

INTRODUCTION

The Presidency of Madras was one of the largest provinces of the British India, situated at the southern part of Indian peninsula. Bounded by the sea on the east, south and west, its eastern and western coastlines running about 1,700 miles. It comprised the Telugu-speaking districts of Vizagapatnam, Godavari, Kishna, Guntur, Kurnool, Bellary, Anantapur, Cuddapah and Nellore in the north. To the south lay Tamilnadu, the centre of activities of Periyar Movement, containing the district of Chingleput, North Arcot, South Arcot, Salem, Coimbatore, Tiruchinapalli, Tanjore, Madurai, Ramnad, Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli. Tamil is the common language of the districts, from a few miles north of Madras to the extreme south of the eastern division of the peninsula.¹ Malayalam is the language of Travancore, Cochin and the Malabar districts. Tulu is spoken in a limited portion of South Kannara district and Kannad in certain portions of the South Kanara, Coimbatore and Salem districts.² The Telugus form a powerful minority in the districts of North Arcot, Madurai, Salem and Coimbatore even today. The Kanarese and the Malayalam districts of South Kanara and Malabar lay on the west coast.

South Canara people played a limited role in the Justice Party and they seldom participated in any of the activities of the Dravida Kazhagam whereas the Malayalis evinced greater interest in the Justice Party and one of its founder leaders Dr.T.M.Nair, was a Malayali, who spent fifteen years of

¹ Maclean,C.D., *Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency*, Vol.I, Madras, 1885, pp1-12.

² *Census of India*, 1921, Vol.XIII, Part I, Madras,1922, p.39.

his life in Madras city. The Malayalam weeklies like *Kerala Sanchari*, *Keralodayam* and *Malayali* played a conspicuous role in propagating the political message of the Justice Party among the people of the west coast. Later some of these papers spread message of Periyar and his Self-Respect Movement. Nevertheless the Movement's main supporters were from Tamil districts of the composite State of Madras. The four linguistic regions including the princely states of Mysore and Hyderabad were known as the land of the Dravidians. Further the term 'Dravidian' is used generally to denote linguistic groups but Periyar Movement employed it to mark racial groups.

The Tamil society from time immemorial was divided into numerous hereditary groups called castes. Etymologically, the term 'caste' is derived from the Latin 'castus' meaning 'pure'. It was first used by the Portuguese to describe the Indian social stratification. Caste may better be described than defined. It is an endogamous group or a collection of such groups, bearing a common name and believing in a common origin, having a hereditary occupation (whether all members follow it or not), possessing common rituals, ceremonies and forms of worship, the members of which consider themselves and are considered by others as belonging to a social group, distinct, separate and identifiable from other such groups.³

The caste has economic, social and religious aspects and economic order; it prescribes and prohibits occupations, as a religious system; it outlines the sacraments and rituals of each caste, as social arrangements; it

³ The elements of caste according to the definition in the Encyclopaedia Britannica are endogamy, common name and origin, traditional occupation and homogeneity.

defines the status of a person in the society with reference to the ritualistic practices and secular occupations pertaining to his caste. In the pattern of society which has evolved by the interaction of all these elements of caste, inter-caste relationship is very restricted.

To the Hindus, *dharma* primarily denotes the fulfilling of caste duties. The inexorable law of *karma* in which the orthodox place implicit faith, assigns to each man his work and status in accordance with his deeds in previous birth. The concepts of sin, merit and pollution are fundamental to concept of Dharma. *Dharma* means that which is right and covers all the phases of human life cycle and fixes several details of intra and inter-group life. Acceptance of caste traditions and the general rules of piety can be said to constitute the *dharma* of the people and it is through *dharma* that one can look forward to shaping one's destiny.⁴ M.N.Srinivas explains how certain Hindu theological notions like *karma* and *dharma* contribute to the strengthening of the idea of hierarchy inherent in the caste system.⁵

In the aspiration of higher status, the adoption of a more Sanskritised or Hindu style of life was normally accompanied by the assertion of a claim to higher *varna*, to *Vaisya*, *Kshatriya*, or even Brahmin status. Classically, caste has been divided into five divisions. The *varnas* represented the caste of Aryan society. Ranked hierarchically, the first three *varnas*, the twice-born (*dwija*), who wore the sacred thread were the Brahmins who acted as the priests, the *Kshatriya* who were the rulers and warriors, and the *Vaisyas* who

⁴ Dube,S.C., *Indian Village*, London, 1955, pp.92-93.

⁵ Srinivas,M.N., *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*, Oxford, 1952, pp.24-26.

were the mercantile classes. The *Sudras*, the lowest *varna*, were the common people, the agriculturalists, craftsmen and the menial workers who because of the defiled and polluted life as scavengers and sweepers, were relegated to the lowest rungs of society. The *varna* represents categories in which the numerous *jatis* may be grouped, but the system bears like resemblance to the reality of caste in Indian society.

Each caste is characterised by a number of attributes significant to its position in ritual ranking. The traditional occupation of each caste is marked by degrees of purity and pollution. Occupations such as leather-working, barbering and toddy-tapping or the extraction of juice from palms for liquor-are considered to be defiling and low in rank. In fact, even the consumption of certain foods carries defilement. While the consumption of meat is a mark of lower status than is vegetarianism, there are degrees of vegetarianism, such as between those who take eggs and those who do not. The style of dress, the forms of jewel worn, and the manner of address are all attributional distinctions denoting a caste's position in the ritual hierarchy.

In the Madras Presidency, there are Brahmins, non-Brahmins and depressed class. The non-Brahmins are Sudras, many of whom, such as the Saivite Vellalas of Tirunelveli in Tamil area, are highly Sanskritised in life and custom. There are no genuine Kshatriyas or Vaisyas in peninsular India and the use of these categories in this area refers only to local castes which have successfully claimed Vaisya or Kshatriya status.⁶ Varna thus has provided a model for the upwardly mobile caste, and it has been the Kshatriya status,

⁶ Srinivas,M.N.,. *Varna and Caste,in Caste in Mordern India and other Eassays*,Newyork, 1962, pp.2-6.

more than any other, to which the rising castes have aspired. The Brahmins were recognised as the regulators of religious life and social interaction. It was largely ordered by religious beliefs and traditional customs. They established their supremacy through their religion and culture. Their supremacy was built upon Hinduism, *Varanashrma dharma* and casteism.⁷

Another factor that reinforced the polarity between Brahmins and non-Brahmins was the belief, widely held in the twentieth century was that Brahmins were racially different from non-Brahmins. In the nineteenth century a number of European and Indian scholars who had begun to study the origin of Tamil, the language spoken in the far southeastern part of Madras Province, held the idea that non-Brahmins were Dravidians and the original civilizers of the region, and that the Brahmins were the Aryan invaders from the north. These scholars believed that the Dravidians were conquered and their institutions supplanted by an imposed Sanskritic Aryan religion and a caste system, by which non-Brahmins had for centuries been kept in an inferior position. Linguistically also, there was a strong tradition for a division between Brahmins and non-Brahmins in Tamil area. The Brahmins were the guardians of northern Sanskrit, the non-Brahmins, or so they themselves believed, were the creators of Tamil and Tamil culture. Thus there were linguistic and cultural as well as social differences between the two groups.

Most of the Indian reformers have tended to rationalise the prevailing religious beliefs, to disparage certain features of Hinduism such as the caste

⁷ Wheeler, J.T., *History of India*, Vol. I. p.31. Madras, 1861

system or idolatry, but to maintain its fundamental doctrines and creeds. Periyar set himself against his deep-rooted Hindu faith and to the very end of his long and busy life. He and his followers continued their propaganda against all aspects of Hinduism, and largely by implication, other religions as well. His inspiration in his anti-religious campaign no doubt came chiefly from the west, but he was not by any means non-Indian in his opposition to religion and priesthood.

The early life of Periyar sheds light on the personality of the man who considerably influenced the social and political thought of the Tamils in the first half of the twentieth century. His early experience of the rigidity of the caste system and the practices that went along with it created in him a feeling of revolution against those who strove to uphold it as the core of the Hindu way of life. As a result of his contempt for the inequalities engineered by the caste system in society he spearheaded social reform in Tamilnadu. His views on caste system were based on entirely his own understanding of the social and religious institutions of the Tamils.

E.V.Ramasami, a non-Brahmin was born on 17 September, 1879 at Erode in erstwhile Coimbatore district. His father, Venkatappa, a leading businessman of the locality was a generous and religious minded man. His house was the meeting place of many men of letters, *pundits* and religious propagandists. The boy Ramasami did not have the benefit of this intellectual atmosphere, as he stayed with his adopted aunt, a widow, till he was eight years of age. She pampered him as much that his formal education was neglected, yet he developed a bold and enquiring mind, even

to the extent of questioning his own family traditions and religious practices. Frequently he absented himself from school and spent most of his time in the company of Vaniya Chetti and Vedagara boys who were regarded as low in the hierarchical system of caste, often violating the family custom by sharing their lowly fare.⁸

E.V.Ramasami was taken to task by his parents for breaking caste rules and was told by them that he had to observe caste rules and other restrictions by not associating with people of low birth. The boy Ramasami seldom understood the logic of his parent's reasoning and thought that the dead weight of customs only divided the people in Tamil society. He therefore ignored their advice, absented himself from school, and spent most of his time in the company of friends of lower caste status. His parents were not only concerned with his stubbornness in flouting family customs but also with his lack of education and therefore they decided to bring him under their direct control. Accordingly he was brought back from his aunt's home and later sent to an English primary school where he seemed to have enjoyed himself in school-boy pranks, often at the expense of his teachers and in teasing his class-mates. When complaints against his vexatious conduct became numerous, Ramasami was withdrawn from the school at the age of ten to assist in his father's business where he proved himself quite successful.⁹

Since his father was a commission agent dealing in seasonal crops like chilli, turmeric and cereals, young Ramasami had plenty of leisure time

⁸ Sami Chidambaranar, *Tamilar Talaivar* (Tamil), Erode, 1958, p.19.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.22-23.

and spent it in the midst of orthodox *pundits* and religious propagandists listening to their *puranic* stories. Through their religious discourses and discussions E.V.Ramasami learnt the rudiments of the philosophical significance of Hindu mythology and theology. Eventually he changed his role of a passive listener to that of an active interrogator, asking questions about inconsistencies and improbabilities in the *puranic* stories and ridiculing the basic concept of Hindu religion and philosophy. Questions were asked on the appropriateness of the institution of caste in society, belief in the theory of *karma* and the soundness of idol worship, but none of the *pundits* or religious leaders who came to his home seemed to have given him convincing answers.

E.V.Ramasami's opposition to Hindu orthodoxy and caste system became more and more outspoken in his later life, for many incidents and his own personal experience as a *sadhu* in the holy centres of India contributed to the hardening of this attitude. In 1904 he left his home after a quarrel with his father and became a religious mendicant visiting various pilgrim centres in the country. While at Kasi he learnt more about the inequalities of the institution of caste, witnessing the exploitation of the illiterate masses by crafty priests in the name of religion and noted the absence of morality. The experience at Kasi so disgusted him that he gave up his temporary life of a mendicant and returned home to assist in his father's trade once again.

E.V.Ramasami was not solely confined to his father's trade after his return from Kasi but also was drawn into a series of public activities. Though

he was engaged in trade from 1905 to 1919, nearly fourteen years he earned not only money but also a good name because of his social service. When E.V.Ramasami entered active public life, the political campaign in the Presidency of Madras was gaining momentum. In 1915, when plague occurred in Erode, his organised relief works with the help of his friends and distributed food and money to the distressed families. As a result, he was invited to serve on various temple committees, offered positions in the local taluk board and elected the chairman of Erode Municipality. During his term of office from 1917 to 1919, he executed the Cauvery Water Scheme which ensured a regular supply of drinking water for the citizens of Erode and earned him appreciation and admiration from people of Erode.¹⁰

He attended the inaugural meeting of the Madras Presidency Association (MPA), which was founded on 20 September, 1917 to protect the interests of the non-Brahmins. He was in full agreement with its aims, and efforts to secure representation for non-Brahmins in public bodies, and was inspired by a desire for social justice. As an active member of the MPA, E.V.Ramasami became familiar with the programmes and policies of the Indian National Congress. He was highly impressed with the programmes of the Congress and its efforts to raise the condition of the masses and do away with untouchability and prohibition. Two prominent leaders of the Congress C.Rajagopalachari and Dr.P.Varadarajulu Naidu persuaded him to join the Congress and hence he joined the Tamilnadu Congress towards the end of 1919.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.61-62.

Though his early life was not a colourful one it sheds light on the personality of the man who considerably influenced the social and political life of the Tamils in the first half of the twentieth century. His uncompromising attitude towards the religious practices of the Hindus, their beliefs in the religion and the caste system could only be explained and understood in the light of the environment in which he grew up. His early experience of the rigidity of the caste system and the practices that went along with it created in him a feeling of revulsion against those who strove to uphold it as the core of the Hindu way of life.

E.V.Ramasami's determination to remove the social imbalance was so strong that it influenced his whole thinking and to some extent clouded his political vision, especially when he found that Brahmins were the protagonists of the system of caste. His views on caste system were based entirely on his own understanding of the social and religious institutions of the Tamils. His zeal to remove the inequalities caused by caste and the wide scope the Indian National Congress provided to further his aims were among the reasons that induced E.V.Ramasami to enter into politics.

As a Congress member, he supported the use of *khadar* and advocated the removal of untouchability and opposed the Brahmins on important issues. He made use of his meetings to expose his views on self-respect and social equality. But the incidents were against this in the Tamilnadu Congress Committee especially the views of the Brahmins on many issues like common use of roads at Vaikkom, inter-dining at Chermadevi and communal representation in jobs and politics. When he

found the different treatment of the Brahmins, he came out of the Congress and started the Self-Respect Movement to attain it for the Tamils.

Kudi Arasu was the major organ of propaganda of the Self-Respect Movement of E.V.Ramasami. It was started in May 1924. Unlike other papers, E.V.Ramasami claimed, "I will courageously say whatever I think to the people."¹¹ He was true to his promise. Many of the editorials were considered to be reasonable and inflammatory, and once he was imprisoned for attacking the government. The Movement was confined largely to the educated non-Brahmins; as a result, bulk of non-Brahmin masses remained untouched. There was hardly any political and social awakening among them. When he entered the political arena in the 1920's he infused the non-Brahmin masses and created in them an awareness of their dignity and rightful place in society.

In January, 1925 it was reported that non-Brahmins in *gurukulam* were forced to eat apart from the Brahmins which came to the attention of Periyar and P.Varadarajulu Naidu. Thereupon the Tamilnadu Congress Committee appointed a Committee to look into the matter.¹² P. Varadarajulu Naidu began an all out campaign against the *gurugulam* and the Brahmin domination within the Congress. He spoke in a public meeting at Selam that before the Tamils sought equality with foreigners, they should establish complete equality with the Brahmins in the matter of inter-dining and save the non-Brahmins from the age-long social injustice that had been made to

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.85.

¹² *The Hindu*, Madras, 22 January 1925.

them by the Brahmins.¹³ He also told in a public meeting at Mayavaram about this which created a minor riot and the meeting broke up in utter confusion.¹⁴ Later on when the T.N.C.C. meeting was held at Tiruchinapalli, P.Varadharajulu Naidu demanded to have a discussion on the resolutions which were disallowed by the Chairman. At this point E.V.Ramasami and several other non-Brahmins in the conference made a walk out.¹⁵ By the end of 1925 he left the Congress and formed an organisation of his own.

The triple-hold of Brahmin minority in the social, religious and political leadership of Tamil society over the non-Brahmin majority gave birth to the Periyar Movement. In the years between 1916 and 1929 nationalist politicians largely Brahmins, the highest caste in the Tamilnadu social hierarchy were challenged by a group of non-Brahmins who had begun to take an active part in the politics of Madras. Non-Brahmins argued that the interest of the majority, especially those of the backward non-Brahmins was poorly protected. The conflict that developed between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins in Tamilnadu at this time was the articulation of a pre-existing social rivalry.

The cumulative effect of the social conflict and social reform determines the socio-political changes in Tamilnadu in the twentieth century. Such forces extinguished the lethargy on the part of those who were affected and resulted in the origin of a few social and political movements in the former composite Madras Presidency. Isolated institutions like Madras

¹³ *Ibid.*, 18 April 1925.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 22 April 1925.

¹⁵ Sami Chidambaranar, *op.cit.*, p.94.

United League and the Dravidian Association gave birth to organised movement, popularly known as the Non-Brahmin Movement but officially called the South Indian Liberal Federation, later known as the Justice Party. It enjoyed popularity with the non-Brahmins and was instrumental in running the administration in the Madras Presidency under the dyarchy scheme from 1920 to 1937, with a short interval.

E.V.Ramasami's goal was to give non-Brahmins a sense of pride based on their Dravidianist past which also meant a denial of the superiority of the Brahmin and of the Brahmins implicit faith in the social system. He wrote in his *Kudi Arasu* that, every Brahmin in this country considers that, he belongs to a superior caste according to the principle of *varanashsrma* and that the rest are *sudras* and the same principle makes him believe that he should not teach the *sudra* and that, if he does so, he will go to hell.¹⁶ He wanted to establish a living bond of union among all people irrespective of caste or creed, including the untouchables.¹⁷

E.V.Ramasami sought to raise the non-Brahmin community, particularly the underprivileged, to a position of political power and social importance equal to that of Brahmins. He was the first to make an organised effort to awaken the largely illiterate non-Brahmin masses and recruit them into his band of political culture. After his break with the Congress, he concentrated on the backward and illiterate non-Brahmins and organized them under the banner of the Self-Respect Movement for social, economic and political betterment, with remarkable agitational skill, he rose to

¹⁶ *Kudi Arasu*, Madras, 7 July 1929.

¹⁷ *Revolt*, Madras, 21 July 1929.

eminence as a leader of a section of the backward and illiterate non-Brahmins. He knew the art of public appeal and could speak to the masses in their own idiom. These abilities together with his past record as one who sacrificed much to the national cause provided him with an image in Tamilnadu.

E.V.Ramasami is remembered chiefly, in Tamilnadu no doubt, for his anti-religious and anti-caste campaigns. He played a very significant part in the politics of Tamilnadu, down to the time of his death. After a brief stint with communism, his politics moved rather to the right while his socio religious attitude remained unchanged and he emerged as one of the leading opponents of the Congress in the south. One must have admiration for his burning sincerity and intense moral courage.

E.V.Ramasami directed his main assaults at the Brahmins, however, and at the *puranas*, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. In this context he wrote a great deal supporting Sundaram Pillai's interpretation on the *Ramayana*. *Puranic* literature, Periyar contended, was the product of Brahminical scheming and unworthy of belief because it did not admit the equality of all men.¹⁸

E.V.Ramasami was an action oriented thinker who dealt with the roots of the problems and had the courage to express his thoughts and pursue them relentlessly, however powerful was his opponent. His effective appearance in the field of social and political reform came to acquire a new significance. E.V.Ramasami was given the title of Periyar in the first

¹⁸ Sami Chidambaranar, *op.cit.*, p.114.

Tamilnadu Women's conference held at Madras on 13 and 14 November, 1938. The conference which was organised by some of the leading non-Brahmin ladies of Madras to protest against the imposition of Hindi in schools was addressed by E.V.Ramasami. The important organisers of the Conference was Mrs.Meenambal Sivaraj, wife of High Court Judge Rao Bahadur N.Sivaraj, Mrs.T.Neelambigai Ammaiyar, daughter of the distinguished Tamil scholar Maraimalai Adigal, Dr.(Mrs) Dharmambal, a social worker and a number of others. This conference was significant because E.V.Ramasami was conferred the title "Periyar" which goes as a prefix with his name even today. Now the people call him simply Periyar which in English means the venerable or the great man.¹⁹

In 1949 the vociferous younger elements of the Dravida Kazhagam broke away from the movement and founded an independent organization known as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. All these movements have one basis at the bottom of their origin and development; the basis being the urge to counteract the forces of social conflict generated by the institution of *varanashrmadharma* or caste system. The anti-Brahmin issue is fundamental. The South Indian Brahmin was traditionally considered to be dominant caste more so than Brahmins in North India where the influence of Islam under the Moghul emperors had created a somewhat different situation. The influence and the integration of Brahmins in the south are incontestable in matters of religion, social life, politics and culture, the extent of which is the subject of much research and study. Thus Tamil culture is an

¹⁹ Here after E.V.Ramasami is mentioned as Periyar in the succeeding pages.

amalgamation of original Dravidian elements and Aryan influence. The rigid caste system, strongly maintained in Madras Presidency, formed the basis of the domination of Brahmins as a socio-ethnic group. The Periyar Movement grew among the socially middle-class, discontented people. The Dravidian culture and heritage is brought into focus against Brahmin domination.

The history of modern period has witnessed the emergence of several political leaders. Some of them have become famous while several others have faded into oblivion. Certain leaders have not been given due recognition as political leaders and have simply been treated as social reformers. Periyar emerged in the political scene of Tamilnadu primarily as a political leader who championed the cause of the depressed castes, women and minorities in Tamilnadu.

Periyar was a powerful writer, orator, journalist, constitutional expert and champion of the rights and liberties of the people of Tamilnadu. His firm conviction and sense of purpose are the keys to an understanding of his philosophy. He would not yield to any pressure for the sake of mere personal benefits. He was never willing to compromise his principles for personal glory and material gain.

This study does not aim at giving a full survey and analysis of the philosophic and activities of Periyar, but it aims at portraying the movement and its impact penetrated in various fields of the Tamil society.

Importance of the topic

The topic *Impact of Periyar Movement on the Tamils* is not a personality study. But it is a study of Periyar as a leader of the downtrodden and depressed castes, who devoted his entire life for the cause of self-respect and development. He played a vital role in establishing social change among the Tamils. In consideration of his multifarious services for the upliftment of the depressed class communities in of Tamilnadu, a comprehensive, systematic and analytical study is attempted. The movement of Periyar was mainly confined to the Tamil speaking areas. Hence this study is limited to Tamilnadu only. Periyar, the leader of the Movement was a rationalist thinker and philosopher till his death in 1973. The different phases of the movement from its origin are highlighted with a historical perspective.

Review of literature

The present study is one of the least trodden and investigated areas in the history of Tamilnadu. A series of studies have been undertaken on the history of Self-Respect Movement. However, the authors have not bestowed much attention on the impact of Periyar Movement on the Tamils and hence a comprehensive and critical study is found necessary. The period under study was political, social and of cultural importance because the Tamil country witnessed political as well as social changes with the formation of non-Congress ministry.

Writing regional history is a recent development in Indian historiography. So only limited literature is available in the social history of

Tamilnadu and they too make only passing references to Periyar the principal leader of the movement. E.Sa.Visswanthan in his book, *The Political Career of E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker-A study in the politics of Tamilnadu (1920-1949)* elaborates not only the political career of Periyar but also the general political history of the period. K.M.Subramanian's *Periyar and Self-Respect Philosophy* is a philosophical study and as such it helps to understand the ideology of Periyar, N.K.Mangalamurugesan's book, *Self-Respect Movement in Tamilnadu (1920-1940)* analyses the genesis and growth of the Self-Respect Movement and its role in the history of Tamilnadu. Christopher John Baker's *The Politics of South India, 1920-1937* gives a graphic account about the political and social changes of Tamilnadu. K. Nambi Arooran's book, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism, 1905-1914* describes the different distinctive phases in the evolution of the policies of the Periyar's Self Respect Movement's crusade against caste, intractability, dignity of women and superstitious beliefs. Eugene F.Irschick in his work, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930's*, furnishes the multi-faceted activities of Periyar. Anita Diehl's *Periyar E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker*, throws light on the thought of Periyar. *Periyar E.V.R. Chinthanaigal (Periyar Thoughts)* in three volumes by V.Anaimuthu is a work on Periyar's speeches and writing, dates from the early days of his public life to his last days.

Source

Both primary and secondary sources are consulted to make the thesis a full-fledged one. The primary sources for the study are collected from the Tamilnadu State Archives, Chennai. The original data are supplemented by

secondary data gathered from published books, journals, magazines and newspapers.

The contemporary documents which I consulted from the Tamilnadu State Archives, Chennai furnish a variety of rare information. Private papers are consulted to make the study more fruitful. The contemporary newspapers abstracted in the form of Native Newspaper Report, other News papers and periodicals also are consulted.

The Administrative Report of the Madras Presidency (ARMP), Manual of the Madras Presidency and Hand Book of Information of the Madras Presidency furnish much information about the participation of members in the Legislative Assembly enactment of the laws and reforms in a scintillating manner.

Government Orders, Official letters, Reports on the Administration of the Madras Presidency (RAMP), proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council (MLCP), proceedings of the Madras Legislative Assembly (MLAP), Native News Paper Reports (NNPR), The Madras Codes and Acts, Fortnightly Reports, Fort St. George Gazette, Collection of Dispatches on Education, Reports on Elementary Education, Reports on Public Instruction, Census Reports of Madras Presidency and the calendars of the Madras University are among the primary sources. The weeklies and newspapers referred to are *Justice*, *Kudi Arasu*, *The Hindu*, *Madras Mail*, *Dravidian* and *Swadesamitran*. Brahmin newspapers like *Swadesamitran* are in general critical on the activities of the Periyar Movement. So also is *New India*. On the other hand, papers like *Justice* and *Dravidian* justify and explain the

policy of the movement. *Kudi Arasu*, which championed the cause of women, provides a lot of information on the condition of women and the religious inequalities which existed in those days. Most of the newspaper reports are valuable and they were written to advocate claim or the other. As they are intended to serve the purpose of propaganda, due margin is to be given for exaggerated accounts.

The data on the social and political conditions prevailing in the Madras Presidency during the British rule have been drawn mainly from the Fortnightly Reports and the weekly Reports of the government of Madras and to some extent from the leading dailies of the time. The Madras Legislative Council's Proceedings and Madras Legislative Assembly Proceedings (MLCP) supply information on various issues like higher education, communal representation in public services, the Hindu Religious Endowments, enfranchisements of women, traffic on women and life of the people of Tamilnadu. The discussions on these issues in the Legislative Council bring out the policy of political parties on these issues.

The orders of the Government in the Departments of Home, Education, Public, Labour and Law give a detailed picture of the needs and demands of the people. These orders issued from 1920 to 1973 provide considerable information, about the administration.

The Census Reports of the period shed light on the position of the non-Brahmins. The percentage they formed in the total population, and the percentage of public offices they held, together with occupational details are found in Census Books, Administrative Reports of the Madras Presidency

(RAMP) from 1920 to 1965, that are preserved in the Connemara Library, Chennai, give a clear idea on education and employment of the Presidency.

Primary data have been collected from Periyar E.V.Ramasami Library, Chennai. Newspapers and journals have been largely consulted. Periyar's Movements newspapers and journals like *Kudi Arasu*, *Revolt*, *Pagutharivu*, *Unmai* and *the Modern Rationalist*, furnish innumerable data for this study.

The original documents collected through the process of heuristicism were subjected to a rigorous scrutiny. Before the synthetic operation the sources underwent the process of internal and external criticism. After a thorough checking of the veracity and originality of the primary data, it was further supplemented by secondary sources which were published in the later periods.

The English newspapers and periodicals like the *Times*, *The Hindu*, *New India*, *Swadesimithran*, *Desabhaktan*, *the Indian Express*, *Andhra Patrika*, and *Justice* furnish valuable information about the response and reactions of the people, government and other political parties whenever the Periyar Movement held a struggle or propaganda activities.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for the study is descriptive and analytical. It critically examines the Periyar Movement for the attainment of social equality, and finally to abolish the caste system based on rationalistic ideals among the people of Tamilnadu.

Organisation of Thesis

The thesis has been divided into seven chapters besides an introduction and conclusion. The introductory part contains a brief description of the Madras Presidency, circumstances leading to the rise of the Periyar Movement and an account of the earlier noteworthy studies on the movement and the sources of information.

The first chapter, **Evolution of Periyar Movement** provides a detailed description of the factors that led to the formation of Periyar Movement. The chapter also explains vividly how the Periyar Movement triggered the social mobility.

The second chapter, **Periyar Movement and Justice Party** deals with the relationship between the Periyar Movement and Justice Party. The Justice Party played a crucial role in the history Tamilnadu during the years between 1920 and 1938. It was a fruitful period in the constitutional development of the Madras Presidency. The rationalistic approach of the party was responsible for the eradication of caste inequalities, untouchability and superstitious beliefs.

The third chapter, **Periyar's Rationalism on the Tamils** deals with Periyar's rationalism on the Tamils. The meetings and conferences in the towns and villages of Tamilnadu for the spread of his rationalistic thought, his philosophy are critically analysed in this chapter.

Periyar Movement and the Tamil Society forms the fourth chapter. The role played by the movement for social change in the caste ridden society of Tamilnadu, the enforcement of communal representation in

education, employment administration and politics to remove the evil of the caste system in society, his activities for the removal of caste system are the major contents of this chapter.

The fifth chapter, **Periyar and Political Awakening** deals with the organisation launched to control the retail price and push up of the sale of *khadi*. The chapter further explains the activities of Periyar against the consumption of liquor. The political awakening in Tamilnadu as a whole has been discussed and analysed.

The sixth chapter **Impact on Education and Employment**, sheds light upon the policies of Periyar regarding compulsory education, education of the children of fisher folk, elementary education and various positive steps to improve the educational institutions of the depressed communities and for their employment opportunities in the government.

Periyar and Tamil, a critical estimate on the role of Periyar for the growth and development of Tamil language forms the seventh chapter. His concepts of Tamil, suggestions for the establishment of a Tamil University for Tamil Studies are discussed in detail in this chapter.

The observations and findings related to the Periyar Movement that helped in accelerating the enviable progress of the people of Tamilnadu are found in the conclusion.