Origin and Growth of Self-Respect Movement
CHAPTER - II

ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF SELF-RESPECT MOVEMENT

In the later half of the 19th and in the early half of the 20th Century many socio-religious and political reformers emerged in the Madras Presidency as elsewhere in India to introduce reforms and bring about changes in South India to improve the social, religious and political status of women. The social reformers like the Siddhars, St. Ramanuja, Vallalar, Vaikunda Swamigal, Ayothee Thass Pandithar, Bharathiyar and Bharathidasan in Tamil Nadu created awakening in the minds of people and brought about some revolutionary changes like encouraging widow remarriage and wearing upper-garment and sowed the seeds of equality of men and women and social justice.

But, all these reformers could bring about changes either in one field or the other which would be the cause of other evils in the society. For instance, abolition of sati led to the rise of infant and enforced widowhood which led to adultery. Again, widow remarriage led to the rise of polygamy among menfolk. Hence, the purpose of bringing about reforms failed due to loopholes in the society. Thus, a total revolutionary change in the society was needed for emancipating women from all sorts of evils and from their deplorable condition.

Periyar E.V. Ramasamy

Periyar E.V. Ramasamy was one such revolutionary who brought forth such far-reaching changes in the society by his radical rationalistic thoughts and cherished ideals for real emancipation of women from all social evils. Erode Venkata Ramasamy Naicker popularly known as E.V.R. was later conferred the title of Periyar. E.V.R. was born in an orthodox Vaishnavite non-Brahmin family on September 17, 1879 at Dadampatti, a part of Ammapettai in Salem173. His parents were Venkata Naicker and Chinnathayammal. He had one elder brother named E.V. Krishnasamy and two younger sisters named Ponnuthai and

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173 G.O. 998, Public Department, Madras, dt., 28.11.1933, p. 93.
Kannammal. (See also Plate No.2). He belonged to the Kannada Balija Naidu caste which had also assumed the title ‘Naicker’.

Periyar was an impartial altruist and humanist. He was quite simple and moved freely with common masses. He was a perfect rationalist, an atheist and an iconoclast. He was not a mere ‘paper-rationalist’, but quite a practical-minded realist. He practised what he preached. He was a great organiser, more modern and progressive and a man of sharp intellect with worldly wisdom. He had strong will power and self-confidence. He was very courageous and never bothered about success or failure. Periyar was a vehement fighter against tradition and deep-rooted religious beliefs in the society. He was a crusader against God, a champion and liberator of the suppressed and downtrodden classes in the society. He was a man of distinguished personality to correct, change and modernize a thing whichever he had come across in his life. He was a professor in the University of Worldly Experience.

He had no equal in taking up the cause of women in India. His main aim was to eradicate the caste system and to emancipate women from all the social evils. He crusaded against caste as well as sex discrimination based on birth. He organized agitations for establishing equality of man and man as well as man and woman. He dedicated his whole life to achieve this goal.

175 Ibid.
176 Sri Sankaracharya’s Letter to E.V.R. from Nijasirungeri in _Kudi Arasu_, Erode, March, 2, 1930.
181 Ibid.
182 _Kudi Arasu_, Erode, December, 24, 1939.
183 Sami Chidambaranar, _Op. cit._., p. 239.
185 _The Modern Rationalist_, Vol. 8, April, 1986, p. 8.
Early Life of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy

Life of Periyar itself is a mission, full of experiences and experiments in shaping his ideologies. Periyar was not born to a traditionally rich family but only later his father became a wealthy merchant in Erode. Till 1888, he was brought up in poor circumstances by his paternal aunt with much freedom. He had his education in a play school at Erode for three years, another two years in the municipal school and finally passed the IV primary examination. But his education came to an end at the age of eleven.

During his boyhood days, he was so mischievous that he intermingled and inter-dined with the low caste people living in the surroundings of the school without heeding the words of his teachers and parents. Both his legs were tied with two iron bars, as a punishment for not following the caste taboo. The system of untouchability and its cruel nature made him work for the cause of the downtrodden and the suppressed in the society.

In 1892, Periyar assisted his father in his business activities. He developed not only his efficiency in business techniques but also his talent in argument, oratory, debate, analysis of pros and cons in any matter, discussed in his whole-sale shop. Later, it became his innate character. In 1890 his house was fully engaged in receiving guests like Sanyasis, Pundits and Brahmins who stayed in his house (See also Plate no.1) for nearly a week.

The series of lectures, discussions and deliberations provided him with enough information to quench his thirst for religious doubts in Puranas and Itihasas. It enabled him to make his decision regarding the existence of God, religion and caste. On the one hand, it trained him to become an excellent rationalistic orator. On the other hand, it created a sense of hatred in his mind towards Brahminism during 1900s. He started criticizing superstition, astrology, blind-beliefs, traditions and omens. He concluded in later days that these were the vital forces which subjugated women.

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188 Ibid.
189 Ibid.
In 1898, at the age of 19, his parents chose for him a bride who was from an affluent family insocial status. Coming to know of this, Periyar stubbornly stated his interest to marry Nagammai, who was thirteen years of age and was a distant maternal relative. He succeeded in his desire to marry Nagammai, though her status was below to that of the girl arranged by parents. He preferred her because of his familiarity with her. The principles Periyar lived by during his young age became his rationalistic ideologies later. For instance, his Self-Respect Marriage principles hint at marriage on mutual consent between the couples which he had already done while marrying Nagammai\textsuperscript{190}.

Being a staunch Vaishnavite, his family was strongly orthodoxical. Hence, they imposed on Nagammai the religious customs of fasting, paying visit to the holy places, marking on forehead, etc. However, Periyar, not following these conventions himself, duly changed the attitude of Nagammai\textsuperscript{191}.

Being an atheist, Periyar didn’t like his wife’s visiting temples or paying offerings to gods. In order to put an end to this, he disguised himself as a ruffian land-lord and along with his friends stationed himself on the path of Nagammai to tease her enroute to temple\textsuperscript{192}. This stopped her from visiting temples.

The practice of wearing Thali or sacred thread by women was completely opposed by Periyaras he thought this would degrade humanism and Self-Respect of women. This bond of thali motivates the husbands to illtreat their wives. Emancipation of women would be possible only if women chose to undo this bond. Being a man who practised what he preached, Periyar wanted his wife to follow this idea too. In order to convince her, he told her, “a Woman needn’t wear thali in the presence of husband and it would suffice if she wore it when he is away”\textsuperscript{193}. This idea was displayed to the public in a marriage function at Virudhunagar in 1930.

\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., p. 40.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., p. 42.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., p.43.
Nerunjipettai Event 1902

Questioning the credibility and rationality of the dharmasastras and the puranas started. A Swami of Nerunjipettai (a village in Erode) attended a Chettiar function conducted by the merchant community at Ellaiyar Inn in Erode. But, the brother of Swami was indebted to a particular merchant and the court issued a warrant for his arrest. However, he was evasive and eluded the officials. Periyar offered his help to catch the culprit when he entered the inn where about 200 Brahmins were having the feast. Manu Dharma Sastra entitles that a Brahmin’s feast must not be watched over by a dog, or a pig, or a Sudra, or any woman. According to this, the entry of Periyar into the inn was considered to be a sin as it polluted their food. So, they reported the action of Periyar to his father, Venkata Naicker. Infuriated by his son’s unruly behaviour Venkata Naicker spat on him with his mouth full of the essence of betel leaves and beat him with his chappal. Despite the adversaries, this incident kindled the rationalistic thoughts of Periyar and he introduced the system of inter-dining of all people in Erode under his headship irrespective of caste, religion and sex on every full moon in the month of Chitrai. So, Nerunjipettai incident created awakening among the people who began to consider that it was unwise to follow discrimination in dining which falsified the statement of Manu. This enabled Periyar to implement the system of inter-dining in every Self-Respect Conference, convened by him to uproot caste discrimination from the minds of people. After two years of married life Periyar was gifted with a female baby. Unfortunately, the baby died within five months and after that he had no issue.

Inter-Caste Marriage

He started supporting inter-caste marriages to demolish the Brahminic demon of caste. A boy belonging to Vellala caste, from Mettuppalayam approached Periyar in search of a job. He was appointed as a clerk in Periyar’s shop. On his mother’s request to arrange

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a marriage for the boy, Periyar arranged the marriage of the Vellala boy with illegitimate daughter of a Naidu man. This inter-caste marriage took place in a grand manner accompanied by a procession and musical chores. An inter-dining took place after the marriage function\textsuperscript{197}. This marriage instilled rationalism in the minds of the youth, government servants and friends of Periyar as it was an inter-caste marriage encouraging the inter-dining. This was a prelude to the Self-Respect Movement as it was the first inter caste-marriage conducted by Periyar in a mass level.

**Visit to Benaras**

Family situation made him leave home and live the life of sanyasi at Varanasi, which, in fact, was a turning point in his rationalistic career. In 1904, Periyar left his family and went to Benaras at the age of 25 due to rigid restrictions and strict observance of orthodox customs and religion in his family. But, the condition of life and religion in Benaras was entirely different from what he thought earlier\textsuperscript{198}. He was able to understand how people especially women were cheated in the name of religion and God\textsuperscript{199}. He also noticed the inhuman treatment inflicted on the non-brahmins\textsuperscript{200}. One year of staying in the sacred city of Benaras gave Periyar (See also Plate No.4) a sound knowledge about Hinduism and all its scriptures and ritual practices. He realized the abuse of women in religious centres – temples, by the priests - the saviours of Hindu religion. The holy places were misused as centres of prostitution. Witnessing such immoral behaviour of the upper- caste people, Periyar returned to Erode with a will to abolish the devadasi system and to liberate women from the clutches of religious stigma\textsuperscript{201}. The death of his father Venkata Naicker in 1911 provided him with great responsibilities and at the same time with freedom to involve in public affairs.

In 1909, Periyar witnessed another pathetic situation is his ten year old niece’s widowhood on the death of her 13 year old husband. Nearly 600-700 people felt sorry for her

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{199} The Modern Rationalist, Vol. 27, No. 1, Chennai, January, 2002, pp. 22-23.
condition. And when Ammayi, the child widow fell on the feet of Periyar crying, “Did I ask to be married so soon? Now with the death of my husband you have burdened me with lots of responsibilities”. “Oh! What would I do?” Even Periyar could not stop the tears rolling down his cheeks and at that point as he raised his niece from his feet, he did it with a determination to perform re-marriage to his niece. Despite his family’s vehement opposition and outcasting of his family by his own relatives, he arranged the remarriage of his niece secretly at Chidambara. The girl too begot a male child but his family was ostracized by their relations. This created sympathy in the heart of Periyar towards infant widows. Totally unexpected, the unfortunate death of Ammayi’s second husband discouraged Periyar to conduct widow remarriages further\(^\text{202}\).

During his youthful days from 1905-1906, Periyar was attracted by the Tamil scholars Pandithamani Ayothee Thass, Erattaimalai Srinivasan, Maruthaiya Pillai of Karur, Kuthoosi Gurusamy and sage Kaivalyam and P.V. Manicka Naicker\(^\text{203}\). The ideologies and principles of these scholars moulded and enriched rational outlook as well as progressive thinking in Periyar\(^\text{204}\).

**Early Career**

*Periyar* assumed many number of posts with great responsibility. He held honorary posts like President of the Devasthanam Board, Member of Erode Municipal Council (1910), a Member of Erode Urban Bank (1911), Honorary Magistrate, Secretary of the Coimbatore District Congress Conference (1914), President of the Merchant Association (1915), Treasurer cum Secretary of the Mahajana School at Erode(1917), Chairman of Erode (1917-1919), (See the Plate No. 5) Honorary War Recruiting Officer (1918), President of Old Boys Association, Sub-Committee member of South Indian Chamber of Commerce, Member of

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\(^\text{202}\) Ibid.


\(^\text{204}\) Ibid.
Taluk and District Boards (1919), President of Khadi Board and President and Secretary of Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (1923-1925).\(^{205}\)

As the Chairman of Erode Municipality, he introduced a number of public welfare schemes. He removed the problems of women from carrying water from distant places by providing protective drinking water facilities in every street.\(^{206}\) He had a chance to establish friendship with C.Rajagopalachariar, a Congressite, who later became the Premier of the Madras State (1937-1939).\(^{207}\) (See also Plate No.7) He also raised his voice against the devadasi system while he was the Secretary of Devasthanam Committee. He issued orders for cancelling not only devadasi rights in temple but also their right to nominate another girl when they had no issues.\(^{208}\) Periyar’s name was recommended for conferring the title Rao Bahadur for his efficient administration.\(^{209}\)

**Periyar and the Congress (1919-1920)**

**Periyar’s rift with Congress policies and drifting from the Congress Party**

While the struggle for freedom in India against the British rule was going on under the Congress Party, P. Varadarajulu Naidu and C.Rajagopala Chariyar persuaded Periyar to enroll himself as a member of the Indian National Congress. Periyar became the member of the Indian National Congress with the assurance that the party would accept the policy of reservation for the emancipation of socially backward people.\(^{210}\) In 1914, Periyar was elected as the Secretary of the Coimbatore Congress Conference and in 1915 he became the member of Madras Presidency Association. Later, in 1918, he became the President of the Steering Committee of the Congress Conference of Erode.

Another turning point in the life of many Indian nationalists took place in 1919. It was the Jallian Wallah Bagh Massacre which drew the attention of Gandhiji to involve

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209 *Kudi Arasu*, Erode, August 21, 1948.
210 G.O.No. 73, Public Department, dt., 8.01.1958, p.116, Government of Madras.
himself in the Freedom Movement. In 1920, Gandhiji launched Non-Co-operation Movement against the suppressive attitude of the British. An ardent believer of non-violence and Ahimsa, Periyar actively participated in all the programmes of Gandhiji\(^{211}\). For spending his whole time and energy to serve the people and to take active part in the affairs of Congress Party, Periyar resigned all his honorary and Government posts which he held in Erode\(^{212}\). He became the President of Tamil Nadu Congress in 1920\(^{213}\).

In the middle of 1921, the Non-Co-operation Movement took an unexpected turn in Madras. The movement gained sudden spurt of energy not from the original plan of Gandhiji but through the adoption of a new tactic, i.e. anti-liquor agitation\(^{214}\). Gandhiji made a special appeal to the Indian women to support the anti-liquor campaign. Hence, Periyar along with hundred volunteers Thondarpadai involved in picketing the liquor shops cut down his own 1000 coconut trees in Thadampatti in Erode. The ban order 144 was imposed. Using the provisions they were arrested and put behind the bars for a month. It made Periyar’s wife, Nagammal and sister Kannammal to lead the picketing of liquor-shops in Erode\(^{215}\). In view of mass picketing, there arose problem in maintaining law and order. The government lifted the 144 ban order on the ground that the arrest of women volunteers, including Nagammal and Kannammal, would make the situation out of control. To pacify the situation, the Government of Madras sent Sri Sankaran Nair to persuade Gandhiji to withdraw picketing in Tamil Nadu. But, Gandhiji stated that the stopping of the picketing of liquor shops was not in his hand but in the hands of those two ladies in Erode\(^{216}\). Therefore, Periyar encouraged women to participate in the public life and to create awareness among women about the political right from the day of his entry into politics. In November 1922, Periyar was elected to the All India Congress Committee. As a true Congressman, he took all efforts to popularise

\(^{212}\) Ibid.
\(^{216}\) Ibid.
the use of *Khadhar* with a view to promote the cottage industries\(^{217}\) and to provide employment to womenfolk.

In April 1922, *Periyar* was once again elected as the Secretary of Tamil Nadu Congress Committee at the Tiruppur Session of Congress\(^{218}\). In September 1922, Gandhiji discussed the political situation with *Periyar* in his house at Erode. *Periyar* was keen on bringing forth equal representation to all the communities in proportion to their population for the national progress\(^{219}\).

In 1924 *Periyar* involved himself in the propagation of the use of *khaddar* and delivered a speech. He stated that “True swaraj will be achieved by keeping our thing in our own country, manufacturing it for ourselves and giving employment to a large number of wage-earners men and women”\(^{220}\). He further added that “It is by giving our raw products to other countries and purchasing finished products from them that we deprive a vast majority of the people of our country of employment and wages and allow economic exploitation of the country. This exploitation keeps us under foreign domination”\(^{221}\). Thus, *Periyar* advocated the use of *Khaddar* to stop exploitation of our country. So, *Periyar* was convicted and sentenced to undergo 4 months rigorous imprisonment for his seditious speeches against the government in different parts of Tamil Nadu\(^{222}\).

**Vaikom Struggle**

*Periyar’s rise in popularity estimate and beginning of the parting of company with Gandhiji and Congress:*

No other part in the country had social evils so much as Kerala which is the hot-bed of untouchability and unapproachability and supported the age-long tradition of caste orthodoxy

\(^{219}\) G.O.No. 186, Public Department, dt., 28.2.192, Government of Madras.
\(^{220}\) U.S.S.No.491, Public Department (Secret), dt., 15.6.1924, Government of Madras.
\(^{221}\) Ibid.
\(^{222}\) *The Hindu*, Madras, July 21, 1924.
and religious superstition\textsuperscript{223}. Irrational practices such as \textit{Pulappedi} and \textit{Mannanpedi}, the scriptural non-surgical customs of \textit{smarthavicaram}, the immoral sexual practice of \textit{sambandam}, the cruel and polygamous \textit{Karavanam} and the \textit{Tarawad}, the exploiting practice of \textit{Janmin Kudiyan} prevailed. Mahavira once said: one should renounce or forego the sense of narrow-mindedness in looking at people as high and low on the basis of birth\textsuperscript{224}. It is not a surprise that many irrational, insurgical and abusive practices were rooted in such a society. One such practice was the denying of worshipping God in a temple for the untouchables in the name of pollution. It is universally acknowledged that God is for all. God is not for a few. If it is so, then God does not exist. Such an impartial God could not ameliorate the wretched condition of the untouchables. It has reference to the Vaikom temple and the Satyagraha for getting the right to enter the street leading to the temple. Not only the caste- Hindus but also the Christians and the Muslims as well as Kaikolans, Kariyalans and similar non-caste Hindus had the right to use the street around the Vaikom Mahadevar temple. As the temple premises had the court, police station, registrar’s office, people could not avoid entering the streets. But the Non-caste Hindus like the Ezhavas, Arayas, Pulayas and Parayas were prevented from using the street on the ground that their entry would pollute the idol of the temple\textsuperscript{225}. But the road in question was constructed and maintained out of public funds which contributed by members of all castes\textsuperscript{226}. A Satyagraha was organized by T.K.Madhavan, George Joseph and Kesava Menon to remove such discrimination against the untouchables\textsuperscript{227}.

Since the custom was un-reasonable, tyrannical, degrading and irrational, some progressive reform-minded leaders planned to oppose it and the result was the arrest of most volunteers. \textit{Periyar} was invited to interfere in the Vaikom struggle\textsuperscript{228}. The entry of \textit{Periyar} gave a new life to the movement since he was much concerned about the down-trodden and

\textsuperscript{223} H.F.M. 58A, 1924-1927, dt., 29.3.1924, p. 32.  
\textsuperscript{226} Tamil Arasu, Chennai, August, 1987, p. 44.  
the under-privileged. He decided to enroll women volunteers in this movement to look after the feeding and other arrangements at the Ashram and to participate in the struggle because he was arrested and sentenced to one month imprisonment in Arivukoothu jail. Having gained training in anti-drinking campaign in Tamil Nadu, Nagammai, wife of Periyar, (See the Plate No.3) immediately, came to Vaikom with S.Ramanathan and played an active role to bring greater number of women to participate in the movement. She, with the company of M.S.Kannammal, Tmt.Emperumal Naidu, Tmt.Govindan Sanar and Tmt.Thanumalaya Perumal Pillai made an attempt to enter the temple but they were prevented by the police. When Nagammai was asked to enter into the temple without Tmt.Sanar, who was a low caste woman, she refused to do so, as it was a movement for the under-privileged class of people. Tmt. Nagammai and Tmt. M.P.Nair were imposed Rs.5/- as penalty since they blocked the transport. They were remanded to 8 days’ custody when they refused to pay the amount. The Vaikom Satyagraha assumed much significance and won support from all quarters including Punjab. Periyar continued the struggle vigorously with the co-operation of women activists after his release from prison. A prohibitory order was also promulgated to prevent him from delivering public speeches in any place in Quilon.

After the death of Sri Mulam Thirunal on August 7, 1924, Sethu Lakshmi Bai became the regent (1924-1931) of her minor son Sri Chitrai Tirunal Balarama Varma Maharajah (1931-1949). To bring a solution, Mahatma Gandhi intervened in this affair at the instigation of Rajaji. Finally, the Regent Rani issued a proclamation removing all restrictions to walk on streets and granted freedom to all people including untouchables to

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233 Swadesamitran, Chennai, August 5, 1924. and see also Anaimuthu.V., Periyar Iyal, Part II, Thaier Nayaki Ninaivu Nool publication, Puducherry, 2009,p.73.
236 Ibid.
access it. It was the ‘first historic social struggle started by Periyar in the history of modern India’. Eventually, it restored the birth rights of untouchables to access the street. But, they did not possess social and civic rights to enter into the temple for worshipping God like that of the caste Hindus. Periyar’s support for the cause of lower caste men and women earned him a special and radical reputation. Periyar was called ‘Vaikom Hero’ by the Congress for his dynamic role in Vaikom Satyagraha to remove untouchability. The Vaikom struggle was the first ever struggle organized by all sections to obtain rights to walk in public roads which was prohibited to the untouchables for thousands of years.

**Periyar and Cheranmadevi Gurukulam, 1925**

**Rift with the Congress and drift from Congress became stiff:**

A Gurukulam was established at Cheranmadevi, in Tirunelveli district. It was started with the noble ideas of imparting nationalism and spreading the spirit of patriotism and infusing a passion for social service among the youth. It was founded by V.V.S. Aiyar and funded by the Congress. It was partial and discriminative in the sense that it imparted education to the boys only. But the girls were not admitted into the school even though Gandhiji, the leader of the Indian National Congress, encouraged and inspired women to participate in the national struggle. Women’s participation in anti-drinking campaign in Tamil Nadu gained appreciation at national level. No leader bothered to provide national education to girls. But Periyar, the crusader for social justice, wanted to mobilize women as a great force not only to transform the society but also to enable them to enlighten themselves. He expressed his anger for not admitting girls in the Ashramam.

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238 Ibid., p. 84.
Even though V.V.S. Aiyer was a veteran Tamil scholar, freedom fighter and the editor of Desa Bhaktam, he endeavoured to strengthen Varnashrama system in the Ashramam. He introduced separate dining for the higher and lower caste pupil. Accordingly, the Brahmin inmates were given rich food and better comforts whereas, the non-Brahmin students were discriminated in boarding and lodging i.e. they had to take their meals outside the dining hall. Separate water pots and vessels were kept for the low sections. Periyar, the then Secretary of Tamil Nadu Congress Committee allotted Rs.5000 as the first instalment for the Gurukulam out of a total of 10,000 for its development and later, he refused to pay the remaining amount of Rs.5000 on the grounds of discrimination followed in the Ashramam. But V.V.S. Aiyer, the President of Ashramam received the remaining amount of Rs.5000/- from K.Santhanam, the Joint-Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee without consulting Periyar. Thus, Periyar, Varadarajulu Naidu and Thiru.Vi.Ka, ‘trios of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee’, brought a resolution of ‘no discrimination on the basis of birth’ in the Congress Committee meeting. Mr.Naidu wrote prominently about it in his paper Tamil Nadu and made the incident public. When permission was denied to pass the resolution in a political meeting, Rajaji quit the committee with some congress members. Knowing the critical situation in Tamil Nadu Congress after the Gurukulam incident, Gandhiji refused to interfere in this matter. It increased the rift between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins.

The discrimination policy of V.V.S. Aiyer and other Brahmin leaders of the Congress party forced Periyar to start Self-Respect Movement. As the first step, Periyar published a Tamil weekly, Kudi Arasu on 2nd May, 1925, from Erode in order to instigate and

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245 Palutharivu, Erode, December, 16, 1934, p 12.
248 Unmai, Madras, March 1, 1976, p. 22.
249 Puratchi, Erode, December 3, 1933.
250 Unmai, Madras, March 1, 1976, p. 22.
251 Ibid.
arouse **Self-Respect**, propagate socialism and to establish a sense of brotherhood among the non-Brahmin to fight against the Brahmins\(^{252}\). Later, it became the organ of **Self-Respect** Movement to express his ideologies and to create awakening among the public.

**Kanchipuram Congress Conference (1925)**

**Rift became irreparable and the drift became final:**

Having failed to discuss the question of communal representation in all the previous Congress Conferences held in Tirunelveli (1920), Tiruppur (1922), Salem (1923) and Thiruvannamalai (1924), *Periyar* participated in the Kanchipuram Conference with the main objective of getting permission for introducing and passing the resolution of communal representation\(^{253}\). *Periyar* moved the proposal for proportional communal representation in the Congress Conference held at Kanchipuram in November, 1925\(^ {254} \). The proportional representation ensured education and jobs to the backward classes on the basis of population. Thereby, they would acquire knowledge and equip themselves to participate in politics in order to get rid of the social stigma and caste taboo in the society\(^ {255}\). Thiru.V. Kalyana Sundaranar, the President of the Kanchipuram Congress Conference barred its discussion in the conference. It was also opposed by Brahmin Congress leaders like Srinivasa Iyengar, Rangasami Iyengar, Sathyamoorthy Iyer and Rajagopalachari\(^ {256}\). The prominent non-Brahmin members like Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu, R.K. Shanmugham Chettiar, S. Singaravelu Chettiar and T.P. Krishnaswamy Pavalal also did not support *Periyar’s* resolution. The lack of support from the non-Brahmin group was the main reason for the defeat of his resolution\(^ {257}\).

*Periyar* left the Congress immediately bearing in mind that it was futile to safeguard the interests of the non-Brahmins by staying in the Congress as it was a Brahmin


\(^{254}\) *Kudi Arasu*, Erode, July, 12, 1925, p. 8.


Periyar agitated against the Brahmin domination in the Congress and revived the anti-Brahmin feeling which was practically dormant until then. Periyar quit the Congress with a plan to ‘eradicate God, Religion, Sastras, the Congress and the Brahmins’. As soon as he left the Congress, Periyar convened a non-Brahmin Conference at the Kambatchi theatre in Kanchipuram to discuss the principle of proportional representation.

Before leaving the Congress Party permanently, Periyar had to deal with Santhanam, the then Secretary of Tamil Nadu branch of All India Spinners Association as the latter appointed a number of Brahmins to key positions in the association. Periyar realised that the non-Brahmins were labourers who suffered while the Brahmins were in the higher posts enjoying the fruits of their labour. Periyar came to the conclusion that Gandhiji too was furthering sectarian interests by his idea of Varnashramadharma. Periyar and Ramanathan met Gandhiji in September 1927 in order to change the latter’s attitude to Varnashramadharma since it strengthened Aryan culture of untouchability and child-marriage. Having failed to convince Gandhiji, Periyar emphasized that true freedom for India could be achieved only with the destruction of Indian National Congress, Hinduism and Brahminism. Consequently, Periyar directed his full attention on strengthening his new organisation to root out all the vices in the society. To Periyar, the public good was ideal rather than personal benefits. His life is an open book of fight for right, attack for liberation from the dominance of the few.

Self - Respect Movement (December 1925)

Periyar gave more importance to social reforms than political reforms. He concentrated on social reconstructing and attaining social mobility. His attention was directed
more on creating an egalitarian and an ideal society based on justice and equality. He started the Self-Respect Movement in December, 1925 to eradicate discrimination based on birth and sex, to remove Brahminism and superstitions, to inculcate Self-Respect and to promote rationalism among the people. The Self-Respect Movement was anti-Brahmin, anti-North, anti-Hindi, anti-Sanskrit anti-scriptural, anti-puranic and anti-God. Periyar thought that the domination of Brahmins was the root cause of all sufferings of human beings particularly women in our country. They imposed upon them unnecessary customs, rituals, blind beliefs in the name of God, religion, Sashtra, Dharma and treated them as beasts and chappals. They were treated as beasts for lust. It was a dynamic social movement based on scientific humanism, secularism, atheism and rationalism. Periyar considered the Self-Respect Movement as an Arivu Viduthalai Iyakkam, i.e. a movement to liberate the intellect. He also described this movement as tan manam or suya mariyadai. The ancient Tamilians considered tan manam as a virtue and valued it in a high manner. Periyar’s Self-Respect philosophy is based on reason, critical intelligence, analytical, intellectual, empirical evidence, statistical verification and scientific approach.

To Periyar, Self-Respect was as valuable as life itself. Periyar thought ‘Man is born free; Self-Respect is his birth right. Self-Respect and Varnashrama Dharma cannot go together. It precedes swaraj. It is a pre-requisite of swaraj. Self-Respect, according to Periyar, is birth right of every human being but not swaraj. It was started to change the society and to enable the people to feel ashamed of their present position. The main objective of Self-Respect Movement was the establishment of a casteless society based on

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264 Ibid.
266 Periyar’s Humanism sprouted from his rationalism and stands for a new world of equality and liberty. Stated by Veeramani in his foreword to Meena Kandasamy, Why were Women Enslaved? PSRPI, Chennai, 2007.
268 Kudi Arasu, Erode, August 25, 1929.
270 Subramanian. M.K., Periyar and Self-Respect Philosophy, Self Respecters Academy, Erode, 1988,p.34.
271 Ibid., p.64.
complete equality of the masses, the eradication of social evils and freeing the society from the shackles of superstitions and blind faith in God and religion.\textsuperscript{273}

It emphasized \textbf{samadharma} in the economic field and opposed the supremacy and monopoly of Brahmins in political and religious field.\textsuperscript{274} To popularize the ideas of \textbf{Self-Respect} Movement, \textit{Periyar} started \textit{Kudi Arasu}, a Tamil weekly in 1925 and \textit{Revolt}, an English journal in 1928.\textsuperscript{275}

\textit{Periyar} started the \textbf{Self-Respect} League early in 1926.\textsuperscript{276} Between 1927 and 1928, he developed contact with Surendranath Arya, the organizer of the non-Brahmin League of Youths and organized Provincial \textbf{Self-Respect} Conferences in Tinnevelly, Tanjore, Ramnad and Trichinopoly to advocate the abolition of caste distinction, to remove untouchability and to denounce Brahmin priestcraft.\textsuperscript{277} He was an ardent follower of Gandhiji in encouraging women to involve themselves in public life and to participate in all the \textbf{Self-Respect} Conferences, agitations and picketings. \textit{Periyar} thought that no movement could succeed unless and until women participated.

The \textbf{Self-Respect} Movement was started to establish equality between man and woman and to create awareness among the womenfolk to be relieved from superstitious belief and rituals imposed by the Brahmins. \textit{Periyar}, an ardent fighter for social justice, advocated forcefully throughout his life that women should be given their legitimate position in society as the equals of men.\textsuperscript{278} Women’s right became part and parcel of the \textbf{Self-Respect} Movement.

Besides, by the pen and propaganda method, \textit{Periyar} introduced action oriented programmes like widow remarriage, \textbf{Self-Respect} marriage and inter-caste marriage for

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{274} Puratchi, Erode, November 26, 1933, p.10.
\item \textsuperscript{276} U.S.S.F. No. 896, Public Department, Strictly Confidential, dt., 16.10.1934, Government of Madras.
\item \textsuperscript{277} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{278} Gopalakrishnan.M.D., \textit{A Garland to Periyar}, Emerald, Madras, 1997, p. 118.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
women to remove their perennial problems in the society. To him, the institution of marriage was the root cause of women’s subjugation in the society.

*Periyar* also encouraged women to fight against their slavery at home and in the society. Since they were dependents on their fathers, husbands and sons they could not get freedom. So, to change their own miserable condition, they should come forward to participate in public life and to liberate themselves. The prominent women who supported *Periyar’s* Self-Respect Movement were *Nagammai, Kannammal, T.S.Kunjitham Gurusamy, S.Neelavati Ramasubramaniam, Dharmambal, Sivagami Chidambaranar, M.Maragathavalli, R.Annapoorniammal, K.A.Janaki, Ramamirtham Ammaiyyar, Narayani Ammaiyyar, Thamaraikanni Ammaiyyar, etc.* *Periyar* encouraged them to preside over the conferences and to hoist the flag.

*Periyar* invited widows, *devadasis* and single women in the society to participate in the conference convened by *Self-Respect* Movement in order to gain awareness about their condition.

*Periyar* convened the first Provincial *Self-Respect* Conference at Chengleput on February 17th and 18th, 1929 in order to propagate the main tenets of *Self-Respect* Movement. It is considered to be the corner stone of women’s rights as it championed the emancipation of women. Again, he convened the second Provincial *Self-Respect* Conference at Erode in 1930 and the third Provincial *Self-Respect* Conference at Virudhunagar in 1931. The three Provincial *Self-Respect* conferences exposed the ideologies of Periyar on women, which are essential for women’s liberation and empowerment. (For details see Appendix No.II). He also welcomed the Simon Commission’s recommendation of 5 to 10% of reservation for women in politics.

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279 Kudi Arasu, Erode, December, 24, 1939.
282 Kudi Arasu, Erode, August 25, 1929.
Visit to Foreign Countries 1929-1932

To propagate Self-Respect Movement and to know the position of people in different parts of the world, Periyar visited various countries. Initially, he undertook voyages to Malaysia with his wife, Nagammai and his friends, S.Ramanathan, Samy Chidambaranar, etc. and reached there on December, 15, 1929. He attended Malaya Indian Association Conference on December 26, 1929 held in Singapore. He addressed a public meeting and quoted the writings of Miss. Mayo on ‘how the social evils suppressed women in Indian Society’. He emphasized that his movement would strive hard for the removal of such problems of women. He returned to Tamil Nadu on January 10, 1930 after spreading the principles of Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Reform Conference. Having impressed with Malayan dress code, Periyar advised women in Tamil Nadu to follow Unisex dress code i.e., common dress, to wear dress like men and have bobbed hair instead of wearing traditional saree and maintaining long hair on grounds of safety and swift movement.

Periyar started his trip to western countries from Chennai on December 13, 1931 in the French ship Amboise. He visited countries like Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Soviet Russia, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, France and Portugal and finally Ceylon. During this tour to Europe, he gave the entire responsibility of managing his movement, his activities and the publication of Kudi Arasu to Mrs.Nagammai and to Mr.E.V.Krishnaswamy. As he was influenced by the principles of communism, Periyar began to call the members of his movement both men and women ‘Thozhar’ or ‘Comrade’ to remove caste and sexual discrimination. Thereby, he wanted to remove the perceptions to see woman as a slave or a secondary citizen and to enable them as powerful person capable of managing any affairs on par with men.

287 Ibid., February, 2, 1930.
289 Ibid., pp. 434-435.
Nagammai, wife of Periyar, who co-operated with him in all his movements, agitations and picketings to obtain women’s rights passed away on May 11, 1933. Periyar worried much about the demise of his partner and he criticized and lamented for not implementing one of his ideologies on women in his practical life. In his condolence message, he stated that Nagammai was the best partner in his life but he failed to be a good partner to her. Her death, however, would help him to spend his entire life for the upliftment of both women and Shudras. He added the programme of Samadharma i.e., economic equality to his original programme of social equality and revolution. He also advocated socialism is the only remedy for the world’s human crisis. He wrote an article on October 29, 1933 in Kudi Arasu entitled on why was today’s Government be Abolished? For this, he was imprisoned and the paper Kudi Arasu was banned. By watching the measures of the British Government to hinder the activities of Self-Respect Movement, Periyar changed his decision to restrict his involvement only in social activities to carry on the task of the socio-cultural emancipation of the disadvantaged and the downtrodden section. He started the publication of a Tamil Weekly, namely Puratchi, from November 26, 1933.

Periyar convened the Kovai Jilla Conference on November 25, 1933 to encourage women to participate in eradicating superstitious beliefs, and in abolishing Sastras. This conference appreciated the support of Government to propagate birth control and pleaded the Government not to withdraw its support on the grounds of any religious resistance. On March 15, 1934, he published another Tamil weekly Pahutharivu (the Rationalist) in order to

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290 Puratchi, Erode, December, 3, 1933, p. 11.
295 Puratchi, Erode, April, 1, 1934, p. 8.
296 G.O. No. 974, Law (General), dt., 23.3.1934, p. 13.
297 G.O. No. 842, Public (General), Confidential, dt., 10.8.1934.
299 G.O. No. 296, Public (General), Confidential, dt., 19.2.1935.
300 Puratchi, Erode, December, 3, 1933, pp. 17-18.
301 Ibid.
propagate rational thinking and to attack all religious beliefs. To enhance scientific spirit in
the minds of the people of the Madras Presidency, he published a book entitled The World to
Come, in which he explained many scientific inventions including the test tube babies.

Periyar’s idea of the empowerment of women is evident from entrusting the
administration of his press to the female members of his family- Nagammai and
S.R.Kannammal. He encouraged his sister, Kannammal, to print and publish the Tamil
newspaper Kudi Arasu, while he was an editor of it. Kannammal boldly published an article
on Roman Catholics in Kudi Arasu. She was made to pay a security of Rs.200/- in 1934. Again, she published an article in Pahutharivu criticizing the immoral behaviour of 9 nuns of
a nunnery with a gardener Masetto on 16th September 1934. It also condemned the cruel
treatment of young girls.

Anti-Hindi Agitation in 1938

On 14th July 1937, Rajagopalachariyar assumed charge as the Premier of the Madras Presidency as a result of the 1937 General Elections which was held according to the
provision of 1935 Act. He introduced Hindi as a compulsory subject in the lower form in
certain schools in Madras Presidency. But, Periyar passed a resolution explaining the bad
effects of Hindi propaganda in the Madras province as early as 1930 in the
Self-Respect Conference held at Nannilam. On October 17, 1938, Periyar stated that the
Aryans and the Tamilians could not live amicably in the State as the Tamils thought that they
were inferior as they were born as slaves of the Aryan and werethemselves slaves. He also
organised the ‘Anti-Hindi Propaganda League’.

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302 G.O.No., 842, Public (General) Department, Confidential, dt., 10.8.1934.
304 G.O.No.842, Public (General) Department, Confidential, dt., 10.8.1934.
305 G.O. Ms. No., 911, Education Department, Madras, dt., 2.4.1938.
306 Pahutharivu, Erode, August 1, 1938.
307 G.O.No., 13, Public (General) (Confidential) dt., 5.1.1939, Madras.
308 Pahutharivu, Erode, August, 1938 and see also C.C. No. 1391 of 1938.
Periyar condemned the introduction of Hindi as a means of domination of the Aryans over the Dravidians. To protect Tamil language and to arouse the Tamilians against the introduction of Hindi, Tamil Nadu Womens Conference was convened at the Wall Tax Theatre, Chennai on 13th and 14th November, 1938309. It was attended by 5000 people and of them 2000 were women310. It was attended by all important women Self-Respecters known as Thamaraikanni Ammaiay, Dharmambal, Narayani Ammaiay, Moovalur Ramamirthamal, Rani, wife of C.N. Annadurai, etc. It was presided over by Neelambigai Ammaiay, the daughter of Maraimalai Adigal. Mrs. Meenambal Sivaraj hoisted the Tamil flag and Pandit Narayani Ammaiay inaugurated the Conference311. This conference was historical as it passed two important resolutions viz312.

1. Women’s wing of the Self-Respect Movement honoured E.V.R. with the title ‘Periyar’ for his incessant fight for achieving women’s rights and passed the resolution that hereafter E.V.R. should be called Periyar which means the Great for his invaluable service to promote the welfare of women and their rights313.

2. The second resolution was passed to send women picketers to involve in picketing before the Theological Hindu School every Monday i.e., from November 14th, 1938314.

Periyar made a specific call to women to participate in the Anti-Hindi Agitation. He said: “It would be proper if the women went to jail and the men congratulated them in turn. Again he exhorted women ‘to fight for the cause of Tamil language and culture with determination’315. He further implored the audience that the Premier of Madras Presidency had not been moved by 400 men who had gone to jail and he wanted atleast 400 women to go

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309 Viduthalai, Erode, November 16, 1938.
310 Ibid.
311 Ibid., December 27, 1938.
312 Ibid.
313 Viduthalai, Erode, December 16, 1938.
314 G.O. No. 13, Public (General) (Confidential), Madras, dt., 5.1.1939, Madras.
to jail if they wanted to achieve that. Men were afraid of going to jail. So, women must rouse their manliness and he exhorted the Tamilians not to mind transgressing law if they had any Self-Respect\textsuperscript{316}.

\textit{Periyar} was arrested for instigating women to participate in Anti-Hindi agitation. He was punished with one year rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs.100/- under section 117 Indian Penal Code and 7 (1) Criminal Law Amendment Act\textsuperscript{317}.

\textbf{Periyar, the President of Justice Party}

Justice Party convened its 14\textsuperscript{th} Provincial Conference at Madras, on December 29\textsuperscript{th}, 1938, and selected \textit{Periyar} as the President of the next confederation of Justice Party while he was in jail\textsuperscript{318} for his Anti-Hindi agitation. The policies of the Justice Party lost their vigour and the party lost its direction.

As the goal of Justice Party as well as \textit{Periyar} was the same and both the party and \textit{Periyar} had been striving hard for the upliftment of women, the downtrodden, the depressed and the non-Brahmins, he was selected as the sole leader of the party. Meanwhile, an order was issued by the Government of Madras for the withdrawal of compulsory Hindi education\textsuperscript{319}. After his release from the Bellary Jail on May 22, 1939, \textit{Periyar} assumed the leadership of the Justice Party in the Fifteenth Conference held at Thiruvarur on August 24 and 25, 1940\textsuperscript{320}. He deeply plunged himself in the task of converting the non-Brahmin Movement into a mass movement as the Justice Party was uprooted by the people in 1937 election. Hence, he identified himself with the downtrodden contrary to the approach of the Justice Party members, who were mostly business magnates. \textit{Periyar} thought that the imposition of Hindi was a step to subjugatethe Tamil people. So, he demanded the creation of \textit{Separate Dravidanad} to remove the disgrace imposed on the Dravidians. He also

\textsuperscript{316} \textit{Viduthalai}, Erode, November 28, 1938.
\textsuperscript{317} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{318} G.O. No. 241, Public (General) Department, dt., 2.2.1939, Madras.
\textsuperscript{320} G.O.No. 2203, Public (Secret) Department, dt., 19.7.1957, pp.3-13.
organised a Dravida Nadu Conference on June 2, 1940 at Conjeevaram in which a map of Dravidanad was unveiled and a separate Dravidanad comprising the areas of Tamil, Telugu, Canarese and Malayalam was demanded from the British after the II World War was over\textsuperscript{321}. \textit{Periyar} was invited by Lord Linlithgow, the then Viceroy of India, to take the ministry. But, he refused the offer giving preference to his goal of improving the condition of Non-Brahmins\textsuperscript{322}. Once \textit{Periyar} rejected the offer, Rajaji accepted the offer. \textit{Periyar} convened a number of meetings to popularise the demand for a \textit{Separate Dravidanad}\textsuperscript{323}. He aroused the feelings of Tamilians, who had lost \textbf{Self-Respect}, rationality, intelligence and rights, to remove the disgrace imposed on them\textsuperscript{324}. In 1940, \textit{Periyar} had an interview with Mohammad Ali Jinnah in Bombay\textsuperscript{325}. \textit{Periyar} extended his support to Mr. Jinnah’s demand for partition of India in a meeting conducted on April 19, 1946\textsuperscript{326}.

In 1941, \textit{Periyar} announced his plan of agitations infront of the Railway Refreshment Rooms and coffee hotels, not only to remove the name board “For Brahmins only”, but also to remove discrimination in the public places\textsuperscript{327}. He thought that caste domination was determined by the food habits and to remove casteism one should abolish discrimination in food too\textsuperscript{328}.

In 1942, \textit{Periyar} was invited by the Governor of Madras to form a ministry in Madras. But, he refused the invitation and thought that it would affect his mission of uplifting the downtrodden people. In 1943, \textit{Periyar} extended his support to the \textit{Tamil Isai Movement} started by Raja Annamalai Chettiar.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{321} Fortnightly Report, Public General, Madras, dt., 19.6.1940, p. 225.
\item \textsuperscript{322} \textit{Kudi Arasu}, Erode, January 21, 1940.
\item \textsuperscript{323} Saraswathi, S., \textit{Op.cit.}, p. 89.
\item \textsuperscript{324} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 90.
\item \textsuperscript{325} Fortnightly Report, Madras, Ending January 17, 1940, p. 215.
\item \textsuperscript{326} \textit{Ibid.}, May 3, 1940, p. 228.
\item \textsuperscript{327} \textit{Ibid.}, January 4, 1941, p. 229.
\item \textsuperscript{328} Saraswathi, S., \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 162.
\end{itemize}
Dravidar Kazhagam in 1944

*Periyar* reorganised the Justice Party on August 27, 1944 as the Dravidar Kazhagam or Dravidian Federation in the conference held at Salem. In this conference, *Periyar* merged the Self-Respect Movement and the Justice Party into a new organ called *Dravida Kazhagam*. He declared that the Dravida Kazhagam was a non-communal and a non-political organisation. It would not contest in the elections. The four-fold objectives of Dravida Kazhagam were the abolition of caste, gods, *Puranas, Vedas, Sastras, Itihasas* as they supported the institution and continuance of caste system, creation of a separate *Dravidamad* to free the Dravidians from the Aryan’s rule and finally, retention of proportional representation for the depressed class people. In protest against the British atrocities, he asked his followers to renounce all titles conferred by the raj. In fact, *Periyar* wanted to reconstruct the decadent society on a humane and rational basis.

Formation of Blackshirts

In 1945, *Periyar* organized a Black Shirt Force, the *Dravidian Freedom Force* to fight for the liberation of the Dravidians. Accordingly, the members of the *Dravida Kazhagam* should wear black shirts, a symbol of downtrodden and degradation of the Dravidians who were subjugated by the Brahmins and the NorthIndians. They should work for the removal of such disgrace. The women members were also included in the Black Shirt Force but they should not wear any ornaments. It is a body though distinct from the *Dravida Kazhagam* it was vitally connected with it. They had to follow the principles of Self-Respect, rationalism and discipline. But they were not extremists. *Periyar* used this force to bring about changes in the society in all spheres. He invited women to become

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329 *Anna, Inba Dravidam,* (Tl), Tamil Nadu Book House, p. 15.
330 *Kudi Arasu,* Erode, August 5, 1944.
332 *Kudi Arasu,* Erode, November 17, 1945.
334 *Kudi Arasu,* Erode, November 17, 1945.
335 G.O. No.1503, Public General (Confidential), dt.,23.6.1948, Madras.
members of the *Dravida Kazhagam* and to participate in the liberation movement. He also convened the *black shirt conference* in Madurai in May 1946 and appealed to his followers to fight for *Dravidanad*.

*Periyar* vehemently opposed *Varnashrama Dharma* and dedicated his whole life for the removal of caste system since 1923. Even after getting independence the caste system was not abolished. As the first step towards abolition of Brahminism, Hinduism, Casteism and subjugation of women, *Periyar* broke the idols of *Pillayar*. On July 8, 1956 the *Dravida Kazhagam* arranged a conference on Buddha’s life in Erode. In the evening Rama’s effigy was burnt by *Periyar* in order to remove superstitious beliefs among womenfolk. It was a symbolic protest against the domination of Aryans, casteism, Brahminism and degradation of Dravidians in *Ramayana*. If the caste system was to be retained it would once again introduce *Dasi System* in Tamil Nadu. Hence, *Periyar* demanded a *Separate Dravidanad for Dravidians* during the time of independence of India but later he dropped that idea as it would check the progress of the Dravidian society. *Periyar* advised his partymen to keep knives during the burning of Rama portrait for their defence. Regarding this, he convened the *Dravidanadu Separation Conference* on September 14, 1947.

*Periyar’s attitude towards Independence Day*

*Periyar* considered the Indian Independence Day on August 15, 1947, as a *Day of Mourning for the Tamils* as he thought that it was just a change of rule from the hands of British to the Brahmins. *Periyar* insisted on social liberation rather than political liberation. Political liberation is transferring power from the foreigner to the native. But social liberation is handing over power by the native to the native. The latter was very difficult to realise. Yet, some of his followers denied the idea of *Periyar*.

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336 *Kudi Arasu*, Erode, October 6, 1945.
337 G.O.No. 3579, Public (Confidential) Department, dt., 23.10.1956, Madras.
339 Ibid.
340 G.O. No. 3211, Public Department, dt., 4.7.1956, Madras.
341 G.O.No. 3579, Public (Confidential) Department, October 23, 1956, Madras.
Split in Dravida Kazhagam

Opposition to his ideas by a few disciples made him more suspicious of his followers and they slowly kept away from him. Under such a circumstance of suspicion, acrimony and abuse, Periyar married Maniammai, just a 28 year old girl, on July 7, 1949 while he was 70 years. The reason stated by him for his marriage was that he was in need of a legal heir to look after his property and he had no confidence in his lieutenant to lead his party after his death. But, C.N. Annadurai, the chief lieutenant of Periyar left the party and formed a new party known as Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam due to dissension with Periyar. In 1950, Periyar was imprisoned for the publication of his book Ponmozhigal (‘Golden Sayings’) which contained the revolutionary ideas of Periyar. Since 1950, Periyar carried on an intensive propaganda for the abolition of caste system for uplifting the Dravidians.

Periyar and the Indian Constitution (1950)

In the same year Periyar carried on intensive propaganda through processions and meetings held on August 13 and 14, 1950 to safeguard the interests of the non-Brahmins, who had enjoyed the system of reservation from 1928 to 1950. In 1950 the Brahmins appealed to the Madras High Court for the establishment of equality on the basis of constitutional provisions. The Madras High Court considered Communal Government Order as ‘ultravires’. Supreme Court also confirmed the judgement of the High Court. However, Periyar did not loose confidence. He arranged for a large gathering attended by 7000 men and 25 women at

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343 Fortnightly Report for the second half of Feburary, Madras, 1950, p.22.
344 G.O. No. 73, Public Department, Madras, January 8, 1958.
346 Madras Government regulated the admission to Medical and Engineering Colleges by issuing G.O.No.1254, Education and Public Health Department, May 17, 1948.
the Napier Park grounds for the retention of the Communal Government Order. At the same time, he wanted to create awakening among the Dravidians that the present constitution was drafted by the majority of South Indian Brahmins to their own advantage. Periyar’s relentless fight for the upward movement of the under-privileged had salutary effect on the Central Government.

As a consequence, the Nehru Government made the first amendment in the Indian Constitution in 1951. Ultimately the sub clause (4) was added to section 15 of the Indian Constitution stating that, “nothing shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes and for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes”. Periyar was solely responsible for the incorporation of the first Constitutional Amendment in the Indian Constitution to preserve the rights and equal opportunities of Backward Classes in India. In the same year, Periyar announced his plan to burn the copies of Indian Constitution in the conference held at Salem.

**Periyar’s agitation against C.Rajagopalachari’s ‘Kula Kalvi Thittam’**

C.Rajagopalachari, the then Chief Minister of the Madras Presidency (1952-1954) introduced a New Elementary Education scheme better known as *Kula Kalvi Thittam* in 1953 in order to enable the children to learn the traditional occupation from their parents in the afternoon. Hence, he suggested that school in rural areas should work only in the forenoon. Therefore, this communal education policy deprived the backward class people, especially in the rural areas from getting formal education. Periyar opposed the new educational policy of the Government in tooth and nail as it was based on *Varnashrama*

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349 Paramarthalingam, C., *Periyar and the First Historic Amendment to the Constitution of India, 1951 – A critical study*, South Indian History Congress, Madras, February 2012.
Dharma which prohibits education to women. Ultimately, Periyar started picketing of elementary schools at a number of places on 20th July and observed hartal on 24th July\textsuperscript{354}. He considered this agitation as a social agitation for the survival of Dravidian race\textsuperscript{355}. Eventually, Rajaji resigned his post in March 1954 and Kamaraj became the Chief Minister on 14th April 1954 and abolished the Kulakalvi Thittam\textsuperscript{356}.

On August 1, 1952 Periyar with his party members was involved in erasing Hindi name boards with tar in 600 Railway stations all over Tamil Nadu\textsuperscript{357}, with a view to remove the domination of North Indians and the Brahmins over the Tamilians. Periyar was not only an atheist but also he was an iconoclast. He criticised the Brahmins who exploited the public by giving all their offerings to idols. He considered idol worship as a symbol of disgrace and barbarism of the low caste people\textsuperscript{358}. In 1953, Periyar organised an iconoclastic campaign to remove blind faith among the public to show that there was no divine power in idols and images. Periyar insisted his party men to break the idols of Pillaiyar on May 27, 1953, at public places in every nook and corner of Tamil Nadu\textsuperscript{359}. To protest this, the reactionaries burnt the effigy of Periyar and the flag of Dravida Kazhagam. In the same year, the High Court in its judgment declared the Self-Respect marriage as null and void as it was anti-ritual\textsuperscript{360}.

In January 1954, Periyar convened the conference on Buddhism at Erode as his inclination was Buddha’s rationalistic, atheistic principles, anti-Brahmanical approach and equal treatment of men and women. He paid his second visit to Malaya, Burma and attended world Buddhist Conference at Yangon Kabyee Thirumangala cave in Mandalay in December 1954\textsuperscript{361}. There he met Dr.Ambedkar, the father of the Indian Constitution and

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{354} Fortnightly Report, Public-General, Second half of Madras, July 1953, August 12, 1953, p.5.
\item\textsuperscript{355} Anaimuthu, V., Periyar E.V.R. Thoughts, (TI), Vol. VI, pp.2883-2888.
\item\textsuperscript{357} Periyar’s Rationalist Diary, 1985, p.71.
\item\textsuperscript{358} G.O.No.3471, Public Department, dt., 10.12.1957.
\item\textsuperscript{359} G.O.No.1814, Public Department, dt., 9.7.1953.
\item\textsuperscript{360} Veeramani, K., Achievements of DMK rule, (TI), Viduthalai, Chennai, 1977, p. 38.
\end{itemize}
discussed his conversion into Buddhism. *Periyar* stated that he was not infavour of conversion since he would lose the right to point out drawbacks in Hinduism and to create awareness among the public to keep themselves away from Hinduism.

After his return from Malaya, on January 17, 1955, *Periyar* passed a resolution in the Central Committee meeting of the *Dravida Kazhagam* on August 5, 1956 to burn the picture of *Rama* to defile the characters in *Ramayana*\(^{362}\). To counteract this agitation the *Hindu Mahasabha* organised Pro-Ramayana campaignto burn the effigy of *Periyar* at Madras\(^{363}\).

*Periyar* published an article in *Erottupathai* which deliberately hurt religious feelings of a section of Hindus\(^{364}\). On August 1, 1956, *Periyar* announced the burning of Indian National Flag with a view to show the dissatisfaction of the Tamils to be in Indian Confederation. Later, he postponed the programme on account of the promise given by Kamaraj that he would not impose Hindi.

Owing to the continuous agitations and picketing conducted by *Periyar* for the formation of a *Separate Dravidanadu*, the States Reorganisation Commission recommended the formation of States based on linguistic lingua. Ultimately, a separate Madras State comprising Tamil-speaking people was established on November 1, 1956 and Tamil language became the official language of the Tamilians from December 27, 1956\(^{365}\). Though *Periyar* accepted the lingual basis in state formation, he demanded a Separate Independent Tamil Nadu instead of *Separate Dravidanadu* in order to remove degradation and humiliation imposed on the people of Tamils in the name of caste system.

In 1957, *Periyar* was charged with contempt of court for criticising the judgment by two Brahmin Judges - Justice P.V.Rajamannar and Justice A.S.Panchapa Kesa Iyer - in the case of R.S.Malaiyappan, Trichy District Collector. *Periyar* explained in his statement in High Court about the Brahmin’s racial attitude towards *Shudras* and *Panchamas* to prevent

\(^{362}\) G.O. No. 2650, Public General (Confidential), Madras, dt., 4.8.1956.

\(^{363}\) Ibid.

\(^{364}\) G.O. No. 3051, Public (General-B) (Confidential), Madras, dt., 3.9.1956.

their progress. Finally, he and his wife Maniammai were convicted. In 1958, Periyar organised an agitation against the Brahmins to remove the name boards like Brahmin Hotel which was inscribed with a view to establish the feeling of superiority of the Brahmins over others. As a result, Periyar was arrested and was sentenced to six months imprisonment. In 1959, Periyar visited different places like Kanpur, Lucknow and New Delhi in North India. In 1960, to show his protest against the Government of India as it was Government of Brahmins, Periyar burnt the map of India excluding Tamil Nadu. In the same year he registered his name as an atheist. In 1957 and 1962 elections, Periyar extended his support to K.Kamaraj, a non-Brahmin candidate as well as a Pacchai Tamilan. (See also Plate No. 8).

**Periyar, the Founder of Athiest Philosophy (May, 1967)**

Though Periyar wrote innumerable articles criticizing the role and character of God in Hinduism which perpetuates subjugation of women, he published his atheist views in verse form for the first time in Tiruvarur on May 1967 in his own words.

‘There is no God

There is no God at all

One who conceptualizes God is a fool

One who propagates God is a scoundrel, and

One who worships God is a barbarian’.

Unfortunately, Periyar’s athiest views did not change the mind-set of women who had a strong faith in the existence of God.

**Implementation of Periyar Thoughts during DMK’s rule under C.N.Annadurai**

C.N.Annadurai, the disciple and lieutenant of Periyar, and his party D.M.K won with thumping majority in the 1967 elections. Anna formed his ministry on March 6, 1967 and became the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu after getting blessings and support from Periyar who was at Trichy then. (See also Plate No.9). C.N.Annadurai declared in the State

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Assembly that he dedicated his Ministry to Periyar and took many steps for the realisation of the long-cherished goals of Periyar. Though the measures for legalising Self-Respect marriage failed during the Congress Ministry, C.N. Annadurai enacted the Tamil Nadu Act 21 of 1967, i.e. the Hindu Marriage Tamil Nadu Amendment Act, 1967\(^{367}\) on November 28, 1967 legalising all the Self-Respect Marriages, anti-priest marriages with retrospective effect. He also brought a resolution for renaming Madras State as Tamil Nadu State, though steps taken in this direction during Kamaraj Minstry could not be fruitful. He introduced the two language (bi-lingual) formula (Tamil and English) inspite of the three language formula including Hindi prescribed by the Central Government. This was possible because education was in the State list. Anna introduced a scheme of awarding inter-caste married couples with gold coins to establish an equalitarian society.

Besides these, Anna not only directed the officials to remove the pictures of all deities from the Government Offices but also issued a Government Order to use only Thiru, Thirumathi and Selvi instead of using Sanskrit words like Sri, Srimathi and Kumari\(^{368}\).

Meanwhile, Periyar observed a day of ‘condemnation of the exploitation by North Indian Business Magnates’ to protect the economic interests of Tamil Nadu. He addressed the Minorities Conference held at Lucknow on April 14, 1968 in Uttar Pradesh. In 1969, Periyar announced a programme of agitation to enter the sanctum sanctorum of temples to remove caste discrimination as well as monopoly of Brahmins in Religion. In 1970, Periyar started the publication of Unmai, a fortnightly Tamil magazine in Chennai. (See also Appendix No.VIII)

**UNESCO’s Honour:**

Periyar’s continuous struggle for infusing revolutionary and rationalistic thoughts in the minds of the public spread far and wide. The recognition of his tireless and dedicated


\(^{368}\) *Periyar’s Rationlist Diary*, 1985.
service to humanity in various fields, UNESCO felicitated Periyar on 27, 1970 with an award which hailed him as:\textsuperscript{369}:

The Prophet of the New Age,
The Socrates of South East Asia,
Father of Social Reform Movement,
An arch-enemy of ignorance, superstitions,
Meaningless Customs and Baseless Manners.

\textit{Periyar} established \textit{Thinkers Forum} in 1971 all over Tamil Nadu to propagate rationalism. Since superstition plays a vital role in subjugating women, \textit{Periyar} convened the Superstition Eradication Conference at Salem in January 1971\textsuperscript{370}. He also invited women to participate in the conference. Moreover, he conducted a great procession to eradicate superstitious beliefs among the public. To create Self-Respect among the non-Brahmin an effigy of Rama was beaten with shoes in the procession because \textit{Ramayana} states that “women, shudras and animals are like drums. The more you beat them the more they work”\textsuperscript{371}. A resolution was passed in this conference that a married woman should be given freedom to leave her husband\textsuperscript{372}.\textit{Periyar} started the English monthly magazine ‘The Modern Rationalist’ from September 1, 1971 in order to propagate the rationalistic views all over India\textsuperscript{373}.

To abolish monopoly of Brahmins in religious matters and to fulfill the long cherished demand of \textit{Periyar} to eradicate casteism from the sanctum-sanctorum of temples, and to abolish the Brahmin monopoly in the religious affairs, the DMK Ministry under Karunanidhi passed (Tamil Nadu Act, No. 2 of 1971) the Tamil Nadu HRCE Amendment Act 1970 i.e., the Tamil Nadu Archaka Act\textsuperscript{374}. It abolished the hereditary appointment of Archakas in temples. It provides opportunity for all the depressed and downtrodden people

\textsuperscript{370} G.O. No. 5, Law Department, dt., 12.1.1971, Madras.
\textsuperscript{373} \textit{Ibid.}, p. ii.
\textsuperscript{374} Tamil Nadu Government Gazette, No. 15, Madras, January 12, 1971.
with certain educational qualifications irrespective of caste to become temple priest after gaining training in priesthood. This Act is another step towards social reform for establishing equality. But this Act was challenged by the Brahmans like Sankarachariars, Seers and Peetathipathi’s before the High Court, which declared the Archaka Act as null and void on March 14, 1972\(^{375}\). Periyar described that the object of the Act to establish equality in religious matter was defeated by this Judgement\(^{376}\). So, he resorted to demonstration against the court order and it led to counter demonstration which disturbed peace and order in the state. Periyar convened a conference of black shirts on September 30, 1973 at Madurai to strengthen the **Self-Respect Movement**. Another conference for eradicating social disgrace was convened at Periyar Thidal in Madras on December 8\(^{th}\) and 9\(^{th}\) 1973 with the purpose of eradicating caste disgrace and social degradation imposed on the Tamilians\(^{377}\).

On December 19, 1973 Periyar delivered his immortal speech in a meeting held at Theagaraya Nagar in Madras. During his speech, he appealed to the public ‘*If you live, live without disgrace, otherwise die*\(^{378}\). Periyar also invited women to participate in an agitation to burn the constitution on December 25, 1973. In his speech he stated “Madam, take the broom in one hand and the Constitution in the other hand and beat the constitution with the broom”\(^{379}\).

Due to unbearable and acute pain of Hernia disease, Periyar was admitted initially in the Government General Hospital in Chennai on December 19, 1973 and later in the C.M.C. Hospital at Vellore, he breathed his last on December 24, 1973\(^{380}\). E.V.R.Maniammai took the leadership of Dravida Kazhagam after the death of Periyar and subsequently, by K.Veeramani.

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\(^{375}\) *Periyar’s Rationalist Diary*, 1985. PSRPI, Chennai, p. iii.


\(^{378}\) Ibid.

\(^{379}\) Periyar E.V.Ramasamy, *Declaration of war on Brahminism, Dravidar Kazhagam, Chennai,1998*, p.35.