



## PERIYAR E V RAMASWAMY NAIKAR: SOCRATES OF SOUTH INDIA

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### Abstract

Periyar E V Ramaswamy Naikar, a man of an ideology who made a remarkable impact on the socio cultural reforms which led to the social reformation in India specially in South India. A man with different ideologies, social reformer who died so many years ago but still he is remembered for his astonishing work for the mankind. He opposed caste system in India and worked for social justice for the creamy layer people who suffered to build their lives in the society because of the caste system and untouchability. Periyar E V R Naikar was not pleased with the practices of dining system and he cast off the practice of separate arrangement for Non Brahmins and Brahmins in Gurukula schooling. Periyar questioned and opposed the priorities and freedom which was given by Vedas to the upper class people and even had the query in existence of god. The 'Vaikom satyagraha' was one of its kind that Periyar instigated all the downtrodden population to join and support the movement. The legalized self respect marriage took place and this was performed from 1967 by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam government.

**Index Terms**-Non Brahmins, Gurukula, Vaikom satyagraha or movement, Caste System, Untouchability, Sharada Act.

### Introduction

In the middle of the year 1916 to 1922, there was a series of changes in the socio and political life of the people who lived in the southern parts of India. A Voltaire of South India Periyar E V Ramaswamy Naikar was born for the downtrodden people. He was a great reformer, believed in atheist system, rationalist debater, a creative writer, efficient spokesmen and a great thinker. He opposed caste system in India and worked for social justice for the creamy lawyer people who suffered to build their lives in the society because of the caste system and untouchability.

Periyar E V Ramaswamy Naikar, a man an ideology who made a remarkable impact on the socio cultural reforms which led to the social reformation in India specially in South India. A man with different ideologies, social reformer who died so many years ago but still he is remembered for his astonishing work for the mankind. The caste system which was the main threat to the humanity, Periyar was the man who worked to up bring the people who are still below poverty line because of their caste system and they are untouchable in the society. He was the main profounder of self-respect movement.

Periyar was born in the year 1879, 17<sup>th</sup> of September in a middle class orthodox Vaishnava family in Erode and still remembered for his struggle for the Tamils and popularly known as the Socrates of south India. Periyar parents were priest Venkatappa Naikar and Mother Chinna Thayammal. Periyar had a Brother and two sisters. Periyar E V Ramaswamy Naikar left the school in the age of ten and started assisting his family in their business. At the age of nineteen Periyar took spiritual mendicancy or begging for living and was not interested in spiritual practices and he gave it up and abandons all religious faith and practice and started his Political life as a congress worker from Erode. Periyar

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### **Life and struggles of Periyar E V Ramaswamy Naikar**

The plenty of advantages and opportunities given to the upper class people were unchallenged and unquestioned in those days. The privileges and advantages which were used in the name of caste by the Brahmins was questioned by Periyar and led the way to the new reforms and challenges, which spread like wildfire all around the country. Periyar questioned and opposed the priorities and freedom which was given by Vedas to the upper class people and even had the query in existence of god. Periyar has taken extremist position in so many issues concerning to the downtrodden population of the society.

Periyar E V Ramaswamy Naikar said once that “so many people feel uneasy with the way, but I will never change the policy and principle which I follow”. This shows the commitment and sincerity of Periyar in the matters of social views and system. The privileged community can be allowed inside the temple, they can pray and worship and some other people belonging to the low caste are not given the chance to enter inside the temple, and in worse case they are not even allowed to walk in the roads which were used by the upper caste people.

### **Caste system**

In south India Aryans introduced the caste system for earning purposes and ‘Manusmriti or Manu Dharma’ defines the rights and duties of each caste or Varna and their working culture. The social division and geological division were predominant facts that divide the population into different caste. The main four types of Varna or caste system were Brahmanas.

The Brahmanas were basically doing their duties in temple as priest and in the educational institutions as scholars or teachers to teach the upper class people. The second group was Kshatriyas and the people belonging to this group were rulers and soldiers. These people protect the city or state from the threat from other invasions. The third group of Varna system was Vaishyas and they does business and all people were merchants, they trade and make business out of it. The last and forbidden class in the Varna system was Shoodras or Sudras, the main occupation of these people were laborers, peasants and servants. As the name indicates that they are allowed to work as servants. Periyar opposed the Indian caste system, superstition beliefs and division of population as per their caste. According to Periyar opposed the rules that divides the people from each others should not entertained and practiced.

### **Untouchability**

India was divided into many states and they were ruled by the British rulers. In those days, the cruel rules ruined the peace of the Indians and all the people of India wanted to be set free from the clutches of British people. Indian people wanted freedom from the British as well as from the ancient custom and traditions which were followed in the matters of caste system.

The Untouchables were ill treated by the upper caste people in all aspects of daily life of the common people. Entering into the temple, walking in the same road along with the upper caste people was not permitted. A small cunning human being to get advantage from the society created the caste system and avail all the advantages without any struggle or hard work. Periyar having the concept that the Indo Aryans influence, and brahmins from the north made these type of discrimination.

Untouchables were restricted from drawing water from the well and restricted to enter inside the temple. The Vaikom satyagraha was one of its kind that Periyar instigated all the downtrodden population to join and support the movement. Non Brahmin marriages were encouraged by Periyar and paved the way for new revolution in the minds of non Brahmin people. Aryan invasion that made the Dravidians as sudras and thus the people in Tamil society was disturbed to gain the knowledge.

### **Women’s Rights and Periyar E V Ramaswamy**

Equality to the women in front of men in all aspects such as social, political and even in the monetary equality was encouraged by Periyar. Equal opportunity for women in terms of working or professional rights was prompted to the non Brahmins. Gender inequality was tackled; child marriages were strictly prohibited and condemned by Periyar.

The reason for women education system and practice was to instill the self respect and wisdom within them and in turn it will help them to promote others in this movement. Periyar stated that girls should be encouraged to do all the

activities which make them energetic and active. Girls and women's are allowed participating in games and sports activities like running, jumping and wrestling to be fit like men. He stated that time and energy of women not to be wasted in group dancing and clapping, instead the energy can be utilized in a proper way, so that it can give courage to face the world.

A famous ancient poet and a Tamil Litterateur stressed the importance of education. Famous poet Naladiar mentioned that, "the beauty of woman is not in her hairstyle or the pattern of dress or the saffron on woman's face, but the real beauty lies in the education". In 1960 Periyar acknowledged that a drastic revolution is in desire and ideals of women of India were to be changed and this desire can in return make them equip them to do all the work which was done by men. A good change in the minds of women can change the entire world and the administrator should give more importance to their upliftment.

### **Self Respect Marriages**

Periyar E V Ramaswamy Naikar encouraged the self respect wedding on the basis of rationalism or emotional response of women. He insisted that the women should have courage to marry at the calendar event of Rahu time and that too in evening time. Brahmin priest and Sanskrit language prayers must stop at the time of marriage, uttering mantras, traditional lamp burning at daylight, the lamp and ritual smoke can be avoided at marriage time.

Self respect marriages are having much significance like, replacing marriage purohiths, inter caste equality marriage, and man –women equality or gender equality. Periyar claimed self respect marriages unofficially from 1925 and officially since 1928. The legalized self respect marriages took place and this was performed from 1967 by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam government.

Encouragement for women in social consideration and mingle with the society to promote cooperation and help from the other upper caste people. Periyar influenced women to marry of her choice and to lead a happy and satisfied life in the society. Inter caste marriage and educational rights for women were brought into the practice. Periyar gave importance to the widow remarriages, so that a woman gets another chance to lead a happy life and getting rid of social ill treatment from the society and its laws that treated women as slaves for her husband and to his family members.

### **Child Marriage**

Periyar E V Ramaswamy Naikar condemned the child marriage and more importance was given to the education of the female child. The right for widow women to get married again in the society was the main idea of Periyar, which give courage to women in facing society and its traditional laws.

Periyar was totally against the child marriage and mentioned that it is a cruel practice of the parents where a innocent girl getting married in a age where she used to play with other children. Early child marriages were in practice in those days and Periyar strictly opposed the child marriage. In 1929, Child Marriage Restraint act was passed in the imperial legislative council of India and fixed the age of girl to 14 and boys to 18, but it was further changed into 18 for girls and 21 for boys.

The Sharada Act was opposed by many upper caste people stating that it was against the Shastras and the reason was after puberty getting marriage is against to the terms and conditions of Shastra or customs. If they do so, the marriages are just like committing a sin and they will go to the hell after their death.

### **Divorce and Right to Property**

According to Periyar there is no difference between male and female in the matters of right to property. Women are equally allowed to own and enjoy the property and its benefits. In case of divorce, women can have a right to divorce her husband if she is not happy with her husband or her husband suffering from deadly disease.

Periyar emphasized on woman and their rights in the society. Women living apart from her husband are entitled to have a claim of property and she can appeal for the maintenance allowance to lead her life in the society. If a widow gets remarried, the right to the property in the share of first husband can be given.

## Conclusion

Periyar E V Ramaswamy Naikar openly condemned the part of puranas, myths and blind beliefs in the society and the people who followed it. Periyar wanted to inculcate a practical oriented thinking in the minds of the people, who are following unscientific procedures and customs. He openly opposed Brahmins and their spiritual practices while performing pooja and functions. Periyar addressed many gathering and visited every corner of Tamil Nadu and different parts of India to insist a person to think and to have innovative ideas which helps the society and the people. According to Periyar the society which gives equal rights to women will definitely going to develop and prosper. The inspired lectures of Periyar encouraged many people all around the country to have a self respect and to lead a better life and to see a better world for our young generation.

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