PROTEST AGAINST, GOD, RELIGION AND SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEFS: RATIONALISTIC AND ATHEISTIC CAMPAIGN
For all evils in the society, like caste differences or distinctions, disunity among non-Brahmins, the cultural domination over them, women's slavery as deterrent to the society's normal growth and development, the self-respectors attributed the dominant influence and power that was wielded by numerous gods, religions and superstitious beliefs on the innocent and illiterate masses in Tamil Nadu. In fact, what impelled to fight against the domination of the higher caste made them later oppose all religions - Christianity and Islam too.¹

In the rise and growth of the SRM, there are two phases: (i) Rationalism and (ii) Atheism and Rationalism. "The theory that reason is the foundation of certainty in knowledge"² was applied and the Hindu religion was scrutinized and criticized till 1929. From 1929 onwards the pure and simple atheism that maintains "disbelief in the existence of God or Godliness"³ which

3. Ibid., p. 72.
associated with the general interests of advancing knowledge, with the more appreciation of western thinking and philosophy was vigorously advocated by the ERM. The trio, the God, religion, and superstitious beliefs, though closely intermingled with one another, as cause and effect, were thematically and logically dealt with by the ERM, separately and in a combined manner, as and when required by the exigencies of the situation. This job was undertaken more through the speeches and writings than through demonstrations and agitations.

The God as an entity and concept and as a super-human, having power over nature and human fortunes was strongly opposed by the ERM throughout the period under study except perhaps during the formative years of it. The first issue of the Kudi Arasu by way of invoking God had a Tamil song. It was upheld by Kaivalyam Swamiar who said that the God who was one,

4. Kudi Arasu, 2-3-1925.
irrespective of distinctions in the society, treated one and all as equals. So, all had equal opportunities in the name of God to come up in their lives, he added.\footnote{Ibid., 24-10-1926, PRLRC.}

Advertisements like, "Siddha Doctor A, Sswaminatha Pillai reached the feet of God in Heaven" appeared in the columns of \textit{Kudi Arani}.\footnote{Ibid., 21-11-1926, PRLRC.} But the SRM began to realise that it was the concept of God that bred the caste distinctions and superstitious practices among the people in the society. So, it (the SRM) under the leadership of E.V.R. had started paying no attention to its existence.\footnote{Ibid., 9-1-1927, & 3-4-1927, PRLRC.} Shortly after this, E.V.R. had a showdown with Mahatma Gandhi. This resulted in the explicit declaration of the SRM of its disbelief in the existence of God. In reply to Somasundaram Pillai's article on \textit{Indu Madamum Vaikom Younarum} (Hindu Religion and Vaikom Hero) that appeared in the \textit{Navasakthi} to the effect that E.V.R.'s main work was to spread disaffection
to God and religion in the society - which struck at the 
roots of the human morality. E.V.R. defended:

Let us know first what is atheism? No one
should worry about it if it refers to the
disbelief in the existence of God. No one
gets power either to undo the existence of God or to
challenge its concept of gods existence in the
world. In case any human being establishes the
truth that there is no such being in the world,
the man in question would have been prevented
from doing so by God itself if it really exists...

As a consequence, a complete shift in its (the SRM)
ideology from indifference to denial or negation of God
had been established at the First Provincial Self-
Respect Conference held in 1929. Subsequently,
contradicting and opposing the new ideological stand
of the Movement, a nationalist congress orthodox and
seemingly a non-Brahmin section with the help of their
media, Desabandhu, a Tamil newspaper, had formed

9. Eyyavasakthi, 7-12-1927, MAL and Kudi Araayu, 25-12-1927, 
PRLRC.

9. Kudi Araayu, 24-2-1929, PRLRC.
several Theist Associations in Tamil Nadu. The opposition of this type had only helped in sharpening its (the SRM) ideology and attack more and more against its opponents. The Movement to disprove the concept of God, had to rely more on western literature and had to dwell deep in the Hindu literature, shruti, smriti and purana. With a rationalist bend of mind. By 1932, E.V.R. could bring out a book on Kadayulum Prapancham (The God and the Universe), which was serialised earlier in the Kudi AFAS, written by M.Singaravelu, a popular socialist. It was argued in the book with scientific evidence that the Universe and the world had emerged over millions of years gradually on their own and the theory that the God had created them represented one's figment of imagination, in fact man created God. The SRM in its tirade against theism and began to utilise the intellectual support extended by M.Singaravelu in the years to come. Under the SRM’s sponsorship, the First Madras Province Atheist Conference was held on 11-12-1933 in Madras. A.Ponnambalam

10. Ramabhadru, 20-4-1929, 12,19-10-1929, INLRC.
and P. Jeewanandam were the Secretaries of the conference. At this much publicised conference M. Singaravelu declared that there was no God as a superhuman having power and control over human and natural fortunes and it was the law of the nature that governed the world and the universe. The concept of God had been enslaving human beings for quite a long time and kept them poor and exploited. The path of glory was waiting for those who ventured to break their fetters of God, religion and superstitious beliefs. 11 In 1942, the Kudi Arasu publications released a book as third edition containing the speech of A. Ragesvan, a leading self-respector-theoretician from Sattankulam in Tirunelveli district, entitled, Kadaivaii Hindikku Kamaiyar Yaar? (Who are the mean base people who blaspheme?) This book made a detailed attempt to disprove the allegations made by the opponents to the effect that the self-respectors were rogues who denounced the concept of God. It questioned the validity of irrationally concocted, 11. Paratabi, 7-1-1934, PRLAC.
fabricated immoral stories of God, which were by any standard unbelievable and unreal, and had concluded that those who created God and His stories were blasphemers and not the self-respectors.

To disprove the belief in God and to denounce the theory that the God created the universe and that the soul is indestructable, besides using the contributions of the natives, the S.R.M. utilized the contributions of western rationalist intellectuals like Ingersoll and Joseph Macabe. It's Rationalist Publications by bringing out a book of Ingersoll on the Life of Voltaire in a translated version (translated in Tamil by K.M.Balasubramaniam) in 1935 had tried to expose the theists' hypocritical and unpious lives, quite in contrast to the rationalists' or atheists' conscientious, brave and philanthropic lives. The book brought out clearly as how, a French atheist of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, by name Voltaire, a personification of all virtues had suffered at the hands of the priests and theologians in his selfless service of dispelling
ignorance and irrational beliefs from the minds of the hapless masses in France. Similarly Ingersoll's article that advocated, that of the two alternatives for one's life, the nature's way in which the belief in the existence of God was abolished and other superstitions beliefs removed was a noble life than the life which entrenched belief in all, God, religion and other related aspects of theism. This was brought out in a book form, translated in Tamil by the Kudi Arasa publishers themselves in 1942 under the title "Iyarkai Yashi - Aathmosam Yashi (or) Irandu Vaythiyan" (Nature's Way - Religious Way or Two Ways). On the other hand, the S.R.M. while advocating the evolution theory, an effective anti-thesis to the theory of God and His creation, had found an easy access in the western writings. Even, M. Singaravelu's solid contribution, to this effect, largely depended on the western philosophical and scientific inventions and discoveries. "Is evolution True?", a publication of the London Rationalist Association (London Watts & Co.), consisting of, for and against arguments regarding the theory of evolution, of Joseph
Nagabo and George Macredpyprice, was translated into Tamil under the title, *Perumalum Urala?* (Is Evolution True?), by a self-respector, T.S. Subramania Pillai and released in a book form by the *Kudi Arasu* publications in 1937. The book ultimately succeeded in proving that it was due to the continuous and constant process of evolution the world was created and the question of God did not matter there. Till today, the *SRM* has been encouraging such contributions that help to carry out its ideals to the ignorant people. An ex-communist and a contemporary of Vladimir Lenin, M.N. Roy at Calcutta once declared that he considered E.V.R. as his guru (teacher) as far as atheism was concerned, because his contribution to atheism in Tamil Nadu was very significant. Several non-Brahmin nationalists and intellectuals, like Mayilaimathen in Tamil Nadu, were sympathetic to the ideals of the *SRM*, that too, on limited issues and aims. He (Mayilaimathen) was reluctant to treat E.V.R., its (the *SRM*)

founder, as one outside the fold of Hinduism. He began to compare him with Prahaspathi, a confirmed atheist, according to Vedic puranas, and a teacher to the Devas (the heavenly gods). An atheist Minister Jabali in the Ministry of Dasaratha of the Ramayana days and a different Minister of the same ideology and conviction, who served in the Ministry of Duryodana of the Mahabharatha days were compared with E.V.R. They being atheists, were very much in the fold of Hindu religion, which gave room to atheism as an essential part of it. Like that, the well-wishers of E.V.R., had considered him as an atheist of the olden days. 13

Writing under the caption Indukkalavaky Orx Vendhool (A plea to the Hindus), K.N.P. Viswanathan in 1925 appealed to the non-Brahmins that the Brahmins as leaders of the Hindu religion were responsible for the extent distinctions and superstitious beliefs and practices in the society, so it was high time that the non-Brahmins

Hindus got rid of them and reformed the religion.\textsuperscript{14} When the Hindu Religious Endowment Bill of 1923 was introduced again in 1926 in the Madras Legislative Council with certain amendments, the Self-Respect Movement sprang into action and opposed tooth and nail the orthodox section represented by Svadesamitran. In fact, it expressed its happiness over the Bill which sought to minimise the Brahmin domination in the Temple Administration of the Presidency.\textsuperscript{15} While speaking at the Coimbatore District Fourteenth Sengunther Caste Conference, K.V.R. stressed the necessity of having self-respect by denying Sanskritic Hindu religion. He said:

The Brahmins are the heads of the Hindu religion. Unlike other religions, the Hindu religion has no originators. If the God has created Hinduism, why entry in temples is denied to a particular community? Why are there numerous Gods? Why are there rituals? Why the omnipotent God requires festival and protection? Why is there

\textsuperscript{14} Kudi Arasu, 31-5-1925, ML.

\textsuperscript{15} Native Newspaper Report: July to September, 1926, pp.1064-66. Kudi Arasu (Erode) 8-8-1926, TNA.
distinction among people in His creation? ...Oh! non-Brahmin brethren! Come out from the clutches of these and possess self-respect.

Similar challenges to Hinduism and its functionalities were carried on by the self-respectors like Kaivalyan Swamiar, S. Ramanathan and others.

When Hinduism was attacked by the SRM, Mahatma Gandhi and other nationalists were more afraid of its (the SRM) growth against the Indian National Congress than for its irreligious attitude; but taking it a pretext, held discussions with E.V.R. in the year 1927 in Bangalore. The inconclusive arguments resulted in unbridging the ideological gap between the two leaders had convinced none of them. Then the SRM more severe in its attack on Hinduism and as a result of it, had provoked stiff opposition and hatred from the

orthodox media and more particularly the Brahmin nationalist leaders opposed its posture. The SRM considered this development an achievement to its credit. 18 A non-Brahmin scholar from Tucicorn had initiated a pungent ideological battle against the SRM in 1927. 19 To a charge that its attack on religion in general and on Hindu religion in particular was baseless and malicious, E.V.R. replied:

There is no Hinduism, a religion as such in India...The word Hindu refers to the people living in the country...This is testified by the fact that no Aryan and Dravidian literature contain any reference to Hinduism...Later on the Brahmins invented this and attributed all past literature as guiding sermons ordained by God...Moreover one can live successfully and happily without associating oneself with any religion...We don’t consider religion a static and ever permanent concept or ideology. It is nothing but the views and ideas of one or many people.

18. Kudi Akaro. 27-11-1927, PRLRC.
19. Navasakthi. 7-12-1927.
They are subject to change. A religion should not intend to enslave men. One can join any religion in his lifetime. One can create many religions. Others can reform and destroy them. Because of this no one will turn to be a sinner; nor a rogue. So there is no mistake in one changing one’s religious often. All the more, we never entertain the idea that each and everyone must have a religion of their own. An intelligent man knows as to how he has to set his life. This is a known fact. Any unintelligent man may be in danger of being carried away by any religion consciously or unconsciously become as a slave...The religion and its tenets emerge according to the changing conditions, changing climates and needs of the people, hence they are flexible and not uniform for all times.

This ideological explanation formed the basis of the future atheistic and rationalistic propaganda throughout the period under study. Kaivalyam Swamiar from 1926 onwards in the columns of *Kudi Arasu* had been regularly writing about the pervasive influence of irrationalism, domination of one particular community.

20. *Kudi Arasu*, 25-12-1927, PRRC.
over others and the exploitation of the gullible masses by quoting śāntis, śaritīs and purāṇas, the Hindu religions literatures in detail. In 1931, the SRM compiled these writings and brought out a book, Keivalyam Alladu Kelaiovanam (Keivalyam or Treatise on Religion). Again in 1936, his writings appeared in another book entitled, Unmai Indu Madam - Keivalyam Swamiar Katturai Thoguny (Treatise on true Hindu religion or the essays of Keivalyam) in Tamil. Using the same yardstick, Chandrasekara Pavalar, Satyaviradhan, Nagai K. Murugesan and women writers like Dharwul Ammal and S. Neelavathī contributed articles on itihāsas (epics), purāṇas, god and religion. Of all the Truth Seekers' Publications (Erode), Swami Sivananda Saraswathi's "Gnanasriyam" (in Tamil) brought out in 1928, had, in its considerable popularity, caused the PCB's complete break from its association with the Hindu religion. The book which was meant to launch a tirade against Brahmins and Brahminism seemed to be an authentic authority over Hindu literature and its dark side of Brahmins' deliberate attempt to subjugate the innocent and ignorant masses in the name
of religion. Subsequently, negating or disowning Hindu religion completely, several resolutions were passed at the First Self-Respect Provincial Conference held in 1929.\textsuperscript{21} Thereafter the SRM became very active in its propaganda against God, religion and superstitious beliefs. While confessing its growing influence, \textit{Pepabandhu}, a Congress weekly in Tamil wrote:

> Every day the nuisance created by the self-respectors increases beyond doubt. In trains, hotels, river and tank-bed, on the roads and everywhere they seem to be active. They have been charging in abusive language the Brahmans, religions, temples, idol worship, incarnations, puranas and itthasas and other religious marks or symbols.\textsuperscript{22}

To counter this, a Theist League was established under the leadership of the Editor of \textit{Pepabandhu}. But it did not seem to be a match for the SRM. Nevertheless, in its own way, the League protested against the Naders' resolutions passed at the conferences, to the effect that, thenceforth, the religious marks which denoted

\textsuperscript{21} Kudi Arany, 24-2-1929, PRLRC.

\textsuperscript{22} Pepabandhu, 13-4-1929, PRLRC.
religious distinctions should not be used. It (the League) alleged that the evil influence of the SRM was alone responsible for that state of affairs. Again at Virudunagar in 1929, the League and its adherents disturbed the meeting that was conducted under the auspices of the American Self-Respect League under the Presidentship of Surendranath Aryan. At that time, the effigy of R.V.R. was also burnt. When Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu, accused the League for this inhuman behaviour in his media Tamil Nadu, the League defended saying that "it was not a party to that; it was the work of the Congress". 23

Till then, other than Hindu religion, Christianity and Islam were not subjected to the SRM's critical examination. Thenceforth, especially, to denounce or denigrate Christianity as a religion and faith, the SRM found literature mostly and essentially from western atheists and rationalists. Except one contribution which had been serialised in the Kudi Aryan under the caption,

23. Desabandhu, 13-7-1929, PRLRC.
"Kruttuva Madham Oor Arasi"* (A Study of Christianity) by Sattangudi C. Vedamuthu, the others were translated articles in Tamil from English. A few articles by western writers which were translated into Tamil by the self-respectors from 1931 onwards;*

In addition to the above articles, several critical works on Christianity were brought out in book form by the SKM*. Those articles and books had carried

24. Kudi Arasu, 25-1-1931, PRLRC.

*(1) Rationalism or Catholic Preacher - A Life and Treatment of Jean Mesbier (translated by S. Guruswamy) - 1931.

(2) Humanity's Gain From Unbelief by Charles Bradlaugh (translated by Samavedanar) - 1932.

(3) Socialism and Religion by Vladimir Lenin (translated by S. Ramanathan and E.V. Rameswamy) - 1932.

(4) Christian Fathers, Ladies and Confessions by Senegue (translated by the Kudi Arasu Editorial Board) - 1933.


Information collected from the perusal of the Kudi Arasu for the period from 1931 to 1934.

**Information collected from the perusal of the Kudi Arasu for the period from 1935 to 1942.

(1) Christian Fathers, Ladies and Confessions by Senegue (translated by Kudi Arasu Editorial Board) - 1933.

(2) What is Man? by Mark Twain (translated by T.S. Subramaniam) - 1938.
a pungent attack on the philosophy of Christian religion and more particularly on its functional aspect which turned the concept of religion useless. In addition to this, the SRM tried to expose the falsity and duality of Christianity in practice in the Tamil districts. In Kanyakumari district in 1932, when efforts were in the process to conduct an annual Christian festival in a Christian church in a grand manner, a majority of the poor Christians of the area, seemingly influenced by the propaganda of the SRM, expressed their protest against the conduct of the festival which was fully abound in rituals incurring unnecessary expenditure. The Fathers and Priests did not approve of this protest, and with the help of the police and consequent lathi charge made on the dissidents, conducted the festival. The SRM took strong exception to this and reacted:

The agents of Jesus Christ, who ought to have upheld the principle 'if one beats one with stone beat him with bread in return' had behaved in a brazenly manner. Let the innocent people know this. 25

(3) A Path to Reform by Robert G. Ingersoll (translated by the Kudi Arasu) - 1942.

25. KUDI ARASU, 13-8-1933, PRLRC.
A religion and its missionaries, by and large, inspired the reform movement in India came in for strong criticism by the SRM in Tamil Nadu. At a place near Pondicherry, in a Roman Catholic church, in the prayer hall there was a wedge between the high caste and low caste christians for quite a long time. The enlightened low caste Christians protested against this distinction in the name of Jesus Christ. The caste christians did not want to abolish this practice was a matter of prestige. This scuffle led to the claiming of ownership of the Church for the respective communities. When it was brought to the notice of the court it passed a ruling to the effect that until further judgment, no community should enter the temple. Disobeying this Court order, the caste christians had decided to do satyagraha inside the Church. Such a malfunctional exposure of a section of christians in Tamil Nadu, really woke up the christians, more particularly the Roman Catholics from slumber into action. They appealed to the Government of Madras to intervene and

26. Kuti Arasu, 13-5-1933, PRLRC.
take action against the SRM and its media Kudi Arasu.\(^{27}\)
The Government did not like to see the SRM's tirade against their religion go unabated and unheeded as that might even threaten its (the Government) existence. So, as the first and last step, it proscribed two out of four western-translated works stated above. The Kudi Arasu Kalampadam (Kudi Arasu Compendium) which in a lucid Tamil had cut up religions like brinjals by means of the axe of rationalism, published by the Rationalist Publications, Erode, was also proscribed by the Government of Madras in 1939.\(^{28}\) The SRM in its rationalistic crusade against religion did not leave Islam scot-free. An article on "Islam and Socialism" that appeared in the Puratchi, written by E.E.Rahman, a self-respector, had pointed out that Islam contained both socialist and reform ideals to promote human cause. At the same time, the purdah system (women's veil), denial of education to their women and the practice of polygamy, if removed from the tenets of Islam, it would be like another SRM.\(^{29}\) However, comparatively

\(^{27}\) Native Newspaper Report: July to December 1933, p.561. "Nalla Ayan"(Madras), October, 1933, TNA.

\(^{28}\) Puratchi, 4-3-1934, PRLRC.

\(^{29}\) Somtiyamram (Jolapet), 19-12-1934. Kudi Arasu, 23-8-1935.
speaking with the SRM's attack on Christianity its criticism of Islam was invariably mild because, it believed that the philosophical and functional aspect of that religion was less irrational and less cumbersome than Christianity. From 1938 onwards, that too when the anti-Hindi agitation was launched, both these religions were not subjected to attack by the SRM. This was precisely because, it was forced to mobilise the support of these religious people under the banner of non-Brahmin unity against Brahmins and the then Ministry headed by C. Rajagopalachari. Especially with the Muslims, it was friendly from late 1930's, mainly because of their claim for separate Pakistan, under the national body, the Muslim League, was analogue to its demand for the separate Dravidanad from the Indian Union. But throughout the period under study, the Hindu religion was the pivot of attack of the SRM. In the process of its activity, it had to face, equally virulent propaganda engineered by the sanatanists and C. Rajagopalachari and S. Satyamurthy, the leaders of the articulate
Hindu orthodox section, in the Tamil districts. It was reported that there were 4793 big temples, 6097 small temples, 53 big mutts and 49 small mutts in the Tamil Nadu. The SRM was aware of the need to streamline the administration of those Hindu Mutts by bringing them under the control of the Government. When a Bill to that effect was passed in 1935, the SRM gave both moral and physical support to the Justice Party which introduced the Bill, against stiff orthodox opposition. On the whole, it took it a policy to decry or denounce

30. Fortnightly Report for the first half of April 1934, No.P.4-8 (Public) (General), Dept. Dated, 19-4-1934, TNA.
Fortnightly Report for the Second half of June 1935, (Public (General) Dept, 5-7-1935, No.P.4-12, TNA.
Fortnightly Report for the first half of August 1940, 19-8-1940, D.O.No.P.4-15 (Strictly Confidential) Public (General) Dept, and Ananda Vikatan, 24-i-1937.

31. Kudi Arasu, 24-3-1940, PRLHC.

Native Newspaper Report: January to June 1935, p.311.
Kumar (Karaikudi), 11-4-1935, TNA.
anything Brahmin. When the demand for a separate Dravidanad or Tamil Nadu was intensified, and when efforts were taken to desanskritise Tamil, more by developing it as a cult and style, even attempts were made in the 1930s to substitute Hindu religion which was Brahminical and alien, with that of Tamil religion that incorporated some of the self-respect ideals.\[33\]

More articles like Indu Madham, Tamizhar Madhamalla (Hindu Religion is not Tamils' Religion) began to appear in the Kudi Arasu from 1939 onwards, and these showed that the pure and simple Tamil religion, devoid of Brahminical influence, and devoid of rituals and superstitious beliefs would be welcome.\[34\] But a religion of this kind and structure would become manifest as a self-respect religion only.

The practices that are related to and connected with god and religion, involving waste of time, energy and money and based on blind faith are against

\[33\] Janaasavaan, February 1948, op.cit.

\[34\] Kudi Arasu, 16-7-1939 and the issues that followed till the formation of the Dravida Kazhagam in 1944, PRLRC,
rationalism were branded as superstitious beliefs.
Accordingly rituals and ceremonies that are performed
at the time of birth, marriage and death and at the time
of offering prayers to God, idol worship, omens and
prophecies, festivals conducted in temples, belief in
soul, birth after death, heaven and hell, incarnations,
ghosts and spirits, magics and miracles and other acts
of religious frenzy were the subjects of attack and
criticism by the SRM on the pretext that they kept
human beings permanently in chains of ignorance and
slavery. Besides offering rationalistic criticism to
such beliefs through writings and speeches, the self-
respectors also tried on several occasions to expose
the evil consequences accrued to such practices and
prevented people from practicing them further. In an
article on *Moorthi Sthala Theertham* (Much venerated Holy
Dip), Kaivalyan Swamiar had said that though the climate
and water of a different place other than the place where
one lived might cure some of the diseases he was afflicted
to, the holy dip in far off places and the belief that
developed around it to the effect that it was all due to
the sacredness of the holy dip that had cured one's illness, was superfluous, hence superstitious. At the same time he ridiculed the idol worship, as there were no birth, death, shape and form to God. He made an appeal to people not to believe in the existence of ghosts and not to be afraid of such beings which never existed. In his article on Payum Bhuthamum (Ghosts and Spirits), he examined psychologically the issue in question. He said:

Psychologically speaking, the anatomy of people, the environment in which they live and the nature of their brought up combined with their imbalanced and disturbed mind, lead them believe that there is ghost. Actually against this background, it is caused by a hallucinated state of mind and body together.

He further explained that mostly, women of unsound mind and health were subjected to this fear and at times they behaved unconsciously as if they were possessed either by good or evil spirits. Doctors attributed this to

35. Kudi Aryar, 5-12-1926 and 14-4-1927, PRLNC.
'hysterical' state of mind of such persons, he said.
But on the other hand, the philosophy of God and religion attributed them to fate and as God-sent gift as against scientific attributes. 36  M.V.R. speaking at a Sengun-
ther's conference held in Coimbatore district in 1926,
had referred to a number of Brahmin-created Hindu
ceremonies for which people spent their money and energy
as slaves and innocent irrational beings professing faith
in them. 37 The self-respectors, particularly, the
activists took it as a principle, to deny and boycott
such superstitious practices. A self-respecter from
Madural, Namachivaya Mudaliar performed his mother's death
anniversary in 1927 without inviting a Brahmin purushit
and without observing rituals. With a prayer followed
by a dinner to the poor, the ceremony ended. On this
occasion, the self-respectors present promised to perform
such ceremonies in the similar manner in their houses
henceforth. It was reported that about forty persons

36. Kudi Arasu, 9-1-1927 and 16-1-1927, PRLRC.
37. Ibid., 9-1-1927, PRLRC.
present agreed to do so. 38 Advertisements to the effect that a certain number of people from various parts of Tamil Nadu, had boycotted the unwanted Hindu rituals at the ceremonies of their dead parents and relatives began to appear in the Kudi Arasu thereafter. 39 To propitiate Gods, the people in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere in India, used to offer goats which in turn would be butchered in front of temples. This practice was encouraged by Brahmin priests, whom the non-Brahmins considered their religious heads. The SRM besides propagating against this cruel, inhuman and superstitious practice, prevented its followers from doing it. In 1928, it published a photo in the Kudi Arasu showing two Brahmins dragging two goats (followed by six other goats) for the purpose of sacrificing them in a temple in Kumbakonam, with the caption: “Kumbakonathu Paypanakkolei” (The Killings of Kumbakonam Brahmins). 40 When sacrifices of the same type

38. Ibid., 20-2-1927, PRLRC.
39. Ibid., 1-1-1928, PRLRC.
40. Kudi Arasu, 13-5-1928, PRLRC.
were performed in the same place in 1934, the SRM strongly
protested against this and took this an opportunity to
criticise the moral dualism of the Brahmans in Tamil
Nadu. 41 It (the SRM) warned people not to be carried
away by the words and deeds of the bogus god-men and
those who professed to possess the super human power,
because they exploited not only the innocence of the
people but also their money however much they had. At
Avinashi in Coimbatore district in 1929, by exposing the
hallowness and cheating of one Goonambattinadam God-man
who promised to do good to the family to which they were
invited, the SRM enabled the affected family which spent
about Rs.3000/- for that God-man for no purpose, to come
to their senses at last. 42 A similar but a gruesome
incident took place in Tirunelveli district in the year
1933, this time by Christian God-women. The hapless men
and women, like sacrificial goats, mesmerised by their
preachings, became victims of their lust, misguidance,
religious frenzy which were harmful to one's health and

41. Ibid. 27-5-1934, PRLRC.
42. Kudi Arasu, 13-1-1929, PRLRC.
moral and material exploitation. The SRM took pity on the victims and tried to relieve them from the clutches of those women agents of Jesus Christ through Christian self-respectors like Joseph from Tirunelveli. 43 Similarly, when one Yogananda Iswarar, a disciple of Ramalinga Adigal, from Tiruchi, distributed a pamphlet in 1942, saying that the dead saint Ramalinga Adigal would come alive on a Thaipoogam day full-moon day in January and give life to two of the dead sons of his disciple in Tiruchi, the SRM ridiculed it and warned the people not to believe such impracticable and unreal statements as they had no precedent, hence false. It averred, these beliefs were perpetuated to cheat the people. 44

It was the decided opinion of the SRM that all religions or caste marks represented once unbridled orthodoxy, and once belief in the meaningless social distinctions and status that invariably hampered progress of humanity. At the first Provincial Self-

43. Kudi Arasu, 6-9-1933, PRLRC.
44. Viduthalai, 19-12-1942, PRLRC.
Respect Conference, the resolutions to that effect were passed. 45

A non-Brahmin orthodox section in 1929 took exception to these (which were branded as mere superstitious beliefs) and tried to explain them giving a religious and hygienic importance to each and every mark and symbol.

(1) The disease producing secretion water inside the body will be removed or dried up due to the application of sacred powders like, sandal, saffron and cow-dung ash on our foreheads and on other parts of the body;

(2) It is a beauty device.

(3) It reminds us of Godliness.

(4) Caste appellations like Pillai, Chetti and others are uniformly being used by all people in the world though in different names. They are based on the different occupations the people do. 46

45. Kudir Amal, 24-2-1929, PRLRC.
46. Desabandhu, 18-5-1929, PRLRC.
The SRM stood against astrology and prophecy as well. "The non-rationalistic frame of mind produced by religious faiths made believers in religion an easy prey to any person professing to pry into the future".\(^47\) The priests and other professional cheats in the field of foretelling the future had kept the innocent people for ages together under the intellectual slavery. They questioned the relevance of astrology to one's life and branded it yet another theology which did not provide an answer to the riddle that the life would not seem identical to persons who were born in the same date, day, time and year. It considered it a subject against rationalism. So, "it is a hoax, an unqualified commercial practice hence superstitious belief."\(^48\)

The celebration of festivals was another victim of the attack in Tamil Nadu. It had


never encouraged the festivals conducted in temples, and other Hindu festivals being performed by people. Lakhs of people used to attend a festival (Mahamagham) conducted once in twelve years' in a grand manner at Kumbakonam in Tanjore district. The e said to see the people blinded by the religious fervour and superstitious belief, spent huge amounts of money on such festivals. An advertisement in the form of appeal to the people to desist from resorting to such practices, had appeared in the Kudi Arasu:

What is the use of this Mahamagam festival?
The Railways get more profit. The prostitutes run a lucrative trade. Womanizers have a hey day. The rich people will rejoice whereas the poor will suffer. -Brahmins image further goes up. You innocent exploited people! Now do you know what is Mahamagam? Are you going there? Are you not ashamed for such a visit? At times of similar and other festivals undertaken for goddesses: in particular, a popular religious frenzy, fire-treading ritual used to take place in various parts of Tamil Nadu. The ridiculed the practice as

49. Kudi Arasu, 25-12-1932, FRLRC.
"hoax" which could be done even by rationalists without much practice, like the religious people. In several parts of Tamil Nadu, the self-respectors demonstrated this practice. They explained that the rough skin under the feet was a bad conductor of heat which helped to withstand the heat for a few seconds without being felt immediately. 50 An another practice by name modi, usually referred to as miracle acts, being performed by several people who were believed to be spirits-possessed persons, the SRM did not spare anyone doing them, and its activists demonstrated against them and exposed the performers' hollowness and the people's innocence and ignorance in several parts of the Tamil districts. In Vadagamandalam in 1944, the self-respectors had to encounter such modi performers and drove them away with a word to the people that there was nothing to fear about ghosts and spirits and one could lead a happy and fearless life if one was a rationalist. 51 Above all, people's strong faith in soul, fate and rebirth seemed to be stumbling

50. Kudi Arasu, 15-8-1937, PRLRC.
51. Ibid., 28-10-1944, PRLRC.
blocks to the progress of the society as well as to the growth of the SRA in Tamil Nadu. P.M. Anandam, a self-respector, writing in 1936, said that, a philosophical explanation that was offered by the Hindu protagonists for soul, fate and rebirth was meant to enslave people both mentally and physically, hence against rationalism. According to him, man was a matter and there was no soul in it. There was no life after death and since everything was the outcome of the action and reaction of the people in combination with the influence or impact of the functions of the Laws of Nature and so, a belief that one's life was pre-determined by God and attributed the belief to fate was an unwarranted and unqualified argument. As for heaven and hell they were fictitious and imaginary worlds which were not a necessary for a rational being to live a happy and orderly life in this world. 52 To spread the rationalist philosophy to a wider public, the SRA, with two of its publishing houses, namely, The Rational Books Publishing Society Limited, Erode and the Kudi Arasu

52. Kudi Arasu, 1-11-1936, pRRC.
Publications, Erode and Madras, published at low-price several books and booklets that contained the rationalist explanation to superstitious beliefs in the society.*

In this manner, the SRM advocated and propagated its philosophy throughout the period under study and thereafter. When some of its opponents as well as its followers and sympathisers, the former out of curiosity and the latter out of conviction, expressed their

* Information collected from the perusal of the Kudi Arasu for the period from 1934 to 1943.

(1) Meiganamurasiyum Moodanambikkaiyum (Scientific Method and Ignorant Beliefs), by M. Singaravelu, 1934.

(2) Ramalingarwandal Padal Thirattu (Ramalingaswami's songs - an anthology), edited by Sami Chidambaramar, 1935.

(3) Narasam, Ence Irukkiradu? (Where is Hell?) by Marshall J. Cavin (translated into by Pandit S. Muthuswamy Pillai), 1936.

(4) Seerthirutha Narasam (A Reform Way), by Robert G. Ingersoll (translated into Tamil by Kudi Arasu Publications), 1942.

(5) E. V. R. Ravin Ilangoal Upanayanam (E. V. R.'s Ceylon Speeches), 1942.

(6) Moodanazhakkangalai Oshiyungal (Discard superstitious beliefs) by S. S. Subbiah, 1943.
doubts regarding its (the Movement) viability and role in enriching the art and culture of Tamil Nadu, as they were so far associated with god and religion, the

SRM way of clearing their doubts explained:

The rationalists take all the aspects of human nature like beauty, love, or a sense of the grandeur of Nature and the universe into account before forming their judgments. Aesthetic and emotional factors are given their full value as a means of enriching human life and the Rationalist's recognition of their importance is none the less eager because, he sees the universe as an expression of uniform laws to which no miraculous exception is possible. 53

The SRM, in its intellectual thrust against Hindu religion and God, visualised a Tamil society that is built on rational and atheistic philosophy which develops itself, ultimately, into an alternative force to Hinduism in Tamil Nadu.

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53. Kadi Aram, 30-4-1939, PRLRC.