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HISTORY OF CASTE SYSTEM IN TAMIL NADU

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Abstract

The caste system in Tamil Nadu has deep historical roots and complex sociocultural dynamics that have evolved over millennia. This paper explores the origins, development, and implications of casteism in Tamilakam, tracing its trajectory from the microlithic and megalithic periods to the Sangam era and beyond. It examines the Portuguese and British influences in coining the term "caste," highlighting its distinction from the indigenous Tamil concept of "Jathi," referenced in ancient Tamil literature. The study delves into the genesis of early human settlements in Tamil Nadu, the migration and integration of Dravidian tribes, and the subsequent interactions with Aryan culture. The paper also examines the societal changes brought by modernization, which have eroded some traditional caste boundaries while preserving others. It further explores the implications of caste stratification on social, economic, and educational opportunities, highlighting ongoing challenges in achieving social equity.

Keywords: Caste, Socio-Cultural, Indigenous, Caste Stratification, Hierarchy, Caste Discrimination.

Introduction

This Paper is to discuss what the caste system is and when was it started in *Tamilakam* to give a background information about the social structure of population within the territories, and then describes casteism during the Vedic era (1500-500 BC), *Sangam* era (500BC-300CE), and post-sangam era (300CE-700CE), Espousal of *Varna* system to Tamil Nadu, Spread of *Varna* system throughout *Tamilakam*, Influence of *Bhakthi* movement on caste system, Intricacy of caste system, Colonial influence on the caste system of Madras Province, Abolition of caste stratification after independence, Advent of Social-class stratification, and Manifestation of caste stratification in recent years, to draw a favourable conclusion about the weakening of caste stratification in Tamil Nadu.

It is a long-standing piece of information that Portuguese, when they visited Indian territories in 1550s for promoting their sea trades,[1] visualized thousands of separate clans each of which was unique in heredity, culture and language, and hence they used to call each of the clans a "*Casta*" the meaning of which was a breed, race or strain having a complex of hereditary qualities,[2] whereupon Britishers who had established trade contacts with and

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settled in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta grasped the idea of calling "*Casta*" as "*Caste*" by their linguistic mock-up in early 1611-1639.[3]What has to be understood from this is that the term *Casta* or *Caste* was not of Indian origin and it was the Portuguese who first introduced this word familiar to them for denoting a "breed or race" in their own country to represent a group of individuals who had a common origin from a tribe in the remote past and occupied a particular region. Therefore, the caste is defined as "*an aggregate of people who usually belong to the same linguistic region, doing same traditional occupation and following the same cultural tradition unique to it*", the Tamil equivalent of which is "*Jathi*" deeply rooted in the hearts and souls of people all over Tamil Nadu.[3] The term "*Sathi* or *Jathi*" is given in the ancient Tamil Poetic piece "*Nalvazhi*" written by the poetess *Avyar* in 1st CE, which denotes that the term *Jathi* has been in use in *Tamilakam* even before the beginning of Christian Era and its dreadful impacts might have arisen over 2000 years ago. In India, there are over 3000 castes and 2500 sub-castes of people, of which about 400 castes and 350 sub-castes are found to be reported from Tamil Nadu state, ie. 13.3% of the total number of Indian castes is seen in this state. All these castes together make up a ranked system called *caste hierarchy* or *Varna system* or caste system.

Within the caste system, every caste is a group of individuals who share a common tradition and occupation unique to it,[4] and the general features of castes in India are as follows: (1) all individuals of a caste have a good relationship and cooperation with each other so as to form a clan, (2) they coordinate certain social associations under the headship of a chief and council of members to take decisions, (3) the occupation that was common for all individuals directly or indirectly was mainly ascribed by birth (it is not so in recent years), (4) no one person is allowed to marry anyone from out-caste (endogamous), (5) no one person was allowed to eat food or drink anything in the houses of people who are inferior to his/her caste (but not so serious now), (6) for maintaining the purity of the clan, people avoided contact and touch with people of inferior castes (it is not a guilty now), (7) their village administrative bodies have settled small disputes at the village level, (8) through the administrative bodies, they protect themselves from the atrocities of other castes of people,[5] and (9) being a Hindu sect, all castes accept Brahmins as their priests in village temples and to perform ceremonies (now a few are exceptions).[6] In many parts of Tamil Nadu, there are separate villages for each caste or the entire village is divided into three quarters of which one quarter accommodates Brahmins, the second one accommodates dominant caste/s and the third one accommodates Dalits or untouchables.[7] However, a lot of differences are there in

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the attributes of every caste in the previous era and of the same castes today because of the social changes due to modernity.

The Genesis of Humans in Tamilakam

Before going to discuss casteism in the early period, it is indispensable to understand the early genesis of humans in *Tamilakam* and the beginning of communal life by which each man feels differently from another man in the community. Ernst Haeckel (1887) while narrating the genesis of humans states that three (*Dravida, Nubians* and *Mediterranese*) of the twelve races of *Homo sapiens* (modern humans) look alike in their characteristic features like strong beads and more or less curly hairs on the head, by which they can be distinguished from other races, and out of these, *Homo sapiens Dravida* is represented only in the southern peninsula of India and Ceylon.[8] It is said that, during the microlithic and megalithic periods, this race seemed to have distributed throughout India but, later on, because of physiographic changes on the surface of land it had shrunk into the regions of southern peninsula in which Tamil Nadu is a part thereof.[9] In support of this, W. Crooke (1898) suggests that *Dravidans* who are surviving in the Indian Peninsula were actually African emigrants to South India, and that Aryans drove the indigenous inhabitants into a ruthless situation that forced them to settle in hills and forests, which was the reason for all caste problems in Tamil Nadu.[10] Regarding the ethnical relation of *Dravidas*, Keane stresses that, although *Dravidas* preceded the Aryans to occupy this land, what ethnography says, as told by C. MacLean, is that they are not at all the natives of Deccan, and the ancient Hindu dynasties here were formed by the admixture of *Dravidas* and *Aryans* settled in the particular areas. Maclean further declares that there is no remnant of pre-Dravidan specimen elsewhere in *Tamilakam*, so that once there might be pre-Tamil speaking tribes of *Dravidans* (also called proto-*Dravidans*) in this area before the spread up of Tamil-speaking population therein, most probably in 1100 BC.[11] Casteism could not be possible in the primitive society where people had no *Dravidan* language to exchange their feelings even if some kind of enmity was there between the tribes.

Archeological findings make known that early microlithic men who could make small tools for hunting had inhabited Tirunnelveli and adjoining areas in Tamil Nadu during 15,000 BC- 10,000 BC, but there could be least chance for caste differentiation in the primitive society that was at the pre-mature stage of development.[12] Krishnaswami investigated so

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many vestiges of microlithic men in excavations at *Attirampakkam, Vadamathurai, Manjanakaranai, Erumaivettipalayam, Odapatti,* some parts of *Vaikai velly, Pudukottai*, and *Ramnad*, due to which it is assumed that stone-age men might be there throughout this region.[13] Historians are of the opinion that Neolithic men had settled in semi-urban condition, their occupation was agriculture and animal domestication, and they learnt to make tools using basalt or dolerite granules and potteries of different kinds using clay. Such Neolithic settlements were found in *Salem, Namakkal, Karur, Kongu nadu* (Coimbatore), *Omalur, Kanchipuram*, and *Tirunnelveli* districts,[14] which enable us to imply that Neolithic man who lived in the north and south parts of Tamil Nadu during 6000-2500 BC could not have casteism as they lived in small colonies at foothills where there was enough water and pasture, and they could live only with finger-shaped stone tools and copper weapons even if they learned to burry dead within urns.[15]

What came next was the iron-age or megalithic period in which semi-urban settlements occurred in several places and agriculture was there mainly in the rural areas, as a consequence of which a local culture developed in these sites especially in the last quarter of the megalithic period. At present, the Archaeological Survey of India (Chennai Circle) has found out 160 megalithic sites throughout Tamil Nadu, especially in *Thiruvallur* district, *Kanchipuram* district, *Villupuram* district, *Nagapattinam* district, *Coimbatore* district, *Pudukottai* district, *Dindigul* district, *Thiruvannamalai* district, and *Tirunnelveli* district,[16] which points out that megalithic men might have migrated southwards and occupied the whole State during 2500 -1800 BC. Excavations of *Adichanallur* (Tuticorine district), *Paiyampalli* (Vellore district) and *Kodumanal* (Erode district) have bronze objects, iron implements, burial mounts, urns, jewels, potsherds, cloth pieces and woods, copper bangles, brassing metals, husks of rice and millets, and kiln floor. So, it is generalized that some sorts of casteism might be there in *Tamilakam* during 2500-1800BC, and that since iron tools for animal sacrifice to Gods were unearthed from these sites, the presence of Aryans at that time could be a doubtful thinking evermore.

Casteism in Tamilakam during the Vedic Era

The Vedas were composed by Indo-Aryans who had settled in north-western India (Punjab and Gangetic Plains) during 1500-500BC so that during the Vedic era nothing had happened to spread the principles of Vedas in South India.[17] Possibly, each tribe that originated in a hereditary line might have risen to the status of a caste or race based on the

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traditional occupation, and might be ruled by a local headman called *Kizhar* or *Manar*.[18] Thus, thousands of primitive tribes lived in isolated groups here and there throughout *Tamilakam* and hence there were many Kings in *Tamilakam* until 1st century CE when some parts of Northern *Tamilakam* were annexed with the first South Indian Dynasty, *Sadavahana Dynasty*. The Varna system that was introduced in north-western India by Aryans through ancient Hindu literatures could not reach *Tamilakam* during the Vedic era (1500-500 BC) and the post-Vedic era (500 BC-300 CE) because the first immigration of Brahmins to South India happened much later during the period of *Pallavas* and there was no well-formed Kingdom up to 300CE.

At this juncture, it should be clear that in ancient *Tamilakam* the tribal chieftains who were variously named as *Kizhavar* or *Moopar* or *Kizhar* or *Velir* seemed to be the local overseers or rulers of their respective clans. It is generally agreed that these primitive tribes were widely apart from one another so that no one tribe was disturbed by other tribe/s. Under the ascendancy of the chieftain, all families of a particular tribe lived in a separate area and did anything possible for the safety of the clan.[19] The distinctive features of the primitive tribes are as follows: (1) all individuals had a good relationship and cooperation with each other, (2) they coordinated all activities of the chieftain, (3) the occupation was mainly ascribed by birth, (4) they were not allowed to marry from out-caste, (5) they were not allowed to eat food or drink in the houses of other caste, (6) they avoided contact and touch with other castes, (7) the chieftain disposed all disputes of people, and (8) they protect themselves from the atrocities of the other castes of people.[20]Their unique occupation may be by and large hunting, theft, farming, selling forest or agricultural products, and the like. According to Ram Sharan Sharma (1990), there could be no caste stratification in the Vedic era even in north-western India and the castes were only differentiated based on their wealth such as kin, tribes and their lineages.[21]

Caste System in Tamil Nadu during Sangam Era

A notable change in the social structure of *Tamilakam* during the *Sangam* era,[22] which is assumed to be between 600 BC and 300 CE as per the carbon dating of things collected from *Keeladi* excavation,[23] was the local king's ascendancy over the territories of *Tamilakam* that was extending from *Venkata Hills* in the north to Kumari (Cape Comarin) in the South. Regarding the origin of earlier kingdoms in *Tamilakam*, it is stated that the earliest one was *Pandya dynasty* that happened to be established in the 6th or 5th century BC and its capital was

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Korkai which was a maritime trade centre at that time,[24] which is witnessed by the writings of *Megasthenese* (4th century BC) that "*Pandiya country is stretching southwards to the sea and composed of 365 villages each of which meets the needs of a royal family per day and the Queen of Pandiya is so beautiful as the daughter of Kerakles*".[25] Next to this, *Chola dynasty* came into existence in *Kavery delta* during the 3rd century BC and the areas included in the country were the present *Thiruchirapalli district, Tiruvaru district, Ariyaloor district, Perambaloor district, Pudukottai district, Karaikaal district* and *Thanjavur district*. In support of this belief, Ashoka Major Rock Edict No.13, which dates back 273-232 BCE, states that "*to the south of Mauryan Empire, there is Chola Kingdom that is so friendly to us*".[26] Reports make it clear that *Chera* dynasty took its origin in 2nd century BC, with *Kudanadu* as its capital and *Thondi* as main trade centre.[27] Hence, it is concluded that during 500-100 BC a few local chieftains who gathered the power over their territories might have established the *Chera, Chola* and *Pandya* dynasties of *Tamilakam*, which might be the beginning of social modifications in this land.

Purananuru – a Sangam literature written in 1st century AD – hails the glories of 18 kings of *Chera* kingdom, 13 kings of *Chola* kingdom, 12 kings of *Pandya* kingdom, and 48 lesser chieftains,[28] which is a witness to the existence of these monarchs in the early days of *Sangam* Era. This poetic work mentions that the entire region of *Tamilakam* was divided into small territories such as *Kattu-nadu, Kongu Nadu, Karai nadu, Parambu nadu, Pennai nadu, Malai nadu, Mevokkam, Mukkaval nadu, Venkata Nadu*, and *Ko-nadu*.[29] The major developments that took place in these settlements were mainly due to the enhancement of trades, temples, village assemblies, and agriculture with the efforts of the Kings.[30] This poetic piece further extols that "*It is the king who is the life of this wide expanse of the earth, so it is the duty of the king to protect all his subjects from enemies*",[31] and praises the Brahmins that "*they are descendents from renowned for superb learning, living with truth, focused on righteousness, never thinking false, wearing a thread around the shoulder, and doing rituals and fire sacrifice to the god, because of which Brahmins should be seen in highest perfect state*",[32] from which it is clear that during the *Sangam* era Kings were given the first order in the social system and a few Brahmins might tripped here during the *Sangam* era. Further, this idea enables us to conclude that Brahmins might have migrated from northern parts of India to *Tamilakam* in 300 BC -1 CE when the northern territories were under *Sadavahana Dynasty* that encouraged rituals and fire sacrifices (Yagam) for the betterment of rulers. Another point

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relevant to this research is that *Purananuru* discloses the low caste drummer asking the King for a gift,[33] which is a witness to the existence of low castes during this time.

From the view of the historians of Kerala, it is obvious that Brahmins had migrated from the north-western regions of India and Tamil Nadu to Kerala during the 2nd century BC - 8th Century CE[34] so that Brahmin immigration to Tamil Nadu might have happened at the same time or a little before that. However, mere immigration of the Brahmins could not mean that Brahmins had attained the top layer of caste hierarchy at that time because it was not possible for anyone to dominate all *Dravidan* castes in one move even if the rulers occasionally used them to perform fire-rituals and others for the wellbeing of the country and rulers. In the subsequent *Kalabhra* interregnum (300-600CE) and *Pallava* dynasty (275-897CE), Sanskrit and Brahmin well-versed with religious literatures were appreciated in educational institutions and palaces, but their status in society was not so prominent.

Tholkappiyam, written by the poet *Tholkappiyar* in 1st century BC, on the physiographic basis divided all the lands of *Tamilakam* into four divisions (*thinais*): (1) *Kurinchi* that is formed of hill tracts, (2) *Mullai* that is formed of pasture and dry farming lands, (3) *Marutham* that includes all cultivable lands, and (4) *Neithal* that includes all the areas of coastal belt. This text further states that (1) hunting, millet cultivation, and honey gathering were main the careers of people lived in *Kurinchi*, (2) animal husbandry, dry farming, and shifting cultivation were the traditional jobs of people in *Mullai,* (3) cultivation of food and fiber crops was the occupation in *Marutham*, (4) fishing, sea trades, salt making, pearl collection, and conch collection were the traditional jobs of people in *Neithal*, and (5) theft, travelling and fighting were prescribed jobs of people in *Palai*.[35] Whilst *Kurinchi* was inhabited by *Kanavar, Vedar* and *Kuravar* under the headship of *Verpan, Poruppan* and *Silamban* respectively,[36] *Mullai* was occupied by *Kuravar, Ayar* and *Idaiyar* headed by *Anal, Thonral* and *Kuramporai* in that order.[37] *Ulavar, Velanmadar, Toluvar*, and *Kadayar* lived in *Marutham*[38] and at the same time *Parathavar, Nulaiyar* and *Umanar* were in *Neithal*.[39] There is no definite desert land in *Tamilakam* so *Palai* is not included in this list; it was occupied by *Maravars, Kalvars* and *Eynars*.[40] *Porunarattupadai* that was composed in 2nd century CE also describes the same (Lines 271-272). *Purananuru* mentions the names of castes such as *Tudiyar, Panar, Kadambar,* and *Parayar*,[41] which, as stated by *Nilakanda Sastri*, does not mean that only four castes were found in *Tamilakam* but the four were mentioned in the poetic lines.

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Pattinappalai that was written in the 1st century AD makes a mention that *Vanigars* who belonged to *Vellala* caste had settled in separate quarters wherein they were assisted by slaves in farming, trade and herding sheep. They never tolerated theft, but maintained cowherds and agricultural fields while devoting their life in the service of God as the Vedas said.[42] *Mullaipattu* which was composed in 3rd century indicates the wandering of *Yavanas*[43] within the territories of *Chera, Chola* and *Pandya* kingdoms (Line 74). *Perumpaannattupadai* utters that *Paravars* were the natural inhabitants of coastal belt and their activity was very important for fishing, trading and running sailing boats (Line 371). *Siruparnatutppadai* states about Brahmin settlements in Amur and other areas of *Dravidian* country and their priestly duties in Vishnu temples. *Maduraikkanchi* depicts that the merchants of *Tamilakam* were very intelligent in earning wealth (Lines 547-554), *Kosars* tribe was found in *Kuda nadu* (Line 537), and *Panars* regularly caught fishes and oysters from freshwaters and sea coasts (Line 414). *Malaipadukadaam,* while narrating the customs of soldiers, conveys that in ancient *Tamilakam* there was a tradition of planting stones inscribed with the name of *Maravas* who died in the war (Lines 503-504), which implies that *Maravas* were *Kshatriyas* during the *Sangam* age. Social-class Stratification in Tamil Nadu

While considering caste as a criterion for backwardness in society, R. A. Gopalaswami who was the Census Commissioner of India for 1951 felt that caste system is, if truth be told, a hindrance in the way of our steps towards egalitarian society, and that for the recognition of certain castes as deprived castes, the only possible solution would be their selection based on socio-economic and educational criteria.[44] For this reason, the castes were all analyzed with reference to their social position, educational advancement, representation in government services, and representation in trade, commerce, and industry. In the study of the status of various classes within a population, based on educational and socio-economic criteria, the people of India were divided into forward class (upper class), Backward class (middle class), and low class.[45] The forward class includes those who are wealthy by birth or earning to enjoy affluent life, by which they access education, high-paying occupations, and resources they want to have in the life. The backward class includes those who earn well to provide comfy life to their family members and access the resources they want to accumulate in their houses; they may have graduation or post-graduation level in education. At the same time, the low caste denotes the people who do hard labours to sustain their life to fulfill their urges.[46] In the analysis of demographic features of society, human population has been divided into classes with reference to the educational levels of people, income and wealth,

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languages, occupations, poverty levels, sex, and some other parameters to cull out information required for planning.

The "*Backward Classes Commission*"[47] to which was recruited B. P. Mandal as the Commissioner culled out caste-wise population figures from the census reports of 1931 and divided the population into five broad groups based on socio-economic status and religions.[48] The five groups were- (1) Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, (2) Non-Hindu Communities (including Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains), (3) Forward Hindu castes and communities (including Brahmins, Rajputs, Marathas, Jats, Vaishyas, Kasyathas, and others), (4) Backward Hindu castes and communities (including all other backward castes), and (5) Backward Non-Hindu Communities. Here, the backward castes (both Hindus and non-Hindus) together constituted the *Other Backward Classes* (OBCs), for the calculation of which total population of Hindus is subtracted by the population of Scheduled castes, Scheduled tribes, and forward castes. From 1980 onwards the social class stratification recommended by the Mandal Commission has been implemented in the census of India as well as in Tamil Nadu state. After that, in the census of 1991 the caste groups were rearranged into (1) Forward castes, (2) Backward castes, (3) Scheduled castes, and (4) Scheduled tribes. In the meantime, the GO. Ms. No.85 of 2008 issued by Tamil Nadu Government has divided the backward classes into (1) Other backward classes, (2) Most Backward classes and (3) Minorities for including the backward castes, disabled backward classes and religious groups other than Hindus.[49] Therefore, the class stratification included Forward class (FC), Other backward class (OBC), Most backward class (MBC), Minorities, Scheduled castes (SC) and Scheduled tribes (ST). In 1991, the denotified communities (DNC) which were actually carved out from Backward classes since they seemed to be criminal tribes in the previous years, according to GO (Ms) 1310 of 1979, were treated as a separate caste group, and at the same time, religious minorities were included in the backward classes. Therefore, the population of Tamil Nadu was divided into - (1) Forward castes, (2) Backward castes, (3) Most Backward classes, (4) Denotified Communities, (5) Scheduled castes, and (6) Scheduled tribes. Here, Backward classes with less than 2.5Lakhs annual income are known as Other Backward classes (OBCs). Further, Act No. 33 of 2007 declares that Christians and Muslims would hereby become Backward class, and 3.5% of seats from BC is carved out and to be allotted to Backward class Muslims. Therefore, the modified class system in use in Tamil Nadu is as follows: (1) Forward castes, (2) Backward castes (see Appendix-III), (3) Backward class Muslims, (4) Most Backward classes

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(Appendix-IV), (5) Denotified Communities (Appendix-V), (6) Scheduled castes (Appendix-VI), and (7) Scheduled tribes (Appendix-VII). In the current system of class stratification, only scheduled castes and scheduled tribes were enumerated in the census while all others were left unnoticed as they had almost attained the mainstream in their educational status and socio-economic conditions.

On the basis of socio-economic conditions, the population is divided into six main classes: (1) Upper-upper class, (2) Upper-Low class, (3) Middle- Upper class, (4) Middle-Low class, (5) Low-Upper class, and (6) Low-Lower class. According to the Annual Income Report (2023), the estimated annual income of households belonging to the upper-upper class is above 1 crore rupees while that of upper-low caste is 30 lakhs -1 crore rupees; the estimated annual income of households belonging to the Middle-upper class is 7.5 lakhs – 18 lakhas rupees while that of middle -low class is 3.5 lakhs -7.5 lakhs rupees; and the calculated annual income of households belonging to the low-upper class (aspirers) is 1.5 lakhs – 3.4 lakhs rupees while that of low -low caste is less than 1.5 lakhs rupees.[50] So, there are six layers in the current system.

Manifestation of Caste System in Recent Years

Though affirmative action has been in practice in almost all corners of Tamil Nadu for over the last 73 years, many police cases have been filed every year by low castes against the criminal activities of dominant castes, and it is stated that for most of the cases there were no proper action from the police-side as they usually used to support the wealthy dominant people in society.[51] That which is most developed in recent years is Science and technology which has given a variety of entertainment media and other things that uplift the social life, but it cannot change the mind-sets of people who are flooded in the traditional caste hierarchy even if it was legally banned.[52] The law and Justice remain inert to do something in front of the feeling of caste hierarchy within the hearts and souls of people irrespective of castes wherein they belong. The low casts cannot escape fully from the feeling of blameworthy hierarchy so far[53]even if advancements in the social culture have provided so many factors for better political power, occupations, land ownerships, spiritual elitism, local leaderships, and partnerships in business and others, with which people's attitudes towards caste hierarchy have been gradually decreasing bit by bit every year.[54]In the psychological point of view, what we had got in the subconscious mind would not vanish easily and come out in right place and circumstance if necessity arises, and hence caste bias in our subconscious mind

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gets its full vigor when there appears a chance in the form of mischief, deviations from rules and avoidance in private or public places, and when we need to face it. Therefore, it is believed that, if the caste hierarchy in minds of people has to be wiped out, it would take some more time until people would, as Dr. Amberkar says in the Annihilation of castes, become ready to accept inter-caste marriages.[55]

It should be kept in mind that, even struggles occur between siblings who had born to the same parents and between the members of the same clan, and, if so, why do we feel that all these criminal activities are due to disputes between two castes. The Crime Records of Tamil Nadu Police (2021) reveals that about 5735 cases (77%) were filed by individuals against their close relatives in the same caste for their rights or properties or others while the number of cases registered by low castes against high castes for their atrocities was 1761 in 2021. The proportion of low castes in this state is 20% while caste-based atrocity is 23% so it is not very high for their relative representation in the society. Therefore, we presuppose that inter-caste clashes must be handled just as criminal disputes rather than viewing them as caste bias because we all cannot distract from the caste unfairness at the mind level. Caste violence has been a serious issue in areas where two castes are almost equal in population size and one caste is abundant and quarrelsome with another caste due to the ego of self-esteem. On the other hand, in areas where one caste is abundant and other is represented only as a few members, the chance for such violence is low. In most police cases concerned with caste bias, the motif for the cause of violence is vengeance for evil or wrong doing of the people of one caste by another caste.

The politicians who have their base on caste power of course help the people to acquire their solidarity that seems to be their strength and they used to urge the people to keep up the solidarity to win other castes and to protect them from caste violence. Another evil in Tamil Nadu is that political parties are fighting with each other to get the votes of Dalits; they offer many favours to low castes to harvest their votes. However, in the present situation, their efforts would no longer support the wellbeing of low castes or eradicate the caste bias from the minds of people.

Conclusion

The historical exploration of casteism in Tamil Nadu reveals its deep-seated origins and dynamic evolution, influenced by socio-political, cultural, and economic transformations

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over millennia. Initially rooted in occupational and regional classifications, Tamil society exhibited a fluid and less hierarchical structure during its early phases. However, the Sangam era marked the gradual crystallization of social hierarchies, fueled by economic specialization, the consolidation of agrarian practices, and interactions with migrating groups, including the Aryans and Brahmins.

This study emphasizes the complexity of caste as a construct, shaped by both indigenous traditions and external forces. Addressing caste-related challenges requires a nuanced understanding of its historical roots and the socio-cultural dynamics that sustain it. By contextualizing casteism within Tamil Nadu's rich history, this paper seeks to contribute to ongoing discourses aimed at fostering equity and social cohesion in a rapidly changing society.

Endnotes

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4. Verse 2 of *Nalvazhi* states that there are really two *jathis* among the people, of which one *jathi* will donate something to the life of other and the other *jathi* people do not give anything to the life of others.
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