

## CONCLUSION

Periyar, the social mentor of the Tamils left behind him a society, vastly different from the one he inherited, more alert, more questioning, less gullible, better educated, more modern and in general closer to take off point for a state of living that would be richer in all respects. He sought to raise the non-Brahmin castes, particularly the under privileged, to a position of political and social importance equal to that of Brahmins. He was the first rational thinker and philosopher to make an organised effort to awaken the largely illiterate non-Brahmin mass and recruit them into his brand of political culture. As founder of the Self-Respect Movement and Dravida Kazhagam, Periyar held a unique position in the society and politics of Tamilnadu both in pre and post independence years without holding any political office. His work was multi-dimensional and produced a lasting impact on the religion, society and politics of Tamilnadu.

Periyar is dead but his movement and rational philosophy are immortal and never die. His struggle for social justice is getting popular and stronger in every passing day. His social justice message and his revolutionary ideas spread all over India. His influence in all spheres of life is so deep and his rationalist thought is so powerful. He was a born revolutionary, though born in an orthodox family. At any cost he never accepted social evils, religious bigotry and superstition of the people. From his experience, he found that religion was nothing but an exploitative system. He was a great organiser from his youth days. His father recognised his capacity, assigned him many public and social works. Periyar once

remarked that 'our family was taking great interest in all the festivals in the temples in Erode as if they were our family functions. My father wanted me to help in all those festivals on his behalf. Probably, he thought that piety could be instilled into me by this was then appointed as the Secretary of Devasthanam Committee and later its President. Periyar discharged every work that was entrusted to him sincerely and efficiently. In his active public life, he made continuous campaign against social injustice, exploitation and inequality. He found that in the name of religion people were exploited and he was very strong against religious fanaticism. Since religion failed to satisfy his thirst for establishing social equality among the Tamils, Periyar found that the Congress Party could do justice to the people. And hence he joined the Congress.

Periyar steadily rose to the position of a leader with independent qualities and charisma. His role in Congress as a social worker was undoubtedly significant. In course of time, for social cause Periyar gave up his lucrative private business, became staunch supporter of Congress, and became a good friend and ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi. He actively participated in the boycott movements against the British and was imprisoned several times with his wife and his sister. The prevalence of caste system in the Congress Party leaders, forced Periyar to leave the party and blamed the Brahmins for the Aryanisation of India and Sanskritisation of Indian culture. The Brahmin leaders maligned that Periyar was anti-national because he severed his connection with the national movement. But Periyar had the belief that unless social justice was attained prior to political

independence in India, it cannot last long. He believed that communal representation was the way to the path of social justice. To realise his ideals he formed a separate socialist group within Self-Respect Movement. Seeing the socio-economic programme elaborated by the Self-Respect Movement, it is beyond all doubts that Periyar was not only a great nationalist but also a socialist by conviction, a humanitarian by his commitment and a visionary who wanted India to be the most modern, progressive, prosperous and a model country in the world.

Untouchability is a social problem and Periyar viewed that the eradication would strengthen the hands of the Indians in their fight against alien rule. Owing to his devoted service to the people irrespective of caste distinction, Periyar's name spread to the neighbouring states. In this concern, Periyar's activities were keenly watched by the leaders of Kerala Congress Committee and they utilised his services for the course of the depressed communities in Kerala. The Kerala Congress leaders were arrested for their *satyagraha* at Vaikom. To continue the struggle, the leaderless Kerala Provincial Congress Committee invited Periyar of Tamilnadu to take the mantle of leadership. In 1924 Periyar led the famous Vaikom *satyagraha* in Kerala which was a great success for him and the doors of the temple street were thrown open to the backward and depressed communities of Kerala.

Periyar was a great champion of women's rights and he fought for their equal status in the society. He advocated that women should be given equal rights along with men in the family property. Periyar since his entry into

public life, advocated that woman would be given equal opportunities in education, employment and payment. He was very particular, that there should be no social difference between man and women. He hated the idea of considering woman as an object of beauty and utility and advised them to develop Self-Resect and organise themselves against social discrimination. Indeed, it was a social revolution as far as the conditions of women were considered because the communal groups in Tamilnadu did not bother about the women. He consistently engaged himself in propaganda against child marriage and supported widow re-marriage and believed in family planning. His intention was to bring the women in the national stream in every respect to the mainstream.

Periyar was a staunch supporter of human rights. He said that a casteless and classless society is necessary for the development of the nation. By utilising his revolutionary philosophy, he wanted to bulldoze the existing obstruction for the development of human beings. He was a doughty warrior who waged a remorseless and relentless war against monopoly of the Tamil society by the virtue of mere birth. To elevate the socially backward classes of Tamilnadu, he pressed the government of Tamilnadu for the introduction of the communal G.O. and he succeeded in it in his life time it self. The Communal G.O. found a permanent place in Indian Constitution by the amendment of Article 15(4) of Constitution. He sowed the seeds for the Human Rights Movement in Tamilnadu. Periyar strongly opposed the Gandhian view on *varnasramadhama* and advised his supporters to abstain from giving their caste appellations and call

themselves rationalists. The followers of Self-Respect Movement opposed those public, commercial establishments which practiced distinction and discrimination based on caste. Periyar's programme for social justice included the eradication of untouchability and uplift of depressed caste people with a wide range of support. The media was fully utilised for the propagation of his philosophy. His speeches and suggestions were published in Kudi Arasu and other dailies. Periyar with a strong sense of social justice evidently differed from the national political leaders. After his exit from the Congress, he focussed his ideas on the backward and illiterate non-Brahmins and organised them under the banner of the Self-Respect Movement.

The Self-Respect Movement was dedicated to the goal of giving non-Brahmins a sense of pride based on their Dravidian past and culture. In his crusading zeal, Periyar followed a radical policy and attacked the very basis of Hindu culture and religion. The conservatives among the non-Brahmins felt that in trying to do away with social iniquities, Periyar should have proceeded with his movement more cautiously and should not have hurt religious susceptibilities. Educated non-Brahmins, the economically poor, and the socially most backward sections of the society actively participated in Periyar's crusade. However he forgot that 'religion is as inseparable from social reform as love to man is inseparable from love to God. He lacked the largeness of vision of other great social reformers. Justice Ranade said, 'If your religious ideas are low and groveling, you cannot succeed in social, economical and political sphere. This interdependence is not an accident but

it is the law of nature'. Periyar spurned these lofty dictums as mere platitudes. His excessive zeal for social reform made him break with traditional culture and religion and do what his own individual reason suggested as proper and fitting. Perhaps he thought without the kind of Tamil society he envisaged and fought for, the non-Brahmins would find themselves low in the scale of social and political rights.

It is likely that because of the Periyar Movement some of the grotesque superstitious beliefs based on religion and tradition were largely given up. Brahmin priestly order was boycotted to an extent by non-Brahmins but not its rites and rituals in conducting religious ceremonies. It shook the very root of Brahmanism. The movement took its pride that because of its propaganda only the sanskrit language in Tamilnadu has lost its glory in ceremonies. Despite these in the social life of Tamils, the priestly order was not completely repudiated, for a new class of non-Brahmin priestly order has been emerging in recent years. The Self-Respect marriages have become more popular among a section of non-Brahmins and after the formation of the D.M.K.rule in 1967, such marriages have obtained its legal sanction. Inter-caste marriages among non-Brahmins have become less uncommon and as a result one can expect that caste distinctions among them would disappear in future. Though visible disabilities of caste no longer exist, the caste system in its entire ramifications still persists in society. Likewise, Hindu religion and Hindu deities still reign supreme in the life of Tamils. Atheism may have become a cult among the followers of the Dravida Kazhagam. But the majority of non-

Brahmins continue to venerate their gods and derive solace and strength from religion.

In politics, Periyar played a dual role as messiah of the lower strata of non-Brahmins in the Tamil society and that as a self-aggrandized leader. He gave political education to a section of non-Brahmin mass that was left uncared for or only partially cared for by other political parties. No doubt he created an awareness of their stake in the body-politics and organised them into a political group that they could play an effective role in the country. His approach was consistent and genuine. He was strongly supported by leaders of the under-privileged communities. As a consequence, he succeeded in building a powerful force in Tamilnadu politics. It owed its loyalty and allegiance to none but it was the source of unfailing strength and support to Periyar. He possessed the ability and diligence to use this force as a powerful political weapon to sustain his position as a leader on his own right and to use it as a pressure group in Tamilnadu politics.

As a political leader, Periyar suffered from certain limitations, which prevented him from taking an enlightened view on men and matters. In handling political issues of the period, he was an autocrat. All the decision was taken by him and he executed them. He never accepted the views of others. His disdain for democratic approach, with independent views and his suspicion of intelligentsia had a disruptive effect on his party organization. Party image was put to the test whenever men of talents fell out with Periyar. The absence of competent and enlightened men in the party precluded it from having meaningful discussion of vital issues relating to constitutional

processes. However, Periyar had sturdy common sense to understand the general implications of such processes, neither he nor his party seldom subjected them to a critical scrutiny. As a result, Periyar's party was invariably in the background, or totally out of the picture, whenever issues of this nature came up for assessment. This was naturally one of the major shortcomings of his political leadership.

This limitation was offset by Periyar's ability to organise agitations and fight issues tooth and nail. He was a zealous propagandist with few rivals in Tamilnadu politics. As an assiduous demagogue, he skillfully led the anti-Brahmanical movement. In the fast changing situations he was ruthless, determined and willing to compromise even cherished principles. A pertinent example is Periyar's eagerness to accommodate the *sanathanists'* stand on the temple entry question in order to present a united front to Rajagopalachari's ministry. From ethical point of view, this attitude was not appreciable, but in the game of politics, it is understandable. In such a case political opportunism alone was the sole criterion to Periyar.

Unlike the nationalist politicians, the political aims of Periyar movement were limited. Periyar did not advocate immediate political freedom for the country. A liberal in political thought, he favoured Dominion status for India. After his exit from the Tamilnadu Congress, he pursued a policy of tactful co-operation with the bureaucracy of the British government. He was hand in glove with those who were in authority except for a brief period when the Congress ruled the province, with the one aim of deriving as

much benefits as possible for the entire non-Brahmin caste. In pursuing this aim he was consistent throughout his political career.

The impact of Periyar's political activity was strong and direct on the Justice Party. With his entry, the party became mass-based. The process of Tamilisation was accelerated. The elite were tactfully pushed to the background. Their pro-British stand was modified, and the party was rechristened Dravida Kazhagam. The cumulative effect of Periyar Movement on the social front was the decline of social, religious and political domination of the Brahmins in Tamilnadu. Political and social gap between non-Brahmins and Brahmins were no doubt narrowed down because of the works of the movement and the non Congress ministries.

On the cultural point of view Periyar's Movement through its grass root organisations brought the message of Tamil nationality to the masses. Tamil language itself acquired capability as the most powerful vehicle for the expression of modern political thought. There was a flowering of Tamil literature. This made easy for the revival of Tamil nationalism and culture. The movement demanded for an independent Dravidanadu in order to preserve the ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity of the Tamils. Though this secessionist attitude can be regarded as a direct threat to the unity of the country, we cannot deny that it has promoted politically-conscious linguistic unity. Such regional nationalism far from being detrimental to Indian democracy may lend viability to it. It is also possible to point out the emergence of a compact federal system in India's political fabric. Till his demise in 1973 at the age of ninety five, for more than half a century, Periyar

dedicated his life for the service of the people. With few parallels in the socio-political history of India, Periyar served the society and the nation.