INTRODUCTION
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The freedom movement in India, which resulted in the ultimate withdrawal of the British and making India a free sovereign democratic state was not the result of the activity of any individual or a leader or a particular region. It was the result of the activities of the entire nation.

In this, each and every region of the country had contributed its might by carrying out the programmes of the All India Congress Committee, which was the chief machinery for launching mass movements against the British for freedom. Tamil Nadu state contributed its own share to the success of the movement. Though several monumental works have been brought out on the history of freedom movement in India, it seems that little scholarship has been spent on to find out the role of Dalits in Tamil Nadu for the National. Hence the main purpose of this theses is to bring out the role of dalit community in freedom movement.

The work mainly concentrates the activities of 28 years from 1919 to 1947. The year 1919 is a landmark in the history of freedom movement as it witnessed the advent of Gandhiji with his non-violent, non-cooperation movement. It may be said that only from then onwards the movement became a mass movement in which all classes of people participated, unlike the movements organised before 1920.
Within the period of 28 years, the scholar has discussed about all movements launched by the Congress such as the non-cooperation movement, boycott of Simon Commission and the Civil Disobedience movement. The Individual Satyagraha Programmes and the part played by dalits in the Quit India Movement are discussed in detail. Though the scholar could not mention each and every activity of the people and their names, he had taken much care to include the collective role of the dalits in the movement.

Caste System and Dalits

From time immemorial, the society in India has been divided into numerous hereditary groups called castes. The word, ‘caste’ is derived from the Latin term ‘castus’, meaning ‘pure’. The Portuguese were the first to use this term to describe the social stratification in India. Caste is an artificial division of society in India. A caste is an endogamous group or a collection of similar groups. Such a group has a common name, believes in common origin, follows a hereditary occupation, possesses common rituals, ceremonies and forms of worship and regards itself as distinct and separate from other groups.

India’s caste system is perhaps the world’s longest surviving social hierarchy. A defining feature of Hinduism is that caste encompasses a complex ordering of social groups on the basis of ritual purity. A person is considered a member of the caste into which he or she is born and remains within that caste until death, although the particular ranking of that caste
may vary among regions and over time. Differences in status are traditionally justified by the religious doctrine of karma, a belief that one’s place in life is determined by one’s deeds in previous lifetimes.

Within the four principal castes, there are thousands of sub-castes, also called Jatis, endogamous groups that are further divided along occupational, sectarian, regional and linguistic lines. Collectively all of these are sometimes referred to as “Caste Hindus” or those falling within the caste system. Whether a person is inside Chaturvarnya, or outside is a question to be determined by the ‘Varna’ of the parents. If he was born of the parents of the same ‘Varnas’, he was inside Chaturvarnya. If he was born of parents of different Varnas or the progeny of mixed marriages, what Manu calls ‘varna-sankara’, then he was outside Chaturvarnya.

The Dalits are described as varna-sankara “outside the system” - so inferior to other castes that they are deemed polluting and therefore “untouchable.” They are also designed as ‘Panchamas’, those of fifth order, below the four varnas. Even as outcastes, they themselves are divided into further sub-castes. Whereas the first four varnas are free to choose and change their occupation, Dalits have generally been confined to the occupational structures into which they are born. In the village they performed all the menial jobs such as those of scavengers, water-carriers and skinners of hides of dead animals.1

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The term dalit is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘dal’ which means to crack, open and split. When used as a noun or adjective it means burst, split, broken, downtrodden, scattered, crushed and destroyed. This term reflected the broken or suppressed condition of the depressed class. This term is now accepted by the people themselves who were treated as ‘Untouchables’ and ‘Outcastes’ in Indian society. The present usage of the term dalit goes back to the nineteenth century.

Marathi social reformer and revolutionary Mahatma Jyotirao Phule (1827-1890) seems to have been the first to use the word dalit in connection with caste in term dalitodhar and described it as the upliftment of the depressed.

The phenomenon of untouchability is closely related to the condition of the dalits. The term ‘untouchability’ is the English equivalent of expression like ‘asprasya’ in Sanskrit, ‘tittu’ in Tamil and ‘pula’ in both Kannada and Malayalam, which means pollution.

The untouchables numbering several millions have been isolated from the rest of the society and forced to live in the outskirts of the Caste Hindus inhabitations. Untouchability has been practiced in its worst form only with regards to lowest caste such as Pallas, Paraiahs and Chakkilians, who have been at the bottom of the system of caste structure.

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The ancient Tamil society did not contain any dalits and consequently the practice of untouchability was absent. The emergence of the dalits was mainly due to the process of Aryanization which introduced the notion of imaginary purity and impurity supposed to be attainable by the avoidance of certain taboos and the observance of certain rites prescribed by the Dharmasastras.

Socio-economic and political status of the dalits of Tamil Nadu

The socio-economic and political status of the people during the colonial period in Tamil Nadu is an imperative study. The untouchables who were one fifth of the total population of the Madras Presidency were oppressed, suppressed depressed and defiled as dust. They were socially, economically, politically and educationally backward. The untouchables have been kept down by the Caste Hindus by systematic oppression. Social and religious traditions were in operation against the depressed classes for centuries. Even the breath of a member of the Depressed Classes was regarded as polluting the people of the higher caste. They were denied access to public well, tanks and roads. They were denied entry into the temples. They could not seek admission to certain schools and colleges run with the assistance of the State. Admission was denied to certain Post Offices, Courts and Government Offices.

The daily life and the living conditions of the depressed classes were extremely pathetic. The place of their residence was called ‘cheri’ or slum.
This was at a considerable distance from the habitations of upper class Hindus. The slums did not have even the basic facilities and amenities.

Most of the depressed classes were employed as agricultural labourers. Some were assigned menial tasks like scavenging. Poverty drove them to the extent of pledging themselves to the landlords for sums varying between 40 and 50 rupees. Thus they became the life long servitude for a pittance as a lot.

During the freedom movement, the national leaders realised the importance of associating them in the politics. Many efforts were taken to abolish untouchability. The government also took measures to uplift their condition by positive discrimination.

For the purpose of positive discrimination, the lists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were prepared. Many additions and deletions were made in the list. After freedom also, the lists were altered for the purpose of providing reservations to them. In 1985, the Tamil Nadu government identifies 78 names of Scheduled castes. Some major castes are duplicated either as synonyms or as sub-castes of a 'caste. Therefore, the 78 names can be grouped into six broad categories:
1. Paraiyan (Adi Dravida Panchama, Paraiyan, Sambavar and Vettiyan)
2. Pallan (Devendrakulathan, Kudumban, Pallan, Pannadi and Kadaiyan)
3. Sakkiliyan (Arunthathiyar, Madari and Pagadai)

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4 The names of Scheduled Castes according to the Tamil Nadu G.O. MS No.1546, Social Welfare Department, dated 30th July 1985.
4. Kuravan
5. Valluvan (Tiruvalluvar and Valluvan) and
6. Others (all other castes not coming under any of the five groups).

The first five groups consist of 17 sub-castes and account for 95 per cent of the total population of dalits in Tamil Nadu while the others account for the rest. They are spread over the entire State. The Chengalpattu and South Arcot districts have a high percentage of dalits.

Physiography

The term ‘Tamil Nadu’ referred in the context of this thesis covered the territories where Tamil was predominantly spoken within the erstwhile Madras Presidency. Tamil Nadu is situated on the southeastern side of the Indian peninsula. It is bound on the east by the Bay of Bengal, in the south by the Indian Ocean, in the west by the Arabian Sea and the Kerala state and in the north by the States of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. During the period of study, Tamil Nadu comprised of twelve districts. They were Madras, Chingleput, North Arcot, South Arcot, Tanjore, Tiruchirappalli, Madurai, Ramnad, Tirunelveli, Coimbatore, Salem and the Nilgiris.\(^5\)

The landmass of the state can be divided into two natural divisions: (i) the eastern coastal plain and (ii) the hilly region along the north and the west. The coastal plain is usually subdivided into: (a) the Coromandel plain comprising the districts of Chingelput, South Arcot and North Arcot,

(b) the alluvial plain of the Cauvery delta extending over Tanjore and part of Tiruchirappalli districts, and (c) the dry southern plains in Madurai, Ramnad and Tirunelveli districts.6

Tamil Nadu is situated between 8° 5' and 13° 35' Northern latitudes and 76° 15' and 80° 0' longitude East of Greenwich.7 It has an area of 1,30,057 square kilometers.8 Along the whole length of the western part, at a distance from the sea varying from 80 to 160 km runs the range of the Western Ghats, a steep and rugged mass averaging 1220 metres above the sea level and rising to 2440 metres. The Palghat Gap about 25 km in width is the only marked break in the great maintain wall. To the south of this gap, the range is known as ‘Anaimalai’.9 On the east are the Palni Hills on which is situated the famous hill station of Kodaikanal. The slopes of the Western Ghats are covered with heavy evergreen forests. These slopes are the sources of the rivers Kaveri, Vaigai and Tamraparni. The Nilgiris and the Anaimalai are hill groups with maximum height. In the famous Ootacamund area of the Nilgiris district, the highest peak of Doddabetta is situated, 2640 metres above the sea level. The Eastern Ghats begin in Orissa and pass through Ganjam district of Orissa and run south west through all the districts lying between Ganjam and Nilgiris plateau. Their

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8 Census of India 1991, Directorate of Census Operations, Tamil Nadu.
9 Meaning ‘Elephant Hills’.
elevation is 610 metres on the average and their highest peaks are less than 1830 metres. No river of any importance rises from these ranges in this State. The rainfall in the region is determined by the southwest monsoon (June to September) and the northeast monsoon (October to December). The northeast monsoon is more important to Tamil Nadu than the southwest. The importance of the northeast monsoon sharply distinguishes the State from the rest of the country where the southwest monsoon plays the major role. The districts of Chingleput, South Arcot, Thanjavur, Madurai, Ramanathapuram and Tirunelveli depend mainly on the north east monsoon. The normal rainfall is 1020 to 1140 mm in South Arcot and Thanjavur districts and 760 to 890 mm in others. The districts of North Arcot, Salem, Coimbatore and Tiruchirappalli in the central region depend on both the monsoons (north east and south west) and the rainfall is between 760 to 1020 mm. Nilgiris depends on the south west monsoon with a normal rainfall of 1520 to 1780 mm. The average rainfall in the State varies over a wide range of 640 to 1910 mm per year.

The rivers of the state flow eastward from the Western Ghats and are entirely rain-fed. The perennial rivers are: Palar, Cheyyar, Ponnaiyar, Kaveri, Meyar, Bhavani, Amaravati, Vaigai, Chittar and Tamraparni. The non-perennial rivers are the Vellar, Noyil, Siruliars, Gundar, Vaipar, Valparai and Varshali. The 760 km long Kaveri is the great river of the State. Rising on the Brahmagiri, a hill in Coorg in the Western Ghats, almost near the Arabian Sea, it travels the entire breath of the peninsula
and forms a large delta at its mouth in the Thanjavur district before flowing into the Bay of Bengal.

**Political History**

Tamil Nadu has a very ancient history that goes back some 6000 years. The state represents the nucleus of Dravidian culture in India, which antedated the Aryan culture by almost a thousand years. It is generally held that the architects of the Indus Valley Civilization of the 4th millennium BC were Dravidians. With the coming of the Aryans into North India, the Dravidians appear to have been pushed into the south, where they have remained confined. Tamil Nadu, with the other southern States, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala today form the repositories of the Dravidian culture.

The Dravida country, of which modern Tamil Nadu formed a part, was reputedly under three dynasties, Chola, Pandya and Chera from the 4th century BC. The Cholas occupied the present Thanjavur and Tiruchirappalli districts and surrounding territories and excelled in military exploits. In the 2nd century BC a Chola prince, Elara, conquered Ceylon (Sri Lanka). The Pandyas excelled in trade and learning. They controlled the districts of Madurai and Tirunelveli and part of South Kerala. A Pandyan King sent an embassy to the Roman Emperor Augustus in the first century BC. The Cheras were powerful on the West Coast, which is today, Central and North Kerala.
The Pallavas of Kanchi rose to prominence in the 4th century AD and dominated the south for another 400 years. In the sixth century they overran the Chola dominions and carried their arms as far as Ceylon. The famous Alvars and Nayanars, sage-poets, flourished during the Pallava era. In the 9th century the last of the Pallavas was defeated by the Cholas who again became a great power in the south. These later Cholas contributed to the development of art and architecture.

In the 13th century the Pandyas became dominant. Their kingdom was a great center of international trade. The rise of Vijayanagar spelt the decline of the Pandyas. Vijayanagar ultimately defeated them and their territories were annexed to the Vijayanagar Empire. With the disintegration of the Vijayanagar Empire, Tamil Nadu was parceled out among several petty kings.\(^{10}\) The rise of the Muslim power in India had its impact on Tamil Nadu. But, by and large, Tamil Nadu remained unaffected by the political convulsions in north and central India. With the establishment of the East India Company at Madras in 1639, a new chapter was opened in the history of Tamil Nadu. By 1801, the whole of Tamil Nadu except certain French and Danish Settlements had been brought under British rule.\(^{11}\) People belonged to different ethnic groups had come and settled in Tamil Nadu. The predominant communities in the state were Kallars, Muthurajas, Vanniars, Vellalas, Nadars, Muslims, Dalits and Brahmins.

\(^{10}\) K.M.Mathew, *op. cit.*, p 649.
The extension of Vijayanagar rule over Tamil Nadu resulted in the flow of Telugu Reddiyars and Naidus from Andhradesa. Majority of the people were agricultural labourers who did not possess land. They were wholly dependent on daily wages for their livelihood.\(^\text{12}\)

**Early Nationalism in Tamil Nadu**

The part played by Tamil Nadu in the freedom struggle was unique. The earliest resistance against the misrule of the British was organised in Tamil Nadu. Vira Pandya Kattabomman played a vital role in the early part of the rebellion against the British. Under his able leadership, the Polygars acted bravely, but failed before the diplomacy of the British. Kattabomman was hanged at Kayathar, near Tirunelveli on October 17, 1779.\(^\text{13}\)

After the execution of Kattabomman, Maruthu Pandyan, Gopal Nayak and Kerala Varma headed the rebellion. In 1800, these patriots planned revolts against the British in Sathyamangalam. Tharapuram, Thalamalai, Coimbatore and other places. They captured the forts of Vellore, Natham and Thiruvellore. However, this rebellion, known as the South Indian Rebellion of 1800-1801 was also suppressed by the British.\(^\text{14}\)

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Subsequent to the suppression of South Indian Rebellion, another revolt burst out at Vellore in 1806. In this revolt the affected Indian Sepoys protested against the British administration, under the leadership of Tipu Sultan’s sons. Scholars believed that it was the prelude to the Great Mutiny of 1857. This revolt was suppressed by British.

In the last decades of nineteenth century many native associations were founded throughout India to create awakening among the people. In Madras, in 1884, the Madras Mahajana Sabha was founded. It conducted meetings and spread the messages of freedom among the people. After Indian National Congress was founded in 1885, freedom struggle was organised at national level. Tamil Nadu also participated in all the movements.

From 1919, it was the Gandhian era in the freedom movement. It became a mass movement under him. People belonged to all communities rallied under him. Dalits participated in large number. Their role is discussed in the various chapters of the thesis.

**Scope and Objectives**

In the recent past, dalit studies are gaining momentum. Plenty of works are published on dalits’ history, but most of them are related to human rights movement. Their contribution to freedom movement is neglected. The present research work highlighted their activities during the freedom movement. The earlier books published on various personalities like M. C. Raja, Ayothidasar, L. C. Gurusamy and Swami Sahajananda
highlighted their constructive reforms. The researcher made an attempt to integrate their social and political activities. After the entry of Mahatma Gandhi, the dalits rallied under his leadership. They responded to the calls of Mahatma and participated in the Non-cooperation, Civil Disobedience, Quit India and other movements. They sacrificed their pleasure, wealth and health for the sake of the motherland. The main objective of the thesis is to record their contribution in the national struggle, which was neglected for long years. The present work opens vistas for further research on the contribution of dalits in the various social and political movements.

**Methodology**

This topic cannot be approached strictly in terms of their contribution of freedom. On many occasions, it seems that, their protest was not vehement as others. Since majority of the dalits were agricultural labourers, they had to work hard to fill their stomach, hence they might not have any time to divert their attention to the freedom struggle. However, they entered into the movement due to the inducement of a handful of elites among themselves. But it is essential to note here that among the elite dalits, there were two groups: one was supporting freedom and other opposing. So a psychological approach is necessary.

Those dalit elites who opposed the freedom movement considered that the British were their saviours. The reasons are obvious Caste Hindus deprived the basic rights to dalits. However, after the entry of Mahatma,
through constructive programmes he was able to draw the dalits towards the nationalism.

The writing is both descriptive and analytical. Chapters I, VI and VII do not evoke any controversy and the writing is descriptive. They are dealing about the personalities and their achievements in detail. But other chapters are analytical and the role of the dalits in the freedom movement is discussed in detail. As psychological aspects are included, an analytical approach is necessary.

**Sources of Information**

This is theses is based on original records of the government that are available in the Tamil Nadu Archives, Chennai. The scholar also undertook pains to meet the relatives of the freedom fighters and collect the personal details of the participants. He was successful in this attempt. He collected some personal documents of the freedom fighters, mainly jail documents, letters and pamphlets related to freedom. He also interviewed the relatives of freedom fighters, who supplied valuable information. Besides the scholar has also consulted a good number of published books. All the sources related to the work collected had been checked and cross-checked and also corroborated with the similar information that is available in different documents and works. Publications like the ‘Who’s Who’ of freedom fighters, and autobiography of freedom fighters are the very important secondary sources.
Chapterisation

Besides introduction and conclusion, the thesis is divided into seven chapters. The meaning of the term ‘dalit’ is explained in the introduction itself. The list of important dalit communities in Tamil Nadu is provided. The physiography of Tamil Nadu is also explained. The early nationalism in Tamil Nadu is discussed.

Chapter one examines the circumstance that led to the emergence of dalits in the political field. This chapter entitled ‘Formative Period of Dalit Consciousness’, narrates the contribution of various leaders, the press and educational institutions for the awakening of dalits. The contribution of Ayothidasar is highlighted. He may be considered as a forerunner to B. R. Ambedkar. His magazine ‘One Paisa Tamilan’ spread the messages of equality among dalit people. Among the caste associations, the contribution of Adi Dravida Mahajana Saba is notable one.

Second chapter examines the contribution of Mahatma Gandhi for the liberation of dalits. Gandhiji, who fought for the liberation of dalits, firmly believed that the political participation of dalits was essential for their liberation as well as for the liberation of the country from foreign yoke. Under his leadership the dalits participated in the non-cooperation movement. Due to the entry of dalits in the non-cooperation movement, it became a mass movement.

The third chapter analyses the role played by dalits in the Civil Disobedience Movement organised by Mahatma Gandhi. Many dalits were
imprisoned and met severe punishments. They tolerated all these for the sake of the liberation of the motherland. This chapter also analyses the constructive programmes and temperance movement. It was felt that only through constructive works dalits could be integrated in the main stream of nationalism.

Chapter four examines the freedom movement of the war period. Mahatma, who did not want to embarrass the British by mass Civil Disobedience, adopted individual Satyagraha Programme. Many dalits from Tamil Nadu participated in this individual satyagraha struggle. When one leader was arrested, the other immediately followed the suit. Their role is discussed in detail.

The fifth chapter analyses the role played by dalits in the Quit India Movement, the last great mass movement organised by Mahatma Gandhi. Dalits enthusiastically participated in this movement than the previous movements. Many were sentenced to rigorous imprisonment, however, they sacrificed the sufferings for the liberation of their motherland. The post World War period saw the liberation of India from foreign rule.

The chapter six gives an account of the profile of some prominent dalit leaders. Not only the accounts of the freedom fighters, but also the accounts of the constructive reformers is also given. The part played by M. C. Raja, R. Srinivasan, Munisamy Pillai, Mayor Parameswaran, Prof. Sivaraj, Rao Bahadur H. M. Jaganathan, Rao Bahadur Madurai Pillai and others is discussed.
The role of non-dalit leaders is discussed in the seventh chapter. For the liberation of dalits and for their participation in the freedom struggle, many non-dalits also rendered their support. K. Kamaraj, Marshall Nesamony, E. V. Ramaswamy Periyar and many other non-dalit leaders induced the dalits to participate in the freedom movement as well as in the social liberation movement. Without their support, it might be very difficult for the dalits, to achieve their liberation. In the concluding part of the thesis, a general summary and overview is given.