CONCLUSION

The eruption of agitations is natural in every society where there are social disabilities, economic exploitation and absence of political freedom. Agitations are launched by a group or a political party, or, sometimes by an individual or the unorganised masses, either to condemn the existing system and project a new social order, or to excite the public and pressurise the authorities in order to win a cause. In any case agitation implies an appeal for justice and a defiance of authority. **Gandhian Social Movements** were one of the important socio-political agitations in the history of Tamil Nadu. It was a part of the escalating campaigns of mass civil disobedience, which marked a major watershed in the socio-political life of Tamil Nadu.

The first half of the 19th century witnessed remarkable socio-political changes in Tamil Nadu. The temples and temple authorities played a significant role in the socio-religious life of the people. The hierarchical caste system was the contrivance of the Brahminical mind, which divided the
society into two larger sections, the high and the low-caste, or the pure and the polluting caste. The Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaisyas and the Sudras formed a pyramidal hierarchy with the Brahmins at the apex and the Sudras at the base. All others outside the pale of this system were considered as impure low-castes. It was considered that the touch of a few or even the sight of others polluted the high castes.

The socio-economic setting of Tamil Nadu in the 19th and 20th centuries was one of extreme contrasts existing side by side – power and bondage, purity and pollution, overlordship and subservience, landedness and landlessness, prosperity and poverty, knowledge and ignorance, the power of women and the degradation of women, immunities and slavery. The Tamil society was rather a complex one. As there were a number of castes and communities, communal harmony was a thing to be desired. Society was dominated by the Brahmins and the caste-Hindus who enjoyed privileges and prestige. The non-caste Hindus were always treated as slaves. A number of basic rights were far away from their reach. Exploitation by the elite group became the order of the day. The division in the society led to confrontations among the different sects of the two groups –
the Valankai (Right hand) and Idankai (Left hand). The Dharmasastras put heavy inhibitions on the non-caste Hindus. The most important being that they were not allowed to worship inside the temples. Physical cleanliness, intellectual appetite and economic status prevented these people from entering the temples.

The advent of the Christian Missionaries and their educational institutions exposed the mythological concepts that governed the caste restrictions. The spread of English education and the formation of caste associations inspired the non-caste Hindus to bargain for their legitimate status within the fold of Hinduism. Some of the non-caste Hindu communities like the Nadars of Sivakasi amassed with wealth through their business and industry. Their sound financial position enabled them to rise equal to the high-caste people. This search for new identity led the Nadars to two courses of action. Some of them abandoned the Hindu fold, converted themselves to Christianity and emerged as leaders of the Christian Community. At the same time, the rest of the Nadars decided to remain within the Hindu fold and wrest for themselves a status of respectability.
Towards this end, they adopted different methods. They submitted documents in support of their claims. They adopted the powers and privileges enjoyed by the Caste-Hindus like the processions in palanquin, wearing of sacred thread and claimed a Kshatriya descent. Some of them became vegetarians. After the adoption of the symbolic paraphernalia exercised by the Caste-Hindus, they claimed the right of temple-entry which was denied to them. They wanted to secure freedom of worship and thereby attain reform and progress in socio-political and religious life. First they tried to secure the entrance through legal machinery. They submitted petitions and registered cases for securing the right to worship in the Caste-Hindu temples.

Though the immediate results were disappointing to the Nadars, but their attempts avoked a new interest in social reform and administrative reorganisation. The Nadars gained a new sense of unity and self-confidence. They established their own temples in total disregard to the traditional system and confined themselves within the precincts of their respective temples for a short period. It brought a period of lull in the Social Reform Movements in Tamil Nadu.
The advent of Gandhiji into the National Movement was a great blessing to the marginalised people. In 1920, the Indian National Congress at Nagpur, adopted a distinct and unequivocal political resolution for the admission of the non-caste Hindus into the Hindu temples. By the Bardoli Resolutions of 1922, Gandhiji brought out a new colour of social content to the Congress programme by advocating the idea of removal of untouchability. At the Kakkinada congress session, a resolution was passed due to the initiative of T.K.Madhavan, a prominent nationalist from Travancore, that proper steps should be taken for the eradication of untouchability in the country. When the Indian National Congress included the “Right of Temple Entry” in its agenda, the Colonial Government started its traditional strategy of Divide and Rule in India. After the discussions in the three Round Table Conferences held at London, Ramsay Mcdonald, the then British Prime Minister announced his famous ‘Communal Award’ by which the Harijans in India were given separate electorates. Gandhiji condemned it in letter and spirit and observed that it was a planned conspiracy to separate the Harijans from the main stream of Hinduism and started Fast Unto death agitation. In order to save the life of Gandhiji, the
leaders of the caste Hindus under Pandit Madan Mohan Malavya conducted wide range of discussions with the Depressed Class leaders like B.R. Ambedkar. As a result, B.R. Ambedkar agreed to give up his demand for Separate Electorate and signed the Poona Pact on 24th September 1932 with the leaders of the Caste-Hindus and this enabled Gandhiji to break his fast. Immediately after the Poona Pact, the caste-Hindus convened an All India Conference consisted of both caste-Hindus and Depressed classes at Bombay on 25th September and that led to the inauguration of the All India Anti-Untouchability League. With the blessings of Gandhiji subsequently the League was named as Harijan Sevak Sangh.

After the formation of the Harijan Sevak Sangh at the national level with Seth Ghanshyandas Birla and Amritlal V. Thakkar as its President and General Secretary respectively, its branches were opened all over the country within a short span of time. The Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh under the leadership of Dr. T.S.S. Rajan was also immediately formed with its headquarters at Tiruchirapalli. T.S.S. Rajan, Physician-cum-Social Worker, completely devoted his energy in organising Padayatras, Bhajans Samabandi Bhojanam (inter-communal dinings) and Common Sports for the removal of untouchability from the minds of
caste-Hindus. He also arranged a number of public meetings and conferences both in rural and urban areas for appealing the people to give up the practice of untouchability. The Temple-Entry of the non-caste Hindus was given top priority in the agenda of Harijan Sevak Sangh. Rajendra Prasad, Devadoss Gandhi, Rameshwari Nehru and other national leaders toured the state and appealed the people to admit the non-caste Hindus into the temples.

The ascendancy of A.Vaidyanatha Iyer of Madurai as the President of the Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh further stimulated the temple-entry agitation. Harijan Sevak Sangh leaders did not consider that the temple-entry of non-caste Hindus alone could solve the problems of untouchability in the caste-ridden society. So from the very beginning, adequate importance was given to provide them education, employment opportunities, knowledge in the fields of religion, sanitation, moral education to give up consumption of alcoholic drinks and carrion eating. As far as the education of the non-caste Hindus was concerned, Congress leaders like T.S.Avinashilingam Chettiar of Coimbatore, started their own educational institutions for educating the Harijan boys and girls.
The Sangh, 'an organisation of Penitent Sinners' as Gandhiji called it, gave scholarships to Harijan children, set up hostels, and industrial schools, dug wells and provided clean water. It maintained a cadre of itinerant medical and para-medical staff, organised co-operative societies and pressurised the local bodies to provide the Harijans with basic welfare services.

Gandhiji mobilised the popular will in favour of the abolition of untouchability, organised and conducted an All India Harijan Tour. A.V.Thakkar Baba, the General Secretary of the All India Harijan Sevak Sangh prepared the plan for the Harijan Tour. Gandhiji started his Harijan Tour in Tamil Nadu on 23rd January 1934, collected funds for the cause of Harijan upliftment, welfare, the removal of untouchability and Harijan temple-entry. Gandhiji was accompanied by A.V.Thakkar Baba, Dr.T.S.S. Rajan and C. Rajaji. Gandhiji toured in the Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu, Kongunadu, Cumbum Valley, West Cauvery Region, East Cauvery Region and finally in the Arcot region. Gandhiji’s Harijan Tour in Tamil Nadu had recorded a number of remarkable significances. He travelled about two thousand miles in Tamil Nadu.
During the Harijan Tour, Gandhiji met thousands of people and addressed in a number of public meetings, Municipal Council meetings, students meetings, labour meetings and women's meetings. He never failed to visit the Harijan Cheries whenever he got time. Throughout the state, in almost all the meetings, a number of addresses, purses, jewels, gifts and other precious materials, paddy and cardamom were presented to Gandhiji. He auctioned all the materials and converted them into money. The only subject of his speeches in all the meetings was the upliftment of Harijans, eradication of untouchability and temple-entry to the Harijans. The results of Gandhiji’s Harijan Tour in Tamil Nadu were remarkable and historic. A number of rich and educated people irrespective of caste, creed, colour, language and religion were attracted by the appeal of Gandhiji for Harijan services. Leaders like Rajaji, T.S.S.Rajan, A.Vaidyanatha Iyer, N.M.R.Subbaraman, T.S.Avinashilingam Chettiar, G.Ramachandran, L.N.Gopalasamy, V. Bashyam Iyengar and Krishnaswami Iyenger who had totally dedicated their career for the cause of the Harijans. Gandhiji’s Harijan Tour helped to liquidate the rigidity of the caste system and to expedite the works for the over all welfare of the Harijans in Tamil Nadu.
As a sequel to Gandhiji’s Harijan Tour, the Temple Entry Movement gained momentum in Tamil Nadu. Blessed and solemnised by Gandhiji, it was organised and sphere-headed by the caste-Hindus who once denied permission to the non-caste Hindus for their entry into the temples. Since the Indian National Congress adopted removal of untouchability as one of its constructive programmes, prelude attempts were made in the Princely State of Travancore where untouchability had prevailed over the centuries in the most irrational and oppressive manner. There was a custom of denying to the non-caste Hindus, the right of passage through the approach roads leading to temples. T.K.Madhavan, who hailed from the Ezhava Community took upon himself the task of fighting untouchability by organising a systematic campaign for getting these roads opened to the non-caste Hindus. Vaikkam Satyagraha was an important milestone in the movement for eradication of untouchability. Not only had the non-caste Hindus become increasingly conscious of their rights, but the caste Hindus themselves had become convinced of the need for bringing about a radical change in the Hindu Society by eradicating the evils of Untouchability. Gandhiji himself visited
Vaikkam in 1925 and after discussions with Pitt, the Commissioner of Police and other state officials finalised the terms of a compromise for the early withdrawal of the struggle. The decision of the Government of Travancore to throw open the prohibited roads on three sides of the Vaikkam temple, keeping the one on the eastern side closed to non-caste Hindus and non-Hindus, by no means, be interpreted as a remarkable success for the Congress. The Vaikkam Satyagraha was started with a higher objective, viz. gaining the right of the non-caste Hindus to move freely along the prohibited roads of Vaikkam. Even the limited objective of securing that right in all the roads round Vaikkam temple was not achieved. As a result of the Vaikkam Satyagraha, about “eight furlongs” more were added to these free roads. Though the Satyagraha at Vaikkam was not a great success, it attracted the attention of people all over India and it helped to bring the political and social movements within the fold of Gandhian revolution.

Even in Guruvayur, due to the Hindu religious rigidity, the non-caste Hindus were not permitted to enter the temple. Disappointed and disgusted with the temple authorities, K.Kelappan Nair, a veteran Gandhian worker who took up the
cause of the non-caste Hindus, commenced the Satyagraha at **Guruvayur**. **Gandhiji** blessed the Satyagraha by sending telegrams to **Kelappan Nair**. All the pleadings and appeals had no effect on the **Zamorin**, who was the hereditary trustee of the **Guruvayur temple**. The **Zamorin** refused to budge even an inch. As per the directions of **Gandhiji**, a referendum was conducted in and around **Guruvayur**, the result of which showed that sixty five percent of the eligible voters were in favour of temple-entry. But the Madras High Court in its judgement opined that the non-caste Hindus had no right to enter the Guruvayur temple; **Guruvayur temple** was not opened to the non-caste Hindus for several years thereafter. No doubt, that the **Guruvayur Temple Entry Struggle** turned out to be a sad episode. In **Suchindrum** too, the temple and the streets where the caste-Hindus lived were not opened to the non-caste Hindus. The liberal minded reformers felt that the total exclusion of non-caste Hindus from the temple was a blot on Hinduism and its removal was indispensable. The issue was elaborately discussed in the **Sree Moolam Popular Assembly** which resolved to open the temple and the roads to the non-caste Hindus. The **Suchindrum Temple Entry Satyagraha** was
led by **Dr.M.E. Naidu** and a host of others including **E.V.Ramasamy Naickar**. The Government of Travancore, appointed a commission to enquire and report on the question of temple-entry. The commission report indicated that the caste-Hindus were in favour of temple-entry reform. Finally the thorny question of temple entry was settled by the historic **Temple Entry Proclamation** issued by **His Highness Sri Chitrai Thirunal Maharaja** the ruler of **Travancore** on **12th November 1936** and thus a great injustice was at last set right.

The prelude agitations for entering the Hindu temple roads in **Vaikkam, Guruvayur, Suchindrum** of Travancore state were not unsuccessful. It served as an instinct to the Temple Entry Movement in Tamil Nadu. The formation of **Harijan Sevak Sangh** and **Gandhiji’s Harijan Tour** intensified the Temple Entry Movement in Tamil Nadu. Due to the efforts taken by **A. Vaidyanatha Iyer, N.M.R.Subbaraman**, a **Temple Entry Conference** was organised at Madurai which was presided over by **Mrs. Rameshwari Nehru**, Vice-President of **All India Harijan Sevak Sangh**. It led to the formation of a **Temple-Entry Propaganda Committee** in Madurai under the
leadership of A.Vaidyanatha Iyer. It was decided by the committee to work towards Temple Entry in the Meenakshi Temple at Madurai. The wonderful event of temple-entry by the non-caste Hindus in Madurai at last happened on 8th July 1939. The Temple entry team was led by A. Vaidyanatha Iyer and L.N.Gopalasamy, President and Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh respectively. On this day at 8.45 a.m. a batch of non-caste Hindus numbering six – P. Kakkan, Swami Muruganandam, Muthu, V.S. Chinnah, V.R.Poovalingam and S.S.Shunmuga Nadar - made their first entry into the Meenakshi Temple.

R.S. Nayudu, the Executive Officer, A.Chidambara Mudaliar of the Meenakshi Temple Devasthanam Committee and other servants received the temple entry team. Temple Entry in the Meenakshi Temple was a remarkable reform in the Hindu religion as it brought about equality among worshippers of God. A great change had come over the land without violence and bloodshed. The whole scheme was planned and executed non-violently without any breach of peace. Following the lead given by Madurai, more temples in different
parts of Tamil Nadu - Tiruchendur, Tanjore, Trichi, Courtallam, Kumbakonam, Mayiladuthurai, Kanchipuram - were opened to the non-caste Hindus.

However, as the law in British India recognised the evil custom of untouchability, the Sanatanists in Madurai filed suits against the protagonists of temple-entry. Due to the initiatives of Rajaji, the Premier of Madras State, the Madras Temple Entry Ordinance 1 of 1939 was promulgated on 17th July 1939. The Madras Legislative Assembly took up the issue of Temple Entry Bill for discussion in the first week of August 1939. After hectic opposition from T.T. Krishnamachari, the Bill was passed in the Assembly on 4th August 1939. Also in the midst of protest from K.R. Venkatarama Iyer, the Bill was passed in the Legislative Council on 8th August 1939. Finally the Temple Entry Bill got the assent of the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow on 4th September 1939 and was published for general information as Madras Temple Entry Authorisation and Indemnity Act XXII of 1939. The Act granted the non-caste Hindus the right to enter and offer worship in the Hindu temples. Even in the legal battle too, the Sanatanists were
defeated. The legal suits filed by them in the Sub-court, District Court, High Court and even in the Federal Court at Delhi were dismissed.

The opening of temples to the non-caste Hindus in Madurai and subsequently in all over Tamil Nadu, heralded a new era in the socio-political, and cultural history of Tamil Nadu. The judgements of the legal courts categorically confirmed the legitimate right of temple entry to all Hindus, irrespective of caste, colour and creed. Thus the Gandhian Social Movements created a cultural awakening among the Tamils and also brought a new sense of Dravidian consciousness and cultural pride which led to the rise of linguistic sub-nationalism in Tamil Nadu.