INTRODUCTION
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Rationalism is an intellectual exercise by which man distinguishes himself from animals. It enables man to distinctly differentiate between what is good and what is bad, virtuous and unvirtuous, righteous and unrighteous, evil and good. It is a state by which man imbibes the ability to critically understand his world and works to free himself from things that hinder his progress. It protects man from meek submission to what is non-real or beyond his comprehension. It is that state in which man begins to learn about other men's lives and treats all with compassion, tolerance and charity. That is, man learns to treat others as his social equals. Then, he even begins to love animals. It helps man to understand what is humanism and what is barbarianism. Thus man can redeem himself from a state of barbarism and became humane.

Humanism is a state of being humane, i.e., nurturing a love for humanity. It is a thought process based on respect for the dignity and rights of man, his all-round development and the creation of favourable conditions for social life. The New Encyclopaedia Britannica defines it as a method of inquiry that regards reason as the chief source and test of knowledge. The rationalists assert that a class of truth exists which the intellect can comprehend directly. To them, knowledge arises through direct apprehension by the intellect; wisdom lies in thinking and the spearhead of thinking is rationalism. The need for rationalism is to remove ignorance; socialism is the ultimate boundary of rationalism. It has been subjected to change from

3. Ibid., Vol.25, P.649.
time to time and its obstacles are God, religion, scriptures and superstitions.\textsuperscript{5} To 'Periyar' rationalism meant 'pulling down the existing social edifice and his vision was all about ushering in a new social order'.

'Periyar' was born in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He was one of the greatest intellectual rationalists, a free thinker, a revolutionary social reformer, an incomparable humanist, an objective social scientist, a mass orator, a great journalist, a prolific writer and a great critic of social evils.\textsuperscript{6} He was popularly and affectionately called 'Thanthai Periyar' meaning the 'Noble Father' or the 'Venerable Father' or the 'Great Father' or the 'Great Sage'. He was also called Periyar E.V.R. and 'Periyar' of Erode.\textsuperscript{7} While in the Congress Party, he was called 'Naicker of Erode' or 'Erottu Naicker'\textsuperscript{8} He was the architect of the Self-Respect Movement and the founder of the Dravida Kazhagam, a non-political party in Tamil Nadu.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Madras Presidency\textsuperscript{9} was one of the most extensive of all the British territories in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{5} Anaimuthu, V., \textit{Thoughts of Periyar E.V.R.}, Trichi, 1974, P.539.
\item \textsuperscript{6} \textit{Extracts from the G.O.'s relating to the Communal Movement in the Madras Presidency}, Vol. No. 106, (1875-1945), Madras, P.403.
\item \textsuperscript{7} \textit{G.O.No. 5959, Confidential Department}, Madras, November 25, 1938, P.6.
\item \textsuperscript{8} \textit{G.O.No. 598, Home Department}, Madras, December 12, 1938, P.8.
\item \textsuperscript{9} Madras Presidency is one of the oldest of the Presidencies. It occupied with its dependencies the entire South of Indian Peninsula from Cape Comorin to the east coast of Bengal. For administrative convenience, Madras Presidency was divided into twenty five districts. In fact, its territories extended from Ganjam in the North East, South Canara in the West. Cape Comorin in the South and Bengal in the East. The seat of the Government was at Fort St. George. The area of the Presidency including the five Native States (Travancore, Cochin, Pudukottai, Banganalpalle and Sandur) was 141,705 square miles. Majority of the Tamil-speaking population lived in twelve districts of the twenty five districts, Telugu-speaking people lived in eleven districts, Kannada and Malayalam-speaking population in one district each. The Madras Presidency before 1956 was called the Dravida Nadu and it comprised of the modern Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka and Andhra States. \textit{The Administrative Report of the Madras Presidency} (1917-1918) Madras, 1918, P.2, Hunter. W.W. \textit{Imperial Gazetteer}, Vol.IX, London, 1886, P.1
\end{itemize}
India and it was officially called the Presidency of Fort St. George. In the Madras Presidency, the Dravidians\textsuperscript{10} once flourished in all fields of life. They were socially and culturally at their peak and were not subjected to blind beliefs based on God and religion. However, in course of time they fell from the high pedestal and lost their glory. They lost their dynamism and the society stagnated. This degradation was caused by the outmoded rituals, practices customs and conventions imposed from outside. They considered any rational thinking an anathema and lived with a very strong orthodox belief that even an atom will not move without the knowledge and the will of God.\textsuperscript{11}

In those days, the specter of caste had increasingly come to haunt Indian politics, caste soon had come to stay with all its attendant evils. This became the unit of social action everywhere.\textsuperscript{12} The caste system created more confusion by layering the people into various segments on the basis of their birth and occupation. It also divided the Dravidian society which had hither to had no castes and existed as one society into many groups.\textsuperscript{13}

At the dawn of the twentieth century though the Tamil society was also influenced by Varnashrama,\textsuperscript{14} it was not segmented into the fourfold divisions. On the otherhand, it was broadly classified into three main layers

\textsuperscript{10} The word Dravidian is not imagination and not taught by anybody. But the Aryans called the Dravidians as Dasyus, Arakkar and Rakshashas. They were the disgraced people called by the Aryans as monkeys. Kudiarasu, Erode, May 5, 1948, P.4.


\textsuperscript{13} Sadasivan K., Presidential Address in the South Indian History Congress, XVII Session Andhra University, Vishakapatnam, 1997.

\textsuperscript{14} Varnashramadharma was practiced in the Hindu Society. It was a source of savage exploitation, social suppression and discrimination. According to Varnashrama, there were four castes; they were the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaisyas and the Sudras,

viz. the Brahmins, Non-Brahmins and the Depressed Class people. Thus many sub-castes came into existence. This division wrought havoc on the people by dividing the Dravidian race into many watertight compartments and paralysed the growth of reason. The Tamil society was hierarchical until the 1930's. It could be seen from the fact that there were very few non-Brahmins in government services then.

The Aryans or the Brahmins in particular, considered themselves superior in the ladder of Varnashrama. They were the Iyers, Iyengars, Raos, Acharis and the Sastris. The 'Code of Manu' or 'Manudharma' laid down the rules the eternal slavery of other castes. The Brahmins received special favours and preferential treatment from the Government. They attained hegemonic rights and duties to distinguish themselves from other castes, which were steeped in ignorance and foolishness. They were the protectors of Vedas and prohists (priests) of the temples. They had for ages been the teachers of not only the Vedas but also morals. The rulers of the land met all their needs. The socio-religious and cultural institutions introduced by the Brahmins were also based on casteism. Though the Brahmins formed a minority of three percent population of the Madras Presidency, their

19. 'Code of Manu' or 'Manudharma' code of injustice to the non-Brahmins is the weapon of the highest caste-Brahmins. It enables them to call themselves the most superior to other castes and lead a happy life without doing any manual work. It has made the sons of soil (Dravidians) as slaves to them.
22. G.O.No.186, Public Department, Madras, February 28, 1922, p. 27.
domination was prominent in all aspects of life. There was no place for the Tamilians even in central government offices like the Accountant General's Office and the Customs Department. Almost all departments of Government had been monopolized by them. Even in All-India Superior Civil Service and Audit Service nearly cent percent Aryans were selected in the name of fitness and efficiency. The Census of 1911 records their clear domination and this ultimately opened the eyes of the Dravidians. The tables given below are clear evidence to this.

**PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gazetted Officers</th>
<th>Non-Gazetted Officers</th>
<th>Arts and Professions</th>
<th>Clerks and Cashiers</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Brahmins</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Balija</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Kaikolan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Katton</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Maravars</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>796</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Deputy Collectors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent of Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Appointments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Brahmins</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Non-Brahmins</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Muslims</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Indian Christians</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sub - Judges

<table>
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<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent of Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Appointments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Brahmins</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>82.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Non-Brahmins</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Muslims</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Indian Christians</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

District Munsifs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent of Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Appointments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmins</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>72.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Brahmins</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Christians</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second major division in the South Indian society was the non-Brahmins. They are the natives of South India. The Dravidians referred to as Tamilians were called the non-Brahmins.\(^{29}\) They were a group mostly of peasants who ranked below the Brahmins in social status but above the Untouchables.\(^{30}\) Among the non-Brahmins, there were three major groups: Caste Hindus, (Mudaliyars, Naidus, Chettiyars, Pillaimars, Maravars and Nairs) the Muslims and the Christians. The Caste-Hindus were educated, influential and wealthy. The Christians were at the mercy of the Caste-Hindus and were subjected to the liabilities of caste and religion.

\(^{29}\) G.O.No.1814, Public Department, Madras, 24 June 1953, P.69.  
Next to the non-Brahmins, there were the Depressed Class people. Among them the prominent were 'Sudras'. They were within the four castes recognised by the Hindu scriptures. They were the fourth class people and they were Vellalas, Naickers, Padaichis, Nadars, Weavers, Carpenters, Barbers, Potters, Fishermen, Kallar, Devangar and Sengunthar.

The privileges, rights and concessions to the first three communities were denied to them. The main cause for their disgrace was their belief in old sayings, blind beliefs, sastras, customs, meaningless rites, religion and scriptures. These inhibited their thinking and retained them as Sudras for many centuries. The Vedas themselves prohibited education to the Sudras and their economic development.

The Depressed Class consisted of the Untouchables, who formed the bulk of the population. Their pitiable plight was a blot on the fair pages of Tamil society. They were the fifth caste people and outcastes and were separated from the rest of the society namely the Brahmins and non-Brahmins. They were socially oppressed and economically exploited. The most important among them were the Paraiyars, Pulaiyas and Ezhavas. They were also called Avarnas (out of the Varna), 'Panchamas' (the fifth caste) and 'Chandalas' (the carrion eaters) and they were reduced to wretched condition of servitude. They were treated as untouchables not only by the Brahmins

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31. Sudras means the sons of concubines according to 'Periyar'. Sudra is the creation of the high castes, the name given by the non-Aryans. The Vedas and sastras mentioned about this.


33. Speech of Periyar E.V.R. at Chakravarapettai in Coimbatore, Viduthalai, Erode, August 11, 1947, P.2

34. G.O.No. 291, Public Department, Madras, July 1, 1934, P.28.


but also by the other castes and not allowed to mingle with the other castes.
They were not permitted to enter the places of public utilities, to wear
chappals, carry umbrellas and not to travel freely. Even they were not allowed
to wear dress below the knees, use bronze and copper vessels, or wear gold
jewels and not to enter temple premises. They had to settle down in thatched
houses built with mud only in the outskirts, i.e., at the pale of the cities.

As regards women in the Tamil society, they were steeped
in illiteracy, ignorance, superstition, male domination, marginalization
and exploitation. They suffered under the weight of the patriarchal
family structure and were denied their birth rights. They were condemned as
barren lands to be ploughed and fertilized by men for production and became
the object of sensual and sexual pleasures. They became the 'abalais',
submissive and reluctant which in turn prevented them from social and
political activities. They faced inherent social evils like infanticide, child
marriage, widowhood, sati and purdah. In short, they were subjected to a
number of inhibitions and restrictions in their day to day life. The orthodox
Hindus justified such a treatment to women quoting the tenets embodied in
the 'Code of Manu'

Thus, when the twenty three million people had categorized themselves
into various castes and sub-castes with all their bewildering cleavages,
Erode Venkata Ramasami Naicker was born amidst wealth and luxury in an
atmosphere of strict orthodoxy and morbid superstitions. Gradually, he rose
to prominence by proclaiming his mission for the reclamation of the backward

40. Inaugural Address, Sadasivan K., on Socio-Political Involvement of Women Since 1985.
ICHR Seminar, N.M.C. College, Marthandam on 13 and 14 July 2001.
41. Personal Interview with Veeramani.K., President of Dravida Kazhagam, Chennai,
May 16, 2002.
and depressed classes. He rose in revolt against the rotten social system wrapped up in superstition and dubious modes of living. He wanted to make the Dravidian society acquire awareness and dignity like the other societies elsewhere in the world. Under his leadership, they acquired importance and the Aryans were accused of dominating the society through caste rules and ritual practices. He began to spread his rationalistic ideas in when ignorance, superstition and Varnashrama had reached their zenith in the Tamil society.

The thesis entitled The Rationalistic Thoughts of Periyar E.V.R. and Social Changes in Tamil Nadu (1924-2008) deals with the impact of his rationalism on the Tamil society. This topic been chosen with a view to examining and evaluating the nature of the implications of his rationalistic thoughts whether it was positive or negative. Very recently, many research works about 'Periyar' have come out they are based on his multi-faceted activities. But none of these works has made any attempt to make a special study about the impact of his rationalistic thoughts on society both positive and negative. Therefore, a study in this direction remains desideratum and it provides a fertile area for further study. Hence, the choice of this topic, here an attempt has been made to explore, examine and evaluate the impact of 'Periyar's rationalistic thoughts on the Tamil Society. Tamil Society here means all segments including the hegemonic Brahmins, the inter-mediary non-Brahmins and the lower castes and communities.

Scope

'Periyar' spared no effort in fighting the forces of degradation. His observations, analysis and attempt at eradication of the age-old evils

were from a humanistic, secularistic and rationalistic point of view. His philosophy was dispassionate, deliberate, constructive and distinctive. He targeted high caste domination and the attendant hegemonic religious ritualism and the elitist suppression of the poor, backward subservient classes. This exploitation by the upper caste people was inhuman. Hence, the thrust of his fight was the restorationation of equal social status, rights and duties. 'Periyar's' life is a saga of inspiration for many. He could rouse a once dominant and cultural society from its stupor of ignorance and subservience. Countless eulogies have been written about him, but a vast body of sources are yet to be explored. Finding it very rewarding, the scholar has chosen this topic.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to bring out the truth about 'Periyar' E.V.R.'s rationalism, his method of reasoning and his proposition about social redemption. It is to be analysed whether his arguments against the outmoded practices were all constructive or carried with them the seeds of destruction or whether they had led to the regeneration and revival of a decadent society that was steeped in ignorance and servility. If his rationalistic outbursts brought about changes, what kind of changes they were; whether they were transparent or transient or durable? What was the nature and the quantum of social change that materialised? Is it true to say that his thoughts in fact created drastic social changes and paved the way for equality of all sections of the Tamil society.

**Area of study**

The area of this study is so vast covering the whole of India and even outside. But it is not possible for a micro study like this. Therefore, it is limited to cover the erstwhile Madras Presidency. In the beginning of the
1930’s, the Madras Presidency included Ganjam, Southern parts of Andhra, Karnataka except the Mysore, the Travancore, Cochin, Pudukottai States and Malabar. 'Periyar' E.V.R. tried to execute his plans for the whole country but knowing its difficulty, he had selected Tamil Nadu as his base and commenced his work. Though he had the knowledge in Telugu, he was well-versed in Tamil and made all his speeches and writings only in Tamil. His address in the vernacular language caught the easy imagination of the masses people. As he was the native of Erode, special focus was given to modern Tamil Nadu. However, the impact of 'Periyar's rationalistic thoughts could not be conditioned and limited. Infact, they have universal appeal and universal in practice. This could be discerned from a study of the recent declarations of the UNO through its various bodies.

**Period of Study**

The period covered in this study is from his birth to the present day but special attention has been given to the period from 1924 to 2008. The significance of both these dates is that in 1924, the Vaikom Satyagraha took place to obliterate the evil of untouchability in India for the first time. The year 2008 was notable for the implementation of the 27% reservation to the Backward Class in the Higher Educational Institutions of India.

**Hypothesis**

The hypothesis of this study is to test the impact of 'Periyar's rationalistic thoughts on various social issues and assess their sustainability. This enables one to understand whether his rationalistic thoughts have infact brought about social changes in Tamil Nadu. If so, whether such changes are transparent or transcient or durable.
Study of Previous Literature

Regarding the study of the previous literature, it should be stated that many scholars have made extensive and intensive studies about 'Periyar's' thoughts and deeds. 'Periyar' himself wrote a number of articles in his own journals like Kudi Arasu, Revolt, Puratchi, Pahuttharivu, Viduthalai, Unmai and the Modern Rationalist. His speeches also were published in all these. All these reveal that he was a unique rationalist free thinker and that he had analysed and examined the root cause of the maladies in the Tamil society. His books like Thatthuva Vilakkam, Village Reform, Untouchability, Social Reform or Revolution and Declaration of War on Brahminism throw light on his attitude to casteism and untouchability. In addition to these, a number of works have been written by his lieutenant Veeramani. The most important among them are Collected Works of 'Periyar' E.V.R, 'Periyar' Kalanjiyam in fifteen volumes, Periyariyal in five volumes and Self-Respect Marriage. These are very useful for the critical analysis of different aspects of 'Periyar's rationalism.

Anita Diehl's work Periyar E.V. Ramasami - A Study of the Influence of a Personality in Contemporary South India deals with the life history of 'Periyar' and the influence of his rationalism. S. Saraswati's Minorities in Madras State, another one Towards Self-Respect Movement and Periyar E.V.R. on A New World trace the social condition and the non-Brahmin Movement in Madras State and the rise and the growth of Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu. Nambi Arooran's book Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism (1905-1944) examines how the rise and growth of the non-Brahmin Movement has helped usher in
Tamil renaissance and in its wake Tamil nationalism to dethrone Sanskrit as the sole medium of culture and bring down Aryan or Brahmin domination. Christober John Baker's *The Politics of South India* gives extensive details about the domination of Brahmins in the socio-political scenario of Tamil Nadu. *Varalaru Kanda Vaikom Veerar* written by S. Mangaiyarkkarasi provides details about the Vaikom Satyagraha. But it is to be remembered that most of the works dealing with the Vaikom agitation and written by the Keralites simply neglected to give due recognition to 'Periyar'. Vanangamudi's *'Periyar', the Revolutionary Orator* presents the unique features of 'Periyar's' speeches, similies, parables and gives a comparitive study with other rationalists. Eugene F. Irschick's *Political and Social Conflict in South India* deals with the non-Brahmin Movement and the Justice Party in South India from 1916-1929. Another book, namely *Tamil Revivalism in 1930's* narrates the emergence of different castes and a little bit of Periyar E.V.R.'s rationalism.

V.S. Naipaul's *India A Million Mutinies Now* throws some information about 'Periyar' Robert L. Hardgrave's *The Dravidian Movement and the Nadars of Tamil Nadu* provides valuable information about the Tamil society and its progressive development. N.K. Mangalam Murugesan's work, *Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu* directly deals with the history of the Self-Respect Movement in Tamilnadu. His study regarding the emergence of 'Periyar' as the founder of the Self-Respect Movement, is just a basic study. He has inadequately focussed attention on events, circumstances and ideological cleavages that have occurred among the various parties that resulted in 'Periyar's' severance with the socialists in early 1930's. Saami Chidambaranar's *Tamizhar Thalaivar 'Periyar' E.V.R.* is the first attempt made by any author to make a succinct
biographical survey of 'Periyar' from his early boyhood. **Periyar E.V.R. the Father of Tamil Race** written by M.D. Gopala Krishnan is very useful as it provides information about the agitations and the important events in his life. All these works in fact, shed more light on the politico-social conditions of Tamil Nadu. None of these above mentioned works has any direct reference to his religious revolt and questions about God. Beyond doubt, all these works help us to understand the social structure, currents and trends then prevailing in the Tamil Country. But the rationalism of 'Periyar' is a subject of his wisdom and imagination.

Ea. Sa. Viswanathan's book **The Political Career of E.V. Ramasami Naicker**, begins with 'Periyar' as a Congressite in 1919-1920 and ends with the formation of Dravida Munnetta Kazhagam (D.M.K) in 1949. The thirty years political career of 'Periyar' has been portrayed. **Thoughts of 'Periyar' E.V.R.** in three volumes edited by V. Anaimuthu throws light on 'Periyar's' own speeches in public meetings, conferences, writings in his own journals, his rational views about God, religion sastras, puranas, soul, superstitions and also his agitations. From the above mentioned literature, any scholar could gather some information about 'Periyar's' life history, agitations and rationalism. But an impartial and dispassionate study of all these works reveals the fact that they have overlooked the impact of 'Periyar' E.V.R.'s rationalistic thoughts and the resultant social changes in Tamil society, both positive and negative.

**Limitations**

It is to be understood that 'Periyar's rationalistic thoughts are unique in many ways, though he had been influenced by the thoughts of great philosophers from Socrates down to Ingersoll. A study about his thoughts could not be divorced from the religious beliefs, sastras, puranas
and dogmas of the day. His criticism was sometimes direct, affecting the parties concerned but there was nothing personal about them. His spearheading of a movement for toppling the hegemony of some castes in Tamil Nadu was never targeted against that community or caste as a whole. 'Periyar' had very close friends among the Brahmins like Rajaji, whom he respected but severely attacked for his orthodoxy. 'Periyar's rationalistic outbursts are to be seen from this point of view that he wanted change, change for the better. In such a study, it is unavoidable for a scholar to state the truth as it is. In stating so, the scholar would be beyond any personal prejudice against anybody, any organisation, any ideology or any aspiration. Revelation of truth is the duty of any researcher.

Another limitation of this study is that instead of writing the whole name of Erode Venkata Ramasami throughout this study, the scholar has used only the conferred title 'Periyar' wherever necessary. If the name 'Periyar' is mentioned, it means his whole name. Yet another important limitation is that almost all the available sources—both the primary as well as secondary—are in Tamil. Of course, it is difficult to translate to find out the truth and establish objectivity. However, his rationalistic thoughts and the social changes brought into the society will remain incomplete until his rationalistic ideas are given wide publicity. Moreover, if the Self-Respect Movement should reach every nook and corner, then a new culture based on human values and new society free from irrationalism, ignorance, injustice and inequality would emerge.

Sources

Sources are the fountainheads of history. They have in them the needed evidence and information. This study has been based on both primary and secondary sources. The Government Orders, Native Newspaper
Reports, Vernacular Newspaper Reports, Fortnightly Reports lodged in Tamil Nadu State Archives, Chennai and Kerala State Archives Nandanam provide enough information about Periyar E.V.R.'s rationalistic thoughts, his agitations and imprisonments. Further, personal interviews with eminent personalities like K. Veeramani, President of Dravida Kazhagam, Justice Venugopal and Justice A.K. Rajan, retired Judges of High Court, Chennai, Judge Paranjoti, Chennai, Dr. B.S. Chandra Babu, Madurai Kamaraj University and others enabled the researcher, to learn about the impact of 'Periyar's' rationalistic thoughts and they are of immense value in this study.

Besides these, the speeches of 'Periyar' and his thought provoking articles published in his own journals such as Kudi Arasu, (1925-1949), (The Rationalist Tamil Weekly), Revolt 1928-1933 (The Rationalist English Weekly) Puratchi 1933-1934 (The Rationalist Tamil Weekly), Pahuttharivu 1934-1939 (The Rationalist Tamil Weekly and later Monthly) all published from Erode, Viduthalai since 1935 (The Rationalist Tamil Daily) published from Erode in the beginning and later from Madras, Justicite, (1944-1945) (The Rationalist English Weekly) published from Erode, Unmai since 1970 (The Rationalist Tamil Fortnightly) published from Trichi and later Madras, The Modern Rationalist since 1971 (The Rationalist English Monthly) published from Madras and other sources lodged in 'Periyar' Archives, Chennai, and 'Periyar' Maligai, Trichi provide enough information about 'Periyar's' rationalistic thoughts.

In addition to these, numerous books written by different scholars about Periyar are available in various places such as Madurai Kamaraj University Library, Madurai, Madras University Library, Chennai, Kerala University Library Kariavattam Campus, Trivandrum, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Library Tirunelveli, Rationalist Library, Nagercoil
and Nesamony Memorial Christian College Library, Marthandam. They deal with the different aspects of 'Periyar's rationalism. Besides these, the Manuals, Gazetteers, Encyclopaedia Britannicas and Encyclopaedia Americanas are of great use as reference works. Other important secondary sources like V. Anaimuthu’s Thoughts of Periyar E.V.R. in three volumes, and K. Veeramani’s Collected Works of Periyar E.V.R, Periyar Kalanjiam in fifteen volumes and Periyariyal in five volumes, published from Chennai, provide a vivid picture of the life, thoughts and achievements of Periyar. Further, Varalaru Kanda Vaikom Veerar written by S. Mangaiyarkkarasi, Thanthai Periyar written by S. Karunandam, S. Saraswati’s Minorities in Madras Presidency, Eugene F. Ircshick’s Politics and Social Conflict in South India, another one Tamil Revivalism in 1930’s, V.S. Naipaul’s India A Million Mutinies Now, Robert Hardgrave’s, The Dravidian Movement and The Nadars of Tamil Nadu, N.K. Mangala Murugesan’s The Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu, K. Nambi Arooran’s Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism (1905-1944), Sami Chidambaranar’s Tamilar Talaivar - Periyar E.V.R, B.S. Chandra Babu’s Social Protest in Tamil Nadu, P. Venugopal’s Five Pronged Battle of Periyar, and M.D. Gopalakrishnan’s Periyar the Father of Tamil Race, A. Venu’s Periyar a History, S. Arivukkarasu’s Periyar are also very useful in examining and analysing the thoughts and deeds of Periyar.

On a closer examination, it is learnt that none of these works has made a specific study to trace the roots of his rationalistic thoughts and its impact on the history of Tamil Nadu both negative and positive. Therefore, this study attempts to evaluate the impact of his rationalistic thoughts and the social changes engineered thereby in Tamil Society - both positive and negative, using the primary and secondary sources.

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Approach of the Study

The approach of this study is mostly analytical and critical. While tracing his life history, the descriptive method is adopted. To make the study more scientific, data from the Government Orders, Fortnightly Reports, Census Reports and Administrative Reports are used.

Chapterisation

This thesis entitled The Rationalistic Thoughts of 'Periyar' E.V.R. and Social Changes in Tamil Nadu (1924-2008) has five chapters excluding the introduction and conclusion. The Introduction defines rationalism, offers introductory remarks about 'Periyar' and the condition of the Tamil society that prevailed at the beginning of the twentieth century. It provides details of source materials both primary and secondary consulted for this study. It also highlights the main theme of the study, its scope and purpose, area and period of study, reviews of previous literature, hypothesis, limitations, and chapterisation.

The first chapter is Brief Life History of 'Periyar' E.V.R. In this, an attempt has been made to delineate some very important events that took place in his life in a chronological order. It traces his birth (1879), early life, character, involvement in public service, his role in the freedom struggle (1919-1925), Vaikom Satyagraha, Gurukulam Episode (1925), his Quitting the Congress (1925), launching of the Self-Respect Movement (1925), first Anti-Hindi Agitation (1937-1938), formation of the Dravida Kazhagam (1944), his attitude towards India’s Independence, Republic and Constitution, his caste eradication measures, formation of his atheist philosophy (1967), UNESCO’s Honour (1970) and his demise in 1973.
The second chapter Shaping of the Rationalistic Thoughts of Periyar E.V.R. reveals the influence of his own personal experiences, the impact of Buddhism, Jainism and Siddha Philosophies and the influence of indigenous social reformers, Tamil literature and the western rationalists in moulding his rationalism. His personal experiences such as the caste fanaticism, he witnessed in sharing drinking water, visit to Benares, experiences in the Brahmin houses and in the various Congress Conferences, especially his disgrace in the Kanchipuram Congress Conference (1925) and his foreign visits shaped and enlightened his rationalism. In addition to these, the influence of the rationalistic ideas of indigenous social reformers such as Vallalar of Vadalur, Vaikunta Swami of Swamithoppu in Kanyakumari, Narayana Guru of Travancore, Jyoti Rao Phooley and Dr. Ambedkar of Maharashtra is noteworthy. It can not be denied that they had profound influence on 'Periyar's' rationalism. The rationalistic principles of Western rationalists like Socrates of Athens, Rene Descartes, Voltaire and Rousseau of France, Immanuel Kant, Scopenhauer of Holland, Karl Marx and Nietzsche of Germany, Lenin of Russia, Thomas Paine, Charles Bradlah, Bernard Shah and William Bertrand Russell of England and Ingersoll of America also left a deep imprint on 'Periyar's' rationalistic thoughts. Besides these, his travel and tours to Malaysia, African and European Countries also shaped his rationalism. His thoughts had its echoes in indigenous and western philosophies. Yet his rationalism is unique in that he used it to fight an evil of oppressive caste system. However, it can not be denied that he went into the roots of the problems with Socratic insight.

The Rationalistic Outpourings of Periyar E.V.R.'s Thoughts forms the third chapter. It deals with the unique characteristics of his rationalistic thoughts such as humanism, secularism, scientific approach and
universal appeal. His rationalism was based on humanism in the sense that it was meant for human welfare, progress and happiness. His approach to the sufferings of the people was humane. He fought against the disgrace of the people particularly the Sudras and stood for their human rights. His scientific humanistic approach to the social problems through anti-God and anit-religious agitations led to the creation of an atmosphere of secularism in Tamil Nadu. The spirit of his secularism was 'Forget God and Think about Man'. He was a social scientist and his rationalistic thoughts were unique and born out of his experience, research and analysis. He stood for the alleviation of the sufferings of the people though research and scientific inventions. Periyar's masterly diagnosis of the social problems made him a very good social scientist. He tried to find out the roots of the social evils and pluck out and destroy them once and for all. His criticism, opposition and attack on casteism, religion, God and the Scriptures led to the creation of a new scientific world order for all ages. For that he was honoured with a UNESCO Award in 1970. Periyar E.V.R. was the repository of revolutionary rational reform ideas of universal appeal. His rationalistic thoughts belong to all people, all ages irrespective of religion, caste, language, and colour. They are applicable and acceptable to the universe.

The fourth chapter Means of Propaganda of Periyar E.V.R.'s Rationalistic Thoughts discusses how he propagated his rationalistic thoughts in every nook and corner of Tamil Nadu. The great intellectual giant taught his ideas through his eloquent speeches in public meetings and conferences. He also spread his ideas through his writings in his own journals like Kudi Arasu, Revolt, Puratchi, Pahuttharivu, Viduthalai, Unmai and the Modern Rationalist. Moreover, his rationalistic thoughts were propagated
through his tours, a satyagrahas, agitations, dramas processions, picketings, demonstrations and hartals. No wonder that, his intellectual weapons are useful to the whole humanity. Periyar's method of propaganda had no political, social, religious or any other kind of material support. On the contrary, due to his full involvement, his philosophical principles spread deep into the society. He expressed his views openly and freely with a view to liberating people from their age-old shackles. His appeal to reason, self-respect and justice through his excellent speeches awakened the people and consolidated them to fight for social equality. His action programme was directed against the age-old beliefs, customs institutions, economic orders, social disabilities and discriminations of life. Fearless like a lion, 'Periyar' roared for more than half a century throughout the length and breadth of Tamil Nadu and assailed the evils of humanity. None could have used pen and platform so successfully as the untiring and selfless crusader 'Periyar' to propagate his rationalistic ideas.

The last chapter Impact of Periyar E.V.R.'s Rationalistic Thoughts and Social Changes in Tamil Society deals with the twofold nature of the impact of his thoughts, both positive and negative and the changes, in Tamil Society. As a result of his rationalistic thoughts, far-reaching changes took place in the Tamil Nadu. His philosophy helped to create social awareness and social regeneration of the decadent Tamil society. It left its impact on various social issues such as the removal of untouchability, obliteration of casteism, blossoming of self-respect ideas, introduction of Self-Respect Marriage, emancipation and empowerment of women, policy of reservation and appointment of Archakas irrespective of caste and so on. His rationalistic thoughts paved the way for the uplift of the suppressed and oppressed Tamilians from slavery, ignorance, illiteracy and disgrace. It also led to
the decline of orthodox Hindu influence, domination of superstitions, customs, traditions and blind beliefs. Ultimately, it led to the Atheist Movement in Tamil Nadu.

'Periyar' criticised and condemned Hindu gods and goddesses for their infatuation and erotic sexualism. When he criticised Vinayaga (the birth of elephant headed God - son of Siva and Parvati) and Vinayaga Chathurthi as an irrational festival, he was condemned by the orthodox Brahmins and other Caste-Hindus. As and when he rose on the platform to fire his salvos against these gods and their festivals, more and more gods and festivals sprang up in the nook and corner of the country. Many an idol and temple for Vinayaga came up making it a national religion. His views were wrongly perceived and negatively approached. Similarly, when 'Periyar' attacked caste system and advocated reservation, it was not approved but vehemently criticised. Inspite of his hard hitting propaganda, still caste and sub-caste consciousness thrives in the society. Many more caste associations have sprung up; when 'Periyar' advocated inter-caste marriage, many orthodox communities opposed it tooth and nail. Even today, inter-caste marriages are not allowed to take place, though the government has already decreed in favour of it. Sometimes, such couples have been burnt alive or their heads chopped off or otherwise kept away from the caste and society. Even, such marriages lead social conflagrations of serious consequences.

The negative impact also deals with the obstacles in the way of implementation of his rationalistic thoughts. For instance, the denial of thirty three percent of women reservation in Assembly and Parliament, continuation of the domination of men in society, gender inequalities, discriminations of the people and the ill-treatment of Dalits, role of
superstitions and social evils such as female infanticide, child marriage, domestic violences and dowry harassment in some parts of Tamil Nadu are harsh realities even today.

The **Conclusion** makes a study of how far and upto what extent 'Periyar's' rationalistic thoughts succeeded in bringing about changes in the Tamil society. His rationalistic thoughts marked a new era in the history of rationalism. As a result, there took place new dimension in the struggle for social reform and social justice. His principles of rationalism helped, uproot social maladies such as untouchability, casteism, ignorance, superstition, blind beliefs, religious fanaticism, foolish dogmas, varnashrama, hegemony of uppercastes, and widowhood. This state of affairs reversed the age-old trend of the twentieth century and it became the basis for the development of human rights, happiness and welfare of humanity. As a result, human society is marching towards the path of progress and modernity. No wonder, 'Periyar's' fight to transform the Tamil society into a place devoid of birth based discrimination is unique in the annals of history.