"GANDHIAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN TAMILNADU" is a captivating theme. The scholar has identified it as a potential theme for doctoral research, for it was a remarkable movement in the Indian society in general and Tamilnadu in particular, as it brought out equality among various social groups. Moreover, this still remains a virgin theme for intensive research, for no one has taken it up for any doctoral programme so far. This is an added advantage and incentive to the scholar.

Gandhian Social Movements were a part of the escalating campaign of mass civil- disobedience which marked a major watershed in the socio- political life of Tamilnadu. The temples and temple authorities became the makers of rules and regulations to control the life of the people. They were closely inter- related with the institution of caste system. It is believed that the hierarchical caste system was the contrivance of the Brahminical mind which divided the society into two larger sections, the high and the low caste, or the pure and the polluting caste. The Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaisyas and the Sudras formed a pyramidal hierarchy in which
the Brahmins at the apex and the Sudras at the lowest level. All others outside the pale of this system were considered as impure **Low castes**.

The socio-economic setting of Tamilnadu in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries was also one of the extreme contrasts existing side by side - power and bondage, purity and pollution, overlordship and subservience, landedness and landlessness, prosperity and poverty, knowledge and ignorance, the power of women and the degradation of women, immunities and slavery.

The non-caste Hindus were always treated as slaves and a number of basic rights were far away from their reach. They were not allowed to worship in the temples and also to walk in the streets. Lack of physical cleanliness, intellectual appetite and economic status prevented these people from entering the temples.

The advent of the Christian Missionaries and their educational institutions exposed the mythological concepts that governed the caste restrictions. The spread of English education and the formation of caste- associations inspired the non-caste Hindus to bargain for their legitimate status within the fold of Hinduism.
Among the non-caste Hindu Communities the **Nadars of Sivakasi** amassed with wealth through their business and industry, began to claim the right of temple entry which was denied to them.

The advent of Gandhiji into the National Movement in this crucial socio-political atmosphere was a great blessing to the marginalized people in India. In 1920, the **Indian National Congress** at its **Nagpur** session adopted a distinct and unequivocal political resolution for the admission of the non-caste Hindus into the Hindu temples. By the **Bardoli Resolutions of 1922** Gandhiji brought out a new colour of social content to the Congress programme by advocating the idea of removal of untouchability. At the annual session at **Kakkinada**, the Indian National Congress included the **"Right of Temple Entry"** in its agenda. To uplift the non-caste Hindus (Harijans) with the blessings of Gandhiji, the **Harijan Sevak Sangh** was formed at the national level with **Seth Ghanshyandas Birla** and **Amritlal V.Thakkar** as its President and General Secretary respectively. The **Tamilnadu Harijan Sevak Sangh** under the leadership of **Dr.T.S.S.Rajan** was also formed with headquarters at **Trichi**. The members of the Harijan Sevak Sangh organised
Padayatras, Bhajans, Common sports, and Samabandhi Bhojanams (inter-communal dinings) for the removal of untouchability from the minds of the caste - Hindus.

Gandhiji mobilised the popular will in favour of the abolition of untouchability, organised and conducted an "All India Harijan Tour". Gandhiji started his Harijan Tour in Tamilnadu from Kanyakumari and toured the entire Southern districts of Tamilnadu, Konkunadu, Cumbum Valley, West Cauvery Region, East Cauvery Region, and finally in the Arcot Region. Gandhiji's Harijan Tour in Tamilnadu had a number of remarkable significances. Throughout Tamilnadu, in almost all the meetings a number of addresses, purses, jewels, gifts and other precious materials were presented to Gandhiji, who auctioned all the materials and converted them into money. A number of rich and educated people, irrespective of caste, colour, language and religion were attracted by the appeal of Gandhiji for Harijan Services.

As a sequel to Gandhiji's Harijan Tour, Temple Entry Movement gained momentum in Tamilnadu. Blessed and solemnised by Gandhiji, surprisingly the temple- entry movement was
organised and sphere-headed by the caste - Hindus who once denied permission to the non-caste Hindus. Of course, the Satyagraha at **Vaikkam** was not a great success; it attracted the attention of people all over India.

Even in **Guruvayur** due to the religious rigidity, the non-Caste-Hindus were not permitted to enter the temple. Disappointed and disgusted with the temple authorities, **K.Kelappan Nair**, a true Gandhian worker commenced the Satyagraha there. Even after the judgment of the **Madras High Court**, **Guruvayur temple** was not opened to the non-caste Hindus for several years thereafter. No doubt, that the Guruvayur temple entry Satyagraha turned out to be a sad episode; but the temple entry movement as such had gathered momentum due to the keen interest evinced by Gandhiji.

In **Suchindrum** too, the temple and the streets around it were not opened to the non-caste Hindus. They were debarred from walking through the streets where the caste Hindus lived. The Suchindrum temple entry Satyagraha was led by **Dr.M.E. Naidu**. Finally the thorny question of temple entry was settled by the historic
Temple Entry Proclamation issued by His Highness Sri Chitra Thirunal Bala Rama Varma Maharaja of Travancore on 12th November 1936 and thus a great injustice was at last set right.

The prelude agitations for entering the Hindu temple roads in Vaikkam, Guruvayur, Suchindrum served as an instinct to the Temple Entry Movement in Tamilnadu. Due to the initiatives of A.Vaidyanatha Iyer and N.M.R. Subbaraman, a Temple Entry Conference was organised at Madurai. The wonderful event of temple entry at last happened on 8th July 1939. The temple entry team was led by A. Vaidyanatha Iyer and L.N.Gopalasamy, accompanied by P.Kakkan, Swami Muruganandam, Muthu, V.S.Chinniah, V.R. Poovalingam and S.S.Shunmuga Nadar which made their first entry into the famous Meenakshi temple. Temple entry became a reality without violence and bloodshed. After the Madurai episode, more temples in different parts of Tamilnadu - Tiruchendur, Tanjore, Trichi, Courtallam, Kumbakonam, Mayiladuthurai, Kanchipuram were opened to the non-caste Hindus. Finally the Temple Entry Bill got the assent of the viceroy Lord Linlithgow on 4th September 1939.
and was published for general information as **Madras Temple Entry Authorisation and Indemnity Act XXII of 1939**. The Act granted the non-caste Hindus the right to enter and offer worship in the Hindu temples. Thus the Gandhian Social Movements ushered in an era of prosperity and created a cultural awakening among the people of Tamilnadu and also brought a new sense of Dravidian consciousness and cultural pride which led to the rise of linguistic sub-nationalism in Tamil Nadu.

D.A. Washbrook’s *South India: Political Institutions and Political Change 1880-1940* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1975) and E.Sa. Viswanathan’s *The Political Career of E.V. Ramasamy Naickar* (Madras: Ravi and Vasanth Publishers, 1983). These works undoubtedly contain references about Gandhian Social Movements. But the informations furnished by them are inadequate. *P. Chidambaram Pillai* narrates the general aspects on the social movements but much importance has not been given to the comprehensive history of the Gandhian Social Movements in Tamilnadu. Likewise, *A. Ramasamy* also outlines the visit of Gandhiji in Tamilnadu and made marginal references about the Gandhian Social Movements. Therefore, having felt the need to fill the gaps, the scholar has ventured to do further research on the theme, making use of several new source materials hitherto untapped.

The topic for research has got wider scope. Major developments have been discussed in great depth here for the first time. The social setting in Tamilnadu by the dawn of the 19th century, the role of Harijan Sevak Sangh and the issue of Social justice, Gandhiji’s Harijan Tour in Tamilnadu and Temple Entry movement in Tamilnadu have formed the major themes of the
dissertation. With the help of a large mass of original documents and secondary sources collected from National Archives of India, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, Gandhi Memorial Museum and Library, Sabarmathi Ashram, Ahmedabad, Tamilnadu Archives, Chennai, and Kerala Archives, Trivandrum, an attempt has been made to present a comprehensive account of the Gandhian Social Movements in Tamilnadu.

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