CHAPTER - III

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The period of E.V. Ramaswamy represents a historical landmark, an epoch, an era, a revolution, a renaissance, a reformation, a rationalistic revolution, and a turning point in the history of the Tamil Nadu people. Periyar is not just an individual. He is an epitome of a chronicle of "hundred years of history of a country and an unique philosophy of human society."1

He was one of the most controversial men in public life. He had taken upon himself a mission that was one of the most hazardous and most sublime ever undertaken by man. He launched a multipronged onslaught, a many-faceted fight. During his three quarter century of public life, he had won more brickbats than bouquets, more critics than admirers! This fact explains in ample measure the truth behind the ceaseless tirades of acrimony and mispropaganda directed against him by the vested interests.

He was a great thinker of the twentieth century,
a great freedom fighter, an aggressive rationalist and the builder of a new era. Unfortunately, he was not understood by the world as much as he should have been, because he was born in Tamil Nadu. Strangely the sub-continent of India has not fully understood the personality of Periyar. Instead his message was deliberately distorted and his name blocked out. "Yet they could not succeed in exterminating or camouflaging his skill and calibre, his intelligence and the philosophy he expounded."

E.V. Ramaswamy was born at Erode in South India on September 17, 1879 with a silver spoon in his mouth. His mother tongue was Kannada. He was born in a family that commanded an unusual place of importance in Tamil Nadu though they were Mysoreans. It was a house of liberal hospitality "that provided a forum for religious discourses and proved the abode of the orthodox." Venkatappa Naicker, his father and a leading businessman of Erode and his mother Chinnathai Ammal were both so devoted to religious and philanthropic activities that their house rightly commanded high respect and general
popularity among the religious circles. As a young lad, Ramaswamy, though often dubbed as 'naughty', exhibited a remarkable capacity for perception and an amazing interest in the state of life in the world around him. The social inequalities, the religious inconsistencies and other ills which then prevailed (and which still prevail) were among the things that caught his notice and agitated the mind of the young lad who was then hardly eight. His thought was stired up. The will to fight the evil showed itself. The question of the baneful custom of condemning certain section of the society as unworthy of equality of status and freedom of movement was perhaps the one that was uppermost in his mind.

The unfortunate community which was condemned as "untouchables" was already in a state of utter poverty. The ruthless regulations of the society, again, added to the misery of these dumb folks. Their state of penury and squalor on the one hand and on the other the disabling social handicap, moved deeply the tender heart of the young boy. The bid to fight the evil was
so overwhelming that he was determined to go ahead against heavy odds, against all obstacles the orthodox might put in the way.

Very soon Ramaswami found himself amidst the 'condemned' folks, "so freely moving and mixing with them. Much to the dislike and irritation of the orthodox, he was seen touching the 'untouchables', he was seen delighting himself in drinking their water and eating their food." He was thus indulging in the kind of activities that met with the bitterest opposition of the orthodox section which was resolved to 'set things right' ere long. His own orthodox parents were no exception to this.

Fonded by his pious grandmother and brought up without discipline, the prodigy Ramaswamy has not much of formal schooling. He would hardly have "attended school for five years when his 'education' was abruptly discontinued." He was too full of energy and intolerably mischievous. He was ceremoniously 'apprenticed' in his father's shop and very soon he evinced a remarkable aptitude for business. His nimble
wit, robust commonsense and prodigious memory brought him a reputation in his trade. His father's business soon became his and his active contact with all phases of life and forces in the world tended to a very large extent to shape his mind, discipline his intellect and enrich his experience which no amount of scholastic education could have possibly done. He had a natural yearning to learn from experience. There was also in him an inherent desire to understand people and their problems. Thus his accent on the empirical way and his longing and love for humanity and human affairs were two distinct factors that supplemented each other.

Ramaswamy, even as a young lad, "displayed remarkable capacity for logical discussion with aged 'pundits' of the orthodoxy, about religion and mythology", who were visiting his house in good numbers. When only nineteen, he married a cousin of his, one Nagammal. She, like any other woman of the day, was brought up on strict, orthodox lines. And so there was a problem for the young wife. Right from the beginning she had to play the not-so-easy role of having to reconcile herself with her
revolutionary husband. She, however, was able to make necessary adjustment with a surprising adaptibility and very soon proved herself a devoted wife and a valuable companion.

While he was still in his twenties, there occurred an incident that is full of humour and romance. "Suddenly this Siddartha was struck with futility of this mundane world and changed clothes as a Sanyasin and started out from home he knew not whither." The sudden renunciation of the world and the precious experiences he had gained and the ultimate return to home are all a chapter in his life that grips any boy's interest. He entered service under some other Sadhus, converting to lead a clean life and gather flower for Puja early every morning. Friendless and foodless, the Sanyasin Ramaswami, the son of a well-known and wealthy merchant, was wandering about in the streets of Benares. His hunger was once so unbearable and food was so scarce that this starving Sanyasin actually "jumped on the leaf (used for dining) that was thrown out of a house and swallowed the crumbs and the castaways therein."
He used to head the Bhajans and interpret the scriptures in the Vedas and Puranas at Benares. He found at last all these Bhajans, rituals, superstitions are sheer humbug and hypocrisy. He returned homewith the aid of a friend of his father but as a matured and entered into business again at Erode.

Though he became a big business magnate earning a substantial income, his mind was eager for public life. He began his public life through the Erode Municipality which was then the prerogative of the wealthy. In the meanwhile, Ramaswamy, on account of his abiding interest and amazing drive, endeared himself to one and all of the locality and identified himself as a selfless worker in the public cause. 'Local offices, one after another, came in search of this youthful worker, so that within a brief period there was hardly any public body, big or small, with which he was not associated.'

On his part, he took as much interest in the office of the Honorary Magistrate as in the administration of the City Municipality of which he was the
efficient chairman. His services during the great plague of the period demonstrated for the first time his amazing spirit of service; and was, because of his hard work and noble example, largely responsible for driving many an aristocrat into action, when the unfortunate epidemic was raging over the area. People began to acclaim him as an example and symbol of public service. Ramaswamy, promoted by a craze to serve, was looking for new avenues that would give him still greater opportunities. Thus he occupied 29 covetable posts in an honorary capacity from 1907 to 1919.

Lure of the Congress:

With Dr. Varadharajulu and C. Rajagopalachari, the influential chairman of Erode Municipality entered politics and was baptised into the Congress in 1919 though he had conducted several Congress meetings since 1907. His wealth, influence and worthy experience no less than his power of oratory and patent sincerity placed him in the front rank of the Congress politicians.
Spontaneously, the Secretaryship and Presidentship of the Tamil Nadu Congress were offered to him in 1921 and 1923. With characteristic zest and zeal, he discharged his duties in all posts that he occupied. As the Congress held views similar to his own on social reform, he thought that by joining that political organization he would bring about "a new social order in the Presidency of Madras." Ramaswamy had a passion for human right and equality. He watched closely the domination of Congress affairs by one section. He resented prerogatives and privileges in the social organization on the basis of birth. He was no respector of the mythological definitions of society and had scant respect for Hindu Puranic exposition of human life.

Picketing the Toddy Shops:

He was the first among those who picketed liquor shops in Tamil Nadu. His wife Nagammal and his loving sister Kannammal were the first Indian women to picket and brave arrest. Though their defiance of the order
under IPC Section 144 was ignored in the first instance, yet persistence on their part to defy law landed them in prison. The whole of Erode was "stunned that the members of a rich and renowned family went to prison."\(^{11}\)

The Civil Disobedience Movement was at its peak in the country. Thousands of men and women who participated in this movement courted arrest. At this juncture, Sir Sankaran Nair convened a peace conference for negotiation with the Government of India in order to create a congenial atmosphere in politics. He wanted that the agitation be withdrawn before the peace talks commenced. Gandhiji did not accept this pre-condition. Addressing the peace conference, he said: "The withdrawal of the agitation is not in my hands. It is in the hands of E.V. Ramaswamy's sister and his wife in Erode."\(^{12}\)

E.V. Ramaswamy had in his private estate over 500 coconut trees, allotted for toddy tapping, all of which yielded substantial income. When prohibition was actually launched, he felled down all "the trees in the 'Tadampatty' farm in order to make prohibition a success as a true protagonist of prohibition."\(^{13}\)
In the wake of the Non-co-operation Movement, the boycott of courts, again proved another great drain on his coffers. The launching of this campaign meant to Ramaswamy "sacrifice of a huge sum of well over 8.50,000 (quite a substantial amount 50 years ago) which he had in bonds and such other documents." Finding Ramaswamy in this predicament, his colleague Vijayaraghavachariar (later Congress President) rushed to his rescue with his strange suggestion. This stalwart of Salem suggested that instead of losing the huge amount, (as had been decided by Ramaswamy) "it might well be made over to Vijayaraghavachariar for the due transfer in turn to Tilak Funds which he was busy collecting." But Ramaswamy was firm on the issue. He, for obvious reasons regretted his inability to accept the suggestion put forward by his colleague. He stood by his "original decision to sacrifice the entire amount - a decision he had never regretted."  

The Vaikam Hero:

A campaign was launched against the inhuman
restrictions imposed on the Pulayas, Ezhavas and the lowest who were denied the basic civil right of using the public streets. In the early twenties - Kerala was considered to be the cradle of untouchability. Touch-me-not-ism assumed an acute and barbarous form of see-me-not-ism. The very sight of the untouchable was supposed to pollute the caste Hindus. "The low caste people had to carry an umbrella to conceal their face from the caste-Hindus and public pathways were barred to them." So rigid and ruthless was the practice that the untouchables were severely confined to their own slums and colonies and any entry into other areas was interpreted as an act of transgression and trespass and punished accordingly.

"Advocate Madhavan was prevented from entering the court to represent his client's case as the court was situated inside the place where the Poojas were conducted on account of Maharaja's birth day. Taking this opportunity, the non-Brahmin leaders of Kerala decided to launch a Satyagraha. George Joseph, a prominent Congressman was in charge of the campaign. But even before the campaign was set properly on its
track, all the leaders of Satyagraha were behind the bars; no one to lead and inspire the volunteers. The movement, even before it could be formed, had almost crippled. The imprisoned leaders thus upset, were seriously thinking of alternative men for leading the campaign, and saving it from the miserable fate that had befallen it. At last a letter jointly signed by the Kerala leaders was sent from the prison cell calling on E.V.Ramaswamy to assume leadership of the agitation."\(^{18}\)

The revolutionary spirit of patriotism and social equality guided and inspired E.V.Ramaswamy. He was full of vigour and enthusiasm, and he was dedicated to the cause of his fellowmen. He headed a contingent of peaceful volunteers and marched to Vaikom. To the surprise and disappointment of the Sanatanists (Hindu orthodox), Periyar was accorded a royal reception on the outskirt of Vaikom by the officers of the royal home of the Maharaja of Travancore. The Maharaja and his retinue "used to halt at Erode and enjoy the hospitality of the family of Periyar whenever the Maharaja passed through Erode."\(^{19}\)
The royal host did not deter the intrepid Ramaswamy from his participation in and leadership of the agitation. The Hindu orthodox made a fervent plea to Travancore Maharaja to take vigorous action against the Satyagrahis. E.V.Ramaswamy was arrested and "convicted for one month R.I. under PC 26 which is equivalent to IPC 144 and he was taken to Arivikkuthi prison. Nagammal wife of E.V. Ramaswamy and his sister Kannammal and a large number of volunteers also courted arrest."²⁰

The Satyagraha gained momentum and it received all-India importance and publicity. Swami Siddananda came from the Punjab with about 30 members and contributed Rs.2,000 for the movement. The caste Hindus and Sanatanists indulged in counter-activities and they alleged that the Satyagraha aimed at extermination of Hinduism. Gandhi also said that non-Hindus and volunteers from other areas should desist from participating in the Vaikom struggle. Gandhi was invited to lend support in finding out a solution. The Maharaja agreed that the street should be thrown open to all sections of people and temple entry might be considered after bringing about a change in the head and heart of
the people. E.V.Ramaswamy's plea was firm that nothing short of temple entry would satisfy them. Vaikom was in travail in 1926 but it results came in the form of Temple Entry in 1936.

E.V.Ramaswamy made a mark in this struggle. His dedication, devotion, firmness in conviction and steadfastness in action attracted the attention of the people all over the country. He was acclaimed, and rightly so as the Vaikom Veera (hero) - an epithet by which he is known even to-day. The Vaikom Satyagraha Memorial Society, planning a standing memorial to Periyar in Vaikom, remembers him with love and reverence.

Mahatma Gandhi had written 48 pages in Young India from 24-4-1924 to 11-1-1946 about Vaikom, but it is surprising that the Mahatma had forgotten to mention even the name of E.V.Ramaswamy in any of his articles.

Gurukulam at Shermadevi:

The scandal of the Gurukulam at Shermadevi denying
equality to the non-Brahmin pupils came as a tremendous shock to the sensitive non-Brahmin leaders of the Congress. This Gurukulam was founded at Shermadevi, Tirunelveli District with V.V.S. Iyer as the chief. He gave a preferential treatment to Brahmin boys, and the non-Brahmins were discriminated against much to the chagrin of parents and Congressmen.

Religious instructions and inculcating the spirit of patriotism and social service, it was declared, were the main objects of the Gurukulam. Perhaps it was the last named that had enabled the institution to enjoy popular support to the extent it had done. "Public funds (on which the institution banked for its existence) were forthcoming freely from almost all communities. The Congress also had sanctioned a decent sum of Rs.10,000 from its own funds. While the main objectives were universally accepted, all was not well with the actual working of the institution and its management in general." 22

There were frequent complaints of gross partiality. The Brahmin members, it was stated, were given richer
food and better comforts than those of non-Brahmin community. These two sections were carefully separated and kept apart. They had their separate mess and separate places of rest. The management was keen not to allow free mixing between the two sections. Any sense of equality among the inmates was thus deliberately rejected.

Periyar took up this matter with Tamil Nadu Congress Committee and wanted the Congress to stop grants to the Gurukula. "The concept of Varnashrama Dharma, as expounded by Gandhi, created a crevice in the Congress in Tamil Nadu for, it gave a convenient handle to the Brahmmins to perpetuate their hegemony over religious and social life. E.V.Ramaswamy was frank and out-spoken in this matter and he opposed Gandhi on this subject."23

Dr. P. Varadharajulu, E.V. Ramaswamy and others saw the need to meet the gravity of the situation and launched an unrelenting campaign against this unashamed demon and succeeded in blotting it out of existence.
The rage of communal hatred in the minds of the Brahmins in the Congress, however, would not die out. In fact, the failure of the Gurukulam, actually kindled it to an unprecedented degree. From then on were heard the rumblings of permanent rupture and every one witnessed the ever-widening gulf between Periyar and the Brahmin leaders. A diabolical conspiracy engineered at Tiruchi by a cabal to unseat and disgrace the then President of Tamil Nadu Congress Committee was hatched.

"In 1928 when the Simon Commission was announced and the Justicites were undecided, it was a bold step on the part of E.V.Ramaswamy who asked the party-men to welcome it with warmth. Thus the development of informal contact with himself and the Justicites on the one hand and dynamic birth of the Self-Respect Movement on the other were going on simultaneously in the province until in the year 1928, the ruling party, the Justicites and the masses were brought together in a common gathering in the Self-Respect Conference held at Chinglepet." The abolition of caste system, abandoning of caste titles, eschewing priesthood and
similar other social reforms were decided upon at that conference.

The next momentous conference met at Erode in 1930 and Mr. M. R. Jayakar presided over it. The choice of the nomenclature of the movement as Self-Respect sent the distinguished president into lyrical raptures and won his warm praise and approval.

**E.V.Ramaswamy's Foreign (European) Tour**

During 1932 E.V. Ramaswamy had injected a large dose of communism into his policies after his return from the Soviet tour. For some months the Tamil country was ringing with the cry of communism and seething with its simmering spirit. Prosecutions and proscriptions, searches of houses and shadowing by police detectives made it hot and inconvenient for the movement to grow and flourish. "Ramaswamy, shrewdly enough, suspended his references to Russia and threw his theories into cold storage and continued his iconoclastic movement aimed at long-time results."

25
Still E.V. Ramaswamy was no loser. He dictated his terms to the supposed Zamindari Party, compelled it to accept and incorporate his socialistic creed and "got himself entrenched in it as its de facto leader."26

The general elections came in 1937 and the Justice Party was routed. In 1938 E.V. Ramaswamy was made the President of the Justice Party and a new era dawned on the party.

Dravida Kazhagam:

The Salem Conference of Justice Party held in 1944 was a turning point in the political history of Tamil Nadu. The Justice Party was converted into the Dravida Kazhagam under E.V. Ramaswamy. He declared that the followers of Kazhagam should wear black shirts wherever possible as a symbol of the downtrodden conditions of the Dravidians. "At the conference held in Tiruchi in the year 1945, a black flag with a red circle in the middle was adopted as the official symbol of the party."27
The Tamil language-speaking public will remain ever grateful to him because he took the cudgel first against Hindi and harnessed people's energies in the cause of Tamil, to protect it from the onslaughts of indiscriminate Hindi imposition.

The anti-Hindi conference organised by the women in Madras, lauded his service to the people and it was Dr. S. Dharmambal, the President of the conference "who gave B.V. Ramaswamy the title 'Periyar' (the revered)." 28

In 1939 he led a deputation to the Cripps Mission and pleaded for proportional representation for the non-Brahmins. During the period of the second world war, the British Governor requested him as the leader of the Justice Party "to form a government in Madras but he refused." 29

As the freedom struggle was heading towards a climax, Kazhagam realised that the British were in no mood to concede the Dravidanadu demand even if they were to quit India. The Kazhagam's campaign took a new turn. Swaraj had no meaning so long as the Brahmin
and North Indian domination of the South was not ended, it said.

Along with the Muslim Leaguers and the Dr. Ambedkar led Scheduled Caste Federation, the party stepped up its campaign against independence.

But this time its slogan had a wider appeal: Swaraj has no meaning to the Dravidians, Muslims and Scheduled Castes. Yet during the years of the nationalist upsurge, the Dravidian movement grew steadily. The new generation of non-Brahmin middle class which had the benefit of higher education under the system of communal reservation in colleges, were entering the job market and facing a stiff competition from the well-entrenched Brahmin intelligentsia.

On the eve of Independence, Periyar's crusade against Brahminism was gathering a new momentum. The Kazhagam can be said to be the conscious atheist party in the country. The Communist party might be atheist by implication but propagation of atheism has never
been a conscious effort on its part. It has never been part of any other party's programme. In a country known for religious feelings, debunking God and religion, particularly Hinduism, demands something bold. "To be fair, Periyar and his Kazhagam, fast shrinking, had never relented in its drive or attempted a compromise."^{30}

Periyar said in one of his angry discourses -
"Since I lost hope in social reform through constitution and persuasive methods, I feel that a totalitarian government pledged to rationalism and socialism alone will be able to do something. A government pledged to eradicate caste must be in a position to prescribe all books and literature that glorify caste divisions, however ancient and sacred they may be. A public bonfire must be made of all those books that harbour superstition and caste. All those Sankaracharyas and Matadhipathis who still practise caste must be jailed or exiled. The wealth hoarded in the temples by way of jewels and utensils must be confiscated and spent for the education of the illiterate and for finding jobs for the unemployed."^{31}
Periyar, the daring iconoclast, led a campaign which took the form of denigration and smashing up the idols and the conduct of weddings without the officiation of the Brahmin priest or any priest. Periyar himself had presided over thousands of such marriages. An American scholar records that in 1953 "such a marriage contracted under the auspices of the Purohit Marruppu Sangham or the anti-Brahminical association, was declared illegal by the Madras High Court. Subsequently the Special Marriages Act validated such marriages among others if the participants registered according to the provisions of the Act." After the court ruling, every reform-wedding had to be given legal validity through registration under the Special Marriages Act while wedding at which a priest officiated did not require registration. Not until the D.M.K. Ministry passed a Bill in 1967 was this lacuna removed.

On 11th May 1946, at Madurai, Periyar conducted the Black-shirt Conference. The Conference pandal was burnt down. Periyar vehemently opposed the Congress for the method adopted in forming the Constituent
Assembly. August 15, 1947, is celebrated as Indian Independence Day but Periyar asked his followers to treat and celebrate it as a condolence day. A black flag demonstration was held against all north Indian governors. The Kazhagam celebrated July 1st as separatist day.

Periyar's role was that of an educator, out to debunk all hypocrisy in the name of religion or God. He thought the term atheism or the idea it represented had no sense. "The real fact is that all those who lose faith in the Brahmin priests, vedas, shastras, itihhasas, and puranas are called atheists. Superstition and exploitation by the priests can't be destroyed without one becoming an atheist. Indeed I am convinced that social reformers, if they are to face the world effectively must straight away declare themselves atheist."33

After independence, Periyar launched a militant agitation with the aim of breaking the stranglehold of obscurantism and of the reactionary elements, and was
himself imprisoned several times right from 1919 to 1965 for the cause of social reform.

Periyar's Rationalism:

World history has no parallel to the rough and rude treatment Periyar had given to God and religion. His famous slogan on God was:

"There is no God. No God, No God;
He who invented God is a fool;
He who preaches God is a Rogue;
He who worships God is a Barbarian." 34

Periyar thought that unless the religious foundations and artificial social stratification on puranic conception, drawing support and recognition from the Vedas and Hindu mythology are destroyed, people, mostly illiterate, would not be able to see the rays of scientific advancement. Social tyranny and social backwardness are related to religion. As an atheist, he was no believer in caste system. He wanted to strike at the root of caste.
With all vehemence at his command, he said - "Caste is a curse which must be abolished; to abolish caste, religion must be abolished." With the uncanny knack of a born revolutionary he always sought the root-cause of the social evils of caste and superstition. Untouchability and allied problems of social segregation were only manifestations. The source of social injustice was the sanctity of the Shastras, buttressed by superstition and mythology. He waged a relentless war against old chronic superstitions and rituals in spite of several hurdles, strains and stresses. He blasted the faith in God and religion, and the beliefs in such pseudo-sciences like astrology and palmistry, in lucky and unlucky numbers, days, colours, flowers, cards, etc. A great philosopher and an analyst of Sastras, Vedas, Itihasas, Puranas, Periyar made this available to the common people, especially Sudras, in the form they could.

A few of his thoughts on Hindu Vedic system are:
"God is nothing but the invention of barbarians; Veda is filled with conspiracy; Itihasa is an ugly and
obscene one; *Purana* is a bundle of bluffs; *Adiyars* are no better than idiots; *Devars* are the Arayans and the *Asurars* are the Dravidians; *Sastras* are the embodiment of all exploitation and *Rishis* and *Munis* are the result of fools." His courage was very astounding. He unmasked the Gods and the Mahatmas. He exposed priestly tomfoolery. He attacked Godmen and *Supermen*.

Periyar says, "God is the creation of very ancient men. When, why and has I got the courage to depose God, religion, *Shastras* sayings of our ancestors etc? These originated some 2000 to 3000 years back when human civilisation was nothing short of barbarism. That period lacked scientific knowledge. Not only that, people were ignorant of the very sense of growth and development." He was a perennial spring of lofty thoughts and was the dauntless opponent of unjust, corrupt and unscrupulous politicians and religionists.

He fought against the tyranny of caste. Not only he made a bonfire of Vedic scriptures but he also burnt
the portrait of Gandhi, some portion of Indian Constitution, and national flag into ashes. He led many agitations. The latest was on January 7, 1972, when a big procession was taken out before the Superstition Eradication Conference in Salem. An effigy of Ram was "beaten with shoes all along the way. Posters satirised the ludicrous stories of birth of Hindu Gods." 38 Till then the Brahmin press had uniformly adopted a policy of total black-out of Periyar's activities but it lost its head and raised a hue and cry - one of the resolutions passed at the Salem Conference was that "a married woman should be free to leave her husband if she wished." 39 This was twisted by the press, which went about telling people that the Salem Conference wanted to legalise wife-snatching. As the elections were imminent, the opponents made a sustained propaganda that to vote for the Dravidian party would be a vote for atheism. But the D.M.K. increased its majority in the State Assembly by getting 183 of 234 seats.

Unlike many in India, whose rationalism is a mere veneer, Periyar and his followers have been genuinely practising humanists. Intellectual honesty has made
them stick to their views. As Periyar says, often with a wink, "he can overnight became a patron saint of Brahminism, with his portrait in every Brahmin eating place, if he was to admit his error in preaching atheism."  

His life's mission was to annihilate superstition by inculcating the spirit of rationalism. He wanted to see a casteless and classless society during his lifetime. He wanted to bull-doze, dynamite and blast off the reactionary, obscurantist, and racist order. He was very eager to see a brave new world where the original sons of the soil are not branded as Sudras and Chandals. They should be free from the shackles which are 2000 years old. They should become worthy of the space age.

The Aim of the Self-Respect Movement:

The object of the self-respect league as embodied in its constitution was "social reconstruction so as to secure liberty, equality and justice for the individual... It is essentially a socio-religious organisation whose
aim is to reconstruct society on a human and rational
basis. It wants to destroy caste, root and branch
and to bring together all Dravidians irrespective of
political or religious affiliations. Though its
ultimate aim is to destroy religious beliefs as
popularly understood and practised, it is not so
virulently anti-religious as represented by the
interested few... The Dravidians in the first place
have the title Sudras (born of prostitutes) conferred
on them by the so called high caste people.\textsuperscript{41}

**His Works:**

Periyar had a multi-dimensional personality. He
was a progressive thinker, a rationalist, a social
reformer, a public educationalist, an orator and a
powerful writer. He was serious without anger and
forceful without being violent. He was eminent in
the exercise of plain commonsense. He was a logician
who never failed to hit the nail on the head.
His daily 'Viduthalai' was his media to communicate with people. Kudi-Arasu 1925-49, 'Puratchi' (Revolt) 1933, 'Pagatharivu' (Rationalist) 1934, all weeklies in Tamil and 'Revolt' a weekly in English 1928-30 were edited by him. To his credit he had over 144 publications. Research scholars and social scientists have made a deep study of the philosophy of Periyar. It is significant that "scholars in foreign universities have also done commendable research on Periyar."\(^{42}\)

Periyar's writings are of a high order and his pamphlet "Theology Explained" was acclaimed by erudite scholars like Marmalai Adigal, and the leading English Daily of South, while reviewing it, compared him to H.G. Wells."\(^{42a}\) He was the leader of a great school of powerful speakers in Tamil Nadu. With a gallant band of speakers from Alagiriswamy through Annadurai to Karunanidhi, he galvanised the youth and moulded a generation. Ministers, orators, writers and social reformers proudly claim that they had their training in the Spartan School of Erode.
Women's Right:

It was in pursuit of his ideal of perfect social justice that he was unceasingly preaching complete equality and freedom for women in every sphere. On the question of women's right, so far, few revolutionary or intellectual leaders anywhere in the world have taken up the position that he had taken. He fought for women's emancipation and introduced Self-Respect Marriage. Widow marriage is another reform that bears testimony to this radical reformist.

Periyar said "If we are to be free, we must free our women who must be allowed the same liberty and privileges as our men..." The women of Tamil Nadu owe their emancipation mainly to this great man Periyar Ramaswamy. "In order to ensure freedom for women, all extreme ideas of chastity require to be abrogated. Chastity enforced under compulsion is really no chastity. Love and companionship should alone condition chastity. One standard for woman and another for man is totally reprehensible and cannot survive under the principle of equality."
As a sincere emancipator of women he said "it is really strange that a land in which goddesses are depicted as giving honoured seats to their wives on their heads or thighs, women in actual daily life should be treated as dolls. One does not know who is actually benefited by this enforcement, of widowhood unless it be that some Sadhus or Sanyasins felt the need of the existence of the widowed women." Periyar, in his Self-Respect movement, advised widows to come forward and strive for their freedom, find husbands for themselves. He further asked social reformers and the government to share sizeable responsibility in promoting widow remarriage.

Periyar had the simplicity of a child, the enthusiasm of youth, and wisdom of the aged. Some of his admirers bracketed him with the greatest of the great, while the diehards of orthodoxy looked upon him as a mere infidel who ridiculed all that was noble in their faith. His work as a social reformer had a positive aspect of undeniable value. "When he began his propaganda, certain class of people were considered
unfit for learning. Even those poor people believed it to be true.\textsuperscript{46} Because of the laudable services of Periyar, the accelerated growth of backward classes can be seen in Tamil Nadu. \textquoteleft The backward community was suppressed by showing false reasons. No people belonging to that community occupy high positions and posts in all walks of life. Now, this has changed, and no doubt this is due to the ceaseless services of Periyar for over half-a-century.\textsuperscript{47}

Periyar's Disciples:

There were great many bands of rationalists who claimed themselves to be the true disciples of Periyar for over 60 years. Annadurai, one of the disciples of the great Periyar, declared as a Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu that \textquoteleft his ministry was dedicated to Periyar.\textsuperscript{48} Karunanidhi took his oath of office after getting Periyar's blessings. Periyar was touched to the heart.

After Periyar's death, the Tamil Nadu government
officials were in a dilemma whether to give state honour to E.V.Ramaswamy's funeral since he was not a state official. "Karunanidhi threatened to liquidate the government if permission were to be denied by the centre. He also cited that Mahatma Gandhi a non-state official was given state honour on his death."49

Periyar's Self-Respect movement was doubtless a mass movement but without even an occasional outburst of violence in the mildest form. Any unbiased student of contemporary south Indian history will never fail to record the non-violent nature of the movement. Indeed, this tall claim cannot be made by any party or organisation in India. If Tamil Nadu has progressed more than the rest of India, it is largely due to the Self-Respect movement. With spartan discipline, with unflagging zeal, Periyar E.V.Ramaswamy 'shaped his disciples into the champions and hearalders of the Dravidian Renaissance.'50

Without a bloody coup and violence of any kind or scale Periyar E.V.Ramaswamy broke the age-old social
slavery in Tamil society, and enlightened the down-trodden and backward classes through a silent and non-violent revolution.

...
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