Introduction
INTRODUCTION

Importance of the study

The importance of studying "Women Status" in the present day society is more pertinent than ever because of the changing attitude of the society towards the same. Important among them are the changing value systems of the society with an increase in women's literacy rate and also an increased participation of women in political, economic and other popular movements.

The situation of women in the past was bleak all round. Some progressive changes in the socio-economic status of women in India were observed from the 19th century onwards. Among the various environmental and institutional factors contributing to the rise in the social status of women in India, the most important have been education and general awareness towards participation in political life.

Women today enjoy better liberty, politically and economically, due to their struggle for participation in public life. The social attitudes of women as well as those of men have changed due to the widespread of education.

The striking change about women's involvement in public life, which was confined only to West in the past, has now started manifesting in India. Till recently, women were treated on a different footing. The society, in general, deprived them of their rights but kept reminding them of their duties. However with the changing times, the role of women has undergone a change,
from that of child bearing and rearing to that of being a breadwinner. Hence it has become inevitable for them to face the emerging reality in the contemporary Indian society. The women in Tamil Nadu along with their counterparts in other States have fought for their liberation from subjugation and also for equal rights with men and have achieved their goal of "adult franchise". Historically speaking, women in India have passed through two phases of life: the period of subjugation and of liberation and the period under which they have started shouldering the responsibility equally with men. While the former is of a longer duration and stretches far back in time, the latter has a short history. For centuries, women have been deliberately denied opportunities of growth in the name of religion and ancient socio-cultural practices. Hence the Researcher considers the study on the women struggle for attaining political liberty as an important and useful study.

Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to discuss about the awakening of women who form a major section of the society. At present, in India there is a talk on bringing a bill on the “Reservation of 33% of seats for women in the State Assemblies and Lok Sabha.” But many attempts to bring a bill in the Parliament were failed due to non-arrival of consensus on this particular aspect. This made the scholar to think why this peculiar situation is existing in India. Hence the Researcher aspired for an attempt to trace the history of struggle of the women how they fought for the “women franchise.” When the Researcher started to study the women franchise movement, she realised that women organisations initiated this movement and fought vehemently to get franchise right. But they failed to continue the women movement with same vigour after the attainment of their goal of women adult franchise. This discontinuance put them in the present precarious position of seeking the help
of men members of the Lok Sabha to get pass through the above said Reservation Bill. Hence the Researcher wanted to trace the historical Feminist Struggle to achieve the "Right of Vote for Women" by showing the power in the period between 1917 to 1952 by using their organisations as well as the freedom movement. Hence the aim of this study is to prove that Indian women could achieve anything if they unitedly act with a single goal.

Scope of the study

This thesis is related to equalitarian struggle of women in India particularly in Tamil Nadu from 1917 onwards. The feminist struggle that aimed to attain women adult franchise was started in 1917 when All India Women's Association was formed. It came to an end in the year 1952 when the First General Election was held in India after independence because in this election women of 21 years and after, cast their votes equal to man to select their own representatives for their future.

In this thesis the role of women of Tamil Nadu in the franchise movement is explained on the basis of available evidences. While tracing the history of struggle the researcher found the AIWC, the Tamil Nadu Women Association, All India Women Graduates Association, The Indian National Congress, the Justice Party, E.V.Ramasamy's self-respect Movement and others took active part in this struggle. The significance of this struggle is that the Indian women achieved their target of getting adult franchise of women equal to men, within a very short period of thirty years from 1917. Due to this achievement, many women entered into Central and State Legislature and Local Self-Governments. They served the people through those public institutions.
They proved their mettle equal to men. The study of such movement for civil liberties may inspire the younger generation and could realise the power of women who were considered as weaker section and dependent upon male. The political liberty relieved them from social and economic subjugation. This would help for the betterment of future India, and ultimately may make India as a developed country.

**Limitation of the study**

The area of study is restricted to Tamil Nadu since India is a vast country and role of women of various states are also to be studied separately so that their role could be understood thoroughly. Further the study of Tamil Nadu Women's role in the franchise movement may be an example for the role of women belonging to other states. Again the Researcher has to refer many sources in order to do microscopic study and to do justice to the study. Hence the researcher limited the area of study. The period of study i.e. from 1917 to 1952 is also a compact period for the study. In 1917 women were organised into Associations and took up the matter of liberating the women folk from the various socio-economic evils. Further they found that they have no political rights also. Political rights could be achieved only by the way of united struggle, they found. This movement, started in 1917 passed on to various stages step by step and achieved its goal “voting rights for women equal with men” only when the new Indian Constitution was brought in use after independence. Hence the researcher limited her period of study with the first General Election that was held in 1952 in which the women utilised their right to vote.
Review of the Literature

Since the Researcher has to discuss the position of women from the Sangam period, she has referred various works on the position of women in the Sangam period. For example, Sangam Literature like Puranaanuru, Aganaanuru, Purapporulvenpamalai and Tholkaapiyam and also works of the scholars like K.K. Pillay, Thiru.V. Kalyanasundaranar, Dr.V.Sp.Manickam and M.Varadharajanar.

The Researcher has studied the Government efforts to give rights to women, since the Government tried to give adult franchise by analysing the then existing social customs of India. In the post-Independence period this issue settled since Indian Constitution gives Universal Adult Franchise after the prolonged struggle of Indians. Hence automatically this problem came to an end and each and everybody got right to vote who attained the age of 21 years.

In this context the Researcher has gone through various previous scholars works. Many scholars have undertaken this study. For example, 1. Dr. Sadhasivam’s “Growth of Public opinion in the Madras Presidency”, 2. P.Umadevi’s “Women’s struggle for Political Identity in Tamil Nadu from 1917 to 1967”, 3. S. Desideria’s “Dr. Mrs. Muthulakshmi Reddi: Social Reform, Legislation and Women’s struggle for political space in the Madras Presidency (1900-1947)” etc. Such works do not describe the feminist struggle for universal suffrage as done in the present work.
Methodology and Outline of Data Collection

The source materials were collected from different sources. The Archieval materials collected from the Government Records such as Central as well as State Government Despatches and Consultations, Administrative Reports, Annual Reports, Government Orders etc., helped to reconstruct the history of social and economic condition of women in the male dominating and ritual ridden society. Minutes of the Missionary Conferences, Missionary Journals, and Magazines like Missionary Herald, Harvest Field etc., helped to understand their work. Various newspapers such as The Hindu, The Mail, Sudhesamitran, Tamil Nesan, New India, Navasakthi, also helped to trace the Government and public role in the elevation of women folk. Journals of women Associations like Stri Dharma, Raja Lakshmi, Women Association Conference reports, etc., helped to collect information related to the research work.

Further the awareness among women due to educational enterprise was studied from Christian Missionary Annual Reports, Reports on condition of converted Christians, and various educational Committee Reports like Hunter Committee, Hartog Committee, etc. South Borough Committee's Report, Lothian Franchise Committee Report, Indian Franchise Committee Report etc., are mine of information. The debate in the English Parliament also helped to reconstruct the various efforts taken by the Government of British India. The Election Reports gave more information about the women contestants and their victory as well as debacle in the elections.

Many Government publications like District Manuals, Gazetteers, Census Reports etc., gave supportive evidence to the primary sources. Many research work, journals, magazines, etc. also provided information.
Interviews with feminist movement leaders like Mrs. Sarojini Varadappan, Mrs. Jaya Arunachalam, Mrs. Captain Lakshmi Saghel, Mrs. Mythili Sivaraman and women political leaders like Mrs. Jayanthi Natarajan and others helped the Researcher to get some more valuable information and corroborate it with other source of information.


Plan of Chapterisation

On the basis of the available sources the Researcher has made an attempt to present this thesis. The materials were analysed and synthesised and finally shaped into the following chapters:
**INTRODUCTION** explains the importance of the study, aim of the study, limitations of the study, scope of the study, review of the literature, methodology and outline of data collection. It also explains how the collected matters were processed into different chapters.

**CHAPTER I** describes the social evils under which women in Tamil Nadu were constantly suppressed and put under ignorance after the Sangam period. It describes how they were made as second rate citizens in the latter years, during the medieval periods due to various influences.

**CHAPTER II** describes how the age long customs were considered as social stigma and various sources like Socio-religious reformers, Christian missionaries, Hindu Religious Associations, Women's Associations etc., viewed these customs as social evils and worked to root out those evils through imparting education to women.

**CHAPTER III** discusses about the impact of the reform movement on the women of Tamil Nadu and how they grouped together to work for the upliftment of women. The 'elite' women took various steps to remove the social evils and ultimately they came to know that all these could be removed only after attaining political liberty through adult women franchise and hence they started a movement for getting it from 1917 onwards.

**CHAPTER IV** describes about the role of women in getting the women adult franchise. This chapter also explains how the Government faced this problem and appointed various committees to deal with the problem. Even after this the women were failed to get voting right on their own merit. Ultimately after Independence the adult women who attained 21 years were permitted to vote in the elections. This chapter explains who were
involved in this struggle and how they fought for attaining success in their goal. They attained only partial success and hence the struggle continued.

CHAPTER V describes how the women activists successfully fought for getting the adult franchise for women equal to men. It also explains how they contested in the General Election, first held after Independence in 1952 and who won in it and how they showed their power and talent in the Central as well as in the Madras Legislatures and Local bodies.

CHAPTER VI explains the role of women in the Central as well as State Legislators by participating in the debate on Social, Religious and Economic matters and their concern for the public matters.

The CONCLUSION was drawn on the basis of the discussions in this chapters. It explains that the women struggle for their civil liberties is responsible for the introduction of universal adult franchise in India and it contributed to the national awakening and development of India.