INTRODUCTION

This research proposes to study the problems and issues of women in Tamil Nadu and how Periyar E.V.Ramasamy, the founder of the Self-Respect Movement, gave a rational touch to these major issues affecting women and what radical changes the two Dravidian Party Governments brought about in the life of women. Periyar, a revolutionary crusader for women’s liberation, not only attacked the caste system but also all its attendant evils which tarnished the reputation of women in Tamil Nadu. He also boldly advocated many ideas to recover women’s lost glory. This research also critically analyses how far the Dravidian Governments succeeded in their attempts to implement the ideas of Periyar to liberate women and empower them equally with men in the society. Since they pose that they were the followers of Periyar EVR’s Self-Respect philosophy, the study proposes to enumerate their work.

India is a sub-continent. It extends from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Kathiawar to Kamarupa. India has a total area of 32, 87, 263 sq. k.m. (provisional as on March 31, 1982). India is a multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-regional and multi-cultural country. Yet, there is unity amidst these diversities as India being one Country. Tamil Nadu is located on the south-eastern part of the sub-continent of India. It has its own distinct land, language and culture, which exists from the pre-historic times to the present days. During the days of the struggle for independence, i.e., before 1947, it formed a part of the then larger Madras Presidency. It was rechristened as the Madras State in 1956 when Andhra Pradesh was formed as a separate State on the linguistic basis in the same year. The State lies between North latitude 8°5’ and 13°35’ and between East longitude 76°15’ and 80°20’ in the Southern end of the Indian Peninsula. The total area of the State is 1, 30, 058 sq. kms. It ranks eleventh in India.¹

The Madras Presidency was one of the oldest presidencies. Its territories extended from Ganjam in the North East, South Canara in the West, Cape Comorin in the South and Bay of Bengal in the East. Hence, it occupied the entire South of Indian Peninsula. It consisted of 25 districts. It did not include the Five Native States like Travancore, Cochin, Pudukottai, Banganapalle and Sandur. The area of Madras Presidency was 141, 705 square miles including the five native states. It comprised of people who speak different languages like Tamil in twelve districts, Telugu in eleven districts, Kannada and Malayalam in one district each. Before the formation of States Reorganisation of Madras Presidency in 1956, It was called Dravida Nadu consisted of Modern Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka and Andhra States\(^2\).

The name Tamil Nadu was given to the then Madras State on 14\(^{th}\) January, 1969 as a unilingual state with Tamil as its language. It covers a total area of 100380 sq. km. It is bounded by Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh on the North, Bay of Bengal on the East, the Indian Ocean on the South and Kerala on the West. The total population of the Madras Presidency during the year 1921 was 42, 794, 155.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>38,653,558</td>
<td>19,054,012</td>
<td>19,599,546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>41,870,160</td>
<td>20,606,008</td>
<td>21,264,152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>42,794,155</td>
<td>21,100,158</td>
<td>21,693,997</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


There was thus an excess of 593,839 females over males during the decade of 1921\(^3\). The population of the Madras Presidency comprised of the Hindus, the Muslims, the Christians, the Animists and others. The following table shows the religious population in the Madras Presidency during the Census of 1921 and 1911.

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\(^3\) The Census of India 1931, Vol.XIV, Madras, pp.256-257.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Religion</th>
<th>Actual Number in 1921</th>
<th>Proportion per 10,000 of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>37,942,191</td>
<td>8,866 8,892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>2,865,285</td>
<td>670 660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>1,380,672</td>
<td>323 289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animistic</td>
<td>578,398</td>
<td>135 153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jains</td>
<td>25,493</td>
<td>6 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2,116</td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: G.T. Boag. The Census of India 1921, p.64.

In 1921 there were 8,092,817 unmarried female in the Presidency, of these 726,233 were over the age of 15. Among these 599,000 were Hindus, 60,000 were Muslims, 47,000 were Christians and 19,625 were Animists.4

The women work force in the Presidency during the year 1921 was 7,565,555, out of 21,693,997 female population was engaged in some occupations. Of every 1000 women workers 750 were employed in cultivation, 90 in industry, 52 in trade, 72 in occupations insufficiently described and 36 in other occupations. Regarding agriculture, of every 1000 agriculturists 313 were cultivating landowners, 295 were field labourers, 209 were cultivating tenants, 111 were farm servants, 45 were non-cultivating land owners and 27 were non-cultivating tenants. Generally, agricultural labour was paid in grain, at the rate of 5 to 8 annas a day for a man and 3 to 4 annas for a woman.5 After cultivation the principal occupations occupied by women for livelihood were trade in food, industries of dress and the toilet, textile industries and building industries. These occupations absorbed 6.5 millions of 7.5 million women workers. Some women were also employed in professions like religion, medicine, teaching and music. In addition to these, the number of men, women, children and infants emigrated to different parts of the world was in the proportion of 60, 203, 132 and 64 respectively for indentured labour between the years 1911 to 1914.6

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5Ibid., p.168.
6Ibid., p.49.
The original Dravidians followed matriarchal system, in which there was no elaborate form of marriage. They gave importance to love at first sight, consummation and wedding ceremony followed later. The Dravidians had no system of child-marriage. The duties of women were to look after their children, caring their partners, gathering food as a bread-winner, picking up fruits, digging for roots and garnering the seeds of cereals found around their places for abode. They worshipped Mother Goddess as well as nature. The matriarchal system with changes is followed till today. The system of bride-price or parisam, puberty rites and the return of young mothers to their parents’ house in the seventh month of pregnancy for the delivery of first child are the remnants of matriarchal system. Later, the institutions of the karpu form of marriage and the development of private property led to the evolution of the patriarchal form of society; father as head of the family, being the possessor of a large, growing herd or cattle, acquired the great influence which the possession of wealth gives. Mother became the procreator. Father became the bread-winner to the family. He became a possessor of not only cattles, lands but also women. It led to the development of feudal system and the emergence of three kings known as the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas who established their control over Tamilaham. During this age, women were required to possess the characteristics of fear, shyness, sobriety and ignorance and they acquired education.

At the dawn of the 20th century in the Madras Presidency the position of women was much deteriorated because of the attendant evils of the caste system which continued to enslave women. The evils include female infanticide, child marriage, sati, enforced widowhood, purdah, polygamy, devadasi system, prostitution and dowry system. Owing to illiteracy, women were steeped in ignorance, superstitions and an object of exploitation. The

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7 Ehrenfels viewed that the introduction child-marriage was the struggle between the patriarchal order of the invaders and the matriarchal of the indigenous civilization. In short, it was a struggle between the father-right and the mother-right. Ehrenfels, B.O.R., Mother Rights in India, Oxford University Press, Hyderabad, 1941, p.124.
8 Srinivasa Iyengar, History of the Tamils from the earliest times to 600 A.D., Asian Education Services, Madras, 1995, p.7.
11 Tholkappiyam, Kalavivai:8.
patriarchal society also subjected them into a number of inhibitions and restrictions in their
day-to-day life. Hinduism supported subjugation of women; whenever necessary quoting the
tenets embodied in the Code of Manu. Caste System made women in India to face two-fold
suppressions: illtreatment and secondary treatment. Women were considered the reproductive
organs, commodities for sale; unproductive women as barren lands; those who were not
accompanied with dowry and servants and slaves were enslaved. Those who brought that
were kept in seclusion; some of whom were ill-teated by their counterparts at homes; sexual
and sensual entertainments were very much expected of them. In the name of saving purity,
many were sacrificed at the childhood days. Education was an unattainable dream to the
lower castes. They were not allowed to learn the reading, writing and speaking skills. Any
one who taught the Veda to the lower caste women was outlawed. High caste women were
forced to observe fasts and distance from lower castes as they would be polluted. Their voice
was never heard of; their pains of many were never treated; their food was wretched; their
dress was dirty; always living in fear and threat. The Sastras which governed the lives of all
sections of women were always inhuman and cruel. Violations of these codes were dealt with
severely. On the whole, the life of a woman in the Madras Presidency, whether of high caste
or low caste was miserable, pitiable and unsympathetic. Therefore, this needed a change, a
complete overhauling; a change for the better that Periyar spearheaded.

Periyar’s radical and rationalistic thoughts on women touched every aspect of a
woman from her birth to her death, the kind of the socio-religious and cultural evils that
affected and afflicted them. He turned his arrows against the caste system and ridiculous
position of women in the system; how did the sastras, the puranas and the Codes and laws
kept them superstitious, irrational and ignorant. The meek submission made them scapegoats
to the lust of high caste men. By innumerable social evils they (the men) took them to the
altar for sacrifice. Periyar highlighted and condemned the worst impact of the dislike of the
birth of female children, ill-treatment of the child as second rate citizens, how ritualistic,
costly and irrational their marriages were; how foolish the male chauvinism which prevented them from acquiring knowledge; how painful are the rituals at marriage - *kanyadhana, saptapati, santhimukurtham*, etc. how woman were fleeced of wealth in the form of movable and immovable property i.e. dowry, how girls were married at the age of five and six; what made them become widows; the reactionary and retrograde step of increasing the pain of widowhood - wearing white, tonsuring the head, eating forbidden (unhealthy) food, keeping them away from the public, how inauspiciously they were looked at, enforced continence and abstaining feasts and observation of fasts – how their dowry (property) was misused; how they were forced to enter the funeral pyre of their dead husbands at the childhood days; how neglectfully the death of a woman was cremated on her death. All these scriptural sanctions of the Hindu sastras and Hindu religion were exposed by *Periyar* as a crusader for the liberation of women from the cruel clutches of the male-dominated society.

*Periyar* advocated equality of male and female children at birth; strongly propagated family control only to prevent women being treated as procreative machines or women to loose their health and charm, making their husbands profess prostitution and lavishing their wealth on *Devadasis* and whores or going for polygamous life. It was *Periyar*‘s thought that child-bearing forbade women to enjoy care, concern and love of their husbands. He vehemently opposed child-marriage and widowhood and advocated widow remarriage and education and employment to them. He was a caustic critic of the pracitce of *sati*, which he called a *sutee* (conspiracy); though the practice was legally abolished, it lingered in our society. Many child-widows were to forego their colour dress (wear white), *talak* flowers and trinket (*mangala*). *Periyar*, therefore, rose against the ritual of *tali* tying and said *tali* is a *veli* (fence) in the march of women to liberation.

*Periyar* was an arch enemy of the practice of untouchability: the concept of purity and pollution and the consequent ill-treatment of low-caste women prevent them from entering temples and the portals of educational institutions. He wanted the outcast women to
follow the upper caste women’s practices. *Periyar* wished all women to wear - to follow a particular dress code – not to go for costly dress (*pattusarees*), costly ornamentation (ornamentation and sensuous dressing is dangerous).

As an advocate of a casteless and creedless society, he fought fiercely for inter-caste marriages, inter-dining and inter-gathering. *Periyar* introduced *Seerthirutha Marriage* or Self-Respect Marriage or a contract for companion of life or a contact for *Vazhkai Thunainalam* by permitting women to choose her companion of life. It allows and encourages inter-caste marriage as endogamy subjugated women. He wanted such self-respect marriages to be simple and unexpensive. Girls should enjoy the right to choose their partners in life; they must be allowed to converse and understand each other before marriage.

He also advocated the right of women to share parental property. He knew that property is a balancing sheet in the life of a woman. He was, as said above, against the practice of paying dowry, which is nothing but a payment the parents of her family pay to groom instead of he paying her (*parisam* or *mulaivilai*).

**Education**

After the introduction of Aryan culture in Tamil Nadu, women were denied the right to access education in the formal institution. However, few members in the society obtained education in private school.

*Periyar* knew that the only panacea to all these evils is women’s education, employment, free movement and free expression of their minds. They should enjoy the right to choose the form of education, the right to political participation and decision-making. They should be free to choose the future of family, planning and pleasant life with husband and children.
Female Infanticide

The birth of a female baby was not welcome in the Tamil society and it was considered as an inauspicious event. Superstition, tradition, oppression and economic impoverishment played very important roles in disgusting the birth of a female baby. Besides these reasons, dowry system also forced the parents to murder the new born female babies. The sex ratio of Madras Presidency was reduced from 1032 per 1000 in 1911 to 1028 per 1000 in 1921\textsuperscript{12}. The number of recorded female deaths in the decade of 1901-1910 and in 1911-1921 was 961 and 979 respectively\textsuperscript{13}.

Periyar stood against female infanticide. He denounced the view of the birth of a female child as a curse, inauspicious event and a burden to the family. On the other hand, the birth of the female child is a great gift to continue the descendancy of the family. The Brahminic concept of purity and pollution did irrepairable loss to the family. In addition to this, Sanskritisation imposed hardship on women. Except for the few days of abstention from dormented crores, the female child as a girl, wife, mother, and a grandmother is more auspicious than a male child. Periyar wanted people to abhor this pratice of killing female child in its foetus or after its birth. He condemned infanticide as a heartless practice to be scorned at.

He also vehemently criticised the dedication of girl-children to a debarrred profession in the name of dedication to the service of gods in temples, but in reality as the whores of the priests, nobles, the wealthy and the officials. He wanted the devadasi system to be abolished and extended moral and ideological support to Dr.Mrs. Muthulakshmi Reddy’s measures. Besides, he also looked at the fallen sisters with concern and the profession of prostitution be done away with.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p.89.
Child-Marriage

Child-marriage is like giving legal sanction to child rape. This is like the cruel practice of thrusting a pole into the female secret part, leading to continuous bleeding, resulting in the female child’s death. The bones would be ungrown, her tissues were very thin and her breasts unripe for sexuality. Anatomically it is dangerous. That is why many female became child widows. Periyar demanded the scriptures which give sanction to child-marriage to be burned/banned.

Widowhood

Widowhood is the cruelest part of the life of a girl/woman. It smacks all sense of dreamy and humaneness. Periyar had his own experience in his own family and he became increasingly unhappy with this practice and took, cudget to conduct, the remarriage of his own niece.

Sati

Sati is a Sutee, a conspiracy against womanhood. It is an inhuman, savage-brutal act on the part of a widow’s family members. Periyar asked what harm did these women do? Instead of allowing them to live with another of her choice, she was being killed by her relatives. Periyar wanted this practice to be done away with completely.

Periyar questioned the superstitious belief which were affecting and enslaving women. He used pen and platform to change the society for the betterment of women from birth to death. Periyar suggested atheistic and iconoclastic principles to imbibe rationalism in the minds of people. Periyar not only suggested radical and rationalistic ideologies for the emancipation of women but also demanded both the Dravidian Governments and non-Dravidian Government whichever were in power to enact necessary legislations for the eradication of every social evil against women. Periyar used his journals, dailies, pamphlets,

14 Sati was a survival of the former custom of killing the wives, slaves and animals of the deceased and to accompany the souls of the master. It was also against the mother-rights in India as it was the idea of punishing the widow and to establish an idea that a woman has a value only through her husband. Ehrenfels, B.O.R., Op.cit., p.129.
conferences and public meetings as a tool to change the mentality of people and to bring revolutionary and far reaching changes in the society.

Periyar’s thoughts on women caught the imagination of all; but the most affected ones were the two Dravidian parties. They maximally utilized Periyar’s ideas on women and promised many ways of their liberation. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, in one way or the other, could come to power only because of Periyar’s radical, revolutionary and rationalistic thoughts on women. They assess that Periyar was much ahead of his time. His ideas and aspirations had world appeal and admirations.

Scope

This topic is a fertile area since it deals with the lives of women from cradle to graveyard. It is universally known that Periyar, in fact, was instrumental in changing the whole life of women. But, it is not widely known how far Periyar’s views were put into practice by the Dravidian Governments and bettered their status in Tamil Nadu. Even though indepth studies on each of the fields have appeared a logical and a scientific study about the contribution of the Dravidian Governments for the emancipation and empowerment of women upto 1989 has not been attempted until now. Not only that but no critical examination of Periyar’s views on women and the possibility of Governments taking steps to boost the morale of women in Tamil Nadu has been done. Besides, no scholar, including the advocates of Periyariya feminism has taken pains to put Periyar’s thoughts on women in a better perspective in the context of the region, nation and the world. When the scholar was collecting material, for writing some papers, she found its vast scope and sources varied for a study. Therefore, the scholar chose this topic as her research area.
Purpose

The purpose of this research is to throw light on the social relevance of Periyar’s views on women and their impact on society. Periyar’s thoughts and ideas worked wonders from the year 1925 to 1989 and there upon also. It is also aimed at bringing out 65 years of women’s progress and the progressive measures taken by the Dravidian Governments. Also it is aimed to deal with how much transformation has taken place in the life history of women by introducing some radical and rational measures to better the life of women in Tamil Nadu. However, it is evident that a lot of changes has taken place from the birth to the death of women. Besides, the study aims at putting on record the revolutionary measures taken until 1989, and the successes and failures, if any in implementing socially relevant schemes. Thereby, the study proposes to examine to what extent women are free and fair with their life, to move freely, to employ freely, to free in decision-making, etc.

Area of Study

The area of the study is so vast, covering the whole of the then Madras Presidency and later Tamil Nadu. But, it is impossible enough to cover all aspects of all areas of Tamil Nadu, for a micro study like this. Though, it is limited to cover the present day Tamil Nadu which formed a part of the erstwhile Madras Presidency in which the kindgoms of Ramnadu and Pudukottai not included, other areas are also drawn whenever found necessary. The Madras Presidency included Ganjam, Southern parts of Andhra, Karnataka except the kingdoms of Mysore, the State of Kerala without the kingdoms of the Travancore, Cochin, i.e. the whole of Malabar. Periyar took ceaseless efforts to emancipate womenfolk in the Madras Presidency with special reference to Tamil Nadu. For this, he expressed his ideas on women through all his journals and the newspapers both in Tamil and English. Periyar’s Self-Respect ideologies had their impact not only in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, but also in other States of Northern India and world at large. However, emphasis is laid more on events affecting Tamil Nadu alone.
Period of Study

The period of the study covers more than one hundred years from Periyar’s birth to the present day. But special attention has been given to the period from 1925 to 1989. The year 1925 is chosen for its historical significance of the founding of the Self-Respect Movement by Periyar after his rift with the Congress Committee meeting held at Kanchipuram. The year 1989 is very important for the enactment of the Hindu Succession (Tamil Nadu Amendment) Act 1989 under Karunanidhi’s Third Ministry for the empowerment of women. On the whole, the study proposed to cover a period of 65 years of Womens’ history in Tamil Nadu.

Hypotheses

The major hypothesis of this study is to test the impact of Periyar’s rationalistic thoughts on women’s issues and assess the steps taken by the Dravidian Governments for its implementation.

The Dravidian Governments have been very much influenced by Periyar’s ideas and thoughts on women;

These Governments have very much realized the importance of women’s liberation in Tamil Nadu by giving effect to Periyar’s ideologies by means of passing several legislations and welfare schemes;

When compared to other states of India, the womens’ issues in Tamil Nadu under Dravidian Governments have received much attention by way of creating opportunities for women in education and employment.

In some cases the Governments could not put into practice some of the radical thoughts of Periyar.
Study of Previous Literature

The topic of this type has to draw inspiration from various studies undertaken by researchers, journalists and politicians. Periyar himself wrote a number of articles in his own journals like Kudi Arasu, Revolt, Puratchi, Paathuvarivu, Viduthalai, Unmai and the Modern Rationalist. His rationalistic ideas expressed through his speeches were published in all these print media. His speeches revealed that he had analysed and examined the root cause of women’s subjugation in the Tamil society as a unique rationalist. His books like Thattuva Vilakkam, Koil Pakishkaram En? Pen En Adimaianal? Suyamariyadhai Iyakkathai Thotruvithathen? Social Reform – Samuthaya Sirthirutham, Karppa Atchi, Vazhkai Thunainalam, and Periyar’s Thousand Golden Sayings threw light on his concern for attitude towards Tamil society and women’s problem. In addition, a number of works written by his lieutenant C.N. Annadurai also created awakening among the public. The most important among them are Ariya Mayai, Varnashramam, Namadu Kurikkol, Periyar Oru Sahaptam (Periyar, an Era). They are very useful in analyzing Periyar not only as a preacher but also a practitioner (experimentalist). Apart from these, numerous books and articles which are written and edited by his lieutenant K.Veeramani are of the immense help to draw his ideas. The most important among them are Collected Works of ‘Periyar’E.V.R, ‘Periyar’ Pennurimai Kalanjiyam in five volumes and Self-Respect Marriage. These are very much useful for the critical analysis of Periyar’s rationalist ideology on women.

Anita Diehl’s work on Periyar E.V.Ramasamy – A Study on the influence of a personality in contemporary South India deals with the biography of Periyar and S.Saraswathi’s Minorities in Madras State, Towards Self-Respect Movement and Periyar E.V.R. on a New World trace the non-Brahmin Movement in the Madras State and the rise, growth and philosophies of Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu. Nambi Arooran’s book Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism (1905-1944) analyses how the rise and growth of the non-Brahmin Movement created awakening among the Tamils to glorify and
revive the Tamil culture and Tamil language and to bring down Aryan culture and Sanskrit language.

Christopher John Baker’s *The Politics of South India* gives extensive details about the domination of Brahmans in the social and political field. Euguene F.Irschick’s *Political and Social Conflict in South India* describes the non-Brahmin Movement and the Justice Party in South India from 1916 to 1929. Irschick’s another work, *Tamil Revivalism in 1930’s* traces the emergence of different castes and it gives a brief account of Periyar EVR’s rationalism. N.K.Mangalam Murugesan’s work *Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu* deals with the history of the Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu.

Sami Chidambaranar’s *Tamizhar Thalaivar Periyar E.V.R.* makes an essential attempt to state the biography of Periyar from his early boyhood and all the turning points and thoughts in his life. M.D.Gopala Krishnan, *Periyar E.V.R. the Father of Tamil Race* provides information about the agitations and important events in his life.

E.Sa.Viswanathan’s *Political Career of E.V.Ramasami Naicker* portrays Periyar’s entry into the Congress and analyses the causes and circumstances that lead to the rise of *Self-Respect Movement* and later the split in his party into DravidarKazhagam. All these above mentioned works provide plentiful sources of information on social and political condition of Tamil Nadu. But, they do not deal with Periyar’s rationalistic ideas on women in full. It can not be totally denied that they had touched up the issue just as passing references.

V.Anaimuthu’s *Thoughts of Periyar E.V.R.* in three volumes and the latest edition of the same work with detail in 21 volumes throw light on Periyar’s speeches in public meetings, conferences, writings in his own journals, his rational views about society, God, religion, sastras, puranas, soul, superstitions, agitations and movements. All these works reveal the ideas of Periyar in different fields but they do not deal about the impact of Periyar’s rationalistic thoughts and the resultant social changes in Tamil society, particularly
among women. Ehrenfel’s *Mother Rights in India*, Tara Ali Baig’s *Women of India*, are very much useful to analyse the status of women.


On a closer examination, it is learnt that none of these works has made a specific study to analyse the impact of Periyar’s rationalistic thoughts on women and the implementation of his thoughts by the Tamil Nadu Dravidian Party Governments for the emancipation and the empowerment of women. Therefore, this study attempts to evaluate the impact of his rationalistic thoughts, the measures taken by the Dravidian Governments for the transformation of women’s status from subjugation to empowerment in the Tamil society using the primary and secondary sources.

**Sources**

The sources are the backbone of reconstructing history. It contains evidence as well as information. This study has been based on both primary and secondary sources. The Government’s Order, Native Newspaper Reports, Vernacular Newspaper Reports, Fortnightly Reports kept in Tamil Nadu Archives, Chennai provide the scholar enough information about Periyar’s rationalistic thoughts and Government measures to enact legislations and women welfare measures to implement his ideas for the upliftment of women.

In addition, the speeches of Periyar and his thought provoking articles published in his own journals such as *Kudi Arasu, Revolt, Puratchi, Pahutharivu, Viduthalai, Unmai,*
The Modern Rationalist kept in Periyar Archives, Chennai provide sufficient information about Periyar’s rationalistic thoughts.

Besides, the Gazetteers, Administrative Reports, Tamil Arasu journal, Manuals, Election and Census Reports available in the Tamil Nadu Archives Library provided the scholar with enough statistical report on progress of women in the specific period of research.

Apart from these, the Tamil Nadu Secretariat Library provides the scholar much information on current affairs which are available in books viz, Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly Debates, Policy Notes of Social Welfare Department and Who’s Who.

Moreover, the works such as Economic Appraisal, Economic and Political Weekly, Census Report, Survey of Family Planning and Social Reform accessible in Madras Institute of Development, Chennai, are more helpful to the scholar in analysing the statistical data on the status of women in Tamil Nadu.

Above all, numerous books written by different scholars on women’s studies and on Periyar are also available in different libraries across the state such as Madurai Kamaraj University Library, Madurai, T.T.S. Library, Arasaradi, Madurai, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University Library, Tirunelveli, Madras University Library, Madras, Connemara Public Library, Chennai, Adyar Besant Library, Chennai, Madras Institute of Developmental Studies, Chennai, Perasiriyar Anbhalagan Library, Anna Arivalayam, Chennai, Periyar Library, Periyar Thidal, Roja Muthiah Library, Chennai, Government Library in Melagaram and Tenkasi, Library in Sri Parasakthi College for Women, Courtallam.

Apart from these, the works of my guide Prof. K. Sadasivan, a social scientist on Tamil Nadu History, are of invaluable help in writing this thesis. His views on traditional Tamil Society, the caste system and its attendant evils, his views on marriage, dowry and divorce and his considered opinions on infanticide and child-marriage, his indepth studies about the devadasi system and the need for its abolition, his studies about the views of
regional and national leaders like Thiru.Vi.Ka, V.V.S.Aiyar’s Gurukulam, Dr.Mrs.Muthulakshmi Reddi, Gandhiji on devadasi system, his views on untouchability and temple-entry movement, the social services of the Protestant Missionaries, with particular reference to Sr. Amy Carmichael of Palayamkottai are all radical and reformist.

Limitations

Periyar’s rationalistic thoughts on women are unique in nature. He derived these ideas only by observing the society and the wretched condition of women. He became the destructor of all these evils that affected women. He attacked God, religion, superstition and Brahmin domination which was responsible for sustaining subjugation of women in the society. But, he had no personal hatred against any particular community or a person. Sometimes, Periyar’s speeches went to the level of suggesting women to remove their uterus in order to wipe out all the sufferings of women. He also demanded the government to abolish the institution of marriage in order to root out the problems of women. So, the scholar has to state the ideas of Periyar in a rationalistic perspective. In stating so, the scholar would be beyond any personal prejudice against anybody, any organization, any party, any ideology or any aspiration. So, the researcher’s duty is to reveal the truth.

Another limitation of this study is that the scholar used the title Periyar instead of writing the whole name of Erode Venkata Ramasami throughout this study. Also, the scholar finds difficult to translate the rationalistic ideas of Periyar into English since all the sources related to Periyar and his thoughts are in Tamil. Due to the vastness of the subject, the scholar has not made any detailed attempt on Periyar’s efforts on the abolition of the devadasi system and prostitution in Tamil Nadu.

Method of Approach

Since the study is a social problem related to politics, society, religion, culture and administration, a historical and sociological approach has been made. The study involves a
critical description, analysis and interpretative approach. As this study tries to fill in the gap that exists between ideology and practice, scientific data from the Government Orders, Census Reports, Economical Appraisal, Human Development Report and Administrative Reports have been perused and pressed into service.

**Chapterisation**

This study is made in eight chapters, excluding the introduction and the conclusion. The Introduction defines the status of women in different fields and impediments of women in Tamil Nadu. The launching of the Self-Respect Movement, it’s programme on awareness and propaganda and its rational and revolutionary principles and their impact on women’s life. The major which affected the life of women and how Periyar started his crusade against them. It also discusses the source material both primary and secondary consulted for this study. It also highlights the main theme, its scope and purpose, area and period of study, review of previous literature, hypothesis, limitations, method of approach and chapterisation.

The first chapter is on *Historical Background of the Tamil Society: it traces* the rights enjoyed by women in Tamil Society and analyses how they were enslaved by the Brahminical culture which intruded in the Tamil Society. It also assesses the steps taken by the liberal minded reformers and the rationalists to relieve women from the evils of caste system.

The second chapter deals with *Periyar’s life.* It analyses how he formulated the rationalistic ideas on women and their rights from his own personal life and from this worldly wisdom and why Periyar E.V.R. started the Self-Respect Movement in 1925. His propaganda and agitations are for creating awareness among the Tamilians to have self-respect instead of submitting them to the Aryans. The landmarks in his biographies are examined. For instance, Vaikom Satyagraha 1924, Cheranmadevi-Gurukulam Controversy 1925 and his quitting the Congress 1925, founding of the Self-Respect Movement 1925, the Self-Respect Conferences and the shaping of his ideologies with particular reference to women. His foreign visits and

The third chapter is on the **Female Child and Child Marriage Restraint Act**: it discusses the challenges faced by women from its birth and analyses whether the ideologies of Periyar for the prevention of female infanticide and child marriages have been implemented by the Dravidian Governments. The evil of abominable female infanticide took place in the districts like Dharmapuri, Salem and Madurai. To abolish this evil and to create awareness among the public about the importance of female child, Reception Centre, was established by the Ministry of Dravid Munnetra Kazhaham. To abolish child marriage and to provide education to female child, the Child Marriage Restraint Amendment Acts were also enacted for raising the age of marriage from 15 to 18 years for a girl and 21 for boys. The Marriage Assistance Schemes introduced by the DMK Government in 1989 were also examined.

The fourth chapter on **Marriage** examines to what extent Periyar’s ideologies on marriage were implemented by the Dravidian Governments to remove the evils caused by marriage and the enslavement of women. How the introduction of Marriage Assistance Schemes assisted poor girls financially and increased both the marriageable age and the educational status of girls are analysed. The significance of Hindu Marriage (Madras Amendment) Act, 1967 is also examined. It also analyses the measures taken by the Dravidian Governments for the rehabilitation of widows, encouraging inter-caste marriage, prohibition of dowry, abolition of polygamy and granting right to divorce to women.

The fifth chapter is on **Family Planning** discusses how far Periyar’s ideas on family planning have been put to practice by the Dravidian Governments for freeing women from
the burdensome duty or repeated pregnancies and nurturing children. The Dravidian Governments steps towards birth control and popularisation of small family norm among the public through different methods are discussed. Attractive schemes of the small family norms are analysed. The dereliction of doctors in their duty and the failure of sterilization operation in some cases are also discussed.

The sixth chapter is on **Women and Education** which analyses how Periyar’s ideas of women’s education with its multifacets have been put into practice by the Dravidian Governments through various schemes introduced at different stages. It deals with the establishment of Nursery School, Elementary Schools, High Schools, Colleges and Universities for the promotion of women’s education in Tamil Nadu. How the introduction of novel schemes increased the enrolment of girls to educational institutions, the establishment of separate university exclusively for women, Mother Teresa Women’s University and the literacy rate of women are assessed.

The seventh chapter on **Women and Employment** discusses how Periyar’s idea of employment on women influenced the Dravidian Governments. It studies how they took measures to introduce reservation policy for women and appointment of women teachers in primary school for removal of disqualification of sex in certain posts and administration. It also examines gradual entry of women in different types of Government posts in different fields like education, medicine, police, ministerial service, judiciary and administrative service. The steps taken by both the DMK Government and the AIADMK Government for the empowerment of marginalised women through Mahalir Manrams, Tamil Nadu Women Development Corporation, Co-operative Societies and Womens’ Welfare Department are examined. In what way the Dravidian Governments develop group approach and co-operation among women in economic activity are assessed. Besides, the legal acts to safeguard womens’ safety and equality are mentioned. It also examines how the National Rural Employment Programme promoted employment opportunities for women.
The eighth chapter deals with the **Empowerment of Women**. It analyses how the ideas of *Periyar* on women’s property rights and political participation were implemented by the Dravidian Governments. The enactment of the **Hindu Succession Tamil Nadu** (Amendment) Act, 1989 is explained. How *Periyar’s* idea of Adult Franchise encouraged women’s participation in political life are also discussed.

In **conclusion** an attempt to analyse how far and to what extent *Periyar’s* ideas and thoughts of women were put into practice by the Dravidian Governments. *Periyar’s* ideas on women’s rights marked a new era in the history of women’s emancipation and created awareness among the public. Its vestiges were really vested in the hands of the administrators to enact legislations for removing all stigmas on women. The ideas of *Periyar* on women’s rights enabled the DMK Government to introduce a number of legislations and to evolve innovative welfare schemes to establish equality of women, to emancipate women from all sorts of shackles and to empower women by providing them education, employment, property inheritance rights and to embolden them to take part in decision making bodies and to control the birth of excess children. But, the delay in sanctioning the financial assistance to the beneficiaries unpopularised the scheme. Moreover, pitfall in schemes are analysed and suggestions were made to improve the existing novel schemes. It is no gain saying that – *Periyar’s* thought on women had electric impact on Dravidian governments. They attained power using the woman power, may be the result of many schemes put forth by them. Consequently, womenfolk in Tamil Nadu are marching towards the path of progress and empowerment and for which they owe a lot to *Periyar’s* radical thoughts on women’s liberation.
Historical Background of the Tamil Society