Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai was a many sided personality. He was aware of the fact that Social emancipation is the base for Economic and political development. He gave top priority to social reforms. This chapter deals with his efforts to upgrade the life standard of Harijan and Adivasis of this area. As an astute Gandhian he continuously struggled to propagate the prohibition policy. As a champion of down trodden he involved very much in Harijan Temple entry movement. In the Bhoodan movement of Vinobhaji also he associated himself to a great extension.
By the time, Vedaratnam Pillai entered into the politics of Tamil Nadu, there came a Qualitative change in the Indian National Movement. The movement had hitherto been confined to the educated middle class only. It did not have a popular base. It was Gandhiji who had converted the national movement into a mass movement.

Gandhi was the first national leader who recognised the importance of masses and mass action in the struggle for national liberation in contrast to earlier leaders, who did not comprehend their decisive significance for making their struggle more effective\(^1\). Hence, he evolved a programme of struggle which would mobilize different sections of people such as peasants, workers, capitalists, lawyers and professionals. He also felt that this would contribute to the building of national unity on a democratic basis\(^2\). But this could not be done only by

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political struggle. This also demanded the elimination of social injustices. So, Gandhiji evolved the national movement based on moral and spiritual principles.

He was a profound humanist and a crusader against social injustices. He denounced the barbarian institution of untouchability. Another social evil that Gandhiji condemned vehemently was the practice of drinking liquor among the poor especially in rural areas. Drinking liquor has been shattering the life of many poor people both physically and economically.

Hence, he attempted to eradicate social evils. Gandhiji's ideals of uplifting the people in the villages was taken up by his disciples like Vinobhave in the form of Sarvodhaya and Bhoodan Movements. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss these questions in general and particularly in Tamil Nadu with special reference to Vedaratnam Pillai's part in these activities.

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3 Ibid., p.349.
As Vedaratnam Pillai followed the principles of Gandhi, he took up the task of eradicating the social evils with full vigour. He followed Gandhiji closely in letter and spirit. In the mission of uplifting the people socially, Gandhiji published his Eighteen Point Programme. This had attracted Vedaratnam Pillai and he evinced a great interest in implementing those programmes in the district of Tanjore.

1. Kadhi Development
3. Rural Prohibition.

Under the leadership of Gandhiji, the Indian National Congress became more popular. In Tamil Nadu too the Congress organisation was becoming more powerful by intimidating the Madras Government through agitations. With the publication of white paper on the proposed constitution at this juncture, there came a new change in the attitude of All India Congress too. Most

of the Congressmen who were hitherto not in favour of constitutional programmes were now enthusiastic in participating in the constitutional programmes. Even Rajaji who highly criticised constitutional programmes now became one of the spokesmen of the new policy. Accordingly, the Congress participated in the elections to Central Legislative Assembly in November 1934. In Tamil Nadu the Congress participated in the seven Central Legislative Assembly Constituencies. It was in this atmosphere, the Congress at its Lucknow session in April 1936 decided to participate in the elections which were to be held in the year 1937 under the constitutional Act of 1935.

In Tamil Nadu too, the Congress Campaign began as early as July 1936. Nearly 500 applicants sought Congress nominations for about 1600 Assembly and council seats in Tamil Nadu⁶. The selection of candidates began in 1936 and the names were published in December 1936 and January 1937. In the Mannargudi - Thiruthuraipoondi constituency Vedaratnam Pillai was selected as

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a candidate. It was a double member constituency. Vedaratnam Pillai was selected for general seat and Kulaindaivelu Nainar was decided for reserved seat from the Congress Party. Both the candidates won with a big margin of votes. The other candidates got less number of votes. The following is the list of candidates contesting in this constituency belonging to different political parties and the number of votes which they got:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai (General)</td>
<td>18,625</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kulaindaivel Nainar (Reserved)</td>
<td>22,789</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiyagu Vaikaran (Justice party) (Scheduled Caste)</td>
<td>6,554</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalyanasundara Mudaliyar (Democratic party)</td>
<td>1,143</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singara Pandaram (Independent)</td>
<td>1,254</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramasubbha Mudaliyar (Independent)</td>
<td>652</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amar Singh (Independent)</td>
<td>483</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invalid vote</td>
<td>129(^7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the Congress party got majority of seats in this election, it came to power in the Madras.

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\(^7\) Kudiyarasu, Tamil Weekly Journal 7, March 1937.
Presidency. The ministry had been formed under the leadership of Rajaji in Madras in July 1937\textsuperscript{8} and it continued only for two and half years. In the meantime in September 1939, the Second World War broke out. The British Government involved India in the Second World War without the consent of the elected ministries. In this, the All India Congress had a difference of opinion in extending its co-operation to the British in the war efforts and hence it asked all the Congress ministries to resign before October 1939. Accordingly, the Rajaji Ministry in Madras also resigned. As a result, Vedaratnam Pillai had to be a legislator only for two and half years in the Madras Legislative Assembly.

As the All India Congress had not co-operated with the British Government in the war, it followed agitational path like individual Satyagraha, Quit India Movement and other programmes during the years 1940 and 1946. It did not also co-operate with the government in any of the constitutional programmes. The result was that there was dead lock in Indian politics. In the year

\textsuperscript{8} Sumit Sarkar, Modern India, 1885 - 1947, Delhi : Macmillan India Limited, 1983, p. 349. See also Erskine to linlithgow, 23 May 1938, linlithgow papers.
June 1945, Lord Wavell, the Governor General and the Viceroy of India called a conference of Indian leaders to end the deadlock. It was during this year, the Labour Ministry came to power in England. The British Government decided to hold elections in the Indian provinces. In the elections conducted to the Madras Legislative Assembly in the year 1946, Vedaratnam Pillai was asked to contest from Mannargudi constituency. This was a double member constituency. Vedaratnam Pillai as usual stood for general seat and Thiagu Vaikaran stood for reserved seat. Both of them were elected to the Legislative Assembly from this double member constituency. The Congress Ministry which had won the majority of seats in the Legislative Assembly during this election also formed the ministry and it continued upto 1952 and Vedaratnam Pillai served as legislator from 1946 to 1952.

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Subsequently, India became independent on 15 August 1947. A constitution for India was given a final shape and it came into force on 26th January 1950. It proclaimed India as a Sovereign Democratic Republic. In accordance with this Constitution, there came a general election both for the Union and State Governments in the year 1952. In this general election, Vedaratnam Pillai kept away from contesting as he had some difference of opinion with some of the Congressmen. Hence he did not become a legislator in this ministry that continued from 1952 to 1957. In his own words Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai avoided contesting the election since he wanted to devote more time for the development of Gurukulam.

The second general election for both central and provincial governments came in the year 1957. This

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11 K.A.N. Sastri and G. Srinivasachari, Advanced History of India, p.761. See also B.L. Sadana, Ravi Chopra, Studies in Indian History, p.252.

time Vedaratnam Pillai contested for the double member constituency of Thiruthuraipoondi to the Legislative Assembly on Congress ticket. V. Vedaiyan was asked to contest for the reserved seat in this constituency. Apart from Congress party, other parties also contested. As both Vedaratnam Pillai and Vedaiyan got majority number of votes from this constituency, they were declared as elected to the Madras Legislative Assembly. The following is the list of candidates contested from this constituency and the number of votes they received:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Candidate</th>
<th>No. of votes polled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Vedaiyan (Scheduled Caste) Congress</td>
<td>54,520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Vedaratnam (General) Congress</td>
<td>48,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Kandasamy Communist</td>
<td>46,256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Dharmalingam D.M.K.</td>
<td>15,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Ambikapathy (Scheduled Caste) D.M.K.</td>
<td>12,115&lt;sup&gt;13&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>13</sup> Interview with V. Vedaiyan, Former Member of Legislative Assembly (M.L.A), (Congress), Kallikudi, Thiruthuraipoondi, 17, January 1993.
As the Congress had a majority in the Legislative Assembly, its ministry had been formed and it continued upto 1962. Vedaratnam Pillai had served as a legislator in this government from 1957 to 1961 till the time of his death. Thus, he served as a legislator in the Madras Legislative Assembly for three terms.

As a legislator, Vedaratnam Pillai was regular in attending the Assembly sessions. In the course of discussions in the assembly he would not hesitate in giving his opinions boldly. He was polite and unassuming that he considered himself as chosen representative of his people. He left no stone unturned in redressing the genuine grievances of the people. When there came discussions on burning problems or controversial issues, he would give his opinions without any prejudice and without offending any section. When there was no assembly session, he would not fail to meet the people of his constituency and would hear the grievances of the people and would move the government to redress their grievances.

Vedaratnam Pillai immortalised himself as a social reformer by faithfully implementing Gandhiji's Eighteen Point Programme oriented towards improving the life of the people. The sufferings experienced by the Kith and Kin of the drunkards were great and the miseries by their family were many. Hence, it was for the good of the poor families that Gandhiji insisted on having total prohibition. It was not also an easy task to enforce prohibition. He also felt that by means of prohibition a good number of poor families would be relieved from their sufferings.

In Tamil Nadu, the programme of fighting against the habit of drinking liquor among the people was started at very earlier stage especially in the districts of Coimbatore and Tanjore. In Coimbatore district, it was Periyar E.V. Ramasami Naicker, a Gandhian then who high lighted the ill effects of toddy drinking and strengthened the prohibition movement. In his mission of preventing toddy consumption, he cut off more than five hundred coconut trees in his own land with the help of his wife and sister and he also started a campaign to persuade the people to give up drinking. The government considered the action as unlawful and
put Periyar and his followers in jail. The news of the arrest of Periyar spread quickly to other areas and it manifested into a law and order problem for the government. In this campaign Periyar was supported by his wife Nagammal and Sister Kannammal\textsuperscript{15}.

In Tanjore district, by the effort of Vedaratnam Pillai and other Gandhian followers, anti-liquor propaganda was carried on even before the announcement of Civil Disobedience Movement. After Salt Satyagraha, this movement gained momentum in Tanjore district. The movement also transferred itself in the "Individual Satyagraha" and many toddy shops were picketed\textsuperscript{16}.

In the months of July and August of the year 1931, large scale picketing of toddy shops took place in Tanjore, Kumbakonam, Sirkaly and Aranthangi\textsuperscript{17}. In all

\textsuperscript{15} The Hindu, August 1921, see also S. Saraswathi, Periyar EVR on a New World, Madras: 6, Nallathambi Street, 1994, p.33.


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.,
these activities Vedaratnam Pillai played an effective role. He took active part and led the movement from being in the forefront. He issued leaflets to promote the movement throughout the district. He went on a whirlwind tour of the district and appealed to the people to give support to the picketing of toddy shops. He himself picked more than hundred toddy shops in the district. These activities created a law and order problem to the government. So the Sub-Magistrate at Vedaranyam issued orders banning prohibition movement. This order was issued purposely to restrain Vedaratnam Pillai from taking part further in picketing of toddy shops. Vedaratnam Pillai was also aware of the seriousness of

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19 Bahirathan, Maraikkattil Oru Manikkam, p.104.


the order. He knew fully well that if he continued or organised any public meeting when the ban order was in force, the government officials would take action against him. Vedaratnam Pillai did not mind this. He did not lose his Vigour and carried on his agitational activities.

On the 16th January 1932, Vedaratnam Pillai organised a Public meeting at Vedaranyam. He also led a procession carrying the portrait of Mahatma Gandhi singing songs in praise of Mahatma Gandhi. The same night, he organised a toddy shop picketing after a public meeting in the Mariamman temple mutt at Kodiakarai near Vedaranyam. He exhorted the gathering to disobey the Forest Laws and enter the Reserve Forest at Kodiakarai.

Although the followers of Gandhiji organised toddy shop picketings, like the one which Vedaratnam Pillai

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22 Ibid.,

23 Ibid.,

24 Ibid.,
conducted a uniform policy on this question had not been evolved by the Indian National Congress. He felt the necessity of adopting a uniform policy on the question of picketing toddy shops. Accordingly, the Congress session which met at Lahore in 1937 discussed this issue and a committee was appointed to collect informations on the question of launching the toddy shop picketings\(^2\). The Chairman of the committee was the Raja of Pirpur which submitted its report on 15th November 1938\(^2^6\).

Meanwhile, in many of the Provinces in India, Congress Ministries had been formed in 1937 after elections as per the Act of 1935. These ministries after

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\(^2\) B.S. Balinga, Tanjore District Hand Book, p.109. See also Saroja Sundararajan, March To Freedom in Madras Presidency, p.460.

\(^2^6\) For details, of Coupland, 111, pp.185-186, Rajendra Prasad, op.cit., p.146. It is difficult to agree with Coupland's assessment of the value of this and two other similar reports mentioned later. His statement that the Pirpur Report is well written and clearly arranged and shows Vestraint clearly betrays a biased view. I have called the charges (frivolous) because Jinnah and Fazal Hug resently refused Congress offers to verify them as noted below. Rajendra Prasad, Autobiography, Bombay: (1957) quoted R.C. Majumdar, A.K. Majumdar, op.cit., pp.607-608.
assuming powers in the Provinces, gave importance to bring laws to prevent the practice of drinking liquor. But the main hurdle in implementing the Act of Prohibition was, they feared of the loss of revenue from liquor.

In Provinces like Madras, expenditure in subjects like education was met from liquor revenue\(^\text{27}\). In Madras Presidency the Ministry was under the premiership of C. Rajagopalachari. He was very particular in implementing the prohibition scheme throughout Madras. Then, Lord Erskine was the Governor of Madras. Rajaji discussed the issue with the Governor and even told the latter that he would make the entire province to go dry in ten years period, if he was allowed to act on his own ways. But the difficulty was that his colleagues wanted funds for their departments. Hence, he could not implement the scheme throughout the Presidency. Hence, he suggested to the Governor that his aim of

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introducing prohibition throughout the province would take a longer time\textsuperscript{28} and hence, he wanted to implement this scheme step by step.

Accordingly, Rajaji took efforts to introduce the scheme of prohibition first in his home district of Salem and then in other areas gradually. A Bill was also introduced on the above lines in the Legislature. When the Bill came up for discussion in the Legislature, Vedaratnam Pillai welcomed this and argued in favour of the Bill. Soon it became an Act in September 1937\textsuperscript{29}. The Act became operative in the district of Salem in October 1937. Later, this was extended to the district of Chitoor and Cuddappah in the year 1939 and thus prohibition came into force covering an area of 23,819

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\textsuperscript{29} Fortnightly Report, Second half of September, 1937. (TNA).
square miles about 1/5 of the whole of Madras Presidency. However, financially this was a loss to the Madras Government.

Besides, in implementing the scheme, the government also experienced some difficulties. There were permit holders who were to be allowed to drink. So some of the clubs applied for licence to keep liquor for sale to the permit holding members. For religious reasons too the Churches were to be authorised to keep wine. All these cases were exempted from the Act. Another problem that the government faced in the implementation of the Act was that many toddy tappers had now become unemployed. But Rajaji ignored this question of unemployment of toddy tappers taking into consideration the general welfare of the society.

There were also cases of some people in the district of Salem to go to neighbouring wet areas in search of liquor. But Rajaji did not care.

30 Two years of Congress rule in Madras, (1937 - 1939), Madras Published in Madras Legislature Congress Party, 1939), p.3.

31 Ibid., p.524.
about all these small bickerings. He was bent upon implementing prohibition at least in the areas where prohibition was promulgated.

The steps taken by Rajaji on this question gave stimulus to Vedaratnam Pillai and he wanted the people of Tanjore to know the importance of prohibition. He being a staunch follower of Gandhiji appealed to the public by means of organising public meetings explaining the evils of drinking liquor. He himself went to Rajaji's Ashramam at Tiruchengode and stayed for a few days and learnt there that drinking of liquor could not be eradicated by means of government measures or law but this could be prevented by convincing and persuading the people by means of lectures and other popular measures. He distributed pamphlets and labels explaining the evils of drinking toddy to the people. He launched this programme first at Thiruthuraipoondi of Tanjore district. He met the cost of printing the pamphlets by himself and distributed them in every nook and corner of Thiruthuraipoondi.

His next plan was to organize Dharna in front of toddy shops. He conducted Dharnas before hundred toddy shops. By such acts Vedaratnam Pillai incurred the wrath of some toddy shop owners. In one of the Dharnas conducted in front of a toddy shop belonging to one Savarimuthu Nadar, there occurred an ugly incident. Savarimuthu Nadar purposely wanted to create some problems and planned to attack the picketeers. When Vedaratnam Pillai and his followers were making arrangements to sit in front of the shop, Savarimuthu Nadar threw a mut pot on the head of K. Santhanam, one of the picketeers and also spat at Vedaratnam Pillai. In this situation Vedaratnam Pillai remained calm and did not show any emotion of anger. He was also aware that had he shown any sign of anger his followers would have surely beaten the toddy shop owner and would have torn him into pieces.

On seeing the peaceful nature of the agitation conducted by Vedaratnam Pillai, other shop owners not only voluntarily closed down shops but also showed their

34 Interview with K. Vairappan, Freedom Fighter, Vedaranyam, 10, September 1994.
sympathy for his further programmes. They also assured Vedaratnam Pillai that they would fight for the cause of prohibition. Vedaratnam Pillai moved by such acts, wanted to rehabilitate the toddy shop owners. So he mobilised them and gave them financial support to open Khadi shops.

Vedaratnam Pillai as M.L.A. during his three terms had participated in almost all the sessions and had raised many questions and sought clarifications and solutions to the problems relating to varied subjects. Of the three terms which he acted as M.L.A., the term between 1937 July and 1939 October, was a short period. Yet in this term, there came in Madras Legislative Assembly the sensitive issues of prohibition, introduction of Hindi as a compulsory language in schools and the question of temple entry. During the term between 1946 - 1952 Vedaratnam Pillai raised questions on varied subjects such as Education, Agriculture, Indian Medicine etc.

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The next social injustice which he intended to fight was the question of untouchability. Of all the social injustices untouchability persisted in Hindu society from the very early days\textsuperscript{36}. This was mainly because of the prevalence of caste system based on birth and hierarchy. Originally, the Hindu society in the days of Vedas had been differentiated into four varnas. Subsequently, as a result of such factors as racial and geographical expansion and growth of different crafts, a section among the Hindus became segregated and became untouchables\textsuperscript{37}. They were regarded as the outcastes of Hindu society. They were eliminated from such elementary rights as the right of entry to public temples or the use of public wells and tanks and the physical touch of whom contaminated a member of the higher caste.

\textsuperscript{36} A.R. Desai, \textit{Social Background of Indian Nationalism}, p.243.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.,
They were not allowed to mingle with other members of the society. In villages they lived in separate quarters known as cheries and they were asked to do the menial services. Even today, such practices are prevalent in many of the villages in many parts of India and particularly in South India\(^{38}\).

At the same time the social oppression had also been condemned by many humanitarian and religious reformers such as Buddha, Adi Sankara, Ramanuja, Kabir and Nandana. It was Adhi Sankara who said that God has not differentiated men like the Vedic Brhamana or condemned paraiiah. According to him, "if we place a pot made of gold and another made of clay on the ground, the rays of the sun pass through each of them. In the water tank, in the place or the muddy water pools in slums the same light of the sun pervades"\(^{39}\). The Alwars and Nayanmars, the Medieval religious reformers in Tamil Nadu also preached the people the idea of Universal Brotherhood.

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39 Swami Vivekananda, Thus spoke Vivekananda, Madras: Ramakrishna Mission, 1980.
In the modern period, there emerged many social reform movements like Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj which also condemned the prevalence of social inequalities and the caste system in the Indian society. These movements by propaganda, education and practical measures tried to restore equal social, religious and cultural rights to the untouchables.

Apart from the services rendered by the social reformers the process of modernisation like the introduction of railways and the establishment of industries in India brought both the touchables and the untouchables physically together. The spread of education among the untouchables brought forth a group of intellectuals such as Dr. Ambedkar who became the spokesman of their sufferings and passionate fighter for their human rights. Yet, untouchability had been persisting in some form or other in Hindu Society.

Gandhiji felt untouchability as a great evil. He also realised that the success of Swaraj could be

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Ibid., pp.270-271.
achieved only by national unity in the real sense. Which required the co-operation of all sections of the people irrespective of caste and creed. In order to eradicate this social injustice Gandhiji integrated this question along with the national movement which compelled the Congress Party workers to strive hard to eradicate this evil with missionary spirit.

AGAINST UNTOUCHABILITY:

Following Gandhian ideals, there emerged eminent leaders in Tamil Nadu like Periyar E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, Vaidhyanatha Iyer of Madurai and Vedaratnam Pillai of Tanjore district. Of these leaders, Periyar E.V. Ramasamy Naicker while he was in the Congress Party led the famous satyagraha movement for the cause of Harijans at Vaikkam of Malabar district in 1924. Even after he left the Congress Party and started the self-respect movement he had been launching fights against casteism and untouchability. In the district of Madura, it was Vaidhyanatha Iyer who took up this question and fought for it.
Likewise, in the district of Tanjore, Vedaratnam Pillai in line with Gandhiji's crusade against untouchability fought against all odds and dedicated himself wholeheartedly to the uplift of the Harijans. In the year 1929, he himself noted in his diary about untouchability as follows:\textsuperscript{41}:

"There is no place for untouchability in our religion. This is only the work of satan. It is a sin perpetuated on the whole humanity. It is due to the arrogance of some section of society holding themselves as superior to others". "Hinduism should be rid of the evil spirit that had possessed it". "It is everybody's responsibility to see that the custom of treating a section of people worse than dogs was put an end to".

In his efforts to fight untouchability, Vedaratnam Pillai followed the method of persuading the people by means of appeals through his speeches. He addressed a
number of public meetings and appealed to the people about the importance of fighting against untouchability. In all his address it was usual for him to recite Dhevaram hymn which speaks of untouchability as a sin.

"Sanganidhi, Padhumainithi, Irandum Thanthu", meaning any untouchable who kills a cow and enjoys its flesh, if pious and God fearing should be honoured and respected"\(^{42}\). At another time when he had a chance to give a talk over the All India Radio, he said, "untouchability is not only a sin but it is the result of the figment of imagination of self-centred persons to solve their selfish interests"\(^{43}\). On many occasions he arranged for common meals in which he invited the Harijan friends and others to dine with him. Besides, he himself went to Harijan homes and dined with them along with his friends.

\[^{42}\text{Thirunavukarasar Devaram, Pathigam No. 95, Thirumarai-6, (Tamil) (Thiruppanandal: Kamatchi mutt, 1970), p.597.}\]

\[^{43}\text{Interview with A.K. Subbiah, Sithamalli, Mannargudi, Former Member of Legislative Assembly, Communist Party of India, 25 March 1993.}\]
His next move was to make the Harijans to use the public wells. It was usual that the Harijans were not allowed to draw water from public wells. This was more common in rural places where the other higher castes did not allow the Harijans to draw water from public wells. Vedaratnam Pillai knew this well and he took up this question to fight for the cause of Harijans with the support of other Congress leaders like Mrs.Soundaram Ramachandran Former Minister of Tamil Nadu and her husband, G.Ramachandran. They selected the village of "Sakkai" of Thulasipattinam region. In the midst of opposition from other castes, they brought some of the Harijans to a public well and made them to draw water from the well. Vedaratnam Pillai then made a Vaishnavite Brahmin to drink the water drawn by a Harijan from the well.

Speaking on the grant of Harijan welfare in Budget speech, Vedaratnam Pillai on 25th May 1960, welcomed the government's measure of allotting 62 lakhs of rupees for the uplift of the Harijans. He further said that

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Bahirathan, Maraikkattil Oru Manikkam, p.37.
as a result of Social Disabilities Act, untouchability in the state to an extent had been reduced. It was this Act which was mainly responsible for eradicating the evils of untouchability. In some areas the government officials had taken actions against those persons who had shown discriminations against the Harijans and asked the government to instruct the officials more effectively in the state. He further said that effective measures were to be taken by the government to give more facilities in the field of education and preferences should also be given in allotting more jobs in government and other public offices. Efforts were also to be taken by the government in allotting waste lands to them for the construction of houses too. Further, financial aids should also be given to them for building houses too.

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TEMPLE ENTRY MOVEMENT:

The temple entry movement was yet another important step that Vedaratnam Pillai took up for the eradication of untouchability. The Vaikkam Satyagraha started by Periyar E.V.Ramasamy Naicker in the district of Malabar of the then Madras Presidency occurred in the year 192446. At Nasik in November 12, 1936 the Bombay Presidency, Dr.Ambedkar led the temple entry movement for the depressed classes to enter into the temple of Kalram47. In September 21, 1932 Kelappan, an astute social reformer of Kanyakumari District launched this movement in the temple of Guruvayoor. He went on fast till death if the temple was not open to Harijans48. All these gave an encouragement to the Gandhians to strengthen the movement further.

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46 Anita Diehl, Periyar, E.V. Ramaswami, New Delhi : B.I. Publication, 1978, p.50. See also The Hindu, April, 1921.
47 Dhananjay Keer, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Life and His Mission, (Bombay: Popular Prakasan, 1954), p.137. See also CWMG, LXVI, pp.299-300.
In the Madras Presidency, the All Indian Harijan Sevak Sangh wanted to make the temple entry of Harijans as legal and requested the government of Madras and Cochin state to declare open all Hindu temples within their jurisdiction to the Harijans. But the situation in the Madras Presidency was different from that of Cochin state where the Hindu ruler of the state owned all temples. Within the jurisdiction of the state temples were not opened for the Harijans.\textsuperscript{49}

In the Madras Presidency the temples could be thrown open to Harijans only if the trustees either of their own accord or at the instance of devotees who used to visit the temple for worship permitted it. Hence, the Ministry under Rajaji could not bring a bill for the whole Madras State although he introduced legislative measures for the Malabar district known as the Malabar Temple Entry Act. Yet, the programme of temple entry movement continued with full vigour in order make all the temples in the state to allow Harijans to enter and offer worship.

On 13 June 1939 the Tamil Nadu Provincial Harijan Temple Entry Movement Conference was held at Madurai with Rameswari Devi, a social worker in the chair. In this conference, a majority of the priests and trustees of Meenakshi Temple of Madurai were ready to throw open the temple to Harijans. On 8 July 1939, under the leadership of P. Vaidhyanatha Ayyar of the Harijana Sevak Sangh, Madurai and his workers, a group consisting of Harijans and caste Hindus entered the temple. They were also admitted by the trustees to its inner prakara which was hitherto the privilege of the Brahmins alone.

But this was opposed by sanatanists since the orthodox Hindus filed civil and criminal suits against the temple authorities. A criminal case was initiated against the temple executive officer. The Ministry headed by Rajaji witnessed the reactions of the orthodox Hindus in the temple entry movement. Hence, the

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ministry wanted to bring a solution to the temple entry movement and by any means Rajaji determined to make temple entry as legal. He requested Erskine, the Governor of Madras to promulgate a temporary ordinance on the lines of the Indemnity Bill they had drafted to give immediate and complete protection against vexatious suits and proceedings. After some delay the Viceroy had consented to issue the ordinance.

The ordinance was promulgated in terms of the Indemnity Bill to take effect immediately. Subsequently, the Madras Temple Entry Authorisation and Indemnity Bill was passed in the Madras Legislative Council on 7 August 1939. This became an Act which empowered the trustees of the temples to allow the Harijans into the temple subject to approval of the government.

All these helped the Gandhians, Harijan Sevak Sangh and other social organisations in achieving their aim of making Harijans enter the temples and thus achieved

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social equality. Thus, the temples in the district of Madurai, Tanjore and other districts were thrown open to Harijans. Vedaratnam Pillai was true to his principles. He never deviated from the ideals on temple entry into the temple. Later when all caste Hindus agreed to allow the Harijans to enter the temple, he took an active part in renovation of the temple\textsuperscript{53}.

In 1953, he collected a number of Harijans and led them to the important temple of Vadaranyesvar, Vedaranyam. In this temple entry movement, he brought J.Sivashanmugam Pillai, the then speaker of Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly and also a Harijan to the temple\textsuperscript{54}. Likewise, in the village of Umbalacheri (near Vedaranyam), Vedaratnam Pillai had a different experience. There was a practice in this village that the orthodox Brahmins would not allow the Harijans to enter into other agraharam and the temples\textsuperscript{55}. He wanted

\textsuperscript{54} Vedaratnam Pillai's Diary, 1952, p.66.
\textsuperscript{55} Interview with K.T. Renganathan, Gandhian, Tanjore, 17 December 1992.
to take up this issue and fight against this practice. In order to make the Harijans to enter into the streets of the Brahmins and also into the temple of the village, he led a satyagraha in the form of a fast. In this endeavour he was supported by another Gandhian K.T. Renganathan, a living freedom fighter.

Similarly, Vedaratnam Pillai attained the consent of the upper caste people of the village namely Thalaignayaru of Thiruthuraipoondi Taluk of Tanjore district where the Brahmins had the same custom of not allowing the Harijans to enter into their agraharams. Besides, Vedaratnam Pillai helped the Harijans in other ways too. In 1957, when the Harijans of Vedakattalai, near Vedaranyam were affected cyclone. With the help of Ramakrishna Mission, Vedaratnam Pillai constructed a colony of 200 houses and named it as Ramakrishnapuram$^{56}$.

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56 Interview with R. Janakiraman, Manager, Kasturba Gandhi Kanya Gurukulam, Vedaranyam, 22, June 1994.
In fact, in Tamil Nadu Vedaratnam Pillai was one of highly enthusiastic leaders to support the Bhoomihan Movement. His enthusiasm in this movement forced him to attend All India Bhoomihan Conference held at Jambooyi in Bihar in 6 September 1953. In this meeting along with Vedaratnam Pillai, Jaganathan, the convenor of Bhoomihan Movement in Tamil Nadu and O.P. Ramasamy Reddiar participated. Vinobhave praised Vedaratnam Pillai for his true services to Bhoomihan Movement. Jaganathan had a special appreciation over Vedaratnam Pillai for having helped the movement along with other Gandhians in Tamil Nadu in getting fourteen thousand acres of land from the landlords. At this conference Vedaratnam Pillai observed that even a gift of one cent of land is welcome and there is no question of compulsion in any form in this. He appealed to the audience to donate liberally.

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57 Ibid., p.385.

58 Ibid., p.8.
Because of the efforts taken by him, the Raja of Ramnad came forward to donate one thousand acres of land and informed this to Vedaratnam Pillai by telegram. In 1955, in his own district of Tanjore Vedaratnam Pillai convened a conference of Bhoodhan Movement at Tiruthurai and got lands from the landlords and distributed the lands to the landless. Then in 1958, he approached and contacted the mirasidhar V.S.Thiagaraja Mudaliar of Vadapathimangalam. He convinced him to offer lands to the movement. He got from him about one hundred and seventy acres of land as donation for the Bhoodhan Movement. Besides Thiagaraja Mudaliar gave away a bungalow, a coconut grove and land with illupai trees in the Thiagarajapuram village as gifts to Bhoodhan yogna.

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59 Baihathan, Maraikkattil Oru Manikkam, p.384.

60 Ibid., p.294.

61 Ibid.,
ADIVASIS UPLIFTMENT:

Apart from serving for the cause of the Harijans, Vedaratnam Pillai also worked for the uplift of the adhivasis living in the neighbourhood areas of Vedaranyam in 1958. About Ten kilometres from Vedaranyam there is a forest region known as Kodiyakkarai. It is a dense forest in which the adhivasis were living without any basic amenities. They had also no shelter nor had they any land to cultivate for their livelihood. To uplift these people, Vedaratnam Pillai's first move was to meet the Forest Department and got some plots for the adhivasis to construct houses. Then he approached the government and got financial help. With this assistance, he made arrangements, to construct a number of houses and thus helped them to occupy these houses.

His next step was to get lands for them to make their livelihood. Again he approached the Forest Department and got some lands in the forest from the department and the same were distributed to the tribals.

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62 Interview with K. Chinna Pillai, about 85 years old, an octogenarian Tribal, Kodiyakkadu, Vedaranyam, 19 September 1994.
Each tribe was able to get one and half acres of land for agricultural operations. Then he encouraged them to cultivate tobacco in these lands, since it was a cash crop of that area. He also helped the tribals in the process of fishing too. In this area fishing is very common among the tribals. They do this in the sea shores as well as in the inland water areas inside the forest. To make the adhivasis to involve into this business largely, Vedaratnam Pillai moved the government and obtained for them fishing nets and other implements.

To give education to the children of adhivasis, he started an elementary school at Kodiyakkarai with the financial help of Gandhi Sanmarg Nidhi in 1959 the school is offering instruction upto eigth standard. An hostel was also started in which the children of this school were given free shelter and food. In another question on the same day, Vedaratnam Pillai told the Assembly that there existed an hostel for the children.

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63 Interview with R. Retnam, about seventy year old Tribal, Kodiyyakkadu, Vedaranyam, 19 September 1994.

64 Interview with P. Mariappan, about seventy year old Tribal, Kodiyyakkadu, Vedaranyam, 19 September 1994.
of Adhivasis in the Kodiakarai village. This hostel was run by the Gandhi Memorial Fund. All of a sudden the aid given by the Memorial Fund had been stopped. As a result the hostel could not be run in that area. Hence, he asked the government to take up the responsibility of running this hostel. The Minister replied that this matter would be considered by the government.\(^{65}\)

At the same time in August 1959, when the Madras Preservation of Private Forest Amendment Bill was introduced in the Assembly Vedaratnam Pillai on 31\(^{st}\) August 1959 told that he welcomed the bill. At the same time he asked the government to take effective steps to preserve the private forests from any further destruction. The government further should also take measures to give protections to the wild life in the forests. For example in the forests of Kodiakkarai there were a number of black bucks. In the long run they were shot down. As a result their population in

\(^{65}\)Ibid.,
the forest was reduced to a bare minimum. Hence, the government should take steps to preserve the wildlife in the forest too.°

On 30 October 1958, Vedaratnam Pillai asked the Minister for Public Works to give informations about the financial aids given to the Adivasis living in the villages of Kodiayakarai of Tanjore District. The Minister replied that a sum of Rs.74,860 was sent during 1956-57 for the distribution of clothes to Seenthi Ambalagars who were the adivasis in the Kodiakkarai area. About forty nine families benefited from this aid.°

EFFORTS TO MAKE TANJORE AS INDUSTRIAL CENTRE:

His services to his own locality were in the form of establishing salt factory, tobacco industry and electricity facilities to his area. In the days of

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67 Q.730, M.L.A.D., Vol.XXII, 30, October 1958, p.120.
British Raj, the manufacturers of salt were put to many difficulties, they could not sell their produce very easily. They had to sell their produce only to the government and that too at the price fixed by the officials of the government. The government would procure these products from the manufacturers then would sell these produces at a high price by bidding creating a competition among the salt merchants. This was beneficial to the government but a loss to the salt manufacturers as well as the merchants too.

To prevent this injustice on the part of the central government, Vedaratnam Pillai united all the salt merchants and convinced them to come into an agreement. In accordance with this agreement, the salt merchants themselves fixed a price and agreed to get salt at the price fixed by the merchants unitedly. This avoided competition among the merchants. They could also get salt at reasonable price. The manufacturers also were benefited by this arrangement. It was this that made the salt merchants to form an organisation. The result was an organisation of a salt syndicate started
in 1921. Vedaratnam Pillai became the secretary of this organisation and served for the cause of salt manufactures and merchants by holding this post till his death. He also helped the salt manufacturers of Vedaranyam in many ways.

The salt industry in this area suffered from paucity of capital during 1920's and 1930's. The owners of salt beds had to run their business with a small amount of capital and as a result they could not get the required production. Vedaratnam Pillai realised these difficulties and tried to get loan facilities for them at nominal interests. He approached banker Sankaralinga Iyer of Kallidaikurichi of Tirunelveli district and discussed with him to start a branch of Indo Commercial Bank at Vedaranyam in the 1930's. Accordingly, the bank was started at Vedaranyam and it gave loans to the small manufacturer of salt at low interest and thus it helped salt merchants and manufacturers to develop.

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68 T. Krishnamoorthi, Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai Avarkalin Valkkai Surukkam, p.132.
69 C.K. Subbiah Pillai's Diary, 1939, Vedaranyam.p.80.
In 1946, when the central ministry was under the Prime Ministership of Jawaharlal Nehru during the time of interim government, Vedaratnam Pillai explained to the Agriculture Minister K.C. Reddy about the difficulties experienced by the salt bed manufacturers in Vedaranyam localities. The result was that the tax on salt was reduced from Rs. 1 and 94 paise to mere 12 paise per mound. At the same time the small manufacturers who are having only 10 acres of salt bed and below were exempted from this salt cess.\(^{71}\)

There were also cases of salt beds being run in waste lands (porumboke) without getting any licenses from the government. They could also be evicted at any time by the officials. In fact, these beds were owned by the small scale manufacturers. Being the secretary of the salt syndicate, he took up this question with the Central Government. The Central Government passed an Act in 1958 permitting the salt beds to be run within an area of 10 acres and below in wastelands (porumboke) without getting government licence in 1958. This also

\(^{71}\) Bahirathan, *Maraikkattil Oru Manikkam*, p.207.
resulted in saving the life of a number of employees who were serving in these salt beds. In 1986, the number of salt beds of this type had risen to 500 employing about eighty thousand workers. There were only forty salt beds run with government licences manufacturing salt in an area of 70 acres.

His another effort was to utilise the swamp areas of this locality too for productive purposes. The swamp areas in Vedaranyam and its neighbourhood is about 200 square miles. At a time when the Indian Government sent a Commission to enquire into the conditions of the salt manufacturers at Vedaranyam, he requested the Commission to visit this swamp bed and established a chemical industry.

As a result of the steps taken by Vedaratnam Pillai and other members of salt syndicate the salt beds in Vedaranyam which were once spread over to an area of 250 acres expanded many fold. In 1980, it was estimated that the licenced salt beds in that area covered 1000 acres, the Wimco Salt industry was spread over 5000 acres, the rest of the small scale salt industries about 200
located around 4000 acres of land and thus the total area under all salt factories was around 10000 acres\textsuperscript{72}.

Vedaratnam Pillai apart from taking efforts for the development of salt factories worked hard to develop other industries such as tobacco. In this area, there were large number of tobacco workers about 500 on daily wages. The government at one time ordered each tobacco factory to remit Rs.10,000/- as cess, many of the small factories found difficulty to remit this amount to the government. They were in danger of being closed down. Thus, there was a danger of housing them for the worker in these factories. Hence, the issue became so serious that Vedaratnam Pillai represented this matter to the Minister for Industries R. Venkataraman, Government of Tamil Nadu who withdrew the Government Order and thus made the tobacco factories to be exempted from remitting Rs. 10,000/- to the government\textsuperscript{73}.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., pp.207-208.

\textsuperscript{73} Voting on Demands for the Grants for the year 1960-61, M.L.A.D. Vol. XVLI, 8, April 1960, pp.190-191.
His services to his locality were not limited to develop salt and tobacco factories but extended to other matters too. In February 1958, he helped the people of Vedaranyam to bring electricity to the village. He approached the government authorities to make arrangements for the electrification of the village. About seven lakhs of rupees were sanctioned by the government for this purpose. In addition, the government also gave away wires, lamp posts, cables and other items on free of cost to this village. The work was then entrusted to Seshasayee company and the village was electrified.

Speaking on voting on demands for grants for the year 1960-61, Vedaratnam Pillai on 8th April 1960 spoke about the importance of industrialisation in this state. He also pointed out that steel industry could also be started at Salem with the aid of foreign countries like Germany. At the same time he suggested that all industries should not be concentrated in particular places or areas. Industries were to be distributed to

74 Ibid., pp.208-210.
throughout the state. While welcoming the starting of heavy industries in the state Vedaratnam Pillai asked the government to encourage small scale industries too and the government should see that cottage and small industries should not be affected as a consequence of the development of heavy industries.\(^75\)

Thus, Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai's contribution in Social Reforms are much of importance. He always indentified himself with the basic problems of Society and the weakest and suppressed people. All his efforts to reform the society were based on permanent relief to the sufferings of the down trodden made them equals in the society.

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\(^{75}\) Interview with R. Jayaraman, Junior Engineer, Tamil Nadu Electricity Board, Vedaranyam, 20, March 1993.