CHAPTER - II

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Thinking is a process of the imaginative reflection of the mind. Thinkers reflect upon what they learn, hear and observe about men and matters. Rationalists distinguish between virtue and vice; what is virtue is to be accepted and what is vice discarded. They are the critics of social order, religious beliefs and political systems. The Buddha in ancient India, Spinoza, Kant, Neitze, Rene Descartes, Lenin, Karl Marx, Russell, Ingersoll were all great thinkers. They were known for their critical questioning of the state of affairs. One such rationalist thinker was 'Periyar'. His rationalistic thoughts were focussed on the regeneration of a decadent society. He was made a rationalist by his own experiences and his perception of life around him. In this chapter, an attempt is made to to trace the evolution of 'Periyar' as a rationalist thinker and the sources of his inspiration.

'Periyar' was an original thinker of the twentieth century. He was more progressive and modern than many of his contemporaries. His thoughts were formulated not through his education but through his experience and questioning. His inquisitive mind led to a rationalist approach to the social problems. His ideas were born out of his keen interest in world affairs. To him, the world was an open book; 'think with rationalism and think with experience' became the key word.¹ His playful but pungent questions to the pundits during his school days sowed the seeds of his rationalistic thoughts of later days. Strict adherence to the Varnashrama even in drinking water facilities, the punishment for his mingling with the low castes, personal experiences at

¹ Kudi Arasu, Erode, May 1, 1948, P.5.
Kasi, his close friendship with the Tamil Pandits, radical leadership against untouchability at Vaikom and caste discrimination in the Cheranmahadevi Gurukulam along with his personal experiences in the Congress all of these go into the making of his rationalistic thoughts. Moreover, the influence of Siddha Philosophy, Buddhist rationalism and humanism and Tirukkural’s universalism and the rationalistic ideas of the India and the Western thinkers particularly of Ingersoll, and his foreign tours greatly facilitated his thought process. A study is made here, as to what extent the above mentioned matters helped to shape his philosophy of rationalism. First of all, let us see how his personal experiences laid the foundation for his thoughts.

I. Personal Experiences of Periyar E.V.R.

(a) Caste fanaticism in drinking water

Those were the days when caste restrictions had to be strictly adhered to inter-caste relations were abhorred. Violation of caste rules were never left unpunished. Lower castes felt threatened and terrorised. It was at this time, that ('Periyar') Ramasami was admitted in a village school at Erode. It was surrounded by the houses of low-caste men like the Chettiyars, bamboo article makers and Muslims. The high-castes scorned their appalling living conditions and the unwritten manucode was that 'none should dine or even drink water in their houses because they were untouchables and untouchability was polluting'. During his school days, he was mischievous and did not pay heed to the instructions and warnings of his parents and teachers as regards the untouchables. He had permission to drink water only from the house of the teacher who was a strict vegetarian. When he went to that house once or twice to drink water, a

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little girl placed a brass tumbler on the floor, poured water into it and instructed him to drink it without touching his lips to the tumbler. While he drank the water in such a way, it entered his nose and caused suffocation. Then, he was asked to keep the tumbler upside down and then she washed it and took it into her house. This hurt him intolerably and he felt ashamed of his submission.

On another occasion, Ramasami drank water by sipping it at a Chettiyar's house along with his friend Palaniappan. After drinking, the lady of that house asked his friend was asked to just wash the tumbler, here the orthodoxy was less stringent. Young Ramasami also drank water from the house of a person who made bamboo article. There were no inhibitions here at all. Gradually, he began to taste the food prepared in that house. When this matter reached his parents, they worried a lot because, in those days they were used to observing rituals and orthodox traditions like the Brahmins. By this time, 'Periyar' dropped out of school, perhaps, his contact with polluting communities. He was considered a ruffian and his feets were chained to logs of wood for about fifteen days in order to prevent him from socialising with the low-castes. But he continued his liaison with them. He could not submit himself to the rigorous regimentation of school life in his early days and this experience stood him in good stead in later days.

His parents were not aware of the psychological trauma that such savage punishments would cause inner-conflict in the mind of the small boy. His chains never controlled his thoughts but created a social ferment in his mind.

He realised the cruelty of Varnashrama and untouchability even at a tender age.\(^\text{12}\) The drinking water episode and the restrictions and punishments imposed on him provoked thinking hard on untouchability and sowed the rationalistic seeds in his mind.\(^\text{13}\)

(b) Blossoming of Rationalism

In 1891, Ramasami entered his father's business at Erode and his work was to write addresses on the bags and auction the goods.\(^\text{14}\) During his leisure times, he studied the Puranas. **In those days, his house at Erode became the favorite haunt of Sanyasis, Bhagavadars, Pundits and religious mendicants, who had great sway over the people.** He used to heckle them and make fun of what they said. He also pestered them with inquisitive questions and embarrassed them. Their incredible exaggerations and contradictions interested him and gradually, became a great revolutionary rational orator.\(^\text{15}\)

Moreover, the religious **Pundits of Vaishnavism and Saivism** conducted Katha Kaletshebams i.e., series of serious religious discourses in his house. His parents heard them with great devotion but Ramasami proved to be extra cute and put a volley of questions to them. But, when they struggled to give satisfactory answers, he ridiculed them. At the same time, he also pointed out their contradictions and incredible exaggerations.\(^\text{16}\) And this experience made him more enthusiastic and incisive. **Gradually, he began to lose his faith in caste, religion, god, sastras, puranas and traditions and started to mock them.**\(^\text{17}\) It seems, his far-reaching deep thoughts were not

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created through his education, but through his free thinking, spirit of
inquiry, freedom-loving nature, doubts, clarifications and questioning
attitude. This not only sharpened his intellect but also opened the way
for him, to be instinctively rationalistic.\(^18\)

(c) Nerunchipettai Incident (1902)

Nerunchipettai is a village in Erode where a memorable
incident happened in 1902. A swami of Nerunchipettai came to Erode to
participate in a function, hosted by the native merchants at Ellaiyar Inn in
Erode.\(^19\) His brother against whom there had been an arrest warrant
accompanied him. Ramasami ('Periyar') went to the function to secure
the brother of swami to help the authorities. He entered the inn, where
the swami's brother was dining along with two hundred Brahmins and
caught hold of him. But his entry was not liked by the Brahmins and so
they did not dine and left the dining hall immediately. It was reported to
Ramasami's father Venkata Naicker that their food was polluted by his entry.
Enraged at this, his father beat him up with his chappals.\(^20\) This Nerunchipettai
incident left a scar in the young rebel's psyche. Such incident ultimately
paved the way for Samabhandi Bhojan in later days in Tamil Nadu.

(d) Ramasami's Visit to Benares and His Enlightenment (1904)

Ramasami visited Benares (now Varanasi), a renowned sacred
Saivite town of Hindu pilgrimage on the banks of the Ganges in 1904.\(^21\) The rigid
discipline of his family, the strict observance of long cherished customs, his
indifferent and uncompromising attitude, and the implicit and explicit pressure at
home drove him into despair and at the age of twenty-five, he left his
family and went to Benares.\(^22\) On the way to Benares, he stayed in an inn at


Bejwada. There, he joined with two Brahmin sanyasis, namely Venkatramana Iyer of Tanjore, who was an expert in Sanskrit, and Ganapati Iyer, a Village Officer of Coimbatore. They used to discuss the puranas and Ramasami added his flavour of atheism to the puranic stories with interpretations, arguments and parables in Telugu. This attracted the mass to a great extent. Later, he reached Benares when he again joined a group of sanyasis. But he found that of all the pilgrims, the Brahmins alone were honoured.

Ramasami, the son of a rich merchant of Erode became a wandering sanyasi on the streets of Benares. He became friendless and foodless and tried to enter a choultry, where the Brahmin sanyasis were fed but the gate keeper pushed him rudely on to the street. And his hunger was so unbearable that he jumped into the garbage bin to compete with the street dogs for the left overs. While eating, his eyes were drawn to the letters written on the wall of that building. He came to know the truth that the choultry was built by a wealthy merchant of Dravidian race from the Madras State. Presently, many questions arose in his mind but no justifiable answers came to convince him.

The disgrace inflicted at Benares made a deep wound in the heart of Ramasami. It inflamed his intense hatred towards the Aryan race and their innumerable gods. Though, Benaras has been acclaimed as the most sacred city, the ugly scenes of immoral activities such as cheating, looting, begging on the streets made Ramasami, abhor that so-called holy place. His personal experience as a sanyasi in the holy centre created

an aversion in him towards priests and priestcraft, leading him to realise that God and religion are the weapons of the priestly class.29

(v) Influence of His Friendship with Tamil Pundits (1905-1906)

'Periyar's mind was receptive to radical thoughts of all kinds. He was thus aware of the radical, socio-religious thoughts of many pandits of his day, who had perhaps, had agonising experiences in society. In those days, the low castes were subjected to suppression and oppression by the high castes. Fearing reprisals and threatened with dire consequences, the humble people meekly submitted themselves to all sorts of inhuman treatment. Such barbarous treatment had already kindled the fire of protest in the minds of 'Periyar'. The articles written by Tamil Pundits like Ayodhidhasar, Erattamalai Srinivasan, poet Maruthaiya Pillai, Sami Kaivalyam and Kuthoosi Gurusami. His friendship with the Tamil pundits helped him to formulate rationalistic ideas.

Pandithamani Ayodhidhasar's30 rationalistic ideas like equality, modernization,31 and his opposition to Hindu religion, sati, female infanticide and casteism greatly influenced and became the source of inspiration for Ramasami.32 The progressive ideas of Tamil Pandit Maruthaiya Pillai33 for such as eradication of casteism, his views against the Hindu

29. Mangala Murugesan, N.K., Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu, Madurai, 1990, P.72
30. Pandithamani Ayodhidhasar (1854-1914) the Grandpa of the Dravidian Movement was one of the greatest Tamil scholars of Modern India and the architect of Tamil Buddhist Renaissance Movement. He founded the Dravidian Mahajana Sabha in 1881 that became the Dravidian Association in 1892. His rationalistic thoughts were spread through his Tamil weekly. He went to the extent of publishing a journal namely Oru Paise Tamilan, the title of which was appealing but ridiculous. Therefore, he changed its name into Tamilan that was the time when the low-castes were ill-treated by the dominant elite class. However, Tamilan was published from 1907-1914.
32. Personal Interview with Thiyagasami R., (Formerly Professor of Tamil, Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Martandam, August 2, 2002.
33. Pulavar Maruthaiya Pillai of Karur was a great scholar and debator. He was the very close friend of E.V.Ramasami. He condemned caste system, Hindu religion, deceptive myths in the epics and Vedic sastras.
religion and the deceptive myths in the Vedas and sastras greatly provoked the rationalistic feelings of Ramasami. His close friendship with Maruthaiya Pillai also inculcated the principle of atheism in his mind and moulded him as a probing rational thinker.36

Another important scholar who influenced Ramasami was Sage Kaivalyam.35 His views on God, religion, Vedas, puranas and sastras were compatible with Ramasami's ideas.36 However, the intimacy of Sage Kaivalyam added strength to the arguing skill of Ramasami and enriched his rationalistic outlook.

Ramasami's contact with Erattaimalai Srinivasan37 had a far-reaching influence on his rationalistic views. Erattaimalai Srinivasan's ideas against caste discrimination and the Congress swayed young Ramasami's mind.38

Kuthoosi Gurusami's friendship39 had deep impact on the rationalistic thoughts of Ramasami. Gurusami's views against untouchability, varnashrama and superstition became a prelude to the rationalistic and samadharma ideas of Ramasami.40

35. Sage Kaivalyam, a Tamil scholar was a great rationalist writer. He was also an expert in Vedas, sastras and Itihasas and he was the bitter enemy of Brahminism. He wrote a number of rationalistic articles in 'Periyar's' Tamil weekly-Kudi Arasu and Tamil daily-Viduthalai about God, religion, Vedas, puranas, sastras and superstitions in the name of Aviyal and Ahappayar and they created a revolution in Tamil Nadu. Sami Chidambaranar, Tamilar Talaivar, Madras, 1997, P.45.
37. Erattaimalai Srinivasan was a great champion of untouchables and fought for their liberation and rights. He was the founder of Paraiyar Mahajana Sabha in Chennai in 1891. He was the editor of Tamil monthly Paraih in 1893. He fought against caste discrimination, wanted to establish a casteless and creedless society and worked against the Congress. Ambedkar Priyar, Erattaimalai Cheenivasan, Chennai, 1994, PP. 140-142.
39. Kuthoosi Gurusami was a great rationalist, self-respector, revolutionary thinker, humanist, writer and orator. He fought against untouchability, Varnashrama and blind beliefs and superstitions. His articles were published in Ramasami's Tamil daily Viduthalai in the name of Palasarakkumoottai. He was also the editor of Ramasami's journals Kudi Arasu and Revolt. Kuruvikkarambii Velu, Kuthoosi Gurusami, Chennai, 1991, PP. 2-3.
In addition to these, 'Periyar' had bitter experiences, while he was in the Congress from 1919 to 1925. The first among these happened at the Provincial Congress Conference in Tiruppur in 1922. In this, he moved a resolution which urged that all the untouchables of Dravidian race should be allowed to enter the temples for worship and laid stress on eradication of the caste system and communal reservation. But, all the Brahmin leaders in the Congress rose against it and compelled him to withdraw his proposal thus disgracing him publicly.

Following this, he had other bitter experiences in the Brahmin houses at Periyakulam and Dindugul. He went to Dindugul for Congress propaganda along with Srinivasa Iyengar. There, they went to the house of a Brahmin, a Congressite when lunch was served Ramasami had to eat in a separate place and dinner also was given to him in the same place without removing the lunch leaf. On another occasion, he along with Venkatasami Pillai of Tanjore went to Periyakulam and was accommodated in the house of a Brahmin advocate. Lunch and dinner were served to him where, he had his breakfast without cleaning the leftovers. These act of discrimination cut him to the quick. However, in spite of these bitter experiences, he worked in the Congress. All such humiliations intensified his rationalistic sense and his hatred against the supremacy of Brahminism. He began to propagate the view that there should not be any discrimination between man and man in public life.

42. Speech of Periyar E.V.R. at Chittayamkottai in Dindugal on June 22, 1931, Kudi Arasu, July 12, 1931, P.10.
43. Kudi Arasu, Erode June 7, 1925, P.8.
45. Kudi Arasu, Erode, December, 1925, P.8.
46. Ibid., July 12, 1931, P.10.
47. Velusamy. N., Periyar the Social Scientist, Chennai, 1990, PP. 60-64.
Besides these, the attitude of the Congress leaders during the Vaikom Satyagraha stoked 'Periyar's' rationalistic fire. At Vaikom, Savarnas (the high castes) did not allow the Avarnas (the low castes), the Tiyars and Ezhavas to enter or walk in and around Vaikom Mahadevar temple up to the year 1924 on the ground that their entry would pollute the idol of the temple.\(^\text{48}\) A satyagraha was started in order to remove the appalling discrimination against the untouchables.\(^\text{49}\) 'Periyar' was stung by the vicious and pernicious caste discrimination that existed there. But what caused anguish and intense pain to him was that whereas, birds, dogs, donkeys and pigs could walk on the streets of Vaikom, human beings with dignity were barred.\(^\text{50}\) So, accepting the invitation of the Congress leaders of Travancore, 'Periyar' went to Vaikom. Inspite of the opposition of Gandhiji and Rajaji, he led the Vaikom agitation, and was imprisoned twice.\(^\text{51}\)

Meanwhile, on the demise of Mulam Tirunal Maharaja and the accession to the throne of the minor Sri Chitra Tirunal Balarama Maharaja, the Regent Rani Sethulekshmi Bai issued a proclamation opening the temple streets for the untouchables.\(^\text{52}\) In this event, though the collusion between Dewan Raghaviah and Rajaji infuriated 'Periyar', he bore it for the betterment of the masses. However, this event sharpened his rationalistic views.\(^\text{53}\) Finally, the Regent released the prisoners of Vaikom Satyagraha on September 1, 1924.\(^\text{54}\) She granted permission to the

53. *Kudi Arasu, Erode, June 21, 1925, P.8.*
54. *Ibid., June 7, 1928, P.8.*

68
depressed classes to use the roads around the Vaikom temple.\textsuperscript{55} and also passed orders to remove all the disabilities of all the people with regard to free access to roads.\textsuperscript{56} Finally, the Legislative Council of Travancore recommended that the Government should open all the roads to all the subjects of His Highness of Travancore without any discrimination of caste or creed.\textsuperscript{57} 'Periyar' realised that the enemies of Vaikom Satyagraha were the highcastes and not the government.\textsuperscript{58} It was not just the attitude of the Brahmin Dewan of Travancore, that was discriminatory, even the nationalist press of the Brahmins blacked out the role of 'Periyar' in the Vaikom Satyagraha and highlighted the part of Gandhiji. Even, when Gandhiji wrote forty-eight pages in his Young India about the Vaikom Satyagraha, he failed to mention the dynamic role of Periyar.\textsuperscript{59} From all these, 'Periyar' learnt more about the cunning attitude of the high castes and felt more and more the need to safeguard the interests of the lowcastes.

Another important event that shaped his rationalism was the \textbf{Cheranmahadevi Gurukulam Episode}. It was established with the object of imparting high ideals of nationalism to the youth.\textsuperscript{60} It also wanted to inculcate the spirit of patriotism and to infuse a passion for social service in the inmates.\textsuperscript{61} But in the Gurukulam, there were discriminations in food and shelter between the Brahmin and non-Brahmin students. This greatly wounded the non-Brahmin students and the matter was reported to 'Periyar', the then Secretary of Tamil Nadu Congress Committee.\textsuperscript{62} He tried to remove the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item \textcite{55} Native Newspaper Report (NNR) Dravidian, June 26, 1925, Madras 1925, P.851.
\item \textcite{56} NNR, Mathru Bhumi\textsuperscript{\textregistered}, September 25, 1924, P. 1327.
\item \textcite{57} Proceedings of the Travancore Legislative Council, Vol. VI, 'October 2, Trivandrum, 1924, P. 318.
\item \textcite{59} Kudi Arasu, Erode, June 14, 1925, P.5.
\item \textcite{60} Ibid., July 12, 1925, P.8.
\item \textcite{61} Viswanathan. E.Sa., The Political Career of E.V.Ramasami Naicker, Madras 1983, PP. 45-46.
\item \textcite{62} Veeramani, K., Periyar Kalanjiyam., Vol.I, Chennai 1994, P.12.
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social injustice and create complete equality between non-Brahmins and Brahmins, especially in the matter of inter-dining.\textsuperscript{63} Gandhiji also intervened in the Gurukulam affair, but he was unable to find a solution. So 'Periyar' refused to allot Rupees 5000/- from the Congress fund to the Gurukulam. But without his knowledge, V.V.S. Iyer, the President of the Gurukulam got the cheque from K. Santhanam, the then Joint-Secretary of the Gurukulam.\textsuperscript{64}

Later, T.R. Mahadeva Iyer, again a Brahmin, was appointed as the President of the Gurukulam on April 25, 1925, but he was dismissed from service due to the misuse of Gurukulam properties.\textsuperscript{65} From the Gurukulam episode, 'Periyar' realised that the Congress organisation stood for the preservation of Varnashrama at any cost. \textbf{He therefore determined to put an end to Varnashrama and for that he started the Self-Respect Movement in 1925.}\textsuperscript{66} The attempts of V.V.S. Iyer and Gandhiji to safeguard Varnashrama in the Gurukulam came as a great shock to 'Periyar.' This event made him realise that the Brahmins were more communal in outlook than anybody and it not only strengthened but also accelerated his rationalistic feelings.\textsuperscript{67} 'Periyar' was very much disillusioned with the Congress and Gandhiji over the Vaikom and Cheranmahadevi incidents. Further, this led him to resign from the Congress rather than be a mute witness to discrimination.\textsuperscript{68} Slowly, he was able to consolidate the support of the non-Brahmins of Tamil Nadu.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Kudi Arasu,} July 12, 1925, P.8.
\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Ibid.,} November 22, 1925, PP.4-5.
\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Kudi Arasu,} Erode, June 14, 1925, P.7;
\textit{Viduthalai,} Erode, April 11, 1951, P.3.
\textsuperscript{68} Christophe Jafrelot, \textit{Indias Silent Revolution,} Delhi, 2003, P.169;
\textit{Kudi Arasu,} Erode, February 6, 1938, P.5.
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{The Modern Rationalist,} Vol.29, Chennai, February 2004, P.25.
The last event that added fuel to the existing fire of his rationalism was provided by the Kanchipuram Congress Conference of 1925. In this, he brought for the a proposal for communal reservation. V. Kalyana Sundara Mudaliyar, was the President of the Conference and he instructed 'Periyar' to bring the proposal with the signatures of thirty persons in favour of it. But, 'Periyar' got the signatures of fifty persons and brought it to the Conference. Meanwhile, the President of the Conference disallowed the proposal. Immediately, 'Periyar' stood up and raised his voice but he was compelled to sit. This was a great disgrace and humiliation to 'Periyar' and he felt the hoax played by some leaders in the Congress. This bitter experience compelled him to quit the Congress. Finally, he severed his relations with the Congress and started the rationalistic movement called the Self-Respect Movement in December 1925. If he had remained in the Congress, he would have easily occupied the highest office in the Country. But, in order to do away with casteism, he left and carried out agitations upto his last breath. Undoubtedly, the personal experiences of 'Periyar' E.V. Ramasami in his early life and in the Congress had an undeniable impact on him against the ills of society. Eventually, he became one of the greatest renowned rationalist free thinkers of the world. According to the Tamil scholar Kalki Krishnamurty, "Periyar E.V.R. learnt in the University of Worldly Experiences."
II. Influence of indigenous Philosophies

Like the Siddhars who experimented with the reality of nature, Periyar, the social scientist, examined social problems scientifically and found out ways and means for them. He was a great humanist who dedicated his life for the intellectual development and welfare of humanity and worked hard to establish a classless and casteless society. He was also a champion of the low castes rejected in the Brahminical social order and condemned casteism. Based on the Siddha system, he carried on his tirade and criticised, god, religion, scriptures, blind beliefs, orthodox traditions and superstitions.

One Siddhar by name, Pampatti Siddhar was vehement in his crusade against casteism. He asked 'Would there be any difference in the feelings of a white man and a black woman, embracing each other and vice-versa?'. It was the most critical but intellectual cognitions of even an ordinary man which attracted Periyar. Of all the Siddhars, Sivavakkiyar seems to

75. Siddhars, the exponents of Siddha system of medicine were the scientists who explored the reality of nature and its relationship with man by their experimental findings. They were rationalists who had micro-cosmatic view about man and gave much importance to the inner feelings of mankind. They were noted for their scientific thoughts, experience and clear vision. They examined everything based on truth with materialistic approach and they had faith in the divine essence of man and his capacity to become a superman. The Siddhars wanted to bring humanity to the intellectual world. They were the great humanists who stood for human welfare, social equality and championed the cause of the downtrodden. Moreover, the Siddhars rejected the Brahminical social order and its values. They condemned casteism, Vedas, sastras, puranas, temples, idol worship, festivals, religious rites, omens, astrology and superstitions in the name of God. They were against the conventional religious practices and stood for social reforms. According to them, the creation of casteism imaginary and legendary. Thirumular, a renowned Tamil Siddha declared that all men belong to one race and one God and no caste in the world except male and female. Another one by name Pambatti Siddhar pointed out that, the puranas, Vedas and sastras should be burnt. In short, the Siddhars created revolution in rationalism.


have had the greatest appeal to Periyar. He urged men to contemplate idol worship, pujas and coming round the sanctum-sanctorum chanting mantras and realise the meaninglessness of all these.

Regarding Jainism, it denied the existence of God as Supreme being. Humanism at its best is seen in the Jaina Philosophy of ahimsa and avoidance of greed (aparigriha). Non-killing and renouncing the attachments could alone ensure the happiness of humanity. These are the most enduring and enlightening aspects of humanism in Jainism that greatly influenced 'Periyar'.

The Buddhist Ethics had its deep imprint on the rationalistic mind of 'Periyar'. Like the Buddha, 'Periyar' also was a great revolutionary rationalist. His Self-Respect Movement could very well be based on Buddha's teachings 2500 years ago. He had no faith in god, religion, rites and rituals. To him, "one has to be steadfast in the Eightfold Path". In the words of the Buddha, "Progress cannot be dreamt of unless humanity is purged of the conception of God". To him 'Knowledge is Guru' and he was the first one to give much importance to it. Based on these, 'Periyar' stated that with the help of questions and critical examination, matters should be analysed in

Chellathurai, P., [edited]

81. Buddhism is a Pan-Asian religion and philosophy, that has played a central role in the socio-cultural life of the Eastern world. The has described Buddhism as one which calls for the use of 'Buddhi' or intellect which denounces blind belief. The Buddha means knowledge or intelligence. The first rationalist movement culminated with Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism.
84. Viduthalai, Chennai, November 7, 2000, P.1,
86. Revolt, Erode, August 11, 1929, P.313.
87. Unmai, Madras, April 29 1990, P.24,

73
the light of knowledge this knowledge it should be improved with the
advance of times.\(^{88}\) The Buddha requested the people not to keep thinking
in the name of god and believe anything blindly according to the oldsayings.\(^{89}\)
'Periyar' also stressed at the end of his speeches not to believe in his ideas
blindly but think, decide and act accordingly. For instance, in a meeting of
Dravida Kazhagam at Karaivaikal Maidan in Erode on July 8 1956, he declared
that none should believe blindly in puranas, castes, sastras etc., but
use common sense and follow accordingly.\(^{90}\)

To Buddha, "desires are the root cause of all sufferings of humanity". 'Periyar' also said that 'if the people desired to lead a happy
life they should avoid unnecessary troubles and worries'. He also declared that
'there should not be any discrimination by one's birth and wealth. If so,
then there could be no difficulty for anyone'.\(^{91}\) He condemned the concept of
inequality of birth and wanted to put an end to the exploitation of the
majority by the minority one has to renounce this world for liberation
from the shackles of life.\(^{92}\) The Buddha stood against disgrace for
casteism and the barbarian treatment of fellow beings and 'Periyar' too did the
same thing.\(^{93}\) He also stressed the need for unblemished moral character
as Buddha had laid emphasis on Right Conduct.\(^{94}\) 'Periyar' exhorted people to
inquire into the concept of religion, God and scriptures by using their
knowledge.\(^{95}\) Based on reason, he rejected idol worship, orthodox traditions,
absurdities of puranas, superstitions and blind beliefs which are found to

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91. Sadasivan, K., *Anti-Caste Movement in Tamil Nadu*, Pondicherry University,
enslave the people. The Buddhist ethics and teachings became the prelude to 'Periyar's atheistic and humanistic ideas. He stated that his Self-Respect Movement was not subjected to blind faith or faith in heaven, hell, soul and rebirth which have no reality.

'Periyar' found Buddhism a moving spirit (sprit) of the knowledge of religion and justice. His final wish was a casteless society where all are free. He took steps to spread the Buddhist ethics through Conferences. He stated that Buddhism laid stress only on the rites and regulations meant for human liberation and not worship. Further, he praised Buddhism for its rationalistic ideas of universal brotherhood and acceptance. No wonder, the Self-Respect Movement and the rationalistic thoughts of 'Periyar' had their origin in the Buddhist ethics. In this sense, he was rightly called the 'Third Buddha of Tamil Nadu'.

Influence of Indigenous Tamil Literature

Moreover, 'Periyar' was very much influenced by the Indigenous Tamil literary work Tirukkural. To 'Periyar', 'Tirukkural is a work of

101. Pahuttharivu, Madras, March 1, 1937, P.43,
103. Thiruvaluvar, a Dravidian Thinker, was the first and foremost rationalist of the Tamil race and he wrote the world famous Tirukkural. It is a classical literary ethical code that dated back to 2000 years. It is timeless, progressive and practicable. It stimulates the thinking process and is acceptable to scientific knowledge. It is against Manusmriti, epics-Ramayana and Mahabharata and Puranas. It is a shield against superstition. Speech of Periyar E.V.R. at Erode Conference on October 24, 1948.
Kudi Arasu, Erode, November 13, 1948, P.3.

75
self-respect and a guiding light to humanity'. He declared that 'Tirukkural is beyond caste, religion and God and there are echoes of Dravidian culture in it'.

'Tiruvalluvar was an atheist and his secular, moral, social, rational humanistic and scientific ideas are more or less the same as those of 'Periyar'.

To him, 'Tirukkural is an encyclopaedia, a work of Dravidian Literature, and a Book of Justice and Discipline which gives knowledge to the people'.

Tiruvalluvar approached men and matters in an intellectual and secular manner.

'Periyar' also emphasised that knowledge and wisdom are not the exclusive possessions of any caste, race, and religion, but common to all.

Tiruvalluvar said that one should acquire knowledge and reasoning power to improve life. In line with the noble ideas enunciated in Tirukkural, 'Periyar' was also against the discrimination by birth and stressed the need for social unity and equality.

Of course, the couplet which lays stress on social equality was very dear to him. 'Periyar's scientific rationalism also had its impact on 'Periyar'.

'Periyar' was noted for humanism and the couplets of

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110. "Birth is alike to all but not their work

Because of their diverse deeds".

111. 'The mark of wisdom is to see the reality

Behind each appearance', *Tirukkural*, No.355.

'Wisdom grasps the truth


'Diagnose with care, discover the cause

And find and apply the remedy", *Ibid*, No.948.

76
Tirukkural became the keynote of his theory of philosophy of mankind.¹¹² He cited Kural couplets to find support for his ideas, strengthen his arguments and establish their validity.

Moreover, the ideas of reformed marriage propounded by Tiruvalluvar greatly influenced 'Periyar' and he praised it.¹¹³ Valluvar's idea of men's domination, his advocacy of the liberation of women, their divorce and family planning, property rights, remarriage, and a new name for the bride 'life partner' also influenced 'Periyar'.¹¹⁴ Like Tirukkural, 'Periyar' also condemned Manudharma, scriptures, superstitions, yagás, and yogás. He laid stress on equality, justice, samadharma, progress and truth¹¹⁵ and he gave much importance to knowledge, moral character, public welfare and service to humanity.¹¹⁶ In Tirukkural, there is no word for God, religion, caste, moksha, karma and fate.¹¹⁷ 'Periyar' cited the universal ethical sayings of Tiruvalluvar in the form of couplets in order to drive home his points and add weight to his opinions. He also propagated the virtuous ideas found in Tirukkural for the benefit humanity by organising conferences and functions in the name of Tirukkural and Tiruvalluvar. By such acts, he removed the disgrace and dishonour heaped on Tirukkural.¹¹⁸ For instance, he convened a Kural Conference on 15 and 16 January of 1949 at Madras and spread its

¹¹² What good is that sense which does not feel and prevent
    All creatures woes as its own?  Ibid., No. 315.
    If some must beg and live, let the Creator
    Himself beg and die!  Ibid., No.1062


¹¹⁴ Kudi Arasu, Erode, April 9, 1949, P.5.


¹¹⁶ Nedunchezhiyan, K., Tamil and Tamilagam in Indian Culture, Trichi 1989, P.144,

¹¹⁷ Periyar E.V.R. Tirukkural and Periyar, Chennai, 2007, P.13,

¹¹⁸ Kudi Arasu, April 30, 1949, PP.1-14.
universal ideas. He also made arrangements to celebrate Kural Day on 12 April, throughout the Madras State. In fact, 'Periyar' owed a lot to Thiruvalluvar for his ideas of universal brotherhood. No wonder, the ideas found embedded in Tirukkural had much to do with the shaping of Periyar's rationalism.

III. Influence of Indigenous Social Reformers

Apart from Thirukkural, 'Periyar' drew his radical thoughts from social reformers like Vaikuntaswami, Joti Rao Phooley, Ramalinga Adigal, Sree Narayana Guru, Kuntrakudi Adigalar and leaders like B.R. Ambedkar and Gandhiji.

Vaikunta Swamikal's Samabhandi bhojanam and 'Nizhalthangal' became the base for the human rights struggles and Self-Respect Movement of 'Periyar'. Like Vaikuntaswami, 'Periyar' upheld views like Samatuva Samuham, social justice, uplift of low castes and inter-dining. He also condemned Brahmin supremacy, meaningless rites, rituals, religious fanaticism, orthodox religious customs, superstitions and discriminations. The humanistic attitude of Vaikuntaswami attracted 'Periyar'.


120. Muthukuttiswami, popularly known as Vaikuntaswamikal was hailed as one of the earliest socio-religious reformers of the then Travancore State. He was the first one to raise the voice for the rights of the downtrodden. He sowed the first seed of revolution to establish the rule of justice and wanted to liberate the non-caste Hindus. He stood for one community under one umbrella. He was a man with progressive ideas and stood for social equality and social liberation. For that, he organised a society called Samatuva Samuham. He awakened the downtrodden from their long social slumber and tried to free them from social evils. As a great humanist, he established many Nizhal Thankals and Dharmasalas in Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli Districts to take care of widows, orphans, destitutes and also for their worship and education. He was in favour of the oppressed and the suppressed and all these attracted the attention of 'Periyar'.


121. Personal Interview with Ponneelan, The Sahitya Academic Award Winner the Tamil Novelist at Tirunelveli, on 10 March 2005.

'Periyar' was also much indebted to the radical social thoughts of Mahatma Joti Rao Phooley, a great social reformer of Maharashtra. Phooley rose against slavery and caste rigidity. He wrote on, why people were enslaved by their own brethren? He condemned nationalism without liberation, Brahmanism and casteism and fought against social injustice, human indignity and inequality. Like phooley, 'Periyar' became a champion of the poor and women's education, their liberation and rights.

The Satya Sadhok Samaj and atheism of Phooley were the two things that strengthened the Self-Respect Movement of 'Periyar'. It can not be denied that Mahatma Joti Rao Phooley was one of the fore-runners of 'Periyar', the rebel and the reformist. 'Periyar' condemned nationalism and called it as an imaginary thing. Phooley also rose against casteism after and humiliating his own personal experience at the hands of high-caste men. His radical thoughts caught the imagination of

123. 'Mahatma' Joti Rao Phooley was the greatest social reformer of Maharashtra in the nineteenth century. He was rightly called Mahatma, the Father of Indian Social Reformers. Phooley attacked the Brahminical scriptures, puranas and revolting against priest craft and caste and also fought for the liberation of Sudras, untouchables and women. He championed the cause of widow remarriage and established orphanages and girls schools. He gave much importance to education for both men and women, which is the only way to put an end to foolishness. Phooley opposed sati, child marriage and encouraged widow remarriage. He was against the celebration of Deepavali which led to the loss of honour and waste of time. Phooley wanted to reconstruct the social order based on social equality, justice and reason and dedicated his life to liberate the lower classes and women from the thraldom of scriptures, priestcraft and caste system. He established the Satya Sadhak Samaj (Truth Seeking Society), to redeem the Sudras from the influence of Brahminical scriptures and to liberate them from mental and religious slavery. He stood for eradication of caste and idol worship and wanted to promote brotherhood of men and education of the lower castes to dispel their ignorance and prejudices. He fought for the dignity of man and conducted marriages without the Brahmin priests. According to Phooley, Vedas were man-made and created to exploit the downtrodden. A selfish man can not be introspective and intellect. But courage spring from the love of truth, clean mind and composure of heart. To him, offer food to God is not the proper way to honour but to serve the people to those who are in need. He also declared that woman is superior to man.

Dhananjay Keer, Mahatma Jyoti Rao Phooley, Bombay, 2000, P.iii.

'Periyar', who later made use of them in his crusade. Phooley believed in the passive resistance of Satyagraha and 'Periyar' also believed in the same which ultimately led to the blossoming of a silent social revolution in Tamil Nadu. Phooley fought for communal reservation which influenced 'Periyar' to a great extent.\(^{128}\)

Another important socio-religious reformer who influenced 'Periyar' was Sree Narayana Guru\(^{129}\) of the erstwhile Travancore State. His watchword was "no caste, no religion and no need of God for man to live". In his words that "Whatever may be the religion, man must uphold principles of the abolition of rituals, ceremonies, casteism and untouchability attracted the attention of 'Periyar'.\(^{130}\) Moreover, his ideas on humanism, equality and universal brotherhood greatly influenced the rationalistic thoughts of 'Periyar'.

Yet another mighty reformer who influenced 'Periyar' was Vadalur Ramalinga Adigal.\(^{131}\) His ideas on humanism, casteism, god, heaven, hell, religious rituals, sastras and superstitions did create an upheaval in the mind of 'Periyar'.\(^{132}\)

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129. Sree Narayana Guru, the greatest social reformer of Travancore, was a great thinker and humanist. His famous watchword was "Whatever may be the religion man must flourish had its universal appeal". He advised his followers to worship their own image reflected in a mirror. He instructed the people to construct schools instead of temples. He started a struggle for the abolition of rituals and ceremonies. He stood for human welfare, equality, solidarity and universal brotherhood. He was against casteism, untouchability, idol worship, luxurious marriages and child marriage.

131. Personal Interview with Prof. A. Ekmabaranathan, Chennai, on March 11, 2005.
132. Vadalur Vallalar was one of the greatest social reformers and a great Tamil architect of 19 century. He was a free thinker and a great humanist. He was against the rubbish sastras, puranas and religious rituals. According to him, casteism is dangerous than poisonous snake. He was against birth discrimination and orthodox Vedic religion. According to him, God, heaven and hell are the plays of children. He gave much importance to girls education and wanted to raise the status of the suppressed humanity. He vehemently condemned the superstitions. He wanted every human being to be compassionate to all lives. He insisted on pure Saivism, which prevented killing of living animals. He wanted to establish a classless and casteless society through his Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Sangam. It was through the conciliatory and virtuous path, he wanted to transcend all barriers like caste and religion. His Sanmarga Sangam was opened to all irrespective of caste, creed, colour, language and nationality. According to him deities, ceremonies were meaningless and he founded Sathya Dharma Salai to feed the poor. He gave much importance to Tamil language. He served as the forerunner of Temple Entry Movement. He believed in 'one caste, one religion, and one God'.

Mangala Murugesan N.K., Self-Respect Movement, Madurai, 1980, P.24,
His ideas of classless and casteless society, women education, temple-entry movement, and the enrichment of Tamil language had deep influence on 'Periyar'. His own weekly Kudi Arasu, published a collection of songs from Ramalingaswami's Tiruvarutpa in 1929 and it reflects the tenets of Self -Respect Movement. Ramalinga Adigal's Samarasa Siddha Sanmarga Sangam had great influence in shaping the rationalistic thoughts of 'Periyar'.

Yet one more social reformer, whom 'Periyar' met was B.R. Ambedkar of Maharashtra. 'Periyar's' contact with B.R. Ambedkar greatly influenced him. Like Ambedkar, 'Periyar' asked the people not to follow anything blindly but question and explore the matters rationally. It can not be denied that Ambedkarism was in the speeches of 'Periyar'. 'Periyar' had the same thoughts and principles as Ambedkar. His principle of social justice influenced 'Periyar' to a great extent. He also translated Ambedkar's book Way to Eradicate Caste. Like Ambedkar, 'Periyar' also wanted to put an end to Aryanism.

133. The Justicite (Rationalist English Weekly), Erode, December 30, 1944, P.2.
138. Bhima Rao Ambedkar (1981-1956) was a great social reformer of Maharashtra. He was a great rationalist, humanist, and a champion of the poor, and the downtrodden. He fought for equality, liberty, fraternity and social justice. He was against varnashrama, untouchability, superstitions and puranas. He stood for social development and human progress. He wanted to educate the downtrodden masses and dedicated his life for the welfare of common people.
141. Kudi Arasu, Erode, March 27, 1938, P.8.
Another influence on 'Periyar' was the ascetic life of Kunrakudi Adigalar, who did a lot of social service to free the downtrodden from the elitist domination of the few. In fact, Adigalar was a senior contemporary of 'Periyar', was a supporter of the Dravidian culture and Tamil language. He used to deliver lectures and propagated the ideas of socio-religious and economic equality, spoke against caste and untouchability. He vehemently opposed Brahmanic domination, priestly connivance and spiritual hegemony over the majority.

Further, it could be also said that the ideas of Bhagat Singh and of M.N. Roy of Calutta had exercised great influence in shaping the rationalistic thoughts of 'Periyar'.

The principled life of Gandhiji also had much influence on 'Periyar'. Gandhiji's principles of non-violence became the base for the agitations of

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143. Kunrakudi Adigal was a social reformer and humanist. He was the author of Temple the Social Centres. He fought against caste system and stood for social justice. He appointed the low castes as Arachakas (priests) in the temples. In 1954, he passed orders to implement it in Meenakshi Amman Temple in Madurai. He passed orders to conduct pujas in Tamil and he stood for the enrichment of Tamil language. *Viduthalai*, Madras, December 20, 1969, P.1.


145. Bhagat Singh (1907-1931) native of Punjab was a great freedom fighter, free thinker, social revolutionary, atheist and rationalist. He had no faith in God soul, karma, fate and rebirth. To him, blind belief in religion is an obstacle to progress. His rationalistic ideas instigated 'Periyar'. To him, puratchi means 'revolution' which needs to change the social structure based on injustice. Of course, puratchi is the inseparable right of humanity. Sivavarma, *Bhagat Singh*, Jaipur, 2007, PP.242-258.

146. M.N. Roy (1886-1955) was a radical rationalist, a great writer, orator and man of action. To him, knowledge is freedom that inherent in each and every individual. 'Periyar's' close contact with M.N. Roy enriched his rationalistic thoughts. S. Jayaprakasam *Freedom Struggle of India*, Madurai, 1981, PP. 161-163.

147. Gandhiji (1868-1948) rightly called the Father of Indian Nation, was a great freedom fighter, who dedicated his service to the common cause. He was a truth seeker, believed in non-violent Satyagraha and never opted for political posts. He stood against untouchability and wanted to reform the religion and society. *Kudi Arasu*, Erode, August 14, 1927, P.8.


82
'Periyar'.¹⁴⁸ Though Gandhiji is said to have been in favour of varnas, his view against untouchability and eradication of caste discrimination had their impact on the mind of 'Periyar'.¹⁴⁹ Like Gandhiji, 'Periyar' never opted for power and positions.¹⁵⁰ Gandhiji advocated swaraj, Ramraj, self-earning and living. Gandhiji had deep faith in God, whether Rama, Christ or Allah and their Scriptures and what they purported to tell humanity. Gandhiji wanted India to be liberated from foreign rule. But, 'Periyar' thought that political liberation is no liberation. He wanted to have both political and social liberation. However, Gandhiji's passive resistance to power and violence evoked much appreciation from 'Periyar'.

Besides, the Self - Respect Movement of 'Periyar' reflected many Christian perspectives. Though 'Periyar' opposed conversions, he simply synthesised both the revivalist ideas of the missionaries and the nativistic ideas. He wanted to remain in the Hindu fold only to reform it. Of course, the goal of the Self-Respect Movement was nativist- to get rid of Aryan domination. On the other, it was a revivalist movement to restore the Tamil society a state of equality.¹⁵¹

IV. Influence of Western Thinkers

Western thinkers too had their share in shaping 'Periyar's' rationalism, socialism, liberalism and secularism. Though, he had no regular higher education he was able to understand the western rationalistic ideas and rose in revolt against religion, god, caste, sastras and superstitions.¹⁵² Rationalistic thoughts of philosophers like Socrates, Spinoza, Rene Desearthe, Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant, Thomas Pain, Schopenhauer, Karl Marx, Charles Bradlah, Robert Green Ingersoll, Neitsche, Lenin, Bernard Shah and Bertrand Russell inspired him.

The foremost among them was Socrates\(^{153}\) of Athens. Like Socrates, 'Periyar' was known for his fearlessness, deep thoughts, knowledge and wisdom.\(^{154}\) He was the bitter enemy of superstitions and irrationalism.\(^{155}\) In looks and thoughts, 'Periyar' was exactly like Socrates.\(^{156}\) Like Socrates, 'Periyar' was concerned with the low born.\(^{157}\) And he emphasised that each and every matter should be questioned and examined.\(^{158}\) He was a good orator noted for his incisive and critical attitude. He also requested the people 'to think with knowledge'.\(^{159}\) So 'Periyar' was rightly called the Socrates of Tamil Nadu.

The thoughts of Rene Deseartes\(^{160}\) the 'Sun of Reason' were very appealing to the heart of 'Periyar'. Like him, 'Periyar' also condemned god, religion, sastras, soul, fate and superstitions. And he gave much importance to

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153. Socrates of Athens (470 to 399 B.C.) was the greatest thinker of the world. He was not only the greatest rationalist thinker but the best orator. His greatest contribution Know Thyself became the seed for the thoughts of others and the greatest inducement of knowledge. He said that one thing I know and that is that I know nothing. According to him, philosophy begins, when one learns to doubt about the cherished beliefs, dogmas and axioms and there is no philosophy until the mind turns round and examines itself. He emphasised that "man should think well and that will raise him up". In his words, "thinking alone has divinity and it distinguishes what is right and what is wrong and one's mind alone regulates life". He was a man of determination noted for his physical and moral courage, a seeker of knowledge and wisdom and ridiculed the gods of Athens.


157. Personal Interview with Veeramani, K., the President of Dravida Kazhagam, Chennai, February 16, 2002.


160. Rene Descartes of Fance (1596-1650) was the first modern rationalist, who sought to explain the entire world by mathematical and mechanical laws. To him, God and soul remained outside his reasoning. He broke the shackles of fate, superstitions and set man on the road to discovery and inventions.\(^{19}\) He asked the people not to accept anything at face value and exhorted them to subject everything to the test of their intelligence and experience. His followers hailed him as the Father of Rationalism. He believed that man can dominate his passions by his will and control forces of nature. To him man was no longer a victim of fate but an architect of his destiny.


84
scientific progress of human beings.\textsuperscript{161} He also emphasized the thinking ability and the spirit of inquiry. Descartes said that anything that could be observed is true and what is beyond the comprehension of man is illusion. One must be true to the situation and truth is comprehensible.

Another Western rationalist thinker who influenced 'Periyar' was Baruch Spinoza\textsuperscript{162} of Holland. Like Spinoza, 'Periyar' too had no faith in soul, life after death, god, religion and scriptures. He also ridiculed the Hindu mythology and declared that it was designed to enslave the non-Aryans. He had deep faith in the unchanging laws which govern the universe.\textsuperscript{163} No wonder, the rationalistic principles of Baruch Spinoza did a major role in shaping 'Periyar's' rationalism.

Another important Western rationalist who influenced 'Periyar', was Francis Marie Arouet Voltaire\textsuperscript{164} of France. His views on reason, religious tyranny, morality, scientific education, liberty and equality\textsuperscript{165} and his opposition to orthodox religion, temples and blind beliefs\textsuperscript{166} were found to be intellectually compatible with 'Periyar's' principles. Further, Voltaire's nothing enfranchises

\begin{enumerate}
\item Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) of Holland was the greatest modern philosopher and his famous book was the Treatise on Religion and the State. He was the champion of freedom of thought. He revealed the contradictions and improbabilities of the Old Testament of The Bible and questioned soul, life after death and the concept of unseen gods. He threw cold water on the teachings of Hindu religion especially over the Vedas, Ramayana and other religious texts. To him, God has no hand in the operation of the unchanging laws of entity and no part in the destinies of mankind. The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 24, Chicago, 1987, PP. 99-100, Will Durant, Op.cit., P.148.
\item Francis Marie Arouet Voltaire (1664-1778), the greatest French philosopher, was a great rationalist and humanist noted for his clear and precise thinking ability. He gave great impetus to mind, reason, rights of man, public welfare and fought against ecclesiastical tyranny and obscurantism. To him, all citizens should be equally strong and free. He gave much importance to morality and ridiculed superstitions, dogmas, revelations and traditions and stood for liberty and equality. He criticised the orthodox religions, temples, conventional beliefs and condemned the Church as a bane on society. The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol.29, Chicago, 1987, P.539.
\item The Modern Rationalist, Vol.28, No.10, October 2003, P.7.
\end{enumerate}
like education had greatly influenced 'Periyar'. He tried to light the candle of scientific education in each and every home of Tamil Nadu. Voltaire was skeptical of God. Like Voltaire, 'Periyar' was aware of the fact that to ask proper question is half of the solution to the problems in life. Voltaire's thoughts on social and religious regeneration were of utmost importance in 'Periyar's thoughts.

The rationalistic ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) of France also exercised much influence on 'Periyar'. Rousseau was a famous thinker, rationalist and humanist. His ideas of equality, liberty and fraternity and his universally acclaimed statement Man is born free but found everywhere in chains have made indelible imprints in the mind of 'Periyar'. Like Rousseau, 'Periyar' wanted to remove the social and economic disparities inorder to establish an equal society. Rousseau's principle "Try to be a Man" is also reflected in the humanism of 'Periyar'. Like Rousseau, 'Periyar' gave much importance to facts and reason and declared that nobody has the right to prevent the natural feelings of mind. He also dedicated his life to kindling reason among people and safeguarding self-respect and therefore, is called Rousseau of Tamil Nadu.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), a German philosopher of the age of reason, was a famous rationalist. He was an idealist and noted for his famous book Critique of Pure Reason. His principles like the dignity of mankind, equal opportunity to both men and women and universalisation of education greatly influenced 'Periyar'. To Kant, mind is an important apparatus that formulates concepts which idea reflects in the rationalistic thoughts

170. Puratchi, Erode, June 8, 1934, P.5.
of 'Periyar'. He argued that the mind is a clean sheet on which experience writes, sense experience begets memory that in turn begets ideas.\textsuperscript{173} This was the essential axiom of Kant's philosophy which 'Periyar' had imbibed. Kantian reasoning and the logic of phenomenon did immense service in shaping 'Periyar's thoughts. It did not mean that 'Periyar' studied the epistemology of Kant, but he was endowed with a penetrative and analytical razor-sharp mind which could form concepts and ideas on its own.

The rationalistic, humanistic and secular ideas of Thomas Paine\textsuperscript{174} of England also did play a role in 'Periyar's thoughts. Like him, 'Periyar' had the lion's courage, and open-mindedness and acted as a champion of freedom of thought. He also had deep faith in rationalism, reason and birthrights\textsuperscript{175} He believed that the decline of religion leads to the growth of civilization.\textsuperscript{176} 'Periyar' also was attracted by Thomas Paine's idea that argument with an irrational man is just like giving medicine to a deadman.\textsuperscript{177} 'Periyar' translated and published the ideas of Thomas Paine in his own Tamil journals like Pahutharivu and Puratchi.\textsuperscript{178}

Schopenhauer (1788-1860), another German thinker, has also influenced 'Periyar'. According to him 'will' is an imperious dictator in man which causes strife and misery. It is the arch-enemy of mankind and so it should

\textsuperscript{174} Thomas Paine of England (1737-1809), was a great rationalist, atheist, humanist, and writer. He revealed his ideas frankly and openly. He was the champion of the freedom of thought and the author of the book Age of Reason which was called the atheist Bible. His famous books on Rationalism, Birth Rights of People and Rationalist Era are of great importance. He was a man of courage and exposed the mistakes in The Bible and he stood for human welfare.
\textit{Pahutharivu}, Madras, December 1, 1936, PP. 60-62.
\textsuperscript{175} Puratchi, December 1, 1936, PP. 60-62.
\textsuperscript{176} Unmai, Madras, June 1-30, 1990, P.34.
\textsuperscript{177} Puratchi, Erode, May 6, 1934, P.13.
be annihilated. This concept went deep into the heart of 'Periyar'. Besides, Schopenhauer's idea of women who were mainly responsible for enticing men and thereby perpetuating the human race also had great influence on the rationalistic thoughts of 'Periyar' on feminism and thus he became the champion of women's liberation.179

'Periyar' in fact, owes a lot to Karl Marx180 of Germany. His rationalistic thoughts are well known. Like Marx, 'Periyar' also developed his intellectual stand through his experiences with the pundits, sanyasis and religious and political leaders.181 It cannot be denied that Marx's theory of classless society and other rationalistic and materialistic ideas are reflected in 'Periyar's' Self-Respect Movement.182 Like him, 'Periyar' was also a great humanist, who had been moved by the wretched condition of the oppressed labourers and fought against capitalism. Gradually, he grew up into a crusader and champion of the backward and downtrodden classes.183

Like Marx, 'Periyar' had close contact with the labourers.184 and fought against inequalities and disparities in their wages, treatment, etc., He also emphasised that class struggles should be eliminated with by communism and socialism.185 For the welfare of workers, he organised many trade unions, and conferences. No wonder, 'Periyar' was greatly influenced by the communist principles of Karl Marx. He translated and

180. Karl Heinrich Karl Marx, was one of the greatest revolutionalist, sociologists and economists. He was the author of the Communist Manifesto in collaboration with Frederick Engels, the most celebrated pamphlet in the history of Socialist Movement. His masterpiece Das Capital became The Bible of the working class. He was a great thinker, fond of truth and the creator of Samadharma. He developed his views through confrontations with the chief leaders of the working class movement. The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol.23, Chicago, 1987, PP.571-578.
182. Ibid., April 23, 1933, P.3.
183. Pahutharivu, Madras, February 1, 1938, PP. 21-25.
185. Kudi Arasu, Erode, April 23, 1933, P.3.
published a series of Marx's articles in his Tamil weekly-Kudi Arasu.\(^{186}\) He was attracted by Marxism because it consists of economic thoughts, political philosophy and ideas for social regeneration. 'Periyar's 'Erode Plan' was meant to free the workers from economic, religious and caste cruelties and to render service to Marxism. His writings on the private possession of wealth and woman's suffrage have brought out his Marxian attitude very clearly. 'Periyar's Samadharma Party of his Self-Respect Movement was yet another important organ where the influence of Marx could be discerned. 'Periyar' also wrote a number of books which revealed his Marxian attitude and the most important among them are.

(a) **Who is the Real Worker?**

(b) **This World Is Not For the Workers.**

(c) **Communism**

(d) **The Philosophy of Communism**

(e) **The Call for Revolution**

(f) **Karl Marx.**\(^{187}\)

Moreover, the religious ideas of Marx also had great influence on 'Periyar'. Religion is an intoxicant, which can brain wash man. Marx therefore said, "**Religion opiates the masses**. it is the heart of the heartless world."\(^{188}\) In the same vein, 'Periyar' considered religion as irrational, hypocritical and servile to the people. It also meant to create illusory fantasies for the poor.\(^{189}\) To him, "mind is the prime source to regulate man's life and not God; thinking has divinity and before doing anything, one must analyse it and examine it". In the words of 'Periyar', religion enabled a class of people to live in comfort against others who themselves were reduced to bone.\(^{190}\)

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'Periyar's' approach to social problems is not far different from that of Marx. The atheism in communism was very close to the heart of 'Periyar'. He even thought that the end of rationalism is Marxism and he declared that there is no place for god, religion and scripture in a nation of socialism. He also denounced Christianity because it preached humility which resulted in blind subservience to authority and that was the root cause for all the exploitations in human society. However, no one can deny the Marxian impact on 'Periyar' and he was rightly called Karl Marx of Tamil Nadu.

The rationalistic ideas of Leo Tolstoy had also left his impression on the rationalistic thoughts of 'Periyar'. Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) was a great Russian reformer, great rationalist, humanist writer and the most influential moral philosopher. His ideas meant searching for truth, and absoluteness in a world of incomplete knowledge and imperfect man. His humanism and his disapproval of the artificial culture of the upper class attracted the attention of 'Periyar'. His ideas of social order were that the world would become better only when all men learnt to love each other and that ownership of property was a source of violence. All these captured the mind of 'Periyar' and moulded his rationalism.

Another important Western rationalist thinker, who exerted influence on 'Periyar' was Charles Bradlah (1833-1891). He was a famous British radical rationalist free thinker, atheist and an iconoclast. His scientific approach to find out truth and iconoclasm left a deep impression on 'Periyar'. Bradlah's idea is that "belief in god leads to the collapse of man's progress; attempts and good deeds leads to happiness". And his famous essay 'Plea for Atheism' inspired 'Periyar'.

194. Ibid., Vol.21, P.677.
The most widely known western rationalist who exercised a powerful influence on the rationalistic ideas of 'Periyar' was Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-1899) of America. He was a spirited orator of the U.S.A., a humanist thinker and a great scientific rationalist and a flamboyant figure in the intellectual upheaval of modern times. His rationalism is a store-house of knowledge, which could lead to intellectual growth and enable one to be free from the fears of superstitions. His idea that 'superstition is the child of ignorance and mother of misery' attracted the attention of 'Periyar'.198 Like Ingersoll, 'Periyar' shook the foundations of orthodox religion and gave much importance to truth and free thinking.199 'Periyar' opined that research should be based on rationalism, freedom, honesty and courage. He wanted to redeem the people from foolishness through his rationalistic speeches. Like Ingersoll, 'Periyar' was a great humanist, who became the voice of the freedom of the suppressed and the downtrodden, dedicated his life to liberate mankind from demoralised dogmas of religions, which have reduced the human race to absurdity.200 He also had deep faith in freedom and equality of both men and women.201

'Periyar' expressed similar views like those of Ingersoll that religion is the crudest fraud and gods are revengeful savages, lustful and ignorant; they should take care of themselves and let us live for man. He also remarked that, the creation of God was ridiculous and he believed in the religion of humanity. It seems that Ingersoll's remark that it was better to love fellowman than God induced 'Periyar' to announce his humanist philosophy forget God and think about man.202 Like him, 'Periyar' had no belief in heaven and hell and declared that the word God was simply born out

of ignorance and it was a guess’. God is for the fearful and the ideas of God are illusory. God can not exist in a world of anti-God activities. To him, blind belief in any particular person or religion is an act of dishonour. ‘Periyar’ took the same attitude as Ingersoll against religion and God. He declared that the blind belief of anything without rationalism leads to foolishness instead of intellectual progress. He considered that religion is a bane to mankind, the root cause of all evils of modern society and all religions should be examined and analysed. Moreover, ‘Periyar’ established rationalist associations just like the associations established by Ingersoll. The religious thoughts of Ingersoll were translated by ‘Periyar’ and published in his journals like Kudi Arasu, Pahuttharivu and Viduthalai. Ingersoll, in fact, sowed the most powerful seeds of rationalism on ‘Periyar’s mind.

The ideas of **Friedrich Nietzsche** (1856-1950), the fearless thinker of Germany, also had influenced ‘Periyar’s' rationalism. His opposition to Christian ideology, blind belief about heaven and hell and his advocacy of scientific investigation and the notion of human rights for better human life attracted ‘Periyar’. Nietzsche’s works gave importance to man and his unlimited power.

A playwright, literary critic and rationalist who influenced the rationalism of ‘Periyar’ was **George Bernard Shaw** (1856-1950). He was one of the well known English dramatists of the twentieth century, noted for courage and unmindful of criticism who never fell into the nets of flatterers. Like Shaw, ‘Periyar’ expressed his views unmindful of criticism. He was an ardent supporter of the liberation of women and wanted to bring up children under

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government control. The religious views of Shaw became thought provoking to 'Periyar', that is, the search for God is an instructive and interesting study of the development of a hypotheses from savage idolatory to a highly sophisticated metaphysics. Shaw's famous for his pungent comments on the social life of the people. Undoubtedly, this had great impact on 'Periyar' and he is rightly called the Bernard Shaw of Tamil Nadu.

Yet another Western socialist who played a major role in shaping the rationalistic thoughts of 'Periyar' was Vladimir Illinich Ulayanov Lenin of Russia. His ideas of atheism, human dignity, proletarian dictatorship, socialism and emancipation of the downtrodden influenced 'Periyar' immensely. In addition, Lenin's ideas on women's liberation, and their equality with men inspired, the thoughts of 'Periyar' on strong feminism. He also cherished the opinion that religion is an instrument to make the people slaves without any kind of, progress and independence. 'Periyar' tried to introduce Communism in Tamil Nadu in the 1930's and wrote articles about basic ideas of Communism which reflected Lenin's radical views. He was even arrested and sentenced to nine months of rigorous imprisonment by the British Government. Lenin's articles also were translated and published in the journals of 'Periyar'.

213. Vladimir Illinich Ulayanov Lenin (1870-1924) was the founder of the Russian Communist Party and the leader of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. He was a great revolutionary thinker since Karl Marx. He was the formulator of Marxism - Leninism the official ideology of Soviet Union. The philosophy of Communism is a revised version of Marxism, largely the work of Lenin and therefore, often called Marxism - Leninism.


216. Ibid., July 30, 1933, P.9.
217. Ibid., December, 11, 1932, P.3.
The most important rationalist thinker who shaped the rationalistic thoughts of 'Periyar' was Arthur William Bertrand Russell\(^{219}\) of England. Just like Russell, 'Periyar' refused to accept God, religion, sastras, soul and superstition.\(^{220}\) He had deep faith in the efficacy of science and scientific developments to dispel superstitions. It seems that when Russell kindled the power of reason, 'Periyar' taught the people to employ reason and kindled their sense of self-respect.\(^{221}\)

Russell's humanism is reflected in his poem *Remember your humanity and forget the rest*, which resembles 'Periyar's' humanistic and atheistic philosophy *Forget God and Think About Man*. Like Russell, 'Periyar' had felt pity for the sufferings of mankind. To Russell, happiness of society was more important than individual happiness.\(^{222}\) The same thing was felt by 'Periyar' and he had the same revolutionary views as regards freedom, equality and progress. His book namely, *Marriage and Morals*, greatly influenced 'Periyar', who in turn wrote, *Why Woman Became a Slave? which created a revolution in India*.\(^{223}\) The atheistic and feminist ideas of 'Periyar' had a lot to do with those of Russell. Moreover, Russell's Rationalist Press Association in England became the model for 'Periyar's' Rationalist Propaganda Institution in Chennai.\(^{224}\) Thus, Russell had much in common with 'Periyar'.

\(\)\(^{219}\) Arthur William Bertrand Russell (1872-1920) a famous British Philosopher, was a socialist noted for his love, search for knowledge and unbearable pity for the suffering mankind. He was a great writer, an iconoclast and an orator. He was a great ideologist and rationalist with progressive ideas. He was the youngest and the most virile of the European thinkers and his passion for clarity drove him inevitably to Mathematics. To him, freedom is supreme. Freedom of thought and speech would go like cleansing draught through the neuroses and superstitions of modern mind. He refused to acknowledge God, scriptures, religious fanaticism, dogmatism, superstitions and soul. To him, all religions are lies based on imagination and they are beyond rationalism give much difficulties to the people. He also said that religion is based on fear and the people blindly believed the old sayings.


The above mentioned Western thinkers were not only renowned and eminent social reformers, but also rationalists. But their line of thinking was not sharp as that of 'Periyar'. The mighty Western philosophers touched upon various subjects of thought but none has covered so many subjects so originally and with so much authority as Periyar did. Thus, 'Periyar' has unique place among the rationalists of the world. A dedicated rationalist and a social scientist, his only aim was social change. He wanted to break the idols only to break down the castles of caste domination and Brahmanism. His main intention was to shatter the shackles of the illiterates, the ignorant and the superstitious people. However, his indebtedness to Western thinkers is beyond doubt. He was never a theorist but a realist in the sense that what he gained from them was adapted to the needs of his people. In this sense, he is different from the Western thinkers.

II. Influence of Foreign Tours

Besides these, 'Periyar' had learnt a lot from the long tours and travels that he made. He wanted to get first-hand knowledge of the world and its development and to see for himself the working systems of government, developments in the political economic, social and cultural fields, and the life style, traditions and customs of various peoples. With these motives, he undertook the Asian, African and European tours. It was on the basis of what he had seen that he formulated his social philosophy for the people of Tamil Nadu. His first foreign visit was to Malaysia, started his voyage from Nagapattinam on December 15, 1929 and reached Penang Harbour on 20 December. His aim was to unite the Tamil people, instil in them the spirit of rationalism and imbibe self-respect, to establish the Thinkers Forum and Rationalist Association in Malaysia and also to enlist subscribers for his own journals. Besides

these, he wanted to spread the ideas of Self-Respect Movement there too.²²⁷ He inaugurated the Tamil's Conference at Ipoh (Malaysia) and visited Kaulalampur and from there, he went to Singapore and visited various places.²²⁸ 'Periyar' returned from Malaysia to Tamil Nadu on January 16, 1930. His Malaysian tour further strengthened his contact with the Tamils living in foreign lands.

Later, 'Periyar' started his journey from Chennai to Europe on December 13, 1931 in the French ship Ambosie. And he visited the African, West Asian and European countries. He reached Cairo in North Africa on January 5, 1932 and from there he went to Greece.²²⁹ There, he visited the famous Universities and the statue of the greatest philosopher of the world namely Socrates. The freedom of speech permitted in Greece inspired 'Periyar' to a great extent.²³⁰ From there, he went to Constantinople on February 10, 1932 and there, he witnessed the fruits of the reforms introduced by Mustafa Kemal Pasha Ataturk, the Father of Modern Turkey. The political and social changes in Turkey attracted and influenced his rationalism.²³¹

Following this, 'Periyar' went to Germany in 1932 and stayed in Berlin for a few days. In Germany, he visited many socialist associations and the offices of the socialist magazines which in turn helped and mould his rationalism.²³² Later, he went to Spain and stayed at Madrid. He got in touch with the labour and revolutionary associations and learnt about their real conditions. Then, he went to Moscow on February 14, 1932 and stayed there up to 19, May.²³³ His Russian tour marked a

turing point in the history of 'Periyar's' revolt. There, he registered his name in the Anti-Religious Propaganda Office. In Russia, he visited the Anti-religious Museum, Youth Associations, Atheist Societies, Universities and the Museum of Lenin, where his body is preserved. He was impressed by the respect enjoyed by workers in factories.234

The General Restaurant at Moscow, which fed lakhs of people daily, attracted the attention of 'Periyar'. In this, the things needed for cooking and the cooked food were examined by the doctors before it was served to the people. The restaurant had provision for workers to take rest and offered recreational facilities like cinemas and cultural programmes.235 Social service and co-operation which in Russia were imperative enabled the people to lead a happy, free and prosperous life. From Russia, he went to England and participated in the Labour Conference at Maesparo in June 20, 1932 in which he exposed the cruelties the British perpetuated in India.236 Then, he went to Ceylon and visited many places and participated in public meetings. From Columbo, he reached Chennai on November 20, 1932.237

A few years later, 'Periyar' undertook his second tour to Malaysia and reached Burma to attend the Third Buddhist Conference on December 3, 1954.238 He participated in the Conference and gave a talk and this shows how much he valued Buddhism. 'Periyar', during his visit to foreign countries, met many leaders and learnt about their ideas of rationalism. This enabled him to expand and enrich his own the rationalistic and socialist principles which were reflected in his speeches and

236. Pahutharivu, Madras, November 1, 1938, P.43.
writings in Tamil Nadu. This also gave a boost to his social activities. The Buddhist word Kalamathov which means to 'think and act' greatly influenced his thoughts. After the tours, he realised the need for the scientific and intellectual development of Tamil Nadu. For that, he needed to eradicate their foolish notions, superstitions, blind beliefs, orthodox traditions, customs and even break the idols of gods or burn the pictures and scriptures. In addition to these, he gave much importance to critical analysis and scientific approach to political, economic, social and religious aspects as in Western rationalism. No doubt, his self-respect ideology too underwent drastic changes in the light of his foreign experience.

The political, economic and social systems of Russia appealed to his imagination and communism captivated his mind. After his Russian tour, he declared that the goal of his Self-Respect Movement was Samadharma. Of course, Samadharma became the key word of the Self-Respect Movement of 'Periyar' which was originally a Western notion. Gradually, samadharma ideologies began to spread in Tamil Nadu too. In addition, some political flavour also was added to his Self-Respect Movement. His foreign visits paved the way for the spread of Self-Respect Leagues and the introduction of 'Erode Plan' in Tamil Nadu. In Russia, he found social justice, equality and fairness. He was highly overwhelmed by the casteless society in the Soviet Union and he wanted to achieve it in Tamil Nadu. He also wanted to put an end to the exploitation of expropriators. He was greatly

240. Personal Interview with Veeramani K., President of Dravida Kazhagam, Chennai, February 2, 2002.
influenced by the special child care policy of the government of Russia which led to the good health and hygienic life of the mothers.\footnote{247} The housing system meant for public welfare also inspired him to a great extent.\footnote{248}

Besides these, socialist propaganda slogans like 'Hail Communism', 'Hail Revolution' began to find place in his journals.\footnote{249} He even advised his followers to use the word Comrade (Thozhan) while addressing each other for the first time. He began to analyse the institution of god, religion, and scriptures intellectually and scientifically under the spell of Russian Communism. In Kudi Arasu, he laid stress on equality, fraternity and liberty like Rousseau of France. He not only translated Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto but also traced and published the history of socialist movements in England, Russia, Spain and China in his journals. 'Periyar's' European tour not only added economic perspectives to his ideas but also strengthened his ideas of communism and revolution.\footnote{250} He also published articles about 'Marxism', 'the Russian Revolution of 1917 and its Lessons' in Kudi Arasu on October 22, 1933.\footnote{251} For spreading the revolutionary ideas his Tamil rationalist weekly Kudi Arasu was temporarily banned.\footnote{252} 'Periyar' also published the life history and the rationalistic ideas of the Western rationalists like Socrates, Thomas Paine, Voltaire, Rousseau, R.G. Ingersoll, Karl Marx, Lenin and Bertrand Russell in his journals. 'May Day' celebration became popular in Madras which is an example of his Russian influence.\footnote{253} No wonder, his foreign tours not only redoubled his vigour but also strengthened and influenced his ideas of rationalism, socialism, atheism, and added a scientific temper and dimension to a great extent.

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{247} Ibid., November, PP.45-47.
\item \footnote{249} \textit{GO.No. 998, Public Department}, Madras, November 28, 1933, P.5.
\item \footnote{250} Nambi Arooran K., \textit{Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism} (1905 - 1944), Madras, 1980, P.185.
\item \footnote{251} Velusami N., \textit{Op.cit.}, P.40.
\item \footnote{252} Nedunchezhian, R., \textit{Op.cit.}, P. 431.
\item \footnote{253} \textit{Pahutharivu}, Erode, May 14, 1933.
\end{itemize}
His thoughts had their echoes in indigenous and Western philosophies. He did not quote anybody and always expressed his own views. There was no mentor and he was a self-made self-respector. He was an original thinker by nature and discussed his own views both within and with others. He followed the views of others to derive his own. All the thoughts that came from within himself were true, clear beyond confusion, unshakable and irrefutable. His thoughts were meant to redeem humanity and not to please anybody. 'Periyar' himself had made firm statements that his thoughts are his own. Even the similies to explain his thoughts would be quite new and born out of his experience and they are of his brain children. He was a steadfast social revolutionary, didnot mind about adverse popular opinion or vile criticism.

This chapter has made a searching enquiry into the factors that promoted 'Periyar's' rationalistic thoughts. Though he was not educated formally, he had educated himself in his school of experience. It seems that he was a voracious reader and voluminous writer. He could very easily absorb the thoughts of others, ingrain them in his mind and derive from them novel ideas in a most logical and radical way, which made his listners and followers think and act. 'Periyar' used to say that the ideas of Self-Respect Movement are to be found in Buddhism and Tirukkural. But his thoughts were the blossoms of his real experiences and the world which became the laboratory for his research. He used to praise the rationalists for their rationalistic ideas of universal acceptance.