization differs from the traditional Aryan structure of the caste system.   Because Vedic caste structure is represented as a fourfold classification and Madurai Kanchi of Sangam literature puts forth a fivefold classification. The most crucial understanding in this fivefold classification is the hierarchical supremacy established in the Vedic theory of caste was absent. The classification here functions in horizontal order and not in vertical order. The vertical structure establishes the dominance of one order over the other, in a well précised and structured manner. This is what Ambedkar (2013) defined as structured inequality or graded inequalities. This vertical hierarchy seems to be the integral component of the Vedic varna system. The indigenous fivefold classification stringently challenges the Vedic varna structure in liberating the inequalities and pre-eminence in its functionality.

In continuance with this observance, the next seems to be Purananuru, it classifies the social structure of Tamil society into four different kudis (classes), they are Tudiar, Panar, Parayar and Kadambar. Moreover, it is just a stratification of social group, rather there are no glimpses of Aryan caste hierarchical structure observed in this classification. However, Purananuru provides special considerations and hierarchical favoritism to Brahmins. Pillay (2007) affirms that Purananuru literature accorded a high position to Brahmins. Also, kings seem to patronize Brahmins by bestowing gifts of land to them. In Purananuru, it is also referred that those who cause harm to Brahmin are sinners. Proceeding to another ancient and prominent Tamil literature, Tholkappiam. It has a social stratification classified into four classes, Andhanar (Brahmins), Arasar (kings) Vanigar (merchants) and Vellalar (peasants).   This classification has direct similarities with the traditional Vedic varna structure which divides people as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, vaishyas, and shudras. Scholars affirm the similarities in both the fourfold classifications. Pillay argues that Tholkappiam gives greater prominence to the Aryans and the varna-based caste. He argues that the Vedic caste system practiced strict endogamous (marrying within caste) culture—through which Aryans sustained resistance over racial superiority and mixture.

Thus, Tholkappiar's pattern of stratification finds it difficult to connect with the context as there was intermarriage practice existed between kings (arasar) and peasants (vellalar) during early periods in Tamil country. Further, Pillay (2007) affirms that intermarriage from kings to peasants was imaginable without restriction, based on the narrowness of sub creeds. Further, there are even references to caste discrimination in other Sangam literature. In Purananuru, Pulaiyar (an alternative term to Parayar) are referred to as drummers and their nature of birth are represented as low born. There are even references to hierarchical favoritism towards Brahmins found in the literature Tirumurukatrupadai, which refers to Brahmins as the messenger of society (Pillay, 2007). Thaper (1966) clarifies that early Tamil literature gives no evidence of caste system in Tamil Nadu. But the incursion of the Aryan authority of caste and the expansion of more intricate political and economic structures produced a caste system, in some ways more

rigid than in the North. Pillay (2007) concludes that the Aryan pattern of caste came before the time of Tholkappiam in the Tamil country.

6. GROWTH OF CASTE DURING KINGS PERIOD (PALLAVAS, CHOLAS & LATER PANDYAS)

Scholars affirm that the early period in Tamil country has witnessed an invasion of Buddhism or Jainism. But the regimes of the Buddhist invaders haven't sustained too long till the rise of the Pallava dynasty. Scholars, also affirm that this period had provoked a situation of uncertainty in Tamil country. According to Tulajappa (2014) the early invaders are called Kalabhras. They are either Buddhists or Jains, who opposed the Hindu faith and varna dharma system. But their descent was positive for Hinduism, especially Brahmanism. Pillay (2007) affirms that in the Pallava period, the Mahendravarman is the one who strongly insisted to preserve the varna system. If the varna structure is strictly followed among the kings in this period. Then it is understandable that Aryan culture and caste system must have flourished in Tamil country in this period. Pillay asserts that the Pallavas are the harbingers of Aryanism in the Tamil land. Tulajappa (2014) observes that during the period of imperial Pallavas the kings and chiefs extended a reception to Brahmins and settled them in separate villages, which were called agraharas. The agraharam lands are gifted near the temples. And the early settlers of Brahmins imposed the varna system rapidly in the administration of the temple. The same began to divide the temple workers in terms of caste. The Pallava rulers were later said to have enforced special rules for all castes and order, which resulted in the emergence of sub caste. The magnitude of the caste system is retained and emphasized even the forthcoming period. During the age of imperial Cholas, the caste system became rigid. This was primarily because of the increased importance given to temples. Pillay (2007) contends that temples and societies of the medieval period enforced caste regulations rigorously. Pillay affirms temple authorities became the makers of rules and regulations to control the life of the people. The Brahmins thus became dominant, not only as temple priests and leaders of the religious observances, but also as ministers, officers, and Senapati of the governments. Pillay asserts that during the period of Cholas, caste regulations with respect to temples became rigorous and untouchability flourished in Tami land. The later Cholas and Pandya periods observed strong endurance of caste discrimination, which treated many indigenous lower social order people in heinous manner.

7. CASTE IN THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

The magnitude of caste dominance during the kings' period in Tamil Nadu, has predominantly resulted in various revolts in later periods. The nineteenth and the twentieth century in Tamil Nadu was an era of social and religious reforms.   The revival of Buddhism in the South was started by the 'Maha Bodhi Society of India in Madras. The early Dalits leader responsible for this initiative was Iyothee Thass and his two associates, G. Appadurai and P. Lakshmi Narasu. Iyothee Thass was perceived to be an imperative rationalist who insisted Buddhism was an imperative solution   to untouchability during this period. His principal understanding of the caste system has strong similarities with anti-caste thinkers like Ambedkar and Phule. Iyothee Thass was the first person to access print media for the upliftment of the untouchables. He introduced   a journal named 'Oru Paisa Tamizhan' to disseminate the socio-justice message. Along   another imperative social activist who worked on the same cause was Rettaimalai Srinivasan. It is essential to observe that Rettaimalai Srinivasan was one of the members who traveled with Ambedkar to participate in the round table conferences held in London. Further, Rao Bahadur and N. Sivaraj were also essentially notable leaders who fought for the socio-political upliftment of the untouchables. Inspired by Iyothee Thass, Appadurai founded the 'South India Buddhist Association' at Kolar Goldfields in 1927. As a result of the Buddhist propaganda, many Dalits converted to Buddhism. (Balaji, 2017). This period further recorded strong retaliation against Brahminism. The non-Brahmin movement and the Dravidian movement are the most indispensable occurrence in this period.

At this time, it is very essential to examine that the congress which planned to impose its politics in the South has boycotted the election. The same has further favored to Justice party's triumph. As Scholars affirm, the Justice party didn't attempt to represent the masses in its politics, also there seem internal rivalries between members of the Justice party in terms of caste, which was observed to pave way for its descent later. It is well known how the unity of non-Brahmins loosens after they gained power in Tamil Nadu. It is because of the competition within dominant castes for acquiring power and office. The Justice Party was defeated and most of the leaders of the Justice Party have lost hope.

There were other imperative non-Brahmin initiatives put forth by leaders like E.V. Ramasamy (popularly known as Periyar). The major objectives of Periyar's self-respect movement are to oppose the social structure of the varna system, promoting brotherhood, abolishing untouchability, and preventing new temples and Vedic schools. Periyar believed temples will make caste rigid. The self-respect movement attempted to replace the Hindu religion with rationalism. The monopoly of power and influence accessed by the Brahmins was diminished due to Periyar's unvarying propaganda against orthodoxy. The Justice Party was then taken over by Periyar, subsequently, it emerged into a Tamil Movement. The Justice party headed by Periyar turned as a forerunner to Dravidian politics in Tamil Nadu. In 1944, this was further renamed Dravida Kazhagam. From then the self-respect movement and Dravida Kazhagam operated on the single ideological framework. They put forth numerous anti-caste movements in this period. But soon the Dravida Kazhagam was separated and one amongst its rise into a new political association.

8. CASTE AND POLITICS IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

The congress achieved popularity throughout India during the freedom struggle. It acclaimed power once again in Tamil Nadu, which assisted Rajagopalachari as chief minister for the second time between 1952 and 1954. During his period, he was very definite in amending policies like Kulakalvi Thittam (education through caste-based profession). Palani (2004) observes that this is one such casteist practice of education from the ancient period, which maintains every child's education with their parent's ancestry job. Indeed it's an indirect policy of imposing the varna structure into society. He observes that Rajagopalachari during his governance let the students study school classes in the morning and traditional jobs from parents in the afternoon. He attempted to implement Kula Kalvi Thittam in society. As a political consequence, he resigned from office in 1954 and Kamaraj turned chief minister during the same period. After the Kamaraj period of governance, later in 1967, the DMK came to power in Tamil Nadu under the Chief Ministership of C.N. Annadurai. It's imperative to observe that DMK abandoned its ideological visions. As Beteille (2010) argues that despite all political and social rivalries between Brahmin and Dravidian parties, there seems to be an emergence of a relationship between both. Because in 1962 and 1967 Brahmins supported the DMK despite its non-Brahmin background. In turn, the DMK renounced its anti-Brahmin notions and campaigned actively for Brahmin support.

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam under the chief ministership of Karunanidhi ruled Tamil Nadu up to 1975. After that in 1977 Tamil Nadu legislative assembly election, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) came to power. From 1977 to 1987 Tamil Nadu was ruled by the A1ADMK under the chief ministership of M.G. Ramachandran. In all these political regimes by various leaders, casteism doesn't seem to deteriorate, whereas a new phenomenon of caste politics has emerged (Palani, 2004). Beteille (2010) clarifies that significance is given to the caste which is prevailing in a particular place, by the inclusion of election candidates from the dominant caste And favoring politics to the particular caste, it seems the politicians sustained their triumph and power in the political field. She further contends, the most significant a consequence of the non-Brahmin movement was the beginning of communal or caste idioms into Tamil Nadu politics. Having lost their reliance on the congress party Dalits foregathered to Dravidian parties like DMK and AIADMK. They later realized that these parties also followed the legacy of the Justice party. In due course of time, many Dalit parties emerged. A few among them are Ambedkar People's Movement established by Balasundaram, Poovaiyar Moorthy started the Puratchi Bharatham party, All India Human Rights Party by Elayaperumal, John Pandian formed All India Devendra Kula Vellalar Sangam. The prominent Dalit parties were Krishnaswamy's Puthiya Tamizhagam and Thirumaavalavan's Viduthalai Chiruthaikal Katchi. The Dravidian parties strategically and deceitfully mobilized the Dalits to support DMK and AIADMK. Moreover, it's essential to observe that Dalits have lost socio-political rights during the period of Dravidian politics and Congress politics. Also, it is critical to note that these political regimes have observed more caste violence Dalits. (Palani, 2004)

9. CASTE CONFLICTS AND POLITICS IN TAMIL NADU

The Mudukulathur caste riots also known as the Ramnad riots are symbolic inter-contextual events of caste and politics in Tamil Nadu. Caste violence broke in Ramanathapuram during 1957, the rationale behind the violence is intricate and multifold. Rather the instantaneous trigger is, during the notification of the 1957 election,

Muthuramalinga Thevar prepare to contest for the Assembly seat from Mudukulathur constituency and Parliament seat from Srivallaiputhur constituency. On the other hand Congress was campaigning to the attract votes of the oppressed (Pallars). Muthuramalinga Thevar won both seats, and he quits the assembly seat. He placed Sasivarnathevar as a forward bloc candidate. Parallel to that, Congress placed another candidate Baskaran Servai, for which Pallars openly campaigned. This instigated fury among Thevar groups. Attributing to their pre-existing rival with the oppressed, violence began to spread all over the Ramnad district. Despite the Congress campaign, Sasivarna thevar wins under the Muthuramalinga Thevar banner. An allegation has been filed against State Election Commission for suspect of corrupt practices behind Sasivarna Thevar's triumph. Then, violence broke out instantly between Thevars and Pallars. A peace committee was organized by the then collector Panikkar, inviting Muthuramalinga Thevar and Immanuel Sekaran. It is a known fact that Muthuramalinga Thevar refuses to sign the joint agreement along with Immanuel Sekaran as it seems to demean his status. The next day Immanuel was murdered. Though riots didn't break instantly, these incidents later contributed to violence in different places (Manikumar, 2017). In these incidents, Palani (2004) argues that Periyar has demanded chief minister Kamaraj invest measures to resist caste clashes, which resulted in the arrest of Muthuramalinga Thevar. While C.N. Annadhurai and his party MLAs in the legislative assembly condemned Kamaraj's pronouncement to manage the riots. The government then shifted from Congress to DMK. It is observed that the Dravidian party government led by Annadurai, released everyone who has been detained in connection with the 1957 riots?

Another, terrible caste violence was the Kilvenmani massacre. In this violence, many women and children belonging to the oppressed caste were murdered by the landowning caste. It is indispensable to perceive that the issue occurred in 1968. And in 1967 the Dravidian parties achieved office in Tamil Nadu (Palani, 2004). An important caste violence that occurred in Madurai is the Melevalavu massacre. In Melavalavu, a Dalit government official Murugesan was brutally murdered for assuming office after succeeding a village panchayat election against a landowning backward caste. Melavalavu incidents remind the strict feudal caste structure constructed by dominant groups. Another imperative caste violence was the Manjolai estate massacre also known as the Thamirabarani massacre. In this incident, seventeen Dalit laborers including women demanded wage increment. The Dravidian party, who assumed power in this period, justified the police excess in the riots. A commission was instituted to enquire into the Thamirabarani massacre by the Tamil Nadu government under the Hon'ble justice Mohan, a former high court judge of Madras. His judgment was in support of the police and administrators. The the commission defended the police atrocities in the Mancholai tea estate massacre. (Viswanathan & Saqaf, 1999). Kodiyankulam caste issues witnessed numerous conflicts between the oppressed and the dominant caste. It occurred due to a disagreement between a bus driver and a student at a village in Tirunelveli district. Following the disfigurement of the figure of Muthuramalinga Thevar, the events led to violence. The occurrence resulted in the assassination of eighteen members of both groups. Later, the police intruded into village and involved in devastating the properties of the oppressed. (Viswanathan, 1999). Viswanathan contends that the purpose of the four-hour-long police the operation, according to people, was to extinguish the economic base of the oppressed. It is further observed that police actions in this regard, seem abhorrent and atrocious. In connection with the political scenario, these events occurred during the period of AIADMK. The then chief minister Jayalalitha refuted police excess at Kodiyankulam. The retired district judge Gomathinayagam has been selected as a one-man commission to report this issue. And even the commission reports were in support of the administrators.

These caste issues are conversed to prompt the measures and response undergone by the Dravidian parties in regimes, which decisively obliged the support of the lower social order people during the influx of the non-Brahmin movement and during their political commencement. But the caste issues against the oppressed are never adequately addressed. Dravidian parties never encompassed Dalits in any vital numbers in decision-making places. However, a blatant transfer occurred in the 1960s, when party leaders began enthusiastically to position backward caste at the cost of Dalits and to restrain any leftovers of agrarian or class fanaticism that would coerce the party's non-Brahmin financial backers who were comprised of landowning and merchant caste groups.

The cases relating to caste issues and conflicts are connected with the state politics. Also, these issues are different when compared to Northern regions. Since Tamil Nadu encountered various movements like non-Brahmin and anti-caste movements. So it is anticipated that Dravidian politics might have carried social radicalism to eradicate the caste system. However, they were unsuccessful in implementing the notions of anti-casteism learned from Periyar. Also, these Dravidian parties abandoned the rights of Dalits and let them under the pre-eminence of dominant groups. Moreover,

their politics were in favor to support the landlords and zamindars. Beteille (2010) concludes that Dravidian leaders at one time were certainly serious in their resentment of Brahmins. But in the later stage, they were disastrous to question the agrarian foundation of caste pre-eminence, where the landowning non-Brahmin caste was an adversary to the interest of the oppressed similar to the Brahmins. Beteille (2010) argues that the dominant groups in villages are not reconciled to the ideals of egalitarianism and social justice formulated by the state and central legislatures. Indeed, these dominant castes positioned their pre-eminence also in political regimes. Beteille asserts that from the 1960s onward the Dravidian parties patently permitted the influential and populous Backward castes, who were previously Dalits to be the most straight oppressors. The Dravidian parties predominantly served as politics that were ineffective towards caste authority and violence.

After the 1990's considerable Dalit parties gained attention and criticized the political hegemony of the Dravidian parties. However, in the past two decades, these Dalit parties wished to participate in the electoral democracy. The social movement politics of Dalit parties shifted to electoral politics. Thus, they have to become the political allies of the Dravidian parties, otherwise, winning election is difficult. Therefore, the Dalit parties who at least attempted to solve the caste question, are now, in a need of Dravidian parties to support their political ambitions. Caste still exists in all spheres of society, Dalits still face caste violence and the caste question remains unsolved

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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