

Preface

E.V.Ramasami, one of the most fascinating personalities of Tamilnadu of the twentieth century played a vital role in bringing about a lasting social change among the Tamils. The people of Tamilnadu affectionately call him “Thantai Periyar” or ‘Periyar’. He was a great patriot, no doubt and at the same time a great rationalist philosopher and thinker as well. Indomitable heroism, hard working temperament, strong conviction, firm determination and social ideology made him a versatile personality. He earned himself a place in the hearts of the people of Tamilnadu by the virtue of his selflessness and untiring services. The non-Brahmins of Tamilnadu consider him as their leader who successfully fought to liberate them from the clutches of the high caste people specially the Brahmins. Through the Self-Respect Movement, he popularised anti- Brahminism and earned the goodwill of the non-Brahmins of Tamilnadu.

Periyar always stuck to his principles and policies which appeared sometimes rigid in nature. His rigidity in his actions and programmes brought more enemies than friends in the political arena. The political stand did not permit any permanent alignment with any party. While refraining from day to day involvement in politics, he wanted those in politics to get involved in social matters. As he always considered social preparedness for self government as important as political, his movement did not compartmentalize society and politics. To him, political power meant the power to remove social evils, and politics unconcerned with social work was not needed. Application of several of

these methods was consistent with Periyar's personality and ideologies. The Periyar Movement has been an ideological movement with the sole aim of effecting an ideological revolution. His vehement criticism on meaningless religious ceremonies and superstitious beliefs of the Tamils termed him an atheist. He dreamed of a united society of all non-Brahmin communities of Tamilnadu. The Self-Respect Movement of Periyar has had a profound impact on all aspects of the Tamil society. His rational philosophy and vision of Tamil society was carried out by the non-Congress ministries of Tamilnadu, the Justice Party and the D.M.K. ministries. The Communal Government Order, the abolition of Devadasi system, recognition of Self-Respect marriage, Temple entries, Archaka Acts etc., are a few examples.

The Movement of Periyar covers a great span of time, half a century, starting from the Vaikom Satyagraha in April 1924 to the end of his life in December 1973. In fact, his speeches, correspondences and writings in dailies and weeklies, made him and his movement quite popular. It also provides a source of great inspiration to the present generation in terms of devotion to duty, dignity, sincerity and love for the country. The present Tamilaham needs to be reminded of his great services.

Based on original sources and theoretic approach, the present study seeks to represent an original contribution to his historical scholarship on modern Tamilnadu. Because of extensive field work, it has been possible to identify and consult a large number of records in Archives and libraries. Though

much has been written about the Self-Respect Movement, a detailed study of the Impact of Periyar Movement on the Tamils has not been attempted so far. Hence the present thesis.

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