CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis indicates that the Mahratha rule was established in Thanjavur by Ekoji in 1676 and after that Thanjavur became the southern home of the Mahrathas.

In the initial stage, the Mahrathas followed the then existing administrative system of the Nayaks, partly because of their preoccupation with the task of consolidation and partly by reason of their reluctance to break with the indigenous system, for it would have alienated the local inhabitants. After the consolidation of their authority they attempted a reorganisation of the system on their own pattern. They created parallel offices (Mahratha and Tamil) for they felt it necessary to maintain their own identity without isolating themselves from the conquered people. These changes actually came into being during the days of kings like Shaji II and Pratap Singh.

Mahratha administrative system in Thanjavur area was not exclusively Mahratha in character. On the other hand it combined in itself many of the elements borrowed from the Chola, Nayaks and the Mughal systems. Monarchy was the order of the day based on Hindu concept of Dharma. There was no separation of powers and system of checks and balances. The judiciary was not organised properly. There were favouritism and bribery. The establishment of the astapradhan in the place of the council of pradhanis and the creation of the Khanas and Mahals represented a major departure from the traditional set up. There were territorial divisions with distinct units called Subas, Simais and Mahanams. Each Mahanam was subdivided into so many units like Vattam and ur. The local administration was neither entirely of their own, nor of
the inherited system, but the combination of both. Though the territorial divisions continued, the old terms *mandalam* and *nadu* became defunct. Instead, words like taluks and *Subas* were used. The offices like *dalavoy*, *rayasam*, *sampriti* and *purohit* continued, but with Marathi equivalents.

Terms like *Faujdar* and *Subedar* were borrowed from the Muslim system of administration. It is seen from the study, that the main source of income to the Mahratha government was from land. Though the local tradition allowed the rulers to collect one sixth of income from the land as tax, many miscellaneous taxes were also collected. These along with their assessment and method of collection created a feeling of oppression among the people. As a result of their attitude and fiscal practices, there developed no sentimental affinity between the rulers and the ruled. This contributed to the inherent contradictions in the administration.

The Mahratha kings spent a large share of the revenue for religious purposes, on palace establishments, armed forces and a meagre portion for administrative set up. The Mahratha kings of Thanjavur very often isolated themselves from other Maratha powers. This political isolation exposed them to aggressions from others like the Nawabs of Arcot, the French and Hyder Ali and so, the rulers had to incur expenditure on war indemnity. Moreover palace intrigues, civil war and succession disputes also caused heavy strains on the administration. In order to meet the expenses, they raised the percentage of land tax and incurred maximum loans. No wonder the people themselves became the victims of the evils of administration. The above mentioned assignment and the method of collection of revenue invited the British intervention. The British took over the administration of Thanjavur kingdom in 1799. The administration
undertaken by the British restricted the Mahratha rule to the fort area alone. Thus the occupation of Mahrathas in Thanjavur region brought about many changes in polity which had many merits and a few demerits.

The research further reveals that their (Mahrathas) migration and settlement in Thanjavur region left some permanent footprints not only on polity, but also over the society. The spirit of India is seen in villages and Thanjavur area of Mahratha period could not have been an exception. Most of the people lived in villages. Their social life centred around the village communities which were self-reliant in economic and administrative matters.

Caste - the important and predominant social institution of those days came in the way of the social life of the people as it prevented them from intermixing freely. Even within the individual villages, life was organised on caste basis which did not permit much of flexibility in the relationship of different groups of people in the society. Caste grew into a complex and elaborate system in the course of time along with their ramification into sub-castes with increasing restrictions on intercaste relations resulting in sort of rigidity. Status in the caste hierarchy was determined by birth and not by one's abilities. Each caste had a caste organisation (Jātisabha) with a chief who was entitled to certain rights. Though the unity of the caste gave its strength, it favoured the spirit of division and also fissiparous tendencies among its members. Society dominated by caste naturally tended to block progress. In such a caste ridden society, the kind of family organisation which obtained during-the Mahratha rule was the joint family recognising patriarchal descent - the practice that had been prevalent in the Hindu society for ages. The family as a fundamental social unit played an
important role in a joint family system. While ensuring some degree of social security and economic stability, it curtailed individual's freedom of action. It wielded a dominating influence in his life as he was looked upon as a caste unit, a member of a family, than an individual. The inexorable hold of caste system over a person’s life played a prominent role in the institution of family. This kind of economic structure of the family had its own effect on marriage which is the basis of a family. It was regulated by certain exogamous and endogamous rules. Breach of these rules led to one's excommunication. The practice of bride price prevailed during the Mahratha period. The evil of dowry apparently had its roots, then in the religious sanction of varadaksina. Perhaps this practice was confined to the royal and upper caste people. One of the conspicuous features of the marriage system of that period was the prevalence of child marriage or pre-puberty marriage particularly, in vogue among the higher castes.

Though monogamy was in vogue, practice of polygamy which was not perhaps accorded the highest social sanction unless supported by such religious justification as need and desire for a son, also prevailed. Remarriage of widows was permitted only among the economically handicapped and low castes, but totally prohibited among the Brahmans and Vellalas. The practice of divorce was confined only to lower castes.

Position of women mainly depend on the level of culture and general outlook of the society of which they were a part. The then prevalent marriage system with its predominant features like the joint family, strict adherence to Hindu law and religion affected their position. It subjected them to various restrictions in their mode of living. Force of religion might have driven a number of women to
perform sati, to avoid the miserable condition of widowhood, degradation, dependence and humiliation. The only alternative was self immolation. This custom prevailed mainly among the Royal Mahratha ladies. It is clear that the women was totally dependent on her family for everthing. Devadasi system was widely practised during the Mahratha rule. The sale of women was legalised among the agricultural labour classes. Female slaves also existed. Though these customs were applicable to all it was only the middle class women of high castes who suffered the most.

The study further reveals that the people led a tradition bound way of life. But western influence was particularly noticeable in the customs and manners among rich and educated people. Though the kings were Hindus the impact of Muslims or Mughals was conspicuous in their costumes and Darbar robes. People of the period under review showed fondness for jewellery as is evident from the vast array of ornaments worn both by men and women of the period.

The festivals formed part of the activities of the society. They were mostly religious in character. The Hindus, Christians and Muslims celebrated many festivals. The society as a whole was influenced by common elements of religious beliefs and practices of that period. The practice of Dhanadharma or Charity was accorded a high place.

This study also reveals the condition of economy during the days of the Mahrathas of Thanjavur along with the classification of land, land grants, land tenure, condition of labour, serfdom, wages etc. Further it reveals the industries that thrived in the Thanjavur Mahratha kingdom, the condition of industrial class, the kind of
trade, prices, weights and measures and transport and communication. The majority of the people were tradition bound, generally but lived a simple and contented life with out much of economic problems unlike the present day.

Religious life in the Mahratha period mainly centred round supersitions, ritualism and casteism. Along with religious beliefs and practices there prevailed the worship of village deities or grama devatas which were believed to have power over demons. Though the Mahratha kings were ardent Hindus, tolerance was shown towards the followers of other religions like Islam and Christianity.

The system of education was rudimentary. Though elementary education was given to all, higher education was given only to Brahmans. The Bramans as a class possessed the monopoly of higher learning and they became the elite. Female education was not totally neglected. Education of women must have been given strictly at home by private tutors.

The research also reveals that the kings were liberal patrons of literature and fine arts. The important results of Mahratha occupation was the migration of a large number of Mahrathi people from Maharashtra. Inscriptions with admixture of different languages and scripts indicate that a multilingual situation prevailed in Mahratha rule. There was no linguistic disharmony due to Marathi immigration. Thanjavur stood as a fine example for cordial relations and co-existence among different language speakers like Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit, Marathi, Kannada, Urdu and Saurashtra. It bore the imprint of various cultures brought by these different language speakers and Mahratha kings.
Though the kings patronised all languages it is unfortunate that Tamil happened to be the least preferred, due to lack of patronage.

Saraswathi Mahal Library which houses a collection of valuable books and manuscripts on all sorts of subjects was developed during this period. Indian systems of medicine and Advaita philosophy of Sankara became popular among the people.

The study further reveals that Music reached its zenith during this period. The influence of Mahrathas is felt on the growth of South Indian music both vocal and instrumental. They patronised Carnatic music. The Mahratha Musicians popularised the Hindustani Tala corresponding to Aditala in Carnatic music. The great composer Tyagaraja, composed many krithis in this tala. Thanjavur the cradle of South Indian music fostered the devotional musical compositions of saints like Tukkaram, Ramadas and Namdev. The Gottuvadya instruments which is used in concert was their innovation. The North Indian Mayura otherwise known as Taus in persian was brought to the South by them. Jalatharang was made prominent by the Mahrathas. Another result of their impact on South Indian music was the development of Harikatha. Kalashepam (Kirtan) which has become popular in all parts of the country even today.

The Mahratha buildings exhibit a considerable amount of European influence. They also followed Indo-Sarsanic and Mughal style. A unique school of painting that is Tanjore painting became popular and was patronised by Mahratha rulers.
Thus the Mahratha settlement in Thanjavur not only merged with the Tamil society but also had its own impact on political, social, economic and cultural aspects of the people of this region.

The outstanding contribution of the Mahratha rulers some of whom were great scholars is to be reckoned in the fields of fine arts and music. They did not exploit the country for their own selfish ends unlike the Muslims or the Foreign settlers. They were not as militant or aggressive like their counterpart in the North, yet, they had left an indelible impression in the cultural life of the people and they have left a rich cultural legacy. The Saraswathi Mahal Library - a veritable store-house of knowledge is a rich legacy left by them and which is still unrivalled for its unique collection of rare works on various branches of knowledge. Their spirit of tolerance, the patronage they extended to men of learning and their bountiful munificence seen in their liberal grants and endowments are indeed some of the redeeming features of the Mahrathas in general. Barring a few exceptions, most of the Mahratha rulers were men of learning and culture. Serfoji II the real architect of the Saraswathi Mahal Library was a multilingual, a renowned scholar and a connoisseur of fine arts. If Mahratha royalty expressed itself in the North by the splendour of its conquests, it ushered in a most remarkable renaissance on the banks of the Cauvery which gave to South India, some of the most imperishable contributions in music, dance, literature and art. It may be said that the Mahratha kings continued their traditions bequeathed by their predecessors, the great Cholas and Nayaks in the history of Thanjavur.