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**III BA HEM**

**History of Tamilnadu**

**SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENTS IN  
INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE  
TO E.V.R. & SELF-RESPECT  
MOVEMENT IN TAMILNADU- A  
STUDY**



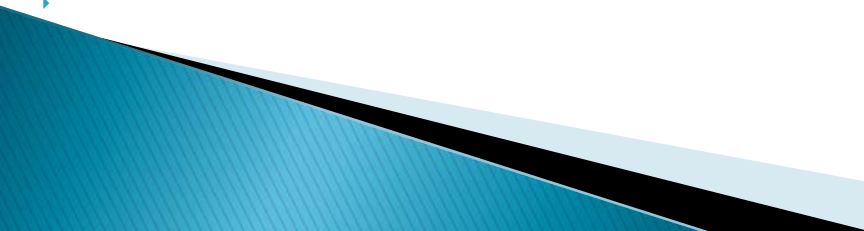
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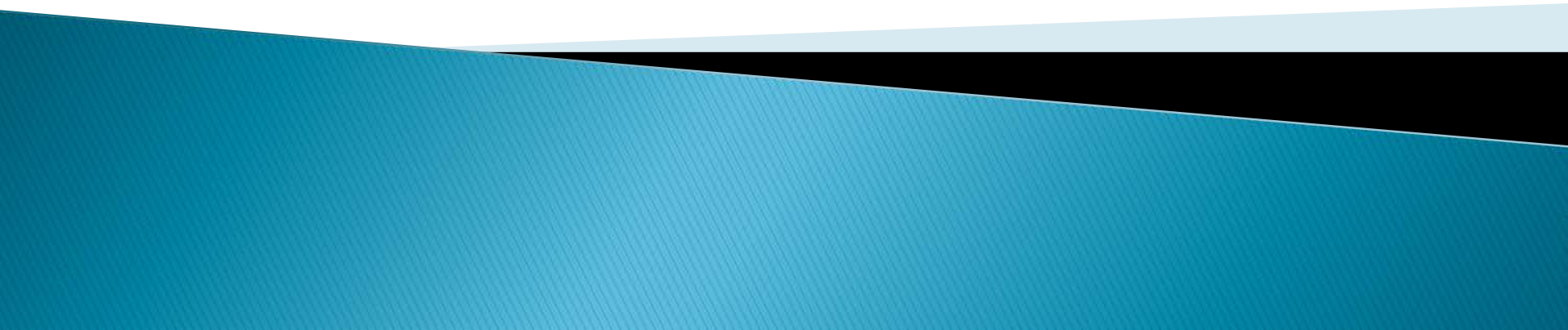
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# INTRODUCTION

❖ Though it is more difficult to reconstruct the social history than the other branches of the history of a people, none can dispute its importance and its social value. An attempt to know the actual life of men in each successive ages of the past is well worth undertaking.



❖ Genuine progress is earned by a change which aims towards a goal propounded and accepted by all reformers at the national level, and not by other changes effected for the sake of change.



❖ G.M. Travelyan. “Social change moves like an underground river, obeying its own or those of the political happenings that move on the same life”.

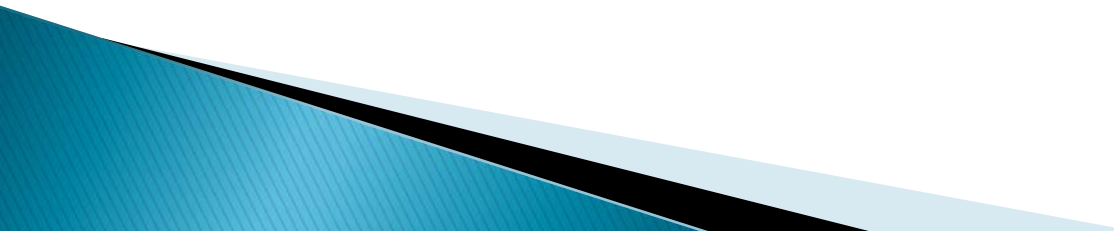
❖ The most important feature with which social reform movements in India have concerned themselves is the inequality based on birth which cannot be found anywhere in this world.

❖ Nineteenth Century was a period of social ferment in India and any historian can safely mark this period as the beginning of Indian renaissance.

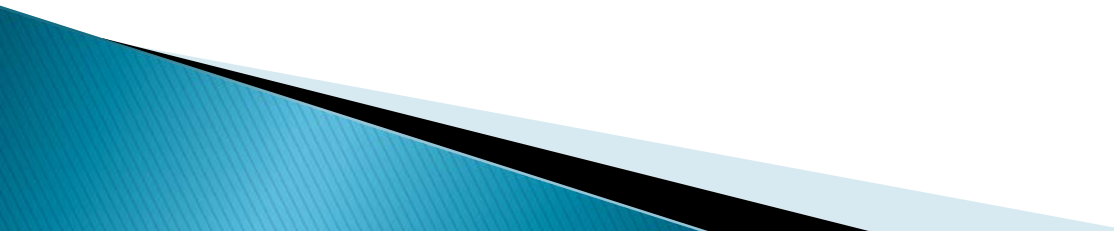
- ❖ Scientific discoveries and rationalistic thought patterns which originated in the west had their echoes in the far off Indian shores too.

- ❖ The educated Indians began to feel the pinch and they were losing their faith in traditional religious beliefs and age-old social practices.

- ❖ The Indian mind thinks more in terms of continuity and evolution than in terms of revolt and sudden change. The past and the present in India form an unbroken chain.

- ❖ In the west, the upper, the middle and the lower classes are mainly divided on economic grounds. In India, birth is the only criterion in deciding upon the caste of a person still. Even after so much of urbanization and industrialization economic condition plays no part in the social classification of Indians.
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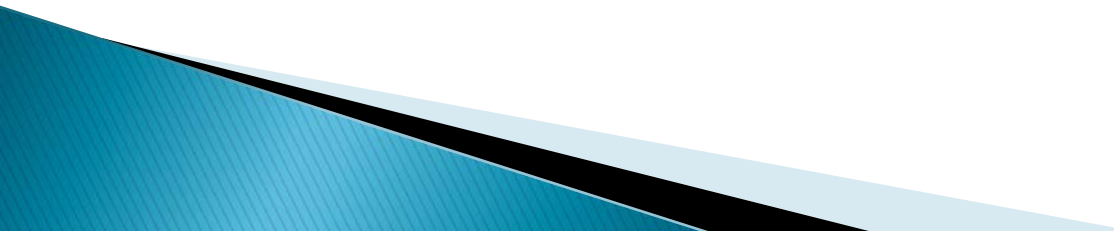


- ❖ Caste rigidity divided the society into water-tight compartments. Child marriage was the order of the day. The lot of the widows was miserable. Women's education was never thought of and when thought of was frowned upon.
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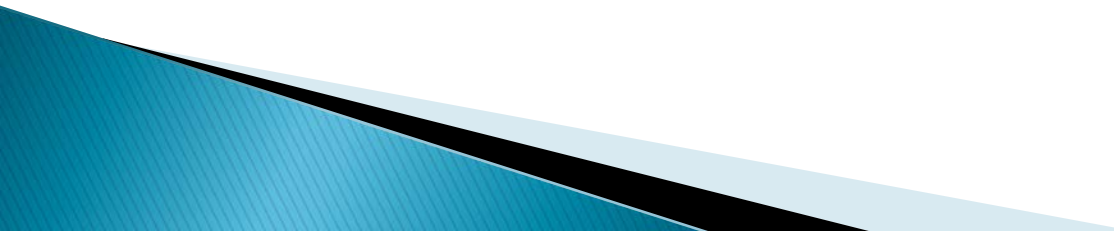
- ❖ Even education in general was confined to a few among the upper strata of society. Inter-caste were unthinkable. Rites and rituals had taken the place of genuine devotion in the sphere of religion.

- ❖ The first force that shook the foundations of the Indian society was the western type of education introduced by the alien rule. The new-fangled education sowed the seeds of egalitarianism, rationalism and developed a scientific approach in the minds of literate sections of the Indian society.

# GENESIS OF THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT IN INDIA

- The Brahma Samaj represented the first organized effort made by the educated Indians to reform the Hindu way of life and the Hindu social system. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of the Brahma Samaj was the fore-runner of all the social reformers of modern India. Hence he is rightly called the father of Modern India.
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- The Arya Samaj was founded in 1875 as against Brahma Samaj. The prominent members of the Arya Samaj were Lala Lajpat Rai, the founder of the Servants of the people Society and Raj Sahib Harbiles Sarada, the sponsor of the famous Sarada Act 1929, which raised the marriageable age.

- Another towering personality in the Indian social reform scene during this period was Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasager. Though allied with the Brahmo Samaj Movement, he was outstanding in his services in the sphere of education, particularly women's education. As an academician, he boldly removed the restrictions on the admission of students on the basis of caste.
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- The Prarthana Samaj was founded in the year 1867 as a consequence of the visits to Bombay undertaken by the Brahma Samaj leaders like Keshub Chandra from Calcutta. Enthusiasts formed this Samaj for the propagation of social reform ideals like eradication of caste, iconoclasm, encouragement to widow remarriage, discouragement and disapproval of child marriage, powerful plea for women's education etc. Removal of untouchability was another item for which they strove ardently. Ranade founded the Indian National Social Conference in 1887. Chandavarkar followed up with formation of the Social Reform Association and the Social Service League. Under the auspices of the Prarthana Samaj Pandit Ramabai started the Arya Mahila Samaj. Women's education in this part of the country had found its enthusiasts in the early period only among the Parsees.

- Jothiba was in more than one respect the forerunner of E.V.Ramasami the founder of the Self-Respect Movement and the former's Satya Shodhak Samaj, the harbinger of the latter's Self-Respect Movement. The only difference was that Jothiba was atheist, whereas E.V.Ramasami was a theist.



- Among the Alvars (Vaishnavite religious leaders), Thiruppanazhavar was from the untouchables class and among the Nayanmars (Saivite religious leaders) Nandanar, the Pulaya untouchables was one of the leading Nayanmars. All the four major religious were vying with one another to attract the masses to their fold and this competition ended in a healthy social reform.

- Next to the Nayanmars and the Alwars, the Siddhas, the mystics of Tamilnadu, were the most vehement critics of the caste system and Hindu rituals and their tirade was a virtual storm in the intellectual ocean of Tamilnadu.

- The Servants of India Society established its Madras branch in 1910 with V.S.Srinivasa Sastri as its senior member. It kindled in the educated young men an interest to know about the public problems of the society. The years between 1917 to 1921 was the period of intense activities since Sastri was then a member of the Imperial Legislative Council. The most striking of its activities, was its Service League of Madras started in 1912 under its auspices.

- To the formation of the Madras Vigilance Association in 1929 with a view to control immoral traffic in women. The Bishop of Madras, Waller was its president. This Association was responsible for framing the Madras Brothels Act , the first of its kind in the country.

- The Self-Respect Movement of E.V.Ramasami, unique in its ideologies and methodologies not only in the Tamil country but also in the whole of the Indian sub-continent.

# JUSTICE PARTY

- During the earlier part of 1910s, Dr.C.Natesan facilitated the formation of ‘Dravidian Association’ and conducted ‘Dravidian Home’, when the students from non – brahmin communities were denied the hostel in Madras. Many persons who became prominent like Thiru.T.M.Narayanasamy Pillai – former Vice Chancellor, Thiru. Subramania Nadar – former Judge of Madras High Court and many others were the student- residents of this hostel.

- The Madras Presidency Medical Department which was under the control of the British, was indigenized by the Justice Party.

- The rule of Justice Party way back in 1921, provided the right of vote for women.



- This provision enabled the nomination of Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy to the Madras Legislative Council in 1926, the first woman who became the legislative member in the whole of the country.

- The famous Annamalai University which enabled higher education to many scholars, persons of eminence and prominence in many walks of life was facilitated for its establishment by the Justice Party.

- The evil menace of Devadasi system was abolished by Justice Party, countering the stiff opposition by the sanathana cult. This abolition was the pioneering work for the liberation of women by protecting their dignity. The pioneering and fundamental service rendered by Justice Party enabled the Government to issue the first communal G.O in 1928, for the cause of social justice, enabling the introduction of reservation system which has got its significant impact in the social fabric of the nation.

## **JUSTICE PARTY AND E.V.R.**

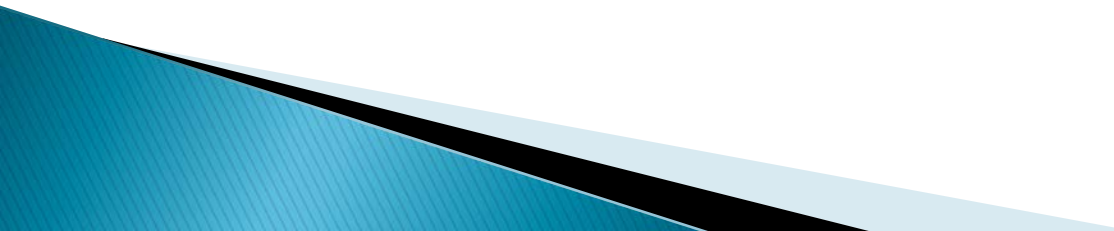
- ❑ Periyar was elected while he was in prison, as the South Indian Liberal Federation, popularly known as Justice party, in its provincial conferences held at Madras (Chennai) on 29, 30 December 1938; When the Justice party was defeated in 1937 election, most of its leaders were disheartened and became inactive. It was at this moment of crisis,  
Periyar accepted the leadership of the party. Now he  
added a new dimension to his movement, viz., a demand for an independent Dravida Naadu.

- Periyar's concept of Dravidians was not based on the purity of blood related to race, but on values and ways of life. The Brahminical upper castes who followed the discriminatory socio-cultural principles, practices and traditions of varna-jathi (caste system) originally enunciated in the Sanskrit Scriptures like Vedas, Ithihasas, puranas, Dharma sastras etc... are Aryans, Those who subscribe to the egalitarian Tamil tradition and values of humanism are Dravidians.

- ❑ December 1944, he appealed to the Non-Brahmins of North- India to give up the religious appellation of Hindu and call themselves as Dravidians.

- ❑ Periyar left for Bombay on 5 January 1940, Dr. B.R.Ambedkar gave dinner-parties twice in his honour. They met the Muslim League leader M.A Jinnah at his residence in Mumbai on 8 January 1940. Periyar explained then his decision to work for an independent state known as Dravida Nadu. On 21 January 1940 the Madras Provincial Government abolished the compulsory study of Hindi in schools.

## SOCIAL JUSTICE

- ❖ Reservation of seats in legislature or separate electorate.
  - ❖ Reservation of vacancies in public services or communal quota in public services.
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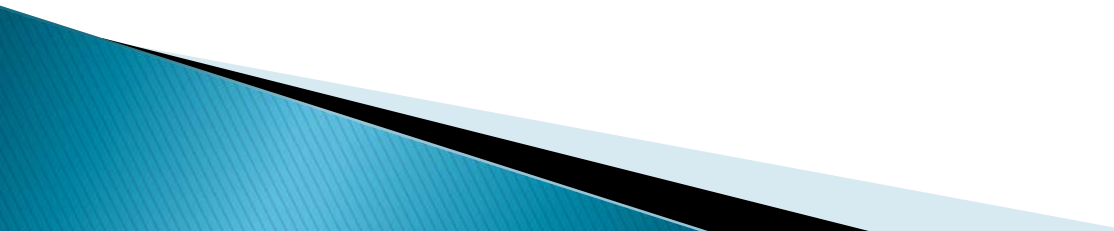
# DOCTRINES OF SELF-RESPECT MOVEMENT

- ❖ The doctrines of the Self-Respect Movement found expression in the speeches of E.V.R. to the people between 1926 to 1973. This movement insisted Self-Respect, opposed the supremacy of Brahmins and instigated people against it. This movement was very particular about bringing in life of people self-respect through self-thinking and relief from slavery. The unnecessary rituals and superstitions, followed by the Hindu religion were severely opposed by this movement.

# SPREADING OF THE DOCTRINES

- To popularize his philosophy of free thinking and rationalism, Naicker frequently toured the country, organized meetings, staged dramas, led demonstrations and published news papers.

- Among the publications that carried his message the important were Kudiyarasu, Puratchi and Viduthalai.

- Elected as president of the Justice Party in 1938, he reorganized this Party into Dravida Kazhagam. At a conference held at Salem in 1944, the Party adopted the Slogan of a Separate Dravidanadu to comprise the four linguistic areas of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Desa, Karnataka and Kerala.
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- The consequences of the movement were of great magnitude, for rationalism assumed strength and the people developed a general disregard for temples, priests, dogmas and rites.

- The Hindu marriages (Tamil Nadu Amendment) Act of 1967 granted legal sanction to the Self Respect Marriages. This was a significant development, for it accepted the equality of women with man and minimized the expenses of marriages.

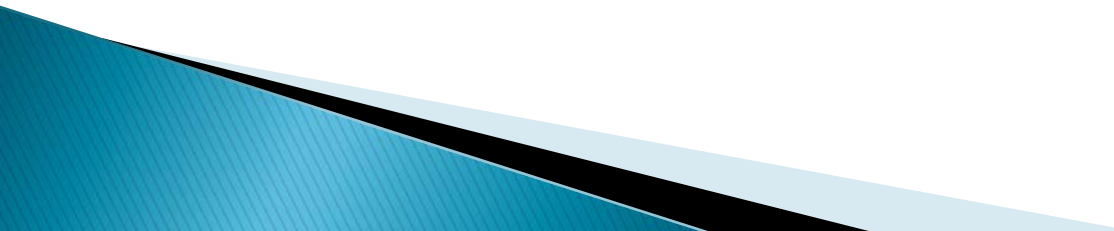
## **ANTI-BRAHMANISM VS ANTI-BRAHMIN**

- ❖ Periyar was a radical advocate of Anti-Brahmanism. Periyar through the Justice Party advocated against the imbalance of the domination of Brahmins who constituted only 3 per cent of the population over government jobs, Judiciary and the Madras University. His self – respect movement espoused rationalism and atheism.

## **THE NON-BRAHMIN MOVEMENT- SOCIAL CONFLICT**

- ❖ Born of the social injustice and also the British diplomacy the Non-Brahmin Movement was nourished by various socio-political organization such as the Justice Party, the Self-Respect Movement, the Dravidar Kazhagam and its offshoot the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.



- ❖ For the first time in Madras, the government servants were recruited on the basis of caste by a government order in 1912. With the emergency of communal politics, a congenial environment was offered for the rise and growth of the Non-Brahmin Movement.
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## **COMPARISON WITH GANDHI**

- ❖ In 1927, Periyar and Gandhi met at Bangalore to discuss this matter. The main difference between them came out when Periyar stood for the total eradication of Hinduism to which Gandhi objected saying that Hinduism is not fixed in doctrines but can be changed.


- ❖ Gandhi accepted karma in the sense that “the untouchables reap the reward of their karma, but was against discrimination against them using the revaluing term Harijans. As shown in the negotiations at Vaikom his methods of abolishing discrimination were to stress voluntary lifting of the ban by changing the hearts of caste Hindus and to work within a Hindu framework of ideas.

- ❖ On the Temple Entry issue Gandhi never advocated the opening of Garbha Griha to Harijans in consequence of his Hindu belief.

# **GURUGULAM CONTROVERSY**

- ❖ In Kerala the Ezhavas and other ‘untouchables’ were forbidden from worshipping in the temples and entering the public streets. Their determination to assert their right to social equality found its manifestation in a satyagraha at Vaikom in 1924.

- ❖ In 1924, he led the Vaikkam Satyagraha organized by Gandhi for the temple entry of the Harijans. But in 1925 he broke his relations with Gandhi as he supported Varunashrama Dharma and left the Congress. Accordingly, in 1925 Ramaswami Naicker founded the Self - Respect Movement. The aim of the movement was the promotion of rational thinking, self respect and self confidence in the people.

- i. The destruction of the institutions of caste, religion, princely order and zamindari system.
  - ii. Eradication of the evils of untouchability, inequality and distinctions based upon status and sex.
  - iii. Removal of Aryan domination and Hindu imperialism which found expression in North Indian leadership in politics, education, industry, commerce and business.
  - iv. Creation of equal opportunities for all, liberation of women from bondage and institution of inter-communal and self-respect marriages with no priest and no ritual.
  - v. End the exploitation in the name of God and Religion.
  - vi. Promotion of rational thinking, self-respect and self-confidence in the people.
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- ❖ In 1931-32 E.V.R, visited Egypt, Russia, France, Spain, Germany, Portugal and England, studied the way of life of those people. He realized that poverty was the root cause of all the social evils. In 1938 E.V.R. was elected as the president of the Justice Party. In 1942 Rajaji made the study of Hindi compulsory in schools. E.V.R. being the champion of the Dravidian cause in protest of Rajaji's language reform headed an agitation known as Anti-Hindi agitation assisted by C.N. Annadurai. In its Salem Conference of 1944, the party adopted the Slogan of a separate Dravida Nadu comprising Tamil Nadu, Andhradesa, Karnataka and Travancore-Cochin states.



# **OPPOSITION TO IMPOSITION OF HINDI**

- ❖ Of all the measures introduced by C.Rajagopalachari's ministry, none came in for so much opposition as the introduced of Hindi as a compulsory subject in the classes at the primary stage in 125 secondary schools from the academic year 1938-39 as an experiment.

# **WOMEN OF THE SELF-RESPECT MOVEMENT**

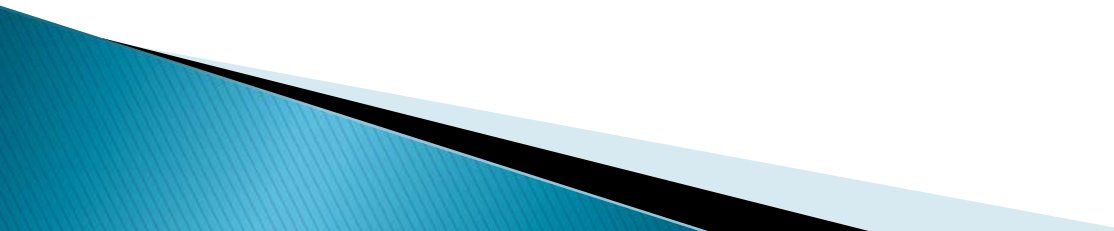
Women included former prostitutes, former devadasi, wage labourers, doctors and teachers. Women in the Movement worked on issues most closely affecting women's like advocating prohibition, supporting survivors of domestic violence and the anti-temple prostitution (devadasi system). On September 11, 1938 in Madras several women including Ramamritham Ammaiar, Narayani Ammaiyar Va Ba Thamaraianni Ammaiyar, Munnagaara Azhagiyar and a total of 73 Women were arrested for protesting. 37 of these women went to jail with their infants. Two Dalit women Veerammal and Annai Meenambal Shivraj were key to the sustenance of the movement and close advisors and friends of Periyar. Annai Meenambal was the person who first gave E.V.Ramasamy the title "Periyar" meaning the elder or wise one and Veerammal is said to have provoked Periyar to think more critically about how the Movement could do better not just for Non –Brahmin castes, but also for Dalits and Adivasis.

## **SELF-RESPECT MARRIAGES**

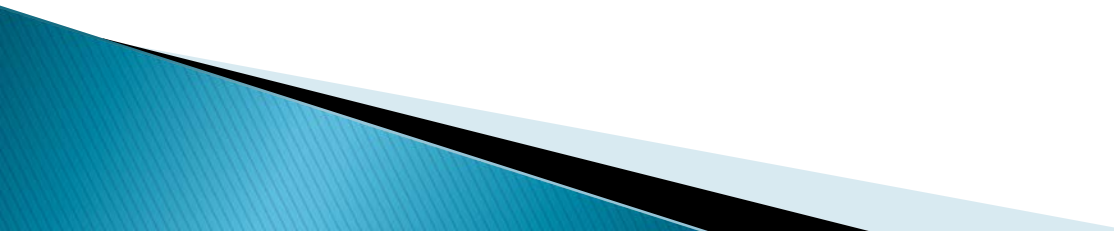
- The Self-Respect Movement encouraged inter-caste marriages, replacing arranged marriages by love marriages that are not constrained by caste. The first Self-Respect marriage that was totally devoid of any Hindu ceremony was the marriage of the prominent Self-Respect Movement writer K. Thiruvalluvar with another prominent leader Kunjitham, under the leadership of Periyar on December 8, 1929 .

- Tamil Nadu became the first and only state to legalise Hindu marriages conducted without a Brahmin priest. This was the first file signed by CM Annadurai sent the rule draft to Periyar This was implemented as Hindu Marriages act (Madras Amendment) 1967, introducing section 7A, permitting Suyamariyathai (Self-Respect) and seerthiritha (reformist) marriages as legal when solemnized in the presence of friends, relatives or any other person by exchanging garlands or rings or by tying of a mangalsutra or by a declaration in language understood by both parties that they accept each other to be their spouse.

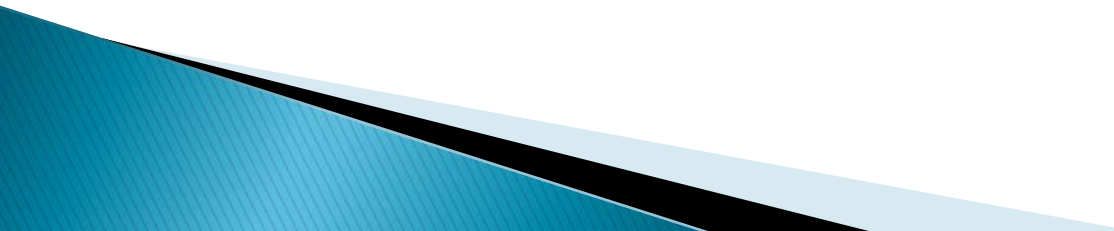
## **SOCIAL REFORM AND ERADICATION OF CASTE**

- Periyar realize that their society was far from satisfaction in the were of social changes and that it was in urgent need of reform. He wanted the government, the political parties and social workers to identify the evils in society and boldly adopt measures to remove them. Periyar's philosophy did not differentiate social and political service.
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- One of the areas of Periyar's focus was on the upliftment of rural communities. In a booklet called Village Upliftment, Periyar pleads for rural reform.

- Periyar felt that a small number of cunning people created caste distinctions in order to dominate over society. That was why he emphasized the view that we must first develop self-respect and learn to analyze propositions rationally. A self-respect rationalist will readily realize that caste system has been stifling self-respect and therefore he will strive to get rid of this menace.
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## **INFLUENCE OF THE SELF-RESPECT MOVEMENT**

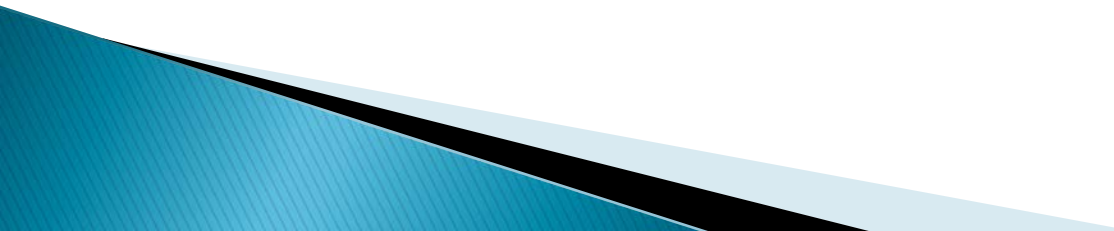
- ❖ After the death of Periyar in 1973, conferences were held throughout Tamil Nadu for a week in January 1974. Members were assured that their whole-hearted support and previous activities which the Dravidar Kazhagam was engaged under the direct guidance of Periyar would continue with the same vigour.
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## **CONCLUSION**

- Social reform movements in Tamilnadu were not isolated incidents, but part of the general reform movements which were going on in the different parts of India, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Of all the social reform movements which was non-religious and secular in its approach to social problems was the Self-Respect Movement, started by E.V.Ramasami.

- The Self-Respect Movement was solely the brain child of E.V.R, who became the grand rebel against the ancient varnashrama system which advocated inherent superiority and inferiority among people.

- The various annual conferences and the resolutions passed therein contributed much to the growth of the Movement. Local Self-Respect Leagues founded all over Tamilnadu became the torch bearers of social reform. Many of them, tried their best to translate their ideals into practice. This added luster to the Movement and aided its development.
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- Widow–remarriage and divorce which were a taboo in Hindu Society came to be practiced by the Tamils as a result of this movement. Another beneficiary result of their propaganda was the practice of monogamy in the place of polygamy. They championed the cause of women, denounced child marriages, the dowry system and the devadasi system. They upheld women’s right to property and inheritance, their right to divorce, to practice the modern method of birth control. The Hindu Religious Endowment Act passed by the Justice Party Government was in fact inspired by the secular ideals of the Movement. Thus, by and large the Self-Respect Movement had a healthy influence on the Tamil Society and culture.