CONCLUSION
CONCLUSION

Great men are seldom born. They are mostly made-self made. They distinguish themselves through a rare combination of wit, work, vision and service. They change the course of history by their ideas and actions. They live long in the minds of people for their original thoughts and exceptional activities. They may be original thinkers, philosophers, scientists, warriors, generals, poets, playwrights, critics, reformers, orators, or even rulers. Thomas Carlyle, the great theorist of 'Great Men', examines how these men bring about changes, changes for the better and some times, for the worse too.

Tamil Nadu (the then Madras Presidency upto 1958 and the Madras state upto 1967) of the twentieth century had produced one of the greatest free thinkers and activists of the rationalistic school of thought. A man of great conviction and courage, ‘Periyar’ E.V. Ramasami championed the cause of social change, which was radical and revolutionary at once. He laboured in a society that was steeped in ignorance and superstition, and that suffered under elitist domination, segregation, negligence and marginalisation of the majority. Priestly dominance, meek submission of the majority to the microscopic minority, imposition of taboos, ritual observance of the concept of purity and pollution and prevention of the dissemination of knowledge, codification of everyday life on the basis of the Manudharma, which preaches Varnashramadharma, the Ramayana, which equates the South Indians to the status of monkeys and the Mahabharata which records the best instance of polyandry, infuriated 'Periyar' and made him rise in revolt against them and usher in an age of transformation in the Tamil Society.
It was with great difficulty that 'Periyar' was able to make an awakening among the traditionally and perpetually suppressed people on an unprecedented scale. He taught his thoughts to the world as one family, but the immediate beneficiaries of these were the Tamils. He was a rationalist, a humanist, an athiest, a secularist, a feminist, social scientist and a language lover. His thoughts on freedom, education, human rights, women’s rights (feminism), secular and universal brotherhood have effected great social changes not only in Tamil Nadu and India, but also the world over (U.N.O). He carried the torch of wisdom and awakening until his last moment, a rare thing to be seen among great leaders. He tried to dispel the darkness that mystified the lives of millions in this country. He played the role of a catalyst in changing the social system, economic order, religious and cultural institutions. These have had an electric impact on the masses, who were groaning and groping in the darkness.

'Periyar', the radical thinker and revolutionary rationalist made earnest efforts to translate his ideas into action. Many of his rationalistic thoughts won great recognition success during his life time itself and have gradually gained influence throughout the world. A realist, 'Periyar' put his thoughts to test and then applied them to various situations. He was of the firm belief that social change was a pre- requisite for the progress of humanity. He believed that a good government could be formed only after making those changes meant for progress and peaceful co-existence. His pursuit of rationalistic thoughts for social progress for more than fifty years yielded good results in the Tamil soil. Like a colossus, he led his movement for change. Many of his thoughts and recommendations have been implemented by the Government of Tamil Nadu since independence either by the Congress or by the Government of Dravidian Parties. The election
manifestos of the Dravidian Parties of Tamil Nadu reflect the basic principles of 'Periyar'. In short, he laid the foundation for the transformation of the Tamil Society.

By birth, E.V.Ramasami had an inquisitive mind, which longed to know more and more about less and less. From his very young age, he was a witness to how religious men brain washed the ignorant the superstitious and the gullible. He wanted to eliminate such practices so that those who have fallen prey to these exploiters could be redeemed. Whenever he happened to witness the sufferings of the poor, his mind went out to them and he tried to give them solace and succour. Seeing the prodigality of his youth, his parents wanted him to be engaged in some business from which he could learn about real life. Clever at finding deliverance from these shackles of life, he left home and became a mendicant at Benares, where he was a witness to how the so-called spiritualists cheated others. Perturbed by the worldly pleasure seeking of sanyasis, he returned home as a changed person. Thus, he started shooting his arrows against the existing social order in order to usher a new order of peace and prosperity where all are equal and happy.

As said earlier, 'Periyar' was a man of courage, conviction and steadfastness. He never compromised any of his ideas nor did he imitate the thoughts of others and make them his own. He read them and formed his own ideas about them, but never quoted them for he himself was an original thinker. His vast reading and wide travels sharpened his ideas of rationalism, humanism, secularism, atheism, feminism and linguism. His rationalism was aimed at the awakening of the illiterate, ignorant and the superstitious. He was a witness to social changes in various countries particularly Soviet Russia. In England,
he saw the unity and integrity of the working class. He wanted to bring about such changes among the working class people in India also.

'Periyar' expressed his rationalistic thoughts freely and fearlessly. His humanism was for universal brotherhood. He expressed his concern wherever people were trodden under foot and his secularism was for freeing people from the clutches of religion, God and scriptures. Moreover, his secularism was also to free them from communal attachments. He was against compartmentalizing people on religious grounds. He thought highly of Buddhism for its reformist zeal and universal brotherhood in the Sanghas, particularly the Buddha dharma. But, when once he witnessed what was going on in the Buddhist monasteries and conferences, he was fed up with it and broke away from it. He wanted to remain in Hinduism and reform it so as to accommodate all human beings in its fold. His atheism was for breaking the castles of domination, elitism, hegemony, ritualism and pre-determinism.

His feminism was radical and it stood for the emancipation of one of the major sections of society. Liberation for women from the shackles of domestic violences and for strengthening equal partnership in family life were most necessary for social uplift. His feminist ideas were then revolutionary and unacceptable to many in the world. But, his ideas have sent a message that unless women are liberated, there is no meaning in achieving political liberation. His linguism was born out of his love for Tamil, the vehicle of communication of the commoner in Tamil Nadu. It does not mean linguistic fanaticism but safeguarding one's own language and culture from impositions from outside, and preventing adulteration of an age old language and literature by another language.
These ideas of 'Periyar' were not born overnight. They were the gradual evolution of his various experiences and experiments. Some were inspired by the reactionary stand taken by the Congress Party and the Native States. They were the cumulative effects of his fight for justice and liberation of the majority from the clutches of the minority. His fight at Vaikom (1924), the defeat of his resolution for communal reservation at the Kanchipuram Congress Conference (1925), the ill-treatment meted out to the non-Brahmin students at the Cheranmahadevi Gurukulam (1925) and his quitting the Congress made him tread a new path. He was much worried about the double standards of the Congressites and became wary of the stands taken by Gandhiji in these. In 1930-31, when B.R. Ambedkar laid emphasis on communal representation, Gandhiji differed from him. 'Periyar's' quitting the Congress emboldened him to launch a movement- the Self-Respect Movement and the Dravida Kazhagam an organization to fight against casteism.

The Self-Respect Movement that he launched (1925) and the Dravida Kazhagam which he started (1944) took his ideas to the commoner and the elites as well. 'Periyar' enlightened the masses about the need for self-respect and explained the implications of self-respect to them. He said that every civilized man is endowed with the qualities of reasoning and self-respect and that man can not live without them. When a man's self-respect was at stake, he must rise in revolt and regain his self-respect.

He launched the Dravida Kazhagam to cry a halt to North Indian domination, Brahmin hegemony and Congress double standards. He was not content with the political liberation of India. So he declared. Independence Day (August 15, 1947) and Republic Day
(January 26, 1950) as Black Days (Mourning Days). Since the North dominated the South in everything, he wanted to echo the views of the Dravidians of the South. He feared that independent India would not represent the whole of India, particularly South India. Therefore, he asked for a separate Dravida Nadu to be ruled by the Dravidians of the South as Jinnah had asked for a separate Pakistan to be ruled by the Muslims. In this sense, he opposed anything imposed from the North, particularly Hindi which was sought to be imposed, on an unwilling people. He also stood against the then Chief Minister Rajaji’s Kulakalvi Thittam ('Traditional Education Scheme'), which was introduced to strengthen the traditional hegemony of the Upper Castes. His opposition to these moves were strong that the Brahmin Chief Minister had to resign and a non-Brahmin had taken over as Chief Minister.

'Periyar' carried out his crusade against the castles of casteism, ritual dominance, scriptural cheating and dogmatic duplicity by various means of propaganda though his speeches and addresses at conferences and meetings. Expecting the rulers to take necessary measures towards the realization of his ideas, he submitted memoranda on many matters. He published his ideas in his journals like Kudi Arasu, Viduthalai, Revolt, Puratchi, Pahuttharivu, Unmai, Modern Rationalist etc. He propagated his ideas and programmes through these organs in the common man’s language. His relentless propaganda machinery included conferences, meetings and writings that evoked the sentiments of the neglected in the society. They joined hands with him in his advocacy of rationalism, humanism, secularism, atheism, feminism and linguism. These created an awakening among the masses on an unprecedented scale and assured social change in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere in India and the world.
Of all the reformers, 'Periyar' alone attacked the enslavement of women for the first time in society. He took up the cause of women as his life mission, right from the day he entered the domain of public service. Credit goes to him for introducing a new method of reformed marriage called Self-Respect Marriage in order to free men and women from the clutches of old customs, blind beliefs, superstitions and religion. It is the outcome of the philosophy of self-respect and it is an outstanding contribution of 'Periyar' to social progress and human welfare. He gave certain practical suggestions to empower women. He advocated fifty percent of reservation for women in all jobs. In fact, his views on women development through education and employment and reservation would help them attain high status and empowerment in society. His crusade against women’s suppression and harassment led them in the path of modernity. They got back their long lost rights to self-determination, law-making and family planning to create a healthy society.

'Periyar' fought for the enlightenment of the poor, the backward and the downtrodden masses. He exhorted the oppressed to assert their self-respect and live with honour and dignity. He taught morality, good conduct, and widened their intellectual horizon and cultivated humanism, compassion and charity in them. His vociferous campaigns shattered the citadels of conservatism, obscurantism and orthodoxy. The domination of one community over another by virtue of birth was called in question and disparaged publicly. He fought against the deep-rooted social maladies single handedly and saved the Tamilian from the evil spell of the puranas, sastras, casteistic domination, superstitions, ignorance and untouchability. By raising the banner of revolt against these he created the beginning of a struggle for socio-religious equality and civil liberties in
Tamil Nadu. In short, a new generation based on equality, liberty and fraternity has sprung up which is enlightened, rational and freedom loving.

He launched his iconoclastic movement in the temples to the dislike of the dominant. He broke the repositories of spiritual, moral, mental and physical corruption. His advocated atheism to promote human justice, progress and welfare. He infused a new set of values such as confidence, strength and sense of self-respect in the minds of people. To achieve his ends, 'Periyar' mostly resorted to passive means. Sometimes, he resorted to agitations, hartals, passive resistance, walk-outs, gheros, propaganda, publications of radical thoughts and revolutionary ideas. Most of his methods of fight were peaceful, but sometimes they took violent turns and resulted in road blocks, traffic jams, bloodshed and even deaths. It is claimed by some that he himself incited violent methods to press for his demands. The government too resorted to repressive measures of arrest, imprisonment without trial and imposing fines. 'Periyar' was arrested on many occasions and released immediately as the agitations took violent turns. In fact, 'Periyar' was a law-abiding citizen. However, he resorted to breaking the laws only when the government stood stubborn in its decisions. Most of his protests yielded positive results barring a few, where something went wrong.

'Periyar's' rationalistic thoughts created a new era and a new generation, of Tamilians. His appeal to reason, self-respect and justice through his excellent speeches awakened the people and consolidated them to fight for social equality and status. His rationalistic thoughts reproduced in his journals several times could establish a definite school of thought. His action programme was directed against the age-old beliefs, customs, institutions, economic orders, social disabilities and discriminations of life.
'Periyar' forged a new social order based on reason, spirit of inquiry, intellectual and critical thinking and the dignity of the individual. His thoughts are far ahead of his time and he is the best example of the well known dictum **what he thinks today the country will think tomorrow**. He consolidated two hundred years of useful work in twenty years as the greatest champion of rationalism in India. He instructed the people to think and learn new things and adapt themselves to modern ways of life. He revolutionized the whole society by spreading his humanistic, secularistic and scientific thoughts in every nook and corner of Tamil Nadu.

'Periyar' ideas and actions enable men to lead a moral and honorable life in society. His thoughts brought progress and welfare to humanity. He emphasized equality of all people. His great lesson to humanity **think with experience, self-knowledge and human dharma** was notable. His clarion call to the Tamilians - **see your countrymen and see the world; think and find out how your shortcomings could be redressed** - is inspiring. He stressed that people should develop a sense of reason and not be a prey to blind faith, ignorance and superstitions ideas. People should not be disgraced on the basis of religion, language, caste, colour and sex. He held that the unity of Hindus and Muslims, low castes and high castes will lead to the peaceful development of the country.

He stated that self confidence is the base for reform and no one should not seek honour for public work, should not be afraid of opposition, not should expect gratitude or be pleased by words of praise. His ambition of social reform was high but his wants were few and kept to the barest minimum. No saints or ascetics have reduced their comforts to such a low level as 'Periyar' did. He ate whatever was offered to him and slept at anywhere when he needed rest. None needed prior appointment to meet him and people could freely meet him at any
time on any matter. He became a role model for public administrators in the matter of economy. He was scornful of luxury in life, extravagance in expenditure and pomp and glamour in public life. According to him, 'one species of corruption generally not recognized as corruption is extravagance'. ‘Periyar’s' prophetic vision in social engineering sustained him in public life. His thoughts and his exemplary public life, serve as guiding principles for the public spirited youngmen of whatever political affiliation. Moreover, political parties learnt from 'Periyar' that public agitations and demonstrations should be held without causing offence or inconvenience to public or private properties or persons.

'Periyar' was in many ways instrumental in bringing about social changes in the orthodox Tamil society could not have achieved in any other way. His imprint could be seen in every socio-religious, political, economic, linguistic and cultural measures carried out by the successive governments. The adoption of the reservation policy in education and emloyment, opening of temples for the downtrodden, free access of the Dalits to public places, passing of a good number of reform and welfare measures owe their origin to the ideas of Periyar. The self-respect marriages and their legal recognition, economic support to their children, women's education, employment, family planning and healthy social atmosphere are the natural outcome of 'Periyar's' fight for justice, equality and welfare. His rationalistic thoughts have produced a galaxy of intellectuals, thinkers, writers, scientists, politicians, pilots, medical practitioners, lawyers, judges, professors, orators, journalists, feminists and activists from among the non-Brahmin Community. The liberation of the backward the untouchables and the emancipation of women are among the most significant of social changes that 'Periyar's' rationalistic thoughts have inspired. It can not be denied that 'Periyar' is the proud symbol of the resurrection of the Dravidian race and forward looking Tamil Nation.