

THE SELF RESPECT MOVEMENT IN TAMIL NADU, 1925-1937

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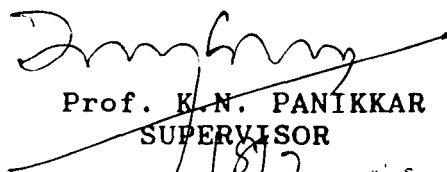
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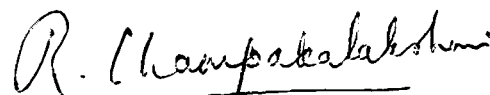
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This is to certify that this dissertation entitled
"THE SELF RESPECT MOVEMENT IN TAMIL NADU, 1925-1937"
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Philosophy has not been previously submitted for any
degree of this or any other University. This is her own
work.

We recommend this dissertation be placed before
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PREFACE

The second half of the year 1990 was marked by widespread agitation in many parts of India to protest the government's decision to implement the recommendations of the Backward Classes Commission also known as the Mandal Commission. The Commission provided for reservations in government employment and educational institutions for the Other Backward Castes (OBCs), a privilege that had hitherto been reserved only for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. At the vanguard of the agitation were upper caste youth who believed that any extension of the reservation principle would seriously jeopardise their own careers and future prospects. Equally noteworthy was that the Southern States remained more or less unaffected by the agitation, attributed to the fact that in Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala, the OBCs already enjoyed a high reserved quota in both these sectors. While this is true enough, what is incompletely understood is the fact that the OBCs of South India acquired this privilege only after a prolonged struggle with the upper castes, mainly Brahmins in this case, the beginning of which could be traced to the early twentieth century. Moreover this struggle went far beyond assertion of a mere claim to a legitimate share

in employment and educational opportunities. It was more in the nature of a social reform movement through which the backward castes tried to bring about their upliftment and social improvement by encouraging the development of a modern outlook and by the giving up of outmoded customs and superstitious beliefs and practices. The subject of this study, The Self Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu, 1925-1937, represents precisely this process of social ferment and upheaval amongst the Backward Castes which in this case consisted of the entire non-Brahmin community, which believed itself to be backward and disadvantaged in relation to the miniscule minority of the Brahmins.

Since all social reform movements are rooted in the realities of the social conditions amidst which they originate, an attempt will be made to describe the broad contours of the social and political situation in early twentieth century Tamil Nadu, keeping in mind that certain specific features inherent in those conditions might have contributed to the distinctive aspects of the Self Respect Movement. There is no doubt that the Self Respect Movement represented in many ways the most radical expression of the sense of deprivation and frustration experienced by the Backward castes. This radicalism was manifested in the stated aim of the

movement which was to bring about revolutionary changes in society and also in its ideology in which atheism figured as a guiding principle. Yet the Movement was not able to sustain this radicalism in the long run, both in its ideology and in its programme of action. By 1937 the Self Respect Movement showed signs of becoming "routinized" and it was increasingly involved in political agitation, a course of action that had been earlier shunned by its founder, Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker. Most social historians would say that all social reform movements, after an initial period of intense dynamism and radicalism settle into a groove, characterized by a dilution in both their ideology and in their programmes. An attempt will be made to trace the specific context in which this occurred in the case of the Self Respect Movement, the political milieu that prevailed and more importantly, the equations and the interactions that characterized the movement with other forces in society.

In a broad way, the various factors that contributed to a perception of their backwardness by the backward castes applied to the Self Respect Movement also. The spread of western education, the political and administrative framework of British rule that recognized the principles of equality of

opportunities and equality before the law for all, irrespective of caste and creed were certainly important. Also significant in this regard was the emergence of the national movement itself with its emphasis on secular and egalitarian principles, all these undermining the legitimacy of traditional institutions such as religion and caste in day to day life. At the same time, a combination of all these factors also contributed to the emergence of a self identity which moreover came to be increasingly defined by reference to a glorious albeit mythical past in which the backward castes occupied a position of supremacy. The invoking of the past also contributed to the evolution of the national movement giving the new middle classes a measure of self-confidence. This process of cultural revivalism also enabled submerged regional identities to gradually assert themselves and no doubt Tamil cultural revivalism created some of the conditions suitable for the Self Respect Movement to develop. The important thing to notice about the Self Respect Movement, however, was that the past never became the reference point, in the sense of setting standards for the goals and the ideology of the movement. In fact the movement resolutely set itself against the past, which was believed to represent a stage of ignorance, backwardness and the incomplete

development of man's innate potential. Rather the key to progress lay in complete and wholesale change, a belief shared by many other social reform movements no doubt, but which was expressed with a clarity and a determination incompletely developed in other movements.

When examining the reasons as to why the Self Respect Movement failed to sustain its dynamic and radical spirit, no doubt the organizational weaknesses of the movement would figure in any explanation of it. Even more interesting, however, is that in the post 1937 period, the very rational and secular principles that the movement prided itself as embodying receded into the background to create an organization that not only collaborated with the colonial rulers but also rejected the very idea of Independence. Its hallmark became a vicious Brahmin-baiting and espousal of a regional chauvinism on an unparalleled scale. It is hoped that this study will provide some understanding of this development especially because much of the existing literature tends to treat this as part of the political history of Tamil Nadu in the years following the assumption of power by the Congress in the province.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

AN OVERVIEW

The selection of the time span 1925-1937 for this study of the Self Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu is deliberate, for this period constituted a definite phase in the evolution and the activities of the movement. The Self Respect Movement was a social reform movement that aimed at the eradication of caste and the inequalities fostered by caste. It envisaged the abolition of organized religion itself, for it was of the firm opinion that individuals and communities could develop the supreme quality of self respect only through the adoption of principles based on rationalism and atheism in the conduct of their life. Indeed, in the colourful language of the "KUDI ARASU", the weekly newspaper started in May 1925, that was the organ of the movement, the aim of Self Respect was described as literally to "turn the present social system topsy-turvy and to establish a living bond of union among all people irrespective of caste and creed".¹

[1] Eugene W. Irschick, Political and Social Conflict in South India, pp. 330-331.

The Self Respect Movement was initiated largely through the efforts of E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker better known as "Periyar"², the honorific conferred on him by his admirers among the Tamil people. It simply means "Great man". Periyar began his political career as a Congressman in 1920 with considerable encouragement and backing from Rajagopalachari.³ Once in the Congress, he was one of its most committed members undergoing his political baptism in the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920-22. He was deeply involved in the Khadi programme as also in the temperance movement. For the encouragement of Khadi, he spent a considerable amount of his private fortune. His greatest concern, however, was the programme of social upliftment of the depressed classes advocated and practised so zealously by Gandhi. This culminated in Periyar's participation in the Vaikom Satyagraha of December 1924 in Kerala in which the *Izhavas*, an unapproachable and untouchable community defied the temple entry regulations of the Travancore State. This campaign constituted a turning point in his political career for it was to leave a lasting impression on his outlook and his attitude

[2] Hereafter referred to by that term.

[3] E.Saa. Vishwanathan, "E.W. Ramaswamy Naicker and the Tamil Nadu Congress" in *Journal of Indian History*, 54, 1976, , , Pp. 191-192..

towards social and political problems of the day. With the conclusion of the Vaikom campaign, began his disillusionment with the Congress, a development that becomes clearer in the subsequent years. In the next one year, events moved at an astonishing pace with Periyar resigning from the Congress along with another close associate, S. Ramanathan, to establish the Self Respect League. This came about in December 1925 immediately after the Kanchipuram Conference of the TNCC in which his resolution demanding communal representation for non-Brahmins in the TNCC executive was out-voted.⁴ Meanwhile in the columns of the KUDI ARASU he had started freely expressing his ideas on social reform, on the politics of the day and above all he gave full vent to his criticism of Tamil Nadu Congressmen, notably Rajagopalachari, Satyamurthy, Sreenivasa Ayyangar and Kalyanasundaram Mudaliar. The Brahmin Congressmen were castigated for their unrelenting communal approach and the non-Brahmins in the Congress for their uncritical attitude towards

[4] Mangala Murugesan, The Self Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu, P. 59. "The present leaders of the Dravida Kazhagam are of the opinion that the movement originated from the time of Periyar's controversy over the communal representation question at the Kanchipuram Congress Conference." A recent publication of Periyar's speeches says that the release of Kudi Arasu should be taken as the date of birth of the movement, i.e. 2 May 1925."

them.

The process by which Periyar, a devoted follower of Congress principles and a Gandhian to the core, was transformed into one of the most bitter critics of the national organization and of Gandhi is in itself an interesting transition but it was merely the prelude to the launching of an independent career at the helm of the Self Respect Movement. Self Respect revealed an identification with the same social issues that Gandhi had raised and brought to the forefront of Congress's concerns, of which eradication of untouchability one of the was the most important. Now Periyar was engaged in very much the same tasks but from within an alternative framework which moreover exhibited bitter rivalry with and criticism of the Congress and Gandhi. He carried on a prolonged polemical battle with Gandhi through the columns of the KUDI ARASU right till the latter's death, on many convictions that Gandhi held dear - *Varnashrama Dharma*, his ideas on *Harijan* welfare and on the programmes of Khadi and Basic Education. Regarding *Varnashrama Dharma* Periyar wrote that it would perpetuate the position of the Tamil non-Brahmins as *Sudras*, a status of permanent servitude in relation to the Brahmins. Where the *Harijans* were concerned, Periyar believed Gandhi's

continued belief in the Hindu *Chaturvarna* system was inconsistent with any genuine plans for their upliftment. His criticism of Khadi stemmed from the fact that he perceived the Tamil Nadu Khadi Board as a den of corruption and under Santhanam it had become an organization to provide jobs for unworthy and needy Brahmins. Thus, beginning with muted criticism of Gandhian policies in 1925-26, it developed into a fullfledged assault on Gandhism and the Congress, making it a fascinating study not simply in itself but also because it allows us to glimpse the slow unfolding of Periyar's philosophy and ideas which after all constituted the core of Self Respect ideology.⁵

The Self Respect movement prided itself on the fact that its ideology and programme of action were based on the twin principles of rationalism and atheism. Periyar moreover believed that the movement should set itself firmly in the direction of social reform only and not participate in politics. The parting of ways between Periyar and the Congress came about apparently because he was convinced that the methods of agitation developed by Gandhi were involving

[5] Mangala Murugesan, The Self Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu, Pp. 74-78. Also Kudj Arasu, 28.8.27, 10.1.31, 17.1.31.

the Congress more in political activities to the detriment of social reform. M.R. Barnett believes that Periyar was one of those individuals whose commitment to social reform increasingly ran parallel and even rivalled his commitment to political action.⁶ Periyar's insistence that Self Respect should come before Self Rule was however not a sudden or a quixotic development. Its origins should be rather traced to the social, political and historical context of early 20th Century Tamil Nadu in which the social gulf between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins was the most glaring feature of Tamil society. This provided the basic conditions for a movement like Self Respect to develop and it also immediately shifts the focus to regarding the movement as essentially trying to bring about a social transformation. That this process can never be studied in isolation is a self-evident truth for society being an organic whole, changes in one field necessarily influence the whole.

CONCEPTS AND ANALYTICAL METHODS

Political developments that serve as the background to the rise of the movement merely

[6] Marguerite Rose Barnett, The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India, Pp. 38-39

constitute one aspect; to get a comprehensive view of what the movement stood for and what it achieved for the social and cultural development of the Tamil people, it is necessary to study it from the broader perspective of social history. This study is however not an attempt at writing social history. It is largely an account of a social movement, the ideology of which changed considerably in a period of rapid political developments. The theoretical framework within which this study is presented is that of the backward castes/classes movement based on the concept of relative deprivation. The conceptual and theoretical aspects involved in such studies have been put forward with great clarity by M.S.A. Rao in his book, "Social Movements and Social Transformation". This work, which is a comparative study of social reform among the *Izhavas* and the *Yadavas*, has provided many new insights to an understanding of the Self Respect Movement also. In most of its important aspects Self Respect clearly falls within the category of the Backward Castes/Classes Movement though it also displays significant differences with both the *Izhava* and the *Yadava* movements. This is not a comparative study but, parallels with other social reform movements will be highlighted so as to bring out not only the broad similarities but also significant distinctions within

this larger category of reform movements. In this connection it may be noted that M.S. Gore has remarked on the striking similarities of certain aspects of Self Respect Movement with the Satyashodak movement of Jyotiba Phule in Maharashtra. Though Phule's movement preceded Periyar's by almost half a century, both displayed a radical tendency in their outright attack on the established social and religious order dominated by Brahminical symbols and value-systems.⁷

The concept of relative deprivation as it was first developed by American sociologists consisted of the perception among certain groups and communities within the larger society that there was a negative discrepancy between what they had by way of access to the total resources of the society, in terms of political rights, social status and economic goods and services and what they ought to have legitimately. It was expanded further to accommodate increasing expectations brought on by the perceptions of the perceived abilities of those concerned groups and what they actually had. Perception of the disjuncture spurs the community into action in the direction of upward

[7] M.S. Gore, The non-Brahmin Movement in Maharashtra, Pp. 3-14. Also Mangala Murugesan, *Op. cit.*, P. 16.

social mobility and overall improvement of condition relative to the rest of society. A variant of this theory holds, however, that this social mobility and improvement comes about only through the development of an ideology amongst those concerned groups, based on protest, militancy and a questioning of the privileges of the dominant groups who now become the opposition reference groups; so called because the relations between the two is one of opposition, conflict and tension. Meaningful improvement in both material and psychological conditions for the deprived groups comes about only after a bitter struggle in the process of which the ideology first developed undergoes gradual modification responding to the changing needs of the situation, but generally expectations rise higher and they acquire legitimacy and widespread acceptance even among the more cautious and timid sections of the disadvantaged groups. The shifting nature of the ideology highlights yet another aspect of it, viz. that it is an ideology oriented towards change. This change can be partial but transformative, i.e. it brings about a change in the norms and the value systems of the society and above all a shift in the power relations. Sometimes the change can be very violent, in the revolutionary sense of the word, as it happened in the case of Russia after the Revolution of 1917 and China

following the rise of the communists to power. Needless to say a change oriented ideology can develop only on the basis of collective mobilization though this mobilization itself could be spontaneous or organized. These then are the criteria that Rao adopts in his study which are also applicable to an analysis of the Self Respect Movement. The advantage of this framework is that it is broad and flexible enough to allow for variations within this category of social reform movements.

Mere presence of the objective conditions of relative deprivation, however, are not enough for a protest movement to develop. There has to be subjective realization on the part of smaller or bigger sections of the deprived groups about the exact nature of the deprivations and there is also the need to articulate these in a manner that makes possible collective mobilization. In this process moreover, certain themes are chosen in preference to others around which an ideology gradually develops. This in turn leads to a mass awakening which moreover has to be channelized into a programme of action.

This awakening consciousness and the perceptions of relative deprivation that follow from it

and which is articulated through an ideology of protest and militancy could be caused by a number of developments. One of the most important of these is the spread of Western education which in turn stimulated the development of regional languages and culture and a growing consciousness of a distinct regional identity, facilitated also by a process of cultural revivalism. This occurred in many parts of India, Orissa and Assam being two areas in the late nineteenth century where it manifested itself in the form of a campaign against the Bengalis who constituted the dominant group in economic and political terms. In Tamil Nadu however due to various historical factors, the revival of the Tamil language and culture manifested itself through two distinct and opposed lines of development.⁸ One identified it with the larger territorial nationalism of the Congress and the anti-imperialist struggle. This is best exemplified by the poetry and the writings of Subramania Bharati. The other and more persistent line of development was to be seen in that Tamil nationalism that reached back or rather re-created a golden past that was unique to the Tamil people, unsullied by alien influences that were equated with a northern, Aryan, Sanskrit and Brahminical culture. It was this

[8] Charles Ryerson, Regionalism and Religion: The Tamil Renaissance and popular Hinduism, P. 87.

revivalism that fed the tap-roots of what is known as the Dravidian movement which had as one of its important elements an unbridgeable ethnic divide between Dravidian = non-Brahmin and Aryan = Sanskrit and Brahmin. The feelings of relative deprivation therefore, in a manner of speaking doubly intensified, for in this wider canvas the entire non-Brahmin community stood disadvantaged in relation to the Tamil Brahmins who moreover had subverted the pristine purity of Tamil culture. Referring to this development Barnett points out that articulation of feelings of relative deprivation can sometimes use the past as a referent also.⁹

To Periyar goes much of the credit for the shaping and moulding of the ideology of the movement and for the preparation of a programme of action. Only on this basis can one partly explain the seemingly disparate elements such as socialism, atheism and Dravidian revivalism being strung together and obviously constituting a meaningful whole to the people who were influenced by it. That is why this study might appear partly like a biographical sketch of Periyar. The milestones in the life and times of Periyar is

[9] M.R. Barnett, Op. cit., Pp. 23-24.

literally the unfolding of the ideology and the activities of the Self Respect Movement. Like Narayana Guru who set the *Izhavas* on the path of social reform, Periyar was undoubtedly a remarkable and charismatic personality. In their temperaments and outlook, however, there could not have been two more different individuals. Whereas Narayana Guru was religious, spiritual and peace-loving in his outlook, Periyar manifested a materialist attitude in the positivist sense of the word, with a raging disregard for and contempt of the existing order which could very often be expressed in the most vituperative language and which sometimes stirred his followers into acts of violence. Irschick states the obvious when he says that "the entire tone of the movement was determined by Periyar".¹⁰ This was certainly the case till 1937 till which period no second line of leadership emerged within the movement.

Although Periyar was no doubt influenced by the prevalent ideas of a distinct Dravidian cultural entity that preceded and which was regarded as perhaps far superior to the social and cultural order imposed on

[10] E. Irschick, Op. cit., Pt 330.

the Tamils by the Aryan Brahmin immigrants into South India, yet his ideology firmly set its face against acceptance of any values or standards believed to have been part of that mythical golden past. Rather it looked ahead entirely to the future, to the prospect of change as the only way and the inevitable path to progress and advancement. In this respect it was much more influenced by the positivist philosophy propagated by Robert Ingersoll and Charles Bradlaugh, translations of whose works sometimes appeared in the KUDI ARASU. Self Respect ideology did not dwell on the past, there was nothing sacrosanct about the past, in fact it was regarded as a period of incomplete development of man mainly because a scientific temper induced by rationalism was absent. The past was relevant only to the extent that given the level of social and cultural development of the Tamils, i.e. the non-Brahmins, enjoyed a certain liberty and a freedom from superstition and blind faith that was the creation of the Brahmin priesthood.¹¹ It was possible once again to recreate that liberty of the mind and spirit and rid society of backwardness and obscurantism but only by looking to a future where rationalism and atheism would

[11] Kudi Arasu, 2.6.29.

reign supreme. In the Self Respect ideology of this period there was clearly no place for an emotional attachment to the cultural symbols of the past whether it pertained to the glory of the Tamil language, the superiority of *Saiva Siddhanta* as a religious and philosophical system in comparison to the Vedic/Brahmanical religion or even simply to the very idea of an idealized past. It was only in the post 1937 period that the idea of a golden age acquired legitimacy as a reference point for the present, complete with its emotional connotations even as the Dravidian political parties continued to pay lip service to rationalism and atheism. Thus the years after 1937 saw a dilution of the radicalism of the Self Respect ideology, a fact that has been incompletely grasped by many writers on the subject.

Further evidence of the radicalism of the Self Respect ideology is provided by the consistent rejection of all organized religions. Beginning with a sweeping criticism of all aspects of Hinduism, Periyar gradually brought within the ambit of his attack all other religions as well.¹² Jyotiba Phule also

[12] Kudi Arasu, 2.6.29 - "Religion has only caused havoc, it tends to divide human society and that is why the Self Respect movement feels that there is no need for God."

subjected Hinduism to the harshest criticism but both he, and many of his followers had an ambivalent attitude towards Christianity. One could detect the same note of ambivalence in the case of Dr. Ambedkar who finally led the Mahars into mass conversion to Buddhism. The Izhava withdrawal from the Hindu order under the direction of Narayana Guru was followed by the creation of a parallel system complete with temples, rituals and priesthood. In the case of the Self Respect movement, however, so persistent were its attacks on Hinduism especially, that in a number of issues of the KUDI ARASU, Periyar is forced into remarking that Self Respectors are grateful to the people for not lynching them, considering the intemperate attacks that the movement made on religion.¹³ Periyar constantly talked of the need to raze temples to the ground, all of which invited much criticism from the public expressed through articles sometimes written in the KUDI ARASU itself. That this atheistic and iconoclastic approach was highly repugnant to a number of non-Brahmins who otherwise subscribed to many other aspects of the Self Respect ideology is evident from the fact that efforts were made to project *Saiva Siddhanta* as the true religion of

[13] Kudi Arasu, 12.5.36.

the Dravidians, eminently suited to the present times, for it was based on reason, on love and brotherhood and otherwise eschewed the superstitious practices and meaningless rituals of the Brahmanical religion.¹⁴ Thus although the Self Respect ideology appropriated, in an extremely selective manner, a few symbols from the Tamil past, it indirectly contributed to a deepening interest in that very past and in the forces of cultural nationalism. Similarly, it contributed to the development of the Tamil language as well. Periyar himself had little formal education. He typified the new generation of leaders who hardly spoke English and relied on the ordinary spoken Tamil of the common people to put across his ideas. He did so with amazing success using metaphors and a simple imagery that immediately registered on the minds of his listeners. It did not matter to him that this simple spoken Tamil included a large number of words of Sanskritic origin; what was important to him was that language should be a vehicle of communication for putting across ideas effectively and in the most intelligible manner.¹⁵ He himself contributed to the simplification of the Tamil

[14] Kudi Arasu, 2.6.29.

[15] K. Veeramani - Informal talk with writer of this dissertation.

script by the deletion of a number of alphabetical signs. It must be noted that this trend begun by Periyar ran contrary to prevalent developments in Tamil in which there was a tendency to cleanse and purify Tamil of its Sanskritic words and substitute them with purely indigenous words. This had begun with the pioneering efforts of Vedachalam Pillai, better known by the Tamil name that he adopted, Maramalai Adigalar which itself was a literal Tamil rendering of his original Sanskrit name. This later tendency was to catch on in the years after 1937 with the second generation of the leadership, a development that was to make the movement increasingly inward looking and constricted in its approach in contrast to the guarded optimism and the belief in the inevitability of a new order unfolding, that largely influenced Periyar's thinking in these years.

It is probably because of the inability to distinguish between what the movement stood for and what impact its ideology and activities created, that has resulted in confusion regarding the connections between the non-Brahmin movement and the Justice Party on the one hand and the Self Respect Movement on the other. Too often the Self Respect Movement has been regarded as an offshoot of the non-Brahmin movement or

the propaganda arm of the Justice Party but the issue is much more complex. It is well to keep in mind that there was no homogeneous category of non-Brahmins. Not all non-Brahmins toed the line of the Justice Party where political reform was concerned or identified completely with the Self Respect Movement in matters of social reform. There were many non-Brahmins in the Congress as well, but the non-Brahmin as an administrative and political category became a pervasive presence in the political and social life of Tamil Nadu. The fact, however, was that Brahmins played a preponderant role in the politics of the province both within the Congress and without. This was bound to be so, for they constituted the bourgeois intelligentsia having had a headstart in Western education and a near monopoly in government employment and in the professions. Socially they were the first class citizens for their ritual and social status at the top of the caste hierarchy was permanently fixed and entrenched. In sharp contrast were the non-Brahmin communities, not one among which fell into the intermediate category entitled to the status of the twice-born, with all the symbols and the rites that went with it, viz. the right to wear the sacred thread, to perform fire sacrifices and to read the Vedas. Under such conditions the non-Brahmins were naturally

attracted to a movement that would ensure to them what they believed was their due; their legitimate social and economic status in society.

The Justice Party, the political manifestation of the non-Brahmin movement, was the first to articulate the grievances of a section of the non-Brahmin community, that which was high in ritual status and yet denied access to all the Brahminical symbols that mattered. In the theoretical framework adopted by M.S.A. Rao this represented the first cleavage between the dominant and deprived groups, i.e. between the Brahmins and upper caste non-Brahmins who however enjoyed considerable economic dominance especially in the rural areas where they were the landowning classes exercising dominance over tenant cultivators, artisans and service castes. There were however two other categories who were not yet able to articulate their feelings of deprivation. The first of these was manifested in the conflict between the upper non-Brahmin castes and the lower non-Brahmin castes and there was yet one more line of conflict between the upper castes in general which included both Brahmins and non-Brahmins on the one hand and the depressed classes on the other. In other words each cluster of castes occupied a position of relative deprivation in

relation to the other except for the Brahmins. The Justice Party, as the champion of upper caste non-Brahmin interests, seeking to replace one elite with another, revealed all its limitations, making way for the rise of a movement that would better ventilate and articulate the grievances of the disadvantaged groups. This could be one way of explaining the rise of the Self Respect Movement.

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It is well to note that castes lower in the social hierarchy perceived their position of deprivation and were able to demarcate the boundaries of their opposition reference groups who were largely upper non-Brahmin castes due to a number of factors of which the spread of education was merely one. It is doubtful if during this period education had filtered down effectively to the levels of the lower castes and the depressed classes in the rural areas, though Madras Presidency had made considerable progress in the fields of primary education and vernacular education. It is not unreasonable to assume that the national movement with its increasing concern for social issues and the problems of the underprivileged was greatly responsible for this awakening consciousness, and an understanding of their actual situation on the part of many lower castes. Moreover the Gandhian programmes of mass

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political involvement gave them a means of articulating their protest. The very espousal of the ideas of egalitarianism and equality of opportunity by the national movement galvanized the underprivileged masses into action. It is only on the basis of such reasoning that we can account for the fact that when a socially committed individual like Periyar chose to join politics he preferred the Congress to the Justice Party. Expanding on it a little further we can also understand why the Vaikkom Satyagraha left such a lasting impact on him. It was however Periyar's desire to bring together all the disadvantaged groups who were finally in a situation of relative deprivation vis a vis the Brahmins that led to the social reform movement in Tamil Nadu diverging from the mainstream of development represented by the national movement. But it is to be noted at the same time that throughout the period 1925-1937 even when social reform was Periyar's primary concern, to the exclusion of political problems it was within the larger framework of the nation that he believed that his efforts had relevance.¹⁶ There were no petty regional tendencies at work here. Although his efforts were concentrated in a corner of the country he talked of the problems of the

[16] Kudi Arasu, 16.7.29, 16.6.29, 24.5.31.

disadvantaged from a wider perspective demanding that solutions be found in the larger national interest and for the progress and advancement of the entire country. That some of the connections and links made to explain the phenomenon of the rise of social reform movement in this case appear too flimsy and simplistic is not to be denied but nevertheless this could be examined further.

The presence of feelings of relative deprivation among the non-Brahmin castes can go a long way in explaining the genesis of social movements, the manner in which they evolved their ideology and also the changing contours of this ideology as it acted and reacted with other forces in society. The conceptualization of relative deprivation provides a handy analytical tool for it helps explain a number of developments that point in a particular direction but can never completely explain a complex phenomenon such as a social reform movement.

Existing Literature on the Subject

Much of the existing literature on the topic does not deal with it exclusively but rather the Self Respect movement is treated as part of the larger non-

Brahmin movement. It is commonly regarded as the more radical phase of the Dravidian ideology that the non-Brahmin movement first articulated. There have been two noteworthy exceptions to this trend in recent years however, the first being the study of E. Saa. Vishwanathan, THE POLITICAL CAREER OF E.V. RAMASWAMY. The second is an even more recent book written by N.K. Mangalamurugesan, THE SELF RESPECT MOVEMENT IN TAMIL NADU, 1926 - 1940.

The pioneering studies that focussed on the Self Respect movement however are Eugene Irschick, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONFLICT IN SOUTH INDIA 1916 - 1929 and Marguerite Rose Barnett, POLITICS OF CULTURAL NATIONALISM IN SOUTH INDIA. Both these studies highlight the social reform orientation of the Self Respect movement noting the radical aspects of the programme that Periyar advocated though they also treat the non-Brahmin movement as the background from within which the Self Respect movement arose. Irschick approached the subject largely from the angle of political history giving considerable importance to the political changes brought about by British rule. Irschick lays particular emphasis on education as largely responsible for bringing about political consciousness. the British created such an

environment in which the foundation of schools and colleges were laid, communication networks provided through which the educated elite from different parts of the country could meet.¹⁷

Both Barnett and Irschick view the growth of political awareness among the Tamil non-Brahmins as a manifestation of cultural nationalism. Irschick regards this as the outgrowth of vernacular education and the revival of the Tamil language to both of which Christian missionaries contributed a great deal while Barnett believes that Tamil nationalism on which rests Tamil political identity, "is itself a re-definition of older identities, the end product of transformations that go back Many symbols associated with Tamil political identity reach deep into Tamil history and culture. The politicization of these ancient cultural symbols was the concomitant of social change associated with modernization."¹⁸ Irschick who believes that the Self Respect movement was an offshoot of growing non-Brahmin political awareness moreover concludes that "the demand for Dravidanad was the logical conclusion

[17] E. Irschick, Op. cit., Introduction.

[18] M.R. Barnett, Op. cit., Pp. 6-10.

of the aims of the Self Respect movement."¹⁹ Moreover the articulation of this separatism "has been characterized by a militancy born of particularly strong feelings of social and cultural uniqueness."²⁰ Finally, the assertion by Barnett that "territorial nationalism emerged out of a particular set of economic and social conditions and developed in a particular intellectual and political climate" (the reference is to Europe) implying that these conditions were absent in India, further underscores her point about cultural nationalism.²¹

Both these authors have focussed on the revival of an idea of a golden past that provided the very foundation of the Dravidian ideology and which was given a radical orientation by the Self Respect movement. They have however not probed the links between the Tamil social reform movement and the larger national movement and they nowhere trace the origins of such regional movements as also representing in a certain way anti-imperialist and anti-colonial sentiments. They look at it in isolation forgetting

[19] E. Irschick, Op. cit., P 348.

[20] Ibid, Introduction.

[21] M.R. Barnett, Op. cit., P. 3 . . .

that the national movement also, at a certain stage depended on the revival of past images to invoke the same mythical past that would rally the people and give them a sense of pride and identity.²² That the attack of the non-Brahmin movement on the Brahmins was as much due to non-Brahmin perception that Brahmin dominance in secular life was a concomitant of British rule is only incompletely utilized by Barnett when she says, "Brahmin domination in the nineteenth century largely due to British rule". Similarly the progressive aspects of the Self Respect movement, its attack on traditional privileges based on birth and ascriptive rights and against vested interests in the economic and social field and that this struggle was also inspired as much by the national movement has not been brought out fully in both the books. Again, there has been no attempt to relate the phenomenon of growing consciousness amongst the lower non-Brahmin castes who were mobilized in large numbers by the Self Respect movement on account of its radical appeal to the economic conditions of the region or to the spreading effects of capitalism.²³

[22] N. Ram, "The Dravidian Movement, a historical perspective" Mainstream, 16, Vols. 25, 26, 1978.

[23] N. Ram, Ibid.

To the Cambridge historians, David Washbrook and Christopher Baker, we owe three studies that focus on the political economy of Madras Presidency. These, THE EMERGENCE OF PROVINCIAL POLITICS, THE MADRAS PRESIDENCY by Washbrook, THE POLITICS OF SOUTH INDIA by Baker and SOUTH INDIA : POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL CHANGE 1880-1920, a product of joint authorship of the two historians, provide a wealth of background material for the period till 1937. But Baker says, "the purpose of this work is ... to discover what factors played a part in the unfolding of political events and to examine the course of political developments with two factors looming large in the account, those of administration and economic change" set certain limits to the relevance of the studies as far as the Self Respect movement is concerned.²⁴

The basic premise of Baker is that this period (1920-1937) "saw the creation of a novel form of state in which the different fragments of a highly diverse region were drawn together than ever before which in turn demanded new political institutions, new leadership and new forms of political organization and the moving force was the government. But it was

[24] C.J. Baker, The Politics of South India 1920-1937, Preface.

not simply the tale of an energetic government imposing its will on a passive society for government was shaped to meet changing needs and changing problems."²⁵ To Baker these were in the nature of "economic change which began to undermine the stable foundation of Madras society; cracks began to appear in the edifice of government, and in the gentlemanly facade of Madras politics. Though these cracks sprouted many new movements and organizations and the hitherto stunted growth of the Congress burst suddenly into bloom".²⁶ The Self Respect movement was presumably one such, "essentially town based organization which lurched into radicalism in the 1930s against this background of urban unrest. (The reference is to the depression which caused acute difficulties for labourers and the working classes with production units shutting down.) In the late 1920s it had gained notoriety through attempts to force the entry of depressed castes into temples and through public ridicule of Hindu texts which the Self Respectors argued promoted an oppressive Brahminical code and they had gained considerable support through a series of carefully staged conferences. Yet their dependence on

[25] C.F. Baker, *Op. Cit.*, Preface.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 14-15.

the patronage of certain leading Justicite politicians had ensured that the movement's radicalism remained largely rhetorical."²⁷ Despite Baker's off-hand dismissal of the Self Respect movement in these words, one cannot afford to dismiss Baker's work in like manner as far as this study is concerned. What he has to say about the involvement of the Nadar community in the Civil Disobedience Movement is an instance and helps to clarify much information that the KUDI ARASU gives on the community. Reading the primary sources such as the KUDI ARASU one would get the impression that the entire Nadar community supported the Self Respect movement but Baker points out to the declining role of W.P. Soundarapandian, the Nadar magnate who headed the Nadar Mahajana Sangham in the 20s and the 30s, how the younger Nadars represented by Kamaraj Nadar were attracted to the national movement and how during the Civil Disobedience, there was a split down the middle in the Nadar community.²⁸

Washbrook and Baker adopt the same approach of giving primacy to political changes in their book

[27] Ibid. Pp. 192-193

[28] C.J. Baker, Op. cit., Pp. 218-219.

SOUTH INDIA : POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL CHANGE 1880-1920. In the essay on Non-cooperation, Baker tries to show how non-cooperation was largely an urban phenomenon rather than a rural one. He ascribes it to the disturbances in the local power structure especially in those newly developing commercial regions as a result first of a boom in economic activity and then the slump brought on by post war recession. While this constituted the background, the real agent of change was the government and the political changes that it affected through the Municipalities Act and then the Government of India Act of 1919 all of which brought the government and its agents and the long arm of the law into the smaller towns and urban centers through licences, marketing regulations and so on. In this manner politics itself became competitive and local dominant elites who were used to non-interference on the part of the government found the situation changing.²⁹ The emergence of factions as a result of the extension of influence into the localities^{of} government and political power in the form of local boards and municipalities created the situation of the 'ins' and the 'outs' with the latter

[29] Washbrook and Baker, South India : Political Institutions and Political Change, Pp. 115-117.

naturally supporting Non-cooperation. In fact the pageantry that characterized Non-cooperation in many towns was merely a continuing manifestation of magnate power which used to be displayed formerly in lavish displays on temple festivals and on religious occasions.³⁰

The rise of caste politics and the emergence of caste associations is also regarded as part of the situation in which the local bosses whether in the rural or in the urban areas were faced with the increasing presence of the government in the localities. The new style of politics brought about largely by administrative and political change but also by economic factors such as increasing commercialization, extension of transport networks and such developments as the spread of education were also contributory. The total effect of all this was that politics became much more competitive in nature and the local dominant elites found that the old political equations, the vertical ties with clients cutting across caste and communal barriers no longer sufficed. Caste solidarities intensified not due to changes in internal organizations of various caste groups but in response to political changes.³¹

[31] Washbrook and Baker, Op. cit., Pp. 165-176.

[30] Ibid. P 119.

Both E. Saa Vishwanathan and Mangala Murugesan have used a wealth of primary source materials to study the Self Respect movement with particular reference to the overwhelming stamp of Periyar's ideas and personality on it. Even though the Self Respect movement was largely ignored by the government except during a short period in 1932-34 when Periyar was greatly influenced by socialist ideas, the two authors show how its ideology appealed even to the upper caste non-Brahmins even as they recoiled in horror at its frank espousal of atheism. The two studies help us in clearly plotting the direction and the development of the various phases of its ideology for a great deal of attention is paid to the political background by both the writers. In fact it is the interaction between the Self Respect movement and the various political forces of the day that is clearly brought out even as Periyar claimed that his movement had no concern with politics.

Both Vishwanathan and Mangalamurugesan point out to the limitations of the movement particularly the openly communal character of the propaganda carried out by the movement. In particular Vishwanathan points out to the limitations of Periyar, the manner in which he was conditioned in his outlook by his total concern

with Brahmins and Brahmanism which precluded a wholesome understanding of current issues and an inability to judge them on their merit.³² Mangala Murugesan on the other hand points out to the positive aspects of the movement. In terms of its impact it was to create an atmosphere congenial to the idea of social change in Tamil Nadu.³³

Robert Hardgrave's study of, The Nadars of Tamil Nadu directly touches upon social change in the province in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He has shown how the Nadars, a community traditionally regarded as an unclean caste because of their hereditary occupation of toddy-tapping, modernized under the influence of the Christian missionaries. It resulted in sustained efforts at upward mobility and was part of the awakening witnessed among ethnically similar communities all along the west coast including the *Izhavas*, *Thiyas* and the *Bilavas*. The Nadar attempts at claiming Kshatriya status was not conceded by the upper castes. Though Hardgrave does not explore the problem further, it may be noted that the Nadars were among the most ardent followers of the Self

[32] E. Saa. Vishwanathan, The Political Career of E.V.R., Pp. 105-113.

[33] Mangala Murugesan, Op. cit., Pp. 153-158.

Respect ideology. A large number of Self Respect marriages which involved the complete dispensing with the services of Brahmin priests and Brahminical ritual were performed within this community. It is interesting to postulate that their failure to achieve higher caste status through the traditional process of sanskritization resulted in the communities' disenchantment with the traditional Hindu order and their acceptance of the Self Respect ideology of militancy and a rejection of the symbols of the Brahminical order. Hardgrave's other work The Dravidian movement, is a simple narrative account of the emergence of the DMK.

As far as primary source materials are concerned, a great deal of information is provided by the newspapers that served as the mouthpiece of the movement. This study is based largely on the accounts provided by the KUDI ARASU, VIDUTHALAI, DRAVIDAN, PAHUTHARIVU were some of the other newspapers published by the movement, articles and excerpts from which have been collected and published in the form of a book entitled, PERIYAR SINTHANAIKAI or the THOUGHTS OF PERIYAR in three volumes. These volumes are edited by Anaimuthu and they are particularly useful for the matter has been arranged subject-wise. In addition,

the Rationalist Book Association and the Self Respect Propaganda Association have published a number of articles by Periyar and other DMK leaders in the form of pamphlets. It must be remembered that many of these publications have a largely propaganda value and hence must be used with caution. To counterbalance this tendency, therefore, this study has also partially relied on information supplied by Swadesamitran for the years 1936-1937, as representing the opposition, the Congress and the Brahmin point of view. These primary sources can be further supplemented by official material such as the information provided by the correspondence of the Governors and other officials. This study has also relied on the Erskene paper which reflects the government's view of the movement. Native Newspaper Reports and the Fortnightly Reports of the Government of Madras are also a useful supplement.

CHAPTER I

**THE GENESIS OF
THE SELF RESPECT MOVEMENT**

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In plotting out the broad stages of the Self Respect Movement, in focussing on the distinctive features of its ideology, or even in understanding the goals and the programmes that the movement set for itself, it is necessary to keep in mind, the socio-political and the cultural conditions within which it arose. This becomes easier if the nature of the interaction between the non-Brahmin awakening manifested politically in the formation of the Justice Party and the emergence of the Self Respect ideology is clearly established at the very outset. Also important to a comprehensive view of this background is the interplay between the Justice Party which largely represented a restricted provincial style of political activity and the larger national movement embodied in the Indian National Congress which in the second decade of the twentieth century was on the threshold of an entirely novel and revolutionary phase of its evolution under the leadership of Gandhi. Moreover, all these developments occurred in an atmosphere, surcharged, both with expectation and uncertainty, in which the

British were under tremendous pressure from various sections of India public opinion to grant meaningful concessions that would lead the country towards the cherished goal of Swaraj.

It was only at the turn of this century that the non-Brahmin sense of deprivation expressed itself in forceful terms and in new forms of political associations. Indeed, it was in the very process of politicization brought about by increasing literacy both in English and in vernacular education, amongst the non-Brahmin communities, that led to the creation of the very category, non-Brahmin denoting in this period, a largely negative connotation because technically it included anyone who was not a Brahmin. M.R. Barnett believes that urbanization and Brahmin dominance with were inter-related features of late nineteenth and early twentieth century social change in Tamil Nadu resulted in the "dichotomization of socio-economic elites into a Brahmin-non-Brahmin category", for prior to this, there were no non-Brahmins, only *Vellalas*, *Reddis*, *Chettiars* and so on and the very emergence of the term non-Brahmin denotes a definite shift in perceptions. How exactly these shifts and changes in perception contributed to the emergence of

the Self Respect movement will become somewhat clearer when a brief general survey is made of the caste structure in Tamil Nadu, how economic development and administrative consolidation contributed to social change and how these in turn brought about caste movements and the formation of caste association in the twentieth century.¹

THE CASTE STRUCTURE

In the absence of castes belonging to the Kshatriya and the Vaishya varnas in the caste heirarchy of South India, all non-Brahmins, especially in the urban context came to be classified under the undifferentiated category of *Sudras* which included castes both high and low in ritual status. Prior to urbanization, however, relations between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins had been specific and transactional in nature, within a well defined ritual context. Moreover, these relations between Brahmins and the upper caste non-Brahmins had been characterized by collaboration and sometimes joint dominance over

[1] M.R. Barnett, The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India (Princeton), Pp. 15-29.

artisan and service castes in the rural areas. As many British officials were quick to note, *Sudras* were equally jealous of their position. *Sudra* villages did not easily allow Brahmins to enter believing that once the Brahmins saw their possessions and property, they would think of some way of appropriating it for themselves.² Apparently the image of the Brahmin as grasping and covetous was firmly fixed in the popular perception and it was to be utilized by Periyar to drive home his message of the utmost necessity to destroy Brahmins and Brahminism if the non-Brahmins were to get their due. Brahmins who already had a tradition of learning behind them were the first to take advantage of western education and moved into the urban centres in ever increasing numbers to fill posts in the professions and in the public services. Since ritually and socially, their position at the top of the caste hierarchy was permanently ensured, a change of location did not affect their status. It was, however, responsible for their social and cultural isolation as the only "twice-born" caste in Tamil society, making them a natural target of non-Brahmin ire, a development that became accentuated with the emergence of the Self

[2] E. Irschick, Political and Social Conflict in South India, 1916-1929 (Los Angeles, Berkeley), P 11.

Respect movement with its professed aim of bringing about sweeping changes in society that included the very abolition of caste and organized religion.³

While the increasing sense of humiliation and deprivation embodied in the use of the blanket term Sudra to denote all non-Brahmins applied equally to the other linguistic areas of Madras Presidency as well, nowhere was it as acute, or the social gulf between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins as wide as it was in Tamil Nadu. This was so because Tamil non-Brahmins, however high in the non-Brahmin hierarchy were disallowed access to Sanskrit learning and to other Brahminical symbols such as the wearing of the sacred thread and the performance of fire sacrifices. This, despite the fact that many of these communities had undergone a process of Sanskritization which implied the adoption of just those very Brahminical symbols and practices. In contrast, in both Kerala and in Andhra, the higher non-Brahmin communities had moved closer to the centres of ritual and social power than the Brahmins

[3] Kudi Arasu, 28.8.27. First stated emphatically in the year 1927 but repeated with increasing frequency in the subsequent years. Refer also Kudi Arasu 7.4.29.

represented. In Andhra the Velama community of Zamindars and landowners claimed Kshatriya status and other privileges of the twice-born. Rama Rayaningar, the Raja of Panagal, the Justice Chief Minister from 1922-28 was an M.A. in Sanskrit from Madras University and belonged to a prominent Velama family. In Kerala even the *Izhavas* who were regarded as an untouchable and an unapproachable community and whose struggle against the upper castes to attain equality in social and economic status left such a lasting compression on Periyar, managed by virtue of their being practitioners of the indigenous Ayurveda system of medicine, to acquire a knowledge of the Vedas and the Sanskrit language.⁴ This could have been one of the reasons why the *Izhavas*, even as they adopted the principle of self-organization and withdrawal from the Brahmin dominated system nevertheless substituted it with another, where Hinduism as a religion and Sanskrit as a sacerdotal language continued to find an honoured place. It is also interesting to note that Periyar refers, on numerous occasions, to the Vaikom Satyagraha, the high point of the *Izhava* struggle to achieve equality with the caste Hindus, in which

[4] M.S.A. Rao, Social Movements and Social Transformation (Delhi), Pp. 23, 27.

Periyar also played a leading role but he nowhere mentions the essence of the Izhava ideology as enunciated by Narayana Guru and institutionalized in the SNDP Yogam, which he founded to carry out the programme of social upliftment of the Depressed Classes. The KUDI ARASU is strangely silent on this aspect of the Izhava movement.⁵

In the Tamil districts of the Presidency, the exclusion of even the highest non-Brahmin castes from participation in all Brahminical rites was in turn matched by a spirit of exclusiveness and a degree of arrogance displayed by the Brahmins that was largely responsible for the vicious anti-Brahmin turn that the social reform movement took. Under such circumstances the Self Respect of the non-Brahmins was incompatible with the very existence of the Brahmin and Periyar thundered that the great mission of the Self Respect Movement was nothing less than the destruction of Brahminism and the system of religion that it upheld

[5] Viduthala, 9.1.59. Periyar says that he participated in the Vaikham Satyagraha on the invitation of some Izhava and nationalist leaders of Malabar. Also Kudi Arasu 6.12.25.

and foisted on the non-Brahmins.⁶

CASTE MOVEMENTS AND CASTE ASSOCIATIONS

Sporadic attempts on the part of some lower castes to bring about their social betterment began as early as the second half of the nineteenth century through the formation of caste associations. In this respect the Shanars, a toddy-tapping community, ethnically close to the *Izhavas* of the Western Coast showed the way when they claimed higher *varna* status and changed the caste nomenclature from Shanar to Nadar. The formation of the Nadar Mahajana Sangham and the attempts of the members of the community to enter temples under the leadership of the Sangham heralded "a conflict with higher castes in which caste identities played a role in assertion of claims to higher caste status."⁷ Christian missionaries were actively at work in the midst of this community which inhabited the

[6] Kudi Arasu 28.8.27 has one of the most direct attacks that Periyar made on Brahminism and religion. In this article Periyar justified his attack on *Varnashrama Dharma* and on Gandhi for upholding it and asserted that for true independence the country needed to attain three objectives which only can help it develop a sense of self respect. These were: Congress should be dissolved, religion to be destroyed and Brahminism to be eradicated completely.

[7] Washbrook and Baker, South India: Political Institutions and Political Change, P. 172.

Southern districts of Tirunelveli, Ramnad and Madurai. A number of Nadars had been converted to Christianity and the community had made considerable progress in education under the impetus of which they gave up their traditional vocation of liquor manufacture to take up petty trading and shopkeeping.⁸ There was much economic improvement in the Nadar condition as they fully exploited the opportunities provided by the improvement of communication in these regions and its emergence as a cotton producing area.

Shanars, whether Christians or Hindus, attempted to locate their community on a par or in a position superior to that of the Maravars - the traditional dominant landholding caste group in the area - in the caste hierarchy. Washbrook believes that this represents the only case of a caste movement motivated by perceptions of status improvement, which called for considerable internal reorganization within the community. The Shanar/Nadar attempts to have their claim to Kshatriya status recognized, however, failed and in the twentieth century they abandoned this approach altogether.⁹ The Nadar Mahajan Sangham, the

[8] Robert Hardgrave, Nadars of Tamil Nad, p. 179.

[9] Ibid., Pp. 179-184.

representative organization of the prosperous trading Nadars of the Madura-Ramnad commercial belt "became the agent of community mobilization and the catalyst for a more participant society. It became the vehicle for the politicization of the community" and worked actively for the social upliftment of its members through rural development and a scholarship programme for young Nadar students.¹⁰ The Sangham not only tried to improve the community's relations with their implacable enemies, a Maravars but it also encouraged the development of the progressive attitude towards the *Harijans*, enabling them to attend schools run by Nadar educational societies. In this respect the similarity with the Izhava movement of breaking pollution barriers both from above and from below cannot be missed. Much of the leadership of the Sangham in the twenties of this century was provided by W.P. Soundarapandian who was also responsible for taking the bulk of the community closer to the line of the Self Respect movement.¹¹ When it became clear to the Nadars that the prospects for social improvement within the existing caste hierarchy were extremely dim, they became the greatest enthusiasts of a movement that called for the very

[10] Robert Hardgrave, Op. cit., Pp. 177-178.

[11] Ibid., P. 179.

abolition of such a hierarchical system and the religious beliefs that upheld such an iniquitous social order. In the 1920s there was a proliferation of caste associations in Tamil Nadu though Washbrook maintains that attempts to create mega-caste categories were a failure.¹² The caste associations such as that of the Pallis who now described themselves as Vanniakula Kshatriyas and of the Gounders came into existence as a response to political changes introduced by the government. In a general way all these associations called for changes in social practices and for education to be given top priority as a means for the community's advancement but equally they also depended on the government to help bring about betterment in their conditions. The Palli attempts at improving their status largely failed for they were widely dispersed in some of the northern districts of Tamil Nadu as well as in the adjoining Rayalseema region of Andhra. Moreover, they were not perceived as a homogenous group by other castes and above all they continued to be poor and backward being mainly agricultural labourers or subsistence peasants.

Gounder attempts once again to give up liquor

[12] Washbrook and Baker, South India: Political Institutions and Political Change, P. 172.

and to adopt the practices and rituals of the higher castes should not be seen as a larger caste movement but rather it followed on the attempts of one Gounder magnate Vellirgiri Gounder to create a caste constituency for himself so that he could better take advantage of the political and administrative changes introduced by the Municipalities Act of 1920 which greatly expanded the scope of local government. This was accompanied by the Government of India Act 1919 both of which gave a death blow to the old magnate style of politics in which the magnates exercised dominance largely in the context of political isolation and absence of interference from the government. There political reforms on the one hand provided the rural magnates with many more opportunities but at the same time the political arena also became more crowded and the style of politics now became much more competitive. On the one hand government's regulations reached right down to the locality, for a continuous link had been forged in the administrative structure from the rural areas through the local boards and small town municipalities right upto the provincial headquarters where under the Government of India Act 1919, local government affairs became the concern of elected Indian Ministers in the Legislature. If the rural elite wanted to maintain their local influence intact, it was also

important for them to have a channel of communication open to the centres of power in Madras. It is in this manner that the position of the publicist who provided the vital link between the locality and province grew in importance and this had an important bearing on communal politics in the 1920s.¹³

Washbrook believes that the spread of education amongst non-Brahmins meant that now many more of these publicists were lawyers and public men with their base in Madras but they found that it was a long hard struggle getting the better of entrenched Brahmin interests. Such non-Brahmin publicists therefore tended to look to their own communities for that extra boost and support and in the process they created wider networks and socio-political institutions that contributed towards a hardening of caste solidarities and hence communal politics. Such developments also received encouragement from the policies of divide and rule of the government. The rise of the non-Brahmin

[13] Washbrook and Baker, Op. cit. Much of the information regarding the role of caste associations is based on this work.

Periyar himself believed that caste associations and caste conferences played an important role in spreading the ideal of social and religious reform within those groups. Kudi Arasu 3.3.29.

movement is thus visualized against this background of the government playing an important role in bringing about changes within society.

Whether one accepts this account for the increasing tempo of caste related activities in Tamil Nadu of the 1920s or not, the fact remains that in association with various other factors including the spread of western education amongst the non-Brahmin community, the popularization of Tamil vernacular literature through the press and the overall improvement in communications, the non-Brahmins as a collective group and individual non-Brahmin castes were in a position to compare their position and status in society with that of the Brahmins. The disjuncture, that they perceived between expectations and perception of their capabilities with what they actually had was deep and pronounced.

SOCIAL REFORMS

The attitude of smug arrogance and complacency on the part of Tamil Brahmins was manifested in their total unconcern with any attempts either at revitalizing their own society to bring it in tune with modern times or to make efforts for the upliftment of

other less fortunate castes. Throughout the nineteenth century both Bengal and Bombay Presidencies had witnessed social reform movements initiated and led by either Brahmins or upper castes which had displayed a real concern for the plight of women, for the depressed classes and generally the weaker sections of society. Although it was not the goal of any of these reform movements to bring about a drastic restructuring of society, nevertheless they aimed at building up in the minds of Indians the strength to adjust to the new situation and to bring about a change and modification in their attitudes and beliefs compatible with the requirements of a new age. In Madras Presidency the only such effort showing commitment on a scale similar to that of Bombay and Bengal Presidencies is illustrated by the efforts of K. Vireselingam, a Telegu Brahmin who opened the first Widows Home in Madras and generally carried on a crusade for the eradication of social evils.¹⁴ Individual Tamil Brahmins did show a commitment to the cause of social reform but their efforts were largely sporadic and ill coordinated and the atmosphere in society so conservative and stifling that in the 1870s when

[14] E. Irschick, Political and Social Conflict,
P 25.

G. Subramania Iyer, the founder of the "Hindu", decided to marry off his daughter, a child widow, he had to perform the wedding ceremony in the relatively liberal and cosmopolitan conditions of Bombay.

Mangala Murugesan notes that "in the Southern part of the Indian peninsula, no social movement of modern origin exercised its sway either through natural evolution or through devolution."¹⁵ The one exception to this state of affairs was the Suddha Sanmarga Movement of Ramalingar in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It was basically a spiritual movement but at the same time it called for an abolition of the caste system on the grounds that the integration of humanity could come about only when they rose above petty divisions. It was more in line with the preaching of the Bhakti Saints of the medieval period with the added point of interest being that Ramalingar was a non-Brahmin. "It is not an exaggeration to say that with the Sanmarga movement the social awakening of TamilNadu had begun."¹⁶

[15] Mangala Murugesan, The Self Respect movement in Tamil Nadu, P. 23.

[16] Ibid., P. 24.

In the early twentieth century social reform activities were largely confined to small scale efforts on the part of some Maharashtrian Brahmins resident in the city, Ragunatha Rao and Sreeniwasa Rao, but they received no cooperation whatsoever from the Tamil Brahmins.¹⁷ Kumaraswamy Tampoe, one of the first non-Brahmins to enter the charmed circle of the ICS in the early twentieth century, pithily summed up the sterility of the social climate in Madras Presidency and the Brahmin aversion to any change in the status quo that was likely to jeopardize their social, cultural and political pre-eminence.

The caste which is most averse to breaking through the trammels of the present social system in India is naturally the one on which the system has conferred the maximum privileges. The Brahmin has been for thousands of years, the custodian and the object of all intellectual culture and other castes in consequence have been placed in a very disadvantageous position intellectually. But the very social conditions that have given the

[17] E. Irschick, Op. cit., P. 25.

Brahmins this advantage have parri passu handicapped him in his ability and desire to absorb democratic ideas on social matters. He is far less able than we (non-Brahmins) are, to take advantage of the educational opportunities offered by institutions which are purely European and which are in consequence inconsistent with the fundamental principles of caste.¹⁸

Tampoe was speaking around the time when the non-Brahmin Manifesto that constituted the creed of the Justice Party was about to be issued. In a general way the non-Brahmin Manifesto spoke of social reform when it attacked the ritual and social dominance of the Brahmin and his role as an intermediary in religious matters or the notion of pollution and purity that Brahminism upheld. It attacked caste divisions and inequalities especially because it also wanted, at the same time to evolve a homogenous category of non-Brahmin out of disparate and amorphous groups and communities. Moreover, it sought to transform this non-Brahmin category into an ethnic and social group whose

[18] E. Irschick, Op. cit., P. 43.

cultural and historical antecedents went much further than that of the Brahmins who were immigrants and late-comers into the Tamil region and society. The Brahmins, moreover with their Aryan belief system, their obnoxious caste regulations and above all with their alien tongue Sanskrit were responsible for destroying the pristine purity and the high level of achievement of Tamil culture.

One of the objectives of the non-Brahmin Manifesto was therefore to redefine a Tamil past that was of direct relevance to the non-Brahmins of the present day - the real Tamils - in that it set the yardstick by which their achievement in the present was to be measured.¹⁹ The creation of a mythical past was the first sign of the emerging consciousness of the non-Brahmins brought about by education, which contributed to a linguistic and cultural revival in many parts of South India in which an important role was played by the Christian missionaries and the newly developing press. The non-Brahmin Manifesto in a manner of speaking, used the past as a reference to underline the present position of the non-Brahmin, his depressed and backward state even as it clearly marked

[19] E. Irschick, Op. cit., P. 47.

out the Brahmins as the main opposition reference group. But the inspiration for the uplift of the non-Brahmins were very much in the present; good education that in the course of time would create political awareness and an attempt to wrest political and executive power which in turn could be used for the further social progress of the non-Brahmin community.

THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND

From the beginning, the commitment of the Justice Party to political participation was greater than its commitment to social reform.²⁰

Social reform was a contentious issue. The non-Brahmins who had come together in the South Indian Liberal Federation or the Justice Party came from diverse backgrounds - Malayalis belonging mainly to the Nair community including the founder of the party, Sir T.M. Nair, wealthy Andhra landlords and commercial castes such as the *Komatis* and educated upper caste Tamils. They were all determined that Brahmin domination of secular and public life had to be brought to an end for then the beneficiaries would naturally be

[20] E.Irschick, Op. cit., P. 257.

the educated upper caste non-Brahmins. They also grasped the fact that the secular pre-eminence of the Brahmins could be weakened by attacking his religious dominance as well and hence their espousal of Dravidian culture as against Aryan values. They were however hardly in a position to articulate the grievances of the poor and the lower castes. The Home Rule movement had given a fillip to the non-Brahmin movement for now there was a genuine concern amongst the educated non-Brahmins as to what the future held for them in case some measure of Home Rule was granted; all this in the face of Brahmin dominance of the Home Rule Leagues and indeed of politics in general.²¹ To a certain extent this factor conditioned the entire outlook of the movement for in the years after 1920 when it decided to form the government and work the reforms of 1919, the Justice Party came to be even more closely identified with the interests of a small wealthy upper caste strata of non-Brahmins more in the nature of an oligarchy that dispensed patronage and distributed the spoils of office. It led to a sense of frustration amongst younger non-Brahmins both within and outside the formal non-Brahmin movement and expressed itself in

[21] E. Irschick, Op. cit., P. 40.

a desire for genuine social reform.²²

The Justice Party, however, broke new ground to the extent that it did articulate ideas of social reform in however limited a manner and it did bring about a consolidation of non-Brahmin forces which was to be of significance for the rise and the spread of Self Respect ideology. The Self Respect Movement took off in the field of social reform from the point where the Justice Party had left it. Moreover, Self Respect touched the imagination and the inner drives of many more people, especially those coming from the ranks of the educated middle classes and largely belonging to the Tamil area of Madras Presidency. Moreover, the Self Respect Movement did not look back to the past to provide the inspiration for self-expression and self improvement in the present but rather looked confidently ahead to the future and welcomed change as the only means of bringing about social improvement.

The Self Respect Movement arose to surmount precisely those problems that the Justice Party could not squarely confront. The first phase of the non-Brahmin movement was hence limited by its class

[22] E. Irschick, Op. cit., Pp. 321-322.

character. The initial enthusiasm for social reform that the party had displayed between 1916 and 1919, during the leadership of its founding member Sir T.M. Nair had quickly evaporated on his death. Even Sir Nair had been rebuffed by the leader of the Depressed Classes or the *Panchamas* when he had approached him with the offer of friendship and guidance for them to organize themselves politically. The Panchama leader had retorted that "if the caste Hindus of the Justice Party wanted to lead the *Panchamas* they should affect a reformation among themselves and treat the *Panchamas* as their brethren".²³ Under the leadership, first of Sir P. Theogaraya Chetty and then the Raja of Panagal, the Justice Party devoted itself entirely to enjoying the fruits of office. Theogaraya Chetty who lacked a broad social outlook believed that the non-Brahmins had simply "to educate ourselves and in due course we shall have our portion of government service and political power proportionate to our importance and strength."²⁴ The Raja of Panagal was equally frank, "government appointments will (not) transform the non-Brahmin communities into the most prosperous of mankind, but.....they carry with them political power of which

[23] E. Irschick, Op. cit., P.71.

[24] Ibid., P. 172.

lords of the soil and inheritors of noble traditions, the (non-Brahmin) communities must have their share.²⁵ Presumably the Justice Party had come full circle, justifying power and position in very much the same manner as the Brahmins justified their pre-eminence in social and political life of the country based on birth and ascriptive rights. "The lords of the soil" that Panagal talked about no doubt referred to the rich land owning gentry to which he himself belonged, for in these years the Justice Party came to be allied more and more closely with the narrow interests of a few caste Hindu communities. The Justice Party had taken the first step in a reordering of society in which it had succeeded in replacing a Brahmin elite by a non-Brahmin elite in the corridors of power but in the process it had restricted its social base leading to the need for the ventilation of the grievances and deprivations of numerous strata of people lower in the social scale. This was beyond the capacity, and against the interests of the rich old men who ran the party and who had made no particular attempt to attract either the youth or women.²⁶ Neither had they passed any meaningful social legislation except the law

[25] E. Irschick, *Op. cit.*, Pp. 175-176.

[26] *Ibid.*, P. 172.

enfranchising women for the municipal and local board elections, passed in 1921. The Hindu Religious Endowments Act was yet another piece of legislation that brought the temples, mutts and monastic chapters within the ambit of government control and subtly undermined Brahmin control over these institutions, a source of prestige and income for them. It was left to the solid core of educated middle classes, largely Tamils who formed part of the Justice Party but who threw the weight of their support behind Periyar and S. Ramanathan when they founded the Self Respect League to carry on the work of social reform. The scope of the reform programme that the Self Respect Movement articulated went far beyond anything even remotely contemplated by the Justice Party. Individuals like Periyar and S. Ramanathan, who infused new vigour into the social reform climate in Tamil Nadu were not only fired by the Gandhian zeal and commitment for the service of the underprivileged but they were also trained in Gandhian methods of political agitation.

The Justice Party did not believe in any activity that was even remotely violent and agitational in nature, in fact the style of its political activity based on request, petitioning and gradual evolution marked the last phase of the liberal style of politics.

Sir Edwin Montague had very acutely noted the characteristic of the non-Brahmins who constituted the membership of the Justice Party and who met him in a delegation when he visited India to discuss the proposed Government of India Act of 1919

The non-Brahmins were "vigorous enough" in objecting to Brahmin influence (but) "they lay on their stomachs and cried out for government help instead of fighting".²⁷ The Justice Party, representing the first phase in awakening non-Brahmin consciousness of their deprivation could therefore be said to represent that stage when the deprived pleaded, supplicated and requested for a legitimate share of the resources of the community. It hardly mattered that this supplication was addressed to the British government

[27] E. Irschick, Op. cit. Montague further noted, "One has here as elsewhere among the majority of educated Indians, a desire for more power. Not, I think for more democracy for the clever Indian wants executive power and executive opportunity but he is not a democrat. If he does not believe in caste, he believes in wealth and division so acute in North India between Hindu and Mohomedan is replaced by the vital almost insurmountable gulf between Brahmin and non-Brahmin", P. 25

Regarding Montague's observation that the Hindu Muslim conflict is replaced in the South between the Brahmin versus non-Brahmin, Periyar also held the same view. In an article in Kudi Arasu he says that the Brahmin-nonBrahmin problem is as serious as the communal conflict.

which after all had gone a long way in detracting from the legitimacy of many of the symbols of the Brahminical system and had instead upheld the concepts of equal opportunities for all irrespective of caste and community and equality before the law. The Self Respect Movement on the other hand articulated the deprivations of a much wider cross section of society and went far beyond pleading, request and supplication. Instead it questioned the very legitimacy of the upper castes, the Brahmins, and it evolved a language of protest characterized by militancy which moreover brooked no compromise or adjustment with the existing order dominated by the Brahmins.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

The politicians of the Justice Party articulated the non-Brahmin sense of deprivation and grievance by drawing the attention of the British government to the wide differences in the educational standards between the non-Brahmins and the Brahmins and the consequent backwardness of the former in matters of government appointments and in the independent professions. The publication of regular census reports helped the non-Brahmins in this regard but they also received active support and help from important

officials including one of the Executive Councillors, Sir Alexander Cardew in the early twentieth century. Even in 1871 the British Census Superintendent, W.R. Cornish had stated, "Politically it is not to the advantage of the government that every question connected with the progress of the country be viewed through Brahmin spectacles. The true policy of the state would be to limit their numbers in official positions and to encourage a large proportion of non-Brahmin Hindus and Muslims to enter official service so as to allow no special pre-eminence or preponderance of a particular caste."²⁸

In 1854 itself the Revenue Board, Madras had sent an order to all district collectors to the effect that they should be careful to see that the "subordinate appointments in their districts were not monopolised by the few influential families Endeavour should always be made to divide the appointments in each district among the principal castes."²⁹

[28] K. Veeramani, The history of the struggle for social and communal justice in Tamil Nadu. D.K. Publications, Madras. Pp 14-15.

[29] Ibid.

Thus in the 1920s when educated non-Brahmins and the politicians of the Justice Party demanded job reservations it was well received by British officials, not only because it concided with their own views, but also because it was a policy they had been attempting to implement, though only with limited success for a very long time. The matter acquired even greater urgency because Brahmin dominance over education and employment seemed as firm as before and Sir Alexander Cardew stated, "It is impossible to apply a system of open competition to the recruitment of the civil services in India unless a monopoly is accorded to the Brahmins."³⁰

Brahmin preponderance in education was an established fact by the last two decades of the nineteenth century though the non-Brahmins were able to narrow the gap in the field of second school education by the close of the century. Literacy levels in absolute terms and a knowledge of English, however, continued to be much higher amongst the Brahmins and this ensured to them the full advantages that they had already derived from their headstart both in Western

[30] K Veeramani, Op. cit., Pp. 14-15.

education as well as in government employment. On the whole the province benefited considerably by the progress of administration, the establishment of law and order which is revealed by the effects that it had on the spread of education. A report on the progress of administration in Madras Presidency published in 1892, detailing the achievements of the government mentions that the noteworthy features consisted of:

1. enormous expansion of higher or collegiate education, i.e. the courses of study leading to the B.A. degree till 1890-91;
2. rapid diffusion of elementary or primary education among the bulk of the population;
3. strong stimulus given to female education.

The report also mentions the establishment of night-schools for the labouring classes.³¹

While no attempts at comparison with the other provinces is being made, nevertheless Anil Seal's remark, "that despite its reputation as the benighted Presidency Madras possessed a level of literacy higher than any other province and that the Viceroyalties of

[31] Sreenivasa Raghavaiyengar, Memorandum on the progress of Madras Presidency during the last forty years of British rule (1892), Pp 293-298.

Lytton, Ripon and Dufferin coincided with a time of rapid expansion of higher education in the South, gives a good picture of the conditions there. Seal also notes that while in Bengal college education was dominated by Calcutta, in Western India by Bombay and Poona there was no such dominance by Madras City in the South. The Tamil districts had a tremendous lead in this regard over the other linguistic regions of the Presidency (Malabar being the one exception and following closely on the heels of the Tamil areas) for more than 80% of the undergraduates and 70% of the high school boys came from there. Tanjore, Trichnopoly and Tiruvelveli, the three districts in Tamil Nadu, however, had about as many students together as Madras city.³²

The distinguishing feature of educational progress in Madras Presidency till the end of the nineteenth century was the impressive lead the Tamil Brahmins had built for themselves in this field though in the period between 1879 and 1884 when the number of college students doubled, non-Brahmin matriculates increased by 67% and Brahmins only by 33%, indicating that non-Brahmins were beginning to realize the

[32] Anil Seal, Emergence of Indian nationalism, Pp 103-110. See also appendix.

advantages of education.³³ There was not only a wider spread of education in Tamil Nadu but also greater depth of this spread with the differences between Madras and the mofussil areas much less pronounced than in the case of the other provinces. What this development signified for the rise of social reform movements or whether it had any impact on the course that such movements took could be the subject of further examination.

The somewhat extraordinary situation produced by the dominance of the Tamil Brahmins in the field of higher education was also reflected very clearly in the field of employment. Figures of employment for the year 1916 reveal that in the Provincial Service, Brahmins who barely constituted 3% of the population held 100 posts while the non-Brahmins had only 29. In the finance department the figures for Brahmins and non-Brahmins respectively were 190 and 35. Sir Alexander Cardew in his evidence before the Public Service Commission in 1913 provided further evidence of the sweeping Brahmin domination even as he pleaded for the

[33] Anil Seal, *Op. cit.*, Pp 103-110. See also appendix.

rejection of the request of Indian nationalists that simultaneous examination for recruitment to the India Civil Service be held in England and India when he stated that the "small rigidly exclusive caste of the Brahmins" would completely swamp the service. Cardew stated that in the competitive examination held between 1892 and 1904 for the Provincial Civil Service 15 out of the 16 successful candidates were Brahmins. During the same period in the matter of appointment of Assistant Engineers 17 of the successful candidates were Brahmins and only 4 non-Brahmins. The record was very much the same in other Departments as well. In the period 1915-1916, out of the 140 Deputy Collectors, 77 were Brahmins, 30 non-Brahmin Hindus and the rest Muslims, Indian Christians, Europeans and Anglo-Indians. Even in those sectors such as the Subordinate Judicial Service of the Presidency where competition was not the mode of recruitment, the major portion of the appointments were in the hands of Brahmins. A similar position prevailed in the native states directly under the control of the government of Madras illustrated by the example of Mysore State where in open competitive examinations in the preceding

[34] K. Veeramani, Op. cit., Pp 15-16

twenty years before 1915 to the Mysore Civil Service had resulted in Brahmins securing 85% of the vacancies. It may also be worth mentioning that in this period and also afterwards, a large number of Tamil Brahmins migrated to the princely State of Mysore in search of employment.

In the period between 1891 and 1921 non-Brahmin progress in education, both vernacular and western, is well registered. In fact it was in pursuit of these objectives of promoting education that the first tentative attempts on the part of the non-Brahmins to organize themselves resulted in the formation of the Dravidian Association.³⁵ The aim of this association was the maintenance of hostels to provide accommodation for non-Brahmin students while they pursued higher studies in Madras. The other activity that the association indulged in was the publication of books that set out the non-Brahmin arguments on the question of Brahmin dominance of the administration and the need to provide non-Brahmins with safeguards through communal representation in the legislatures, in educational institutions and in public services. It was on the basis of information provided by these informal

[35] E. Irschick. Op. cit., P. 47.

associations that the non-Brahmin Manifesto that heralded the formation of the South Indian Liberal Federation, better known as the Justice Party, was prepared. In this connection one may note that both progress in education amongst non-Brahmins and consciousness of this progress were essential ingredients in the growth of political awareness amongst them.³⁶ The desire to establish a political organization that would moreover contest elections and make a bid for administrative and executive power was also stimulated by the fact that the non-Brahmins had not really benefited from the Morley-Minto Reforms though it had introduced the elective principles in, however, limited a form. This was partly because the qualifications laid down for election were unfavourable to them, non-Brahmin property owners who had the right of franchise lacked the education to understand the intricacies of the rules and regulations and therefore the Brahmins continued to play a dominant role.³⁷

[36] E. Irschick, *Op. cit.*, P. 17.

[37] E. Saa Vishwanathan, *Op. cit.*, P. 17.

CHAPTER II

THE IDEOLOGY OF THE SELF RESPECT MOVEMENT

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The elements that went into the making of the Self Respect philosophy and ideology stemmed from the atheistic feelings that Periyar displayed very early in his life. This is clear from what the Self Respect leader has to say in one of his autobiographical articles where he talks about the contempt that he felt for religious ceremonies and observances and for the numerous holy men and priests patronized by his highly orthodox family.¹ During the course of his early career in the municipal politics of his birthplace Erode, when he was a trustee of numerous temple boards, he gives us to understand that he performed the functions connected with these out of a sense of duty and responsibility, never out of conviction or belief

[1] E.V. Ramaswamy, "Why I started the 'Self Respect movement'". SRP Assn. publication, Erode and Madras, Pp 3-4.

in religion or God.² These emerging ideas on God and religion particularly Hinduism that occupied such a central position in the ideology of the movement took shape in a period (the first two decades of the twentieth century) when a number of Sabhas and associations for the protection and propagation of *Sanathan Dharma* and *Varnashrama Dharma* had sprung up in large numbers in Tamil Nadu both in the rural and urban areas. Most of these were established under Brahmin leadership and they propagated blatantly obscurantist ideas and beliefs.³ It is worthwhile speculating whether this phenomenon had anything to do with the activities of the Theosophical Society and the propaganda of Annie Besant that glorified the Vedic religion and Hindu culture as the highest achievement of man. Brahmins were the most ardent followers of

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- [2] C.J. Baker in Washbrook and Baker, Political Institutions and Political Change 1880-1940. Pp 115-117. Baker feels that Periyar turned to non-cooperation only when he was unseated from the municipal chair in Erode following factional quarrels in the municipality that itself was due to increasing political competition as a result of economic and commercial development. Individuals like Periyar, as leaders of their community underscored their importance in lavish displays on religious and festive occasions. This pageantry was now transferred to non-cooperation when he found himself out of power.
- [3] Anaimuthu (Ed.), Periyar Sinthanaigal, Introduction.

Annie Besant mainly because her interpretation of Hindu religion and culture was based on a positive definition of Aryanism and Brahminism. Once within the Congress Periyar is believed to have drawn the attention of the leadership to the activities of these religious organizations pointing out the inappropriate nature of their propaganda at a time when the Congress itself was propagating a secular and egalitarian ideology. Apparently, it drew no response from the predominantly Brahmin leadership of the Congress.⁴

It was the non-Brahmin movement that realized that the superior position of the Brahmins in Tamil society and their position of dominance over the non-Brahmins was due not so much to the public and secular positions that they held, but that it arose out of the prevalent social, religious and cultural values in society.⁵ The non-Brahmin leaders held that rather than follow the cultural mores and traditions of the Brahmins, non-Brahmins should realize that as Dravidians - indeed even describing themselves as non-Brahmins was a misnomer - they were the proud inheritors of a cultural

[4] Anaimuthu (Ed.), Periyar Sinthanaigal - Introduction.

[5] E. Saa Vishwanathan, The Political Career of E.V. Ramaswamy, P 75.

tradition that had been characterized by a rich all-rounded development and which moreover was not characterized by the conspicuous inequalities of caste and the social divisions that Brahminism fostered.⁶ This glorifying of an indigenous Dravidian tradition as opposed to an alien Aryan-Brahminical tradition was not only a source of pride but it also provided the very basis for the welding together of what was really an amorphous non-Brahmin community on the basis of language, race and culture. Thus the early non-Brahmin movement helped in the development of Dravidian nationalism in its broad contours but religion as such was not the subject of attack till Periyar initiated the Self Respect movement. At this stage it was the Brahmins' role as a religious intermediary, the spirit of *Varnashrama Dharma* that sustained the entire caste hierarchy in which the Brahmin was placed at the apex and all the non-Brahmins relegated to the lowly

[6] E.V. Ramaswamy, An invitation to the Youth, SRP Assn., Erode, Pp 5-6. The relevant passage says, "that the very use of the term non-Brahmin connotes a negative identity due to a lack of solidarity and cohesiveness amongst both the caste-Hindu non-Brahmins as well as the Adi Dravidas. Both these groups are divided into castes in very much the same fashion as the larger Hindu society is divided. These communities perceive their position only in relation to the Brahmins and fight shy of stating forth their Dravidian identity boldly.

position of *Sudras* that was questioned and challenged. In fact non-Brahmin leaders sought to substitute the Brahminical religion by the indigenous philosophical - religious system of the *Saiva Siddhanta*.

THE ATTACK ON RELIGION AND TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Against this background of an evolving Dravidian cultural nationalism to which Christian missionaries, British officials and Tamil scholars, all contributed in equal measure, Periyar's criticism came to be focussed increasingly on Brahminism which moreover was regarded as synonymous with Hinduism. No longer was the sacerdotal role of the Brahmins and the caste system the only targets of attack for it now became widened to include many of the basic concepts and institutions of Hinduism such as the principles of Karma, dharma and Moksha as well.⁷ The entire corpus of sacred literature

[7] Kudi Arasu 23.6.1929. "These were the institutions and ideals manipulated by the Brahmins to maintain the traditional way of life and established religion." Also Kudi Arasu of 25.1.1931 and 1.2.1931, in which Kaivalyam Samiyar stated that Brahmins were responsible for the distortion of simple religious beliefs and creating out of it a religion that instilled fear, blind faith and superstition in the minds of the people. Moksha, karma and dharma are all symbols of this fear and embodiments of the enslavement of the masses. Hence they are potent instruments in the hands of the Brahmins to dominate the non-Brahmins."

such as the Puranas, the Itihasas and the Shastras, especially the Manu Dharma Shastra were the subject of intemperate criticism and attack for they were believed to be the instruments for the oppression of the Dravidians.⁸ The Self Respect ideology held that the Hindu religion lacked in homogeneity of beliefs mainly because it did not reflect an authoritative historical background that had been documented through an authentic scripture.⁹ It was believed that the pantheistic nature of the Hindu doctrine was responsible for the proliferation of sectarian cults and this owed much to the machinations of the Brahmins who were the main beneficiaries of Puranic Hinduism and its emphasis on the performance of meaningless rituals and on superstitious beliefs. Various rules including the elaborate regulations connected with pollution and purity of castes and the attendant religious ceremonies were created for the purpose of strengthening the hold

[8] Kudi Arasu, 9.1.1927. "Hinduism has created a state of acute mental subservience amongst the mass of people. The Brahmins by claiming to be the hereditary custodians of the sacred literature use their position to promote meaningless rituals that rob the non-Brahmins of their self respect. In fact the Brahminical system reduces the mass of the people to the dead level of animal existence." This was the scathing indictment of Hinduism delivered by Periyar.

[9] Ibid., 9.1.1927.

of the Brahmins over the masses. Thus the character of the Brahmins came to be synonymous with cunning and manipulation, deceit and trickery leading Periyar to coin a particularly derogatory term "*Parpan*" to describe them. In turn the Brahmins of Tamil Nadu by their arrogance, their air of exclusiveness and their extreme shortsightedness in not conceding even the minimum access to the upper class non-Brahmins in the ritual and social hierarchy helped to define their position as distinct and separate from the rest of the society, hence they were not only vulnerable to attack but also by the very nature of the onslaught on Brahminical values it acquired a virulent communal overtone once the Self Respect movement used it as the main plank of its programme to bring about social change.

It is only on the basis of some such reasoning that one can understand the central role assigned to Brahminism in the Self Respect ideology as the one institution that had to be destroyed under any circumstances as the first step towards the transformation of society. "Brahminism was to Periyar what the French Revolution was to Burke - the mother of

all evils."¹⁰ The permanence and the stability of the social changes to be achieved depended largely on the successful eradication of Brahminism for it was believed to be a monster whose tentacles penetrated and crushed every section and segment of society. Ironically Brahminism had its greatest effect on the mind of those very communities that it oppressed and literally held in thrall.¹¹ The argument was that the Brahmins could be shut out from public and political life through a system of communal representation and reservation, the sacred literature which the Brahmins studied and treasured could be burnt and destroyed, the cultural ideals which they represented could be criticized as inferior and immoral but in themselves

[10] K.M. Balasubramanian, Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy. Self Respect Propaganda Association. "Swaraj and Self Respect, Rationalism and Atheism, Socialism and Communism, Communal Justice and Dravidian Culture - their central and common feature, the central thread that runs through all of them is Brahminism, the bane of our people" in the words of Periyar. "Be it a speech in a reading room, or on the benefits of the British Raj has invariably concluded his eloquent speeches with his pet formula: "For the rest I am of the opinion that Brahminism must be destroyed". P 32.

[11] Kudi Arasu 9.1.1927. Also refer to Kudi Arasu 23.6.1929. Adi Dravidas were told that they are duped by all religions.

Ibid. of 11.1.1930. The Adi Dravidas are held responsible for their own oppressed and backward position for they believe everything that is told to them by the upper castes in the name of religion.

none of those actions mattered. What was needed was a multipronged attack to get rid of the social, the ritual and the political Brahmin, all at the same time and of even more over-riding importance was the need for a change in attitude and outlook of those oppressed by the Brahminism. In fact, the wholesale destruction of Brahminism in its visible manifestations on the one hand, and correspondingly the weaning away of the non-Brahmins from continued faith in the Brahminical system/Hinduism could be brought about only by an opening up of the minds of the non-Brahmins.¹² What was needed was the conditioning of their minds to the very idea of a change in the present set-up, to the very vision of a society in which Brahminism would be totally extinct. These were merely two aspects of what in reality represented a single path of development that would culminate in a new social order.

In a general way it was believed that this transformed society would resemble the simple but egalitarian structure of the ancient Dravidians. While

[12] Kudi Arasu 10.8.1930. Pride, self respect, courage and confidence reflected a state of mind that had to be built up in the first place. This in turn would produce the necessary confidence in people denied social and economic rights that they could also gain their legitimate due.

Periyar often talked of the freedom from slavery that characterized the Dravidians prior to their falling prey to the Aryan religion and cultural imperialism, this image of a pristine civilization was merely a pointer to the great difference in their condition between then and now. It was under no circumstances to be understood as the truly idealized state, for freedom and true liberation for the non-Brahmins in the present depended entirely on looking firmly ahead to the future, by concentrating on the problems of the here and the now to build a better tomorrow.¹³ In this period certainly there was no uncritical glorification of the Dravidian past.

From 1927 onwards, the Self Respect ideology gradually moved to a position characterized by a frontal attack on the Hindu social and religious establishment. The increasing severity of the attacks on Hinduism has been attributed to Gandhi's reported

[13] Kudi Arasu, 26.5.1929. This aspect of the ideology comes out quite well in this address to a youth association where the importance of their role in national progress and development is highlighted. They are encouraged to be bold and innovative in outlook and to create situations where social change is possible. In this speech where Periyar is somewhat conciliatory towards religion, he admits that religion helps regulate man's life but there is constant need to change, modify and renew our beliefs as man realizes his rational faculties.

observations on the seminal role played by the Brahmins in the maintenance of Hindu civilization in Tamil Nadu and on the need for the continued maintenance of *Varnaashrama Dharma*. Periyar and his close associate in the Self Respect movement, S. Ramanathan, met Gandhi in Madras in 1927 to acquaint him with the unfairness of some of his reported remarks where the Tamil non-Brahmins were concerned but it appears that both Gandhi and Periyar were unable to retreat from their respective ideological position leading to a break between the two individuals that went far beyond the confines of Congress politics. It was also around this period that the KUDI ARASU discontinued with the customary poem that appeared on its front page. The poem normally based on the hymns of the Tamil Bhakti saints was religious in content though it stressed the themes of tolerance, harmony and equality.¹⁴ At this period Periyar did not scoff at the attempts of the Tamil Bhakti saints to bring about improvements in society but the battle lines were clearly emerging to suggestion a situation in which Hinduism was the target of the most pungent criticism but other religions notably Christianity also came to be included well

[14] Anaimuthu (Ed.) Periyar Sinthanaigal - Introduction.

within the orbit of this critical examination.¹⁵

The attack on Hinduism was dual in nature. In the first place it was Hinduism as depicted in the Puranas, i.e. popular Hinduism that was subjected to "critical and rational enquiry". Periyar never bothered about the Upanishadic philosophy apparently because of his personal intellectual limitations. The other aspect of the attack on Hinduism was to focus attention on its logical and intellectual inconsistencies. The main line of criticism was that Hinduism could simply not stand the test of a critical enquiry conducted into its origins. Christianity also became a target of similar criticism but there were certain reasons why it was Puranic Hinduism that was the subject of so much ridicule and hatred. Puranic Hinduism could be most easily identified with the Brahmins. the Brahmin not only personified cunning and trickery but also greed, covetousness and all those debasing qualities that seemed to characterize the Hindu gods. Periyar bitterly lampooned and caricatured the figure of the Brahmin who subsisted by grasping what belonged to others. In numerous writings and speeches, Periyar drew the image

[15] Kudi Arasu, 23.6.1929. Also Kudi Arasu, 15.8.1926.

of the Brahmin as a parasite who literally presided from birth to death of an individual demanding material goods and justifying it on religious grounds. The imagery that he evoked of the Brahmin smug, contented, well fed, is remarkably similar to the portrait of the village Bania in North India folklore. The covetousness of the Brahmin is further underlined by the fact that he claimed superiority of status on the grounds of his being the spiritual preceptor of the Hindus but he was the first to take advantage of purely secular and non-spiritual occupations that should strictly be the domain of other castes. The double standards evolved in this, the fact that he himself could not maintain the high standards which he claimed were his exclusive prerogative were all well brought out. It is interesting to note that Phule and the Satyashodaks also had the same complaints about Maharastrian Brahmins.¹⁶ Such a picture of the Brahmins must have been fixed firmly in the popular mind, hence the acceptability of many aspects of Periyar's doctrines, even though the espousal of atheism shocked many. This position could also have been determined by the groups and communities that the Self Respect movement hoped

[16] M.S. Gore, The non-Brahmin Movement in Maharashtra, P. 3.

and wished to direct its appeal to. Hence from the very beginning the tone and the content of the Self Respect ideology was in sharp variance from that of the non-Brahmin movement. Even at the initial stage it had the potential to develop into a mass movement.

The other interesting feature and also distressing to many people, was the intemperate and coarse language that was used when Hinduism was attacked. In particular the Hindu gods were portrayed as the very personification of immorality, debauchery and sexual excesses of the worst kind. E. Saa Vishwanathan expanding on this aspect points out to the titles of some of the pamphlets on Hinduism that were published and circulated.¹⁷ Since Periyar set the pace for the entire movement even the more educated of his followers were forced to follow his example and adopt the same earthy and crude language and expressions. Such attempts on the part of the members of the movement did invite public wrath however. In particular, Guruswamy's comments on the Ramayana drew considerable criticism from the reading public who protested that the Ramayana should not be literally understood as an authentic

[17] E. Saa Vishwanathan, Op. cit. The relevant title, "Amarous Exploits of the Hindu Gods". Pp 78-79.

account of the Hindu religion but rather it should be read as a work of art that portrayed human virtues and weaknesses alike. Guruswamy's reply was that the Ramayana was a reflection of the mentality of the people who contributed to its composition. Agreeing that it was no an accurate chronicle of events, he maintained that the sentiments expressed in it, far from being relevant to all times was certainly not applicable to the present and therefore its study ought to be discouraged.¹⁸ The idea behind this critical examination of Hinduism was to pour scorn and heap ridicule on it and thus reveal to the ordinary man that there was nothing in Hinduism worthy of faith or emulation, rather it stood for immorality and depravity. Writers pointed out that Hinduism was probably the only religion in which the common people were debarred from reading the holy books. Under the circumstances, it could hardly be regarded as a religion. Very often this argument was also used to deflect public criticism over the movements stand on Hindu religion.¹⁹

[18] Quoted in E. Saa Vishwanathan, Op. Cit., Pp 84-85.

[19] Kudi Arasu 26.5.1929. Samiyar Kaivalyam frequently used this as an argument to show the superiority of *Saiva Sidhhanta* as a religious system over than of the Vedic religion. The scriptures of *Saiva Sidhhanta* were all in Tamil accessible to all for it was a religion based on love and humanity.

The attack on Hinduism which was the prelude to a hard ideological line on religion as such however served to expose clearly the two lines of thought current in the Self Respect movement. Self Respect ideology is almost entirely associated with Periyar but in these early years there was some room in the movement for the expression of differing views. M.R. Barnett has drawn attention to the presence of a conservative section within the movement which remained dormant in the years between 1930 - 1935 but which was to assert itself in the form of a soft line on religion in the subsequent period.²⁰ In the early period this group was in broad agreement with Periyar regarding the immoral, depraved and irrational character of popular Hinduism. Like Periyar this group also did not concern itself with the philosophical complexities of the Upanishadic religion but instead it emerged as the votary of the indigenous philosophical-religious tradition of the Dravidians, i.e. *Saiva Siddhanta*, relevant for all times for it embodied truth, compassion and humanism.²¹ In contrast to Hinduism it did not uphold an inegalitarian social order marked by conspicuous divisions in human society. This

[20] M.R. Barnett, Politics of Cultural Nationalism, P 44.

[21] Kudi Arasu, 2.6.1929.

conservative section whose views were expressed by Kaivalyam Samiyar in the KUDI ARASU believed, that social transformation could be brought about by a cultural and moral regeneration through the principles of *Saiva Siddhanta* that embodied the spirit of questioning and rational enquiry. In fact *Saiva Siddhanta* represented the tradition of protest and challenge to the religious and cultural imperialism of the Aryans. The Self Respect movement was believed to be merely a continuation of the same process. The outlook of this section of Self Respectors was more in line with the nineteenth century reformist movement that stressed the importance of rationalism even as it invoked images of the past glory of Indian history, culture and civilization. The reinterpretation of traditional cultural values as a means of making them more suitable for contemporary needs providing at the same time a sense of identity, a sense of having discovered one's roots in a period characterized by flux and change unleashed by the forces of modernization was articulated by many social reform movements.

This process was to gain momentum in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when there was a perceptible national awakening. The anti-imperialist

ideology of radical nationalism sometimes took the form of an opposition to all aspects of western culture and at the same time it found its moorings in traditional religious and cultural values, suitably revived and modified. Unfortunately it "affected the content of that ideology which was to take it in the direction of social conservatism that the national movement assumed; visible as early as Tilak but attempted in a more refined way by Gandhi. It extolled orthodox Hinduism and equated it with superior Aryan achievement (and) the nationalist leaders appeared in practice as the champions of social reaction and superstition, of caste division and privilege in the name of a high-flown mystical national appeal. Apart from weakening and dividing the forces of national advancement, the movement was subjected to a socio-political trend that identified religious unity with national unity. It gave rise to a reactionary streak of communalism in the national movement. Revivalism and obscurantism of a northern variety fed the taproots (of the same) in the south and this particular division and contradiction contributed distinct elements of tragedy to the correlation of the freedom movement to what came to be interchangeably

known as the non-Brahmin or the Dravidian movement."²²

These conservative or rather moderate views embodied in the writings of Kaivalyam, Maraimalai Adigalar and other Tamil Saivite scholars in a general way could be said to reflect the views of the older generation within the Self Respect movement, many of whom were also members of the Justice Party. In fact even non-Brahmins in the Congress expressed unanimity with this school of thought which moreover believed that the Self Respect movement did not come into existence merely to destroy everything of the past.²³ Non-Brahmin leaders both within the national movement and outside it were certainly in broad agreement with Periyar when he stated that the aim of the Self Respect movement was to bring about social transformation so as to make society better and more egalitarian and so that

[22] N. Ram, "The Dravidian Movement, a historical perspective". Mainstream 16, Vols. 25, 26, 1978.

[23] Kudi Arasu, 21.7.1929. Kaivalyam Samiyar answers the question, "why has the Self Respect movement come into existence? Not for the destruction of God and religion but rather to highlight the true religion (*Saiva Siddhanta*) and expose the false religion of the Brahmins. The religion that the Self Respect movement stood for was humanistic in nature and which did not make destructions of high and low. The Self Respect movement did not want to wipe out culture or destroy everything inherited from the past."

non-Brahmins could receive their legitimate due but they all shuddered in horror at the very thought of an atheistic society in which literature, the arts and the cultural values of the past stood totally destroyed. *Saiva Siddhanta* with its emphasis on moral values, its tradition of questioning Brahminical dominance and above all in the fact that it was a religion in the conventional sense seemed to offer a way out.

Chidambaranar, yet another frequent contributor to the KUDI ARASU, articulated the more radical stand of the Self Respect ideology on religion which was also more in conformity with Periyar's own views. Chidambaranar was of the firm opinion that religion could not be reformed or improved, it had to be therefore eradicated root and branch.²⁴ Periyar also believed that all the earlier attempts at social reform had failed because none of these reformers had attacked the religious foundations of society. Periyar had cited the attempts of the Vaishnava Bhakti saint Ramanuja to bring about an end to caste inequalities by elevating *Harijans* to the ranks of the Brahmins by investing them

[24] Kudi Arasu, 23.6.1929. Religion has to be eradicated by its roots for it is the source of evil, ignorance, misery, backwardness and inequalities in our society. (Chidambaranar)

with the sacred thread. Had these attempts succeeded, he asked and he answered, the question by describing Hinduism as a polluted tank that could never be cleaned but only filled up. In the same way Chidambaranar cited historical evidence and pointed out how even Buddhism and Jainism failed to reform the Hindu social system. Instead they were forced to compromise with the system and became religions in their own right. Thiruvalluvar, the great Tamil saint failed in his attempts to bring about social reform because he failed to attack the bastions of religion at the same time. Under the circumstances, the members of the Self Respect movement, Chidambaranar asserted, should not hesitate to attack religion even when labelled atheists for the attitude of the movement towards religion and god was one of contempt.²⁵

As early as 1927 Periyar's extremely critical attitude to religion found expression in the KUDI ARASU. Religious beliefs were regarded as a serious drawback because it was an obstruction to man exercising his full natural rights and because it stood in the way of the full development of the human personality. This was so because religion in general

[25] Kudi Arasu, 23.6.1929.

and Hinduism in particular created a state of mental subservience and slavery that prevented those very people who were exploited from raising their voices against that shameful exploitation.²⁶ Periyar tried to put across this message particularly to the Adi Dravidas when he told them that religion and god were the twin obstacles that stood in the way of their social and economic emancipation. His advice to them was to give up religion completely²⁷ and at the same time he asked them to be prepared for a long struggle against their oppressors in which they could come out successful only if they developed the qualities of self organization and self-confidence.²⁸ God and religion were ideal conditions for the upper castes to thrive but they could never provide the inspiration for the progress of the backward and the non-Brahmins.²⁹

There were also other writers who used the columns of the KUDI ARASU to highlight the negative aspects of

[26] Kudi Arasu, 9.1.1927.

[27] Ibid., 16.6.1929.

[28] Ibid., 25.4.1926, In another context, in an adress to young people, Periyar says, "rights have to be struggled for and demanded and if necessary force has to be used."

[29] Ibid., 7.5.1933.

Hinduism and who believed these qualities characterized most other religions as well but they did not propagandize for atheism. They agreed that Hinduism created divisions in society, that it sanctified and upheld superstition and blind faith and that it killed the rational spirit in man. Under the circumstances, the Self Respect movement believes that there is simply no need for such a religion or the gods that were part of it. The Self Respect movement does not say that there is no god or religion; this was the point of subtle difference from the Periyar line especially during the radical heydays of the Self Respect ideology between 1931 and 1935.³⁰ Later on, especially in the period 1936-37, Periyar himself was to gradually make a come-back to a much more conciliatory stand when he tried to woo conservative communities like the Muslims who were horrified by his advocacy of atheism. The essence of the stand on religion on the part of such individuals was that what goes by the name of religion especially in the practice of meaningless rituals as in

[30] Kudi Arasu, 25.1.1931, 1.2.1931, One exception to the strident call for the destruction of religion was this moderate statement of views where there was an attempt at a logical analysis of the rise of religions. "Religion is simply irrelevant in this era of scientific temper and research. Religious beliefs had some meaning in the earlier stages of man's development when he was at the mercy of the forces of nature."

the case of Hinduism should be substituted by developing a state of mind in which awareness and a critical spirit of enquiry would stand forth as the main characteristics. This will help bring about the transformation of the larger society.³¹

In a broad way one could say that there were roughly three approaches at work regarding the all important question of religion and atheism. Of these two were purely materialist in content and advocated atheism either directly or indirectly. Periyar himself was an exponent of this ideological line varying it according to the nature of the audiences that he addressed. His stand on religion also shifted over the course of time beginning with an extremely critical attitude towards Hinduism which soon encompassed all religions. From 1936 onwards due partly to the political necessity of joining hands with the Justice Party in order to broadbase the support for the

[31] Kudi Arasu, 2.6.1929, 30.6.1929.

movement, his radicalism became diluted.³²

To many contemporaries what the Self Respect ideology propagated and what Periyar had to say about Hinduism and traditional cultural values appeared as a frightening prospect. To them his assertion that the Self Respect movement would engage itself in really "destructive work" seemed to be the passing of an age.³³ Both Brahmins and non-Brahmins were equally shocked forcing the members of the Self Respect movement into a defensive position on their stand regarding religion and their advocacy of atheism. Such postures became increasingly frequent from 1930 onwards when it dawned on Periyar and many other Self Respectors that many non-Brahmins who identified with the broad aims of the reform programme of the movement

[32] Kudi Arasu, 28.8.1932. A series of articles justifying atheism appeared in 1937 almost as if to prove that radicalism was yet an important aspect of the Self Respect ideology at a time when Periyar himself was soft pedalling atheism for political considerations. Earlier articles in the Kudi Arasu (28.9.1930, 7.9.1930) had held atheism as inevitable given the growth of a scientific attitude. In fact atheism, it was believed, would lead to equality and surprisingly enough it was also stated that in a society where the common people had no scope for awareness and for exercising their individuality, sooner or later atheism develops.

[33] *Ibid.*, 9.12.1928.

did not take kindly to its attacks on Hinduism. Moderates among the non-Brahmins especially the *Saiva Vellala* community held *Saiva* conferences in which they decided to throw open *Saiva* temples to the *Harijans*. There was a resurgence in the study of ancient Tamil classics and a revival of interest in Tamil culture which once again restated the values of *Saiva Siddhanta* as abiding for all times.

Shifts in the ideological stand that became very apparent from 1936 onwards showed the flexibility of the movement's ideology and its capacity to change as the situation demanded. The year 1936 saw numerous attempts on the part of the *Harijan* communities all over India seeking to withdraw from Hinduism and to convert to a new faith.³⁴ Periyar had always targeted the *Adi Dravidas* as one major group towards whose aspiration the Self Respect movement would have to orient its ideology. This was probably due to his Gandhian experience. He, however, came to the conclusion after addressing numerous *Adi Dravida* meetings and conventions, that given their low levels of educational and cultural development, withdrawal from Hinduism and the movement's advocacy of atheism

[34] Swadesamitran, 3.6.1936, 24.6.1936.

was meaningless to them. Moreover Periyar was well aware of the political mileage that many *Harijan* leaders hoped to extract by threatening to leave the Hindu fold. Thus from the beginning his approach to the *Harijans* was that they must give up Hinduism which was responsible for their oppressed state but they should take a collective decision on conversion to another faith, so that they were able to get the maximum privileges.³⁵ Periyar openly admitted that religion and conversion had become a political game and his advice to the Adi Dravidas was to reject the Arya Samaj under all circumstances; not even Sikhism, nor Christianity but only Islam. As early as 1929 Periyar was talking about the values of Islam and its superiority over all other religions.³⁶

From the beginning Periyar displayed tremendous goodwill towards Islam though as he made clear, his understanding of Islam was his very own and quite different from the conventional idea of that religion. He believed that like many religions Islam also had an aspect to it that laid stress on the observance of certain ceremonies but there was another quality in

[35] Kudi Arasu, 5.11.1936.

[36] Ibid., 16.6.1929.

that religion that was absent in Hinduism certainly. This was the characteristic connoted by the very word Islam - love, compassion and mercy. Above all, the followers of Islam were inspired by a tremendous sense of brotherhood that made people from the Middle East, from the Indian sub-continent and Africa come together in a unity and a oneness that was not to be found in any other religion. This was because, in Islam only the main principles of religion were uniform, all other practices being influenced by local institutions and customs.³⁷

Periyar felt that it was Islam which gave the Muslims the strength born out of solidarity and self-respect. This was the point that he constantly made to his Adi Dravida audiences telling them that Islam symbolized Self Respect and hence conversion to the religion was the best under the circumstances.³⁸ This was the reason why Periyar made a fervent plea for the unity between the non-Brahmins and the Muslims because both were oppressed by the Brahmins and in any case it was the Muslims who initiated the struggle for the

[37] E.V. Ramaswamy, Islam the only religion to rid this depressed condition.

[38] Kudi Arasu, 10.8.1930.

oppressed communities to regain their self-respect.³⁹ On such occasions, Periyar emphasised the fact that once religion and God are relegated to the realm of the mind and not allowed to intrude as visible external symbols it should be possible to prepare the ground for common action. Or he would simply deny that the Self Respect movement stood for atheism, claiming that it was merely a healthy form of scepticism. Or that it was the means through which people were guided to utilize their rational faculties fully so that they perceived the hollow claims of Brahminism.⁴⁰ Since the Self Respect movement stood for social reform and social change, there was really no connection between this objective of the movement and either God or religion which were after all personal beliefs.⁴¹ Such changes in the position towards the all important question of religion was not simply to assure the Muslim community but it was also perhaps motivated by the need to weld together the non-Brahmins, who had shown themselves hopelessly divided, with a large section obviously attracted to the Congress and its anti-imperialist

[39] Kudi Arasu, 12.12.1937.

[40] Ibid., 9.12.1928, 15.12.1937.

[41] Ibid., 12.12.1937.

ideology.⁴²

It was the period around 1932 that saw the most virulent attacks on religion particularly on Hinduism and to a lesser extent Christianity. Mangala Murugesan feels that one reason for the hard line on religion was the influence of Marxist philosophy, itself a result of his year long European tour. It was the exposure to Marxism that made Periyar realize that missionary influences and colonialism progressed side by side.⁴³ The harsh criticism of Hinduism could also have been prompted by the enormous success of the Civil Disobedience Movement all over the country and the resultant increase in the popularity of Congress.⁴⁴ In

[42] Kudi Arasu, 19.12.1937. The article reports a public address in which Periyar categorically stated that "the Self Respect movement simply did not come into existence to deny God and to denigrate religion". In what was obviously a reference to his own understanding of religion he said, "the Self Respect movement objects to a religion that destroys man's capacity to think and to develop an awareness of the world around him which in turn ruins his sense of self-esteem and pride. The Self Respect movement does not have objection to a religion that enables man to lead a well adjusted life at peace with other members of society. Neither are Self Respectors concerned with a religion that occupies itself with man's 'atma' or soul for it is a personalised set of beliefs".

[43] Mangala murugesan, The Self Respect movement in Tamil Nadu, Pp 125-127.

[44] Kudi Arasu, 7.12.1930.

Periyar's mind, the resurgence of the Congress especially in Tamil Nadu was identified with a revival of Brahmin power. In any case Periyar and the Self Respect movement were convinced that nationalism was merely an elaborate ploy on the part of the Congress using emotional symbols such as Swaraj and Self Rule in the political field to hoodwink the masses in very much the same manner as the Brahmins used Dharma Karma and Moksha in the social and religious field to dominate over the non-Brahmins.⁴⁵

One would expect that the logical end of what began as a bitter attack on Hinduism that soon came to encompass all religions was the movement's open championing of atheism. Apart from Periyar himself, some of the most virulent attacks on Hinduism were made by younger members of the movement, like Guruswamy

[45] Kudi Arasu, 15.8.1926. Even at this early period Periyar was convinced that the use of terms like Swaraj and Self Rule were merely the political equivalents of *Moksha* and *Dharma* in the social and religious spheres - potent instruments of oppression in the hands of the Brahmins. This was to be stated even more emphatically in the years to come. Periyar believed that for true independence of the country, the oppressed sections (the non-Brahmins) needed to develop a sense of self respect and this could be achieved only when the Congress was destroyed and when religion and Brahmin domination were completely destroyed (Kudi Arasu, 28.8.1927).

whose articles on the Ramayana invited much criticism. Periyar's espousal of atheism was also much more strident in public addresses to the youth and young people. The atheism of the Self Respect ideology also drew inspiration from another source; in fact it was a natural progression of the movement's intense emphasis on rationalism and the development of a scientific temper. Periyar was aware of developments in positivist thinking in the West. It could be expected to have an even greater impact on the young and the educated within the movement including a number of leftist inclined individuals who were associated with the movement. People like Jeevanandam and Singaravelu, a labour leader, were drawn into the movement in a period when the Self Respect movement tried to establish a support base for itself amongst the working classes in Madras in 1930-31 when there was much unrest due to the depression. The increasing radicalism of the Self Respect ideology could also partially be attributed to this development.

The doctrinal stand that justified atheism did so on the grounds that it was a humanistic philosophy, that it regarded human beings and their activities as of central concern in contrast to religion particularly Hinduism and Christianity that concentrated on

salvation and the afterlife. Atheism was justified on the grounds that it had gained considerable currency in Europe and thus could be regarded as the significant factor in the progress of European nations.⁴⁶ Atheism was also regarded as a part of the Indian historical experience for both Buddhism and Jainism did not have belief in God at the core of their philosophy. This was reason enough why Self Respectors should not bother about their description as atheists by their enemies. Periyar believed that an atheist was merely one who did not believe in the Brahminical religion and who had seen through the chicanery of the Brahmins.⁴⁷ Furthermore he said, "We are not in the least bothered about God and religion and our own principal purpose is to break the shackles that keep our people away from freedom, knowledge and happiness. There is no need for Self Respectors to probe the mysteries of God and religion but then we have been forced to express an opinion because they have been thrown in our path to

[46] Kudi Arasu, 7.9.1930, 28.9.1930. It was held that atheism was inevitable given the development of a scientific attitude among people and that it would lead to equality. It was also believed that in societies where the mass of people had no scope for exercising their individuality, atheism would develop.

[47] *Ibid.*, 9.12.1928.

thwart us from our intent and purpose."⁴⁸ This stand has also been described as "non-religion, the precipice that Periyar sought to scale".⁴⁹ Periyar believed that atheism was a logical follow up of any radical social ideology. In the case of Hindu society especially any social reform oriented towards change, towards putting an end to caste divisions and inequalities naturally worked towards the eradication of Hinduism. Hence it was easy to describe such movements as atheistic.⁵⁰

YOUTH, WOMEN AND THE MOVEMENT

In the absence of any centralized organisation, at least till 1936 when the Self Respect movement joined hands with the Justice Party, which could take on the functions of a permanent directing body, the Self Respect movement realized that it would largely have to depend on voluntary effort to supplement the propaganda carried on by its senior leaders and by its newspapers. Voluntary efforts localized in the smaller towns could be entrusted with the responsibility of year-round propaganda and at the same time could also be expected

[48] Dharmalingam, Periyarana, P 10.

[49] K.M. Balasubramanyam, Periyar E.V.Ramaswamy, P 10.

[50] Kudi Arasu, 16.2.1936.

to infiltrate the local educational institutions, the students and the teaching communities being ideal targets for mobilization. Some such step was advocated at the very first Provincial Self Respect Conference held in Chinglepet in Feb 1929 but much before that Periyar had realized that students and the youth were one of the most important media for the spread of the message of Self Respect. Here once again the contrast with the Justice Party is obvious with the latter hardly making any effort to motivate the younger generation. Many of the meetings that Periyar addressed in the pre-1936 period were in schools and colleges or consisted of small town addresses to the local Library associations and groups of Rationalists. Invariably in these he confined himself to the stated goals and objectives of the Self Respect movement which was the creation of truly free, egalitarian and casteless society which made it imperative that Hinduism be destroyed, nevertheless he also touched upon some other aspects of the ideology that throw further light on the manner of its development.

The youth and the student community were expected to play a central role in the dissemination of the Self Respect ideology for they were believed to be blessed with boundless enthusiasm, energy and capacity for self

sacrifice. At the same time being young, their minds were capable of imbibing new ideas that could lead to a progressive change in outlook and culminate in a social revolution. Therefore the youth were to be the most potent agents of change for their character was a contrast to the timidity and the conservatism of the older generation. Being young and impressionable, Periyar and the other leaders felt that the young could be expected to be bold and innovative in outlook, they should be encouraged not to blindly follow their elders and the older generation who were inhibited and pressed down by the very system, by those very institutions and principles of religion and society that kept them in an oppressed state. Even as Periyar warned the youth against getting carried away by their enthusiasm he also stressed to them the supreme importance of the task of moulding public opinion in their favour, in favour of social reform and rather than wait for opportunities, they should look around for means to create situations in which social change was possible. He however warned the youth against falling into the nationalist trap for the slogans of the national movement were all hollow and they were a mere ploy to divert the attention of the oppressed masses from the real task that lies ahead of the nation which was that

of social reform before political independence.⁵¹ He told the youth in clear and unmistakeable terms that all those countries that have progressed (Russia and China are specifically mentioned) have done so only after they took up the task of eradicating social evils with determination and by giving it priority over political reform, or at least they attempted both tasks simultaneously.⁵² That the youth were expected to break new ground is obvious from the fact that to them was entrusted a large share of responsibility for bringing about the emancipation of women.⁵³

[51] Kudi Arasu, 22.2.1930. The thrust of this article is that the question of social reform really boils down to the issue of the oppressed communities (non-Brahmins and Adi Dravidas) acquiring a sense of self-respect. Only a people who possess this quality will have the strength to fight for political independence and Swaraj and furthermore to sustain it.

Also Kudi Arasu, 25.5.1931, in which the youth were warned against being taken in by the Congress slogan of Swaraj which Congress believed was like a 'mantra' that would put an end to all the problems that the country faced. On the contrary, the article warned, the cry for Swaraj represented a soft option for it puts the responsibility for the country's problems entirely on the British. There is the further warning that this is merely an elaborate scheme for the maintenance of the status quo in society on the part of the Brahmins who constitute the Congress membership.

[52] *Ibid.*, 26.5.1929.

[53] *Ibid.*

To the Self Respect movement goes the credit of breaking new ground in many hitherto untouched areas of social concern and reform. The ideology of the Self Respect movement looked at the problem of women from an entirely new angle. The nineteenth century reform movement in a general way had propagated the line that women being an oppressed group and at the centre of so many cruel and backward social practices ought to be given special consideration in any programme of social upliftment. The importance given to encouraging widow remarriage, to giving them education so that they could exercise their rights and later on the campaign to raise the age of consent for marriage of girls and boys were all part of a larger programme. The Self Respect movement however was the first to concede to women the position that they were equal partners in progress and social reform. The line of the Self Respect movement was that no programme of social reform was ever likely to succeed if women withhold their support or cooperation to it.⁵⁴ In fact the position of women in Indian society was not very different from that of the Adi Dravidas and therefore along with a movement for the eradication of untouchability, there ought to be a movement for the upliftment of women as well with the

[54] Kudi Arasu, 23.6.1929. Also Kudi Arasu, 17.8.1930.

same priority.⁵⁵

The programme that the Self Respect movement envisaged for women went far beyond giving them equal opportunities for education or encouraging widows among them to remarry or imposing a ban on child marriage and raising the age of consent. The Self Respect movement demanded that women be given equal rights before the law in respect of property and inheritance.⁵⁶ They should similarly be accorded rights that make possible easy divorce and their right to marry according to their choice cutting across caste barriers should be recognized by the society at large. Diagnosing the

[55] Kudi Arasu, 12.8.1928. The struggle for women's rights cannot be undertaken by men. it has to be carried on by women themselves. Unfortunately women themselves accept their position of inferiority which they believe has divine sanction. Therefore like the *Harijans*, women have to develop an attitude that they are in no way inferior to men. Another factor responsible for the inferior position of women, apart from the fact of their sex, was also the differing standards of morality and behaviour. The onus of chastity was always laid on them and they were judged far more harshly than men for lapses in behaviour.

[56] The problem of the social upliftment of women was a major item of debate in both the Erode and the Virudhunagar provincial Self Respect Conferences held in 1930 and 1931 respectively. Resolutions were passed on all the aspects of the problems faced by women that favoured their right to practice birth control, to contract marriages of their choice, etc.

reasons for the lowly position of women, the conclusion arrived at was that it was due to the social responsibility thrust on them of child bearing. The fact that woman was a "child bearing machine" was no doubt determined by biology but it could be prevented from becoming a restriction on her activities and her independence if she had free access to modern methods of birth control and moreover if her right to practice these were recognized by society at large.

The KUDI ARASU carried a whole series of articles on modern practices related to birthcontrol even as early as the years 1929-30. The cooperation and the positive support of women was deemed essential if the programme of social reform envisioned by the Self Respect movement was to be attained. As an instance it was believed that mixed marriages and intercaste marriages would go a long way in tearing down caste barriers and the inequalities created by them. Women however hesitated and shrank from these practices because of their lower awareness due to low educational levels. Moreover just as *Harijans* would have to change their traditional attitude that made them resigned to their fate and accept their oppressed condition as god given in character, in the same manner women have to be weaned away from the belief that they had been

born to occupy an inferior position in society. Periyar's advice to would be parents was that they should greet the arrival of a daughter in the family with equanimity and if necessary they could always feel better by dressing her in the garments of a male!

Periyar's programme for the progress and the upliftment of women went far beyond mere choice of clothes though that was important enough in his view. He was sincerely convinced that if men and women dressed alike, it would go some way in bringing about equality between the sexes. He had been much impressed by the sight of a woman dressed in trousers and factory overalls at work in industry in the Soviet Union. He advocated that Indian women should also give up their cumbersome costumes and adopt the practical western mode of apparel.⁵⁷

The Self-Respect marriages that the movement advocated and which were practised by many Self Respectors had for its basic aim the dispensing with the services of Brahmin priests in important life cycle ceremonies such as marriage, birth and death. In this way it was believed the Brahmins would be deprived of a

[57] Kudi Arasu, 9.11.1930. Also Kudi Arasu, 21.9.1946 in Anaimuthu (Ed.) Periyar Sinthanaigal.

lucrative source of income and thus a death-blow could be dealt to them both economically and socially. The Self-Respect marriage, however, in Periyar's thinking was also important because it dispensed with all those ceremonies and rituals which drove home to the woman in a symbolic manner her subordinate position in marriage which itself was a result of her position of inferiority in society. The Self Respect marriage on the other hand signified a contract and therefore by implication a position of equality between the two contracting parties which moreover was witnessed by the members of the community and acquired legitimacy on account of that. Moreover, the Self-Respect marriages were celebrated in a simple and frugal manner in contrast to the pomp and ostentation of a traditional marriage associated with Brahminical practices.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCIPLINE

The importance that Periyar gave to discipline in the accomplishment of the task that the Self Respect movement had set itself arose out of his belief that the struggle against the oppressors, the Brahmins who enjoyed social, economic, cultural and political superiority through the Hindu religion and the value system erected on it was likely to be a long and hard

one made even more difficult by the fact that the movement was trying to bring about a change in the mind and in the very thinking of the people. He stressed the need for discipline especially in his addresses at youth gatherings for he believed it was easy for young people to get swayed by the sor of emotionalism generated by the national movement with its slogans of Swaraj and Self Rule. When Periyar called for discipline it wasnot simply of the mind but also at a more ordinary level. The need for observing discipline in all aspects of life was much more frequent in the years 1931-32 following the Civil Disobedience Movement and the popular resonse to it.⁵⁸

The interesting feature of the stress on discipline on the part of Periyar should also be seen in the larger context of the tone and the content of the philosophy that he articulated. If one goes through the speeches of Periyar it becomes very evident that he was trying to make his audiences understand that they were in an oppressed state largely due to their own

[58] Kudi Arasu, 22.11.1931, 6.12.1931. The Civil Disobedience Movement was criticized for it was believed to destroy discipline amongst the people and promoted defiance of authority.

shortcomings and deficiencies.⁵⁹ They accepted all too readily everything that was laid down for them by the Brahmins by way of religious beliefs and social conventions in the sacerdotal literature. In his blunt and outspoken manner, short of telling the non-Brahmins, including the richest amongst them and the Adi Dravidas that they were utterly foolish to believe everything that the Brahminical literature laid down, neverthelss through his authoritarian manner of address, the incisiveness and confidence with which he spoke and above all in the manner in which he repeatedly selected a few themes for his speeches, he made it clear that he knew best. Although he invariably temporized by telling the audiences in his public meetings that they were welcome to accept or reject what he had to say, the charismatic image that he presented with his long flowing beard, the tone of reproach and reprimand that he constantly adopted would have ensured that he was heard with respect and rapt attention. He never claimed any messianic role⁶⁰ but the overall effect that he produced was probably not dissimilar. The result of these traits in his character, the manner in which he dominated the

[59] Kudi Arasu, 19.1.1936.

[60] Ibid., 29.4.1936.

movement like a collosus probably had the effect of creating an organization in which his word was law. As events were to show it was bound to lead to dissidence and differences of opinion brought on by lack of inner party democracy and from 1936 onwards some of his most trusted followers including Ramanathan and Jeevanandan deserted him.⁶¹ The signs indicated that in the years to come, the movement lacking in the flexibility that comes only when a second line of leadership was present was in the danger of becoming an organization with fascist overtones where loyalty to the leader became a synonym for discipline and a virtue in itself.

Along with the utmost importance laid on discipline the need for simplicity and frugality were some of the other qualities emphasised in the ideology of the movement as essential to the progress of the non-Brahmin community and indeed the nation itself.⁶² He was stressing these qualities in connection with the Self Respect marriages that incorporated them in contrast to the lavish ostentation of traditional social and religious practices. To Periyar pomp and ostentation were the outward manifestations of social

[61] Kudi Arasu, 29.8.1936.

[62] Ibid., 8.3.1936.

and economic divisions in society. It was always associated with Brahminical ceremonial and styles of life and hence the call to eschew unnecessary expenditure was regarded as yet one more blow against Brahminism. Moreover it was very necessary to build a united front of non-Brahmins whatever the divisions of wealth between them and the Adi Dravidas. The call for simplicity could be interpreted as a call for levelling tendencies to be at work so as to bring about greater solidarity within the non-Brahmin ranks.⁶³

PROGRAMME AND METHOD

Periyar stated that the aim of the Self Respect movement was to jolt society out of its stupor so that people could take note of the changes that have occurred in the external world on account of the progress of science and technology. Time and again it was argued that no social structure could remain

[63] Kudi Arasu, 30.10.1927. Periyar explains that the reason why he used the blanket terms non-Brahmins for both caste Hindus as well as Adi Dravidas is that although divisions exist between the various non-Brahmin castes, they are not reflective of the true divisions in society. They are artificial to the extent that they are a copy of Brahmin behaviour pattern. They were not the creation of the Tamils for in the Tamil language there is no equivalent to the Sanskrit terms *Varna* and *Jati*.

unchanged over the millenia and that adjustments and modifications in the field of religion, in philosophical beliefs and in human relationships were inevitable as man realized the full power of his rational faculties and used it for his material advancement. The Self Respect movement therefore advocated even when it was fully aware that rapid change was the order of the day and it hoped to utilize it and harness it for the benefit of the oppressed sections of society. Unfortunately the Hindu religious and social order maintained that the values, beliefs and practices that it upheld and sanctified were relevant for all times. Since this claim was unthinkingly accepted by the mass of ordinary people, the Self Respect movement therefore advocated the destruction of Hinduism for that was the only way to free the mind of the people and open it up to the very idea of change.⁶⁴

One notable aspect of the Self Respect ideology especially when expressed in the pithy language and the popular idiom of Periyar was that it tended to see issues in terms of black and white. This probably had some connection with the proletarian influences on his

[64] Kudi Arasu, 7.4.1929.

early background and probably because he lacked the sophistication that comes with higher education. He raised questions and answered them in a simple direct and straightforward manner. In a way, it could be said of him that he looked at the world as being divided into the twin camps of good and evil with the struggle between them being one of epic proportions. In such an ideological scheme there was no place for nuances, for shades of grey especially when one considers that Periyar appeared to be in a tearing hurry to spread his message of reform. In fact he believed that he was a doer, not a simple peddler of ideologies and in some of his writings and speeches, he gives the impression of an attitude of contempt towards merely stating an ideological position.⁶⁵ He constantly warned his followers through public meetings and through the columns of the KUDI ARASU that if the problem of the oppressed people, the non-Brahmins was not solved and an equitable social structure evolved, India would face an upheaval similar to the Russian revolution.⁶⁶ The sharp edge that the Self Respect ideology displayed, the starkness of its radicalism, unsoftened by even the slightest hint of a compromise with the forces of

[65] Kudi Arasu, 26.4.1936.

[66] *Ibid*, 19.4.1931.

tradition especially in the years between 1927-1935 could partly be accounted for by the fact that the movement had not yet descended to the level of practical action. In fact the impression given is that the work achieved by the Self Respect movement of creating in the minds of the people an awareness of their position, and of the need for transformation in society through a change of outlook was merely the prelude and the rest would follow in its own time.⁶⁷

This ideology and the programme of action based on it that aimed at bringing about a change in attitude and outlook amongst non-Brahmins to their social conditions and which was meant to inculcate in them the necessary spirit of self-confidence and self-reliance was partly to be disseminated through the KUDI ARASU and other newspapers such as the English daily, REVOLT and the Tamil, 'PAKUTHARIVU'. Periyar himself believed that the public platform was far more effective in spreading the message of social reform and along with other leaders of the movement he toured the length and breadth of the province regularly. In all such public

[67] Kudi Arasu, 5.4.1936. "The Self Respect movement was started to create a sense of shame, anger and indignation among the oppressed who are to blame for their condition."

addresses the crucial role was always played by informal local Self Respect associations that had come into existence as a result of local effort rather than due to any positive directions or guidelines from above. In fact in the years between 1925-1936 one gets the impression that Periyar so dominated the movement that even the names of individuals like S. Ramanathan hardly featured in the columns of the KUDI ARASU. Most of the associations that acted as the hosts and the promoters of the Self Respect leaders consisted of local notables, many of whom were also members of the Justice Party, but equally a large number of people did not have any political connections at all. It appears that the movement, at this stage, coopted any senior, well known non-Brahmin leader who showed the slightest interest in social reform. It took care to keep a line open to all the wealthy members of the locality for ultimately the finances had to come from them.⁶⁸

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From its inception the Self Respect movement was believed to be closely associated with the Justice Party because the membership was overlapping. Probably only a few discerning individuals could make out that the ideology of the Self Respect movement had a social

[68] Kudi Arasu, 24.1.1937. Also K.M. Balasubramanian, Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy, P. 13.

content and a radicalism that was entirely absent in that of the Justice Party. Although in the years 1926-27 Periyar realised that it might be a drawback for the success of his social reform programme to be seen to be too closely associated with the Justice Party, yet the reality that he faced was that the big money bags were all to be found within that party and in terms of organization the fledging Self Respect movement was very badly off. Moreover, in a period of shifting political loyalties when individuals drifted in and out of political parties being associated with the Justice Party, a political group that claimed to work entirely for the upliftment of the non-Brahmins definitely gave some advantages to Periyar's movement. It enabled it to widen its circle of influence within the non-Brahmin community, it could exploit to its advantage the support of the richer class of non-Brahmins so well represented in that party whose suspicions would probably be allayed over the radical content of ideology of Self Respect movement as a result of this association. Under such circumstances it is not at all surprising that the first provincial level Self Respect Conference held at Chinglepet (Feb 1929) had a large number of Justicites in attendance.

The three provincial level conferences held consecutively over those years in 1929, 1930 and 1931 were the only occasions when the Self Respect movement came anywhere near creating a permanent organizational structure, the membership of which could provide the leadership to supplement Periyar's control over the organization. But this practice was allowed to lapse following the third provincial conferences held in August 1932 in Viruthunagar. From the year 1935 onwards taluqa and district level conferences became much more frequent gradually allowing for a new cadre of leaders to emerge whose social origins drew much more from the small town middle classes and who could be expected therefore to articulate the aspirations of emerging groups in semi urbanized areas.⁶⁹ The challenge to Periyar's leadership was also to originate from amongst this group. Nevertheless the three provincial level conferences were important because it gave wide publicity to the ideology and the programme of the Self Respect movement.⁷⁰ The presence of so many Justice notables at Chinglepet and the fact that one of the key-note speakers at this conference was none other than Subbarayan the first minister of the province made it a

[69] Kudi Arasu, 21.11.1937, 5.12.1937, 12.12.1937.

[70] Mangala Murugesan, Op. cit. P 82 .

matter of some importance that even the provincial level newspapers such as the Hindu and the Mail were forced to take note of it. For this very same reason, a few Brahmins were also present at the conference.

The Conference itself had the air of a country fair with an exhibition of agricultural implements including pumps and motors for irrigation. The idea was obviously to attract the largest number of people especially those inhabiting the neighbouring villages and semi-urbanized environs of Chinglepet. Obviously these were all methods of mobilisation.⁷¹

All this Conference the major theme stressed by all the speakers was the need to rationalise social and religious institutions so as to make society more egalitarian. Most of the major speakers focussed on the inequity of the caste system, the general opinion being that the institution of caste could be given a death-blow if the government ceased to recognise caste differences either in the administration or in the law of the country. Popular representatives were urged to legislate against caste and the members of the movement

[71] Mangala Murugesan, Op. cit., P. 83.

decided to delete all caste suffixes to their name and also to encourage the practice of intercaste marriages. The second major issue taken up was that of the position of women and how an improvement could be effected in their social condition. In this respect the Self Respect movement went far beyond most other similar reform movements. Thirdly the Conference turned its attention to the continued superiority of Brahmins in society and came to the conclusion that one way of putting an end to it was for the government to take over all the temples and maths in the province and entrust their administration to the government appointed trustees. In this way it was felt that the unearned income siphoned off by the Brahmins on the strength of their exclusive access to religion, the source of this income being mainly the non-Brahmins, would thus be cut off and the economic position of the Brahmins seriously undermined. The income of the temples should not be used to perpetuate religion and false beliefs but instead should be utilised for the encouragement of education, public health, etc.

Most of the non-Brahmin leaders especially those who were members of the Justice Party were in full agreement with the self-respect principles that aimed at the destruction of the dominance of the Brahmins.

After all it was such individuals who would benefit the most by the destruction of the social secular and economic power of the Brahmins. They could even subscribe at a very intellectual level to yet another goal of the self-respect ideology, which was the creation of the caste less society. But they were aghast at the prospect of the temples being taken over completely by the government and even more shocked at the suggestion that the temple funds should not be used for the maintenance of the traditional forms of worship in the temples. It was this resolution of the Conference that was vigorously opposed by a section of the non-Brahmin leadership for it evoked in their minds a situation in which all culture and civilization itself seemed threatened with extinction.⁷²

As was to be expected the resolutions passed at the Conference regarding the administration and management of the temples was opposed by both Brahmins and non-Brahmins. Some of the non-Brahmin leaders of the Congress, including Kalyana Sundaram Mudaliar, interpreted it as an open attack on religion. The immediate reaction, however, came from the highly

[72] Mangala Murugesan. The Self Respect movement in Tamil Nadu. P 87.

orthodox *Saiva Vellala* community concentrated in Tirunelveli and some of the southern districts of Tamil Nadu. This attack on the temples was regarded as a direct blow to the priceless legacy of the indigenous Saivite religion and in the numerous Conferences held that year *Saiva Siddhanta* was upheld as the religion relevant for all times. Moreover, the *Saiva Vellala* Conference took much of the sting out of the criticism of the self-respect conference by their decision to throw open all their temples to the Adi Dravidas as long as they were vegetarians and abjured liquor. In this manner the wide publicity that the ideology and the programme of the self respect received as a result of the Chinglepet Conference created a new spirit of religious revival even as it awakened Tamil society to some of the realities of the social situation.

At the second provincial level self respect conference held in May 1930 in Erode, the themes selected showed the same broad concern with every aspect of society and it could be said to be a continuation of what had been debated at the first conference. The concept of *Varanasrama Dharma* was severely attacked and with it the position of the Brahmins as intermediaries between the worshipper and the worshipped. Also emphasised once again was the need

to use the enormous funds at the disposal of the temples for education and public welfare activities. The need to raise the age of consent for marriages, the amendment of the Hindu Marriage Act so that inter caste marriages could take place more easily, were some of the social reforms measures that were advocated. Mangala Murugesan is of the opinion that at this conference Periyar deliberately adopted a moderate line by stating that it was not the intention of the Self Respect movement to spread atheism.⁷³ At the previous conference the impression had been that the movement was against all religious institutions, the cardinal aim was to free the common man from the greedy priestly class and to educate him on the futility of his worship with material offerings. The protagonists of the movement criticised religion not because of their faith in atheism but because orthodox Hindus continued the sanction of religion for the perpetuation of unjust laws and objectionable customs. "It has never been and never will be the aim of our movement to preach the doctrine of atheism." What is made obvious by the proceedings of the second conference is that the ideology of the movement was flexible enough, it

[73] Mangala Murugesan. Op. cit., P. 99.

contained a spectrum of ideas that could be interpreted according to the inclinations of the persons and the groups concerned. At the third conference held in Viradhunagar in August 1931, however, once again there was a return to the hard line on religion with a call for the abolition of all religions. Untouchability could be eradicated only through the destruction of Brahmanism and all those institutions that embodied *Varnashrama Dharma*. While the Self Respect movement had always reflected a genuine concern for the problems of the *Harijans* the renewed emphasis on it, and the general spirit of radicalism could partly be accounted for by the success of Civil Disobedience Movement. In fact this was the period when the movement mounted its most severe attacks on all forms of social and religious orthodoxy. Moreover, the conference was literally being held on home ground in the sense that Virudhunagar was one of the centres of Nadar dominance. The Nadars were the most ardent followers of Periyar.

The strident note of the Self Respect ideology and the wide publicity that it received as a result of the three provincial level conferences made inevitable some sort of interaction between the movement and the leading political forces of the day. Periyar himself

claimed that his movement had nothing to do with politics, that it had come into existence only for the purpose of social reform. Give his background, however, and the basic premise on which the Self Respect ideology was based, viz. the complete destruction of Brahmanism led the Self Respect movement to develop on ideological line with political content as well. What the political philosophy of the Self Respect movement was will be seen in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

**PERIYAR -
LEADING UP TO SELF RESPECT**

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In the 1920s, a rejuvenated national movement captured the imagination of the people especially after the prolonged inactivity and stagnation following the Moderate-Extremist split in the Congress in 1907. In Tamil Nadu itself, this process began when a new meaning was given to politics by the activities of the Home Rule Leagues under the leadership of Annie Besant. Her followers in the Theosophical Society, the majority of whom were educated Brahmins, constituted the most committed membership of the League. Annie Besant's redefinition of Hinduism, in terms of its past glories and achievements greatly appealed to the average Brahmin for in this view Brahminism itself was identified with Hinduism. In this re-interpretation of Indian history, the highest ideal of achievement came to be equated with that of Aryan Hinduism and Sanskritic learning¹ and it gave educated Brahmins the necessary self-confidence that inspired their first

[1] E. Irschick. Political and Social Conflict in South India, Pp. 26-27.

foray into agitational politics. To an equal extent, these developments alarmed the newly politicizing non-Brahmins who were confronted with this spectacle of Hindu revivalism in which moreover the ultimate in culture was represented by Vedic and Brahminical value systems. It is believed to have hastened the formation of Justice Party, diverted non-Brahmins in the direction of Tamil cultural nationalism that moreover excluded Sanskrit and Brahminical culture as being the ultimate symbols of Aryanism. It also made them determined to capture political power through a policy of loyalty to the Raj and thus effectively counter the Brahminical bid for Home Rule.²

Home Rule agitation however had one important consequence for future political activity in Tamil Nadu. It effectively took politics to the level of the common man and in the process of doing so also vernacularized politics, a legacy that it bequeathed not only to the Gandhian Congress in Tamil Nadu but

[2] E. Irschick, *Op. cit.*, Pp. 27 and 40. "When she became the champion of Home Rule, her emphasis on the great Brahminical past of India quickly brought her into opposition with the non-Brahmins and aroused serious social conflict and political dispute The Home rule Leagues that she founded cannot be said to have caused communal discord but it helped to catalyze it."

also to the Self Respect movement. For the first time the lower middle classes within the urban environs of Madras, as well as in the mofussil came to know what politics was all about, for the style of political activity perfected by the Home Rule League involved interaction with the people through public meetings and through informal street corner distribution of pamphlets, much of it in Tamil. A whole new generation of politicians, moved from one small town to another addressing public meetings in Tamil. Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu who later on, along with Periyar and Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, constituted the most famous Troika of non-Brahmins in the Congress of the 1920's was initiated into politics in this way. He toured the whole of North and South Arcot districts disseminating Home Rule propaganda³ and Periyar, more than a decade later, was to follow precisely the same method for mobilizing public opinion both before and after the foundation of the Self Respect movement. In the TNCC itself right from the 20's onwards Tamil was increasingly used in all meetings and in correspondence facilitating the recruitment of individuals whose education had been entirely through the vernacular.

[3] E. Irschick, Op. cit., Pp. 36-37.

It is doubtful if Periyar had any connection with the activities of the Home Rule League. Annie Besant was the subject of unflattering comments in the columns of the KUDI ARASU for having upheld the Brahminical system and Sanskrit language as symbolizing the very essence of human cultural achievement.⁴

The dynamism that the Congress displayed and the wide ranging appeal that it had in the 20's undoubtedly owed a great deal to the Gandhian programme that integrated the political goal, of the attainment of Swaraj with a comprehensive plan of social reconstruction that moreover intimately touched upon the needs and the lives of the most underprivileged sections of society. It was the intermeshing of these two objectives, one making contact with the emotional needs of the people and the other holding the promise of looking to their material needs which moreover was bound together as a consistent whole by high moral principles of truth and nonviolence that had a special attraction for people with a commitment to social

[4] Kudi Arasu, 23.7.1933.

reform.⁵ This was the Gandhism that Periyar understood, identified with completely and worked selflessly to achieve in practice. The Non Cooperation Movement appeared to him as the living manifestation of this creed.

Periyar's life especially in the formative stages clearly indicates the development of that intense commitment to social reform, and an involvement with the plight of the underprivileged that was to be such a marked feature of his career. In one of his articles, an autobiographical sketch in which he explains the

[5] E. Saa Vishwanathan, Political Career of E.V. Ramaswamy, P 40. "The Non Cooperation Movement campaign was of particular significance to Periyar for it sought to put the country on the road to Swarajya." His commitment to the boycott resolution was so strong that he not only forfeited personal and surety bonds to the tune of Rs.15,000 which the court had ordered released. The same was the case with the temperance movement when Periyar destroyed all the toddy yielding coconut and palmyra trees in his estate suffering considerable personal loss.

Also Mangala Murugesan, The Self Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu, P 34. "The Congress set before it certain grand ideals such as amelioration of the condition of the masses, removal of untouchability, prohibition, etc. As these ideals were similar to his own principles on social reform, Periyar thought by joining the Congress organization he could realize his ideal of bringing about a new social order. The main goal of the Congress, namely, attainment of national freedom was only of secondary importance to this new entrant.

reasons for his initiating the Self Respect movement, he mentioned a growing indifference to religion from childhood that developed into an aversion especially after his tour of several North Indian pilgrim spots, including Benares, as a *sanyasi*.⁶ This was certainly a factor that resulted in the conviction in later years that the Hindu religion especially as it was understood, practised and interpreted by the Brahmins was synonymous with cant and hypocrisy. In direct contrast to his growing withdrawal from tradition and religion was the deep involvement of his family in both the devotional and the conventional practices of religion. As a family comparatively high in the ritual status, Periyar mentions that all the essentials of religion including the numerous rites and ceremonies were meticulously performed in his parental home over which sometimes Brahmin priests presided. Moreover his parents loved to entertain sanyasis and other holy men but the young Periyar felt that these individuals took advantage of his parents' simple devotionism. This was again a theme that was to repeatedly recur both in his speeches and in his articles in the KUDI ARASU and other newspapers where he warned the people that their

[6] E.V.Ramaswamy, Why I started the Self Respect Movement.

credulity was taken advantage of by the Brahmins to dupe them in religion and through religion establish a hold over their lives.⁷

The intense religiosity of the parental household of Periyar was also to be attributed to the fact that though the family belonged to the prosperous trading community of the Baliga Naidus, his father had only recently amassed a fortune. There was the pressing need to purchase social respectability in keeping with economic prosperity and soon Periyar as a young man found himself drawn into the performance of charitable deeds that included the construction and maintenance of temples and serving as a member of numerous temple committees. Periyar claims that he performed all these jobs out of a sense of duty, not due to any religious beliefs and convictions.⁸

In fact rebellious tendencies, and a desire to indulge in the unconventional which he believed was a marked feature of his character developed very early in life when as a school boy he preferred to fraternize

[7] Kudi Arasu, 15.8.1926, 9.1.1927, 2.6.1929.

[8] Washbrook & Baker, Political Institutions and Political Change in South India 1840-1920, Pp. 117-119.

with friends coming from ritually impure castes including Muslims. Rather than drink water at the house of the Headmaster, a high caste Saiva Vellala he preferred to do so in the families of low castes whose food also he partook of. This was one of the reasons why he was withdrawn from school at a young age leaving him only with the most informal sort of education. This was to have several consequences. On the one hand he could easily communicate with the masses, especially the uneducated and illiterate amongst them for he could speak to them in a simple and direct idiom that immediately conveyed the essence of his thoughts. The articles that he wrote in the KUDI ARASU and other newspapers such as VIDUTHALAI, PAKUTHARIVU and DRAVIDAN are remarkable for the simplicity of style, for the uncomplicated language, the pithy expressions and the delightful homilies and metaphors which must have immediately conjured up clear-cut images in the minds of the unsophisticated. Moreover the style of his writing closely followed that of personal exchange.

In the 30's and the 40's Periyar appeared to be the very embodiment of anti-Brahminism that seemed almost pathological in nature. The irony of it however was that it closely followed on the heels of his experiences and interaction with the Brahmins in the

Tamil Nadu Congress - an organization resting on secular and egalitarian principles.⁹ It was precisely this aspect of the Congress movement that attracted him in the first place. For one, it was a continuation of his work in the smaller world of municipal politics in Erode, his hometown in Coimbatore district. He shot into prominence there as the man who almost single-handedly managed the plague relief operations in the year 1913. It was also in the course of his career in the Erode municipal board that he came into contact with C. Rajagopalachari, a small town lawyer based in Salem who visited Erode frequently in connection with his profession. It was Rajaji who pressed him into

[9] Mangala Murugesan, *Op. cit.*, Pp 32-33. "During the latter period he appeared to be embodiment of hatred towards the Brahmins and Brahminism in the early stages of his life, no trace of such a hatred could be found in him In fact his prejudice against Brahminism was the result of slow evolution. He first attempted to remove the inequalities in society and eradicate social evils. When he was engaged in such a task he realized that the Brahmins were the custodians of those inequalities and social evils. It was the Brahmin opposition to his social reform movement that converted him into a Brahmin hater.

E. Saa Vishwanathan, *Op. cit.*, P 42. "Till early 1924 there were very few issues that he differed with from the Brahmins but this situation changed as he became involved in the campaigns of social reform although many Brahmins expressed sympathy, nevertheless the manner in which he went about hurting Brahmin susceptibilities went a long way in creating a communal divide."

leaving the narrow world of Erode municipal politics for the bigger arena of provincial politics in Madras.

Peiriyar's first association with the Congress and his growing familiarity with Gandhian principles and programmes was through the newly established Madras Presidency Association, an informal grouping of non-Brahmin and nationalist Congressmen.¹⁰ This was in the year 1917 when Periyar also became increasingly associated with Kalyanasundara Mudaliar and the paper that he edited, *Deshabhaktan*. In fact Periyar along with Mudaliar and Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu had a hand in the formation of the MPA.

Although the MPA was an association of non-Brahmins informally linked to the Congress, it was not a communal organization in the way that the Justice Party was. Rather it had come into existence to repudiate the claim of the Justice Party that it was

[10] E. Saa Vishwanathan, *Op. cit.*, P 24. "It was through the MPA that he became familiar with the policies and the programmes of the Congress."

Also, Mangala Murugesan, *Op. cit.*, Pp 32-35. "Association with the MPA helped him in the development of his ideals." He utilized the period when he worked in the MPA to build up his image in Congress circles and he became one of the chief exponents of Gandhian political principles in the Tamil districts.

the sole organization representative of the non-Brahmins. Periyar was part of the MPA not because he was drawn into communal politics or held communal views. Rather it was the increasing appeal of nationalism that led him to question the communal pretensions of the Justice Party and its claim of being the protector of non-Brahmin interests. At the same time not only Periyar, but also Dr. Naidu and Kalyanasundaram Mudaliar were all equally convinced that the extremely backward state of the non-Brahmins, because of lack of sufficient progress in education, called for some form of safeguards - communal representation on a proportionate basis in the Legislatures - and some form of reservation of seats in educational institutions and the public services that moreover required statutory recognition. Individuals like Mudaliar, Naidu and Kesava Pillai represented the educated sections of the non-Brahmins and they were in a position to understand and articulate the latent feelings of deprivation of fellow members of their castes and tried to draw the attention of the national organization to the problem.

When the Congress announced its programme of Non Cooperation, it appeared tailor-made to suit qualities and the aspirations of Periyar. Before he formally

joined the Congress, Periyar had undertaken an extensive tour of the Tamil districts in which he was the exponent of Gandhian principles and presumably he also got an opportunity to know the problems of the masses and all those sections of the population who had been unmoved by the propaganda of the Justice Party. Thus began five years of intense involvement with Non Cooperation, a complete dedication to Gandhism and an almost fanatical devotion and loyalty to Gandhi personally.

The circumstances under which Rajaji persuaded Periyar to join the Congress is particularly interesting in the light of the propaganda carried on by the DK at a later day that sought to explain Periyar's association with the Congress. Veeramani, the General Secretary of the DK, clearly expresses the view that Periyar joined the Congress for he found in it an organization through which he could easily carry out his social reform.¹¹ The implication is that there was no larger identification with the political goals and

[11] K. Veeramani, The history of the struggle for social and communal justice in Tamil Nadu, P 30. "He joined the Congress on the specific understanding that Congress would work for the salvation of the suffering non-Brahmin communities."

the philosophy of the Gandhian Congress. Mangala Murugesan is of the opinion that Periyar clearly distinguished between the social reform objectives of the Congress and its political goal of Swaraj to which he did not subscribe. Periyar's numerous articles in the KUDI ARASU sometimes give the impression that he sharply distinguished between political objectives and social reform.¹² Once he became convinced that social reform should take precedence and when he found that the Congress no longer followed this line, he quit the national organization to involve himself entirely in social reform activities which he believed was *sine qua non* for Swaraj and political independence.

Rajaji's interest in drawing Periyar into the Congress fold was due to the obvious fact that he was impressed by the organizational ability of the latter, his influence in Erode and the neighbouring areas and the fact that his presence in the Congress would help to attract the prosperous community of the Baligas into the national movement. This was important in a period when educated non-Brahmins were being drawn into the Justice Party for it offered them the option of collaborating with the Government and in return reap

[12] Kudi Arasu, 28.9.1930, 4.1.1931.

the rich rewards of power sharing which in turn would effectively lead to the scaling down of the Brahmin monopoly in the administration and politics. There is also the widely held view that Rajaji encouraged Periyar to join the Congress out of purely selfish motives, viz. to bolster his own position visa-a-vis the other Brahmin factions in the Congress led by Sreenwasa Ayyangar, Kasturi Ranga Ayyangar and Satyamurthy.¹³ While none of these theories can be completely disapproved or accepted in their entirety it is well to keep in mind that the political affiliations of individuals is a much more complex issue conditioned by self-interest and pragmatism on the one hand and idealism on the other.

Once in the Congress, Periyar devoted himself wholeheartedly to the Khaddar programme for the promotion of which he spent his considerable fortune.

[13] E. Saa Vishwanathan, Op. cit., Pp 24-25. Also, Mangala Murugesan, The Self Respect Movement, P 35. "Two personalities, Rajagopalachari and Varadarajulu Naidu, influenced him in his decision to join the Congress. Rajagopalachari's invitation was well received by Periyar who was already looking upon the organization as affording almost unlimited opportunities for his urge for social service.

Also E. Saa Vishwanathan, "E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker and the Tamil Nadu Congress". Journal of Indian History, 54, 1976, Pp 191-192.

He was closely associated with the activities of the Tamil Nadu Khaddar Board, an association which also influenced his ideas on the Brahmin - non-Brahmin problem. The manufacture and the use of Khaddar symbolized the principles of self-reliance that was at the heart of the Gandhian philosophy of social reconstruction and which was also to figure so prominently in the Self Respect ideology. Little wonder that Mangala Murugesan has no hesitation describing the Self Respect Movement as the child of the national movement.¹⁴

As Periyar threw himself heart and soul into Congress programmes and activities, his position and prestige in the TNCC was assured and was largely responsible for his meteoric rise in the organization. The intense activity, the skill for organizing propaganda and public meetings that characterized this early phase of his political career was something that remained with him till the very end. When he established the Self Respect Movement, he no doubt depended on the KUDI ARASU, the weekly newspaper, that he had founded in May 1925 to propagate his views, but

[14] Mangala Murugesan, Op. cit., P 74.

his forte was the programme of mass contact, through constant touring and public meetings that distinguished his career and style of politics.¹⁵

It was in the course of his work in the cause of social reform in the Congress that Periyar's views on the relations between Brahmins and non-Brahmins slowly crystallized. He was forced to into the conclusion that Brahmins irrespective of whether they were traditionalists or progressives would not brook any changes that brought about a modification in the power relations of the two communities. The truth of this was borne out by his experiences in the Congress organization when he sponsored resolutions that the Congress recognize the right of communal representation for the non-Brahmins in the TNCC executive, that could be progressively extended to other spheres as well over the course of time. This process began in the Tiruvannamalai meeting of the Tamil Nadu Congress when Periyar also castigated Rangaswamy Ayyangar a Brahmin member of the TNCC executive for the intemperate language that he used against P. Theogaraya Chetty, the leader of the Justice

[15] E. Saa Vishwanathan, Op. cit., Pp. 84-85.

Party. It is doubtful if this criticism was levelled in a communal spirit but it was an indication that Periyar felt that the interests of non-Brahmin community were the same irrespective of their party affiliations. In the 20's and the 30's such feelings were to affect even the less educated non-Brahmins as well, in which resentment, anger and hatred gradually built up towards the Brahmins. The humiliation that Periyar underwent was the lot of many non-Brahmin leaders. Sir P.T. Rajan, a Justice leader and J.S. Ramanathan, a Congressman and an associate of Periyar in the Self Respect movement had similar anecdotes to tell.¹⁶ In the nineteenth century different codes of behaviour in which discriminatory practices were inbuilt into the very normal relations between castes was simply accepted by the majority of non-Brahmins. In the twentieth century, however, with the spread of education and increasing awareness amongst them, facilitated also by the role of newspapers, what Periyar had to say about Brahmin arrogance and exclusiveness and the complete lack of justification for the discrimination that they suffered at the hands of the Brahmins had much meaning for them.

[16] E. Irschick, *Op. cit.*, P. 335.

Also Mangala Murugesan, *Op. cit.*, P. 52.

The one notorious incident of the Seranmahadevi Gurukulam in 1925 finally crystallized the ideas that were shaping in his mind on the relations between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. The Gurukulam, an education center modelled on traditional lines but meant to inculcate in young boys a spirit of social service, self-sacrifice and patriotism was located in Tirunelveli district and was run by a former terrorist turned Congressman, V.V.S. Iyer. Iyer was believed to be broadminded and eclectic in social matters and so it came as somewhat of a shock when some non-Brahmin students including the son of O.P. Ramaswamy Reddiar (later to become a Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu) complained that non-Brahmin boys were subjected to discriminatory treatment. They received less wholesome food, they ate separately and even the waterpots for their use was not the same out of which the Brahmin boys drank water. Since the Gurukulam subsisted on the financial contributions made by generous individuals many of whom were non-Brahmins and also because the Tamil Nadu Congress had granted a sum of Rs.10,000 as donation, there was a hue and cry over these reports and non-Brahmin members of the Congress were particularly agitated over the fact that institutions that were devoted to inculcating the nationalistic spirit and popularizing the egalitarian ideology and

secular ideals should indulge in such practices. Varadarajulu Naidu expressed the anger of the non-Brahmins when he stated "the immediate question of interdining (of Brahmins and non-Brahmins) was merely a symptom of the larger problem of social injustice which was not conducive to the ideal of Indian nationalism -- ----- Iyer was attempting to bring up the non-Brahmin children in the Gurukulam in an atmosphere of inferiority".¹⁷ Periyar on his part supporting these views gave the first hint of the direction in which his ideas on social problems were moving when he emphatically stated that the "Brahmin question should be settled even while British supremacy lasted in the country for otherwise (non-Brahmins) would have to suffer the tyranny of Brahmanocracy". This was not a view expressed in haste but it could very well have been a response to what Brahmin Congressmen like T.S.S. Rajan and K. Santhanam had to say about the Gurukulam affair. They believed that interdining between castes was normally not practised in society, it was not enforced in government institutions, and the Gurukulam, being a private institution had every right to formulate its own rules and regulations.¹⁸ Rajaji had, however,

[17] E. Saa Vishwanathan, Op. cit., Pp 48-53.

[18] Ibid.

clearly said that in future admissions, Brahmins would have to be told that the Gurukulam believed in common messing arrangements irrespective of caste and community. Gandhi, when informed of the incident also stated the same views and moreover he felt that such social prejudices could be eradicated only slowly with a liberal attitude developing amongst the people themselves. Neither of these replies satisfied the non-Brahmins and Periyar's anger was all the more pronounced when he discovered his utter helplessness in preventing the payment of the next instalment of the donation that had been promised to the Gurukulam by the Congress. The Brahmin Treasurer of the TNCC, K. Santhanam had already issued the cheque while the controversy was raging. The Tamil Nadu Congress which was very rarely divided on such communal lines underwent the full trauma of sectarian hatred and bitterness that caused deep divisions in its ranks and that was followed by repercussions throughout the grassroots organisation right down to the district and village levels.¹⁹

[19] E. Saa Vishwanathan, Op. cit., P 18.

The Gurukulam affair which opened the lid on the frustration, anger and humiliation that had been simmering in the mind of Periyar and other non-Brahmin leaders including the extremely moderate Kalyana Sundaram Mudaliar followed closely on the heels of the Vaikom Satyagrah. This Satyagraha, a truly epic event in the history of the social reform movement in South India was a campaign launched by the *Izhavas* to press their demand for the roads around the Vaikom temple to be thrown open for common public use. It may be regarded as the last phase of the non-cooperation movement for the *Izhava* leaders had enlisted the support of Gandhi and the Congress. Periyar was one of the Congress leaders closely involved in the planning and the strategy of the Satyagraha. It brought him into close contact with the *Izhava* leaders from whom he had an opportunity to learn about the social reform movement that they had started under the leadership of Sri Narayana Guru and SNDP Yogam. He observed their commitment to social reform the zeal which they exhibited in the struggle for the collective social upliftment of their community and above all the singlemindedness of purpose and the discipline which they displayed in all their actions. The Satyagraha was to leave a lasting impression on Periyar's mind and ideas, if not simply for the fact that he was brought

into painful contemplation of the opposition and the equal determination of the high castes to prevent the *Izhavas* from gaining their objectives. The Divan of the Travancore State in this period was a Tamil Brahmin, Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, famous for his keen intellect as he was notorious for his low cunning, who used every scheme and strategem to divide his opponents and prevent the success of the Satyagraha. Although the *Izhavas* gained their objectives after an arduous struggle lasting six months, the event also left bitter feelings in Periyar's mind which he expressed later in the columns of the KUDI ARASU but which slowly generated the belief that the self respect of the non-Brahmins was incompatible with Brahmin supremacy.²⁰ Brahmins would use every trick in their arsenal to divide and confound non-Brahmins in their quest for social equality and therefore progress of the non-Brahmins demanded the very extinction of Brahminism and the system of religion and society of which they were the custodians. These were only hazy notions in this period but they took shape and substance as elements of the ideological foundations of the Self Respect movement. Periyar was embittered about the fact that

[20] Kudi Arasu, 15.8.1926, 9.1.1927, both in Anaimuthu (Ed.), The Thoughts of Periyar.

neither the Brahmin leadership of the TNCC, including Rajaji, nor Gandhi recognized the stellar role that he played in the Satyagraha. In fact he was convinced that the Brahmin leadership and for that matter even Gandhi had weakened the Satyagraha by starting negotiations with the Maharani and the Diwan while it was yet in progress. He felt that the motive could only have been the wish of the Brahmins to preserve upper caste hegemony over society.²¹ Brahmin leaders in their turn could very well have taken objection to the statement issued by Periyar just prior to the Satyagraha which was reflective of his growing iconoclasm and also of that tendency in him to hurt the susceptibilities and feelings of the Brahmin community which also contributed to the worsening relations between the two communities within the Congress.

They argue that pollution would result if we untouchables passed through the streets leading to the temple. I ask them whether the Lord of Vaikom or the so-called orthodox Brahmins would be polluted by the presence of the untouchables. If they say that the deity would be polluted,

[21] Viduthalai, 8.1.1959, 9.1.1959.

Also E. Saa Vishwanathan, Op. cit., P. 45.

then that could not be god but a mere stone fit only to wash dirty linen with.²²

Here one can see a preview of his speeches that were characteristic of the 30's and the 40's.

It was against this background of mistrust, ill-will, bad relations and simmering controversies that the Tamil Nadu Congress met at Kanchipuram in November 1925. Periyar was determined this time to introduce his resolution on communal representation in which he received no more than lukewarm support from other non-Brahmin leaders including Dr. Naidu and Mudaliar. Apart from his conviction that non-Brahmins needed the benefit of communal representation both in the Congress Committee and in all walks of life what caused him disquiet and fear were the plans hatched by a section of the Brahmins to contest the elections to the Legislative Assembly in 1926. They had already formed a Swarajist group under Satyamurthy and Sreeniwasa Ayyangar and hoped to have the ban on council entry clamped by the All India Congress Committee revoked. These Brahmin leaders were convinced that if the

[22] E. Saa Vishwanathan, Op. cit., P. 43.

Justice Party was left unchallenged in the next election, its continuance in power would mean the complete de-Brahmanization of the administration and executive authority, a situation which it had already achieved to a considerable extent during its almost six years in power.²³ By the same argument, Periyar probably felt that the Congress would have to be kept away from the seats of power for under the present circumstances Congress rule meant Brahmin rule. So while Periyar continued to firmly back the stand of the "no Changers" led by Rajaji who were not in favour of Council entry, he continued his campaign in favour of the principle of communal representation. He kept his fingers crossed hoping that Gandhi's opinion on prohibition of Council entry would prevail but Gandhi also finally gave way to the Swarajists in 1926.

The Kanchipuram Conference of November 1925 took place at a crucial period when Non Cooperation had petered out, when enthusiasm had given way to a sense of inactivity and desperation. Brahmin leaders were well aware of the prevailing mood of dissatisfaction in the non-Brahmin camp but they were unable or they were

[23] E. Saa Vishwanathan, Op. cit., Pp. 53-56.

unwilling to do anything about it and let the problem fester.²⁴ The resolution introduced by Periyar seeking communal representation for the non-Brahmins proportionate to their population strength both for membership of the decision making organizations of the Congress as well as in the choice of candidates for elections was disallowed in the opening session itself. This was followed by the dramatic walk-out from the Congress by Periyar and his associate S. Ramanathan and Periyar at least never looked back to the Congress. Turning his back to the Congress did not however mean at this stage, loss of faith in Gandhi or that the Congress ideology had lost its relevance for Periyar.²⁵ Rather the events in Tamil Nadu were dictated by the peculiar social conditions in which Brahmin - non-Brahmin conflict was manifested not only in competition for employment and political power but went far beyond

[24] Mangala Murugesan, *Op. cit.*, Pp 48-49. "The practical minded politicians both in the Brahmin and the non-Brahmin groups of the Tamil Nad Congress were aware of the prevailing mood among the followers of E.V. Ramaswamy but they failed to move the Congress machinery to take positive steps to suggest a solution for the communal problem. E.V. Ramaswamy felt that the Brahmin leaders on account of their vested interests were opposed to any measure that sought to improve the political fortunes of the non-Brahmin community.

[25] *Ibid*, P 55.

that to become rooted in arguments of a Dravidian past and a consciousness among Tamil non-Brahmins that they were culturally and ethnically unique and their civilization superior to that of the Aryan Brahmins. These notions were now verbalized by Periyar to support his objective of social reform which to him was the same as the improvement of the status of the non-Brahmin community as such irrespective of whether they were upper caste non-Brahmins or lower caste non-Brahmins. In relation to the Brahmins they were all disadvantaged and deprived and there was no way out of this inequitable system except through a struggle that would have to be launched on revolutionary proportions. For nothing less than the overturning of the present society - its caste system, its religion, its outdated customs, its superstitions and other retrograde practices which moreover were justified in the name of the Hindu religion which was the same as Brahminism.²⁶ Since the Congress functioned as an instrument in the hands of the Brahmins, at least in Tamil Nadu and since the Tamil Brahmins had prevented non-Brahmin leaders from acquainting Gandhi and the Central Congress leadership with the nature of the social problems peculiar to Tamil Nadu, Periyar felt there was no

[26] Kudi Arasu, 2.12.28, 9.12.28.

alternative to leaving the Congress and starting an independent social reform movement. The primacy of social reform over any other objective was forcefully underlined by the fact that in Tamil Nadu 97% of the population was in a state of slavery and oppression. The progress of the country could take place only through simultaneous progress of the backward non-Brahmin community. This now became an end in itself crying for attention and solution.

CHAPTER IV

IDEOLOGY AND POLITICS

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Periyar broke off all connections with the Congress at a time when he appeared to be at the peak of his career in the national organization. His role in the Vaikom Satyagraha had cast him in a heroic mould made clear by the title by which he was frequently referred to, "Vaikom Veeran" (the hero of Vaikom).¹ The subsequent role that he played in the Kanchipuram Conference of the TNCC in November 1925 when he demanded that non-Brahmins be granted proportional representation in the TNCC executive further enhanced his standing amongst non-Brahmins. In the meanwhile, he had also started the newspaper, KUDI ARASU, through which he publicized his views on social reform and political issues, highlighting what he believed was the blatantly communal character of the Brahmin leadership of the Tamil Nadu Congress.

Although the Self Respect League had been inaugurated sometime in 1926, its activities including

[1] Viduthalai, 9.1.1959, quoted in Anaimuthu (Ed.) Periyar Sinthanaigal.

the spelling out of an ideology did not come about till later. All that Periyar said at this juncture was that he would speak out frankly and boldly on all major issues through the columns of the KUDI ARASU. Although he attended some of the meetings of the Justice Party, it is clear that during this period Periyar was unable to sever the close ties with the Congress completely.² He retained faith in Gandhian principles, recommending some aspects of that programme to the Justice leaders to help them build a mass base. When he addressed a non-Brahmin Confederation in Madurai in this period he extolled many features of the Non-Cooperation Movement.³ In the KUDI ARASU itself he stated that non-cooperation enshrined many of the ideals and the goals that would enable non-Brahmins to regain their self-respect, but it was deliberately derailed by the Brahmins especially those owing allegiance to the Swarajist faction within the Congress to deny the non-Brahmins their due.⁴ Periyar had all along supported the "No Changers" within the Congress led by Rajaji which had finally set itself against all participation

[2] Mangala Murugesan, The Self Respect movement in Tamil Nadu, Pp 55-56.

[3] Ibid., P 72.

[4] Kudi Arasu, 11.10.1925, 15.11.1925.

in electoral politics. This stand of Periyar while he was yet within the Congress also helps focus attention on an aspect of the evolving ideology of the Self Respect movement in which a clear dividing line was sought to be drawn between social reform objectives on the one hand and the attainment of political goals on the other. What Periyar stated was that social transformation that would lead to the establishment of an egalitarian and progressive society was of greater importance and was the condition for the achievement of Swaraj and Self Rule.⁵ Whether Periyar believed this as a serious possibility can only be comprehended by a further examination of the various political issues with which the movement, the ideology of which was largely determined by Periyar, was confronted. Whether it was the national movement and Gandhism or socialism or the thorny question of reservations and communal representation, the problem posed by the need for upliftment of the *Harijans* and finally the attitude of the movement towards the British and the Justice Party - on all these matters Periyar was to express his views in a forthright manner that sometimes appears to have contradictory elements in it, but which on careful

[5] Kudi Arasu, 29.9.1929.

examination can be seen to have been linked together as an ideology which was moreover flexible enough to adapt to changing situations.

Periyar's break with Gandhi and his philosophy when it came, was decisive and violent in precisely the same proportion as had characterized his devotion to Gandhian principles during the Non Coperation Movement. Periyar believed that the Brahmin leadership in Tamil Nadu was partly responsible for they monopolized the channels of communication with Gandhi and never presented a proper picture of the social condition in Tamil Nadu for fear that it might jeopardize their position of influence.⁶ Mangala Murugesan maintains that once Periyar made up his mind on an issue there was no going back for him;⁷ in this instance he had convinced himself that Brahminism and religion, Gandhism and the Congress had all to be destroyed so as to help non-Brahmins recover their self-respect and this became the main goal of the Self Respect movement and the very basis of its ideology.

[6] Kudi Arasu, 28.8.1927.

[7] Mangala Murugesan, Opn. cit., P 78.

Once the uncertainties of the period 1926-27 gave way to the articulation of definite goals and objectives of the movement, its activities gained momentum, a fact signalled by the adoption by Periyar in both public debate and in the Press of a position of confrontation and challenge as far as the national movement and Gandhi were concerned.⁸ This gave many of his speeches and writings a polemical quality especially because of the vivid and forthright style of the language, his use of popular idiom and the blunt statement of views, in contrast to the staid literary tones of the other Tamil newspapers. That this habit of Periyar, of squarely grappling with issues and confronting them head-on and of expressing his views in a tone of finality, had some connection with his close involvement and participation in grassroot level politics during the non-cooperation seems obvious enough. Such a stand in any case ensured that Periyar

[8] Kudi Arasu, 28.8.1927. In this editorial Periyar explained his stand on Gandhi following the publication of an earlier article on the same which had caused a public furore. It is from such information in the Kudi Arasu itself that one gets an idea of the controversies that Periyar and the Self Respect movement were involved in. Periyar however finds brief mention in the Government Fortnightly Reports only in 1933-34 when he was arrested for preaching communist ideas through his paper. Also Mangala Murugesan, The Self Respect movement in Tamil Nadu, Pp 117, 119-120.

was at the centre of controversy, that he was always in the political limelight even as his movement claimed that it had nothing to do with politics.⁸

SELF RESPECT, CONGRESS AND THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

To Periyar, the Congress and the national movement were synonymous for he believed that the Congress had appropriated to itself exclusively, the message and the slogan of nationalism. Periyar's attitude towards the Congress, which was also bound to be reflected in the ideology of the movement was determined by the circumstances of his departure from the national organization following his dawning perception that it no longer lived up to its high ideals. Moreover the increasingly firm conviction that even Gandhian ideals were tainted by the consideration of upholding Brahminical values added a completely new dimension to the situation.

The Congress embodied in concrete form all those negative and harmful qualities that the Brahmins and Brahminism represented in the social life of the country.⁹ These Brahminical ideals and the methods

[9] Kudi Arasu, 27.12.1931.

that were used to entrench them in the life and the outlook of the ordinary mass of people was transferred to the political field through the philosophy and the activities of the Congress. Hence the national movement was basically characterized by the single objective of furthering the interests of the Brahmins and the upper castes in the political life of the country to further buttress the dominance that they already enjoyed in the social and economic spheres. Gandhian philosophy and the values that he propagated acted as the binding factor between the two for when Gandhi attempted to spiritualize politics or when he spoke about the need for truth and non-violence to remain the foundations of all action, he was actually making an eloquent plea for the maintenance of the status quo.¹⁰ This was the sincere conviction of Periyar who believed that the veracity of his belief was well attested to by the supreme importance given by Gandhi to the maintenance of the spirit of *Varnashrama Dharma* in public life. In fact the Self Respect movement went further to state that these were also tactics to enable the Brahmins and the upper castes to take over the country as and when Swaraj was granted by the British. It was because Brahmins realized this and appreciated this fact about

[10] Kudi Arasu, 28.9.1930.

Gandhi that they conferred on him the title of "Mahatma" and raised him to the level of a semi divine figure. Moreover these traditional values, masked and cloaked in the political terminology of the national movement, were expressed in a symbolic manner that appealed to the emotion of the people rather than to their rational faculties.¹¹ By laying emphasis on devotion and self sacrifice without spelling out in material terms what the ultimate benefits of such a policy would be, the Congress was also guilty of tricking and duping the masses.

The opposition to the Congress and the national movement also arose out of the view that it was the embodiment at an institutional and political level of the duplicity, the double standards and the hypocrisy that was characteristic of the Brahmins as a community and more importantly of the value system that they upheld and imposed on the rest of society. As evidence Periyar pointed out to the divergence of views that prevailed within the Congress on major political issues and the numerous occasions when the Congress failed to live up to its stated goals and ideals. Even as Gandhi advised the Congress against participation in elections

[11] Kudi Arasu, 7.12.1930.

and office holding, the Swarajist faction prepared to contest elections. Once within the Legislative Assembly, however, instead of honouring the mandate granted to it by the voters, it claimed that it was yet conforming to the selfless objective of rejecting office even though it tried to exercise power indirectly by supporting a coalition of forces that was capable of dislodging the Justice Party from office. At the same time the Congress accused the non-Brahmins in the Justice Party as an organization of job-hunters bent on holding office through the goodwill of the British.¹²

In the year 1931 especially, the Self Respect movement was surprised and shaken by the spectacular response of the people to the call for Civil Disobedience given by Gandhi a year earlier.¹³ It was forced to rethink its stand on the national movement especially because there appears to have been some opinions expressed by prominent non-Brahmins that the Self Respectors should also join in the agitation.¹⁴ This was followed in turn by the socialist orientation

[12] Kudi Arasu, 22.9.1929.

[13] Ibid., 7.12.1930.

[14] Ibid., 4.1.1931.

to the Congress programme that came about in the Karachi session in which the younger members of the organisation, notably Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose, rose to prominence.¹⁵ It was obvious that the Congress had caught the imagination of the masses through its political agitation and also through the new socialist programme. Moreover as far as Tamil Nadu was concerned one can only conjecture that the groups whose aspirations the Congress succeeded in articulating were the same that the Self Respect movement had also targetted as worthy of mobilization. In fact the continuous administration of the non-Brahmin parties for more than a decade had not only helped to de-Brahminize the administration but it had also resulted in the emergence of a powerful non-Brahmin element at the grassroots level of the Congress itself in Tamil Nadu. The continued expansion of municipalities and local boards as also of educational and communication networks no doubt facilitated this process. As part of its strategy of broadening its base

[15] Kudi Arasu, 15.3.1931, 5.4.1931. Article on the Congress session "lauded the speech of the younger members of the Congress, Subhash Bose and Nehru and believed that their stand on the Congress programme implied dissatisfaction with Gandhis leadership. In fact the Congress programme adopted at Karachi was very similar to the views of the Self Respect movement on social and economic reforms and held this was precisely what Periyar had advocated to Gandhi as a Congress man in 1925.

of support the Self Respect movement on its part had evinced interest in those groups such as the working classes in Madras who were being mobilized by the Communists.¹⁶ This led to contacts between Periyar and Labour leaders like Singaravelu who sometimes expressed their views through the columns of the KUDI ARASU. It was probably this exposure to the problems of the working classes, to Marxist philosophy and Singaravelu's advice to the Self Respect movement that instead of concentrating exclusively on caste divisions and the eradication of social evils, the Self Respect movement should take up the larger issue of economic emancipation for which purpose it should devise a political programme.¹⁷

One of the basic doctrines of the Self Respect movement was that a social reform programme that aimed at a complete restructuring of society had to take primacy over the political struggle that had Swaraj as its objective. Political emancipation for the Indian people could come only from a position of strength and what exactly Periyar meant by this is clarified in the

[16] E. Saa Vishwanathan, The Political Career of E.V.R., P 116.

[17] Kudi Arasu, 1.11.1931.

KUDI ARASU. A country would be ripe for Swaraj only when the mass of people had acquired a sense of self respect. This was the mission that the Self Respect movement had set itself to and it could come about only when people developed the qualities of self-confidence and self-reliance. Such a transformation in the attitudes and the mentality of the people could come about irrespective of who ruled the country, Periyar asserted confidently.¹⁸ Hence the struggle of the oppressed - the non-Brahmins and the *Harijans* - to achieve equality with the Brahmins had to precede the political struggle for the ending of British rule. Once a social change on these lines came about it would be a far easier matter overcoming political problems for it would strengthen India on all fronts in such a manner that British rule would come to an end by itself. The Self Respect movement questioned the claim of Congressmen that social reform would follow Swaraj/Self Rule as a matter of course or that it had to emerge spontaneously out of its social context.

Periyar was particularly emphatic on the priority that the Self Respect movement gave to social transformation partly because it appears there were a

[18] Kudi Arasu, 25.5.1931.

large number of non-Brahmins (not simply Congressmen) who believed that Self Respectors should join hands with the Brahmins and strengthen the appeal of the national movement, bringing about Swaraj as a first step in the improvement of the conditions of the oppressed. Periyar warned however that this was a foolhardy step for the moment the British rule came to an end, Brahmin grip over the social, economic and political life of the country would strengthen further. Periyar always cautioned the non-Brahmins in the national movement that it was the Brahmins who had destroyed the self-respect of the non-Brahmins and they would do everything in their power to prevent them from recovering it, for the Brahmin control over the oppressed non-Brahmin masses was based on an extremely effective system that encompassed their social, political and cultural existence. Periyar in a rare statement of disapproval of the British held that ideally both Brahmin and British rule should disappear though strategy dictated that the non-Brahmins could not take on both, the British and the Brahmins together.¹⁹ Since British rule was the lesser of the two evils, it was better that the non-Brahmins do away with Brahmin rule as a first step.

[19] Kudi Arasu, 30.6.1929.

Many aspects of the Self Respect doctrines were based on Periyar's own understanding of the Brahmin character, and their role in religious and secular life and since Brahminism was the very foundation of the system that exploited the non-Brahmins, his views on every other issue followed a predictable course of logic and reasoning. It also gave his pronouncements that quality of finality and assertiveness that brooked no challenge at least within the ranks of the Self Respect movement. Opinions expressed by others were merely a variation of Periyar's own beliefs. Periyar's contempt for the non-Brahmin members of the Congress and his constant warning to them that they were members of the national organization on the sufferance of the Brahmins can be better comprehended against this background.²⁰ So also his assertion that his personal experience as a Congressman had opened his eyes to the deceitful nature of the Brahmin community and the ploys that they adopted to safeguard their supremacy.

Periyar was of the firm belief that the Brahmins encouraged factionalism within the Congress as a means of retaining their control but in the long run they

[20] Kudi Arasu, 26.5.1929.

harmed national unity. Of all the divisions and the cleavages that resulted due to the presence of such factions, the one between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins was the most serious. The Brahmins however dealt with it in their own typical way, generally by retaining the services of a senior Congressman from the north to mediate over such differences. Periyar decried the role played by such Congressmen in the affairs of the Tamil Nadu Congress on the grounds that north Indians simply did not comprehend the actual social conditions in Tamil Nadu, nor did they bother about probing into the historical reasons for the cultural and other differences between the Aryans and the Dravidians in Tamil Nadu.²¹ As early as 1931 Periyar voiced this feeling of an intense lack of appreciation on the part of the national leadership, of the unique social characteristics of the region and the fact that most north Indian leaders were content to readily accept the Brahmin version of the same. They were quite unable to perceive the distinct and the unique cultural identity of the non-Brahmins or the Dravidians. This was a feeling that was to intensify in the latter years so much so that in 1937 Periyar could state with complete conviction that Rajagopalachary, the Chief

[21] Kudi Arasu, 8.9.1929.

Minister, took his instructions regarding governance of the province from the all-India leadership that was largely Aryan/north Indian in composition and not on the wishes and the desires of the Tamils.²²

The vision of a larger national perspective, a concern with its problems including an intense commitment to the cause of the oppressed countrywide comes out very clearly in the KUDI ARASU, even during the period 1931-32 when the anti-Congress polemic of Periyar was at its peak. In the KUDI ARASU itself there is frank admission of the fact that there is no difference between the Self Respect movement and the national movement where the diagnosis of social evils confronting the country were concerned, the difference lay in the methods that each movement wished to adopt to overcome these.²³ In fact at one stage the Self Respect movement did believe that national problems of poverty, ignorance and backwardness could be solved if all "serious minded individuals including nationalists, Self Respectors and other reformers put their heads together to come out with practical solutions."²⁴

[22] E. Saa Vishwanathan, Op. cit., P. 191. '

[23] Kudi Arasu, 25.5.1931.

[24] Ibid., 16.6.1929.

Periyar was aware that the Congress had succeeded in articulating the aspirations of vast sections of the people through the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930. Within the Self Respect movement itself there was a group that expressed the desire to participate in it. When the Erode Conference of the Self Respect movement was held in May 1930 this group of Self Respectors wished to pass a resolution calling on the British government to free all the agitators arrested in the Civil Disobedience campaigns. This was fiercely criticized by Periyar on the grounds that the Self Respect movement being a social reform movement should not concern itself with political activities. The group nevertheless protested against this ruling of Periyar and walked out of the organization.²⁵ While it is difficult to say with any degree of certainty, it would be worthwhile keeping in mind that the scale of success of the Civil Disobedience movement also opened up to the Self Respectors the possibilities of mass mobilization. It may also have contributed to Periyar's interest in and a desire to expand the support base of the Self Respect movement amongst the proletariat in which direction the first steps had already been taken and also among the middle and lower middle classes in

[25] Mangala Murugesan, Op. cit., Pp. 100-101.

the smaller urban locations.

SELF RESPECT, GANDHI AND THE GANDHIAN PROGRAMME

Periyar's attitude to Gandhi and the Gandhian ideology presents us with a fascinating picture of the relations that existed between two dynamic personalities who shared many qualities. It also gives us some insights into two movements, the goals and objectives of which in some respects were similar but which developed in divergent directions. The gradual change that one detects in Periyar's stand on the Gandhian programme provides us with a key to understanding the various stages in the development of the Self Respect ideology. The Self Respect movement believed itself to be at the centre of the opposition to the ideology and programme of Gandhi that in turn was the main driving force and the source of inspiration for the national movement. Basically Periyar visualized the Self Respect doctrines and Gandhian ideals as standing at two poles, of dynamism and transformation on the one hand and maintenance of the status quo on the other.²⁶

[26] Kudi Arasu, 23.7.1933. The attack on Gandhi and Congress were particularly frequent and virulent in the period from 1932 onwards probably because of the tremendous response to the Civil Disobedience movement. Also Kudi Arasu, 12.4.1931.

Gandhian philosophy was merely a reflection of the more salient features of the Brahminical system and hence it lacked consistency and internal logic. Gandhi's main concern was to carry the social and the religious establishment along with him and this meant that apart from the Brahmins, the rich and the capitalists, the feudal classes and the western educated constituted his main support base.²⁷ Although Gandhi gave considerable priority to the upliftment of the *Harijans*, his approach to the problem was neither sincere nor correct for the entire programme was constructed within the framework provided by the Hindu religious and social order.²⁸ His espousal of the *Varna Ashrama Dharma* was a clear illustration of this and in his philosophy as was also the case with Tolstoy he used religion to contain the masses and prevent a social upheaval.²⁹

The entire Gandian programme revealed this dual approach. For instance, the much publicized Khaddar programme was not conceived of, as was commonly believed, to wipe out rural employment. Rather it

[27] Kudi Arasu, 10.1.1931, 17.1.1931.

[28] *Ibid.*, 7.8.1927.

[29] *Ibid.*, 30.7.1933.

acquired all the trappings of a commercial organization especially in Tamil Nadu, where it was merely a means of providing a livelihood to needy Brahmins. In fact Periyar had no hesitation in describing the entire national movement in such terms even as he claimed that Self Respectors were neither professional politicians nor in the business of social reform as a mean of earning one's living.³⁰ Economically Khaddar was far from a sound proposition, it cost much more than mill cloth to produce and in quality it was far inferior. It had however provided certain groups (in Tamil Nadu) such as the Khaddar traders of Tirupur with enormous profits and hence they were supporters of the Congress.³¹ When Gandhi found that the Indian mill-owners opposed his call for boycott of mill made cloth, he quietly revised his policy to exempt Indian mill made cloth from the Congress boycott programme. This was pointed out by Periyar as yet an example of the backpedalling that Gandhi indulged in every time he found that he was opposed by an influential section of Indian society.³²

[30] Kudi Arasu, 1.3.1931.

[31] Ibid., 10.1.1931, 17.1.1931.

[32] Ibid.,

Gandhi's schemes for the encouragement of rural industry and cottage industry was again derisively dismissed by Periyar as an attempt to obstruct the development and the progress of the country towards the goal of modernization.³³ The KUDI ARASU in numerous articles stated that Gandhi's plans for the economic regeneration of the country through a revival of traditional hand industry was of a piece with his views on religion and society. It was all meant to perpetuate existing conditions of backwardness if not to take India backward at a time when technology was advancing by leaps and bounds in the rest of the world and large scale mechanization was replacing manual labour.³⁴ Periyar was convinced that without the adoption of modern technology there could be no solution to the problem of employment and lack of industrialisation. Periyar and the Self Respect movement were convinced that every aspect of Gandhi's programme was prompted by ulterior motives. In this view the main reason behind the encouragement given by Gandhi to a revival of rural industry was his desire to perpetuate the caste system based as it was on a hereditary occupational structure. In fact Gandhi's espousal of basic education was also

[33] Kudi Arasu, 21.6.1931.

[34] Ibid, 18.1.1930.

believed to have been motivated by the same considerations.³⁵ His criticism of the materialist outlook that developed among people as a result of modernization and industrialization, his belief that the more advanced the technology, the more impersonal the human relationships were all regarded as the outcome of his obscurantist and conservative mentality and his intense desire to protect the status quo. Finally Gandhi opposed large-scale, organized factory production not because it made man a machine and dehumanized him but because it led to the unionization of labour giving rise to the fear that in demanding their rights the working classes could overturn the entire system.³⁶

For a person who made his political debut under Gandhian leadership and whose very political initiation was through Gandhian methods of agitation, Periyar was to come full circle and hold Gandhi responsible for the baneful effects of the Civil Disobedience Movement. He held it subversive of law and order and what was even more reprehensible was the growth of an attitude of defiance of authority and indiscipline in the minds of

[35] Revolt, 10.12.1933, quoted in Anaimuth (Ed.) Periyar Sinthangaigal.

[36] Ibid, 21.6.1931.

the people.³⁷ He failed to grasp the symbolic significance of the salt satyagraha describing it as yet one more instance of Gandhi's commitment to take India back to a primitive stage of development.³⁸ The Civil Disobedience campaigns, apart from resulting in suffering for the people hardly had any concrete achievements to its credit, a stand that was also responsible for the failure to appreciate the 1931 Gandhi-Irwin settlement and that it represented a moral victory for the forces of Indian nationalism.³⁹

The brunt of Periyar's criticism of the Gandhian philosophy and programme was directed against the concept of Ram Rajya, the very term as it were signifying to Periyar its religious and social character and yet more evidence of the fact that the entire Gandhian programme was inspired by the tenets of the Hindu religion. Here once again we can see how the prosaic and materialistic outlook of Periyar failed either deliberately or otherwise to glimpse the

[37] Kudi Arasu, 6.12.1931.

[38] Ibid., 22.2.1930. "Criticized the proposed Satyagraha, calling it a waste of time."

[39] Ibid., 1.3.1931. Believed that the agreement was the result of both Gandhi and the Viceroy desire to build up their image and for self glorification.

symbolic and emotional content of such concepts.

At a superficial level Periyar's arguments in favour of technology and industrialization as a mean of relieving unemployment and poverty resembles the stand of many nationalists. In reality, however, except that these observations indicate the strength of the influence of positivist philosophy on him, there is hardly any other evidence to show a deep understanding of economic problems. In fact as E. Saa Vishwanathan says, his theories about Brahminism being the source of all inequalities in society, it not only clouded his political vision, but it appears to have relegated major and current issues to the background as far as his philosophy and the Self Respect ideology were concerned.⁴⁰

THE SOCIALIST PHASE

From the period beginning December 1932 till about 1934 the ideology of the Self Respect movement clearly showed the influence of socialist principles following Periyar's successful tour of the Soviet Union and other European countries along with S. Ramanathan. To Periyar

[40] E. Saa Vishwanathan, Op. cit., Pp. 105-113.

it appeared that in the Soviet Union he found what he had been looking for; genuine equality among all human beings made possible by a true appreciation of the dignity of human labour.⁴¹ While Periyar returned to India greatly influenced by both the theory and practice of Soviet Communism his colleague S. Ramanathan foresaw numerous difficulties in the application of socialist principles to a traditional society like India.⁴²

The impact of socialism was almost immediately apparent on the Self Respect movement. Periyar encouraged the use of word "thozar" or comrade as the usual form of address among Self Respectors including women.⁴³ In fact Periyar wished to change the character of the movement on socialist lines as otherwise he perceived that the influence of the non-Brahmins in politics would wane. It is not clear whether he felt so because of the rapidly declining popularity of the Justice Party which had failed to create a mass base or whether it was due to the rising

[41] Mangala Murugesan, *Op. cit.*, P 106.

[42] *Ibid.*, P 110.

[43] *Ibid.*, P 107.

attraction of the Congress which appeared to have successfully articulate the increasing anti-imperialist feelings of the common people through the Civil Disobedience movement. In all likelihood it was the latter for the KUDI ARASU candidly admits that the Civil Disobedience campaigns had caught the imagination of the people.

The Russian experience permitted Periyar's initial foray into theoretical communism on the basis of which a new plan of action for the Self Respect movement was chalked out. Known as the Erode programme (December 1932) it was drawn up with the help of Singaravelu and it had the enthusiastic support of some Self Respectors such as Rathnasabapathy and S.A. Raghavan.⁴⁴ Ramanathan however refused to cooperate in this venture though the Erode programme itself was significant for the well defined socialist orientation that was given to the goals and the objectives of the Self Respect movement. For the first time, the importance and primacy of economic factors in any meaningful transformation of society was emphasized which in turn enabled that concern with the problems of the under-privileged to be

[44] Mangala Murugesan, Op. cit., P 109.

spelt out in clear terms. Hence the Erode programme was a much more radical and comprehensive exposition of the Self Respect ideology, in fact the first definite statement of the same.⁴⁵

The Erode programme envisaged the formation of two wings within the Self Respect movement - the Self Respect League and the Self Respect Samadharma Party of South India, the former continuing with social reform and the latter stepping forth boldly into the political arena.⁴⁶ Singaravelu's advice had at last found its mark. Many of the Self Respectors felt "that only a mass movement with a radical programme like the Self Respect movement could take up the challenge of the Brahmin dominated Congress".⁴⁷ Ramanathan, Chidambaranar and some other objected to political involvement because they felt it would dilute the basically social reform thrust of the Self Respect movement. In addition, Ramanathan warned that the introduction of socialistic principles especially that pertaining to private property would alienate large

[45] Mangala Murugesan, Op. cit., Appdx.

[46] Ibid., P 109.

[47] Ibid., P 110.

sections in a country wedded to traditional beliefs.⁴⁸ Whether Ramanathan was merely echoing the views of the propertied classes or whether he was implying that radical programmes which included the atheistic principles that the Self Respect movement propagated had their limitations, it is difficult to say. E. Saa. Vishwanathan avers that "the atheistic image was one of the main reasons for Periyar's limited success even in the social sphere".⁴⁹ Periyar's reply to Ramanathan is worthy of note in that he believed that since the movement was a mass organization, its programme whether social, political or economic had to be oriented towards the majority of the people and not to a privileged few.

In its new socialist incarnation the Self Respect movement displayed tremendous admiration for the Russian Revolution reflected in the number of articles published about conditions in that country in the KUDI ARASU and numerous other weeklies whose names betray their leftist leanings - Puratchi, Vedigunduer. Puratchi for example stated emphatically that all

[48] Mangala Murugesan, Op. cit., P 110.

[49] E. Saa. Vishwanathan, Op. cit., P 105

all capitalists must be destroyed and everyone including women must live in a state of equality. It was during this period that Periyar and the Self Respect movement caught the attention of the British government which put hurdles in the publication of the KUDI ARASU. In fact in 1933 Periyar was forced to serve a term of imprisonment and following his release in 1934 he issued a statement that was regarded by many as a retreat from his radical socialist stand.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE BRITISH AND THE JUSTICE PARTY

Immediately after his exit from the Congress in November 1925, (he was to resign his formal membership a year later) Periyar's political outlook underwent a change from the radicalism of the Congress variety to a stance that was more in keeping with the political liberalism of the moderates outside the Congress. Basically, this implied belief in gradual political change and it was an integral element in the non-Brahmin Manifesto released by the South Indian Liberal Federation (Justice Party) in 1917. This development clearly showed how Periyar was "aligning his creed unofficially with that of the Justice Party"⁵⁰ The

[50] Mangala Murugesan, Op. cit., P 70.

immediate outcome of such a change in outlook was that Periyar now advised voters through the KUDI ARASU to vote for competent candidates by which he presumably meant non-Brahmins who would sacrifice their personal interest for the larger non-Brahmin cause.⁵¹ This sudden volte-face was the result of his convictions that the Brahmins were the protagonists of that system which reduced the non-Brahmins to a downtrodden state.

Periyar and later the Self Respect movement adopted the stand of many backward caste organizations of looking upto the government for special support in the form of reservations in employment and separate electoral representation.⁵² Periyar's new attitude towards the government echoed the views of the Justice Party that only the British government could hold the scales even between the various communities in India.⁵³ As a matter of self-interest, therefore, the ideology of the movement advocated a loyalist attitude towards the British.

[51] Mangala Murugesan, Op. cit., P. 71.

[52] E. Irschick, Political and Social Conflict - Introduction.

[53] Ibid., Pp 47-48.

Self-interest was further strengthened by considerations of tactics and political strategy. Periyar often asserted that British rule in India was the result of collaborative effort between them and the Brahmins.⁵⁴ Articulating the new communal approach Periyar accused the Brahmins of not only assisting the British but all foreign invaders to establish their political control over the country in return for the all important privilege of the rulers maintaining a position of neutrality on all religious and social matters of the subject population. This was the manner in which the Brahminical system entrenched itself in the social religious and cultural life of the country. As evidence he pointed out to the early phase of the Congress activities in which it swore loyalty to the British claiming that the attitude of the Brahmins who constituted the Congress changed only when the non-Brahmins became educated and started demanding their share of government employment and political privileges. While it would be an ideal situation if both Brahmin and British rule could be done away with simultaneously, the combination was far too powerful for the non-Brahmins to struggle against.⁵⁵ But these

[54] Kudi Arasu, 30.6.1929.

[55] Ibid., 30.6.1929.

tentative anti-imperialist tendencies were almost immediately modified to a bland assertion that Brahmin rule being the greater of the two evils had to be destroyed first.⁵⁶

The feelings of loyalty that the Self Respect movement displayed can also be explained by appreciation of what were regarded as positive contributions of the British towards the welfare of the non-Brahmins and the Scheduled castes. The Communal GOs that the British had enacted even in the previous century were highlighted as attempts to give the non-Brahmins their due in government employment but all these actions had failed in their objective largely through the trickery of the Brahmins. Periyar repeatedly cautioned the Scheduled castes from falling into the nationalist trap, telling them that the claims of the Congress regarding Harijan upliftment were all hollow, for no one who believed in the spirit of the *Varnashrama Dharma* could bring about true emancipation of the Depressed classes.⁵⁷ To strengthen his case Periyar pointed out as evidence the McDonald Award, that conferred the privilege of separate electorates on

[56] Kudi Arasu.

[57] Ibid., 11.1.1930.

the *Harijans*, Gandhi's subsequent fast and the nullification of this positive gesture on the part of the British by Ambedkar's acceptance of the Poona Pact.⁵⁸ Where the non-Brahmins were concerned he similarly warned them that had it not been for the intervention of British rule (to a lesser extent also Muslim rule) all of them would have been reduced to the status of outcastes or *Panchamas*. The Brahmins did not want to share even the minimum of their privileges with the intermediate non-Brahmin castes. Periyar was convinced that without the help of the British Government any social, reform legislation was impossible to pass through the legislature.⁵⁹ Periyar was to go even further in this regard and to remark that true social reform and a transformation of society could come about only through the rule of a dictator who could ruthlessly impose his will.⁶⁰ This was clearly revealing of the authoritarian cast of his mind

[58] Kudi Arasu, 13.10.1935.

[59] Ibid., 29.9.29. The reference was to the Sarda Act that had been hanging fire for the last twenty years due to opposition from Brahmins and nationalists.

[60] Ibid., 9.12.1928. The destructive work that Periyar often referred to could come about only in this way and a "brave new world" created.

and the direction in which the Self Respect ideology and programme were moving, towards a regimented system, directed from above leading to a well ordered change in which the mass of people living in an uncivilized state as in the ages of the 'Kural' would be prodded into changing their attitude. Such an outlook would naturally emphasize with a system based on an imperialist ideology. That aspect of Periyar's character reflected in the form of deeply felt commitment for improvement of the conditions of the underprivileged as a whole contrasts sharply with his contempt for individual rights and for democratic forms of government best expressed in Periyar's own words, "what this country needs is good rule, not necessarily self-rule."⁶¹

At the practical level such an attitude resulted in a relationship of cooperation and sometimes of uncritical support to the British illustrated by the stand adopted by Periyar on the Simon Commission. He reduced it to a Brahmin-versus non-Brahmin issue and justified its all-white composition on the grounds of it being a parliamentary body.⁶² E. Saa. Vishwanathan

[61] Viduthalai, 19.1.48 in Anaimuthu (Ed.) Periyar Sinthanaigal.

[62] Kudi Arasu, 27.11.1927.

notes that apart from this largely pro-British attitude (and conversely carping criticism of the Congress) neither Periyar nor the Self Respect movement showed any true appreciation, of the major political issues of the day.⁶³ There were no debates or discussions in the KUDI ARASU regarding the proposals and the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee that was formally proclaimed later as the Government of India Act, 1935, Periyar's political understanding was "nebulous" influenced as it was by his openly communal approach.⁶⁴ His belief that Congress represented the forces of Brahminical hegemony, of obscurantism, of the perpetuation of age old and backward traditions and above all that it was a commercialized organization meant to provide a livelihood to Brahmins who called themselves nationalists prevented him from judging issues on their merit. This complete neglect of major political developments of the day except insofar as they provided opportunities for a political war of words with the Congress also extended to KUDI ARASU's coverage of international events. Except for highlighting certain aspects of the Russian achievement the newspaper mainly confined itself to small town news

[63] E. Saa. Vishwanathan, Op. cit., Pp. 107-113.

[64] Ibid., P. 144.

reporting concentrating on meetings of Brahmanical associations and *Astiga Sangams* with the idea of putting across to readers the true nature of the threat that the social reform movement faced from the traditionalists. Needless to say the opposition to the British during the socialist phase proved shortlived and unsustainable in the face of the government's determined efforts to put an end to all communist propaganda.

In 1934 when Periyar was released from imprisonment, his statement of the aims of the movement indicated a retreat to a somewhat moderate stand politically in which social reform once again occupied the area of major concern. In actual fact, in the fast changing political scenario, there were two events which forced the Self Respect movement to come forward and take a stand on political issues that was bound to have momentous consequences for the very future of the movement.

The Government of India Act 1935 promised devolution of powers into Indian hands on a scale never thought possible before. The second important development that the Self Respect movement had to contend with was the continuing decline of the Justice

Party, due to its organizational drawbacks, leadership struggles and above all its ideological weaknesses. In a way these opened up new possibilities for the Self Respect movement despite Periyar's avowed objective that his movement would never transform itself into a political organization. The 1935 elections to the Central Legislative Assembly provided further opportunities for the Tamils and the Self Respectors within the Justice Party to assert themselves. The Rajah of Bobbili, the Justice leader though from Andhra had to depend entirely on the Self Respectors to build up the propaganda arm of the party, non-existent from the beginning but a matter of utmost importance in this period of the run-up to the local and the provincial elections.⁶⁵ In Tamil Nadu all the major Justice leaders including P.T. Rajan and A. Ramaswamy Mudaliar were forced to rely on Self Respect volunteers for their electioneering. This provided opportunities to the younger members of the movement such as C.N. Annadurai not only to familiarize themselves with political problems but the very process of participation in an election campaign meant that even a programme of social reform had to be couched and put

[65] E. Saa. Vishwanathan, Op. cit., P. 161.

forward in a political language. It had to be made intelligible in terms of what precisely it would signify when translated into laws and administrative regulations. The constituencies to which these messages were addressed were far more diversified and they also provided at the same time new groups that could be effectively mobilized. These were possibilities and opportunities that were beginning to open up to the Self Respect movement and it gained momentum from 1935 when the elections to the local bodies were held where the electorate was far more representative of the middle classes. The 1937 elections to the new and enlarged provincial assemblies however were crucial for it brought about a transformation in the very character of the Self Respect movement. This election was significant, for the Congress was now back in the electoral game but above all it saw the complete rout of the Justice Party and the sweeping victory of the Congress in the provincial election. Where exactly did the Self Respect Movement stand in this new unfolding situation, what were the implications for its ideology and for the future course of its development?⁶⁶

[66] E. Saa. Vishwanathan, Op. cit., P 162. "Periyar's entry into the Justice Party helped his emergence as a political force in the province."

A better understanding of the significance of the alliance between the Self Respectors and the Justice Party will help explain some of the developments of the period 1937 and latter. It might appear odd that the Self Respect Movement that had succeeded in attracting the attention of much wider groups of people should have identified its political future with that of the Justice Party. It however becomes intelligible when one probes the attitude of the Self Respect movement to the question of reservations and communal electorates for this would help explain the symbiotic nature of the relationship between the two organization.

STAND ON COMMUNAL ELECTORATES
AND POLICY OF RESERVATIONS.

When Munuswamy Naidu assumed leadership of the Justice Party and decided to throw open its membership to the Brahmins he was resolutely opposed by the Tamil wing of the party consisting mainly of Self Respectors and by Periyar who was managing the party newspaper, Dravidan. Periyar believed that this was positively suicidal for the Justice Party especially at a time when it enjoyed widespread popular support illustrated by the number of municipalities and local boards that it controlled. When the Madras Legislature presented a memorandum on the forthcoming political reforms for the

consideration of the Parliamentary Committee Periyar and the KUDI ARASU clamoured that the special privileges for the non-Brahmins must be maintained at a time when many felt that separate electorates for the community could be abolished. Periyar however held that it was a necessity as long as the non-Brahmin membership of these bodies was not proportionate to their population strength. Moreover he pointed out that the Brahmin representation in the public services continued to be overwhelming and on these views he had the full support of the Tamil membership and the conservative element within the Justice Party. The common identity of views between the two groups, that mere attainment of political power by the non-Brahmins in itself was not enough, was the factor that made for their close relationship. Periyar was convinced that the social reform programme of the Self Respect movement would succeed only when all vestiges of Brahminism, not simply in the political and administrative field but in all other spheres was completely destroyed. Excluding the Brahmins from public service was a small but vital step in this direction in which the Justice Party had played a pioneering role.⁶⁷ For the Movement to sustain its

[67] Kudi Arasu, 12.5.36, 29.4.36.

programme and progress, this had to be a continuous process.

Periyar was often asked in public meetings and by readers of the KUDI ARASU as to why he supported retention of caste as a category in political life and administration when his movement had launched a crusade for the abolition of caste. His reply was characteristic in that he maintained that in a country where caste played such an important role it could not be simply excluded from calculation in any programme of reform and progress.⁶⁸ Caste provided readymade blocks as it were through which an entire community could be mobilized. No doubt this view was fortified by experience, for in the 20th century there were a number of caste organizations and associations through which individual caste groups were striving for upward mobilization. Periyar said that since the British relied so much on caste, the very fact that it was one of the constituent elements in the census surveys were all indicative of its importance and utility. Finally he asserted that the very essence of progress in the Indian context was the advancement of individual castes and communities for which purpose they should have the

[68] Kudi Arasu, 11.10.1931.

privilege of job reservations and separate electorates as warranted by their population figures . The belief in this theory of the utility of castes in no way militated against his general attempts to unite the mass of non-Brahmins into a solid cohesive group, for in his view there were basically three divisions within Indian society, the Brahmins at the top, a miniscule minority but constituting the oppressors of the non-Brahmins who represented more than ninety per cent of the population including within their ranks not only the *Harijans* but also Muslims and Indian Christians. Periyar was aware that *Harijans* were exploited equally if not more by the upper caste non-Brahmins and hence his sincere advice especially to the upper caste non-Brahmins that it was not simply enough claiming equality with the Brahmins but he also pleaded for the need to develop an outlook that was capable of accepting the *Harijans* as equals. He repeatedly stressed that the divisions amongst the non-Brahmin castes were not of significance for they were based on the pattern of division that the Brahmins had introduced into Tamil society. The real division was between Brahmins and Non-Brahmins and once this was ended the first step towards an egalitarian society would have been achieved.

STAND ON HARIJAN UPLIFTMENT

Even as Periyar emphasized the character of the non-Brahmin communities as a homogeneous block,⁶⁹ he stressed to the *Harijans* the importance of developing a sense of solidarity amongst themselves. In this respect he pointed out to the characteristics of the Muslims, the intense feelings of unity and brotherhood that existed amongst them and which gave them a sense of self-respect and self-esteem. It was responsible for their assertiveness and militancy which in turn gave them enormous political clout for the Congress was much more accommodating in their case. He advised the *Harijans* that efforts for their upliftment would finally have to come from within their community but he also warned them at the same time against vesting leadership in the educated sections of their community.⁷⁰ The educated, Periyar feared, tended to be opportunistic in outlook, they had a tendency towards factionalism and above all they committed the ultimate crime of introducing political ideologies into a social reform movement. It is difficult to say whether this outlook of Periyar was the result of his

[69] Kudi Arasu, 30.10.1927.

[70] Kudi Arasu, 30.6.1929.

Congress experience or whether it arose out of his observation that the backward classes and the *Harijans* were attracted by the secular and anti-imperialist ideology of the national movement once they attained the minimum educational levels. One can only speculate in like manner that suspicion of the educated was the logical outcome of the overwhelming Brahmin dominance of the political field in Tamil Nadu, or that it stemmed from a certain sense of inferiority due to his own low levels in formal education especially when contrasted with a large number of the younger generation of educated Self Respectors.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE SELF RESPECT MOVEMENT

Even when Periyar devoted himself full time to campaigning for the Justice Party from the later half of 1936, his election speeches were full of references to the pioneering work of the Self Respect movement in the field of social reform, to cataloguing the achievements of the movement in that field and focussing on the utmost necessity of voting the Justice Party to power so that the momentum of social reform could be maintained and its achievements stabilized and strengthened . A little later the younger generation of Self Respectors especially Annadurai however referred

to the inevitability of political involvement at a time when the movement was literally at the cross roads.⁷¹ The quality of Annadurai's speeches and writing differ from Periyar not only in the use of a powerful form of Tamil but also in the use of flowery expressions that did not quite convey the message of social reform in the same direct and brutally frank manner as Periyar. Periyar had no use for the diplomatic niceties of language, in fact he positively hurt the sensitivities of the Tamils by berating them for their backward outlook and for totally lacking in self respect. Annadurai also stressed the need to support the Justice Party to defeat Gandhism and nationalism which was merely religion in another garb.⁷² Annadurai asserted that to crush this new form of religion in politics the Self Respect movement would have to wage a war on two fronts, on the social reform as well as the political fronts.

[71] Kudi Arasu, 12.12.1937. C.N. Annadurai was elected leader of the Namakkal Taluka Conference of the Self Respect movement where he clearly stated the importance of supporting the Justice Party.

[72] Ibid.

As the Self Respect movement and Periyar were drawn into politics in a big way, for they literally took over as campaign managers of the Justice Party during the 1937 elections, Self Respectors tried skillfully to underplay the declining momentum that had occurred in the movement's crusade for social reform.⁷³ Now social reform objectives became fused with political objectives which in this case consisted of a single point programme of defeating the Congress and facilitating the victory of the Justice Party. Periyar openly admitted that the objective of the Self Respect movement and the Justice Party were one and the same. Other Self Respectors described politics itself in terms of the attainment of social reform objectives, the most important of which was the eradication of caste divisions. Periyar believed that since this goal implied the destruction of Brahminism which could be brought about through a system of affirmative action for backward communities in the form of job reservations and separate electorates, the Self Respect movement supported the Justice Party which had already

[73] Kudi Arasu, 21.11.37. Address at Salem District Self Respect Conference, addressed by Kunjitham Guruswamy one of the leading woman members and belonging to the younger generation of the membership.

achieved a great deal in this regard.⁷⁴ To work in close association with the Justice Party and ensure the defeat of the Congress had become the objective of the Self Respect movement. Furthermore since the achievement of social equality was the ultimate goal irrespective of whether it was under British rule or otherwise, the Self Respect movement would support any government including a dictatorial form of government.⁷⁵ It is in this connection that a number of references to Germany under Nazi rule were made, all highly appreciative of what Hitler had achieved for the German people which was to improve its standing in the community of nations. Nazi atrocities against the Jews were condoned indirectly. The Self Respect movement in turn was described as having been initiated to avert such terrible happenings by destroying Brahminism but unfortunately the Brahmins were unwilling to change their outlook towards the non-Brahmins.

[74] Kudi Arasu, 14.11.1937.

[75] Ibid., 21.11.1937. Kunjitham Guruswamy advocated the same treatment to the Brahmins as Hitler had dealt to the Jews except that her suggestions were milder. "Brahmins should be driven into the forest to seek Sanyas."

Upto 1935 Periyar continued to give open expression to his admiration for socialism notwithstanding the imprisonment that he suffered, the hurdles that the government put in the publication of his newspapers and the conciliatory statement that he had to issue partly to allay British suspicions. In the period 1936-37 however socialism took the back seat or it is understood and articulated in a manner in which much of its original meaning was lost. The year 1935 saw a considerable exodus from the Self Respect movement, of leftist radicals like Jeevanandam and also individuals like S. Ramanathan who joined the Congress in protest against the cooperation and association with the Justice Party. Periyar was aware of the tremendous attraction that the Congress had for the younger generation and the radicals and while he continued to criticize the Congress he also sometimes adopted the paradoxical stand that there was really no difference in the position between the Congress and the Self Respect movement on social reform. Sometimes he encouraged Self Respectors to adopt the same methods of agitation as the Congress.⁷⁶ The Self Respect movement was aware that within the Congress itself the socialist group of Nehru and Bose were admired by many Self

[76] Kudi Arasu, 5.12.37, 12.12.37.

Respectors but Periyar underplayed the significance of socialist principles of economic equality claiming that even if it was brought about by law it could hardly survive in the absence of social equality. Social equality itself was interpreted in terms of reservations and separate electorates, the ingenious explanation being that the division of jobs on the basis of community, amounted to the division of the wealth of the country on an equal and fair basis.⁷⁷ To support his stand he maintained that the number of Brahmins in the public services and in elective positions had declined only after this policy had been implemented by the Justice Party. Periyar now claimed that it had never been the intention of the Self Respect Movement to destroy rich people for the result of such actions would be that they were likely to join the Congress and strengthen it. Hence it was important that the Self Respect movement also cultivate them. It was believed that a socialist society would be impossible to achieve without first eradicating Brahminism.

Issues such as socialism and religion had proved potentially divisive. One thus finds a retreat on all

[77] Kudi Arasu, 12.5.1936.

these fronts from a rather rigid stand to purely original interpretation of it by Periyar. This was the only way that the wealthy landlords and merchants within the Justice Party could be won over to the Self Respect cause. The perspective of the Self Respect movement itself had broadened as a concerted drive was made to recruit new groups and communities. Where religion was concerned, Hinduism in particular continued to be the target of intemperate attack but the *Harijans* were advised that Islam was the answer to their problems. In this period when Periyar was often bitterly criticized by his former followers for compromising on social reform for political rewards he continued to assert that the aim of the Self Respect movement continued to be liberation from Brahminism for the Dravidians, escape for the poor from the exploitation of the wealthy and also freedom from government control for the people but the priorities keep shifting with the twists and turns in the political situation.⁷⁸ This was one of the clearest statements of Periyar indicating the nature of the political involvement of the Self Respect movement and it showed the extent to which the ideology had descended from the level of the doctrinaire radicalism

[78] Kudi Arasu, 29.3.1936.

of the previous years. The shift on religion was inevitable, from a hard line to a soft approach given the desire of the movement to broaden its membership and appeal at a period when the Congress was clearly in the ascendant. What E. Saa Vishwanathan says about the limited success of the Self Respect movement because of the strident advocacy of atheism was yet another factor in this shift in ideology.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

Any evaluation of the impact of the Self Respect movement on Tamil society is best done by studying the self-perceptions of its leaders and followers. This procedure has the added virtue of clarifying much that has already been said about the ideology, the goals and the programme of the movement. Opinions regarding the impact of the movement, in the sense of what it had achieved, were expressed in the KUDI ARASU within a few years of the movement's inception. In fact the KUDI ARASU itself claimed that not only has it said what it feels with great frankness and without fear but also instead of taking the lead from its readers, it has created a following for itself and the principles for which it stands. In this manner it has brought about a revolutionary spirit and a fundamental change in the attitude of the people.¹

The convening of the first provincial level Self Respect Conference at Chinglepet in February 1929 provided the occasion for much introspection and for taking stock of achievements especially in view of the importance of chalking out long term programmes and

[1] Kudi Arasu, 16.5.1936.

goals. What was sharply brought into focus as a result of these exercises was the unique character of the movement, in the sense of it being one of a kind, with a programme which allowed it to engage itself in really "destructive work" so as to evolve a progressive society. Not simply the goals, but the very methods were remarkable, it was suggested, considering the obstacles put in the path of social reform by the Brahmins and other reactionaries. In this respect the observation of Periyar to the effect that the Self Respect movement was popular because of the unrelenting Brahmin attempts to destroy it is quite revealing.²

What were the unique achievements that the movement believed it had to its credit? For one it had made people aware of the social realities of their existence and it had impressed on them the need to bring about changes in their conditions if they were to realize fulfillment as human beings. Moreover this awareness it was believed, had become an integral part of their consciousness so much so that even if Periyar was not around to guide and lead the movement the momentum of its activities would yet continue.³ People

[2] Kudi Arasu, 10.8.1930

[3] Ibid., 2.12.1929, 16.12.1928.

had learnt to think for themselves, to ask questions and to fully utilize their rational faculties as a result of which they no longer accepted everything told to them by the religious and social establishment - the Brahmins - on the grounds that it was sanctioned by religion and tradition. They had shown their ability to rise above their condition that had been one "worse than that of cattle and pigs". Honour, pride and above all a sense of self-respect, the qualities needed for a society and nation to progress and become ready for Swaraj were all instilled by the Self Respect movement.⁴ In fact this was believed to be the very premise for the political struggle that would culminate in independence and hence the Self Respectors were the true nationalists.⁵

The change in the attitude and outlook of the people that created a rebellious spirit was by implication considered far more important than practical social reform. Here the contrast between the Satya Shodak movement of Jyotiba Phule and the Self Respect movement becomes obvious. Phule's ideology, though it did not involve an outright rejection of

[4] Kudi Arasu, 19.12.1937.

[5] Ibid., 7.11.1937.

religion was radical and yet descended to the level of practical implementation of reformist objectives such as the opening of widow's homes and schools. In contrast the record of the Self Respect movement in this regard was blank and the movement in fact displayed some hostility towards the educated classes.⁶ We have the paradoxical situation in which Periyar exhorted the people to pay attention to education and the movement demanded that the enormous funds at the disposal of the temples and religious institutions should be utilized for that purpose and yet at the same time *Harijans* were repeatedly warned against dependence on the educated of their community to provide the necessary leadership.⁷

The reasons for downgrading the importance of the educated could be various. To Periyar, the archetype of the educated was the Brahmin Congressman and it could very well have developed out of a sense of inferiority on the part of Periyar over his lack of education. The rationalism that he talked about, it may be noted, was more in the nature of a robust commonsense, a pragmatism conditioned by the visible facts of material

[6] Kudi Arasu, 30.6.1929, 24.5.1931.

[7] *Ibid.*,

existence, and the attempts of the movement to broaden the base of its support to include newly urbanizing groups and castes who very often perceived the educated in the role of upper caste exploiters could have been the other factor in the negative perception of the educated. The Self Respectors were aware that they had antagonized the educated especially in the context of the movement's sweeping attacks on religion and culture.⁸ In place of the emphasis on education which could only have a gradual and slow effect on moulding public opinion, the movement channelized its efforts in the direction of agitation and an intensive propaganda to create a deep polarity between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins. The efforts to unite the non-Brahmins and the *Harijans* by emphasizing their common Dravidian ancestry, in contrast to the Brahmins and their Aryan background, were all motivated by the same factors.

Our understanding of the effect that the movement had on Tamil society would be incomplete without taking into account also what others had to say about it. People opposed to the Self Respect ideology charged the movement with inciting communal hatred.⁹ They wondered

[8] Kudi Arasu, 9.11.1930.

[9] Ibid., 30.7.1929.

how a movement, that had as its principal aim the removal of caste divisions and inequalities, could support such an unprogressive and backward policy of caste based job reservations and communal electorates.¹⁰ The answer that Periyar gave was that in a country where the entire social fabric was determined by caste, its importance could simply not be ignored and secondly he believed that his movement made a distinction between caste based reservations that ensured to each group and community a share in the privileges of office commensurate with its numbers and on the other a community that believed in monopolizing and arrogating to itself all offices.

When the Self Respect movement was charged with indiscriminately attacking and undermining the foundations of traditional culture and values, there were many educated non-Brahmins who defended it on the grounds that its criticism should not be taken literally. Rather as A. Ramaswamy Mudaliar, a prominent Justicite and Self Respector put it, "the leaders of the Self Respect movement have done their task, they have increased the literature over temple worship and

[10] Dravida Nadu, 30.5.1936, Quoted in Anaimuthu (Ed.), Periyar Sinthanaigal.

temple entry, they have driven you to examine the whole position, they have made you realize that your religious system needs examination and while you were sleeping that need had risen. If need be even to combat Self Respect propaganda you should come forward with your facts about the religious and social system. That I believe has been the result of their activities."¹¹

Periyar himself was quick to respond to many of the contradictory aspects of the programme of the Self Respect movement. A case in point concerned the temple entry programme that the movement took up to secure for the *Harijans* the privilege of entering and offering worship in all the Hindu temples. Periyar took some trouble to clarify that this privilege in itself had no positive benefits for the *Harijans* considering that the temples were the visible symbols of that blind faith and superstitious beliefs that constituted Hinduism. The movement insisted on the right of temple entry as a symbolic gesture for temples were at the forefront of enforcing the laws of pollution and purity. A blow at this amounted to a blow at the very foundations of the

[11] Mangala Murugesan, Op. cit., Pp. 94-95.

Hindu social and religious order.¹²

These differing perceptions of the impact of the movement followed from the divergent ideas of what Brahminism, that constituted the core of the Self Respect ideology, signified to various groups and communities. Where the Brahmins were concerned the situation was straightforward in that they owed their dominant position in society to the fact that it was upheld by a religious value system about the legitimacy of which they had no doubt and hence they embodied the qualities of excellence. The upper caste non-Brahmins contested this claim of the Brahmins, for the spread of Western education, the opportunities provided by British rule showed that there was an alternative route to social preferment and status. At the same time the diffusion of modern education provided them with an ideological weapon in the form of a revived Dravidian culture that effectively countered Brahmin or Aryan claims to cultural supremacy.

For the lower non-Brahmin castes, Brahminical symbols were rather remote and meaningless especially in the social context of Tamil Nadu and hence they

[12] Kudi Arasu, 27.10.1929.

could not be expected to react sharply to the denigration of Puranic Hinduism. In fact there was possibly some link between the atheism propagated by Periyar and such an outlook. In Tamil Nadu the gulf between the 'Great Tradition' or the State level culture represented by classical Hinduism, Sanskrit learning and the *varna* system on the one hand and the 'Little Tradition' symbolized by numerous local cults and folk level religious practices was particularly wide.¹³ In North India Brahminical symbols and popular Hinduism with all its attendant institutions had struck much deeper roots. The atheism of the Self Respect ideology may have made meaning for the backward castes in that it amounted to the rejection of a social and cultural system in which they had no place and which in any case represented the forces of exploitation. Indeed it could be regarded as the defence of an autonomous way of life representing a continuity with the remotest Dravidian past.

A potentially vast support base existed for the Self Respect movement but in the absence of facts and figures it is impossible to state with certainty the

[13] Washbrook, The Emergence of Provincial Politics, Madras Presidency 1870-1920, Pp 13-16.

success that the movement had in mobilizing large backward caste groups in the rural areas. We have already seen how one of the areas of significant activity was amongst the *Harijans*. A concerted effort to woo the rural masses appears only from 1936 onwards but presumably the movement had already made some headway among the lower caste groups, probably those belonging to artisan and service castes who had migrated into the urban areas and also the lower middle classes presumably with some degree of vernacular education. This is clarified by the stand of some wealthy members of the Justice Party who were against too close an alliance with the Self Respect movement especially if the price that they had to pay for this alliance was the acceptance of the radical 'Erode Programme' of the movement. Their contention was that the constituency of the Self Respect movement could hardly provide voters for the Justice Party under the franchise arrangements of the Government of India Act 1935.¹⁴

The movement made definite inroads in the urban and semi urban areas by mobilizing caste groups through

[14] E. Saa. Vishwanathan, Op. cit., P. 162

their leaders even though the concerned groups may not have accepted every aspect of the ideology. In the southern districts the Nadar community was one of the major sources of support while in the northern districts such as North and South Arcot and Chinglepet, the Vanniars were attracted to the ideology. The weaving community of the Sengundars again concentrated in Chinglepet, Salem, Coimbatore and Madurai and whose caste association played a prominent role in raising community consciousness were also among the movement's supporters. In Tanjore the attraction of the Self Respect movement for the Adi Dravidas in particular should be traced to the extreme polarity and social division between high caste and Brahmin land owners on the one side and the landless labourers on the other, many of whom were bonded in status.¹⁵ Moreover, Tanjore was the very home of Brahminical culture and the upper caste non-Brahmin land owning gentry approximated very closely to those cultural and intellectual values.

It appears that despite its atheistic image being a factor in its limited success,¹⁶ the ideology of the

[15] E. Saa. Vishwanathan, Op. cit., Pp 85-90.

[16] Fortnightly, Government of Madras, July 1934, October, 1935.

movement apparently touched upon the social consciousness of large section of the population, though to emerge as a mass movement it had to change ideological direction. The first manifestation of this change in concrete terms was the alliance with the Justice Party but the earlier attempts at giving a socialist orientation to the movement in 1932 by the adoption of the Erode programme was important. It was no doubt inspired by the resurgence of the Congress especially after the Karachi session followed by the spectacular success of the Civil Disobedience movement. The toning down of atheism and the generally soft line on religion was again adopted with a view to winning the support of the Justice Party and other conservative communities such as the Muslims. The combined effect of all this was a considerable slackening of the reform drive of the movement, ultimately sealed by the complete involvement in the anti-Hindi agitation in 1938. Hindi provided a hated symbol against which could be rallied upper caste and lower caste non-Brahmins and Muslims and seen against the background of a Congress ministry which represented not only a revived Brahmin Raj but which also evoked a new demonology, the other element of which was the Aryan, North Indian link.

The decision of the Rajaji government to introduce the compulsory study of Hindi in middle schools was according to the directives of the all-India Congress, Rajaji was particularly keen that Tamils should study Hindi so that they did not loose out on jobs and positions as and when an all-India federation came into existence. The Chief Minister, however, did not explain the practical aspects of this policy and neither was he fully aware of the strong spirit of Tamil revivalism. He failed to realize that Hindi and the Devanagari script conjured up images of Sanskrit and Brahmin domination. It added to the feeling of dissatisfaction and uneasiness in the mind of the non-Brahmin communities, of the revival of Brahmin Raj, especially after the disproportionate representation given to the Brahmins in the Cabinet and the fact that they were entrusted with all the important portfolios. What Periyar had all along warned had actually come about. Non-Brahmins, apart from being unfamiliar with the Devanagari script, had yet to develop a vision that went beyond the realm of provincial politics to comprehend developments at an all-India level. Moreover the de-Brahminization of the Congress had also vernacularized politics and hence the suspicion of

Hindi was shared by many Congressmen as well.¹⁷ They were unable to explain the true position to their non-Brahmin compatriots. The opposition to Hindi in turn was matched by a corresponding glorification of the Tamil language and Tamil culture and the radical ideology of the Self Respect movement that had all along planted its vision firmly on the future found itself looking backwards into what was partly a mythical past.

Any concluding account of the Self Respect movement also cannot afford to ignore the fact that despite the radical content of the Self Respect ideology, it did not emphasize the democratic and individual rights of men. In contrast, the national movement believed that the essence of the political struggle against the British lay in the securing of civil liberties and the rights of every Indian in the economic, political and social and cultural field. The authoritarian inclinations of Periyar were evident in the manner in which he ran the movement as a one-man organization, his intolerance of dissidence and above all it was visible in the attitude in which the

[17] E. Saa. Vishwanathan, Op. cit., Pp. 191-195.

"for man in the abstract, it was man in society that Periyar seeks to make happy and contented. Individual men make little appeal to his philanthropy. He commiserated poverty but treats the poor with contempt. In spite of his reputed mind of a revolutionary, he scrupulously observed the code of conduct of the bourgeois and the rich. And again paradoxically he rings out the death-knell of the wealthy even as he respects the individual rich."¹⁸

[18] K.M. Balasubramanian, Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy,
P 44.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX - ITHE ERODE PROGRAMME

1. The attainment of complete independence from the British and other forms of capitalistic governments.
2. The cancellation of all national debt.
3. Public ownership of Railways, Banks, Shipping and other transport services, water and land.
4. Public ownership without compensation of all agricultural lands, forests, etc.
5. Cancellation of all private debts and other obligations incurred by workers and peasants.
6. Change of all native States into one common Indian federation under the rule of the workers and peasants of India.
7. Improving the life of the workers and peasants of the land by securing for them no more than seven hours labours, increased wages, State aid for the unemployed, health resorts, free libraries and other cultural facilities.
8. These shall form the main ideals of the Self Respect Party.

SELF RESPECT LEAGUE; SAMADHARMA PARTY OF SOUTH INDIA;
PROPOSALS PREAMBLE

OBJECTS:

- i) To obtain by constitutional means and methods the repeal of public utilities, for all harmful religious and caste practices and habits, and thereby free the masses from their degrading religious and caste superstitions and habits and improve their economic life.

APPENDIX-I(cont'd)

- ii) To obtain the adoption of adult suffrage for election of members to all the government, Legislative and Municipal bodies, local, provincial and central.
- iii) To obtain security of service and minimum wages to all workers in public and private utility services, such as factories, workshops, railways, shipping, transport, post and telegraph, etc.
- iv) To get for the landless workers and agricultural labourers working in cultivable lands, estates and water, a reasonable share in the produce of such lands, estates and water.
- v) To obtain State sanction for utilizing temple, church, mosque and religious funds and incomes for the education both literary and vocational, for sanitation and housing of the mass of population in the country and for the maintenance of destitute children and orphans.
- vi) To obtain the removal of all caste distinctions amongst all castes, sects and classes of the Indian community, by removing all caste titles from all public records and making such retention of caste titles a disability to hold any kind of public service.
- vii) To secure through State action, municipalization of housing, transport, milk and medical service and establishment of nurseries in Municipalities, Taluks, District Boards and Village unions.
- viii) To set up party candidates to the Legislative Councils, Taluk, district, village Boards and Unions and Panchayats to secure the aforesaid objects of the Party.
- ix) Party candidates pledged to the various objects of the Party will be elected for the various Legislative Councils, Taluk, District Boards and Village Unions.

APPENDIX-I(cont'd)

- x) These various measures, acts and reforms shall be obtained through all constitutional means and methods, such as Council entry and propaganda by means of lectures, discussions and discourses as well as through the press. Rules and regulations for party funds and organizations etc. will be made by the Provisional Committee of the Party called for the purpose.

SOME FIGURES RELATING TO EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT OF VARIOUS CASTES

CASTE OF HINDU MALE PUPILS; MADRAS PRESIDENCY; 1883-84

	BRAHMINS	VAISYAS	SUDRAS	OTHERS INCLUDING HARIJANS
COLLEGES	74.6	3.2	21.7	0.5
SECONDARY SCHOOLS	45.5	5.6	45.8	3.1
PRIMARY SCHOOLS	14.4	10.0	68.4	7.2

"Between 1876-86, 73% of all successful Hindu candidates in the degree exams were Brahmins."

"Between 1879-84, the number of college students doubled, the number of matriculates, i.e. candidates qualifying for entrance into the university from amongst the non-Brahmins increased by 67%. the corresponding figure for Brahmins was only 33%."

[All the non-Brahmin candidates who qualified in their matriculation examination, however, did not enter the university whereas probably more eligible Brahmin candidates did so in increasing the numbers from amongst them who acquired a degree.]

APPENDIX - II (cont'd)

LITERACY AND KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH BY CASTE AND COMMUNITY IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY - 1891

CASTE/COMMUNITY	TOTAL NO. OF MALES IN CASTE/COMMUNITY	PERCENTAGE ILLITERATE	NO. KNOWING ENGLISH	NO. OF LITERATE MALES AMONG WHOM ONE KNOWS ENGLISH
Deshesth Brahmins	16,036	-	2,290	-
Vadama Brahmins	68,170	18.99	4,184	10
Niyogi Brahmins	54,082	19.10	2,878	12
Tenkalai Brahmins	22,898	19.65	1,844	8
Vadakali Brahmins	32,080	19.98	2,342	8
Vaidiki Brahmins	56,778	24.69	1,674	19
All Brahmins	5,51,951	27.79	24,976	12
<u>NON-BRAHMINs</u>				
Kanakan	19,908	34.19	198	53
Karnam	26,800	42.34	200	59
Komati	144,223	39.54	549	126
Chetty	312,384	55.24	1,781	63
Vadugan	87,475	75.55	240	72
Baliga	352,604	79.88	4,545	12
Nayar	189,830	51.02	1,405	49
Vellala	1,043,426	72.78	9,514	22
Kapu/Reddi	1,222,546	90.55	1,291	67
Pariah	997,314	97.25	706	23

Anil Seal, Emergence of Indian Nationalism, P 108, Table 35.

HIGHER EDUCATION - 1890-91

NO. OF STUDENTS ATTENDING ARTS COLLEGES	European/ Eurasian	Native Christians	Muslims	Brahmins	Non-Brahmins	Others
3,200	38	244	46	2,208	658	6

In the year 1891, 7,002 students appeared at the Matriculation examination as against the year 1871 when only 1,358 students appeared.

S. Sreenivasaraghava Iyengar - Report on the progress of Madras Presidency during the last forty years of British rule (Published 1892) - Appendix D-2 CCCXI - CCCXV.

SOME FIGURES ON EMPLOYMENT

CASTE	PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION	POSTS WITH SLARIES OF RS.10 AND ABOVE	POSTS WITH SALARY BELOW RS.10	TOTAL
1. Brahmin	3.6	42.2	4.4	19.2
2. Other Hindus	87.9	36.5	67.7	55.4
3. Muslims	6.2	5.5	24.1	16.8
4. Native Christians	2.2	4.9	3.5	4.1
5. Europeans	0.1	10.9	0.3	4.5

GOVERNMENT SERVICES AND CASTES - 1881

K. Veeramani, The History of the Struggle for Communal and Social Justice in Tamil Nadu, P 5.

SALARY	NON- BRAHMINS	MUSLIMS	CHRISTIANS	BRAHMINS	OTHER	TOTAL
Rs. 50 - 99	52	8	18	128	2	208
Rs.100 - 299	18	1	7	78	6	110
Rs.300 - 499	3	-	2	8	-	13
Rs.500 and above	Nil	-	2	7	18	27

EMPLOYMENT FIGURES IN THE SUBORDINATE SERVICES

K. Veeramani, The Struggle for Social and Communal justice in Tamil Nadu, P 11.

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