

Self-Respect Movement – Contributions of Thanthai Periyar

Periyar E.V.R:

- Periyar E.V. Ramasamy (1879–1973) was the founder of the Self-Respect Movement.
- He was the son of a wealthy businessman in Erode, Venkatappa and Chinna Thayammal.
- Though possessing little formal Education, he engaged in critical discussions with scholars, who used to be patronised by his devout father.
- As a Young man, he once Ran away from home and spent many months In Varanasi and other religious centres.
- The Firsthand experience of orthodox Hindu Religion led to his disillusionment with Religion.
- On his return, he took care of his Family business for some years.
- His selfless Public service and forthrightness made him a popular personality.
- He held different official Positions of Erode that included the Chairmanship of Municipal Council (1918– 1919).
- As president of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, Periyar proposed a resolution regarding the rights of “Untouchables” to temple Entry.
- In the name of “caste Dharma” the “lower caste” People were denied access to the temples and the streets surrounding the temple.
- In Vaikom (a town in the then Princely State of Travancore and in present day Kerala), People protested against this practice.
- In the Initial stages George Joseph of Madurai played big role.
- After the local leaders were arrested Periyar led the movement and was imprisoned.
- People hailed him as Vaikom Virar (Hero of Vaikom).
- In the meantime, he was disturbed By the caste-based discrimination in the dining Hall at the Cheranmadevi Gurukulam (school), Which was run by V.V.Subramaniam (a Congress leader) with the financial support of The Tamil Nadu Congress Committee.

- Periyar Was disappointed when, despite his objections and protests against this discrimination, the Congress continued to support the iniquitous Practice in the Gurukulam.
- In 1929 the first Self-Respect Conference was held in Chengalpattu.
- In the crucial elections of 1937 the Congress party, led by C. Rajagopalachari, Won majority of seats.
- The Congress Party victory was largely because of the Decline of Justice Party.
- The Congress Formed the government and Rajaji became the premier of the Madras province.
- Soon after assuming power the Congress government introduced Hindi as a compulsory subject in the schools.
- Periyar launched anti-Hindi agitation.
- A Large number of students have participated in the agitations organized by Periyar.
- During this period, the Communist Party (formally launched in 1925) became Active in campaigning for socialist Programme and organized labour Movements.
- M.Singaravelu, and his Associates were impressed by the social Reform programmes of the Self Respect Movement, which in turn extended Support to the economic programme of the communists, and these two movements agreed to work on a common programme (Erode Plan).

Objectives of Self-Respect League:

- Reforming Dravidian society to make it truly rational.
- To teach the truth of ancient Tamil Civilization to Dravidians.
- Save the Dravidian society from the Domination of Aryan culture.
- Reforming the Hinduism by Eliminating Brahmin influence and Superstitious practices.
- He wanted to do away with Indignities on of Dravidians by creating Social awareness among the non-Brahmins.

- The Self-Respect movement advocated a casteless society devoid of rituals and Differences based on birth.
- The movement Declared rationality and self-respect as the Birthright of all human beings and held these as more important than self-rule.
- The movement Declared illiteracy as a source for women’s Subordination and promoted compulsory Elementary education for all.
- The movement demanded women’s Emancipation, deplored superstitions, and emphasised rationality.
- The movement also advocated self-respect marriage.
- The Self-Respect Movement championed not only the cause of the non-Brahmin Hindus, But also that of the Muslims.
- The Self-Respect Movement extolled the lofty principles of Islam Such as equality and brotherhood.
- Periyar started the Self-Respect movement in 1925.
- Periyar understood the relevance of mass Communication in spreading rationalist thought.
- He started a number of newspapers and journals Such as Kudi Arasu (Democracy) (1925), Revolt, Puratchi (Revolution) (1933), Paguththarivu (Rationalism) (1934), and Viduthalai (Liberation) (1935).
- Kudi Arasu was the official newspaper of the Self-Respect Movement.
- Usually, Periyar wrote a column and expressed his opinion on social Issues in each of its issues.
- He frequently wrote Columns under the pseudonym of Chitraputtiran.
- Periyar had a close relationship with Singaravelar who is considered the first communist of south India and a pioneer of Buddhism.
- In 1936, Periyar got Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s Annihilation of Caste translated into Tamil immediately after it was written.
- He also supported Ambedkar’s Demand for separate electorates for scheduled Castes.
- In 1937, in opposition to the Rajaji’s Government’s move to introduce compulsory Hindi in schools, he launched a popular movement to oppose it.

- The anti-Hindi agitation (1937–39) had a big impact on Tamil Nadu's politics.
- Periyar was imprisoned for his role in the movement.
- When he was still in jail, Periyar was elected the President of the Justice Party.
- Thereafter the Justice Party merged with the Self-Respect Movement.
- It was rechristened as Dravidar Kazhagam (DK) in 1944 in Salem Conference.
- Rajaji, the Chief Minister of Madras State (1952–54), introduced a vocational education Programme that encouraged imparting school Children with training in tune with their father's Occupation.
- Periyar criticised it as Kula Kalvi Thittam (caste-based education scheme) and opposed it tooth and nail.
- His campaigns against it Led to the resignation of Rajaji.
- K. Kamaraj became Chief Minister of the Madras State.
- Periyar died at the age of ninety-four (1973).
- His mortal remains were buried at Periyar Thidal, Madras.
- Periyar, a Feminist Periyar was critical of patriarchy.
- He Condemned child-marriage and the devadasi System (institution of temple girls).
- Right from 1929, when the Self-respect Conferences began to voice its concern over the plight of women, Periyar had been emphasising women's right to divorce and property.
- Periyar objected to Terms like "giving in marriage".
- This, he said, treats woman as a thing.
- He wants it substituted by "valkaithunai," (companion) a word for Marriage taken from the Tirukkural.
- Peiyar's most important work on this subject is why the Woman is enslaved?
- Periyar believed that property rights for Women would provide them a social status and Protection.

- In 1989, Government of Tamil Nadu Fulfilled the dream of radical reformers by the introduction of the Hindu Succession Tamil Nadu Amendment Act of 1989, which Ensured the equal rights to ancestral property for women in inheritance.
- This Act became a Trendsetter and led to similar legislation at the National level.

