CONCLUSION

The Dravidian Society, in the ancient times, led a life of secularism, naturalism, humanism and universalism. Women were regarded with self-respect and dignity. They had the right to choose life partner, mobility, employment and education. But, women had no property rights. The practice of bride-price, voluntary sati, kaimai nonbu (abstension or continence) and paratthai were also prevalent.

The infiltration of Brahminical culture into the Tamil Country pushed women into a degraded position and the native Tamils, the Dravids, who were illtreated and insulted by introducing various degrees of distant pollution. Education became religious, caste and sex-based. The attendant evils of caste system like Female infanticide, child-marriage, sati, enforced infant widowhood, dowry menace, purdah and seclusion came into existence in the name of protecting women’s chastity. Fidelity was forcibly enforced on women, to maintain purity of blood. Women faced double hardships and suffered its dominant pressures of having to lead a life of slavery.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the society became static and stagnant. Most women in the Southern regions were either conservatives or orthodox, reactionary to social reform or male-dominated. They fell preys to the evil practices of the caste system. They were mostly mute spectators under male-domination. Since wealth was accumulated in the hands of male members, the society was polygamous (very rarely polyandrous too) and prostitution was encouraged. Religion-based prostitution, the devadasi was not prevented.

Society, at a later time was compartmentalised - Hindu under water-tight compartments of high, middle, low, lower caste/classes. It was racial, caste-ridden, region and language-based. Women were excluded from property rights. Many women by the lower strata were considered polluted and therefore they were untouchables. They were denied
social participation though some social reformers raised their voice for reform, it was heard in wilderness. They were either scorned at or ridiculed.

In particular, Tamil women were increasingly becoming illiterate, ignorant, superstitious and landless. They were prevented from learning, social participation, possessing land and confined to secluded life. They too came under the spell of most of the high caste heinous practices, practiced by the upper castes. They turned more conservative to observe the social taboos strictly and silently. Since wealth was heaped in the hands of a few, the privileged ones enjoyed immunity from social laws. For instance, the Brahmin was let free of all crimes, even if he has committed those crimes, for the simple reason of killing of the Brahmin was considered a sin (Brahmahatiya), one of the five sins which has no expiation. Finally, women in Tamil Nadu during the nineteenth century were reduced to a very pitiable plight.

During the Colonial period, though the Christian Missionaries brought prospective changes in the system of education and infrastructure of India, religious practices were regarded with caution and even the ‘Mistress of Seas’ was afraid of approaching and eradicating the evils prevailed in India as those evils were so deep-rooted and engrained in the minds of people.

Eventhough some beginnings have been made by some liberal-minded progressive thinkers and reformers towards the liberation of women what has been achieved does not commensurate with their expectations. Periyar was one of these radical thinkers, who never left a stone untouched/unturned in relation to women and their social position. His ideas and activities, thoughts and deeds about women were radical and revolutionary. They had electric impact on most of the literates and even some women of the lower stratum. Periyar touched the life of a woman from her womb to tomb (cradle to grave). He wrote, spoke and propagated against female-infanticide, child-marriage, wearing tali and ornaments, sati,
widowhood, dowry, Purdah, seclusion, illiteracy, population explosion, polygamy, prostitution, devadasi, slavery and exclusion from property.

On the other hand he favoured for women’s right to education, self-respect marriage, inter-caste marriage, widow’s-remarriage, right to divorce, employment, independence, common dress code, birth-control, property inheritance right and participation in decision-making body. He did not just put up a fight. He did not just propagate about the evils of the society. He started the Self Respect Movement in 1925 for the betterment of society and strived hard for the liberation of women. His queries offered a solution in itself. He brought forth a new revolution! By his uninterrupted speeches, writings and propaganda, Periyar touched the heart, mind and souls of human beings and rationalised the society. He spoke, wrote and propagated his ideas and aspirations by way of his journals, platform and conferences through resolutions passing infavour of women and facing the government to consider them.

Though the Justice Party Ministry, the Congress Party under Kamaraj have made the initiative, which echoed the words and deeds of Periyar, it was left to the Dravidian Parties Government to cherish and fulfil all the ideals into practice, what Periyar thought and wrote.

To emancipate women from the horrible practice of Female infanticide, the DMK Government established the Reception Centre in order to protect female babies and to provide rehabilitation to the abandoned children and declared the year 1990 as the Year of Girl Child and ordered for taking stringent measures against the offenders. Consequently, the sex-ratio in Tamil Nadu was 974 in 1991 Census. The Reception Centre encouraged the AIADMK Government to introduce the Cradle Baby Scheme in 1992 to save the life of female babies and to provide rehabilitation.

Child-marriage spoiled the whole life of female children both physically and mentally and increased the maternal mortality rate. Hence, the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 was enacted andincreased the age of marriage of girls and boys to 14 and 16 respectively. The
**Hindu Marriage Code**, 1955 increased the age of marriage to 15 and 18 and again the **Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act, 1978** increased the age of marriage of girls and boys to 18 and 21 respectively.

Since women were subjected to slavery through the Brahminical form of marriage, the DMK regime under C.N. Annadurai enacted the **Hindu Marriage (Madras Amendment) Act, 1967** and introduced a scheme to award the inter-caste marriage couples with gold coins in order to remove the enslavement of women and to establish a rationalistic society. The dowry practice leads to other evil practices of child-marriage, female-infanticide, divorces, dowry-deaths and polygamy. By the introduction of Dharmambal widow remarriage assistance schemes the percentage of widows in Tamil Nadu by 1991 Census was 8.78%. The DMK Government under M.Karunanidhi included a provision of **Dowry Prohibition** in the **Tamil Nadu Government Servant Service Conduct Rules in 1973** to prohibit this obnoxious practice besides the working of **The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961**. The effective implementation of **section 498 A sub sec (3) in section 174** by both the Dravidian Governments put the problems under control.

Divorce is an indispensable protective instrument to women. The enactment of the **Madras Hindu Bigamy Prevention and Divorce Act, 1949** became a model to the central legislation of the **Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act, 1955** which granted women the right to divorce. It gave a great sigh of relief to women from the harassment of their cruel husbands. The inclusion of **section 125 Criminal Procedure Code in 1973** providing maintenance is a great boon to the divorced wife to lead a comfortable and peaceful life. The inclusion of rational grounds like **mutual consent, cruelty** and **desertion** for divorce helps to expedite the divorce cases to get relief. Therefore, the percentage of women seeking divorce in Tamil Nadu has increased.

The novel schemes of **mid-day meals, supply of free text books, free elementary education and distribution of free uniform** to the poor students tremendously increased the
enrolment of girls in primary schools. The introduction of uniform dress code in schools removes the class discrimination among the students. The remodelling of the mid-day meal scheme into the Chief Minister’s Nutritious Meal Scheme, 1982 and supply of free note books to the students in addition to text books encouraged a large number of students primarily girls to enter the portals of schools. In 1989, the introduction of two innovative schemes: One was the Foster-parent Scheme prevented dropouts of girls from school studying I to VIII standards and another one Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiayar Marriage Assistant Scheme promoted the compulsory education of girls up to VIII standard. These schemes promoted not only school education among girls but also encourage them to enter into colleges. As a result of these all novel and innovative schemes, 17.53% of girls against 19.53% of boys in the age group 6-14 studied both primary and middle school education in Tamil Nadu in 1991.

The AIADMK Government under M.G.Ramachandran founded separate University for women in 1986, namely the Mother Theresa Womens’ University solely for the education, research, extension services and employment of women. In addition, the Bharathiar, Bharathidasan, Azhagappa and Tamil Universities were started under the AIADMK Government to promote higher studies and research among women too. In 1989, the DMK Government introduced Nagammaiyar Memorial Free Under-graduate Scheme to promote education upto under graduate level among poor and middle class women students. In fact, all these measures of the Dravidian Governments rightly enhanced the literacy rate of women in Higher Studies.

In the field of Professional Education, the DMK Government upgraded the four Hospitals into Medical College Hospitals i.e. Kilpauk Medical College Hospital, Chengleput Medical College Hospital, Tirunelveli Medical College Hospital and Coimbatore Medical College Hospital. The AIADMK Government, on its part, established the Dr. M.G.Ramachandran Medical University in 1988 and the Anna University in 1978 at Chennai which area great boon for women to extend their reasearch knowledge in medical and
engineering studies. The three **Government Polytechnics for Women** were opened at Madras, Madurai and Coimbatore and womens’ wings were established in Nagapattinam and Tuticorin. It equipped women to acquire technical know-how in different kinds of jobs. Further, the introduction of **free education scheme to the first generation students** belonging to the poor MBC and Denotified Tribes increased their entry into professional courses. Ultimately, the number of females in the age group (15-24) who were qualified up to higher secondary and higher level of education (colleges) in 1991 at the State level was 9.15% of female against 14.92% of male population of the same age group. On the whole, the female literacy rate in Tamil Nadu was increased from 40.43% in 1981 to 51.33% in 1991 while the male literacy was increased from 68.05% in 1981 to 73.7% in 1991. The female literacy in Tamil Nadu during 1991 was 51.3% against 39.3% in the national level.

A number of noble schemes were introduced by both the DMK and the AIADMK Governments to increase the employment opportunities for both literate and illiterate women. They are the appointment of lady teachers alone in schools up to V standards, the recruitment of women to police service in 1973 and the **reservation of 30% to women** in employment opportunities are encouraging women to enter into Government service. The founding of the **Tamil Nadu Corporation for the Development of Women** in 1983 promoted the self-employment abilities of women. The introduction of *Mahalir Thittam, the Vocational Training Programme and the Entrepreneurship Development Programme* are very much encouraging women to become entrepreneurs. The introduction of the **Chief Minister’s Nutritious Noon-Meal Scheme, 1982** and the **freesupply of uniforms** to the student’s up to X standard provided ample opportunities for the empowerment of widows and destitute women. The **Equal Remuneration Act, 1976** recognized equality of men and women in work field. **Muthulakshmi Reddi Ammaiyan Maternity Assistance Scheme, 1989** enhanced the health of women. As a result of above such schemes, the percentage of women got appointment during
the year 1990 was 10.34% in Central Government, 17.40% in State Government and 44.99% in Local Bodies.

The Hindu Succession (Tamil Nadu Amendment) Act, 1989 recognised the birthright of women and thereby establishing gender justice. Though the Suffrage Movement went on in India from 1917 onwards to remove sex disqualification in enfranchisement the Constitution of India 1950 only guarantees equality and equal opportunity to all citizens without discrimination on the basis of caste, colour, creed, sex and religion. It introduces Universal Adult Franchise, a benevolent feature for women to enter into politics. The enactment of Tamil Nadu Panchayat (Third Amendmant) Act, 1981 encouraged women to contest in 15% seats in the office of Presidents of Panchayats.

The period taken for this study for the DMK Ministry was vast i.e. 1967-1976 & 1989 while the AIADMK Ministry was short i.e. 1977-1988. Eventhough the DMK and the AIADMK Party Governments had taken much pains to put into practice the aspirations of Periyar and achieved many mile stones, much remains yet to be achieved in relation with women. Though the Justice Party, Kamaraj, Annadurai, Karunanidhi, M.G.Ramachandran and Jayalalitha have taken many steps towards the realization of the emancipation of women that has been done through schemes, resolutions, Government Orders and legislations. Consequently, the position of women in Tamil Nadu is better than women in other states of India. Tamil Nadu is a role model for the introduction and implementation of various welfare schemes to our nation. Some of the schemes received world-wide appreciation particularly from UNICEF. The guiding force for the achievement of the Dravidian Governments is the rational and radical ideologies of Periyar.

Despite the introduction of these plenty of welfare measures to improve the deplorable conditions of women, they could not bring about the expected change among women to the extent of what Periyar had dreamt.
Even in this century, women face discrimination, sexual abuse and violence, acid-throwing, honour-killing, child-marriage, female-infanticide, desertion, destitution, polygamy, prostitution, dowry menace, suicides, chain snatching, killing of women, etc. which shows that women are still under subjugation. And Reservation of 33% for women in decision making bodies still seem a distant hope. Death of Periyar resulted in the withering of his revolution with the primary push or strong rationalism as he once did due to the formation of splinter groups in Dravida Kazhagam. Nowadays, socialistic renovation is rarely heard of and more occasionally seen, politics and power became more important.

All is not yet lost. We can still improve the position of women through effective implementation of planned strategies.

The following suggestions are made for consideration and improvement of the present schemes and for the improvement of the status of women.

- First of all, the loopholes in all the schemes should be removed.
- The bureaucrats, the officials from rank and file who are in charge of implementing various welfare schemes should be clean-handed, action-oriented and service-minded. Persons having social responsibilities with dedication and helping tendency must be appointed to eradicate corruption. Stringent actions must be taken against the corrupt officials.
- The Chief Minister’s Nutritious Noon-Meal Scheme is indeed praise-worthy. It not only increases the enrolment of children in the schools but also provides employment to women particularly widows and deserted wives. To increase the cognitive power of children the DMK Government has provided eggs to children in all week days. Now and then, this scheme faced a number of challenges for want of awareness among the women workers on hygiene and safety of children. Added to these, there are also self-centred and corrupt women swindlers. Since these women workers are mostly illiterate, they must be provided orientation programme on hygiene and safety. After the Fire
accident in the Kumbakonam school (July 16, 2005) the officials may construct a separate protected building in every school for the nutritious meal centre. The teaching staff members may be given the charge of supervising these centres during the lunch hour in rotation. Frequent squad inspection should be made. The whole-grain may be provided to supplement the meal instead of providing eggs to children in all the week days in order to improve the physical and mental health of innocent children. No doubt, the Nutritious Noon Meal Scheme is a great boon and boost to the poor and poverty-ridden children. This remarkable scheme also improves the stamina and strength of children more than that of children studying in private English medium schools. Nevertheless, care should be taken to safeguard the life of innocent and poor children.

- Eventhough both the Dravidian Governments have introduced a good number of innovative and novel schemes to provide employment to women to emancipate them economically, still a sizeable number of families are engulfed in poverty. As most of them are illiterate, they are unaware of Government welfare schemes and involve in daily wages and lost the same in the hands of drunkard husbands. It is the onus of a welfare state to protect the life of every citizen particularly women and children and to maintain the moral and health standards of the society. It should close, therefore, all TASMAC shops in every nook and corner of the state. They may introduce a complete/poorna prohibition across the state as they are the true followers of Periyar, who organised the anti-liquor campaign even in the 1920s, in order to rescue women and children from all sorts of violences inflicted on them and to establish a peaceful atmosphere to lead a dignified life as per the Article 21 of the Constitution of India.

- Periyar thought that empowerment of women depend on their participation in decision-making bodies, their control over finance and possession of property. The reservation of 30% for women in employment must be according to the proportion of women’s population and legislation must be enacted to make the G.O a permanent.
Steps may be taken to ensure reservation in every decision-making bodies of every Government institution so as to evolve policies for the welfare of women.

- **Family Planning Programme** should not be gender-biased. Generally, women take pains in following the methods of small family norms as if it is women-oriented. The society is of the opinion that small family norm would incapacitate men. The Government may provide attractive incentives to encourage the male members to do vasectomy, as it is scarless, atleast to the Government servants initially. In addition to this, **Family Planning Programme** should not be religion-based. It should be implemented uniformly to all religious groups, irrespective of their religious doctrines, in order to protect the health of women and to emancipate their family grieved in poverty. The dereliction of doctor in sterilization surgery must be checked and prevented. Moreover, the small family norm introduced by the Dravidian Governments had not still reached the people in remote areas. Female-infanticide and poverty-deaths are caused due to over population. The new trend emerges in Tamil Nadu i.e. **surrogative/rental mothers** sell the new born babies in high rate. It should be checked and prevented. Steps may be taken to appoint more female AHNs (Assistant Health Nurse) and Grama Sevikas to the widely spread of birth control methods and to avoid delivery at home. Medical termination of foetus should be rarely allowed only under unavoidable circumstances, the doctor who violates the provisions should be brought to book.

- **Uniform Civil Code** in marriage should be introduced to establish equality of all the citizens irrespective of religion. Bigamy is widely prevalent in the society and it must be checked and prevented by making amendments in the provision of the **Hindu Marriage Act, 1955** which gives importance to the solemnization of marriage alone.

- Since hundred days employment under Rural Developmental Scheme enhanced the standard of life of women, especially widows and destitutes, it should be seriously
taken care of. Unless the unnecessary interference of politicians and brokers are avoided, it would malign the whole scheme. This Rural Employment Scheme must be extended to municipalities and townships so as to extend its benefits to the poor and marginalised further more. Awareness programmes for all the welfare schemes of the Government should be conducted periodically in all villages to reach the unreachable.

- The legislations and the welfare schemes introduced by both the Dravidian Governments equipped women to compete with men equally in all affairs. Besides, they must develop courage and determination to confront male supremacy which is responsible for the occurrence of female infanticide, foeticide, child-marriage, dowry problem, sexual violences, battering and deaths, which are still continuing in the society. These are great threats to the development of our nation. So, the education system should be revised to include Human Rights, Child Rights, Women Rights and Periyar Rational Ideologies on Women in the syllabi of students from the primary level so as to develop gender perspectives.

- Nowadays, women in Tamil Nadu are interested more in visiting temples which would again reinforce the retention of priestly hegemony. The strenuous efforts of Periyar in creating a rational society will become vain. It proves the statement of Vivek in one film that ‘even if hundreds of Periyar come, you will not change’. So, the Governments should take steps to inject rational ideologies into the minds of the public. Many women think that visits to religious centres could atone their sins or the misdeeds of their partners and bring peace of mind. A materialistic world, no doubt, seeks spiritual remedies (expiation), for all sins and ills. Where mind is free, mantras have no place.