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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT IN TAMIL NADU DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE” submitted to the Department of History, Annamalai University for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History is my original research work. It has not previously formed the basis for the award of any Degree or any other similar title or recognition.

(E.MANIKANNAN)
Research scholar
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The topic of this thesis Working Class Movement in Tamil Nadu During the Colonial Period – A Historical Perspective was suggested by my guide P. RAJAN, The Head of the Department, Department of History, Annamalai University. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to my guide for having given me an opportunity to work on a theme at once Working Class Movement and sublime. At first I was hesitant to accept this topic the reason being the complicated nature of the topic itself and the difficulty of tracing resource material in the State Archives, Chennai. When my guide encouraged me, I made a beginning and he sustained my enthusiasm with timely suggestions by providing the relevant materials and making regular revisions and corrections of my written portion from time to time. It was this initial help, which gathered momentum as my thesis progressed. Though at first my performance was not up to my satisfaction, I gathered speed interesting myself in all aspects of the theme. If I have completed my work with in stipulated time the credit goes in no small measure to my guide only. He not only equipped me with all available source materials, but also enlightened me with Historical Perspective and Labour Movement details, in all of which he has himself specialized. His unsparing efforts inspired me and I was in a position to bring out something, of which I now feel proud. I do consider myself fortunate in having been guided by him. I now begin to think of similar themes and it is my fervent desire that more of such themes should be attempted by others, which will create a proper understanding of our rich Historical Perspectives on Working Class Movements.
I am thankful to Dr. R. Rajendran, Dean, Faculty of Arts, Annamalai University, for his valuable support in carrying out my research work.

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Research Scholar

Place : Annamalai Nagar

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## ABBREVIATIONS

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AICC</td>
<td>All India Congress Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>AISF</td>
<td>All India Students Federation</td>
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<tr>
<td>AITUC</td>
<td>All India Trade Union Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CID</td>
<td>Criminal Investigation Department</td>
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<td>CLAD</td>
<td>Central Legislative Assembly Debates</td>
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<td>CPI</td>
<td>Communist Party Of India</td>
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<td>CTA</td>
<td>Criminal Tribes Act</td>
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<td>CWMG</td>
<td>Collected Works Of Mahatma Gandhi</td>
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<td>FNR</td>
<td>Fort Nightly Report</td>
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<td>G.O</td>
<td>Government Order</td>
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<td>Ibid.</td>
<td>Ibidem</td>
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<td>IFA</td>
<td>Indian Factories Act</td>
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<td>ILC</td>
<td>Industrial Labour Council</td>
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<td>ITU</td>
<td>Indian Trade Unions</td>
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<td>KPCC</td>
<td>Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee</td>
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<td>LKPH</td>
<td>Labour Kisan Party Of Hindustan</td>
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<td>LLU</td>
<td>Local Labour Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>M.N.N.R</td>
<td>Madras Native News Paper Report</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLA</td>
<td>Member of Legislative Assembly</td>
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<td>MLU</td>
<td>Madras Labour Union</td>
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<td>MSO</td>
<td>Madras Students Organisation</td>
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<td>PD</td>
<td>Public Department</td>
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<td>PW &amp; LD</td>
<td>Public Works And Labour Department</td>
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<td>SIR</td>
<td>South Indian Railway</td>
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<td>T</td>
<td>Tamil Works</td>
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<td>TDA</td>
<td>Trade Disputes Act</td>
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<td>Thiru. Vi. Ka</td>
<td>Thiruvavur Viruthachala Kalyansundaranar</td>
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<td>USSF</td>
<td>Under Secretary Safe File</td>
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<td>USSR</td>
<td>Union Of Soviet Socialist Republic</td>
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<td>VOC</td>
<td>Valliyappan Olaganathan Chidambaram Pillai</td>
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INTRODUCTION

Madras Presidency and Tamil Nadu

The Composite State of Madras was called the Madras Presidency until 1947. It consisted of the whole of present Tamil Nadu, some of the Districts of Andhra Pradesh and Districts of South Canara and Malabar. It was one of the largest provinces in British India, extending over an area of 1,41,000 square miles.\(^1\) Madras Presidency was the southernmost Province of British India. It was bounded by sea on the West, South, and East. Its northern boundary touched the boundaries of the Presidency of Bombay, Mysore State, the Dominions of Nizam of Hyderabad and the Central Provinces and Orissa.

In 1901, the Madras Presidency consisted of 25 administrative districts which raised to 28 in 1911.\(^2\) The people of the Presidency spoke as many as seventy languages. But only six had scripts and were in use. They were Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kanarese, Oriya and English. Among these, Tamil was spoken in the Districts of Madras, Chengalpattu, North Arcot, South Arcot, Salem, Coimbatore, Tiruchi, Thanjavur, Madurai, Ramanathapuram and Tirunelveli. The areas where Telugu was spoken included the Districts of Vizakapatinam, Godavari, Krishna Guntur, Kurnool, Bellary, Anantapur, Cudappah and Nellore. Malayalam was spoken in Malabar region and Kanarese in South Canara. Oriya was spoken
in the Ganjam District. The population of the Madras Presidency, according to the Census of 1901, was 38,209,436.³

The three vital rivers, namely, Godaveri, Krishna and Cauvery as well as other rivers of secondary importance like Pennr, Palar, Vellar and Tamiraparani were the major sources of irrigation to the agricultural population of the Presidency. Both South-West and North –East monsoons bring heavy, moderate and at times freak rainfalls to different Districts of the Presidency. Usually the areas of scarce rainfall suffer from soil deficiency. Heavy rain falls and continued failure of rains, at times, creating flood and drought or famine situations, brought untold miseries to the people. Besides this natural factor, more than a century of the British colonial rule in India was largely responsible for the distress of the Indian population. Madras was mainly an agricultural province

A predominant section of the population lived in rural areas. During the Nineteenth Century, there were three principal land systems known as the Ryotwari, Zamindari and Inamdari tenures. The people of the Madras Presidency may be divided into two classes - the well-to-do who represented more than a fourth of the population and the poor-the remaining three fourth.⁴ Big land-lords, small peasants and landless agricultural labourers constituted the rich and poor of the society.

The Presidency itself, and to a great extent its Tamil component, were far removed from the Gangetic plain, the heart of political India, and the
northwestern passes through which for centuries, foreigners had made their way into northern India and beyond as invaders or migrants. Moreover, the Vindya Mountains served as a natural barrier that separated northern from the southern India, preventing to a great the political and social convulsions of north India from overflowing into the south.  

In the sprawling polyglot Madras Presidency, the Tamil regions were the dominant element. They constituted a third of the land area and half of the population- 21 million out of nearly 43 million in 1921. Tamil Nadu was more urban than its regional neighbours. In the year 1931, nine of the fifteen largest towns and cities in the Madras Presidency were located in Tamil Nadu, including the four most populous- Madras (6,47,230), Madurai (1,82,018), Trichinopoly (1,42,843), and Salem (1,02,179). Tamil Nadu was further distinguished from its neighbours. Unlike the other linguistic regions of the Dravidian South, almost the whole of the Tamil speaking area was under one administration. Thus the Tamil Districts of the Madras Presidency constituted a relatively compact and homogeneous linguistic block, and they corresponded closely to the State of Madras.  

**Economic Condition**

The new political and economic forces gave an impetus to the evolution of the middle class and promoted political cohesion. The mental attitudes of this new class were determined by the reaction against the alien imperialist rule by the growing awareness of conflict between the interests
of India and those of the rulers. The organised political movement had begun in 1885. It continued to draw the attention of the Government to the political and economic grievances of the people and to make eloquent pleas for their remedy. Indian arts and crafts had been an important contributory factor, from time immemorial, to her immense wealth in the past. Raw materials like cotton and iron were exported to other countries. The finished products of Indian industry as well as her natural products such as pearl, perfumes, dye stuff, spices, sugar, etc., were exported to distant countries. She imported gold, copper, zinc, tin, lead, wine, horses, etc. They was always an excess of exports over imports, which meant necessarily the influx of a large quantity of gold. The introduction of the modern means of transport, policy of free trade and measures of public finance arrested the growth of industry. With the economic change, the political system tended to bind all British Indian Provinces into a uniform legal, judicial and administrative organisation. Foreign trade rapidly increased during this period. Internal trade was accelerated on account of marvelous improvement in communications. The result of this improvement was an immense internal traffic between the various trade centres such as weekly markets and towns and a considerable import and export trade in which thousands of carts took part with railways. In 1869, the average annual value of exports and imports amounted to nearly ninety crores of rupees. In 1900, it exceeded two hundred crores. This did not satisfy public opinion because trade was to a
large extent monopolised by foreigners who had ousted the natives of the soil from their legitimate fields of enterprise. They were able to procure raw materials from remote parts of Tamil Nadu and exported them to their country in order to import them as finished products.\textsuperscript{11} In fact, the British did not develop Indian industry. For their commercial profit, they bought materials from India and manufactured goods. Then they sold the goods in the markets of British colonies.

In the meantime, the mercantile policy of the English ruined the traditional industries. On the advent of the Europeans, the Tamil Country was noted for the finest varieties of Calico. But after the establishment of their political authority, the people were required to export cotton to England to purchase textile products and to pay taxes on looms. As a result, the weaving industries and the auxiliary industries like dyeing were ruined and weavers were thrown out of employment.\textsuperscript{12} At this juncture, the nationalistic spirit spread all over India. Tamils also protested against foreign administration and sale of foreign goods.

Agriculture had been, from the past, the predominant occupation of Tamil Nadu. The East India Company was not much interested in the development of agriculture except the collection of land revenue. After 1858, when the Crown took over the administration, some further attempts were made to improve irrigation facilities. The Srivaikuntam Anicut was undertaken by the Government across the Tambaraparani River in
Tinnevelly District. This was completed in 1818. It provided for the extension of irrigation on both sides of the river. Pelendorai anicut was built across the Vellar River. The works were completed by 1878. This Anicut was used for irrigation in South Arcot District. Similarly, wells were dug in various districts of Tamil Nadu. A large number of new wells were planned and old wells deepened. The people fully recognized the value of wells for irrigation.\textsuperscript{13} In 1883, the Government of India passed the Land Improvement Loans Act under which long term loans were granted for making improvements to the land like the construction of wells, tanks, irrigation channels, etc. In 1884, the Agriculturists' Loans Act was passed under short term. Loans were granted for the purchase of seed, grain, manure, cattle, fodder, pumpsets, etc. In 1904, the Government of India passed the Co-operative Credit Societies Act which provided for the formation of credit societies.\textsuperscript{14}

Political restrictions, economic disabilities, spread of western education, growth of communication and the working of social organisations created a situation favourable for an awakening in the land. The educated people found the political bondage and economic degradation of the Country, intolerable. With the growth of communication systems, they were enabled to forge contents and exchange views. The nationalist press carried the message of freedom to the nearby towns and remote villages while the nationalist leaders inspired the people through patriotic songs and ballads.\textsuperscript{15}
These led to the Swadeshi Movement and terrorist activities and the growth of indigenous industries in Tamil Nadu.

**Backdrop of Working Class Movement**

Today imperialism all over the world has outlived its objectively progressive role, corresponding to the role of capitalism, and has become the most powerful reactionary force in the Indian sub-continent, strengthening all the other forms of Indian reaction. The stage has thus been reached when the task of the political transformation indicated by Marx is directly on the order of the day.

Working Class Movement played somewhat a unique role in India. Unlike many other countries, the working class movement there worked within the existing democratic framework and still has a major involvement in contemporary politics. Working Class itself affected India in two ways. It worked for the set righting of social injustices and vaguely committed itself to a revolution in the future. Grassroots working class movements also worked against existing social setups to create a fairer environment for peasants. At the same time, favourable principles for the working class were institutionalized into Indian government and these principles made their way into government policy.

The working class movement in colonial Tamil Nadu grew out of India’s independence movement against the British. Disenchanted members
of the Indian National Congress were radicalized by Communist ideas, especially in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution. They formed their own party and eventually led an armed struggle against the British with the aid of the Japanese, called the Indian National Army. The world’s first democratically - elected Communist government was formed in the southern state of Kerala. They did follow elements of the Bolshevik plan by doing their best to dismantle the existing economic and power structure that was dominated by elite members of India’s caste system. They tried to empower peasants and workers by redistributing land, raising political awareness and promoting literacy. All this had a largely beneficial effect as the state of Kerala boasts near-universal literacy and living standards much above the norm. However, the abandonment of Bolshevik methods meant that the Communist Parties in India never could extend their appeal or power enough to be major contenders for power in India at the national level. Communist movements in India were almost as prone to corruption and criminalization as others and it should not be inferred that Communism was an especially positive force.

In the early Twentieth Century Marxist philosophy influenced the working class movement in India and many people in India were impressed by its ideals and many working class leaders from around the world arrived in India to teach and preach the communist philosophy. After the communist revolution, which occurred in Russia in 1917, many in India wished to cause
the same kind of revolution in India against the British. Under inspiration from Moscow the Communist Party was established. Like other communist parties in the world, this party’s members also had strong relations with Moscow and its actions were dedicated by Moscow. This party did not support the freedom struggle, which was organized by the Indian National Congress and saw it as a struggle organized by rich businessmen.

The Communist Party of India (CPI) was founded on December 26th, 1925, at an all-India conference held at Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, in late December 1925 and early January 1926. Communists participated in the independence struggle and, as members of the Congress Socialist Party, became a formidable presence on the socialist wing of the Indian National Congress. They were expelled from the Congress Socialist Party in March 1940, after allegations that the communists had disrupted party activities and were intent on co-opting party organizations. Indeed, by the time the communists were expelled, they had gained control over the entire Congress Socialist Party units in what were to become the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh.

Working class Communists remained members of the Indian National Congress although their support of the British war effort after the German invasion of the Soviet Union and their nationalist policy supporting the right of religious minorities to secede from India were diametrically opposed to
Congress policies. As a result, the Communists became isolated within the Congress. After independence, Communists organized a peasant uprising was suppressed only after the central government sent its army. Starting in 1951, the CPI shifted to a more moderate strategy of seeking to bring communism to India within the constraints of Indian democracy.

The Communist Party of India (CPI) is a prominent political party of the country. There are distinguished views about the formation of the party. The foundation day as they celebrate is 26th December, 1925. It is said that the CPI was founded in Tashkent on October 17th, 1920, soon after the Second Congress of the Communist International. M.N. Roy, Evelina Trench Roy (Roy’s wife), Abani Mukherji, Rosa Fitting of (Abani’s wife), Mohammed Ali (Ahmad Hasan) Mohammad Shafiq Siddiqui and M.P.B.T. Acharya were the founding members of the party. Afterwards they aimed at starting a party organization within India. For a while, Anushilan and Jugantar , the newspaper groups were active in the Bengal region. It was M.N. Roy who contacted these active groups in the Bengal region and attempted to form a small communist group in Bengal (led by Muzaffar Ahmed) Bombay (led by S.A. Dange) Madras (led by Singaravelu Chettiar), United Provinces (led by Shaukat Usmani) and Punjab (led by Ghulam Hussain) Eventually, only Usmani, became a CPI party member.
At the time of its formation, there was poor organizational structure within the party. In addition to that, many communist groups within the party worked with restricted national co-ordination. At that time, all communist activities were banned by the British colonial authorities. The concept of forming a united party came out from there. In the years from 1921 to 1924, four conspiracy trials took place against the communist movement. They were First Peshawar Conspiracy Case, Second Peshawar Conspiracy Case, Moscow Conspiracy Case and the Cawnpore Bolshevik Conspiracy Case. The Cawnpore Bolshevik Conspiracy Case had an intense political impact indeed. M.N. Roy, S.A. Dange, Muzaffar Ahmed, Nalini Gupta, Shaukat Usmani, Singaravelu Chettiar, Ghulam Hussain and R.C. Sharma were accused on 17th March, 1924 in Cawnpore (now spelt Kanpur) Bolshevik Conspiracy case. The allegation was that, they, as communists were attempting “to deprive the King Emperor of his sovereignty of British India, by complete separation of India from imperialistic Britain by a violent revolution.”

The Cawnpore Bolshevik Conspiracy case from then onward was held responsible for actively introducing communism to a larger Indian audience Muzaffar Ahmed, Nalini Gupta, Shaukat Usmani and Dange were condemned to several years of imprisonment. M.N. Roy and R.C. Sharma were out of British territory at the time and Ghulam Hussain was granted pardon because he confessed his association with the Russians. After the
release of Dange, on 25th December 1925, a communist conference was organized in Kanpur where approximately 500 people participated. Satyabhakta convoked the conference. The name Communist Party of India was adopted at the conference. Groups such as LKPH (Labour Kisan Party of Hindustan) dissolved into the unified CPI. Thus Communist Party of India started its operation inside India.

The system of political parties is an integral part of modern nation state system. It is the very life blood of a democratic system. Even in communist countries we find that there is one party system. The British introduced representative institutions as early as the middle of the 19th century and later in 1919, they in theory, introduced responsible government. The democratic spirit fostered by the British favored the growth of political parties. In India the party system began to emerge even during the British colonial rule as a result of the awakening of political consciousness. The British were to a certain extent tolerant despots. The British therefore encouraged the growth of political parties in India. The congress party was thus founded in 1885 by A.O. Hume and the other India Leaders. In Tamil Nadu there emerged two parties, a national party, the congress, and a regional party, the justice party. When Gandhiji dominated the political scene of India, the communist party of India was founded. This communist party spread in Tamil Nadu and played a vital role in Tamil Nadu politics since Indian Independence.
Statement of the Problem

The history of the working class in colonial Tamil Nadu still remains unwritten and many stereotypes surround the study of the working class. One of these stereotypes about the Tamil Nadu Working Class was the inability of the working class to organize themselves and the lack of ‘firmness of purpose and unity of actions.

Quoting the same phrase, B. Shiva Rao, one of the foremost leaders of the Madras Labour Union wrote that “the placid and pathetic contentment of the masses was disappearing particularly in the urban areas at a more rapid pace than the British Officials perhaps appreciated. The industrial worker emerged definitely as one of the most significant symbols of Post-War India.

To some extent, the ideological positions of some moderate leaders like Thiru. Vi. Ka. and G. Selvapathy Chetti played a crucial role in Labour issues and Freedom struggle. In many ways these labour leaders sympathized with the Self-Respective Movement.

The communists came on the labour scene actively from the middle of the 1930s after the initial start of Singaravelu from the early 1920s. The labour leaders who engaged in labour problems in the Post-War period from diverse backgrounds. Examples are Thiru.Vi. Kalyana Sundara Mudaliar (a
school teacher by profession), V.O. Chidamparam Pillai (an Advocate), Singaravelu Chetty (an Advocate) and G. Chelvapathy Chetty (a merchant). Many of them maintained links with the Congress.

Some of the labour leaders did not have however any identifiable occupation, e.g. Chakarai Chetti and Harisharvatham Rao, both of them considered as ‘extremist’ for their participation in the nationalist movement by the colonial administration.

It may be also noted here that except communists such as Singaravelu and later his lieutenants like Jeevanandam and A.S.K. Ayyangar, other leaders did not have any coherent ideology towards labour interests.

In this colonial period the role of the state itself was discriminatory. New state structures and policies were created to meet the rising challenge of labour movement in 1920s and 1930s. Their purpose was less to protect the interests of workers than to defend the world of capital.

This was sought to be accomplished by establishing new mechanisms to settle labour disputes without undermining the strength of the capitalists. In the 1920s and 1930s the government got involved in labour issues not in order to help workers, but rather in an attempt to defuse widespread strike action.
An indepth micro-study of a locally has the advantage of capturing these aspects which are given otherwise casual treatment in the macro-studies. In this context the underdeveloped city of Madras where one of the strongest working class movements emerged in the Post-War period provides the scope for analysis of the emergence of working class movement in the complex socio-economic milieu and for analysis of some of the structural weaknesses which had accompanied the working class movement in this city.

The study of the working class movement in Madras Presidency is important in that vague generalizations have been made about the proletariat on the basis of the study of the workers employed in textile mills. Therefore the emphasis has been placed on the study of the textile mill workers of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills, ignoring the condition of other categories of workers employed in various factories.

Apart from this, the condition of a particular company’s work force is used as a surrogate for the condition of the other categories of employees. This study overlooks the distinctions between the various categories of employees. The cause and scope of strikes that took place in various firms varied from firm to fir. Strikes in the colonial period reveal the workers solidarity and militancy involved in strikes.
Issues as well were different in strikes; economic strikes were clubbed with the survival of trade union itself. These required well articulated leadership and strong commitment from workers themselves to trade unionism. Therefore concentration is laid in this topic entitled “Working Class Movement in Tamil Nadu During the Colonial Period – A Historical Perspective”.

**Aims and Objectives**

The Study has the certain aims. They are:

1. To fill up the gap that exists in understanding the contribution by the Working Class Movement to the political trends in Tamil Nadu.

2. To identify the role of the working class in Indian Freedom Struggle

3. To understand the attitude of the working class towards to issues of the common people.

4. To trace the growth of the Communist Party in Tamil Nadu

5. To find out the reasons for the emergence of the Communist Party in the Indian political scenario
6. To highlight the role of Thiru. Vi. Ka., Vardadarajulu Naidu, E. V. Ramasamy, Singaravelu Chetty, Jeevanandam for the cause of the working class people in Tamil Nadu

Hypotheses

The Study attempts to investigate the following hypotheses framed by the Scholar.

1. The formation of the Madras Labour Union was the beginning of the working class activity in Tamil Nadu.

2. The contribution of Thiru.Vi. Ka, E. V. Ramasamy, Varadarajulu Naidu, and Singaravelu Chetty was immense for the cause of the working class in the first half of the Twentieth Century.

3. Singaravelu Chetty was the pioneer Communist leader in Tamil Nadu.

4. The Communists actively involved in the freedom struggle.

5. The split in the Communist Party had its impact in Tamil Nadu also.

6. The Communists were unable to capture power in Tamil Nadu.

7. The Communists believes in Indian democracy

8. The Communists involved in many agitations for the cause of the toiling masses.
Period of the Study

The study covers a period of ninety years. It commences from the year 1918 and ends in 1947. It was in April 1918, the Madras Labour Union (M.L.U.) was established. The founding of the M.L.U. led to the emergence of various other unions in and around Madras. The growing consciousness among the working class paved the way for hectic activities of the working class in Tamil Nadu. In 1947, India got independence and the working class dominated Communists began to participate in the democratic up and discharge democratic duties. The given period of the study covers, the role of the labour unions in Tamil Nadu, labour issues, role of the communists in National Movement, the communists in national and regional politics, the communists in elections and the agitational politics of the Communists in various socio-political issues in Tamil Nadu.

Sources and Review of Literature

The Primary Sources for tracing the growth of the Labour Movement in Colonial Tamil Nadu are the writings of the leaders of the Indian Communist Party. The Party had its own Newspaper which also constitutes the primary source. The documents and records of British India Government, found in the Tamil Nadu State Archives also form the part of the primary source. Reports of the conferences, judicial reports and the
reports from the criminal investigation department are remarkable primary sources.

In addition to these primary sources, there are important secondary sources. These sources are the newspapers other than the Communist Party. There are also many pamphlets, news reports and biographies written by Indian Communists of the post Independent period. These are regarded only as secondary source materials because they have been written at a later date. Many of the writers were connected with the shaping and molding of the Labour Movement.

The Fortnightly Reports drawn up by the British Governments in the Madras Presidency were reports written every fortnight which supply summary of the important events that took place in the Presidency. By and large, the reports cover the political activities in Tamil Nadu and therefore they provide a vital source of information for this study. In addition to these reports there are the secret files that are preserved in the form of Under Secretary Safe File (U.S.S.F). There are also the Government Orders (G.Os). Some of these Government Orders are confidential.

The Manifesto of the Communist Party by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels gives us insights into the ideological foundations for the Labour Movement. The Manifesto sums up the ideas and aims of the working class underscoring the unity of workers throughout the world. Marx and Engels
had written their theories and Lenin put them to practice in U.S.S.R.T. Borodulina compiled their works in the book ‘Marx Engels Lenin’. It deals with the theory of historical materialism, the role of revolution in society, the role of the masses and the individuals in history. This book contains certain select articles which show how the founders of historical materialism applied their ideological theories to analyze contemporary events.

*“India Communist Katchiyin Varalattu Kurippugal”* (Tamil) is a Tamil book which gives valuable information regarding the growth of communist movement in India. *Indiya Communist Iyakka Varalaru Arimugam (1917-1934)* (Tamil) by Arunan lays special stress on the different aspects of the Communist Movement in India.*“Communist in India”* by Subodh Roy is a very useful book, studying the movements and its growth during the period 1934-1935. Facts pertaining to the growth of the Communist Party in Madras Presidency are also available in this book. The work *“Communism in India”* by Over Street and Wind Miller is another book which gives a detailed study of the movement in India. All the aspects relating to the growth of communism and its relationship with the national party, the Congress is also discussed in this book. *“A Marxian Glimpse of History”* by Susobhan Sarkar gives a general background to the study of communism. It focuses attention to the fundamental aspects of communist party in a simple and absorbing style. The work *“Myself and Communist Party of India”* by one of the pioneers of the communist movement in India, Muzaffar Ahamed, is a very useful study of the party’s early history.
It is a store house of information giving particulars about the origin and foundation of the party in India and its relationship with the Soviet Government.

Singaravelu’s book “Pothuvudamai Vilakkam” (Tamil) gives a complete idea of the concept of socialism to the people of Tamil Nadu in their mother tongue. This book was instrumental in drawing attention of the proletariat to Marxian way of life at a time the British had a vigilant, watch on the movement in Tamil Nadu. His “Arasial Nilaimai” (Tamil) covering the period from May 1935 April 1936 is again a collection of various articles. Written by this author in the newspapers and they deal with the political situation of those days. The book “Viduthaliporum Dravida Iyakkamum” (Tamil) by P. Ramamoorthy deals with the growth of the extremist movement in India. Singaravelu had taken the lead in this. The book gives details on the manner in which the railway workers were organized by Singaravelu even in those days when India’s Independence was far away in the horizon.

“Singaravelu the First Communist in South India” by K. Murugesan and C.S. Subramaniyan gives a valuable account of the life of Singaravelu. He devoted his life to the cause of communism, and courageously opposed the British even at the beginning of Twentieth Century. His service to the people in imparting the ideas of communism is something unique. The autobiographical reminiscence of A.K. Gopalan for the cause of the people gives a glimpse of the work under taken by the
author in the Madras Presidency. His daring feats of escape from the prison and his underground activities in and around Madurai are also treated in detail. He was one of the earliest persons who worked in Madurai in organizing the people towards the communist movement. The autobiography of E.M.S. Namboodripad “How I became a Communist” deals with the author’s contact with the Communists in Madras. The Communists from Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh met in this Presidency and they are welded into one unit. The book also points out how Communism in Kerala had its roots in the Madras Presidency.

The book “Jeeva Vazhkai Varalaru” (Tamil) by K. Balathandayutham deals with his tireless services for the growth of communism in his early days. Jeevanandam devoted his whole life to the Communist ideology and his fiery speeches infused into the minds of the workers and the general public who began to fight against the British imperialism. Saminatha Sarma’s “Jeevanin Padalgal” (Tamil) is a compilation of the poems written by Jeeva. These poems portray the condition of the workers, and they are written with the purpose of making the ordinary people wake up from their slumber and gain political consciousness. “B.S.R. Vazhkai Varalaru” (Tamil) by R. Nallakannu gives the life history of B. Srinivasa Rao, a Communist from Karnataka, who worked in the midst of the Tamil Kisans, winning their love and affection.
He also actively participated with other Communists in the independent movement. His life mingled with the agriculturists of Tamil Nadu.

The book “*Revolutionaries of India in Soviet Russia*” by M.A. Persits deals with the revolutionary struggle of the Indians in Soviet Russia against British imperialism. These émigrés wanted to learn Marxism in U.S.S.R. and to liberate their nation from British rule. They took a lead in organizing the working classes and peasants and they contributed much for the growth of Communist Movement by India. The “*M.K. Gandhiji - Joshi Kaditha Pokku Varathukal*” (Tamil) translated by P. Ramamoorthy is a compilation of letters of the two leaders. Gandhiji wanted to clarify to P.C. Joshi, his own viewpoint in regard to the communist’s relationship with the Britishraj in 1942 this there was a dialogue between the two leaders as to the genuine nature of the accusations and counter accusations. The book “*Thozhar A.S.K.*” (Tamil) by K. Murugesan is a work on A.S.K. Ayyangar who approached socialism in a scientific way. His life history is the history of Trade Union Movement in Tamil Nadu. A.S.K. also wrote a number of books on the Communist ideals.

*S.V. Ghate*’ a memorial volume is a book which contains articles written by Communists who had the opportunity of moving close with him. The *Rinstrike* by Subroda Bonerjee, shows the strike in Royal Indian Navy. The strike paralyzed the British Government for some time. The
strike started in Bombay but it had its effect throughout the country, and as a consequence Madras was also affected.

The two magazines “Karal Marx Nootrandu Malar’ by Janasakthi and the other bearing the same title published by Theekathir” give a complete picture of Marx life and his ideas about the transfer action of colonial India into a Communist country. “Stalin Nootrandu Malar” by Theekathir is another work which deals with the contribution of this Russian leader who brought to reality the dreams of Marx, Engels and Lenin. In this endeavor, he closely followed the footsteps of Lenin and brought about a series of economic plans for Russia especially after the early Second World War. “The Suthanthira Malar” of Janasakthi recalls the political struggle of Communist Party for the cause of national liberation and adults, working classes and kisans. The “CITU Tamil Nadu Fourth Conference Sirappu Malar” gives an account of trade union movement in this state, its emergence and growth during the colonial British rule in India. “M.R.U. Ninaivu Malar” from Theekathir is a collection of various articles written by men involved in the communist movement with M.R. Venkataraman. These articles emphasize his true and sincere work for the promotions of communist ideology. In his letter to his daughter he writes son pact, Bharathi and this signifies the fact that Bharati had pronounced learning towards communism and socialism. “A.B. Ninaivu Malar” is also a collection of essays of many writers on A. Bala Subramanian an eminent
communist leader. His work among the leather workers of Dindigul is something remarkable.

Likewise the book *“History of Tamil Nadu”* by K. Rajayyan and the other bearing the same title by N. Subramanian give us the background of the political history of Tamil Nadu. There were also other publications of the Communist Party which help us in tracing the history of communist movement in Tamil Nadu. Interviews were conducted with few communists K. Murugesan gives an elaborate account of the communist movement in Tamil Nadu and also of the part played by E.V. Ramasamy Naicker in propagating the working class ideals. P. Ramamoorthy in his interview traced the course of working class movement in Tamil Nadu. K. Muthiah gave adequate information regarding the part played by the students in the working class and communist movement. The interview with M.R.S. Mani helped in tracing the communist activities in Madurai, the formation of the movement in the district by A.K. Gopalan and his own role as vice president of the Textile Mill workers.

**Methodology**

Historical Methodology has been adopted to trace and unfold the role of the working class movement and communist movement in the political scenario of Tamil Nadu. Further, the study adopted the analytical approach to understand the labour issues. The analytical study of the source materials
served the purpose of reconstructing the past in a spirit of free enquiry and with a view of presenting as objective an account as it was possible.

**Limitations**

The study is region-specific which manly deals with the origin and development of the working class movement during the period of late colonial Tamil Nadu and occasional references are given about working class movement at national level. The working class in colonial Tamil Nadu faced many problems and obstacles to express opinions on the socio-political issues of the State. Therefore, the focus was on the frontline issues of the working class which served the Tamil society in the backdrop of the National Movement. Many of the agitations of the working class were short-lived. Further, it was very difficult to collect the back volumes of the newspapers and periodicals which focused the working class activities in Tamil Nadu. In this respect, the essence and abstract of those newspapers and periodicals were culled from Madras Native Newspapers Reports of the pre-Independence period.

**Plan of the Study**

This study, *Working Class Movement in Tamil Nadu During the Colonial Period- A Historical Perspective* is arranged into Five Chapters excluding an Introduction and a Conclusion. In the first part of Introduction Chapter, physical features of Madras Presidency, Tamil Nadu, economic
condition and general introduction on Marxian ideology is given. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels evolved the ideological base and Lenin practiced it in Russia. In India the working class movement began in 1918 as an impact of Russian Revolution. In the year 1920 the Communist Party was founded in Tashkent, and later in 1925 in India at the Kanpur Congress. In the second part, aims, hypotheses, period of the study, plan of the study, sources and review of literature, methodology and limitations are given. A development of this kind in 1918 marked a new chapter in the hectic working class movement in Tamil Nadu.

The First Chapter on ‘Working Class Unrests and the Birth of Madras Labour Union’ focuses the grievances of the workers and their condition, the sporadic agitations of the workers and the subsequent reforms. It highlights the problems in the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills and the grievances of the workers. Further the gradual reforms proved inadequate to improve the condition of the workers and did not yield the expected results. Hence the workers demanded remedial measures which also paved the way for the growth of awakening among them. The arrival of Keir Hardie, Chairman of the Labour Party initiated a new stimulus in history of the working class movement in Tamil Nadu. The Russian Revolution of 1917 also contributed for the awakening of the workers who began to integrate. To unite the workers in the Madras Province, the Madras Labour Union (M.L.U.) was formed. In it the role of Thiru Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudlaliar,
C. Chelvapathi Chetti, Ramanujulu Naidu and B.P. Wadia played a remarkable role as the founders of the M.L.U.

The Second Chapter, on ‘Labour Issues’ deals with the problems of the workers in colonial Tamil Nadu. The Labour Movement in Madras City began among the workers in the Europeans owned Buckingham and Carnatic Mills. There was rapid rise of prices of essential commodities in 1920s. Low pay, excessive working hours, inadequate lunch breaks and high handed action of European Officials were the major social problems for the labourers. Thiru.Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, a Madras- based Congress Leader, took the cause of the labourers and waged a tireless struggle against the Mill Authority. He wrote about the labour problems in his paper, Deshabakthan. The Congress leaders demanded better working condition and provided needed leadership to the working class people who were involved in the agitation now and then. As the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in Madras and Harvey Mill in Madurai were European enterprises, the Congress leaders equated the plight of the workers with colonial exploitation. The European Business Community was furious at the rise of Trade Unionism, especially under the patronage of Congress Leaders. The situation turned worse in 1921. The Pro-Government Workers returned to work. Hence there was a clash between the Strikers and Non-Strikers. Strike was a traumatic experience for the Madras workers and their Congress Patrons.
‘Legislative and Administrative Measures for Working Class’ forms the Third Chapter. The establishment of the M.L.U. in Madras paved the way for the emergence of the other unions. The emergence of the unions stressed the need of the legislative measures for the well-being of the workers. The Wokmen’s Compensation Act of 1923 provided compensation to the workers in case of injury by accident. Another piece of legislation was the Indian Trade Union Act of 1916. It paved the way for the registration of the Trade Unions and defines the rules for registration. A very important piece of legislation was the Trade Disputes Act of 1929. It considered strikes and loc-outs were illegal. Labour Unions opposed the Act vehemently. An amendment bill was passed in September 1932. Further the government introduced many administrative measures. The Labour Department was created in 1920. Until 1926, the Labour Department was part of the Law (General) Department. Since then a new department was created, called the Public Works and Labour Department. This department initiated administrative measures on reclamation of Kallars, amelioration of the Depressed Classes, Wages for agricultural labourers and artisans, and Emigration. Regular inspections were made to improve the sanitation in the factories. Factory laws were strictly imposed.

‘Various Working Class Movement’ constitutes the Fourth Chapter. The National Movement did not fail to attract the working class. The appeals of the nationalist leaders were well received and followed sincerely.
Substantial sections of the industrial working class during the National Movement contribute all that they could for strengthening the base of the National Movement in Tamil Nadu. The solidarity of these workers with the popular anti-imperialist movement was remarkable as was manifested demonstration in support of the National Movement. B.P.Wadia, Thiru.Vi.Ka and Varadarajulu Naidu were not only labour leaders but also the freedom fighters in Tamil Nadu. These leaders were able to harness the support of the working class in the National Movement. They advocated non-violence and Gandhian methods in the working class struggle. In 1920 the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) had come into being. M. Singaravelu Chetty, S. R. Chate, Jeevanandam and P. Sundaraiah were the other labour leaders. The post-war developments in economic and political spheres led to frequent labour struggles against capitalist exploitation and greater response to the popular anti-imperialist movement. Thus the working class movement in Tamil Nadu had coincided with the on-going National movement.

The Fifth Chapter, ‘Rise of Communists’ deals with the emergence of the Communists in the political scenario and the growth of Communist Party in Tamil Nadu. The formation of labour unions, the strikes organized by them and the meetings organized to make labour consciousness are elaborately dealt in this chapter. The important stronghold of labour activities was Madras, and a few distant places like Madurai, Coimbatore,
Tirunelveli, Trichy, where the Mills and Railways were concentrated. The government took note of their collective effort and tried to solve their problems by establishing the court of enquiry. There was labour unrest in many textile mills and in the railways throughout the country. Recognition was given to the unions through which the labour force could voice their grievances. Necessity arose to create a better understanding between the employer and the employed, and the collective bargaining power of the workers increased. In Conclusion, the summary of the chapters, findings of the study and the trends of the working class and communist movement in Tamil Nadu are portrayed. The Conclusion is drawn on the basis of the study on the origin and growth of the working class movement in Tamil Nadu.
END NOTES


2. Ibid., p.3

3. Ibid.


8. Ibid., p.44.


