

**DE-CONSTRUCTING THE CASTE CATEGORIES
IN TAMIL NADU : A READING ON
THE DISCOURSE OF DRAVIDIAN MOVEMENT**

*Dissertation submitted to the
Jawaharlal Nehru University in
partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY



N. SATHIYAMURTHY



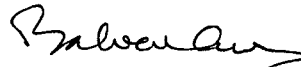
**CENTRE FOR POLITICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067
1997**




CERTIFICATE

Certified that the Dissertation entitled "De-Constructing The Caste Categories In Tamil Nadu : A Reading On The Discourse Of Dravidian Movement", submitted by N. Sathiyamurthy, is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this University. This Dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University, or any other University and is his own work.

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


Prof. Balveer Arora 21.7.97

Chairperson


Dr. Sudha Pai

Supervisor.

for

Mr. R. VIJAYARAGHAVAN

.. my first Teacher...

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor Dr.Sudha Pai for her valuable guidance and caring encouragement. The affectionate presence of Mr.Venkat Saminathan and Mrs. Manimegalai Thennarasu enabled me to discover this El Dorado..

Messieurs Suresh Subramaniam, Dr. Thangavelu and Devaneyan have helped me with critical study materials. My friend Sundar has been most crucial in this regard. The little magazine milieu of Tamil Nadu had facilitated me to abide such an interest..

At the Aravallis, it has been a lyrical experience to confluence with genuine souls from near and distant lands. Equally joyous was to keep aloof from the philistine petty-politicking which seems to have entrapped many a Tamil folk..

The fountainheads in the making of me have been Su. Ra., Ve. Sa., Sriram, Pe.Murugu, Jayamohan, Jayasankar and Rathinasamy. To be fair, my intimate relationships across and beyond the Tropics, ought to remain anonymous at this juncture..

Pranam to all the wonderful Teachers in my life...

New Delhi
July 1997



(N.Sathyamoorthy).

CONTENTS

<u>Titles</u>	<u>Pages</u>
Introduction	1
Chapters :	
I. HISTORICAL OVER-VIEW OF CASTE CONFIGURATIONS IN TAMIL SOCIETY.	25
II. CATEGORISATION OF CASTES IN THE POLITICS OF MODERNITY	59
III. CONFLICTING CASTE IDENTITIES AND THE 'NON-BRAHMIN' DISCOURSE OF DRAVIDIAN MOVEMENT	91
Conclusion	122
Bibliography	132

INTRODUCTION

The dominant theme in the political history of twentieth century Tamil Nadu is the emergence of a 'Dravidian' Movement whose professed ideology has been the obliteration of caste system in Tamil soil. It has held political power in 'diluted' or 'concentrated' forms from 1920 to 1926, 1930 to 1937 and from 1967 to the present period. The sway it has over the electoral politics of Tamil Nadu since 1967 is so complete that it still remains as the hegemonic ideology holding political power in the state. The basic political identity was the "non-Brahmin community" which formed the focal point of political discourse in Tamil Nadu. Under this newly constructed overarching entity, all the conflicting differences that existed within it were relegated on the backburner by projecting a common 'Other' namely, the Brahmin Aryans. The sharply antagonistic contradictions that were smouldering under such a concocted unity, resurfaced time and again, proving that history will always let the cat loose out of the bag as its own inevitability.

Untouchability has always supplied the ultimate defining line of both 'unprivileged' and identity in historical Tamil society. Dravidian politics can be best understood as an overtly political manifestation of more deep-seated contradictions that are implied in the 'modernisation' of Tamil society, which sharpened early in this century against the background of colonial rule. Unfortunately it failed to deliver the promises made for the amelioration of the underprivileged in a deeply hierarchical society, except catering to the interests of a select few of the Tamil community. Till the eighties, the sporadic incidents of violent conflicts that took place amongst the 'non-Brahmin' partners in the 'Dravidian' marriage of convenience namely, the Backward and Dalit communities, were wished away as unprecedented aberrations in the law and order of the state. Deep fissures and violent bloodshed mark this decade of the nineties when conflicts between the communities have become widespread and recurrent across the length and breadth of Tamil Nadu. The disillusionment of the Dalits with the Dravidian movement is now patently manifest and the rift has become irreconcilable. It is in the light of such recent developments that a serious attempt to re-examine the ideology and politics of Dravidian movement assumes crucial significance.

Any attempt to assess a movement after about fifty years of achieving freedom in the background of vast socio-economic-political changes that occurred in the interregnum, and on the basis of its role in the transformatory process is an arduous task. It is becoming increasingly clear that the Dravidian movement should be studied in depth in a comprehensive manner, as it is becoming evident in the recent fissures that has developed as an inevitable corollary of its inherent transformations. This movement can be clearly demarcated into three clear phases for the convenience of our analysis. They are : (1) From the Non-Brahmin manifesto in 1916 to 1926-the period of the Justice Party, (2) The movement under Periyar E.V. Ramasamy's leadership which had a definite Dravidian overtone from 1926 to 1949 - this period covers the founding of the Dravida Kazhagam and Self-Respect Movement and (3) from 1949 when C.N. Annadurai broke away from Periyar- this phase is more political with sharp discontinuities from the earlier phase as well as the continuation of certain basic themes of the Dravidian ideology. The rhetorics of ideology and the pragmatics of politics that were underlying beneath the nuanced praxiology of the Dravidian movement, in all the varying phases of its complex development, constitute the fulcrum in the thematic of this research.

For such an enterprise it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of the vital facets of the Tamil society.

The politics of Tamil Nadu encapsulates the complexities, contradictions and conundrums of its society. An analysis of the Dravidian movement which vehemently championed the cause of Tamil nationalism and social justice, inevitably entails the analysis of the political parties, especially the DMK and AIADMK after the Independence and, Justice Party and the Self-Respect movement prior to it. Tamil nationalism has been a central part of Dravidian Movement for many decades since its inception in the turn of this century, which can be linked to themes of identity that can be traced back to Tamil political history. The Tamil political identity is itself a redefinition of older political identities, and the end-product of transformations in identity that go back to the emergence of Dravidian movement. And it was the Dravidian movement that first made political identity an ideological and public policy issue in South India. The social base of the radical Dravidian ideology during its period of origin was the elite non-Brahmin groups who felt a sense of relative deprivation. At the outset, Dravidian ideology and its ^didentity had a strong progressive social-reform character because these elite non-Brahmins believed that they had to attack the very structure of society to accomplish their ends. As they

achieved some goals and re-established their position vis-a-vis the Brahmins, their orientations changed and the movement began to assume a reactionary retrogressive character. Accompanying these subtle transformations in the inherent agenda of the movement, there was a gradual but steady dilution of its ideological radicalism. It took a decisive turn in 1949 when C.N. Annadurai split away to form the DMK as a party set to capture the political power of the state.

Once in power, some of the inherent contradictions in the Dravidian movement's ideological perspective began to emerge. Of particular importance were the dilemmas created by the existence of competing groups within the movement, with competing class interests. Unlike the forward non-Brahmins, who saw themselves in opposition to Brahmins and the caste system, the orientation of the backward castes stressed their economic and social position as they faced from the Dalits below. Out of this dilemma, the fissures developed on its project of social justice and cultural nationalism. Thus, while the outlines of the Dravidian ideology were maintained, the meaning of basic symbols and its overall emphasis in the politics changed. The Dravidian movement legitimised the elite non-Brahmin mass participation and assimilation into the political elite, and facilitated the political integration of Tamil society by providing an ideological basis for unity encompassing

the caste Hindus and the elite sections of the state. Interestingly, the project facilitated by the Dravidian movement has not only excluded the Brahmins but also the Dalits. It is a fact which has seldom found recognition, let alone discussion. It is in this light that one has to examine the conceptual →

→ category of the "Non-Brahmin" which is rooted in a complicated history of colonial modernity. It is extremely relevant at this critical juncture to link it up with the peculiar dynamics of caste configuration in Tamil Nadu, which is now facing a turbulent caste conflict at various levels of the society. It would pave towards understanding the present situation in a better way.

Over the last few years, some distinguished social science scholars have been engaged in a critical re-evaluation of the intellectual and institutional legacies of the European Enlightenment in the Indian sub-continent. Broadly called the 'critique of modernity' debate in India, it increasingly focusses upon the politics of categorisation of various nebulous identities during the colonial era which had serious repercussions into the post-colonial polity. This would steer us towards the uncharted territories of academic scholarship on Dravidian movement which has hitherto been maintaining a curious and studied silence about the real dynamics of caste politics in Tamil Nadu. It would facilitate a more

comprehensive understanding of the changes in the making within the polity and society of Tamil Nadu. This study would deal with the following as constituting the problematiques in the analysis of the shifting categories on caste in the discourse of the Dravidian movement;-

(i) The shifting categories in the discourse on caste in the history of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial society of Tamil Nadu.

(ii) The various measures of enumeration and categorisation as a part of the larger politics of modernity; their inherent limitations and inadequacies.

(iii) The politics behind the categorisation of 'non-Brahminism'; the Vellala domination in Tamil polity; contradictions within the Dravidian movement.

(iv) 'Periyar' E.V. Ramasamy and his ideology; the transition from D.K. to D.M.K. and the graduation from opposition to government; the role of C.N. Annadurai in shaping these transformations; the ideological and tactical shifts in these transitions. The split of D.M.K. in 1972 and its aftermath; a further shift in the character of the movement.

(v) The real nature of non-Brahmin casteism and hegemony throughout Tamil Nadu; a historical understanding of caste configurations in Tamil society and an analysis of the politics of caste identities as shaped by its polity.

(vi) The dynamics of domination by the elite non-Brahmin castes along with the nature of subjugation faced by the Dalit communities contributing to the caste conflicts between them.

(vii) The politics of mobilisation of various Dalit communities; the nebulous moorings of Dalit ideology in the context of Tamil polity; the fissures and ruptures in the ideology and politics of Dravidian movement.

These issues have been synthesised in an interrelated and comprehensive manner for our analysis. The study being undertaken intends to enrich itself by scrupulous and discreet utilisation of the intensive researches made on the politics and history of Dravidian movement, dynamics of Tamil caste system and the mobilisation of Dalits in both English and Tamil.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

There is a vast body of literature on the various aspects of the Dravidian movement, the structural and functional dynamics of caste system in Tamil Nadu, and also about the pattern of Dalit mobilisation, all of which deals the issue from various angles and standpoints. Apart from the books of academic and non-academic nature, there is an enormous body of articles, reports, manifestoes, etc. which would greatly supplement in the process of understanding the complex phenomena. It is also interesting to note that a great deal of focus is now being bestowed

upon the surveys and researches conducted by the Christian missionaries, colonial administrators and Orientalists which constituted and shaped the various themes of Indian historiography. By deconstructing such colonial discourses, the new corpus of research offers deeper and powerful insights, opening up new vistas of understanding the past. The domain of social sciences is now intertwined with various fields of knowledge making it more inter-disciplinary in orientation. The various studies in sociology, anthropology, history, semiotics, etc. will have to be integrated with political science paving way for an authentic and pertinent analysis. Moreover, a generous usage of the study materials available in Tamil has also been made use of to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject of research.

The compelling need for a defining feature of Indian society has not only been responsible for the use of the term 'caste', but also for according it seminal importance. While Louis Dumont¹ has been rightly hailed as one of the most important writers on India in recent years, he has in many ways only updated the view of India found in Marx and Weber. The ideo-structural approach of Dumont has been able to arrive at the functional equivalent of the Western idea of the individual in the Indian institution of caste.² Dumont holds that the political and economic domains of social life are "encompassed" by the "religious". The

religious principle becomes articulated in the Indian case in terms of the opposition of purity and pollution, with Brahmins at the top of the hierarchy. This view is being increasingly discredited by the recent research studies. Ronald Inden in his book 'Imagining India'³ maintains that accounts of caste have been used as a foil to build up the West's image of itself. The late eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century interpretations of caste have been examined in detail by Inden who distinguishes from amongst the great abundance of research and surveys undertaken, two main approaches which he labels concisely as pertaining to those of the 'empirical realists' on the one hand and the 'romantic idealists' on the other. Roughly speaking, to the former camp belonged missionaries and administrators, and to the latter Orientalists and philosophers of history and comparative religion. Consequently, the intellectual reservoir from which organising principles were drawn were, needless to say, invariably Eurocentric.⁴

The shifts and changes in the rationality underlying the construction of this rigid and closed model of Indian society have been examined at length by Inden and prior to him by Bernard Cohn.⁵ Moreover, since the pragmatic and ideological constraints of establishing and maintaining colonial rule were preoccupations of earlier epochs, and the evolutionary theory of Darwinism and the

politico-economic philosophy of Marxism are no longer undisputed, interpretations and theories of the caste system formulated in that political and intellectual climate⁶ can legitimately be contested in the present. Since scientific theories and scholarly interpretations from the late eighteenth century onwards were highly coloured by intellectual preconceptions, determined to a large extent by the colonialist framework.⁷ By referring to the historical period prior to the establishment of British rule i.e, pre-1757, a differently oriented representation^t of Indian reality may be gained. The often mentioned drawbacks of these pre-scientific reports, namely, their naive descriptive superficiality and their non-systematic orientation, enable them in fact to represent less uniformly⁸ the disparate nature of the reality observed without having recourse to speculative holistic conceptions of a unitary system which is so characteristic from the late eighteenth century onwards. The corpus of material belonging to the pre-colonial period were receptive to human differences and variety.

The writings of Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, who belonged to the early eighteenth century, is an entirely different calibre of reportage, pertaining more to the genre of proto-ethnography⁹ than to that of travel literature. Not only he was a perspicacious observer, but also being fluent in Tamil he was able to consult Tamil scriptures as well as converse

freely with his Tamil associates. The interesting aspect of this quasi-ethnographic survey¹⁰ is that, even though the four 'varnas' are mentioned, he focuses his attention on only one of them, namely, the Sudras. In enumerating by ~~name~~^{name} 71 of their families or jatis, he shows that they constitute the majority of the 98 families cited at the outset, and thus, for him, the Sudras seem to legitimately represent the genuine mass of Tamil society. And, it is the divisions or 'jatis' of the Sudras that are considered the real tangible entities, whereas the fourfold 'varnas' are relegated to the nebulous realm of cosmogony. Furthermore, this specificity or group prestige which, according to him, is exhibited by all Sudra 'jatis', is considered more as a trait defining group identity rather than as a 'closed status symbol'. Whereas the comparative stratification studies of Rudolph and Rudolph,¹¹ and Bailey¹² have tended to employ a reified conception of caste viewed as a system in which rigidly ascribed and closed status groups, whose superordinate and subordinate relationships are legitimised by a comprehensive sacred ideology, block social mobility and change. But Ziegenbalg's writings on Tamil Nadu offer us a different picture of a complex reality.

As Klass in his book on the origins of caste¹³ makes the point, endogamy and 'purity of descent' are unrelated concepts. Where they are fused, as for caste, the fusion reflects culturally

biased or ethnocentric categorising. But it was this fusion of distinct concepts which served as the central premise for the theory promulgated a century or so later, attributing to the Aryan/Dravidian racial antagonism the origins of caste system. In the accounts of the earlier observers, not only caste was not conceived as the defining institution of India¹⁴ but viewed from a non-Brahmanical angle - and from a social rather than a religious perspective-- central notions such as linear hierarchy, rigid occupational specialisation, the racial implications of group endogamy and, last but not least, the pre-eminent status of the Brahmins were radically questioned, if not refuted, or at least so it may seem in retrospect. Over the last few decades, especially since the 1980s, there was post-structuralist and deconstructionist philosophy that increasingly called into question Enlightenment rationalism and the meta-narratives of progress/emancipation that the traditional Indian Left had never questioned.

There was also the development in the United States, particularly after Said's critique of Orientalism,¹⁵ of a whole field of study that devoted itself to understanding the formation of colonial subjectivities through the 'colonial discourses'.¹⁶ Within the field of Indian history, the anthropologist-historians such as Arjun Appadurai, Nicholas Dirks and other scholars working under the intellectual

leadership of Bernard Cohn in the 1980s also began to draw our attention to the way that colonially instituted practices and knowledge-systems affected the formation of new subjectivities in India and cast a lasting shadow over emerging politics of identity in the sub-continent. And then, at the same time, there was the 'Subaltern Studies' collective, Gramscian in inspiration and led by Ranajit Guha, who developed a critique of nationalism and of the political imagination that saw the nation-state as an ideal form for a political community. All this together now constitute what is sometimes broadly referred to as the 'critique of modernity' debate in India. It leads to the exploration of the complex and unavoidable links that exist in Indian history between the phenomenon of caste conflicts and the modern governing practices that the British introduced into India as the historical bearers of Enlightenment rationalism. The most dramatic example of this governmental concern with measurement were the decennial Indian censuses, the first of which was published in 1872. Of particular importance in this process is the 'categorisation' of different castes, which were enumerated for the politics of affirmative action in the development of colonial modernity in India.

Partha Chatterjee, in his recent work 'The Nation and its Fragments',¹⁷ has called for an immanent critique of caste, which by

implication would also give us the general form for an immanent critique of all synthetic theories about "the unity of Indian society." The two dominant strategies of understanding the Indian society through the framework of the categories of caste were the Marxist approach¹⁸ and the liberal approach.¹⁹ Both, however, accept the premise of modernity, the former espousing it to condemn caste as an oppressive and antiquated institution inconsistent with a modern society, the latter asserting that caste in its ideal form is not oppressive and not inconsistent with the aspirations of individuality within the harmony of a unified social order. The former could be said to represent the pure theory of universal modernity; the latter, its genealogy running deep into the traditions of Orientalist scholarship, upholds a theory of Oriental exceptionalism. As nationalist arguments, both adopt the externally given standpoint of bourgeois equality to criticize the empirical reality of caste practices and to advocate modernist reform. As for their overall framing devices, the former argument, of course, has made available to it the entire Western discourse on modernity; the latter, on the other hand, has to construct a special theory, in this case the synthetic theory of caste, which however has the same form as any synthetic theory of the unity of Indian society. Louis Dumont's well-known work, "Homo Hierarchicus" claims that the essence of caste lies in a continuous

hierarchy along which castes can be ordered in terms of relative plurality. Our criticism using recent scholarship consists in essentially questioning this premise. These attempts would help us to deconstruct the categories of caste in Tamil society by applying the recent methodological approaches to Tamil Nadu's complex reality.

There has been a rich tradition of socio-political and historical scholarship on the Dravidian Movement in Tamil Nadu. Following E. Irschick's "Politics and Social Conflict in South India" and R. Hardgrave's "Nadars of Tamil Nadu : The Political Culture of a community in change" and "The Dravidian Movement," which appeared before 1969 almost synchronising with the election, M. Barnett's "The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India", C.J. Baker's "Politics of South India 1919-1937," D.A. Washbrook's "The Emergence of Provincial Politics, the Madras Presidency, 1870-1920", R. Sundaralingam's "Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India, 1852-1891" and K. Nambi Arooran's "Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism, 1905-1944" appeared only after 1970. A large number of research articles and books began to come out since then. The works of Hardgrave, Sundaralingam, Washbrook, Baker and Barnett have provided the political history of South India with special reference to Tamil Nadu as connected with and determined by the Dravidian

Movement.²⁰ Though they have been done under differing theoretical frameworks, they do provide a clear picture of the evolution and the changing phases of the movement in Tamil Nadu. The studies of Nambi Arooraⁿ and Mangala Murugesan written largely from a Tamilian point of view, read along with the above works, enable us to get a better rounded view of the development.

The attempts to understand the Dravidian Movement in terms of historical materialism are now available both in English and Tamil. P. Jeevanandham operated in a limited sphere of language, literature and culture. He cried a halt for anti-Kamban and anti-Subramanya Bharathi outpourings and laid the foundation for the correct understanding of these literary giants. He was originally against the pure Tamil movement started by Manomaniyam P. Sundarampillai and Maraimalai Adigal. On realising that the attitude towards pure Tamil movement had landed the Communists in isolation, he did not hesitate to correct it and hail the movement, and its achievements while inaugurating the foundation conference of "Tamil Nadu Kalai Ilakkiya Perumaniam" held in 1961 at Coimbatore a few years before his death. However, it must be said to the credit of N.Vanamamalai, a close admirer of Jeevanandam and the two Srilankan scholars K.Kailasapathy and K.Sivathamby that they picked up the thread and carried forward Jeeva's tradition. The

studies of N. Ram, Mythili Sivaraman and A.Srinivasan are also important in this regard. P.Ramamurthy's response to a booklet serialised in "Theekathir" in no less than hundred instalments in Tamil is very valuable in understanding the history of this movement from the point of view of a Marxist who had been in the thick of political activity in this whole period.

With the Dravidian Movement entering into its most crucial phase of transition with respect to the equilibrium between different caste groups in Tamil Nadu, a spate of academic research has emerged to throw deeper insights into the Movement. There has been the publication of books, articles and reviews both in English and Tamil by the intelligentsia belonging to Tamil Nadu. Though they invoke controversial "silences" in the study of the Dravidian Movement paving way for acrimonious exchanges, it has certainly led to a more comprehensive understanding of the politics in Tamil Nadu. Notable among the Tamil scholars who are currently engaged in the academic debates on the various facets of the Dravidian Movement are S.V.Rajadurai, V.Geetha, M.S.S.Pandian, Anandhi, A.R.Venkatachalapathy, V.Suresh, A.Marx, Raj Gowthaman, Guna, Rajan Kurai and also the intellectual circles of various little magazines in Tamil. This study intends to make use of the Tamil Academic tradition which is largely unknown outside the

state. Besides them, the memoirs and biographies, manifestoes and reports that have been published in English and more specifically in Tamil have also been made use of to understand the complex discourse of the Dravidian Movement in Tamil Nadu. Since the Dravidian Movement is yet a "living" problem, academic propriety ~~demands~~ demands a clear and profound analysis that would break new grounds with deeper insights through our research.

OBJECTIVES FOR THE STUDY :

The aim of our study shall be to examine : (a) the shifting categories of caste in the various phases of the history of Tamil Nadu and patterns of dominance ; (b) the inherent contradictions within the conceptual category of the "Non-Brahmin" which formed the focal point in the discourse of Dravidian Movement ;(c) Conflicting caste identities that are re-shaping the politics of the Dravidian Movement.

METHODS OF STUDY :

Our study would be historical and analytical. It would be based on some relevant books and published articles, government publications, census data, manifestoes and publications of political organisations, memoirs and biographies of the key figures, newspapers, local journals, little magazines in Tamil and research works done on related topics with an interdisciplinary nature.

CHAPTERISATION :

The dissertation is divided into three chapters. The Introduction consists of the framework of research, review of important works done in relation to our research and the objectives of the study. Chapter I attempts to trace the historical configuration of various caste groups in Tamil Society all through the period of its recorded history. It also focuses on the unique aspects of caste configurations that are characteristic to Tamil Nadu alone. Chapter II studies the enumeration of various categories of caste in the politics of modernity in Tamil Nadu. This chapter traces the emergence of the overarching entity of the Tamil politics called the "Non-Brahmin". Chapter III analyses the undercurrents of contemporary caste conflicts in Tamil Nadu and the emerging contours in the discourse of the Dravidian politics. It also focuses upon the nature of the Dravidian movement in relationship to the patterns of socio-economic dominance and the inherent limitations involved in its politics. The final part forms the conclusion that summarises the research, while examining the wider implications and possibilities that are in the making to shape the future politics of Tamil Nadu.

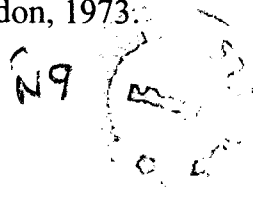
NOTES AND REFERENCES :

1. Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, (rev. English ed.) Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1988.
2. Louis Dumont, "The Modern Conception of the Individual", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, No.VIII, October 1965, pp. 85-99.
3. For a discursive critique of 'traditional' interpretations of caste, refer to this controversial and provocative book, in particular ch.2: 49-84. (See Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1990).
4. 'They have been derived, almost without exception, from Western Philosophy or the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, never from Asiatic, African, or native American sources', (See, Margaret Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1964).
5. Cf. the reprinted essays in Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1987.
6. For details on nineteenth century socio-political thought cf. Maurice Mandelbaum, *History, Man and Reason : A Study in 19th Century Thought*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1971.
7. Talal Asad (ed.) *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, Ithaca Press, London, 1973.

DISS
305.5122 095482
Sa82 De

TH6 440

London, 1973.



21

TH-6440

8. For a re-evaluation of early travel literature based on its naive receptivity to human difference and variety c.f., James Boon, "Comparative De-enlightenment : Paradox & Limits in the History of Ethnology", *Daedalus*, 1992, pp. 73-91.
9. The first book of Ziegenbalg was *Malabarisches Heidenthum* ('Malabarian or Tamil Paganism'). Even though this monograph-like treatise was completed in 1711, was published in 1926, Cf. Bartholomaus Ziegenbalg, *Maslabarisches Heidenthum* (ed. W. Caland), Amsterdam, 1926. Other important works by Ziegenbalg are 'Genealogy of the Malabarian Gods' (1867), an anthropology of Tamil Ethical and judicial principles (1867) and *Ja* Tamil grammar work (published during his lifetime in 1716).
10. For literature on Ziegenbalg, cf. Arno Lehmann, *It Began at Tranquebar : A History of the First Protestant Mission in India*, CLS, Madras, 1956, and, Gita Dharampal-Frick, "Shifting Categories in the Discourse on Caste" in Vasudha Dalmia & Heinrich vol Stietencorn (eds.), *Representing Hinduism : The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1995.
11. Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition : Political Development in India*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1967.

12. F.G., Bailey, "Closed Stratification in India", quoted in Gita Dharampal-Frick (ibid).
13. Morton Klass, *Caste: The Emergence of South Asian Social System*, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia, 1980.
14. Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1990.
15. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage, New York, 1979.
16. See Lata Mani, Vivek Dhareshwar and Mary John in James Clifford and Vivek Dhareshwar (eds.), *Travelling theories, Travelling Theorists*, Santa Cruz, 1989.
17. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments : Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994.
18. See "Caste and Class in India", in A.J. Syed (ed.), *D.D. Kosambi on History and Society: Problems of Interpretation*, University of Bombay, Bombay, 1985, (p.132).
19. Some of the most distinguished examples being Nirmal Kumar Bose translated into English by André Betelle as *The Structure of Hindu Society* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1975); G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Class in India* (Bombay : Popular Prakashan, 1957); Irawati Karve, *Hindu Society:*

An Interpretation (Porna : Deccan College, 1961); M.N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (Bombay: Asia, 1962); and *Social Change in Modern India* (Bombay: Allied, 1966).

20. See Karthigesu Sivathamby, *Understanding Dravidian Movement : Problems and Perspectives*, NCBH, Madras, 1995.

CHAPTER-I

HISTORICAL OVER-VIEW OF CASTE CONFIGURATIONS IN TAMIL SOCIETY

The history of caste configurations in Tamil culture is indeed possible for there are abundant historical sources-such as the many thousands of temple inscriptions, manuscripts and authentic interpretations of various texts-that offer a foundation for historical analysis.¹ The interpretation of caste in Tamil culture is founded squarely on the premise that our understanding of the meaning of caste statuses in the Tamil tradition emerged only when Tamil society is understood both anthropologically and historically. The ubiquitous paradox² with which the Tamil society presents us is that the Tamil caste system comprises features which are not only unknown in North India but are also without any clear foundation in the Dharmasastric lore. The Sastras have little application to the Tamil caste system which should be analysed in purely Dravidian terms. So distant is the 'varna' scheme from actual social reality, that many scholars discount its relevance or utility for the analysis of caste anywhere in Tamil Nadu. The option open to us, as Louis

Dumont³ himself has very clearly foreseen, is to study regional patterns and configurations of caste in terms of regional ideological traditions and complexities. And this is precisely the aim of this chapter, which attempts to understand the fluid dynamics of caste configurations in Tamil history.

THE RISE OF THE TAMIL SOCIAL FORMATION:

The Coromandel Plain of the southeastern India, presently Tamil Nadu, was separate and distinct from that of the Gangetic Plain of the North. Between 200 B.C. and 300 A.D., incipient civilisation-by which is meant the beginnings of writing, urban centres, widespread trade, monumental construction and political centralisation to some extent-had apparently emerged in the south. According to Burton Stein,⁴ this early Tamil civilisation was founded on irrigated rice agriculture. Its centres of political and cultural development were the centres of early achievements in irrigation. There were three such centres or core areas of technical and political development : the Cauvery river and delta, the Tambaraparani and Vaigai drainages to the south, and the lushly watered littoral alongside Kerala. Corresponding to these three centres were the three ancient "Kingdoms" of South India viz, the Cholas, Pandyas and Cheras. The palace, the city and the village were to come under the increasing influence of Gangetic civilisation during the first centuries

of the Christian era, in a process that was entirely peaceful and gradual.⁵ The indigenous traditions of the South Indian hinterland village were not wholly erased by acculturation. The decidedly autochthonous nature of the earliest stratum of Tamil literature, the "Sankam" poetry - dated between 1st to 3rd centuries A.D.-appear to reveal a worldview that was least influenced by the North Indian thought.

The rise of the Tamil social formation as we know it today may be traced, according to Bryan Pfaffenberger,⁶ to the period subsequent to the Sankam era, when Brahmins became important figures next only to the indigenous cultivating groups typified by the Vellalars. By the 8th or 9th century A.D., there had crystallised throughout the Coromandel Plain an agrarian social order which was to endure without radical transformation, but with gradual alterations, for more than one thousand years. The 'varna' scheme is not pertinent here because, in the middle ranges of the Tamil caste hierarchy, the ranking categories and overall form of the Gangetic caste tradition are very poorly represented. The most striking aspect of his anomaly is the enigmatic status of certain non-Brahmin cultivating castes, which are traditionally of the 'Sudra' rank in Sastric terms and which are epitomised by the cultivating Vellalars of the Tamil hinterland. Throughout South India, in those areas in which Brahmins are not the chief landowners, 'Sudra' cultivating castes often

possess what M.N. Srinivas⁷ has termed the 'decisive dominance.' Numerically predominant in an area and endowed with the lion's share of the land, the dominant caste believes itself to be entitled to rule the villages in which it resides, and does not shrink from the use of force to maintain what it sees as its legitimate privileges.

THE HEGEMONIC TRAD OF MEDIEVAL POWER AND AUTHORITY:

The Tamil society seems to have had three interrelated and highly flexible institutions whose functions were based more on the manipulation of ideological representations than of crude physical force.⁸ The first of these institutions was that which might be termed 'Kaniachi'. It is derived from the corporatist ideology of the original, land clearing peasantry who settled in the river valleys during the early centuries A.D. The resources were possessed by corporate grouping in the villages along river valleys. The rights to privileges were given by ancestry and history of original settlements.

The second institution underwriting social order was that of the kings, for kingship in Tamil Nadu was a system of shared sovereignty stretching down from the king to the humblest local chief ('Palaiyagar') who looked to him for legitimacy. The significance of kingship has been most strongly emphasised in the work of Nicholas Dirks.⁹ Tamil

kingship in the late medieval period was perhaps most heavily influenced by developments from the 14th century when the river valleys were 'invaded', or brought under the control, of warrior groupings from Andhra and the forested uplands. These warrior kings rarely settled in the valleys, preferring instead the uplands whose forest-clearance they promoted and whose 'mixed' economies they helped to develop. But their power was certainly felt even in the deltaic lowlands.

In the kingly ideology, resources were held by reason of grant or gift from the king (known as 'inam'). Much that the kings 'gave' to local communities and groups were already possessed by right of kaniachi: the relationship was more symbolic than immediately economic; representing the ritual incorporation of 'kaniachikarar' communities into the domain of the king. The Tamil royal authority never developed in the way of a bureaucratic system capable of extracting resources. Its dominance over society was demonstrated partially by savage displays of coercive violence, but mostly through system of ritual incorporation. Arjun Appadurai¹⁰ has argued that the royal authority conjoined with the corporate authority of 'kaniachikarars' whose ritual acts were performed in the name of both the king and of themselves.

The third institutional source of order and privilege was religion. The main tradition of religion in Tamil Nadu was Bhaktism and indigenous modes of worship which were gradually institutionalised and partially Brahminised through templeworship. Its implications were that 'honour' and 'status'-and thus the right to possess privileges-were derived from services performed for the gods. Part of these services consisted of donating lands, money and products to the temples for the maintenance of regular worship and occasional major festival celebrations. The temples thus became huge economic institutions, playing a vital role in the complex processes of resource redistribution and helping to develop the exchange economy.¹¹ The rewards for making donations consisted of rights to participate in certain ceremonies in certain ways and to receive gifts and honours from gods. These, in turn, established the position of the recipient families and groups in the local social hierarchy, with their relative positions of privilege.

Thus, the social structure of late medieval Tamil Nadu may best be understood in relation to the ideological triad represented by 'Kaniachi', kingly and divine authorities. Dominance lay with an alliance of kaniachikarars and kings, whose joint hegemony was validated by Brahmins and most clearly expressed in temple rituals. Stein¹² has argued that Brahmins were first brought into, or supported in, the rich river

valleys by powerful groups of vellala kaniachikarars, eager to be associated with Brahmin ritual supremacy in order to distinguish themselves from lesser and poorer social groups coming to surround them. Patronage of Brahmins brought prestige and hence helped to validate claims to a superior share of 'nadu' rights. Brahmin-vellala relationships started to become problematic in the Vaishnavism of the '*vadagalai*' (northern) school. But in the majority tradition of the '*thengalai*' (southern) Vaishnavism and of Saivism, the alliance between Brahmins and vellala donors and devotees remained fundamental to the end of this period.

The hegemonic alliance of 'kaniachikarars', kings and Brahmins can be seen to have maintained its dominance over the society through a complex process of ideological 'management'. The most important aspect of this management was the conferring of honours and gifts by the dominant alliance onto specific and discrete groups among the 'inferior' majority of the population. Such gifts and honours flowed from kings (as 'inams'), from 'kaniachikarar' communities (as 'manyams' given to artisan and immigrant groups in the 'nadu') and, perhaps most importantly, from the 'gods' (as share rights to sacred substances, precedence in public rituals and entitlements to carry banners at festivals). They associated select members of the inferior population

with the power and status of the elite, giving the former a share of the latter's privilege.¹³

PATTERNS OF SOCIAL CLEAVAGE IN MEDIEVAL PERIOD:

Accompanying the emergence of a definite Tamil social formation in the irrigated rice lands was an enigmatic distinction between "right hand" (*valankai*) and "left hand" (*itankai*) castes in Tamil Nadu.¹⁴ This created a context of rivalry and division within the population, whereby intense competition took place for the right to receive the gifts and honours.

Historical records amply prove that especially during the period of Kulothunga Chola III, the competition between the two groups were very intense. Beck is of the view that this social competitiveness grew out of the need to incorporate new social groups into expanding and increasingly complex 'nadu' settlements.¹⁵

The "right hand" alliance tended to represent groups with long-standing connections in the old agricultural community. They were grouped around the dominant Vellala cultivators, who deemed themselves committed to reproduce the social ideal of indigenous Tamil traditions. The predominant themes among these groups were agrarian ideals, a lusty involvement in life, lack of concern with purity restrictions and caste interdependence. The 'Right Hand' alliance included, apart from the

Vellalars, groups like Komutti Chettiars, bards, unobis, Farayars, Maravars and Nadars. The 'Left Hand' alliance was associated with trade, artisanal production and the money economy-elements of increasing importance in the late medieval period.¹⁶ This group was led by the artisans, who shirked the world of agrarian independence in favour of a town life. The group consisted of black smiths, Koikola weavers, Chakkaliars, Pallis and Pallars.

The bifurcation is also described by some writers as a dissenting response to the superimposition of an alien 'varnasrama dharma' upon Tamil society. The status level in these two groups were contradictory and evidences show that there was an apparent unity among different strata of the same alliance group during the late medieval period. However, by the 17th and 18th centuries, especially in the larger cities and towns, the primary function of the division was to generate social competition : a social competition which the hegemonic elite, who stood outside and above it, fostered, manipulated and via the conferral of honours, used to reinforce and ratify their position of dominance.¹⁷

Another persistent social cleavage was founded, as Ludden¹⁸ as argued, on the ecological dichotomy of rice-growing lowlands versus dry uplands. The upland areas were controlled by groups like Kallars and

Maravars whose links with the irrigated lowlands were few and antagonistic. It was only in the irrigated lowlands that anything approaching a well-integrated social order emerged. In the light of Wittfogel's analysis of Oriental despotism,¹⁹ it is very tempting to link the emergence of this "hydraulic society" to the achievement of highly centralized state power. But the evidence suggests a strongly different picture. Throughout most of →

→ the period, the political organisation of the Coromandal plains resembled not so much a centralized state as a chiefdom, with the territorial segments of the agrarian order, the many 'nadus', possessing almost complete autonomy. Far from the royal centre, conditions doubtless bordered on statelessness.

IMPACT OF PEASANTISATION AND' OUTSIDE' INVASIONS :

The history of Tamil society can also be seen as the history of peasantisation of the Upland and Tribal lands in a gradual manner. The Upland and Tribal people had always posed a stiff resistance against this process, although in vain. The process of peasantisation began in the Pallava period and reached its zenith during the Chola regime. At the religious level, these struggles got articulated in the form of Bhakti movement, Saivite resurgence and the extrication of Buddhism and Jainism from the Tamil soil. The people who lived in the Uplands were

hitherto free with a relatively backward mode of production.²⁰ With increased peasantisation, these Upland populace were absorbed into the irrigated lowland society as agricultural labourers and as the underprivileged lower groups in the system of 'honours' prevalent in that society.

During the rule of Vijayanagar kings, a lot of demographic changes took place in Tamil Nadu. The dominant group of Reddis and Naidus immigrated from Andhra on a largescale, alongwith the lower strata like Chakkaliars and Thottis during the 16th century A.D. Under the patronage of Telugu rulers, the Naidus and Reddis assumed dominant position in the rural agrarian structure by sharing the privileges of indigenous Vellala landlords. The immigrant Chakkaliars and Thottis were forced to perform lower menial jobs like scavenging to eke out a living.²¹ The Nayakar kings of Andhra recruited the Brahmins for administrative governance of their kingdoms. Meanwhile there were large number of Saivite mutts established by the dominant Vellalars all over Tamil Nadu and the hegemonic religious ideology of 'Saiva Siddanta' spread its roots in Tamil soil deeply.

THE PROBLEM OF 'UNTOUCHABILITY' IN MEDIEVAL TAMIL NADU :

Among the majority of Tamil population, in the intermediate caste of the Left and Right hand, social relations appear to have been mediated by the logic of "honors", where purity criteria was neutral, except perhaps in one regard. The receipt of gifts and honours meant establishing a privileged association with the dominant alliance whose own ideology contained a component of purity. Thus, all who sought and approached this association had to be, to some degree, "pure" themselves. This requirement immediately distinguished them from "untouchables" who formed the lowest strata of the society. They were considered not to be "pure" and hence would not be permitted to seek direct association with the dominant elite. Untouchability as a widespread phenomenon could be traced to the period around 8th century A.D. when the agrarian order got loosely crystallised everywhere in Tamil Nadu.

The Untouchable communities were, specifically and exceptionally, excluded from access to the institutions within which competition for honours, status and power took place while, for example, "kaniachikarar" status and the rights were open to members of all clean castes, they were generally denied as a possibility to untouchables. Equally the untouchables could not compete against clean castes for temple and royal honours. It was not, it should be added, that untouchable communities had no place in and existed, "outside" the legitimate social

order. Untouchable labourers had recognised rights (to subsistence and protection) under "kaniachikarar" communities and recognised places and roles in temples and royal ceremonies. They were very much "incorporated"²². The real issue- and their real disability^a-was that they could not compete for an improvement in their social position, could not approach the dominant alliance for the type of gifts and honours which, both ideologically and materially, could elevate and transform the nature of their social existence.

The crucial, and almost the defining, characteristic of "clean" caste society was its competitiveness. There was intense competition between the Left and Right Hand communities which carries several implications for the nature of the caste system. Stephen Barnett, following Dumont, assumed the traditional caste system to have been non-competitive and hierarchical^{ic}, and made the appearance of competitiveness, the functions of modernisation.²³ He also linked the rise of competition to the substantialisation of caste ideology and the transformation of caste into ethnic identities. But according to Washbrook,²⁴ substantialisation and competitionⁱ were "traditional" elements of the system. The matters are further complicated by its hierarchy. In their relations with both the hegemonic elites and

untouchables, the majority of intermediate caste were involved in relations of hierarchy. By accepting →

→ honours from the elites, they validated the latter's superiority; and by denying the untouchables the right to compete for the same honours, they affirmed their own superiority and privilege. Moreover, the closedness and localisation of community relations and marriage circles suggest an emphasis on the significance of shared blood.

This localisation itself, however, may be seen as a further function of the honours system. There were many kings, temples and "kaniachikarar" communities. The honours which they conveyed were differentially distributed; thus "jatis" of what the 19th century was to term the same caste enjoyed widely differing statuses in different places in relation to different kings, gods and "kaniachikaras."²⁵ Furthermore, these honours were achieved as the result of performing services, the most important of which was endowment, and they could be lost as a result of failing to achieve, since they were re-distributed and contested everytime royal and temple rituals were performed. The pressure towards continuous achievement, especially in material terms that is necessary for making endowments, can be seen to lie behind the strong tendencies towards spatial and occupational mobility, in pursuit of the main chance.

THE 'POLITICAL' CROWN OVER THE 'RELIGIOUS' DOMAIN:

The prevailing conceptions about Indian state and society reflect the larger history of Orientalism, in which the colonial and now post-colonial interest in controlling the East,²⁶ an interest which entailed the delegitimisation of pre-or postcolonial state forms, has merged with a nostalgia for spirituality and, more specifically, a religiously based society. India's represented past haunts not only studies of colonialism, but even the historical legacy handed down to modern India. India's need to invent the nation, the state, and to find the basis for a society which is neither narrowly religious nor ethnic is made for more difficult by prevailing forms of Orientalistic knowledge. As Wendy D.O'Flaherty puts it succinctly, "In Indological studies, it appears all roads lead to the Brahman".²⁷ This kind of Orientalistic knowledge have their immediate roots in representations of the old regime as despotic, decadent, and deformed by decontextualised versions of caste or the village community as the sole and autonomous basis of the Indian society.

According to Nicholas Dirks,²⁸ until the emergence of British colonial rule in southern India the crown was not so hollow as it has generally been made out to be. The kings were not inferior to Brahmins and the political domain was not encompassed by a religious domain. The state

^{or}
forms, while not fully assimilable to western categories of the state, were powerful components in Indian civilisation. Indian society, indeed caste itself, was shaped by political struggles and processes. The term "political" here refers to a situation in which ritual and political forms were fundamentally the same. The stress on the political is both to redress the previous emphasis on "religion" and to underscore the social fact that caste structure, ritual form and political process were all dependent on relations of power. These relations were constituted in and through history; and these relations in the final analysis, were culturally constructed.

In an important study on the ethnohistory of a little kingdom in South India called Pudukkottai, Nicholas Dirks stresses the political over the religious in opposition to the classical standpoint of Louis Dumont. The "little kingdom" called Pudukkotai was located in the middle of Tamil Nadu and was ruled by "Kallar" kings from the end of the 17th century until 1947. Dumont, in his first work on India and his only ethnographic monograph,²⁹ used kallars as examples of ritually marginal group that exemplified the Dravidian isolation of kinship from the influence of caste hierarchy. But in Pudukkottai, kallars were "kings"; they exercised every conceivable kind of dominance and their social organisation reflects this fact. Pudukkottai, according to Nicholas Dirks, rose within the

context of late medieval Hindu political order³⁰. It was the case with other little kingdoms throughout the southern India. In both its emergence to and the maintenance of power, it exemplified the social and military vitality of certain productively marginal areas in the 17th and 18th centuries before it began its long decline under a distinctive form of colonial hegemony engineered by the British. The historical case of Pudukkottai strongly suggests that the caste system, and its attendant hierarchical forms, reached a particular stage of development under a social formation in which the kallar kings reigned supreme.

An important and crucial aspect of the caste system in Tamil Nadu is that caste was embedded in a political context of kingship. This meant among other things that the prevalent ideology had not to do, at least primarily, with purity and pollution, but rather with royalty and honour, and associated notions of power, dominance and order. Though this proposal has already been raised by Arjun Appadurai, Carol Breckenridge, Valentine Daniel, Dennis Mc Givlary and others³¹ in important ways. "The Hollow Crown" of Nicholas Dirks³² provides concrete ethnohistorical evidence by studying the then princely state of Pudukkottai in Tamil Nadu. This runs counter to the dominant theory of caste as proposed by Louis Dumont et al by providing still greater credibility and sharper clarity to the alternative agenda on Caste. This

reintroduces the concern with power and dominance in the culturally determined structures of thought. It is a mistake to try to separate a materialist 'etic' from a culturalist 'emic': even the domain of ritual action and language is permeated with the complex foundation of lived experience of hierarchical relations. And this was very much true in the case of Kallars of Pudukkottai. It was also because of the fact that this group was less affected than most other groups by colonialism and the demise of the old regime in the 19th century.

COLONIAL MEDIATION OF KINGSHIP :

Colonialism changed things both more and less than has commonly been thought. While introducing new forms of civil society and separating these forms off from the colonial state, colonialism also arrested some of the immediate disruptions of change by preserving many elements of the old regime. But by freezing the wolf in sheep's clothing, it changed things fundamentally. Paradoxically, colonialism seems to have created much of what is now accepted as Indian "tradition", including an autonomous caste structure with the Brahmin clearly at the head, village based systems of exchange, the ceremonial residues of the old regime state, and fetishistic competition for ritual goods that no longer play a vital role in the political system. To reverse in a clear-cut historical manner-whether the Brahmin or the king had

precedence- is perhaps to do injustice to the complexity of the issue.³³

The caste system, however, prior to the mediation by the colonial apparatus, was dominated by the kings. The demise of kingship led to major changes in the caste system. The demise of kingship was accompanied by the steady ascendancy of the Brahmin, as the maintainer of social order and codes of caste. Brahmins reached a new high under British colonialism both in their participation in the development of Hindu Law and in their preponderance in colonial administration. Even in the realm of the ideological basis of caste system, the role of Brahmins, not as honoured and valued members of kingdoms, but as the colonially constituted arbiters of caste order, has changed in major ways in the last two centuries. Kings in Pudukkotai of Tamil Nadu continued to rule until very recently where the Brahmins were heavily patronised by these kings. And the caste system was profoundly political.

Under the colonial regime, the honours which were vitally connected to rights to land and to political privileges, were suddenly cut off from the total political system of the old regime. Ultimately colonialism must be seen as a hegemonic structure, which articulated its own particular impact and influence through a variety of institutional and ideological forms. These forms were, for example, the very notion of an Inam settlement, the creation of new bureaucratic office and

procedures, the establishment of new bureaucratic responsibilities of village miracidars, local tahsildars, Diwans and Political Residents, and District collectors, members of the Board of Revenue and judges. Law and property and a whole set of discursive formations predicated on the free and autonomous functioning of these modern ideas and institutions, were set up to appropriate the political functions. They were represented as autonomous, as fundamentally non-political. But this autonomy from political concern and process was as much a myth as the taming of wild elephants by some eponymous ancestor. Like all myths, it gained its power and authority through ritual and effective domination. The "Polligar wars" were ultimately won not on the battlefield but in law courts, in the offices of Diwans and Political Residents, and in correspondence books. The charade was remarkably effective.

Not until the advent of colonialism would the stage be finally set for India's "theatre state", to borrow Clifford Geertz's phrase.³⁴ For under British rule, little kings in India were constructed as colonial subjects and given special colonial scripts. They were maintained, altered and managed as part of a systematic, if awkwardly developing, set of colonial purposes and understandings. The permanent settlements with local lords yielded to settlements with cultivators, annexations increased, and efforts to control those lords who had been appropriated by British

rule intensified. Colonized lords- whether as talukdars, zamindars, or even more saliently as princes in one-third of India under indirect rule- were progressively constructed as edifices not only of loyalty and subservience, but of a newly created and gentrified managerial elite as a tribute and a support to British rule.³⁵ The kallar 'Raja' was reconstructed- and ultimately deconstructed-as an object of colonialism. But when the British achieved the total separation of the Raja from the state, and in the process appropriated the total enunciative function that had once been the Raja's, they realised that this too was not what they had in mind. What they really wanted, of course, was a fiction : a mummified simulacrum much like the displays in the museums of natural history.

The case of Pudukkottai,³⁶ where the otherwise less dominant kallars, ruled as kings, is sensitive to the complex interweaving of ritual - symbolic forms with the so-called actual mechanisms of state power. The shared sovereignty of overlord, king, chief and headman was enacted and displayed through gifts and offerings : through priveleges, honours, emblems, "material" resources, women service, and kinship. Indeed, kinship, caste, territorial organisation, temple worship, and the growth of protection networks and local chiefship were all variably but powerfully inflected by a discourse of order, control, dominance, and power; this discourse was in turn expressed through and in, these gifts,

offerings, and related political and social process. The social relations which made up Tamil society, far from being "essentialist" structures, were permeated by "political" inflections, meanings, and imperatives³⁷. Caste, as it is still portrayed in much current anthropological literature, is a colonial construction, reminiscent only in some ways of the social forms that preceded colonial intervention; Louis Dumont's insistence on the "religious" foundations of hierarchy reflects both post-colonial Orientalist classificatory structures and the depoliticization of Indian society under colonial rule. Thus Nicholas Dirks argues for the historical study of "caste".³⁸ Colonial hegemony succeeded in part by disguising its own intervention, creating masks that continue to deceive. And caste system could be thus understood through colonialism, for it is a critical component in the history of mediations and reconstructions.

THE STRUCTURE OF POWER AND DOMINANCE :

The Tamil agrarian economy has always been, and is even more today, based upon small-scale production units and an extremely wide distribution of rights in land. Since accurate census data began to become available in the later decades of the last century, the preponderant majority of the workforce engaged in agriculture has held rights of 'ownership' to the soil. Early British attempts to create a superior class of revenue/rent-receiving zamindars failed dismally, and even where some zamindars

survived, they were noticeably unable to turn themselves into effective 'landlords'. The revenue system that eventually developed over most of nineteenth century Tamil Nadu was based on 'ryotwari' principles which taxed peasant households directly and individually. Of course, the structure of the peasant economy was highly inegalitarian and, during the colonial period, tended to become more so with the uneven development of the economy.³⁹ But, importantly, this growing inequality did not manifest itself in the form of the loss of land rights and the expansion of proletarian labour. The proportion of 'totally' landless labourers increased hardly at all and the formal structure of landholding underwent remarkably little change between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries.

The development of capitalism manifested itself in more subtle ways which, via the credit, marketing and distribution networks gave richer peasants and larger farmers a greater control over and hence a larger share of the profits of small producers who, nonetheless, retained their access to land. Equally, population pressure was accommodated by intensifying the division of land rights and not by stripping any considerable sections of the population of their rights. These process of development and accomodaton have, if anything, been speeded up by more recent history.⁴⁰ During the inter-war years, agricultural profitability

went into a decline and many of the wealthier families responded to this decline by selling their lands and withdrawing to the towns, where they had longstanding commercial and educational interests. They altogether did not wholly divorce themselves from the land ; their urban commercial interests were subsequently developed to take a new and more 'modern' control of agricultural profits through joint-stock banks, crop purchasing companies and distributive agencies for chemicals, fertilisers and other increasingly necessary farming inputs. But the withdrawal from landownership by the other elite families released considerable quantities of land for further sub-division and distribution among the residual small peasantry. Patterns of petty landownership were intensified. Moreover, technological developments particularly concerning the use of fertilizers and the ever more rigorous exploitation of family labour, have raised per acre productivity to the point where fewer and fewer acres can sustain, at some low level of subsistence, more and more people. The consequence of this has been to put nothing in the way of a continuous fragmentation of holdings to accomodate the more rapid rates of population growth witnessed over the last five decades.

In essence, the development of capitalist agriculture or rather the development of capitalism in agriculture in Tamil Nadu, has not led to the consolidation of landholdings into ever larger, more efficient

enterprises and to the proletarianisation of labour. Rather, it has proceeded by means which promote the fission of landholdings, into smaller production units, which raise production levels by intensifying the 'self-exploitation' of family labour ; and which extract profit through the 'hidden' instruments determining prices, credit, interest rates and 'casual' wage levels.⁴¹ The result, from the perspective of class relations, is →

→ a very incoherent structure in which it is difficult to isolate general interests and to conceive general strategies. 'Pure' agricultural labour represents a relatively small element in most districts, so that it is no wonder it has failed to organise as an effective political force in its own right. The rural society of Tamil Nadu has never been politically passive by nature. But, as capitalist relations have developed, it is difficult for the poor to know where to put the blame or whom to mobilise against. In the absence of rent-demanding zamindars and , since the inter-war period, even members of the old 'informally exploiting', rural elites, the enemies of the poor have moved out of reach and, to some degree, disappeared into the towns. A small number of successful capitalist farmers remain in the countryside but they play a far more reduced role in the general exploitation of the majority of the peasantry than did their grandfathers. The real forces of oppression emanate from the 'impersonal' institutions

of the 'modern' economy, behind which the bourgeois elites have come to hide and which determine prices and profits in ways difficult to comprehend. Diffuse resentments become directed at the government which mediates them in such a way that the class forces giving rise to them are obscured by the bureaucracy. The possibilities of ^{la} class politics in rural Tamil Nadu, then, have been reduced by the extent to which capitalism has promoted the almost infinite 'petit bourgeoisification' of interests in the countryside and developed a managerial state to undertake reconciliation of the conflicts which it generates.⁴² In a sense much the same has happened to the class relations of the towns. In the wake of declining agricultural profitability, the towns of Tamil Nadu grew apace from the inter-war period onwards and have become the main centres of economic development.

To a greater degree, the growth of many towns reflected the development of new industries-cotton textiles, sugar, cement, and light engineering. The petty commercial and informal trading sectors also experienced huge growth, coming to represent the single largest employers of labour in the urban context. Moreover, government and allied educational and professional service employment expanded at an unprecedented rate. So far as class relations are concerned what urbanisation, industrialisation and modernisation brought to Tamil Nadu

was no more a context of binary opposition between capital and labour than the countryside possessed. In effect, these forces brought infinite proliferation of a petit bourgeoisie based in pedlar commerce, quasi-artisanal and small workshop production and educated professional employment. If the nature of the economy favoured the fractionalisation of class interests and the petit-bourgeoisification of the relations of labour and capital, the distribution of castes provided no firmer basis for the development of broad social solidarities.

Tamil Nadu may best be described as a society of small family groups inserted into an economic context of peasant farming, artisanal production and exchange, which, from the later Middle Ages, was increasingly articulated by relations of commercial capitalism. Its small groups were also highly mobile, both spatially and occupationally. Local 'jatis' had their eyes firmly fixed on the main chance, be this in agriculture or trade or manufacturing or education. The barriers which caste posed to occupational mobility were low and, the degree of occupational differentiation among various castes were regularly jumped⁴³. One legacy of this for the 20th century is that the 19th century categories of caste, which have come to provide contemporary definitions of the phenomenon, have only tangential implications for occupational class. Caste and class categories do not overlap to any great extent

even at the very bottom of society where, it might be supposed, lack of opportunity would have done most to keep castes in their hereditary occupations. Another interesting feature to note in Tamil society is the fact that majority of the landless labourers in the state were not Dalits and the majority of the Dalits were not landless labourers. The diffuseness and fragmentation which mark the caste and class relations of Tamil Nadu have their corollaries in very problematic structures of social dominance.

Extreme sensitivity to the issue of superiority and privilege with a high degree of social awareness and status consciousness can be seen among the various caste groups of Tamil Nadu. Objections to privilege are rarely made in terms of universal social equality or that privilege per se is an illegitimate moral norm. Rather, the protests are inclined to focus on the particular person or social group currently possessing privilege and to take the form of representations that the protestor and his/her social group ought to possess the same privilege as well. Caste conflicts are being increasingly witnessed at regions where the Dalit communities command adequate ownership of land, which sometimes is more, if not at par, with the other dominant communities of that region. Indeed, a characteristic of Tamil society is the extent to which all claims to privilege and superiority are constantly and continuously contested. However, the challenges reduce politics to a zero

sum game since, obviously, if all privileges were shared they would lose their exclusivity and cease to be privileges and they are not questioned on its own right. These contradictions could be seen being manifested overtly in the politics of Tamil Nadu.

NOTES AND REFERENCES :

1. Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, OUP, Oxford, 1989, p. 14.
2. *ibid*, p. 52.
3. Louis Dumont, *Homo hierarchicus*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981, p. 37.

4. Burton Stein, *op.cit*, p. 77.
5. David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1985,
6. Bryan Pfaffenberger, *Caste in Tamil Culture*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1982, p. 32.
7. M.N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and other Essays*, Asia Publishing House, London,
8. A. Appadurai, Is Homo Hierarchius? *American Ethnologist*, 1986, 13: 745-61.
9. Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown^w*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987.
10. A. Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict Under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, p. 50.
11. Burton Stein, *op.cit*, p. 86.
12. *ibid*, p. 95.
13. A. Appadurai and Breckenridge C.A., The South Indian Temple: Authority, Honour and Re-distribution, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 1978, no.2.

14. A. Appadurai, Right and Left Hand Castes in South India, *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (Delhi), 1974, vol.II, 216-60, nos.2-3.
15. Burton Stein, *op.cit.*, p. 113.
16. B. Beck, *Peasant Society in Konku*, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 1972.
17. *ibid*, p. 50.
18. David Ludejn, Ecological zones and the cultural Economy of Irrigation in Southern Tamil Nadu, *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 1978, NS, 1-1-13.
19. See, for an analysis on 'hydraulic society', Bryan Pfaffenberger, *op.cit.*, pp. 32-24.
20. Edgar Thurston and K. Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes of South India*, vol. 7, Cosmos Publications, Delhi, 1975.
21. *ibid*, p. 77.
22. K.A., Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India : From the Earliest Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1966.

23. Stephen Barnett, 'Approaches to Changes in Caste Ideology in South India', in B. Stein (ed.) *Essays on South India*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1975.
24. D. Washbrook, 'Caste, Class and Dominance in Modern Tamil Nadu', in Francine Frankel and MSA Rao (eds.), *Dominance and State Power in Modern India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989.
25. *ibid*, pp. 234-236.
26. For literature on this topic, refer Michael T. Ryan, *Assimilating New Worlds in the 16th and 17th centuries*, *Comparative Studies in Society and Literature*, 1981, 23,4: 519-38.
27. Wendy D.O' Flaherty, 'The aura of renunciation', *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS, 1984), no.4, (Nov. 23): 260.
28. Nicholas Dirks, *op.cit.*, pp. 14-23.
29. This is the only ethnographic monograph of Louis Dumont. It was published in French in 1957 but has been translated into English only in 1986. See, Louis Doumont, *A South Indian Sub-caste*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986.
30. Nicholas Dirks, *op.cit*, pp. 32-35.

31. Arjun Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict under Colonial rule : A South Indian Case*, Cambridge University Press, 1981. Carol Breckenridge, *The Sri Minaksi Sundaesvarar Temple : Worship and Endowments in South India : 1833-1925*, University of Wisconsin, Wisconsin, 1976. Valentine E. Daniel, *Fluid Signs : Being a person the Tamil Way*, University of California Press, Berkeley. Dennis Mc Gilvray, *Mukkuvar Vannimai : Tamil Caste and Matriclan Ideology in Batticaloa, Srilanka in Dennis B. Mc Gilvray (ed.) Caste ideology and interaction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982.
32. Nicholas Dirks, *op.cit.*
33. Bernard Cohn, 'Representing authority in Victorian India', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (ed.) *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983.
34. For details on the concept of "theatre state", refer to Clifford Geertz, *Negara : The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1980.
35. Nicholas Dirks, *op.cit.* p. 320.
36. K.R. Venkatarama Ayyar, *A Manual of Pudukkottai State*, The Sri Brihadamba State Press, Pudukkottai, 1940.

37. J.C., Heesterman, 'The Conundrum of king's authority' in J.F. Richards (ed.), *Kingship and authority in South Asia*, University of Wisconsin Publications Series, Madison, 1978.
38. Nicholas Dirks, *op.cit.*, p. 302.
39. D. Kumar (ed.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol.II, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983.
40. C.J. Baker, *An Indian Rural Economy 1880-1995 : The Tamil Nadu Countryside*, OUP, Delhi, 1984.
41. J. Harriss, *Capitalism and Peasant Farming*, OUP, Bombay, 1982.
42. D. Washbrook, *op.cit.*, pp. 220-221.
43. K.C. Alexander, 'Caste Mobilisation and Class Consciousness' in Francine R. Frankel and M.S.A. Rao (eds.), *op.cit.*

CHAPTER-II

CATEGORISATION OF CASTES IN THE POLITICS OF MODERNITY

When the Portuguese traveller Vasco da Gama succeeded in sailing around Africa by landing on the West Coast of India in 1498, the world trade had acquired a new dimension and a basis was laid for colonial expansion. From the 16th century onwards, European missionaries and traders started settling down on the shores of India. The heterogeneous amalgam of customs and rituals, so foreign and thus confusing to European perceptions, could not be comprehended in its own terms. The compelling need for a defining feature of Indian society has not only been responsible for the use of the term 'caste', but also for according it a seminal importance.

The main tenets of traditional explanations of caste, raised to the status of official definitions, paved way to decode India not only for the West, but also for the Indians themselves. The great abundance of research and surveys undertaken could be grouped under

Empirical Realists constituted of Christian missionaries and administrators. The second group of Romantic idealists comprised of the Orientalists and philosophers of history and comparative religion. For both groups, i.e., the empiricists and idealists, caste was concerned as the defining institution of a "Hindu India", and both linked it with the racial theory of Aryan conquest. The corpus of knowledge thus generated facilitated the 'domestication of the other'², which had far-reaching consequences. The Christian missionaries were the first Westerners to show an interest in Tamil culture and to study Tamil language. The European missionaries like Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656), Constantius Beschi (1680-1743), Rev. Robert Caldwell (1819-1891) and G.U. Pope (1820-1907) were also outstanding Tamil scholars.³ Robert Caldwell developed the theory that Sanskrit had been brought to South India originally by Aryan Brahmin colonialists, and with it a peculiar type of Hinduism which embodied the worship of idols. Though this theory had been subsequently contested by the later-day scholarship, some British officials like J.H. Nelson and M.E. Grant-Duff of the Madras Presidency echoed the sentiments of these missionaries⁴. The ideological category "non-Brahmin" had its roots here. It began to be perceived by the development of a sense of a Dravidian cultural history 'inherently superior' to that of the South Indian Brahmins. The

European missionaries had been instrumental to a greater extent, in the process of forging such an identity.

ENUMERATION OF 'CASTES' BY THE BRITISH COLONIAL STATE:

The British rule in India formally lasted from 1757 to 1947, a little short of two hundred years. The most far-reaching and fundamental innovation that the British introduced to Indian society was the modern state. One symptom of its modernity was that its techniques of government were very closely tied to the techniques of measurement. From surveys of land to crop output to prospecting minerals, from measuring Indian bodies, diets and life-span (laying the foundations of physical anthropology) to modern medicine, the British had the length and breadth of India, its history, culture and society, mapped, classified, and quantified in detail. The most dramatic example of this governmental concern with measurement were the decennial Indian censuses, the first of which was published in 1872. Without numbers, it would be impossible to practice bureaucratic or instrumental rationality.

Systematic collection of detailed and classified statistics for the purpose of ruling seems to be intimately connected to modern ideas of government⁵. This belongs to the deep structure of imagination that is invested in modern political order. The history of the very discipline of 'statistics' carries the tale. The word 'statistics',

etymologically speaking, has the idea of statecraft built in to it. Measurement is central to our modern ideas about fairness and justice and how we administer them. Benthamite attempts at using law for social engineering or the utilitarian aim of devising a society that tried to maximise the pleasure of the maximum possible number of people—all speak a language borrowed from mathematics and the natural sciences, given the connection between Enlightenment rationalism and scientific paradigms. The 1790 American census had to do with the idea of proportionality in the sphere of political representation. Ideas of ‘correspondence’ and ‘proportionality’ mark Rousseau’s thoughts on ‘equality’. Without them and without the numbers they produced, the equal opportunity legislation of our own period would be unworkable. A generalised accounting mind-set is what inhabits modernity.⁶

The British, as the representatives and the inheritors of European Enlightenment, brought the Liberal political ideas to India. While the British would never take the step of granting India full self-government until 1947, they were often concerned about being ‘fair’ to the different competing sections that, in their view, made up the Indian society, and these sections, the British had defined quite early on in religious and caste terms. Naturally then, categories about caste and religion dominated the censuses that the British undertook in India. At every census, people were asked to state their religion and

caste and, this was in marked contrast to what the British did at home. Counting Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Untouchables became a critical political exercise particularly in the twentieth century as the British began to include Indian representatives in the legislative bodies in very measured doses. What made the census operations critical was that the British, in trying to be fair referees, made the process of political representation 'communal': seats in the legislative assemblies were earmarked for different communities according to ideas of proportionality⁷.

New identities are created through this process of a quasi-modern, albeit colonial, state instituting through modern means of measurement, a structure of political representation tied to notions of proportionality. The 'communities' in pre-British India had 'fuzzy' boundaries, and in the British India they became 'enumerated': A fundamental change effected in the discursive domain of 'modern' politics in the colonial period was the impoverishment of the earlier 'fuzzy' sense of the community and an insistence upon the identification of community in the 'enumerable' or countable sense⁸. The censuses and other similar reports then reconstituted the meaning of 'community' and it gave three important political messages all of which are entirely commensurable with liberal political philosophy⁹. These messages were :

- (a) that communities could be enumerated, and in numbers, lay one's political clout,
- (b) that the social and economic progress of a community was a measurable entity, measured in the case of Indian census by their share in public sphere (education, professions, employment, etc) and,
- (c) that this enabled governments and communities to devise objective tests for the relative 'backwardness' or otherwise of a community.

The everyday sense of multiple identities is too complex for the simple binary rules for public life. It is this pressure, which is essentially the pressure that modern political orders produce, that led many communities to profess simplistic, homogeneous identities in 'public life' disregarding all the heterogeneity and diversity of everyday social practices. This structure of relationships has the nature of what is called fractal or self-similar patterns i.e., it is capable of reproducing itself at many different levels. As an idea, as the French historian Lucien Febvre¹⁰ once reminded us, it has been with us since the second half of the eighteenth century. It was packed into the idea of 'civilization' a word the French started to use in the 1760s, and which soon found its way into the English language to provide the noblest justification for England's work in India. The

word 'civilization' has long since fallen out of favour; we prefer to talk about 'progress' in the nineteenth century and 'development' in the twentieth, but the idea of a united world with an internally articulated hierarchy measurable by some universally agreed indices, has remained with us. The rise of modern caste consciousness shows a similar concern for the measurement of 'progress' and 'development' in public life. The middle classes of Tamil Nadu strongly internalised this idea during the later half of the 19th century. Thereupon 'caste' had become the focus of political discourse in modern Tamil history. It is of crucial significance, at this juncture, to compare and contrast this modern construction of 'caste' with the earlier conceptualisations about Tamil society.

THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS OF ZIEGENBALG:

Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg¹¹ was a Pietist-Lutheran missionary, belonging to the early 18th century, based in the Danish enclave of Tranquebar. Not only was he a perspicacious observer, but also being fluent in Tamil he was able to consult Tamil scriptures as well as converse freely with his Tamil associates. The interesting aspect of his quasi-ethnographic survey, '*Malabarisches Heidenthum*' ('Malabarian or Tamil Paganism')¹² is that, even though the four varnas are mentioned, he focuses his attention on only one of them, namely, the Sudras. In enumerating by name 71 of their families or jatis, he

shows that they constitute the majority of the 98 families cited at the outset, and thus, for him, the Sudras seem to legitimately represent the genuine mass of Tamil society. Moreover, Ziegenbalg's exclusive interest in the Sudras stands out in stark contradiction to the Brahminically-oriented research of the late 18th and 19th centuries. Furthermore, it is the divisions of jatis of the Sudras that are considered the real tangible entities, whereas the fourfold varnas are relegated to the nebulous realm of cosmogony.

The real entities- the Sudra jatis, the first is called the Sudra Brahmin who, in Ziegenbalg's words, commands the most respect and is supposedly versed in Grantha, in other words, South Indian equivalent of Sanskrit. This fusion of two distinct varnas could be explained in sociological language *a la* Dumont¹³ as follows: The Brahmin varna serving as an ideological archetype can be incorporated as a respected jati in the Sudra varna. Ziegenbalg, though oblivious of such a theoretical explanation, does nonetheless grasp intuitively that distinctions of status between social groups can be concretized by referring to another level of classification, and more significantly that this varna level of classification has a mere referential function. Furthermore, this specificity or group prestige which, according to him, is exhibited by many Sudra jatis, is considered more as a trait defining group identity rather than as a 'closed status symbol'¹⁴. Other restrictive notions generally held about

caste organisation can be viewed in a more nuanced way as we proceed with Ziegenbalg's report.

First and foremost, his description of the Sudra community comprising a number of distinct families or *jatis* does not convey the existence of a rigidly structured system, but rather one of 'scale of forms'¹⁵. With regard to occupational specialisation, a characteristic feature of caste organisation, and one which Ziegenbalg stresses, there seems to be considerable discrepancy between theory and practice. For though it is reported that theoretically the profession of a family or *jati* is hereditary, from the evidence of field data supplied by Ziegenbalg, where at least one-third of the groups cited practise something other than the traditional calling, this is by no means rigidly maintained in practice. Furthermore, it is stated that official and political functions, such as those of teachers, councillors, governors, priests, poets and even kings are not considered the prerogative of any particular group, but are open to all. This, to a large extent, contradicts Risley's claim that 'the exclusion of most of the castes from politics left little room for the growth of feeling of common interest and public spirit'¹⁶. Even Abbe Dubois had to admit that it is not uncommon to come across 'a Sudra scribe and a Brahmin labourer'¹⁷. So, if these empirical observations are to be accepted at face value, occupational specialisation could be considered a theoretical

norm rather a prescriptive reality. Flexibility and mobility appear to have been the hallmarks of the pattern of economic organisation.

As regards the hierarchial structure of Indian social organisation there seems to be little evidence of this in Ziegenbalg's presentation of the Sudra groupings. Though the distinctiveness of individual groups is stressed, no mention is made of intergroup ranking. Admittedly, besides the respective status of the Sudra Brahmins being acknowledged at the outset, three occupational groups are reported as having a low status. The pre-eminent status of the Brahmins highlighted in 19th century literature on caste is another feature that can be questioned by a close reading of Ziegenbalg's view of Tamil society. Not only does he stress its Sudra composition but, in citing from a Tamil text "*Ererubadu*"¹⁸, he elevates the sudra Vellala on to a pedestal, higher even than the Brahmin's, by proclaiming : "Even being born a Brahmin does not by far endow one with the same excellence as when one is born into a Vellala family"¹⁹. Rather than investigate why Ziegenbalg selected this sudra Vellala text, one should ask more pertinently why the pre-eminence of the Vellala agriculturists propounded here made no dint on the Brahmanical view point propagated since the late 18th century. And, viewed from a theoretical angle, the acknowledgement of the prestigious position of the Vellalas would mitigate the dichotomy posited by Louis Dumont²⁰ of 'status versus power', stemming from the notion of Brahmanical

spiritual purity, since both concepts would seem to be incorporated in the single person of the dominant Vellala.

Regarding the practice of group endogamy which has been treated as the distinctive feature *par excellence* of caste society, Ziegenbalg merely mentions the practice without passing any judgements, positive or negative. This, however, is not the case with later more ideologically biased observers who stress the religious implications of the 'caste system'. As Klass in his book²¹ on the origins of caste makes the point, endogamy and 'purity of descent' are unrelated concepts. Where they are fused, as for caste, the fusion reflects culturally biased or ethnocentric categorising. But it was this fusion of distinct concepts which served as the central premise for the theory promulgated a century or so later attributing to the Aryan/Dravidan racial antagonism the origins of the caste system. The early observers thus projected a divergent view of the Tamil social organisation as seen explicitly in the case of Ziegenbalg. In these accounts, not only was caste not conceived as the defining institution of Indian society but viewed from a non-Brahminical angle- and from a social rather than a religious perspective- central notions such as linear hierarchy, rigid occupational specialisation, the racial implications of group endogamy and, more importantly, the pre-eminent status of the Brahmins were radically questioned.

CONTEXTUALISING CASTE IN THE POLITICS OF MODERNITY :

By 'putting caste in its place' we do not mean denying its importance but rather trying to identify its importance relative to other aspects of social life which might also be considered axial to Tamil society, and subjecting the fascination it has led for social researchers to critical scrutiny. As Appadurai²² has suggested, the idea of Indian society as dominated by caste hierarchy fulfils the need for a single and powerful organising image which enables people in the West to think about a particular non-Western society, an image which 'captures internal realities in terms that serve the discursive needs of general theory in the metropolis.'²³ The compelling need for a defining feature of Indian society has not only been responsible for the use of the term 'caste,' but also for according it seminal importance. Consequently, the intellectual reservoir from which organising principles have been drawn were unabashedly Eurocentric²⁴. The consequences of this 'domestication of the other'²⁵, curiously enough, have been not to draw India closer to Europe, but rather, by attributing it a distinctive social institution, to distinguish it from the West, and, let it be emphasised, in the West's own terms. Such interpretations in terms of a superimposed structured system of caste have been used as a foil to construct the West's image of itself.

The late 18th, 19th and 20th century interpretations of caste have been examined in detail by Ronald Inden²⁶ who distinguishes from amongst the great abundance of research and surveys undertaken two main approaches which are labelled concisely as pertaining to those of the empirical realists on the one hand and the romantic idealists on the other. To the former camp belonged missionaries and administrators, and to the latter orientalist and philosophers of history and comparative religion. The empiricists considered that the jatis constituted the real entities of what they defined as the exploitative and chaotic caste system, representing conflicting groups which were an obstacle to economic and political progress according to the administrators, or to Christianisation in the case of missionaries. For both interested parties Brahmins were the real culprits, for they were seen to exercise despotic control over the whole of society. India, consequently, was viewed as a peculiarly unenlightened primitive society, held in chains by the ancient caste system, and thus, by logical implication, foreign intervention and domination by a more highly developed and enlightened society was legitimised.

To the idealists, however, and primarily to the Orientalists whose knowledge of Hindu society was based on the classical Brahmanical texts, the *varnasrama* was the organising principle *par excellence*, representing a cohesive, albeit primitive, form of social

order. In this scheme of things, the Brahmins, who were viewed as the original legislators of India, were the upholders of the traditional order. For both groups, i.e., the empiricists and the idealists, caste was conceived as the defining institution of Hindu India, and both linked it with the racial theory of Aryan conquest. In such a conceptualised view of caste, India is denied a relationship of coevalness with Europe, and more significantly, there is no room for 'human agency', i.e., 'the capacity of people to order their own world'²⁷. The shifts and changes in the rationality underlying the construction of this rigid and closed model of Indian society have been examined at length by Inden and prior to him by Bernard Cohn. Moreover, since the pragmatic and ideological constraints of establishing and maintaining colonial rule were preoccupations of earlier epochs, interpretations and theories of caste system formulated in that political and intellectual climate can legitimately be contested in the present. In fact, the very inconsistencies in these differing representations of the internal structuring in Indian society could tangibly reveal another notion of system, namely that of a 'scale of forms'. To elucidate briefly, we refer to Inden's exposition: 'the scale of forms is built out of overlapping classes rather than mutually exclusive or even opposed ones. Agency is integral to a system in this sense, for it is assumed that systems of this sort are made and not simply found and they are continually being completed, contested and remade'.²⁸

All this together now constitute what is sometimes broadly referred to as the 'critique of modernity' debate in India.²⁹ It leads to the exploration of the complex and unavoidable links that exist in Indian history between the phenomenon of caste conflicts and the modern governing practices that the British introduced into India as the historical bearers of Enlightenment rationalism. This governmental concern with measurement was manifested in the decennial Indian census, which was first published in 1872. Of particular importance in this process is the 'categorisation' of different castes, which were enumerated for the politics of affirmative action in the development of modernity in India through the process of colonial mediation. The idea of 'scale of forms' that would more adequately capture the complex diversities and heterogenous variations was relegated to the backburner. Its place was taken away by a rigid conceptualisation of a hierarchically structured caste system which was more convenient to the politics of modernity. This hegemonic ideology reigned supreme even after Independence, reaching its consummation in the approach of Louis Dumont. While the post-Dumontian approaches of the recent times are endeavouring to 'put caste in its place', it lies beyond the scope of our study to delve deep into the intricacies of the debate. It would best serve our objectives if we venture into studying the dynamics of 'caste' politics in Tamil Nadu as it got mediated by the erstwhile colonial state, and later on by the modern nation-state.

THE COLONIALY MEDIATED BIRTH OF A "NON-BRAHMIN" COMMUNITY:

As we have seen earlier, Tamil Nadu's 'caste system' was very different from that of the Northern Gangetic tradition. Indeed, it has perhaps come to be considered as a 'caste system' at all more because of the activities of the 19th century Orientalist scholars and their 20th century anthropologist progeny, Anglo-Indian legal theorists, census enumerators and bureaucratic centralisers than because of anything else. As has already been explained in the preceding chapter, these complexities arose out of the peculiarities of Tamil history. By the second half of the 19th century, the regional distribution of preponderant (in the sense of numerically the largest) castes became extremely fragmented. No single caste was preponderant over an area equivalent to more than one British district, and usually it was much less. There were, in the first place, great differences between the societies of the river valleys, plains and hills, which were, nonetheless, spatially proximate and, at times, intersecting.

Classically, the river valley society, based upon paddy cultivation, was formed around a core of Vellala farmers, whose local dominance was ritually legitimised by the Brahmins and exercised mainly over an Untouchable landless labour force. The society of the plains was poorer but much more open and diverse. There were few Brahmins and Untouchables. The agrarian economy was organised

TABLE 1: 1891.
CASTE TYPES AS PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION OF EACH DISTRICT, 1891.

District	Madras	Chengulput	S.Arcot	Salem	Coimbatore	Thanjavur	Tiruchirapalli	Madurai/ Ramnad	Tirunelveli	Total
• Priest	4	4	3	2	2	6	6	2	4	3.09
• Vellala	12	7	7	16	31	10	8	9	9	12.42
• Milita & Immigrant	13	25	36	29	10	24	31	23	18	24.61
• Field Labour	12	26	24	13	9	22	21	13	16	17.49
• Hunter/Herder	4	7	7	7	3	9	6	11	5	7.02
• Artisan & Service	9	14	10	18	26	10	9	16	28	16.32
• Merchant	28	5	7	7	8	10	4	12	8	9.64

Source : C. J. Baker, An Indian Rural Economy 1880-1955, Oxford, 1984, p-55.

around peasant clans, who combined farming with warfare. Outside agriculture, there was a diverse set of economic opportunities involving artisanal, pastoralist and merchant groups. The hills were organised on what might loosely be termed tribal principles with few outsiders. From the 15th century, international trade began to make an increasing impact on the economy, drawing towards the coasts and hence the river valleys, artisans and merchant groups. The river valleys themselves expanded to incorporate, alongside the Vellala/ Brahmin/ Untouchable triad, the tenant and land controlling groups from the plains.³⁰

The implications for 'caste' of these patterns of diversity and movement can be seen in Table 1, which breaks the district population down by caste 'type' or origin as of 1891. As can be seen, it was rare for a 'preponderant' caste type to represent more than a quarter of district's population. Moreover, in most districts, there were usually two or three major caste types, whose 'hierarchical integration' is usually difficult to conceive in conventional terms. The matter, however, is more complicated yet. These 'caste types' themselves break down into a series of much smaller groupings based on discrete identities, names and traditions. South Indian marriage and kinship patterns were extremely localised and inclined to reflect cross-cousin liaisons: most endogamous jatis extended over no more than a few villages. Moreover, since the effective jati status was

principally determined, as we have seen earlier, by the achievement of royal and temple honours and, as there were many kings and many temples, and as levels of achievement varied, so different jatis of what the 19th century perceived as the same caste frequently enjoyed different statuses in different places across the land.

How far the caste groupings represented any social solidarities given by history may be judged from the fact that, while the preponderant 'Pallis' of Chengelpet and North Arcot included many dominant landowners, those of the South Arcot and north Thanjavur were mainly inferior tenants and landless labourers. Likewise, while the preponderant 'Nadars' of Thirunelveli were principally toddy-tappers, scarcely considered 'clean', those of northern Ramnad and Madurai included houses of great merchant capitalists and temple patrons.³¹ The extremities of local differentiation and fissiparation in the Tamil 'caste system' are to be seen in the results of the 1891 census: the enumerators were obliged to list more than 9,000 different caste titles. The diffuseness and fragmentation which mark the caste relations of Tamil Nadu, have their corollaries in very problematic structures of social dominance. With the exception of inferior status of the Untouchables who were termed as 'Panchamas' during the last decades of the 19th century, it is difficult to define any other areas of social consensus regarding matters of hierarchy and authority. Indeed a characteristic of Tamil society is the extent to which

all claims of privilege and superiority are constantly and continuously contested.

Harriss, in his study of Chengelpet district³² noted how caste groups while acutely conscious of the bases of social difference between them, insisted that none was or should be inherently superior to any other. That is why, extreme sensitivity to the issue of superiority or privilege can be seen to lie behind the campaigns of the Dravidian Movement for a united 'Non-Brahmin' resurgence at a later stage.³³ At this juncture, it is pertinent to shift our focus of attention upon the British administrative policies during the later half of the 19th century. The Report of the Education Commission of 1882, created a list of 'backward classes' in the context of the education of lower strata of society. The then Public Instruction Department termed it as 'popular instruction', by both governmental and private efforts, especially those by the European Missionaries. This resulted after the British administration realised that shaping men of high castes in the Macaulay mould of "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, opinions, morals, and intellect" was no longer the only necessary and desirable motivation of its educational policy in India. Implicit in this realisation was a belated concern for broadening the base of its colonial paternalism.

The list of 'backward classes' became diversified as early as 1884 with the inclusion of Paraiyas and kindred classes alias

Panchamas alias Adi-Dravidas, as they were named subsequently. Till 1925, the list of 'backward classes' included both the Panchamas and other lower strata above them. The 1911 census was published by the British government to demonstrate a Brahmin 'monopoly' of the Civil Service in the Madras Presidency. And the famous "Non-Brahmin Manifesto" took birth at this historical conjuncture in 1916, calling for the end of the 'Brahmin raj' by a 'united struggle of all Non-brahmins'³⁴. Thus, the mediation of the colonial state through the decennial census operations and various modern governing practices paved way for the concocted birth of an enigmatic entity called the 'Non- Brahmin' community.

CONSTRUCTING THE BRAHMIN 'OTHER' :

With their scribal background, Brahmins were the first to realise that under the colonial dispensation, English education was the key to government employment and literate professions. It is now a well established fact that as the 'ritualistic supermen' and literate, combining in them both sacral and temporal powers, Brahmins had dominated the employment sector of the newly created colonial state apparatus. To begin with, the key positions were held by Mahratta Brahmins, a miniscule group. By the mid- 19th century they, along with the Tamil Brahmins, controlled major positions in the district administration. In the whole of Madras Presidency Brahmins accounted for about 90% of all the Chief Sheristadars, 87% of all the

Deputy Sheristadars, 75% of all the Tahsildars, and 78% of all these positions taken together (Table 2). Things did not change much when the 1911 census was published in Madras Presidency. It again revealed the preponderance of Brahmins : they held 57 to 76% of the jobs in different departments, and about 69% of all the jobs, though they were only about 3% of the entire population. The 'Non-brahmins' which then included the Depressed classes during 1911 constituted 87% of the population. But their share in jobs was about 22% only (Table-3).

This is only one side of the coin. What was conveniently forgotten in this maze of statistical data is the fact that out of the share of 22% 'Non-Brahmin' jobs, the dominant Vellala community was preponderant. Eventhough the Vellalas constituted of about 16% of the population, their proportion in the total share of the 22% jobs occupied by the 'Non-Brahmins' was the largest, i.e., around 18%. The remaining 4% of the jobs was left over for the rest of the majority of the population. The feverish enthusiasm of the Dravidian ideologues to label an 'alien' enemy blinded the people from perceiving the contradictions that existed within its close proximity. The Justice Party and later on the Dravida Kazhagam were copiously funded by a closely knit elite of rich people from the higher echelons of society comprising of landlords and educated professionals belonging to the non-Brahmin upper caste groups. They were very much worried about the growing number of Brahmins in Public

TABLE 2: COMPOSITION OF DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION, 1855

Cast/Community	Huzur Sheristadar		Naib Sheristadar		Tahsildar		Total	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
• Mahratta Brahmins	17	81.0	20	52.6	117	47.6	154	50.5
• Other Brahmins	2	9.5	13	34.2	68	27.6	83	27.2
• Non-Brahmins	2	9.5	3	7.9	45	18.3	50	16.4
• Muslims	-	-	-	-	13	5.3	13	4.3
• Indian Christians	-	-	2	5.3	3	1.2	5	1.6
• Total	21	100.0	38	100.0	246	100.0	305	100.0

Source : Tabulated from Suntharalingam 1980 : 18.

TABLE 3 : OFFICIALS BY CASTE/COMMUNITY, 1911

Department	Brahmins		Non-Brahmins		Christians & Muslims		Total	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
• Revenue	4106	70.1	1324	22.6	427	7.3	5857	100.0
• Judicial	178	62.7	78	27.5	28	9.8	284	100.0
• Salt, Abkari and customs	613	56.8	284	26.3	183	17.0	1080	100.0
• Public works	397	72.7	88	16.1	61	10.6	546	100.0
• Education	440	75.7	56	9.6	85	14.6	581	100.0
• Total	5734	68.7	1830	21.9	784	9.4	8348	100.0
• Population		3.2		87.4		9.4		100.0

Note : Christians include Europeans/Eurasians (0.1 percent) ; population as per 1911 Census

Source : Go 1561 Public, December 19, 1912.

Services, in the District Boards and also in the Home Rule Movement which was very vocal at that time in Madras under the leadership of Dr. Annie Besant.

The category of 'Non-Brahmins' came in handy at the hands of the dominant elite to mobilise the masses under a single banner with a common 'enemy'-the Brahmin 'Other'. Another factor, however minor it may be, was that the Brahmins were generally portrayed as not 'similar' with the local population. They were easily distinguishable from the others by dress or manner of speech and behaviour. The existence of '*agraharams*' and numerous temples made their sequestered position very conspicuous, in addition to their overwhelming presence in services and professions.³⁵ But then this was at least partially true in the case of Vellalas also. The domination of Vellalas in the Saivite '*mutts*' and the puritanical motions of Saivite tradition were equally explicit in their cultural markers. This became to be ignored or at best criticised in a friendly undertone. In many a region of Tamil Nadu, Brahmin dominance was never a marked feature in any way. Such complex realities were underplayed by the leaders of the Dravidian Movement. All these factors paved the way for a significant re-orientation of perceptions about castes and communities in Tamil Nadu.

THE PANDORA'S BOX :

The identity of a 'Non-Brahmin' community encapsulates the complexities, contradictions and conundrums of Tamil Society. Though the Dravidian Movement steered towards an apparent unity between the antagonistic communities, it had to come to terms, with its own differences. The categorisation of the population into various lists for the governmental policy of affirmative action or protective discrimination became a competing domain for the communities based on the principles of inclusion and exclusion depending upon the perceptions of the relative deprivation. The policy of the reservation in the educational institutions and public services has a long history in Tamilnadu dating back to the year 1921³⁶. It is beyond the scope of this study to dwell upon the politics of reservation in Tamilnadu. It would suffice to capture the picture thus emerged in the following terms:

(1) DEPRESSED CLASSES/SCHEDULED CASTES/DALITS :

As the Backward Classes list continued to grow rapidly from 1884 onwards, threatened ^{of} by getting swamped by the multitude of castes in such an ever expanding list, the 'Panchamas' clamoured for treatment as a separate category of depressed classes³⁷. At its sixth session held at Madras on December 16, 1917 the South Indian Depressed Classes Conferences passed a resolution requesting the British government for separating the 'Panchmas' from the backward classes. From then on the Panchamas put forth their claim for

the separate treatment. In the light of these developments, in 1925, the government split the backward classes list into two:

- a) 'Depressed Classes' comprising the Panchamas and the tribals, and
- b) 'Castes other than Depressed Classes.'

In 1935, following the Government of India Act, the list of 'Depressed Classes' was replaced by the 'Scheduled castes' list. It comprised of both the 'Panchamas' and the tribals. After 1950, the tribals were separated from the list. The 'Untouchable'/'Harijan' communities in Tamil Nadu who belong to the constitutional category of 'Scheduled Castes' drew inspiration from the Dalit resurgence of Maharashtra and Karnataka. From the mid-eighties onward, they named themselves as 'Dalits' rejecting all the other labels imposed by others. The dominant communities of Dalits in Tamil Nadu include the Pallars, the Paraiyars and the Chakkaliars.³⁸

(2) SCHEDULED TRIBES :

When the Constitution of India came into being, consequent to the publication of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, and the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950, for extending the concessions granted to the Scheduled Castes to the Scheduled Tribes also, in March 1951, the Scheduled Castes' list was also split into two :

- a) The Scheduled castes, and,

b) The Scheduled Tribes.

In Tamil Nadu, the tribal population includes the Todas, Badugas, Kurumbas, Irulas, Villis, Kanis, etc., who live in the hilly regions of Nilgiris, Shervaroys and Courtallam. Together they constitute less than 1% of the total population and hence does not enjoy any significant clout in the politics of the state.

(3) BACKWARD CASTES :

The most fluid category in Tamil Nadu is the Backward Castes. The first Backward Classes Commission was constituted in 1969 by the DMK Ministry. It was headed by A.N. Sattanathan and it submitted its Report in 1970.³⁹ It added certain Forward Communities into the list of Backward classes. The dominant community of Western Tamil Nadu namely the Kongu Vellalars along with the Tuluva Vellalars and Sozhia Vellalars from other parts, were included in the list of Backward classes by the DMK Ministry owing to their political clout. The Arcot Mudaliars, Saiva Vellala Pillais, Nattukottai Chettiars and Rajus were excluded from the list of the Backward classes in 1953. At present, they, along with of course, the Brahmins, come under the category of Forward Communities, totally constituting less than 10% of the state's population. The rest of the entire population including the Muslims and Christians comprise the list of Backward Classes in Tamil Nadu.

The Second Backward Classes was constituted by the AIADMK Ministry in 1982 headed by J.A. Ambasankar⁴⁰. To prevent the 'creaming effect' of the Reservation policy, it recommended compartmental reservations. The DMK Ministry in March 1989 implemented its recommendations by setting aside, out of the overall 50 per cent for the Backward Classes, 20 per cent for the 'Most Backward Classes' and denotified communities at the state level. The major communities among them includes the Vanniars and Vettuvars. During the early nineties under the regime of AIADMK, the dominant communities of central and south Tamil Nadu namely, the Maravars, Kallars and Ahamudaiyars, collectively called as Mukkulathors or Thevars were shifted from the list of BCs and were added to the list of MBCs, owing to their political clout. There is an increasing clamour for the list of MBCs among other dominant backward castes also⁴¹. This compartmentalisation is more a measure of political expediency than an advance towards social justice. The central government's list of 'Other Backward Classes' includes all the communities coming under both the BC and MBC lists with the exclusion of a few minor ones in Tamil Nadu.

The foregoing account of the evolution of various categories of castes in Tamil Nadu clearly shows that far from being a creation of the Indian Constitution, these have been created by the British administration, supported and sustained by the missionary

educationists, and propagated by the numerous bottom groups craving for their social advancement under the new dispensation. Understanding the emergence and growth of these various lists is crucial for rationalising the present caste categories. For it is these lists and not any other arrived at after proper enumeration, which have been used to fill the three backward classes categories envisaged by our Constitution. The fact to be noted here is that a few dominant caste groups have gained the maximum benefit out of this politics of categorisation of castes employed in the policy of positive discrimination at the cost of other communities. Further these communities represent the dominant and powerful communities in the different regions they inhabit. They are involved invariably in the atrocities and oppression being committed against the Dalits. Thus casteism clearly is not a preserve of the Brahmins alone. The casteist tendencies amongst the non-Brahmin castes, the manner in which they enforce caste norms and their role in maintaining the status quo is an intricately complex factor that has to be taken into account in this changed socio-political context. But equally important for rationalising these various categories of castes is a closer look at the discourse of 'non-Brahminism' in the politics of Dravidian Movement in the light of the recent accentuation of caste conflicts that has gained momentum during the later half of the twentieth century.

NOTES AND REFERENCES :

- (1) Benard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and other →*
→ *Essays*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1987, PP. 136-71.
- (2) Michael T. Ryan, 'Assimilating New Worlds in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *Comparative Studies in Society and Literature*, 1981,23,4: 519-38.
- (3) Eugene F. Irschick, *Dialogue and History : Constructing South India, 1795-1895*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1994.
- (4) *Ibid.*
- (5) See Kenneth W. Jones, 'Religious Identity and the Indian Census' in N.G. Barrier (ed.), *Census in British India : New Perspectives*, Delhi, 1984, P. 74.
- (6) See T.H. Hollingsworth, *Historical Demography*, London, 1969, P. 78.
- (7) Kenneth W. Jones, *op. cit.*, P. 77.
- (8) Sudipta Kaviraj, *On the Construction of Colonial Power : Structure, Discourse and Hegemony*, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, 1989, Mimeo.
- (9) See Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Modernity and Ethnicity in India', *South Asia*, Vol. XVII, Special Issue, 1994, PP. 143-55.

- (10) Lucien Febvre, 'Civilisation : evolution of a word and a group of ideas', in Peter Burke (ed.), *A New Kind of History : From the Writings of Febvre*, London, 1973, PP. 219-257.
- (11) For literature on Ziegenbalg, see-Arno Lehmann, *It Began at Tranquebar : A History of the first Protestant Mission in India*, CLS : Madras, 1956, and, Dharampal, *The Madras Panchayat System*, Vol. II, Impex India, Delhi, 1972.
- (12) This monograph-like treatise was completed in 1711 and sent to Halle, Germany for publication. However, due to the ideological opposition of the Pietist missionary authorities, it remained in manuscript form for more than two centuries, when it was edited by the Indologist W. Caland in 1926. Other important works by Ziegenbalg are *Genealogy of the Malabarian Gods* completed in 1713 and published in 1867, an anthology of Tamil ethical and judicial principles, compiled in 1708 and published in 1930, and a Tamil grammar, the only work to be published in Halle in 1716.
- (13) Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, OUP, Delhi, 1988.
- (14) Comparative stratification studies like that of Rudolph and Rudolph, and F.G. Bailey have tended to employ a reified conception of caste viewed as 'a system in which rigidly ascribed and closed status groups, whose superordinate and subordinate

relationships are legitimised by a comprehensive sacred ideology, block social mobility and change.'

- (15) Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1990.
- (16) Herbert Risley, *The People of India* (ed. and introduction William Crooke), Thacker Spink, Calcutta, 1915.
- (17) See the much cited work of Abbe Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, published first in French and translated into English in 1825.
- (18) According to Caland, this poem is attributed to Kambar.
- (19) This is further supported by evidence provided by Stein. See Burton Stein, 'Brahman and Peasant in Early South Indian History', *The Adyar Library Bulletin*, 1967-68, 31-32 : 229-69.
- (20) Louis Dumont, *op. cit.*
- (21) Morton Klass, *Caste : The Emergence of the South Asian Social System*, Institute for the study of Human Issues, Philadelphia, 1980.
- (22) A. Appadurai, 'Putting hierarchy in its place,' in George E. Marcus (ed.), *Re-Reading Cultural Anthropology*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1992, PP, 34-47.
- (23) *ibid*, P. 37
- (24) 'They have been derived, almost without exception, from Western Philosophy or the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, never from Asiatic,

African or native American sources'. Cf. Margaret Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1964, P.9.

(25) Michael T. Ryan, *op. cit.*

(26) Ronald Inden, *op. cit.*

(27) *ibid*, Chapter I.

(28) *ibid*.

(29) Our eyes have been opened to these aspects of 'modernity' by, among others, the pathbreaking works of Michel Foucault. Of specific importance to our study are the pioneering works of Arjun Appadurai, Nicholas Dirks, Carol Breckenridge, and others.

(30) D. Washbrook, 'Caste, Class and Dominance in Modern Tamil Nadu', in Francine Frankel and MSA Rao (eds.), *Dominance and State Power in Modern India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989.

(31) D. Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976.

(32) J. Harriss, *Capitalism and Peasant Farming*, OUP, Bombay, 1982.

(33) D. Washbrook, no. (31), PP. 234-235.

(34) R. Hardgrave, *The Dravidian Movement*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1965.

- (35) See also, Rudolph and Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition : Political Development in India*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1967, PP. 25-30.
- (36) In this connection see, R. Suntheralingam, *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India, 1852-1891*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1974, PP. 19-20.
- (37) The depressed classes leader M.C. Rajah had clarified that the term 'Depressed Classes' should not be confused with the term 'Backward Classes' in his book '*The Oppressed Hindus*', published in 1925.
- (38) The several castes known in different districts of Tamil Nadu who come under the category of Dalits would include, apart from the three, Chachadi, Chamar, Chandala, Godari, Holaya, Madiga, Mala, Mochi, Paidi, Panu, Polaya, Toti and Valluva. They were reported as almost akin to each other in the ED, GO 68 of February 1, 1893. For further details see P. Radhakrishnan, 'Backward Classes in Tamil Nadu: 1872-1988', *Economic and Political Weekly*, March, 10, 1990, PP. 509-520.
- (39) See P. Radhakrishnan *op. cit.*
- (40) *ibid.*
- (41) V. Suresh, 'The DMK Debacle : Causes and Portents', *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 17, 1992, PP. 2313-2321.

CHAPTER - III

CONFLICTING CASTE IDENTITIES AND THE 'NON-BRAHMIN' DISCOURSE OF DRAVIDIAN MOVEMENT

The 20th century history of Tamil Nadu is dominated by the rise to power over the state level political process and to virtual hegemony over vernacular political discourse, of a 'Dravidian' Movement whose ideology has been committed to the destruction of the caste system. That the majoritarian political tradition of society as deeply caste-ridden as is Tamil Nadu's should be predicated on the abolition of caste may be conceived, in and of itself, as something of a paradox. More paradoxical still, however, are the social effects of the governments which, in the name of this ideology, have ruled Tamil Nadu, with the brief exception of the Emergency, since 1967. So far from dissolving caste at the social level, the evidence seems overwhelming that, in all its many guises, they have tended to enhance its importance. With regard to caste as the basis of social competition, the governments have so expanded the Categories of Reservation, aimed at giving special patronage and support in education and government employment to disadvantaged social groups defined by caste, that they have built a permanent line of conflict between the various categories into the political system.

Equally, with regard to caste as the basis of social dominance, the position of most Dalits has tended to worsen under their rule. On the one hand, they have done nothing to ameliorate the condition of Dalit landless rural labourers and, wherever those labourers have mobilised themselves, they have been inclined to unleash savage forces of repression against them. On the other, as the Dravidian ideology has come to develop since the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) achieved state power in 1967, Dalits have tended to suffer from increasing social exclusion. The Dalit caste isolation is increasing since the rules of hierarchy are maintained for ex-Untouchables even while they are breaking down among other castes. Furthermore, the economic plight of the Dalits has remained dismal. The paradox of a caste-ridden society generating a major anti-caste movement which, on coming to power, reinforces caste is deepened still further if we look away from the level of social praxis and back towards that of political discourse. ¹For here, there can be no doubt that the rise of 'Non-Brahminism' has neutralised many of the caste-based issues of conflict which dominated Tamil Nadu politics in the first half of the 20th century. The most celebrated of these issues were the non-Brahmin movement of the 1910s and 1920s and the much more violent 'radical' Dravidian or anti-Aryan movement by

E.V. Ramaswami Naicker (hereafter EVR) in the 1930s. But, since 1967 untouchability as a major political issue has also lost its centrality in the 'Non-Brahmin' discourse of Dravidian politics.

THE NON-BRAHMIN MANIFESTO OF 1916 :

The aspiration of the elite Non-Brahmin leadership in the early years of this century, was to replace the Brahmins fast from their dominant position in the newly created colonial officialdom and places of political influence and power. But they also realised that without education, economic power or political influence, the process would not be easy unless they got outright support from the British bureaucracy. The new Non-Brahmin elite which was fast gathering strength expressed their distrust of the new nationalist movement of the Congress, as in their view, with its Brahmin leadership the Congress would stifle the progress of the ordinary people after the British rule was eliminated. ²The new leadership was openly hostile to the Indian nationalist movement and stood solidly behind the British. Their apprehensions were expressed in the "Non-Brahmin Manifesto" of 1916. The Manifesto and the South Indian People's Association which issued it, stood firmly against the transfer of power from the British to what they feared would be Brahmin overlordship. Soon after in August 1917, the South India Liberal Federation was formed to function as a political organisation

called the Justice Party under the leadership of Dr. T.M. Nair, P. Theagaraya Chettiar and Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar.

A closer reading of the Manifesto would easily reveal the nature of the social base of the non-Brahmin leadership of Justice Party. The Manifesto signed by the Secretary of the South Indian People's Association, Rao Bahadur P. Theagaraya Chettiar begins as follows : "... the bulk of tax-payers including a large majority of the zamindars, landholders and agriculturists belong to the same class of Non-Brahmins ..." (emphasis added)³ . The first session of the Confederation was held on 28th December 1918 in Madras which had about 500 delegates and a large number of visitors. Among those present on the dais were - the Rajah of Ramnad, Rajah of Pittapuram, the Zamindars of Singampatti, Telaprole, Mirzapuram, Doddappanayakanur, Uttukuli and Elavarasandal, the Kumara Rajah of Challapalli, Prince K.S. Dorairaja of Pudukottai, Dewan Bahadur P. Rajaratna Mudaliar, the honourable Muppil Nair, Dewan Bahadur A. Subbarayalu Reddiar, Dr. T.M. Nair, Rao Bahadurs - P. Theagaraya Chettiar, T. Balaji Rao Naidu, M.G. Arogiasami Pillai, R. Venkatraman Naidu, G. Narayanasami Chettiar, etc.⁴

The Federation which espoused the cause of an united struggle of 'non-Brahmins' was a closely knit elite of rich people from the higher echelons of society - who in no way represented the

masses, or knew them, or could speak their idiom. They did not seriously contemplate any social reconstruction or economic uplift to the benefit of the masses. The fact was that the Justice Party phase of the Dravidian Movement never reached the masses at large and it was largely urban oriented. There is no evidence of their ever having thought of the depressed classes. As landlords they hardly could afford to take note of them. Its membership consisted only of the first generation of educated upper caste Non-Brahmin graduates and the educated professionals. They were worried over the growing number of Brahmins in Public Services, in the District Boards which had been set up by the British as a first measure of local self-government, and the Brahmin influence in the Home Rule Movement which was very vocal in Madras under the leadership of Dr. Annie Besant.⁵ Thus an overarching identity of "Non-Brahmins" comprising the rest of the population excluding the Brahmins was successfully constructed and deployed as the focal point of the political discourse of Dravidian Movement in the then Madras Presidency.

THE 'RADICALISM' OF E.V. RAMASWAMI NAICKER :

The Radical Dravidianism's attitude towards the caste system seems very complex. EVR extended non-Brahmanism into virulent anti-Brahmanism and into a general attack on the caste system, which the elite non-Brahmin caste members had strenuously resisted. He called for the extermination of the Brahmin race and for

abolition of all forms of caste-based social discrimination. But there were many ambiguities. His advocacy of Brahmin genocide, for example, made little impact on his own circle of friends and acquaintances, among the closest of whom was the 'Brahmin' Congressman C. Rajagopalachari who was not only a personal friend but also acted as his defence counsel on several ^{oc} occasions, when he was charged with incitement of violence.⁶ Equally, his advocacy of increased intermarriage between non-Brahmin castes was, for the most part, besides the point. It was because of the fact that most of those intermarriages never transcended the class strata of the respective partners and took place within the same stratum. Moreover, caste relations between the bulk of 'jatis' in the 'intermediate' sections of the Tamil caste system have never reflected purity/pollution criteria very strongly and intermarriages between such jatis-and in some cases, fusing and creation of new jatis - have a long history.

The crucial issue for caste reform other than Brahmanism was untouchability and, here, radical Dravidianism was highly equivocal. On the one hand, EVR appeared to take up the issue : renaming untouchables Adi-Dravidas or the first Dravidians; performing marriages between Adi-Dravidas and caste Hindus under the auspices of his Self-Respect League; campaigning alongside Adi-Dravida and Communist organisations on several occasions, as in Thanjavur in the 1940s and 1950s. On the other hand, however, the

precise nature of EVR's commitment and ideology are not always easy to grasp. Although proclaiming them 'the first Dravidians', EVR explicitly addressed the meetings of Adi-Dravidas as 'you' in clear contrast to the 'we' he employed when speaking to the other Tamil audiences.⁷ His Self-Respect marriages, although celebrated very publicly, were few and far between making no more than a symbolic impact on the conventions of Tamil Society.

Radical Dravidianism's involvement in Adi-Dravida class politics were also no more than occasional and in a secondary, rather than primary, organisational capacity. They seldom went beyond the giving of EVR's blessings to mobilisations started and conducted by others. Sometimes they did not go even that far : in the early 1930s when, under the first impact of the Great Depression, there were major labour uprisings across Tamil Nadu and, for perhaps the first and only time in the 20th century, capital experienced a general threat from labour, albeit for only a few months, the Self-Respect Movement disappeared from view.⁸ If the caste system at the point of untouchability, and the deprived position of the landless labourers held in its grasp, represent the clearest symbols of what might be meant by 'Aryan oppression', it is striking how difficult even 'radical' Dravidianism found them to confront. Indeed, there is in the end much to suggest that EVR's engagement with the Adi-Dravida problem at all owed more to the tactical needs of his personal struggle with

Gandhi than to anything deeper. From the late 1920s, he perceived himself to be involved in a cultural battle with Gandhi and the 'Northern' Indian National Congress, taking his own tactics from their strategy and offering exposition on a point-by-point basis to their programme. When Gandhi took up the issue of the 'Harijans', it followed logically that EVR would have to address the issue of the 'Adi-Dravidas' too⁹. These ambiguities lead us to question the so-called 'radicalism' advocated by E.V. Ramaswami Naicker during the second phase of Dravidian Movement in the later 1920s.

THE D.M.K.(s) IN POWER :

During the late 1930s, the Congress began to capture the imagination of most of the elite groups in Tamil Nadu, as elsewhere in India. The Congress was now seen clearly to represent the future and to offer programmes of national economic development which went beyond those pursued by the colonial state during the interwar period. The Tamil elites buried the hatchet of Brahmin/non-Brahmin controversy, which has split them earlier, and went over en masse to the Congress-cause. Although Tamil Nadu had little tradition of the freedom struggle, the Madras electorates of 1937 and 1946, which consisted of the wealthiest 10-15% of society and were predominantly non-Brahmin, gave Congress its largest majorities anywhere in India.¹⁰ After 1947 and through the 1950s, Congress continued to rule, principally it would seem, by resting itself on the clientage networks

of the elites and by controlling the distribution of the very considerable patronage made available to its 'machine' under the first three five-year plans. In spite of universal suffrage, voting participation rates remained extremely low : only 49.3% turned out for the general election of 1957.¹¹ The problem for the Congress, however, was that it was never able to capture a broad base of popular support nor to extend its appeal beyond the elites. Indeed, its control over the electoral system never gave it control over the streets.

Encouraged by EVR, the petit bourgeoisie of the towns regularly raised riots and launched popular agitations against those measures of Congress Policy, concerning especially Hindi and backward castes legislation, of which they disapproved. Also, in the countryside, the hegemony of the Congress was starting to be challenged, particularly by small caste-based parties, such as the Tamil Nadu Toilers which represented the Pallis of Chengelpattu and the Forward Block which represented the Maravars of Ramnad-Tirunelveli. There was political material in plenty, in the dissatisfied petit-bourgeoisie of the towns and the inward focussing 'dominant' castes of the countryside, as well as, and perhaps most of all, in the majority of voters who as yet remained apathetic, to build an opposition capable of displacing the Congress hegemony.¹² It was very much the work of C.N. Annadurai, the founder of the DMK which had

broken away from EVR in 1949, to weld this incoherent opposition into a potential force capable of taking political power.

Annadurai set about building a Dravidian political party and, from the late 1950s, began to enjoy growing success. The success came first, and most obviously, in municipal elections and urban constituencies where the petit bourgeoisie backbone of Dravidianism was the firmest. But they spread steadily to the countryside, picking up a very large slice of what was a newly mobilised vote. The rise of the DMK and increased electoral participation rates went hand in hand. In 1957, when the participation rate was just 49.3%, the DMK won 13 seats; in 1962 when the rate was 70.6%, the DMK won 50 seats; and in 1967, when it was 76.6%, the DMK won 50 seats; and in 1967, when it was 6.6%, the DMK won 136 seats.¹³ Behind the victory of 1967, there were perhaps three major factors. One, of course, was the turmoil in the Congress itself after Nehru's death. This had much to do with the struggle for succession but it can also be very much associated with changing economic equations which upset the old politics. The second factor aiding the DMK was its economic promise. On the argument that, in spite of its record growth rates, Tamil Nadu was being cheated by New Delhi and on the offer of a bonanza of cheap food, the DMK promised a new age of plenty for all. And the third factor was its brilliant manipulation of values, culture and history to convey simple

messages which identified villains and promoted unity against them across many of the 'artificial' lines of caste and class. The key to the success of its propaganda lay in its use of the cinema which visually recreated the glorious past and impressed it upon the consciousness of the millions of even rural Tamils who regularly went to the cinema.¹⁴

In spite of the pledge to equality, there can be little doubt that economic differentiation has grown rapidly under the DMK: the rewards both of the green revolution and of industrialisation having stayed firmly with the rich.¹⁵ Yet the DMK and the AIADMK later on have marched on to become not merely parties but Tamil Nadu's dominant political tradition, unrivalled by any other parties. A central reason for this success is that the elites have more or less abandoned alternative platforms to the DMK (s) and have thrown their own support behind it. The ousted village 'bosses' of the Congress in mid 1960s, re-appeared in the colours of the DMK in the 1970s. Indeed, in many ways, this development was incipient in DMK politics even before 1967. One part of Annadurai's strategy was to 'de-radicalise' Dravidianism and make it acceptable to the interests of as much of the electorate as possible.¹⁶ Besides dropping the contentious separatist issue, Annadurai also dampened the anti-religious rhetoric and, by offering Tamil cultural nationality to Brahmins, opened the way for the reconciliation with the

majority community. Moreover, while maintaining an egalitarian critique of the evils of the rich, DMK propaganda was inclined to attribute the evils to personal qualities of greed, which could be overcome by generosity, and not to suggest that unaccountable wealth itself should be penalised. How far Annadurai came back from the road of Dravidian 'radicalism' may be judged by the close relationship he developed with the conservative Swatantra Party of Rajagopalachari who is often credited with having tutored him in the ways of public and constitutional politics.¹⁷

The most amazing of all transformations which the Dravidian ideology was to undergo was that which turned it from a vehicle of anti-elitist protest into one which accommodated elite privilege in Tamil society. In its de-radicalised form, the Dravidian ideology could not only hide these self-same privileges but even provide a validation for them. As we have seen, 'community' in this ideology is constituted in opposition to an 'Other' : if, therefore, the 'Other' can himself become a member of the 'community', his otherness disappears. Moreover, privilege in the Dravidian ideology is legitimised by appearing to be 'shared' : if therefore, privilege could appear to be shared again, its possession would be validated once more. A Tamil nationalist ideology, in which 'the community' was redefined to include all Tamils, could hide and validate privileges.¹⁸ Wealth,

then, would be re-legitimised by appearing to be held and used for the benefit of other members of other Tamil 'non-Brahmin community' - providing employment and distributing largesse. Even Forward dominant caste status might be acceptable so long as members of the Tamil Forward castes agreed to other ~~right~~ of members of the Tamil Backward Castes and Dalits to a share in the privilege of education and government employment. Annadurai's offer to de-radicalise Dravidianism, to bring together the elites and the masses in a single Tamil community, had an obvious appeal to the dominant elite communities. Simply by agreeing to convert their primary loyalty from 'Indian' to 'Tamil' they could carry on just as before and sleep soundly in their beds.

In essence, then, the elites may be seen to have penetrated and cooperated with the DMK and AIADMK because it has become in their interests to 'disappear' from the public scene and because Dravidian non-Brahmin ideology helps them to 'disappear'.¹⁹ Their increasing presence in, or rather behind, the DMK or AIADMK, however, can be seen to have affected its social character in several ways, particularly pushing it in the direction of conservatism. Whatever ambiguities there may have been in Dravidian attitudes towards Brahmins, religion, Dalits and organised labour, there were some 'radical' strands in the movement. Latterly, these seem to have been cut by ruling party groups and the anti-

elitism of the past has largely been disowned. In fact, after Annadurai, the regimes of Karunanidhi, M.G. Ramachandran and Jayalalitha seemed to have drifted as far 'rightwards' under elite influence as any before it. The strikes and protests of various labour unions were frequently proscribed; armed police were used against Thanjavur 'Naxalite' Adi-Dravida labourers; state repression of the various caste conflicts which showed symptoms of Dalit resurgence and a neo-Hindu patronage, all maintained under the rhetoric of egalitarianism.

On our analysis, the Dravidian regimes since 1967 of both DMK and AIADMK, were one of bread (or rice) and circuses (or movies) and, in broad political terms, might be conceived as Tamil variant of Bonapartist or Caesarian democracy. Classically, the bourgeoisie or the elite of wealth and the dominant castes or the elite of status, withdrew from a formal position of control over the state apparatus and the constitutional political process. Not only was their direct control no longer necessary for the purposes of capital accumulation but their attempt to exercise it provoked resistance and instability. Formal control was transferred to a cadre of professional political managers who on the basis of populist ideology, mollified resistance by turning what was left of the state into a welfare agency and by stirring up feeling of patriotism and atavism. By these means, the elites 'disappeared' so that they could preserve their privileges,

status and abilities to accumulate at very little cost, while the illusion of democracy permitted the people to imagine that they ruled. The Dravidian regimes have become desperate attempts to keep the forces of mass poverty and an intractable economic situation from overrunning the small elite groups who have enjoyed most of the benefits of the 20th century. The principal future pressures on the interest group synthesis achieved by the DMK (s) would have to come from the Dalits and the propertyless poor who are most obviously excluded from the Dravidian politics.

CONFLICTING CASTE IDENTITIES OF THE RECENT PERIOD:

The dominant Backward Castes have been engaged in a process of dialectical upheaval, now tending towards ideological and political unity, but often pitted against each other and against the Dalits, drawn as they are into economic contradictions and social antagonisms. The Backward Caste/Dalit relationship are sought to be worked out within the terms of this dialectical logic²⁰. The Dalits are being exploited and berated; and upper Backward Caste arrogance and pride express themselves through the ritual and actual humiliation of the Dalits. The caste conflicts persists, because land relationships and relationships of production in the rural countryside continue to be informed by the political economy of caste and caste oppression is often the form assumed by economic exploitation. In recent times, conflicts have hinged upon the Dalit defiance of traditional authority.

Education and prospects of mobility and employment in far-flung places have fostered in a new generation of Dalits a resolute self-worth that does not hesitate to call into question customary notions of servitude. The new equations that are fast emerging suggest the opening up of deep fissures between the "non-Brahmin" partners in the Dravidian Movement-whose potential seems to have fizzled out.

The Southern districts of Tamil Nadu have a history of friction between the upper and lower caste groups on account of oppressive social practices and it has off and on erupted. In fact, towards the end of the last century, there had been skirmishes even within the different caste segments of Hindu converts to Christianity, the Vellalars and Nadars for example in the Tirunelveli district. The Sivakasi riots of 1899 saw the Nadars and the Maravars backed by other caste groups, fight over the former's right to enter the local temple. Again in the early 1930s, the Nadars of Sankarankoil village revolted when they were not allowed to take out a religious procession through the streets where the upper caste people lived.²¹ Yet if there is one important reason for the spurt in caste clashes it is the sharper polarisation of castes. The so-called "Other Backward Classes" who include the BCs and MBCs in Tamil Nadu have in recent times not only discovered a new strength in themselves as a political pressure group but have emerged as a dominant force in several regions of the state.²²

The dominant caste groups vary in its nature and composition in different parts of Tamil Nadu. It could be Maravars in one region, the Nadars in another or Naidus, Reddiars, Gounders, Vanniyars and others elsewhere. In fact, historically, the anti-Brahmin plank lent a facade of homogeneity to these castes and once the drastically altered social milieu of Tamil Nadu rendered it irrelevant, the non-Brahmin classes ceased to be a consensual bloc and the contradictions between the elitist and the subaltern groups within them got sharpened. Also, internal conflicts began to surface, each community being driven by an urge to assert itself and strive for a superior status. The result is a hegemonical propensity which indeed is at the root of caste conflicts in general. And when they see the Dalits seeking to shake themselves out of the shackles of oppression, asserting what really are basic human rights and improving their living standards, they tend to feel threatened.

Gone are the days when the Dalits as a class would submit to the sort of indignities perpetrated on them for ages. If there is a better awareness among the community about their rights under the various enactments, the younger generation is fired by an enthusiasm to improve its educational and economic status. Wherever there has been a distinct break in the attitude of the community-from meek submission to one of revolt - retaliation by the dominant caste groups has been the result. In Tirunelveli, for instance, the Dalits, mostly landless farm workers, who were taking all the oppression of the

Maravars, who are the lessees of a vast tract of temple lands along the Thamarabarani belt, lying down have started defending themselves and are hitting back with vehemence.²³ Not only has there been an awakening among them, but they are now better organised, although the emergence of self-styled leaders is not without its seamy side in the rabbleroising and militant techniques adopted. The other communities have also come up with their own exclusivist outfits all over the state and their number is legion. Induced not a little by the penchant of political parties for seeking to consolidate their electoral base by exploiting the political divide especially in the post-Mandal phase, this phenomenon has in its own way contributed to the caste friction.

The infamous Mudukulathur riots in the Ramanathapuram district in mid-fifties formed an important event in the history of caste conflicts in Tamil Nadu. In September 1957, Emanuel, a Dalit convert to Christianity, was murdered in Paramakudi against the backdrop of a running feud between the Dalits and Thevars, the dominant community of the area. Five persons, all Maravars or Thevars, were killed in police firing in Keelathooval village where the police had gone in search of the murder suspects. The police action set off a series of armed attacks by either side, with the caste strife spreading like wildfire. Some 80 villages in Paramakudi, Sivaganga and Mudukulathur taluks of the undivided Ramanathapuram district borne the brunt of the

frenzy.²⁴ The most outrageous incident was the firing by a hysterical mob on a group of people who had taken refuge in a village church. Such was the terror generated by these no-holds-barred attacks that hundreds of people belonging to both the communities fled their homes to places their own folk were in strength. It took several months of sustained effort by the political authority to inspire the people's confidence and restore peace in the violence-hit areas of the region.

A spate of caste conflicts followed the Mudukulathur riots and most of them started significantly after 1967 when the regime of Dravidian parties came to assume political power of the state successively. The most notable cases were the ones specifically concentrated in Southern districts of Tamil Nadu, even though other regions were not spared completely. Keelvenmani in 1968, Vilupuram in 1978, Oonjanai and Thevakottai in 1979, Ramanathapuram in 1981, Meenakshipuram in 1981, Puliangudi in 1982, Bodinayakanur and Meenakshipuram in 1989, Siruvachi in 1990, Thiruvadalai in 1992, Kurinjikulam and Puliangudi in 1992, Bodinayakanur and Theni in 1993, Ponnur and Thottakurichi in 1994, Kanyakumari, Tuticorin, Tirunelveli and Palayamkottai in 1995, and the wave of caste violence sweeping the southern districts of Tamil Nadu in 1996-97, marked by brutal killings and large-scale arson, all conjure up traumatic visions of the orgy of caste violence in the state.²⁵ The undoubted reality of changing fortunes as a consequence of the massive social churning is at

the root of the recent turmoil and increased turbulence in the Southern Pandyan land of Tamil Nadu.

The recent caste conflicts seem to threaten the very rationale and existence of mainstream parties by rendering their interventions irrelevant and signalling new factors in the emerging caste equations. The 'traditional' militancy of the warrior castes of Thevars has pushed, in turn, the Dalits to assume a new-found militancy. The Devendrakula Vellalar Federation of the Pallars led by Dr. Krishnaswamy, emerged after police brutalities on Dalits at Kodyangulam in Tuticorin district, towards the end of Jayalalitha's regime. The 'Thyagi Immanuel Peravai' led by R. Chandra Bose and the 'Dalit Panthers of India' under P. Thirumavazhavan are the new militant outfits that have converted select Adi-Dravidar colonies in the southern districts into well armed fortresses and, reportedly, with some training from fraternal ex-servicemen, have even perfected techniques of laying siege of Thevar Villages.²⁶ While Thevars continue to be the aggressors, of late they too have been suffering heavy casualties in Dalit reprisal attacks. The striking feature of this new Dalit militancy in Tamil Nadu is their scepticism of 'justice' from the state and their mocking rejection of intervention from mainstream political parties.

THE BEGINNINGS OF A DALIT RESURGENCE:

The various Dalit organisations, mostly representing Pallars and some Parayars, seem to have decided to strike it out on their own. This was inevitable considering the Dravidian parties which came to power in 1967 on the plank of a united front of oppressed southern non-Brahmin communities against the hegemonic Brahmin and northern domination, historically could not protect their Dalit camp- followers from brutal attacks, in subsequent years, from the middle castes in Keezhvenmani, Vilupuram, Pennadam, Seekkanankuppam - some of the villages that became notorious for Dalit suffering at the hands of the dominant caste groups. The AIADMK came after the DMK and, despite pretensions to 'social justice' invoked by MGR's screen rhetoric, the Dalits were on the run again-this time seeking refuge in religious conversion at Meenakshipuram and neighbouring villages, in 1981. While the erstwhile DMK regime under Karunanidhi exposed its lack of will in bringing upper caste aggressors to book, the MGR regime converted the 'conversions' into a soap-opera, announcing 'samabandhi bojanams' or inter-caste feasts in 5000 temples across the state.²⁷ It was during the AIADMK under Jayalalitha that rampant casteism was valorised in the pro-Thevar kitchen cabinet of her cronies. The most shameful assaults on Pallars or Devendrakula vellalars happened during this period at Bodi, Naaraikinaru, Kadayanallur and Kodyankulam.²⁸

Historically, none of the inquiry commissions into caste clashes have borne fruit - no aggressor has been identified or punished. Added to this, district administrations and police have been seen to be directly pro- Thevar or pro-dominant castes, and the political parties ill-equipped to rise to the occasion. The parties have only been exploiting the caste divide by pretending 'benevolence' and 'protective patronage'. They are left befuddled without a plank when Dalits reject this. The militant Thevar organisation, 'Thevar Peravai', is now led by none other than a former director general of police, with the help of other officials. That the Thevars may be sadly out of their times in insisting upon the servility they expect from Dalits, manifested through a code of do's and don'ts prescribed in '*ettukattalai*' or the eight 'rules' of untouchability, is something that will take more time to sink in. The real issue in recent years, however, has been land alienation, as the dominant Thevars have - often through coercive state pressure - bought up Dalit lands.²⁹ On the other hand, Dalits are no longer prepared to accept caste slavery. Many of them, enabled to enter lucrative professions through progressive legislations and reservations, also have the economic means to buy back their lands, which Thevars could not brook.

The recent resurgence of Dalits in the Southern districts of Tamil Nadu is a sure sign of a transition to a new equilibrium between the BCs and Dalits in the state. Signalling the transition, the

very character and intensity of violence as well as its geographical spread has undergone a significant transformation, particularly during the 1990s.³⁰ First of all each new spell of caste violence in southern Tamil Nadu takes an increasingly longer time to subside. While the conflict between the 'Thevars' and the 'Devendrakula Vellalars' in Ramanathapuram in 1948 ended in five days, the 1957 Mudukulathur conflict took 15 days to subside and the 1989 Bodi conflict, 23 days. The 1995-96 conflict took even a longer time to be brought under control. It continued for over nine months. This progressive increase in the duration of violence is an obvious result of the recent militancy among the 'Devendrakula Vellalars' and the consequent resistance offered by them to the caste oppression practiced by Thevars.

Secondly, the tally of deaths and loss of property is also marked by an important shift. In the past conflicts, the victims were mostly the Devendrakula Vellalars. For example in the infamous Mudukulathur conflict of 1957, they lost 17 lives and 2,735 houses, while the Thevars, only eight lives and 107 houses. But things have changed in recent times. During the 1985-86 conflict the Thevars lost almost an equal number of lives as the Devendrakula Vellalars, despite most of the police force being biased in favour of the Thevars.³¹ Also, the Devendrakula Vellalars inflicted a substantial damage to the properties of land-owning and trading classes among the Thevars. The Thevars, who take enormous pride in flaunting their

martial past, were forced, for the first time, to acknowledge that violence was eluding them as their monopoly and demanded compensations for the victims of their caste.

Finally, conflicts are no longer confined to localities where there are immediate provocations. They quickly spread to and paralyse the whole of the southern region, including urban centres. In addition, they lead to protests and public demonstrations in the northern region. Such large-scale regional mobilisation, which till recently was possible only by the Thevars, is a new feature of the politics of the Devendrakula Vellalars, reflecting their increased organisational strength. Their new assertiveness and the organisational resources is, among other things, a consequence of both the positive and negative trends in the politics of the Dravidian parties. Under the rule of these parties, Tamil Nadu witnessed a relatively effective implementation of educational and job reservation for the Dalits as well as a range of welfare schemes directed at them such as free housing, subsidised loans and hostels and scholarships for school and college-going students. Today, the Devendrakula Vellalar settlements in southern Tamil Nadu have a critical number of educated youth, professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers, and those employed in government offices. Their economic advancement has also been furthered by migration to West Asia. A section of them has emerged as small landholders and traders.³² These factors helped to usher in a new sense

of revolt among the Dalits which has led to the resurgence of caste conflicts in southern Tamil Nadu.

THE CHANGING EQUILIBRIA OF TAMIL POLITICS:

Unlike as in the past when the representatives of Dalits negotiated for macro-level state interventions in terms of protective legislation and welfare schemes, now their resistance to caste oppression is locally focussed and spread across villages. Demanding equal treatment in temple festivals, the refusal to carry out ritually demeaning tasks and claiming an equal share in public goods have become the new modes of assertion. More significantly, the dominant castes are responding to the advancement of the Dalits by clinging more resolutely to their caste status as a way of affirming their superiority. Though the Dravidian parties have directly and indirectly been responsible for setting the stage for this inevitable conflict between the dominant BCs and Dalits, which alone can reconstitute caste relations in more equitable terms, the very same parties have also lost the political resources to respond to the democratic aspirations of the Dalits through mobilisation from below. If not blatantly siding with the dominant castes as the Dravidian parties of both DMK and AIADMK hues have been doing indirectly during their tenures, their ways of conflict resolution have been confined to

administrative intervention from above and framed in a language of bureaucratic governance. All these factors strongly point out that the Dravidian politics has lost its credibility as a resourceful movement to meet the emerging challenges born out of its own contradictions.

This has opened up an 'uncolonised political space' in Tamil Nadu for the development of an autonomous Dalit leadership. Unlike the earlier Dalit organisations in the state, which aligned themselves with the mainstream political parties for short-term gains, the new organisations exhibit a higher degree of autonomy, work among the rural youth and spurn the traditional mode of conflict resolution and employ a militant language of caste equality. Given this new configuration of the Dalit politics wherein they are now armed with a heightened desire for caste equality due to economic advancement as well as a certain hitherto unavailable organisational strength due to the failure of the mainstream political parties, the state-sponsored traditional modes of conflict resolution, with their emphasis on immediate peace and not on a structural realignment of caste forces, are not going to deliver the goods. Unprecedented police brutalities on the Dalits during the past few years in places such as Naaraikinaru, Kodayankulam and Kadayanallur, as well as the unconvincing outcomes of inquiry commissions on atrocities on the Dalits during the 1990s, have taught them not to rely on the State or the mainstream parties for justice.³³

It is in this changed social context that one has to understand the growth of 'Hindutva' forces in Tamil Nadu. There are three broad institutionally interweaving levels through which the 'Hindutva' groups are operating. The BJP as the national party encompassing Brahmins, upper-caste non-Brahmins and Gujarati-and Marwadi business and financial interests operating in the state, is increasingly gaining ground in Tamil Nadu. After the BJP, the RSS with its 'Pracharak' and 'shaka' networks, has penetrated deep into the hinterlands of Tamil Nadu since the late 1980s. At the third level is the 'Hindu Munnani' representing mobilisation of dominant non-Brahmin castes, with an expanding support base. It has become very popular in the southern districts of Kanyakumari, Nagercoil, Tirunelveli, Tuticorin, Ramnad and Madurai apart from Thanjavur, Coimbatore, Erode and Salem.³⁴ For the first time in the history of Tamil politics, the vote share of the BJP has risen considerably in many of these regions during the last Assembly elections. This is partially due to the participation of some of the regionally dominant caste groups in the 'Hindutva' politics, not as appendages of Brahmins, but in a very active leadership role. The middle class population has been weaned away from the Dravidian rhetoric and are increasingly identifying themselves with a pan-Indian nationalistic politics of the Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) and the BJP/RSS/Hindu Munnani variety. With the liberalisation of the economy, the dominant caste and class groups of

Tamil Nadu are finding it passionately attractive to compete with the Indian market forces on a national scale, if not globally.

Rather than 'new' forces of caste and class pressure, one suspects that the most serious threats to the stability of the current synthesis will come from contradictions between the elements already inside it. These elements exist in a state of dynamic equilibrium : the dynamism being created by their insistent demands for more privilege, patronage and resources. The new lines of potential conflicts generated out of the collapse of the 'non-Brahmin' consensus created by the Dravidian Movement are sought to be mollified by the pan - Indian politics that is fast gaining ground. Tamil nationalism's rapprochement with Indian nationalism has made Hinduism one of its common points of reference. In the longer term, of course, the most serious threat to Dravidian politics comes from the drying up of resources for redistribution. One way out of the crisis could be successful economic development and modernisation that might transform the character of social aspirations. As of now the system is largely harmless to the modern elites and the dissensions have affected only the traditional ones. In this kind of a socio-economic milieu, one suspects that the political system of Tamil Nadu will remain locked into its cycles of charismatically-inspired synthesis, and 'community' - inspired conflicts for many more years to come..

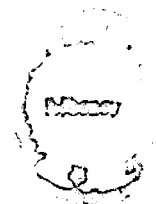
NOTES AND REFERENCES :

1. For a critique on Dravidian Movement, see the controversial book in Tamil by Guna, *Dravidathal Veezhnthom* (Dravidianism Made Us Fall), Pahruli Publishers, Chennai, 1994.
2. A.N. Sattanathan, *The Dravidian Movement in Tamil Nadu and Its Legacy*, University of Madras, Madras, 1982.
3. T. Varadarajulu Naidu, *The Justice Movement 1917*, Dravidar Kazhagam, Madras, 1992.
4. *ibid.*
5. Geetha V., and S.V., Rajadurai, "One Hundred years of Brahminitude : Arrival of Annie Besant", *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 15, 1995, pp. 1768-1773.
6. B. Barnett, *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism*, Parinceton University Press, Princeton, 1976, Chapter III.
7. Anita Dehl, *E.V., Ramaswami*, Lund, 1977.
8. E.K. Gough, *Rural Society in South East India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981.
9. Christopher J. Baker, *Leading upto Periyar* in B.N. Pandey (ed.), *Leadership in South Asia*, Vikas, Delhi, 1977.
10. Christopher J. Baker, *The Politics of South India 1920-1937*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976.
11. P. Spratt, *The DMK in Power*, Madras 1969.

12. Robert Hardgrave, *The Dravidian Movement*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1965.
13. M. Barnett, *op.cit*, Ch VI.
14. D. Forrester, "Factions and Film Stars : Tamil Nadu Politics Since 1971", *Asian Survey*, no.3, 1976.
15. J. Harriss, 'The State, Industrialisation and Development' in *The State in South Asia*, University of East Anglia, 1983.
16. D.A., Washbrook, "Caste, Class and Dominance in Modern Tamil Nadu", in Francine R. Frankel and M.S.A Rao (eds.), *Dominance and State Power in Modern India : Decline of a Social Order*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989.
17. P. Spratt, *op. cit*.
18. D.A., Washbrook, *op.cit*, p. 254.
19. *ibid.*, pp. 256-257.
20. Stephen Barnett, "Identity, Choice and Caste Ideology in Contemporary South India", in K. David (ed), *The New Wind*, The Hague, 1977.
21. Robert Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamil Nadu*, University of California Press, California, 1969.

22. V. Suresh, 'The DMK Debacle: Causes and Portents', *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 17, 1992, pp. 2313-2321.
23. Sadanand Menon, "TN: 'Caste-benefit' analysis fails", *The Economic Times*, June 20, 1997.
24. M.C. Sampath *et. al.*, 'A boiling cauldron in Tamil Nadu', *The Hindu*, December 10, 1995.
25. Ravikumar (ed.), *Dalit Kalai Makkiyam Arasiyal* (Tamil), (Dalit Art, Literature and Politics), Dalit Kalaivizha Kuzhu, Neyveli, 1996.
26. Sadanand Menon, *op.cit.*
27. *ibid.*
28. Sandhya Rao *et.al.*, 'The New Resistance : Dalits and the Politics of Caste', *Frontline*, December 1, 1995.
29. Sandhya Rao *et.al.*, 'Roots of tension: Dalits and the Politics of Caste', *Frontline*, December 15, 1995.
30. M.S.S.,Pandian, 'Elusive Peace in Tamil Nadu', *The Hindu*, May 30, 97.
31. *ibid.*
32. Syed Muthahar, 'Haven for the oppressed?', *The Hindu*, May 14, 96.
33. A. Marx *et.al.*, *Dalit Arsiyal* (Tamil), ('Dalit Politics') Vidiyal Publications, Coimbatore, 1995.
34. V. Suresh, *op.cit.*

TH-6440



CONCLUSION

The politics of Tamil Nadu along with its socio-economic transformations brings to surface a complex agenda concerned with caste, class and dominance in modern India. It has to be located within the institutionalised practices of governance that were introduced by the colonial state as an indispensable corollary of the project of modernity. The colonial mediation of Indian society drew its inspiration from Enlightenment rationalism and got articulated through the meta-narratives of progress/ emancipation. As a consequence, the colonially-instituted practices and knowledge systems deeply affected the formation of new subjectivities in India. This has inevitably cast a lasting shadow over the emerging politics of identity and recognition in the sub-continent, particularly in Tamil Nadu. In this light, our study has explored the intricate linkages that exist in the history of Tamil Nadu between the phenomena of conflicting caste identities and the politics of representation and recognition, mediated by the modern state.

The surveys and researches conducted by Christian missionaries, colonial administrators and Orientalists constituted

to shape the major themes of Indian historiography, the most important of them being the 'official' discourse on the Hindu 'caste' system. It resulted in the hegemonic construction of an Indian caste system, *a la* Dumont, where the political and economic spheres of social life are encompassed by the 'religious' domain. Thus, the religious principle became articulated in terms of the binary opposition between purity and pollution, with the Brahmins at the top of the hierarchy. Such an Eurocentric explanation of caste, raised to the status of official definitions, paved way to decode India not only for the West, but also for the Indians themselves. This formed an inevitable corpus of knowledge in the post-colonial discourse on caste which coloured the study of social sciences in India as well. These studies became loaded with rigid, culturally biased categorisations while depicting a nebulously heterogenous reality. All this calls for deconstructing the categories of caste as an internal critique, as the critique and rejection of those who have been its inhabitants.

The understanding of the formation of various categories of Indian/ Tamil subjectivities would be more profound if we take into account description of our society that preceded the Brahminically-oriented research of the late 18th and 19th centuries. The classic example is the account of Bartholomaus Ziegenbalg on Tamil society, which, eventhough belongs to the early 18th century

was disinterred only recently. Ziegenbalg focusses his attention on the so-called 'Sudra' jatis of Tamil Society and accords prime importance to the dominant Vellalas, who incorporated in the single person both status and power simultaneously. Further more, it is the dominant jatis of the Vellalas that are considered the real tangible entities, whereas the fourfold scheme of varnas are relegated to the nebulous realm of cosmogony. It radically questions the central notions of the caste system namely, linear hierarchy, rigid occupational specialisation, the racial implications of group endogamy and more importantly, the pre-eminent status of the Brahmins. But as a result of colonial construction and intervention a hierarchial notion of caste system was superimposed, hardly reminiscent of the social forms of relations that preceded colonial mediation.

The social relations which made up Tamil society, far from being 'essentialist' structures, were permeated by 'political' inflections, meanings and imperatives. The pathbreaking works of Arjun Appadurai and Nicholas Dirks elucidates the view that the Tamil caste system was not religious but profoundly political. Prior to the mediation by the colonial apparatus, the caste system was dominated by the kings, who were the dominant non-Brahmin elites of the earlier periods. The demise of kingship was accompanied by the steady ascendancy of the Brahmins as the colonially constituted arbiters of caste order. Contrary to the stark facts, it is the arbitrary

fusion of distinct concepts that served as the central premise for the theory promulgated in the early 20th century, attributing to the Aryan/Dravidan racial antagonism, the origins of the Tamil caste system. Our study finds more relevance and authenticity in an alternative conception of a 'scale of forms' which takes into account the human agency built out of overlapping classes rather than mutually exclusive identities. Systems of this sort are actually made and not simply found, and they are continually being completed, contested and remade. It is also high time to do something like what Foucault would call an 'archaeology' of studies on caste system in order to provide an in-depth narrative of its epistemic and methodological structures.

The fundamental change effected in the discursive domain of 'modern' politics of the colonial and post-colonial periods had been the impoverishment of the earlier 'fuzzy' sense of the community and an insistence upon identification of community in the 'enumerable' sense.

The everyday sense of multiple identities is too complex for the simple binary rules of public life. Such a pressure produced by the modern political order led the communities to profess simplistic, homogenous identities which structured the social relationships in a fractal pattern of reproducing itself at many different levels. It is not a freak accident of history that the movements of the 'dalit' and 'backward class' categories began almost simultaneously with the

'categorisation' of the population by the colonial state in its decennial Indian censuses. It created new identities and perceptions of interest among the heterogeneous collectivities. It is in the interstices of the 'official' categorisation and recognition devised by the modern state, and compartmentalisation of the fluid classificatory systems of society, that paved way for the emergence and growth of the politics of identity in the country. This process gradually led to the birth of a Non-Brahmin Movement in South India. Tamil Nadu has ever since been overwhelmed by the Dravidian politics as an inevitability.

The origins of Dravidian Movement can be traced back to the 'Non-Brahmin Manifesto' of 1916. The statistics provided by the 1911 Census demonstrated a Brahmin 'monopoly' of the Civil Service in Madras Presidency, but disguised the domination of the powerful elite communities in the countryside. The category of 'non-Brahmins' was successfully deployed by the dominant elite groups to mobilise the masses, including the Dalits, for a united struggle against a singularly common 'enemy'-the Brahmin 'Other'. The dominance of the Vellala and other such elite communities in many regions was ignored or at best underplayed by the Dravidian politics. The 'Non-Brahmin' community was constructed as the basic political entity, which became the focal point of political discourse in Tamil Nadu. The categorisation and re-categorisation of the various communities into different lists of backward classes

for the governmental policy of protective discrimination, has become a major preoccupation of the Dravidian parties in the post-colonial politics of the state. Opening up a Pandora's box, it has also become a recurrent phenomena to reshuffle the list more as a measure of political expediency than any advance towards social justice. Thus, the diverse structure and patterns of dominance in various →
→ regions of Tamil Nadu were relegated to the backburner by the deployment of a 'Non-Brahmin' discourse and the resultant manipulate politics of the parties belonging to the Dravidian Movement.

The sharply antagonistic contradictions that have been smouldering under a concocted 'Non-Brahmin'/'Dravidian' unity resurfaced time and again. The conflicts between the dominant Backward Caste groups and the Dalits have become widespread and recurrent in Tamil Nadu since the late eighties. The Dalits have become disillusioned with the Dravidian Movement making the rift patently manifest and irreconcilable. The Dravidan Movement legitimised the elite Non-Brahmin mass participation and assimilation into the political elite. It has also facilitated the political integration of Tamil society by providing an ideological basis for unity encompassing the caste Hindus and the elite sections of the state. In the process, it has not only excluded the Brahmins but also the Dalits. The rhetoric of ideological radicalism was promptly dismantled once it captured political power and the movement began

to assume a reactionary retrogressive character. The Dravidian Movement can be best understood, against the background of colonial rule, as an overtly political manifestation of more deep-seated socio-economic contradictions that are implied in the 'modernisation' of a complex society, which sharpened and transformed the politics of Tamil Nadu in the 20th century.

The modern project of constructing and transforming the multiple identities in a fluid political community into simple binary oppositions of 'Brahmins' and 'Non-Brahmins' by the Dravidian Movement has proved to be a failure. The Dravidian politics had been the result of a conflict between the landowning Non-Brahmin elite with a history of rural dominance and a nascent urban Brahmin elite that used the opportunities presented by the colonial state. The 'Non-Brahmin' unity was not at all sought to be faithfully reproduced in the social and economic domains despite the radical posturings of the Movement. While apparently preaching 'equality', it has contrived to leave 'untouchability'→

→ untouched - a continuing category of unprivilege in relation to the rest of the society which is privileged. The Dalit-dominant Backward Caste relationships are sought to be worked out within the terms of this dialectical logic. The Dalits are exploited and berated; and upper/Backward Caste arrogance and pride express themselves through ritual and actual humiliation of the Dalits. Caste conflicts

persists because land relations and relationships of production in the Tamil countryside continue to be informed by the political economy of caste, and caste oppression is often the form assumed by the economic exploitation of the under-privileged.

The awakening of Dalits has been a positive development of the recent period auguring well for the emergence of a more democratic polity. The resistance of caste Hindus to Dalit assertion and the failure of Dravidian parties which were drawn into the cesspool of dominant caste politics, were at the roots of the prolonged caste tensions in Southern Tamil Nadu. The conflicts are more acute in the South because a substantial proportion of people belonging to the Backward Castes as well as the Dalits were marginally small farmers and agricultural labourers with less difference in their class status. This has opened up an autonomous political space in Tamil Nadu which is being competed for by the Dalits and the dominant communities under the militant and pan-Indian nationalistic ideologies respectively. Both these developments of the recent period have exposed the hollowness of Dravidian Movement which has collapsed into a mythified spectacle. The initial effervescence of the *agit prop* style of Dalit politics should be guarded against getting hijacked by certain self-styled leadership out to serve their own vested interests. Instead of cutting the Dalits adrift from their indigenous moorings, the new emancipatory politics ought to work out a

democratic agenda where certain rights are to be basic and fundamental, realisable by all people. The Dalit politics would survive only if it resolves its internal contradictions and by rearticulating its dynamic concerns with a basic human agenda which is democratic and emancipatory. At the same time, the pan-Indian resurgence of communal politics should be effectively countered in Tamil Nadu by a democratic and vibrant ideology that reflects the new era of global transformations.

The modern managerial state has been successful at obscuring the structure of exploitation on which the capitalist system rests and at fragmenting people into discrete interest groups and categories, petitioning government for their own limited ends, forces which might otherwise flow into generalised opposition to the system itself. On the one hand, subscribing to industrial modernisation and successful economic development would seem to create a clearer context of opposition between capital and labour thereby transforming the character of social aspirations. On the otherhand, the same formalised dream envisaged by modernity can put off the structural contradictions thereby remaining largely *status quoist* by catering to the needs of the select few among the modern elites. In the globalised context of the liberalised epoch, we are passively witnessing a simulated war of each against all and all against each, where the self and the other have become an enigmatic

simulacra. Knowledge is never neutral, and the stakes are no less important today. The vicious politics of post-colonial modernity masks more than it illuminates. While in the short run there seem to exist no 'practical' alternatives to the politics of modernity, it is important that we create an Archimedean point at least in 'theory' in order to have a longer term perspective on the living problems of our testing times. It demands an intellectual rigour and intuitive vision that is critically rooted in our profound traditions- with humility and passion. That, in any case, is not an easy task...

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. PRIMARY SOURCES :

Government of India, *Report of Education Commission*, Vo. 1, Government Printing, Calcutta, 1883.

Government of Madras, *Report of the Census of the Madras Presidency, 1871*, Vol. 1, Government Press, Madras, 1874.

-----, *Census of India 1911*, Government Press, Madras, 1912.

The Dravidar Kazhakam : What It Stands For, The Dravidar Kazhagam Publication, Madras, 1982.

The Non Brahmin Manifesto : December 1916, The Dravidar Kazhakam Publication, Madras, 1931.

B. SECONDARY SOURCES :

BOOKS :

Anaimuthu V. (in Tamil), *Periyar Ee Ve Ra Sinthanaikal*, Vol. I-III, Thinkers Forum, Tiruchirappalli, 1974.

Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 1983.

Appadurai, Arjun, *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule : A South Indian Case*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982.

- Arrooran, Nambi, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidan Nationalism, 1905-44*,
Koodal Publishers, Madurai, 1980.
- Baker, C.J., *The Politics of South India 1920-1937*, CUP, Cambridge, 1976.
- , *An Indian Rural Economy, 1880-1955 : The Tamil
Countryside*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1984.
- (with D.A. Washbrook), *South India : Political
Institutions and Social Change*, Vikas, Delhi, 1975.
- Barnett, Margnerite Ross, *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism*, Princeton
University Press, Princeton, 1976.
- Barrier, N.G., *Census in India : New Perspectives*, OUP, Delhi, 1984.
- Beck, B., *Peasant Society in Konku*, University of British Columbia,
Vancouver, 1972.
- Béteille, A., *Caste, Class and Power : Changing Paterns of Stratification in a
Tanjore Village*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1966.
- , *Studies in Agrarian Social Structure*, OUP, Delhi,
1974.
- Breckenridge, Carol, *The Sri Minaksi Sundaesvarar temple: Worship and
endowments in South India : 1833-1925*, University of Wisconsin,
Wisconsin, 1976.
- Chatterjee, Mary Seale and Sharma, Ursula, *Contextualising Caste: Post
Dumontain Approaches*, Blackwell Publications, Oxford, 1994.
- Chatterjee, Partha, *The Nation and Its Fragments : Colonial and Post-Colonial
Histories*, OUP, Delhi, 1994.

- Cohn, Bernard. S., *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, OUP, Delhi, 1987.
- Daniel, Valentile, E., *Fluid Signs : Being a person the Tamil Way*, University of California Press, Brekeley, 1984.
- Dalmia, Vasudha and von Stietencorn, Heinrich (eds), *Re-presenting Hinduism : The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, Sage, Delhi, 1995.
- Dharampal, *The Madras Panchayat System*, Vol. II, Impex India, Delhi, 1972.
- Diehl, Anita, *E.V. Ramaswami : A Study of the Influence of Personality in Contemporary India*, B.I. Publications, Delhi, 1978.
- Dirks, Nicholas, B., *The Hollow Crown : Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*, CUP & Orient Longman, Bombay, 1989.
- Dubois, Abbé, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, Rupa, Delhi, 1982.
- Dumont, Louis, *Homo Hierarchius : The Caste System and Its Implications*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981.
- , *A South Indian Subcaste*, OUP, Delhi, 1986.
- Foucault, Michel, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Harper and Row, New York, 1972.
- Gough, Kathleen, E., *Rural Society in South East India*, CUP, Cambridge, 1981.
- Geertz, Clifford, *Negara : The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1980.

Guna, (in Tamil), *Dravidathal Veezhnthom*, Thamizhaga Aivaran, Bangalore, 1994.

Guha, R., (ed), *Subaltern Studies I*, OUP, Delhi, 1982.

Ghurye, G.S., *Caste and Race in India*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1979.

Hardgrave, R., *The Dravidian Movement*, Popular Prakashan Bombay, 1965.

-----, *The Nadars of Tamil Nadu*, University of California Press, California, 1969.

Harriss, J., *Capitalism and Peasant Farming*, OUP, Bombay, 1982.

-----, *The State in South Asia*, University of East Anglia, 1983.

Hocrat, A.M., *Caste : A Comparative Study*, Russel and Russel, New York, 1950.

Hodgen, Margaret, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1964.

Inden, Ronald, *Imagining India*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1990.

Irshick, Eugene F., *Politics and Social Conflicts in South India : The Non-Brahmin Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929*, University of California Press, Berkely, 1969.

-----, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, Crea -A Madras, 1986.

-----, *Dialogue and History, Constructing South India, 1795-1895*, UCP, Berkeley, 1994.

- Kaviraj, Sudipa, *On the Construction of Colonial Power : Structure, Discourse and Hegemony*, Mimeo, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, 1989.
- Kavlekar, Kashinath, *Non-Brahmin Movement in South India*, Shivaji University Press, Kolhapur, 1979.
- Klass, Morton, *Caste : The Emergence of the South Asian Social System*, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia, 1980.
- Kumar, D. (ed.), *The Cambridge Economic History of (South) India*, Vol.II, CUP, Cambridge, 1983.
- Leach, Edmund, R. (ed.), *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-West Pakistan*, CUP, Cambridge, 1960.
- Lehman, Arno, *It Began at Tranquelbar : A Histoty of the First Protestant Mission in India*, CLS, Madras, 1956.
- Ludden, David, *Peasant History in South India*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1985.
- Marx, A., et. al. (in Tamil), *Periyariam : Nirappirikai Kutturaikal*, Vidiyal Pathipagam, Kovai, 1995.
- Mc Gilvray, Dennis B., (ed.), *Caste Ideology And Interaction*, CUP, Cambridge, 1982.
- Mencher, Joan, *Agriculture and Social Stucture in Tamil Nadu*, Durham, 1978.
- Moffat, Michael, *An Untouchable Community in South India : Structure and Consensus*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1979.
- Omvedt, Gail, *Dalit Visions*, Orient Longman, Madras, 1995.

- Plaffenberger, Bryan, *Caste in Tamil Culture*, Vikas, Delhi, 1982.
- Rajadurai, S.V., and V. Geetha (in Tamil), *Periyar : Suyamariyathai Samadharmam*, Vidiyal Pathipagam, Kovai, 1996.
- Rajaraman, P., *The Justice Party : A Historical Perspective, 1917-1937*, Poompozhil Publishers, Madras, 1988.
- Rajamanickam, S., *The First Oriental Scholar*, De Nobili Research Institute, Tirunelveli, 1972.
- Ravikumar (ed). (in Tamil), *Dalit Kalai Ilakkiyam Arasiyal*, Dalit Kalaivizha Kuzhu, Neyveli, 1996.
- Risley, Herbert, *The People of India*, Thacker-Spink, Calcutta, 1915.
- Rudolph, Lloyd and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition : Political Development in India*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Said, Edward, W., *Orientalism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978.
- Sarkar, Sumit, *A Critique of Colonial Reason*, Papyrus, Calcutta, 1985.
- Sastri, Nilakanta K.A., *A History of South India : From the Earliest Times to the Fall of Vijayanager*, OUP, Delhi, 1966.
- Sathyamurthy. T.V., (ed.), *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India*, Vol. 3, OUP, Delhi, 1996.
- Singer, M., *When a Great Tradition Modernises*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1974.
- Sivathamby, Karthikesu, *Understanding Dravidian Movement : Problems and Perspectives*, NCBH, Madras, 1995.
- Spratt, P., *The DMK in Power*, Madras, 1969.

- Setin, Burton, *South Indian Temples: An Analytical Reconsideration*, Vikas, Delhi, 1978.
- , *Pesant State and Society in Medieval South India*, OUP, Oxford, 1980.
- Subramanian, N., *The Brahmin in the Tamil Country*, Ennes Publications, Madurai, 1989.
- Suntheralingam, R., *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India, 1852-1891*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1974.
- Thirumaran, K., (in Tamil), *Thani Thamizh Iyakkam*, Marutham, Tiruchirappally, 1992.
- Thurston, Edgar and K. Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes of South India*, vol., 7, Cosmos Publications, Delhi, 1975.
- Venkatachalapathy A.R., (in Tamil), *Marimalai Adigalar Naatkurippukal, 1898-1950*, Maraimalai Adigal Pathipagam, Madras, 1988.
- , (in Tamil), *Dravida Iyakkamum Velalarum*, South Asian Books, Madras, 1994.
- Viswaanathan, E.Sa., *The Political Career of E.V. Ramaswami Naicker*, Ravi and Vasantha Publishers, Madras, 1983.
- Washbrook, D.A., *The Emergence of Provincial Politics*, CUP, Cambridge, 1976.
- Whitehead, Henry, *The Village Gods of South India*, OUP, London, 1916.

ARTICLES :

Anandhi, S., "Women's Questions in the Dravidian Movement, 1925-48"

Social Scientist, May- June, 1991.

Ambirajan, S., "Caste Clashes in Tamil Nadu" *The Hindu*, June 2, 1997.

Appadurai, A., "Right and Left Hand Castes in South India", *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (Delhi), vol II: 216-60, nos.2-3, 1974.

-----, "Is Homo Hierarchicus?", *American Ethnologist*,
13: 745-61, 1986.

-----, "Putting hierarchy in its place" in George E.
Marcus (ed), *Re-reading Cultural Anthropology*, Durham and London,
Duke University Press, pp. 34-47, 1992.

-----, and Brekenridge, C.A., "The South Indian Temple :
Authority, Honour and Re-distribution", *Contributions to Indian
Sociology* (Delhi), No.2, 1976.

-----, "Identity Choice and Caste Ideology in
Contemporary South India", in K. David (ed.), *The New Wind*, The
Hague, 1977.

Barnett, S., "Approaches to Changes in Caste Ideology in South India", in B.
Stein (ed.), *Essays on South India*, University of Hawaii Press,
Honolulu, 1975.

Beteille, Andre, "Caste and Political Group Formation in Tamil Nadu", in Rajni
Kothari, (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics*, Orient Longman, Delhi, 1970.

- Boon, James, "Comparative De-enlightenment : Paradox and Limits in the History of Ethnology", *Daedalus*, 109, 2:73-31, 1980.
- Chakraborty, Dipesh, "Modernity and Ethnicity in India", *South Asia*, vol.XVII, pp. 143-55, Special Issue, 1994.
- Cohn, Bernard S., "Representing authority in Victorian India", in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, CUP, Cambridge, 1983.
- Chatterjee, Partha, "The manifold uses of Jati", in T.V., Sathyamurthy (ed), *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India*, Vol.3, OUP, Delhi, 1996.
- Deliege, Robert, "The Myths of Origin of the Indian Untouchables", *Man*, Vol.,28, no. 3, September 1993.
- Dharampal-Frick, Gita, "Shifting Categories in the Discourse on Caste", in Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron (eds), *Re-presenting Hinduism*, Sage, Delhi, 1995.
- Dirks, Nicholas, "The Structure and Meaning of Political Relations in a South Indian Little Kingdom, *CIS*, California Institute of Technology, NS, 13:2, 1979.
- Frankel, R., Francine, "Middle Classes and Caste" in Atul Kohli (ed.), *India's Democracy*, Orient Longman, Delhi, 1991.
- Gnani, (in Tamil), "Socialisathai Purakkanithu Vidathirkal" in Marx *et al*, *Dalit Arasiyal*, Vidiyal, Kovai, 1995.

- Gough, E. Kathleen, "The Social Structure of a Tanjore Village", in M. Marroit (ed.), *Village India*, UCP, Chicago, 1995.
- Guha, Ranajit, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India", in Ranajit Guha, (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I*, pp. 1-8, OUP, Delhi.
- Gupta, Dipankar, "Continuous Hierarchies and Discrete Castes", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19, nos. 46-48, Nov - December, 1984.
- Heesterman, J.C., "The Cundrum of King's authority", in J.F. Richards (ed.), *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, University of Wisconsin Publ. Series, Madison, 1978.
- Irschick, Eugene, F., "Order and Disorder in Colonial South India", *Modern Asian Studies* 23(3), 459-92, 1982.
- Kaviraj, Sudipta, "On State, Society and Discourse in India", in James Manor (ed.) *Rethinking Third World Politics*, Longman, London, 1991.
- , "The Imaginary Institution of India", in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (eds.), *Subaltern Studies VII* pp. 1-39, OUP, 1992.
- Lakshmi, C.S., "Mother, Mother Community, Mother-Politics in Tamil Nadu", *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 20-27, 1990.
- Luden, David, "Ecological zones and the Cultural Economy of Irrigation in Southern Tamil Nadu," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Ns 1-1-13, 1978.
- Manivannan, R., "1991 Tamil Nadu Elections : Issues, Strategies and Performances", *Economic and Political Weekly*, January, 25, 1992.

Menon, Sadanand, "Backward Caste Politics", *Sunday Observer* (Bombay),
December 18, 1988.

-----, "T.N., 'Caste-benefit' analysis fails : *The Economic Times*, (New Delhi), June 20, 1997.

Mores, Brindavan C., "Struggle for Panchama Lands: Dalit Assertion in Tamil Nadu," *EPW*, February 4, 1995.

Mukund, Kanakalatha, "Elites vs Subalterns or Ideology vs Methodology?",
EPW, July 13, 1996.

Nandy, Ashis, "Introduction: Science as a Reason of State," in Ashis Nandy
(ed.), *Science, Hegemony and Violence: A Requiem for Modernity*, OUP
and UNU, Delhi, 1990.

O'Flaherty, Wendy D., "The aura of renunciation," *Times Literary Supplement*,
No. 4(Nov. 23): 260, 1984.

Pandian, M.S.S., "From Exclusion to Inclusion: Brahminism's New Face in
Tamil Nadu," *EPW*, September 1- 8, 1990.

-----, "Denationalising the Past : 'Nation' in E.V.
Ramaswamy's Political Discourse", *EPW*, October, 1993.

-----," Notes on the Transformation of Dravidian
Ideology : Tamil Nadu, C., 1900-1940", *Social Scientist*, 252-53, 1994.

-----, "Elusive 'peace' in Tamil Nadu", *The Hindu*, May
30, 1994.

Parthasarathy, R., "Smouldering Caste Fire", *The Hindu*, March 18, 1996.

Price, Pamela, "Revolution and Rank in Tamil Nationalism", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 55, no. 359-383, May 1996.

Radhakrishnan, P., "Ambasankar Commission and Backward Classes", *EPW*, June 10, 1989.

-----, "Backward Classes in Tamil Nadu : 1872-1988", *EPW*, March 10, 1990.

-----, "Communal Representation in Tamil Nadu, 1850 - 1916", *EPW*, July 31, 1993.

-----, "Backward Classes Movements in Tamil Nadu", in M.N. Srinivas (ed.), *Caste in Contemporary India*, Penguin India, Delhi, 1996.

Rajadurai, S.V., and V. Geetha, "Dravidian Politics: End of an Era", *EPW*, June 29, 1991.

-----, "Neo-Brahminism : An Intentional Fallacy?", *EPW*, January 16-23, 1993.

-----, "Dalit and Non-Brahmin Consciousness in Colonial Tamil Nadu", *EPW*, September 25, 1993.

-----, "One Hundred years of Brahminitude : Arrival of Annie Besant", *EPW*, July 15, 1995.

- Ram, N., "The Dravidian Movement in its pre-independence phases", *EPW*, Annual Number, 1979.
- , "The Pre History and History of D.M.K", *Social Scientist*, vol. 4, No.5, December 1977.
- Ranadive, B.T., "Towards an Understanding of the non-Brahmin Movement", *Social Scientist*, No. 68, March 1978.
- Rao, Sandhya, et.al., "The New Resistance : Dalits and the politics of caste", *Frontline*, December 1, 1995.
- , "Roots of Tension : Dalits and the Politics of Caste", *Frontline*, December 15, 1995.
- Redfield, Robert, N., "The Folk Society", in M. Redfield (ed.), *Human Nature and the Study of Society : The Papers of Robert Redfield*, pp. 231-53, UCP, Chicago, 1962.
- Ryan, Michael, T., "Assimilating New Words in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centures", *Comparative Studies in Society and Literature*, 23, 4: 519-38, 1981.
- Said, Edward, W., "Identity, Negation and Violence", *New Left Review*, 171, 46-60, 1988.
- Saminatha Aiyar, U.V., (in Tamil), Part II, in U.V.S. Aiyar, *Ninaivu Manchari*, Dr. U.V. Saminatha Aiyar Nool Nilayam, Madras, 1991.

- Sampath, M.C., et. al., "A Boiling Cauldron in Tamil Nadu", *The Hindu*,
December, 10, 1995.
- Sheth. D.L., "Politics of Recognition and Representation", *The Book Review*,
vol. XIX, Number 11, November 1995.
- Shivakumar S.S., "Transformation of the Agrarian Economy in Todaimandalam
1790-1900", *Social Scientist*, no. 70, 1978.
- Sivaraman, Mythily, "The DMK: Its content and Ideology", *Radical Review*,
vol. 1, No.2, Madras, 1970.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, "Subaltern Studies : Deconstructing
Historiography", in Ranajit Guha (ed), *Subaltern Studies IV*, pp. 338-63,
OUP, Delhi, 1985.
- Srinivasan, R., "The Ideological Genesis of The Dravidian Movement", *The
Indo-British Review*, VIII (1), Jaquary-June, 1987.
- Stein, Burton, "The Segmentary State in South Indian History", in R.Fox (ed),
Realm and Region in Traditional India, pp. 3-51, Duke University Press,
Durham, 1977.
- Subramaniam, T.V., "The Tamil Brahmins : Some Guidelines to Research on
their Emergence and Eclipse", *EPW*, July 4, 1969.
- Sudha Pai, "Regional Parties and the Emerging Pattern of Politics in India",
The Indian Journal of Political Science, vol.51, No.3, 1990.

Suresh V., "The DMK Debacle : Causes and Portents", *EPW*, October 17, 1992.

-----, and P. Nagasaila, "Caste Politics and Tamil Nadu Elections", *The Independent*, June 1991.

-----, "Stooping Very Low", *The Independent*, (Bombay), June 15, 1991.

Thamizhavan (in Tamil), "Ithu Aariyar, Dravidar, Dalit Porattam", in S.V., Rajadurai and V. Geetha (eds.), *Dravida Dinamaniyin Parpaneeyam*, Viruddhachalam, 1992.

Venkatachalapathy, A.R., "Dravidian Movement and Saivites : 1927-1944", *EPW*, April 8, 1995.

-----, "Coining Words : Language and Politics in Late Colonial Tamil Nadu," *South Asia Bulletin*, Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, vol XV, no.2, 1995.

Washbrook, D.A., "The Development of Caste Organisations in South India, 1880-1925", in C.J. Baker and D.A. Washbrook (eds.), *South India : Political Institutions and Political Change : 1880-1940*", Macmillan, Delhi, 1975.

-----, "Progress and Problems : South Asian Economic and Social History, 1720-1860", *Modern Asian Studies*, 22, no.1, 57-96, 1988.

-----, "Caste, Class and Dominance in Modern Tamil Nadu: Non-Brahminism, Dravidianism and Tamil Nationalism", in Francine Frankel and M.S.A. Rao (eds), *Dominance and State Power in Modern India*, OUP, Delhi, 1989.