

UNIT – II
SOCIAL THINKERS
RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY (1772 — 1833)

Introduction:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a great socio-religious reformer. He was born in a Brahmin family on 10th May, 1772 at Radhanagar, in Hoogly district of Bengal (now West Bengal). Ramakanto Roy was his father. His mother's name was Tarini. He was one of the key personalities of "Bengal Renaissance". He is known as the "**Father of Indian Renaissance**". He re-introduced the Vedic philosophies, particularly the Vedanta from the ancient Hindu texts of Upanishads. He made a successful attempt to modernize the Indian society.

Life

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy was born on **22 May 1772** in an orthodox Brahman family at **Radhanagar** in Bengal.
- Ram Mohan Roy's early education included the study of **Persian** and **Arabic** at Patna where he read the Quran, the works of Sufi mystic poets and the Arabic translation of the works of Plato and Aristotle. In Benaras, he studied **Sanskrit** and read Vedas and Upanishads.
- Returning to his village, at the age of sixteen, he wrote a **rational critique of Hindu idol worship**.
- From 1803 to 1814, he worked for East India Company as the **personal diwan** first of **Woodforde** and then of **Digby**.
- In 1814, he resigned from his job and moved to Calcutta in order to devote his life to religious, social and political reforms.
- In November 1830, he sailed for England to be present there to counteract the possible nullification of the Act banning **Sati**.
- Ram Mohan Roy was given the title of '**Raja**' by the titular Mughal Emperor of Delhi, **Akbar II** whose grievances the former was to present

before the British king. In his address, entitled '**Inaugurator of the Modern Age in India**,' Tagore referred to Ram Mohan as '**a luminous star in the firmament of Indian history**'.

Ideology

- Ram Mohan Roy was greatly influenced by western modern thought and stressed on rationalism and modern scientific approach.
- Ram Mohan Roy's immediate problematique was the **religious and social degeneration** of his native Bengal.
- He believed that **religious orthodoxies** have become causes of injury and detrimental to social life and sources of trouble and bewilderment to the people, instead of tending to the amelioration of the condition of society.
 - Raja Ram Mohan Roy concluded that religious reform is both **social reform** and **political modernisation**.
 - Ram Mohan believed that each sinner must make restitution for his sins and it is to be done through **self-purification** and **repentance** and not through sacrifices and rituals.
- He believed in **social equality** of all human beings and thus was a strong opposer of the caste system.
- Ram Mohan was attracted to **Islamic monotheism**. He said that monotheism is also the fundamental message of **Vedanta**.

His idea of single, unitarian god was a **corrective to the polytheism** of orthodox Hinduism and to **Christian trinitarianism**. He believed that monotheism supported one **universal model for humanity**.
- Raja Ram Mohan Roy believed that unless women were freed from unhuman forms of oppression like illiteracy, child marriage, sati, purdah, Hindu society can not progress.

He characterised sati as the **violation of every humane** and

social feeling and as symptomatic of the **moral debasement of a race.**

Contributions

Social reforms:

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy conceived reformist religious associations as instruments of social and political transformation.
He founded the **Atmiya Sabha** in 1815, the **Calcutta Unitarian Association** in 1821, and the **Brahmo Sabha** in 1828 which later became the **Brahmo Samaj.**
- He campaigned against the caste system, untouchability, superstitions and use of intoxicants.
- He was well known for his pioneering thought and action on the emancipation of women and especially on the **abolition of sati** and **widow remarriage.** He attacked **child marriage, illiteracy of women** and the degraded state of widows and demanded the right of inheritance and property for women.

Abolition of Sati custom:

Ram Mohan Roy was the man who boldly challenged evils like the Sati and caste systems. Rammohan Roy openly said that Sati system was more than murders according to all Shastra as well as to the common science of every nation. He protested against the Sati system inside and outside his home. Consequent upon this the orthodox community rose up in protest and social boycott was organized against him. His life was threatened. It goes to his credit that he proposed to the Government of his times to legally abolish Sati which was a curse on the fair name of Hindu society. At that time the papers like "Samachar Darpan", 'Sambad Kaumudi', 'Bengal Harkara', 'Indian Gazette', 'Calcutta Journal', 'Friend of India' etc. protested against Sati. To establish the right of women in their paternal property,

Ram Mohan quoted the Yajnavalkya Smriti and said that women have rights in their paternal properties. With the earnest efforts of Ram Mohan , Bentinck prohibited Sati by “Bengal Sati Regulation – XVII” in 1829 A.D.

Educational reforms:

- Roy did much to disseminate the benefits of modern education to his countrymen. He supported **David Hare’s** efforts to find the **Hindu College** in **1817**, while Roy’s English school taught mechanics and **Voltaire’s philosophy**.
- In **1825**, he established **Vedanta college** where courses in both Indian learning and Western social and physical sciences were offered.

Women Education:

Equally able was the Raja’s advocacy of the education of Women. Although the concept had already been put forward by missionaries, it was the Raja who helped to popularize it among the Hindus. He said that the women of India were highly educated and that the education of women was in keeping with ancient religious traditions and beliefs. The Brahma Samaj did great service in removing the popular prejudices against the education of women that were the prevalent in the Hindu society and the credit for this goes mostly to Ram Mohan (Naik, J. P and Nurullah, S., 1974, pp.131-132).

English Education:

In field of education, Ram Mohan was one of the first thinkers in India to realize the value of Western Science, and thought. He created major opinion in favor of the English education that could generate a sense of unity among the Indian educated youths. His ideas of western education helped the Government of Lord William Bentinck to introduce European learning in India.

(www.historydiscussion.net).

Literature:

Ram Mohan`s contributions to other aspects of social and literary life were highly valuable. True it is that, Mrityunjoy Vidyalkar, Ram Mohan Bose, Rajiblochan, Carey etc. had preceded him in the field of Bengali prose literature, yet it must be admitted that Ram Mohan contributed a style and standard which facilitated the development of Bengali prose as a vehicle of stories, novels as well as polemical literature (Banerjee, J. P., 2004).

Language:

The great contribution of Ram Mohan Roy to the system of modern education was his emphasis on the study of modern Indian languages. He himself gave a great lead in the matter by writing books in Bengali on Grammar, Geography, Astronomy and Geometry and he is considered as the father of modern literary Bengali prose. His advocacy of the study and development of modern Indian languages.

Economic and Political Reforms:

- **Civil liberties:** Roy was impressed and admired the British system of constitutional government for the **civil liberties** it gave to the people. He wanted to extend the benefits of that system of government to Indian people. **Press freedom:** Through his writings and activities, he supported the movement for **free press in India.**

When press censorship was relaxed by Lord Hastings in **1819**, Ram Mohan found three journals- **The Brahmanical Magazine** (1821); The Bengali weekly, **Samvad Kaumudi** (1821); and the Persian weekly, **Mirat-ul-Akbar.**

- **Taxation reforms:** Roy condemned oppressive practices of Bengali zamindars and demanded **fixation of minimum rents**. He also demanded the **abolition of taxes on tax-free lands**.
He called for a **reduction of export duties on Indian goods** abroad and the abolition of the East India Company's trading rights.
- **Administrative reforms:** He demanded the **Indianisation of superior services** and **separation of the executive from judiciary**. He demanded equality between Indians and Europeans.

Religious reforms

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy's first published work **Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhiddin** (a gift to deists) published in 1803 exposed irrational religious beliefs and corrupt practices of the Hindus as the belief in revelations, prophets, miracles etc.
- In 1814, he founded **Atmiya Sabha** in Calcutta to campaign against idolatry, caste rigidities, meaningless rituals and other social ills.
- He criticized the ritualism of Christianity and rejected Christ as the incarnation of God. **In Precepts of Jesus** (1820), he tried to separate the moral and philosophical message of the New Testament, which he praised, from its miracle stories.

Brahmo Samaj

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy founded **Brahmo Sabha** in **1828**, which was later renamed as **Brahmo Samaj**.
- Its chief aim was the worship of the eternal God. It was against priesthood, rituals and sacrifices.
- It focused on **prayers, meditation and reading of the scriptures**. It believed in the unity of all religions.
- It was the **first intellectual reform movement in modern India**. It

led to the emergence of **rationalism and enlightenment** in India which indirectly contributed to the nationalist movement.

- It was the forerunner of all social, religious and political movements of modern India. It split into two in 1866, namely **Brahmo Samaj of India** led by **Keshub Chandra Sen** and **Adi Brahmo Samaj** led by **Debendranath Tagore**.
- **Prominent Leaders:** Debendranath Tagore, Keshub Chandra Sen, Pt. Sivnath Shastri, and Rabindranath Tagore.

Synthetic approach :

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a man who loved Western culture and very thoroughly studied Western literature . He was loved by British liberals. Even his Majesty the King gave him audience. However, he upheld the great flag of Indian culture and civilization which he felt was the noblest. He did not borrow his ideas blindly from Western political philosophers. Nor did he try to establish the supremacy of Western over Indian culture. He simply and clearly drew his inspiration from Indian religious books thereby establishing the values and worth of Indian spiritualism.

We are more concerned here with the work of Raja Ram Mohan Roy as an educationist, and it is in this field that we find his most signal services to his country. He was one of the earliest Indians to realize that India`s greatest need was a Synthesis of Eastern and Western cultures. At the same time, he understood that the Indian mind had rusted very considerably on account of its isolation and realized that contact with Western Literature and Science alone could regenerate oriental culture, correct its follies and contribute to it the essential qualities which are lacked. (Naik, J. P & Nurullah, S., 1974).

Regeneration of women:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy felt that the treatment which was being given to the women in India was unjustified. Not only did he plead for women's share in the ancestral property but he wholly supported many of their other causes. He stood for female education and also widow re-marriage. In order to give the women their rightful place in the society he stood against polygamy and also for inter-caste marriages. He was a symbol of Indian spirituality and had deep faith in that. He studied Indian religion in proper sense of the term. He believed that the ancient Indian religion in its true sense stood for religious toleration, universal brotherhood, humanism and liberalism. He very boldly said that untouchability or caste system or idol worship were only such institutions which were subsequently introduced in religion by the selfish people and thus not part of original and pure Hindu religion.

Literary Works of Raja Ram Mohan Roy

- Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin (1804)
- Vedanta Gantha (1815)
- Translation of an abridgement of the
- Vedanta Sara (1816) Kenopanishads (1816)
- Ishopanishad (1816)
- Kathopanishad (1817)
- A Conference between the Advocate for, and an Opponent of Practice of Burning Widows Alive (Bengali and English) (1818)
- Mundaka Upanishad (1819)
- A Defence of Hindu Theism (1820)
- The Precepts of Jesus- The Guide to Peace and
- Happiness (1820) Bengali Grammar (1826)
- The Universal Religion
- (1829) History of Indian
-

Philosophy (1829)
Gaudiya Vyakaran
(1833)

Conclusion

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was one of the few people in his time to realise completely the significance of modern age. He knew that the ideal of human civilization does not lie in isolation of independence, but in the brotherhood of inter-dependence of individuals as well as nations. His attempt was to establish Indian people in the full consciousness of their own cultural personality, to make them comprehend the reality that was unique in their civilisations in the spirit of sympathetic cooperation.

KESHUB CHANDRA SEN

Keshub Chandra Sen also spelled **Keshab Chunder Sen**; (19 November 1838 – 8 January 1884) was a [Hindu](#) philosopher and social reformer who attempted to incorporate [Christian theology](#) within the framework of Hindu thought. Born a Hindu in the [Bengal Presidency](#) of [British India](#), he became a member of the [Brahmo Samaj](#) in 1857^[1] but established his own breakaway "Bharatvarshiya Brahmo Samaj" in 1866^[2] while the Brahmo Samaj remained under the leadership of [Debendranath Tagore](#) (who headed the Brahmo Samaj till his death in 1905).^[3] In 1878 his followers abandoned him after the underage child marriage of his daughter which exposed his campaign against child marriage as hollow.^[4] Later in his life he came under the influence of [Ramakrishna](#) and founded a syncretic "New Dispensation" inspired by [Christianity](#), and [Vaishnav bhakti](#), and Hindu practices.

Contents

- 1 Early life and education
- 2 Career
- 3 Brahma Samaj
- 4 Christianity
 - 4.1 Love for Sovereign
 - 4.2 Discord within the Brahma Samaj of India
- 5 Annette Akroyd and the female emancipation controversy
- 6 Mysticism controversies
- 7 Ramakrishna's influence
- 8 Universal religion

Early life and education

Keshub Chandra Sen was born on 19 November 1838 into an affluent Kayastha family of [Calcutta](#) (now [Kolkata](#)). His family originally belonged to Gariffa village on the banks of the river [Hooghly](#). His grandfather was [Ramkamal Sen](#) (1783–1844), a well known pro-[sati](#) Hindu activist and lifelong opponent of [Ram Mohan Roy](#)^[5] His father Peary Mohan Sen died when he was ten, and Sen was brought up by his uncle. As a boy, he attended the Bengali Pathshala elementary school and later attended [Hindu College](#) in 1845.^[6]

Career

In 1855 he founded an evening school for the children of working men, which continued through 1858. In 1855, he became Secretary to the Goodwill Fraternity,^[7] a Masonic ^[8] lodge associated with the Unitarian Rev. Charles Dall and a Christian missionary Rev. [James Long](#) who also helped Sen establish a "British Indian Association" in the same year.^[9] Around this time he began to be attracted to the ideas of the Brahma Samaj.^[6]

Keshub Sen was also briefly appointed as Secretary of the [Asiatic Society](#) in 1854. For a short time thereafter Sen was also a clerk in the Bank of Bengal, but resigned his post to devote himself exclusively to literature and

philosophy.^[10] On this, Professor Oman who knew him well writes, "Endowed with an emotional temperament, earnest piety, a gift of ready speech and a strong leaven of vanity, Keshub Chunder Sen found the sober, monotonous duties of a bank clerk intolerable, and very soon sought a more congenial field for the exercise of his abilities." and he formally joined the Brahma Samaj in 1859.^[11]

Brahmo Samaj

In 1857 Sen again took employment in clerkship, this time as private secretary to [Dwijendranath Tagore](#) and joined the [Brahmo Samaj](#). In 1859, Sen dedicated himself to the organisational work of the Brahma Samaj and in 1862 was assigned, by [Hemendranath Tagore](#), a stipendary ministry (*Acharya*) of one of its worship houses despite being a non-Brahmin (previously a *Shudra* untouchable had been made an *Acharya* by Debendranath Tagore).^[12]

In 1858, left his home in Coolootola and took refuge in the Jorasanko House of the [Tagore family](#) when the patriarch of the family was then away. In 1862 Sen helped found the Albert College and wrote articles for the *Indian Mirror*, a weekly journal of the Calcutta Brahma Samaj in which social and moral subjects were debated.^[10]

In 1863 he wrote *The Brahma Samaj Vindicated*. He strongly criticised Christianity and travelled about the country lecturing and preaching that the Brahma Samaj was intended to revitalise Hindu religion through use of ancient Hindu sources and the authority of the Vedas.^[10] By 1865, however, Sen was convinced that only Christian doctrine could bring new life to Hindu society.^[13]

In November 1865 he was caused to leave the Brahma Samaj after "an open break with its founder Debendranath Tagore" over Christian practices in Brahmoism, and the next year (1866) with encouragement of the Unitarian preacher Charles Dall he joined another new organisation, BharatBarshiya Brahma Samaj, as its Secretary (President being "God"). Tagore's Brahma

Samaj then quickly purged itself of Sen's Christian teaching, and encouraged being described as [Adi Brahma Samaj](#) to distinguish it from Sen's deliberately eponymous version.^[14]

Christianity

In 1866 Sen delivered an address on "Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia", in which he proclaimed that "India would be for Christ alone who already stalks the land", and which fostered the impression that he was about to embrace [Christianity](#).

Professor Oman writes "From the time of his secession from the parent Society, Keshub by his writings and public lectures enlisted the sympathies of the Viceroy, [Sir John Lawrence](#), who took a deep interest in the work of the native reformer, particularly as Keshub had spoken publicly of Christ in terms which seemed to justify the belief that he was Christian in all but open profession of the faith."^[16]

This drew attention to him and in 1870 he journeyed to England where he remained for six months.^[15] The reception in England disappointed him,^[15] as he records much later in a letter to [Max Müller](#)

The British public ought to know how the most advanced type of Hinduism in India is trying to absorb and assimilate the Christianity of Christ, and how it is establishing and spreading, under the name of the New Dispensation, a new Hinduism, which combines Yoga and Bhakti, and also a new Christianity, which blends together Apostolical faith and modern civilisation and science. It is this christianity.^[citation needed]

Love for Sovereign

In 1870 Keshub introduced a new doctrine into his Church "Love for the Sovereign". Perceiving Christianity as a model tradition from which the Indians could learn, Keshub became convinced that the British presence in India served a divine purpose for the Indian people. At his historic 1870 meeting with the queen he expressed his acceptance of British rule which pleased the

British. This theological stand against Indian nationalism (then being propounded by the Brahmos under [Hemendranath Tagore](#)'s new doctrine of "Brahmos embrace the co-existence of Brahmo principles with governance, but oppose all governance in conflict with Brahmo principles.") made Keshub the target of tremendous criticism at home.^[17]

Discord within the Brahmo Samaj of India

The passage of the Special Marriages Act in 1872, caused great resentment among Brahmos that Sen had caused an inherent break with the [Brahmo Dharma](#) compiled by Maharshi Debendranath and forever associated with Tagore's [Adi Brahmo Samaj](#). A powerful section of "the Brahmo Samaj within the Brahmo Samaj of India" and with reformist views more advanced than Keshub's, especially on women's education and upliftment, now openly complained that they were left with no religious status whatsoever other than to turn to Christ like their leader, which was distasteful to them or return to Brahmo Dharma's fold in disgrace. In 1873 Sen was caused to trenchantly counter this faction by the following speech:

Whither is the spirit of God leading India? Towards the Brahmo Samaj? I say, No. To deny Heaven that is leading us onwards to his Holy Church would argue blind infidelity. You dare not deny that India is marching towards the Kingdom of Heaven. But the Brahmo Samaj, as it is, is not God's Holy Church; as it has no semblance whatever of the Kingdom of Heaven. Verily, verily, this Brahmo Samaj is a ridiculous caricature of the Church of God.^[18]

Annette Akroyd and the female emancipation controversy

Around 1875 Sen was involved in a public controversy with [Annette Akroyd](#) a prominent feminist and social reformer who had sailed to India in October 1872. Akroyd was shocked by her discussions with Sen and felt that Sen, the rhetorician of women's education in England was a typical Hindu obscurantist back home in India, trying to keep knowledge from the minds of women. This dispute spilled into the native press and had its impact on

the [Bethune School](#). Akroyd was also dismayed with Sen's associates such as [Bijoy Krishna Goswami](#), [Aghore Nath Gupta](#) and [Gour Govinda Ray](#) who were traditionally Hindu in educational background and resisting the education of women in [British India](#).

Mr. Sen had a strong prejudice against university education, in fact, against what is generally regarded as high education, of women. He objected to teaching them, for instance, such subjects as Mathematics, Philosophy and Science, whereas the advanced party positively wanted to give their daughters and sisters what is generally regarded as high education. They did not object to their university education and were not disposed to make much difference in point of education between men and women. There was no hope of compromise between two such extreme schools of thought, Accordingly, the radical party proceeded to start a separate female school of their own, called the [Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya](#) for the education of the adult young ladies belonging to their party. The successful manner in which they carried on the work of this school under Miss Akroyd, subsequently Mrs. Beveridge, attracted much public notice and was highly praised by the officers of Government. This school did excellent work for many years and was subsequently conducted under the name of the [Banga Mahila Vidyalaya](#) and was at last amalgamated with the [Bethune College](#) for ladies, to which it furnished some of its most **distinguished students**.^[19]

Personal life

Keshub Chandra Sen was married to Jagonmohini Sen. The couple had ten children: five sons – Karuna Chandra Sen, Nirmal Chandra Sen, Prafulla Chandra Sen, Saral Chandra Sen,^[33] and Dr. Subroto Sen; and five daughters – [Suniti Devi](#) (Maharani of Cooch Behar), Sabitri Devi, [Sucharu Devi](#) (Maharani of Mayurbhanj), Monica Devi and Sujata Devi. One of his grand-daughters, [Naina Devi](#) (1917–1993), daughter of Saral Sen, became a noted classical singer.^[34] One of his grandsons, [Erroll Chunder Sen](#) (c.1899–c.1942) became a pioneer Indian aviator who served in the [Royal Flying](#)

[Corps](#) and [Royal Air Force](#) during the First World War.

Sen was a friend of [Rabindranath Tagore](#).

KANDUKURI VEERESALINGAM

[Rao Bahadur](#) Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu (16 April 1848 – 27 May 1919) was a social reformer and writer of [Madras Presidency](#), British India. He is considered as the father of renaissance movement in Telugu. He was one of the early social reformers who encouraged women education, remarriage of [widows](#) which was not supported by the society during his time and fought against [dowry](#) system. He also started a school in [Dowlaiswaram](#) in 1874.^[2] He constructed a temple known as 'Brahmo Mandir' in 1887 and the 'Hithakarini School' in 1908 in Andhra Pradesh. His novel *Rajasekhara Charitramu* is considered to be the first novel in Telugu literature.^[3]

He is often considered as [Raja Rammohan Roy](#) of Andhra. He was also known by the title Gadya Tikkana, meaning '[Tikkana](#) of Prose'.^[4]

Contents

- [1Early life](#)
- [2Literature](#)
- [3Brahmo Samaj](#)
- [4Social reformer](#)
 - [4.1Welfare of women](#)
- [5Politics](#)
- [6Personal life](#)
- [7Death](#)

Early life

Veeresalingam was born in [Rajahmundry, Madras Presidency](#), to Subbarayudu and Poornamma. When he was six months old, he suffered from [smallpox](#), a dangerous disease during that time, and when aged four his father died. He was adopted by his paternal uncle, Venkataratnam. After studying in an Indian street school, he was later sent to English medium school where his talents were recognised. His good nature and studiousness earned him the best student award in his school. He completed his [matriculation](#) in 1869 and got his first job as a teacher in Korangi village.^[2]

Literature[[edit](#)]

Veeresalingam was a scholar in Telugu, Sanskrit, and Hindi. Considering literature as an instrument to fight against social evils, his writings also reflected the same. He wrote plays such as *Prahlada* (1885), *Satya Harischandra* (1886).^[2] He published a novel *Rajashekhara Charita* in 1880, originally serialised in *Viveka Chandrika* from 1878. Generally recognised as the first Telugu novel, it is inspired by [The Vicar of Wakefield](#), a novel by the Irish writer [Oliver Goldsmith](#).^[3]

His works include:

- First novel in Telugu 'Rajasekhara Charitra'
- 'Viveka Vardhini' a journal for women education in 1887.
- 'Satihita bodhini' a monthly magazine for women.
- First drama in Telugu and first book in Telugu on sciences & history.

Brahmo Samaj[[edit](#)]

Veeresalingam was inspired by the principles of [Brahmo Samaj](#) leaders like [Raja Rammohan Roy](#), [Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar](#), & [Maharshi Keshab Chandra Sen](#). He started his own Brahmo Mandir in [Rajahmundry](#) near bridge in 1887.^[2]

Social reformer

Welfare of women

One of the greatest reforms of Veeresalingam was to promote women's education, which was considered to be a taboo in those days. In 1876, he started a journal called *Viveka Vardhini* and published articles about women's issues of that era. The magazine was initially printed at Chennai (then [Madras](#)), but with his writings gaining popularity, he established his own press at Rajahmundry.

Remarriage of widows was not appreciated in the society during those days, and he opposed this by arguing that widows were not prohibited from remarrying by quoting verses from the Hindu [Dharma Sastra](#) to prove his point. His opponents used to organise special meetings and debates to counter his arguments, and even resorted to physical violence against him when they failed to stop him. Undeterred, Veeresalingam started a Remarriage Association and sent his students all over Andhra Pradesh to find young men willing to marry widows. He arranged the first widow remarriage on 11 December 1881. For his reformist activities, Kandukuri gained attention all over the globe. The Government, in appreciation of his work, conferred on him the title of Rao Bahadur in 1893. Later he established a widow home.^[4]

Politics

Veeresalingam served as one of the members of the first Indian National Congress (INC) meeting in 1885.^[2]

Personal life

Veeresalingam was married to Bapamma Rajyalakshmi in 1861. At the time of marriage, he was 16 years old, and his wife was 9.^[2]

Death

Veeresalingam died on 27 May 1919 at the age of 71. His statue has been unveiled on the Beach Road in Vishakhapatnam.^[2] In his

memory, the [Indian Post](#) department issued 25 [paisa](#) postage stamp in 1974.^[5]

PANDITA RAMABAI SARASWATI

Childhood and Early Life

Pandita Ramabai Saraswati was born on 23 April 1858, to the Sanskrit scholar Anant Shastri Dongre, and his second wife Lakshmibai Dongre.

She was born in an ashram run by his father in the Gungamal forests. Her name at birth was as Rama Dongre.

Her family were Chitpavan Brahmins. During her childhood, her father taught Sanskrit texts to her and her mother.

During the famine of 1874-76, her father, mother and sister died of starvation. Ramabai and her brother Srinivas survived and travelled all over India.

Ramabai's fame as a lecturer reached Calcutta, where the Pandits invited her to speak.

In 1878, Calcutta University conferred on her the title of Pandita, as well as the highest title of Saraswati in recognition of her interpretations of various Sanskrit works. The theistic reformer Keshab Chandra Sen gifted her a copy of the Vedas to study.

After her brother Srinivas died in 1880, Ramabai decided to marry a Bengali lawyer, Bipin Behari Medhvi, who was a [shudra](#) – a low caste.

It was an inter-caste and inter-regional and was considered inappropriate by the society at that time. They were married in a civil ceremony on 13 November 1880. The couple had a daughter, Manorama.

Ramabai wanted to improve the status of women in India. She wanted to create awareness and address the issues that were being faced by Indian women due to outdated and oppressive Hindu traditions.

She stood against the practice of child marriage, which resulted in many child widows who led a miserable life.

Along with her husband, she planned to start a school for child widows. However tragedy struck in 1882, when her husband Medhvi died due to Cholera.

Her Journey of Social Activism

Ramabai moved to Pune after her husband's death. In 1881, she founded the Arya Mahila Samaj (Arya Women's Society), for promoting the cause of women's education and to stop child marriages.

In 1882, Lord Ripon's Education Commission was appointed to look into education. Ramabai petitioned the commission to promote women's education.

She also suggested training of teacher and appointment of women school inspectors. She also argued that under the existing social environment only women can medically treat women, therefore Indian women should be admitted to medical colleges.

Ramabai's evidence created a great buzz in the Indian society sensation and the news also reached Queen Victoria in London. Soon there was a Women's Medical Movement started by **Lady Dufferin**.

She travelled to every part of India to spread her message and motivate the women.

In 1883, she visited England to start medical training. During her stay in UK, she converted to Christianity.

In 1886, she travelled to the United States from UK, to attend the graduation of the first female Indian doctor, Anandibai Joshi.

She stayed in US for two years, during which she translated textbooks and gave lectures throughout the United States and Canada.

She also wrote and published one of her most important books, and her first book in English, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*. The book described the sad plight of women, including child brides and child widows. The book was dedicated to [Dr. Anandibai Joshi](#), who died in 1887, six months after she returned to India.

Ramabai Associations were formed in major American cities to raise funds to run a Widow's Home for upper-class Hindu widows in India.

In 1889, she returned to India and established 'Sharada Sadan', a home for destitute women. Her daughter Manorama returned to India after completing higher studies in the United States and became Principal of the High School under Sharada Sadan.

In 1896, during a severe famine in Maharashtra, Ramabai rescued thousands of outcast children, child widows, orphans, and other destitute women. They were given shelter in Mukti and Sharada Sadan.

In 1897, Ramabai went to USA again to revive the Ramabai Association. Upon her return she built a new building Kripa sadan within the Mukti complex to house and rehabilitates destitutes.

By 1900, the Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission had more than 1,500 residents and more than 100 cattle. It is active even to this day. It provides housing, education, vocational training and medical services, for widows, orphans, blinds and many needy groups.

In 1912, Pandita Ramabai established Christian High school at Gulbarga, Karnataka where her daughter Manorama became the Principal.

Sad End and Tragic Death

A learned woman fluent in seven languages, Ramabai was also a poet and a scholar. She translated the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek, to her mother tongue, Marathi.

In 1920, Ramabai's health began deteriorating. She passed on her daughter Manorama the mantle to take over the ministry of Mukti Mission.

In a sad twist of fate, Manorama died in 1921. Her death came as a rude shock to Ramabai.

After barely nine months, Ramabai, who was already suffering from septic bronchitis; breathed her last on 5th April 1922, almost a fortnight ahead of her 64th birthday.

Awards and Recognitions

- 1878 – “Pandit” and “Saraswati” titles at Bengal from Calcutta University.
- 1919 – [Kaisar-i-Hind Medal](#) for community service awarded by the British Government.
- She is honored with a feast day on 5th April, on the liturgical calendar of the Episcopal Church in USA.

On 26 October 1989, Government of India issued a commemorative stamp in recognition of her contribution to the advancement of Indian women.

A prominent road in Mumbai is also named as Pandita Ramabai Marg, in her honour.

Many more awards and institutions have been named after her. She was a rare and unique Indian woman who had such strong character, so daring yet so compassionate, such a capability to organize and a spirit of selfless service and dedication.

Quotes by Pandita Ramabai

“People must not only hear about the kingdom of GOD, but must see it in actual operation, on a small scale perhaps and in imperfect form, but a real demonstration nevertheless.”

“I realized after reading the fourth chapter of St. John’s Gospel, that Christ was truly the Divine Saviour he claimed to be, and no one but He could transform and uplift the downtrodden women of India. ... Thus my heart was drawn to the religion of Christ.”

“A life totally committed to God has nothing to fear, nothing to lose, nothing to regret.”

JYOTIBA PHULE

Born: 11 April, 1827

Place of Birth: Satara, Maharashtra

Parents: Govindrao Phule (father) and Chimnabai (mother)

Spouse: Savitri Phule

Children: Yashwantrao Phule (adopted son)

Education: Scottish Mission's High School, Pune;

Associations: Satyashodhak Samaj

Ideology: Liberal; Egalitarian; Socialism

Religious Beliefs: Hinduism

Publications: Tiritiya Ratna (1855); Powada: Chatrapati Shivajiraje Bhosle Yancha (1869); Shetkarayacha Aasud (1881)

Passed Away: 28 November, 1890

Memorial: Phule Wada, Pune, Maharashtra

Jyotirao ‘Jyotiba’ Govindrao Phule was a prominent social reformer and thinker of the nineteenth century India. He led the movement against the prevailing caste-restrictions in India. He revolted against the domination of the Brahmins and struggled for the rights of peasants and other low-caste people. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule was also a pioneer for women education in India and fought for education of girls throughout his life. He is believed to be the first Hindu to start an orphanage for the unfortunate children.

Childhood & Early Life

Jyotirao Govindrao Phule was born in Satara district of Maharashtra in 1827. His father, Govindrao was a vegetable-vendor at Poona. Jyotirao's family belonged to 'mali' caste and their original title was 'Gorhay'. Malis were considered as an inferior caste by the Brahmins and were shunned socially. Jyotirao's father and uncles served as florists, so the family came to be known as 'Phule'. Jyotirao's mother passed away when he was just nine months old.

Jyotirao was an intelligent boy but due to the poor financial condition at home, he had to stop his studies at an early age. He started helping his father by working on the family's farm. Recognising the talent of the child prodigy, a neighbour persuaded his father to send him to school. In 1841, Jyotirao got admission in the Scottish Mission's High School, Poona, and completed his education in 1847. There, he met Sadashiv Ballal Govande, a Brahmin, who remained his close friend throughout his life. At the age of just thirteen years, Jyotirao was married to Savitribai.

Social Movements

In 1848, an incident sparked off Jyotiba's quest against the social injustice of caste discrimination and incited a social revolution in the Indian society. Jyotirao was invited to attend the wedding of one of his friends who belonged to an upper cast Brahmin family. But at the wedding the relatives of the bridegroom insulted and abused Jyotiba when they came to know about his origins. Jyotirao left the ceremony and made up his mind to challenge the prevailing caste-system and social restrictions. He made it his life's work to hammer away tirelessly at the helms of social majoritarian domination and aimed at emancipation of all human beings that were subjected to this social deprivation.

After reading Thomas Paine's famous book 'The Rights of Man', Jyotirao was greatly influenced by his ideas. He believed that enlightenment of the

women and lower caste people was the only solution to combat the social evils.

Efforts Towards Women Education

Jyotiba's quest for providing women and girls with right to education was supported by his wife Savitribai Phule. One of the few literate women of the time, Savitribai was taught to read and write by her husband Jyotirao.

In 1851, Jyotiba established a girls' school and asked his wife to teach the girls in the school. Later, he opened two more schools for the girls and an indigenous school for the lower castes, especially for the Mahars and Mangs.

Jyotiba realised the pathetic conditions of widows and established an ashram for young widows and eventually became advocate of the idea of Widow Remarriage.

Around his time, society was a patriarchal and the position of women was especially abysmal. Female infanticide was a common occurrence and so was child marriage, with children sometimes being married to men much older. These women often became widows before they even hit puberty and were left without any family support. Jyotiba was pained by their plight and established an orphanage in 1854 to shelter these unfortunate souls from perishing at the society's cruel hands.

Efforts Towards Elimination of Caste Discrimination

Jyotirao attacked the orthodox Brahmins and other upper castes and termed them as "hypocrites". He campaigned against the authoritarianism of the upper caste people and urged the "peasants" and "proletariat" to defy the restrictions imposed upon them.

He opened his home to people from all castes and backgrounds. He was a believer in gender equality and he exemplified his beliefs by involving his wife in all his social reform activities. He believed that religious icons like Rama are implemented by the Brahmin as a means for subjugating the lower caste.

The orthodox Brahmins of the society were furious at the activities of Jyotirao. They blamed him for vitiating the norms and regulations of the society. Many accused him of acting on behalf of the Christian Missionaries. But Jyotirao was firm and decided to continue the movement. Interestingly, Jyotirao was supported by some Brahmin friends who extended their support to make the movement successful.

Satya Shodhak Samaj

In 1873, Jyotiba Phule formed the Satya Shodhak Samaj (Society of Seekers of Truth). He undertook a systematic deconstruction of existing beliefs and history, only to reconstruct an equality promoting version. Jyotirao vehemently condemned the Vedas, the ancient holy scriptures of the Hindus. He traced the history of Brahmanism through several other ancient texts and held the Brahmins responsible for framing the exploitative and inhuman laws in order to maintain their social superiority by suppressing the "shudras" and "atishudras" in the society. The purpose of the Satya Shodhak Samaj was to decontaminate the society from caste discrimination and liberate the oppressed lower-caste people from the stigmas inflicted by the Brahmins. Jyotirao Phule was the first person to coin the term 'Dalits' to apply to all people considered lower caste and untouchables by the Brahmins. Membership to the Samaj was open to all irrespective of caste and class. Some written records suggest that they even welcomed participation of Jews as members of the Samaj and by 1876 the 'Satya Shodhak Samaj' boasted of 316 members. In 1868, Jyotirao decided to construct a common bathing tank outside his house to

exhibit his embracing attitude towards all human beings and wished to dine with everyone, regardless of their caste.

Death

Jyotiba Phule devoted his entire life for the liberation of untouchables from the exploitation of Brahmins. Apart from being a social activist and reformer, he was also a businessman. He was also a cultivator and contractor for the Municipal Corporation. He served as Commissioner of the Poona Municipality between 1876 and 1883.

Jyotiba suffered a stroke in 1888 and was rendered paralyzed. On 28 November, 1890, the great social reformer, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, passed away.

Legacy

Perhaps the biggest legacy of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule is the thought behind his perpetual fight against social stigma that are enormously relevant still. In the nineteenth century, people were used to accepting these discriminatory practices as social norm that needed to be enforced without question but Jyotiba sought to change this discrimination based on caste, class and colour. He was the harbinger of unheard ideas for social reforms. He started awareness campaigns that ultimately inspired the likes of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi, stalwarts who undertook major initiatives against caste discrimination later.

Commemoration

A biography of Jyotiba was penned by Dhananjay Keer in 1974 titled, 'Mahatma Jyotibha Phule: Father of Our Social Revolution'. The Mahatma Phule Museum in Pune was set-up in honour of the great reformer. The Government of Maharashtra introduced the Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Jeevandayeeni Yojana which is a cashless treatment scheme for poor. A

number of statues of the Mahatma have been erected as well as several street names and educational institutes have been rechristened with his name – eg. Crawford Market in Mumbai is rechristened as Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Mandai and the Maharashtra Krishi Vidyapeeth at Rahuri, Maharashtra was renamed Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth.

Published Works

Jyotiba had penned a number of literary articles and books in his lifetime and most were based on his ideology of social reforms like the ‘Shetkarayacha Aasud’. He also penned some stories like ‘Tritiya Ratna’, ‘Brahmananche Kasab’, ‘Ishara’. He wrote dramas like ‘Satsar’ Ank 1 and 2, which were enacted under his directives to spread awareness against social injustice. He also wrote books for the Satyashodhak Samaj that dealt with history of Brahminism and outlined Puja protocols that the lower caste people were not allowed to learn.

SIR SYED AHMAD KHAN

His legacy is a complicated one — he was a “loyal servant” of the British administration before the revolt of 1857. He even penned a pamphlet titled *The Causes of the Indian Revolt* to explain the reasons of the revolt from a “native perspective”. However, witnessing the near annihilation of the Muslim elites prompted Sir Syed Ahmad Khan to take up the case of Muslims and his life-long journey as an Islamic reformer and educationist is a testament to his dedication.

“Post-*ghadar* (revolt), I was not disappointed by looting of my house and loss of belongings. I was disturbed due to the ruination of my *qaum*,” Khan said. He initially thought to leave the country but decided against it later. “I gave up the idea of migration and decided to struggle for the rebuilding of the *qaum*.”

Born on 17 October 1817 to a wealthy family that was close to the Mughal court, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan wore many hats: Civil servant, journalist, historian. However, he is, first and foremost, known for his pioneering role in transforming the educational opportunities for Muslims. He recognised that education is the most important tool through which Muslims could emerge from a position of disadvantage and compete with Hindus, especially Bengali Hindus who were at the pinnacle of the political scene at the time.

He pushed for educational and social reforms and was a champion of democratic ideals and freedom of speech. In one of his essays he wrote, “Freedom of expression is the right of everyone... Suppression of opinions, be it for any religious fear, or the fear of community and tribe or the fear of being defamed, or the fear of the government – is very bad”

The Aligarh Movement

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan is best known for the Aligarh Movement — a systemic movement aimed at reforming the social, political and educational aspects of the Muslim community. He founded the Scientific Society in 1863 to translate major works in the sciences and modern arts into Urdu. He released two journals to this end — *The Aligarh Institute Gazette*, which was an organ of the Scientific Society, and the *Tehzibul Akhlaq*, known as the Mohammedan Social Reformer in English.

Khan’s most notable contribution to the field of education is establishing the Madarsatul Uloom in Aligarh in 1875, now known as the Aligarh Muslim University, a premier educational institution of the country. He attempted to model the college on universities such as Oxford and Cambridge. His work on Muslim education was not limited to this alone — he wanted to create a network of educational institutions managed by Muslims and founded the All India Muslim Educational Conference.

In 1886, he set up the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental Education Congress, later renamed the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental Educational Conference, to bring together education and culture. He emphasised the need for an autonomous Muslim institution free of any government funding.

On this issue he said, “As long as we depend on Government for wants which are essentially of a domestic nature as education necessarily is, we really expect to get what is simply impossible to obtain. The best educational institutions in Europe are either entirely or next to entirely free from any control of the government.”

An avid historian, he was the first person to publish an archaeological study in an Indian language. As a result, he was also named as an honorary member of the Royal Asiatic Society. He also collected sculptures and rare artefacts, including those of Hindu deities.

Critical of the Indian National Congress

In 1888, three years after the Indian National Congress was founded, Khan delivered a lecture in Meerut on the invitation of the Muslims residing in the area. He was critical of the Congress and talked about how it was essentially a party of Bengali Hindus who could not best represent the viewpoint of a Muslim population. He called for greater representation of Muslims.

“The unfair interference of these people is this — that they have tried to produce a false impression that the Mahomedans of these Provinces agree with their opinions. But we also are inhabitants of this country, and we cannot be ignorant of the real nature of the events that are taking place in our own North-West Provinces and Oudh,” he said.

He further iterated that some Hindus were misled by the party and given false assurances that joining Congress would result in them becoming the dominant group in the nation; he expressed regret at the discord this was sowing between the two communities.

“These proposals of the Congress are extremely inexpedient for the country, which is inhabited by two different nations — who drink from the same well, breathe the air of the same city, and depend on each other for its life. To create animosity between them is good neither for peace, nor for the country, nor for the town.”

VINOBA BHAVE

Date of Birth: 11 September, 1895

Place of Birth: Gagode village, Kolaba District, Maharashtra

Parents: Narahari Shambhu Rao (Father) and Rukmini Devi (Mother)

Association: Freedom Activist, Thinker, Social Reformer

Movement: Indian Freedom Movement; Bhoodan Movement; Sarvodaya Movement

Political Ideology: Right wing, Gandhian

Religious Views: Egalitarianism; Hinduism

Publications: Geeta Pravachane (religious); Teesri Shakti (political); Swarajya Shastra (political); Bhoodan Ganga (social); Moved by Love (autobiographical).

Death: 15 November, 1982

Acharya Vinoba Bhave was a nonviolence activist, freedom activist, social reformer and spiritual teacher. An avid follower of Mahatma

Gandhi, Vinoba upheld his doctrines of non-violence and equality. He dedicated his life to serve the poor and the downtrodden, and stood up for their rights. Most of his adult life he led an ascetic style of existence centered on spiritual beliefs of right and wrong. He is best known for his 'Bhoodan Movement' (Gift of the Land). Vinoba once said, "All revolutions are spiritual at the source. All my activities have the sole purpose of achieving a union of hearts." Vinoba was the first recipient of the international Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership in 1958. He was also conferred with the Bharat Ratna (India's highest civilian awards) posthumously in 1983.

Early Life

Born Vinayak Narahari Bhave, at Gagode in Kolaba district, Maharashtra on 11 September, 1895, he was the eldest son of Narahari Shambhu Rao and Rukmini Devi. He had four other siblings, three brothers and one sister. His mother Rukmini Devi was a very religious person and instilled in Vinoba a deep sense of spiritualism. As a student Vinoba was quite fond of mathematics. He also developed a spiritual conscience quite early having studied the Bhagavad Gita under the tutelage of his grandfather.

Although a good student, traditional education never really appealed to Vinoba. He considered renouncing social life and head out to the Himalayas. On other days, he considered joining the Indian independence struggle. He started travelling the length of the country, learning regional languages along with knowledge of scriptures and Sanskrit. He ended up in the holy city of Banaras, where he came across a piece on Mahatma Gandhi, specifically about a speech he gave at the Banaras Hindu University. The course of his life was altered after he read it. He burned his entire school and college certificate on his way to Mumbai in 1916, to appear for the intermediate examination. He started corresponding with Gandhi, who being impressed with the 20-year-old Vinoba invited him

to Kochrab Ashram in Ahmedabad. Vinoba met Gandhi on June 7, 1916 and took residence at the Ashram. He dutifully participated in all the activities at the ashram, leading an austere and sparse life. He eventually dedicated his life towards various programs designed by Gandhi like the Khadi Andolan, teaching, etc. The name Vinoba (a traditional Marathi epithet signifying great respect) was conferred upon him by Mama Phadke, another member of the Ashram.

Association with Gandhi

Vinoba was attracted towards the principles and ideologies of Mahatma Gandhi and he considered Gandhi his guru, from both political and spiritual point of view. He followed Gandhi's leadership without question. Over the years, the bond between Vinoba and Gandhi grew stronger and his involvement in constructive programs for the society kept increasing. In a letter to Vinoba, Gandhi wrote, "I do not know in what terms to praise you. Your love and your character fascinate me and so does your self-examination. I am not fit to measure your worth. I accept your own estimate and assume the position of a father to you". Vinoba spent a better part of his life in the ashrams set up by the leader carrying out the various programs designed by Gandhi. On April 8, 1921, Vinoba went to Wardha to take charge of a Gandhi-ashram there under the directives from Gandhi. During his stay at Wardha, Bhave also brought out a monthly in Marathi, named, 'Maharashtra Dharma'. The monthly comprised of his essays on the Upanishads. His political ideologies were directed towards principles of peaceful non-cooperation in order to attain freedom. He took part in all the political programs designed by Gandhi and even went to participating in the same. He believed in Gandhi's social beliefs like equality among Indians and various religions.

Role in Freedom Struggle

Under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba also got involved in the Indian freedom struggle. He took part in programs of non-cooperation and

especially the call for use of Swadeshi goods instead of foreign imports. He took up the spinning wheel churning out Khadi and urged others to do so, resulting in mass production of the fabric.

In 1932, accusing Vinoba Bhave of conspiring against the British rule, the government sent him to jail for six months to Dhulia. There, he explained the fellow prisoners the different subjects of 'Bhagwad Gita', in Marathi. All the lectures given by him on Gita in Dhulia jail were collected and later published as a book.

Till 1940, Vinoba Bhave was known only to the people around him. Mahatma Gandhi, on 5 October, 1940, introduced Bhave to the nation by issuing a statement. He was also chosen as the first Individual Satyagrahi (an Individual standing up for Truth instead of a collective action) by Gandhi himself.

Social Work

Vinoba Bhave worked tirelessly towards eradicating social evils like inequality. Influenced by the examples set by Gandhi, he took up the cause of people that his guru lovingly referred to as Harijans. It was his aim to establish the kind of society that Gandhi had envisioned in an Independent India. He adopted the term Sarvodaya from Gandhi which simply means "Progress for All". The Sarvodaya movement under him implemented various programs during the 1950s, the chief among which is the Bhoodan Movement.

Bhoodan Movement

In 1951, Vinoba Bhave started his peace-trek on foot through the violence-torn region of Telangana. On April 18, 1951, the Harijans of the Pochampalli village requested him to provide them with around 80 acres of land to make a living. Vinoba asked the landlords of the village to come forward and save the Harijans. To everybody's surprise, a landlord got up

and offered the required land. This incident added a new chapter in the history of sacrifices and non-violence. It was the beginning of the Bhoodan (Gift of the Land) movement. The movement continued for thirteen years and Vinoba toured the length and breadth of the country, a total distance of 58741 Km. He was successful in collecting around 4.4 million acres of land, of which around 1.3 million was distributed among poor landless farmers. The movement attracted admiration from all over the world and was commended for being the only experiment of his kind to incite voluntary social justice.

Religious Work

Vinoba was greatly influenced by the Bhagvad Gita and his thoughts and efforts were based upon the doctrines of the Holy Book. He set up a number of Ashrams to promote a simple way of life, devoid of luxuries that took away one's focus from the Divine. He established the Brahma Vidya Mandir in 1959, a small community for women, aiming at self-sufficiency on the lines of Mahatma Gandhi's teachings. He took a strong stand on cow slaughter and declared to go on fast until it was banned in India.

Literary Work

In his lifetime he authored a number of books most of which were based on spiritual content. He had command over multiple languages including Indian regional languages like Marathi, Telugu, Gujarati, Kannada, Hindi, Urdu, apart from English and Sanskrit. He got the content of scriptures written in Sanskrit legible to the masses by translating them to the various common languages. Some of the books written by him are Swarajya Sastra, Geeta Pravachane, Teesri Shakti or The Third Power etc.

Death

In November 1982, Vinoba Bhave fell seriously ill and decided to end his life. He refused to accept any food and medicine during his last days. On 15 November 1982, the great social reformer passed away.

Awards

Vinoba Bhave was the first international figure to receive the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1958. He was awarded Bharat Ratna posthumously in 1983.

Criticism

Vinoba Bhave received serious brickbats in 1975 for supporting the state of emergency imposed by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Bhave advocated that the emergency was required to teach people about discipline. According to many scholars and political thinkers, Vinoba Bhave was a mere imitator of Mahatma Gandhi.

Periyar E. V. Ramasamy

Erode Venkatappa Ramasamy^[1] (17 September 1879 – 24 December 1973), commonly known as **Periyar**, also referred to as **Thanthai Periyar**, was an Indian [social activist](#) and politician who started the [Self-Respect Movement](#) and [Dravidar Kazhagam](#). He is known as the 'Father of the [Dravidian movement](#)'.^[2] He did notable work against Brahminical dominance and gender and caste inequality in [Tamil Nadu](#).^{[3][4][5]}

E.V. Ramasamy joined the [Indian National Congress](#) in 1919, but resigned in 1925 when he felt that the party was only serving the interests of [Brahmins](#). He questioned the subjugation of non-Brahmin Dravidians as Brahmins enjoyed gifts and donations from non-Brahmins but opposed and discriminated against non-Brahmins in cultural and religious matters.^{[6][7]} In 1924, E.V. Ramasamy participated in non-violent agitation ([satyagraha](#)) in [Vaikom](#), [Travancore](#). From 1929 to 1932 Ramasamy made a tour of [British](#)

[Malaya](#), [Europe](#), and [Soviet Union](#) which influenced him.^{[8][9][10]} In 1939, E.V. Ramasamy became the head of the [Justice Party](#),^[11] and in 1944, he changed its name to *Dravidar Kazhagam*.^[12] The party later split with one group led by [C. N. Annadurai](#) forming the [Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam](#) (DMK) in 1949.^[12] While continuing the Self-Respect Movement, he advocated for an independent [Dravida Nadu](#) (*land of the Dravidians*).^[13]

E.V. Ramasamy promoted the principles of [rationalism](#), [self-respect](#), [women's rights](#) and eradication of [caste](#). He opposed the [exploitation](#) and [marginalisation](#) of the non-Brahmin Dravidian people of [South India](#) and the imposition of what he considered [Indo-Aryan](#) India.



Contents

- 1 Biography
 - 1.1 Early years
 - 1.2 Kasi Pilgrimage Incident
 - 1.3 Member of Congress Party (1919–1925)
 - 1.4 Vaikom Satyagraha (1924–1925)
 - 1.5 Self-Respect Movement
 - 1.6 International travel (1929–1932)
 - 1.7 Opposition to Hindi
 - 1.8 As President of the Justice Party (1938–1944)
 - 1.9 Dravidar Kazhagam (1944–onwards)
 - 1.9.1 Formation of the *Dravidar Kazhagam*
 - 1.9.2 Split with Annadurai
 - 1.9.3 Later years
- 2 Principles and legacy
 - 2.1 Rationalism
 - 2.2 Self-respect

- 2.3 Women's rights
- 2.4 Social reform and eradication of caste
- 2.5 Tamil language and writing
- 2.6 Thoughts on the Thirukkural
- 2.7 Self-determination of Dravida Nadu
- 2.8 Anti-Brahmanism vs. Anti-Brahmin
- 2.9 Comparisons with Gandhi
- 2.10 Religion and atheism
- 2.11 Controversies

- 2.11.1 Factionism in the Justice Party

- 3 Followers and influence

- 4 In popular culture

Early years

[B. R. Ambedkar](#) with Periyar when they met in connection with a Buddhist conference in [Rangoon](#), [Myanmar](#) in 1954.

Erode Venkata Ramasamy was born on 17 September 1879 to a [Kannada](#)^[14] [Balija](#) merchant family^{[15][16][17]} in [Erode](#), then a part of the [Coimbatore district](#) of the [Madras Presidency](#).^[18] E. V. Ramasamy's father is Venkatappa Nayakar (or Venkata), and his mother was Chinnathyee, Muthammal. He had one elder brother named Krishnaswamy and two sisters named Kannamma and Ponnuthoy.^{[1][18]} He later came to be known as "Periyar" meaning 'respected one' or 'elder' in the [Tamil](#).^{[1][19][20][21][22]}

E. V. Ramasamy married when he was 19, and had a daughter who lived for only 5 months. His first wife, [Nagammai](#), died in 1933.^[23] E.V. Ramasamy married for a second time in July 1948.^[24] His second wife, [Maniammai](#), continued E. V. Ramasamy's social work after his death in 1973, and his ideas then were advocated by Dravidar Kazhagam.^[25]

In 1929, E. V. Ramasamy announced the deletion of his caste title *Naicker* from his name at the First Provincial Self-Respect Conference

of [Chengalpattu](#).^[26] He could speak three [Dravidian languages](#): Kannada, Telugu and [Tamil](#).^{[27][28][29][30][citation needed][31][32]} Periyar attended school for five years after which he joined his father's trade at the age of 12. He used to listen to Tamil [Vaishnavite gurus](#) who gave discourses in his house enjoying his father's hospitality. At a young age, he began questioning the apparent contradictions in the [Hindu mythological](#) stories.^[1] As Periyar grew, he felt that people used religion only as a mask to deceive innocent people and therefore took it as one of his duties in life to warn people against superstitions and priests.^[33]

E.V. Ramasamy's father arranged for his wedding when he was nineteen. The bride, Nagammai, was only thirteen. Despite having an [arranged marriage](#), Periyar and Nagammai were already in love with each other.^[citation needed] Nagammai actively supported her husband in his later public activities and [agitation](#). Two years after their marriage, a daughter was born to them. However, their daughter died when she was five months old. The couple had no more children.^[23]

Kasi Pilgrimage Incident

In 1904, E.V. Ramasamy went on a pilgrimage to [Kasi](#) to visit the revered [Shiva](#) temple of [Kashi Vishwanath](#).^[1] Though regarded as one of the holiest sites of [Hinduism](#), he witnessed immoral activities such as begging, and floating dead bodies.^[1] His frustrations extended to functional Hinduism in general when he experienced what he called [Brahmanic](#) exploitation.^[34]

However, one particular incident in Kasi had a profound impact on E.V. Ramasamy's ideology and future work. At the worship site there were free meals offered to guests. To E.V. Ramasamy's shock, he was refused meals at choultries, which exclusively fed [Brahmins](#). Due to extreme hunger, E.V. Ramasamy felt compelled to enter one of the eateries disguised as a Brahmin with a [sacred thread](#) on his bare chest, but was betrayed by his moustache. The gatekeeper at the temple concluded that E.V. Ramasamy was not a Brahmin, as Brahmins were not permitted by the Hindu [shastras](#) to have

moustaches. He not only prevented Periyar's entry but also pushed him rudely into the street.^[1]

As his hunger became intolerable, Periyar was forced to feed on leftovers from the streets. Around this time, he realised that the eatery which had refused him entry was built by a wealthy non-Brahmin from [South India](#).^[1] This discriminatory attitude dealt a blow to Periyar's regard for Hinduism, for the events he had witnessed at Kasi were completely different from the picture of [Kasi](#) he had in mind, as a holy place which welcomed all.^[1] Ramasamy was a [theist](#) until his visit to [Kasi](#), after which his views changed and he became an [atheist](#).^[35]

Member of Congress Party (1919–1925)

E.V. Ramasamy joined the [Indian National Congress](#) in 1919 after quitting his business and resigning from public posts. He held the chairmanship of Erode Municipality and wholeheartedly undertook constructive programs spreading the use of [Khadi](#), picketing toddy shops, boycotting shops selling foreign cloth, and eradicating [untouchability](#). In 1921, Periyar courted imprisonment for picketing toddy shops in Erode. When his wife as well as his sister joined the agitation, it gained momentum, and the administration was forced to come to a compromise. He was again arrested during the [Non-Cooperation movement](#) and the [Temperance movement](#).^[6] In 1922, Periyar was elected the President of the [Madras Presidency](#) Congress Committee during the [Tirupur](#) session, where he advocated strongly for reservation in government jobs and education. His attempts were defeated in the Congress party due to discrimination and [indifference](#), which led to his leaving the party in 1925.^[7]

Vaikom Satyagraha (1924–1925)

According to the prevalent caste system in Kerala and the rest of India, low-caste Hindus were denied entry into temples. In Kerala, they were denied permission to walk on the roads that led to the temples also. (Kerala state was

formed in 1956; earlier it was broadly divided into Malabar (North Kerala), Cochin and Travancore kingdoms).

In the Kakinada meet of the Congress Party in 1923, T K Madhavan presented a report citing the discrimination faced by the depressed castes in Kerala. That session decided to promote movements against untouchability.

In Kerala, a committee was formed comprising people of different castes to fight untouchability in the region. The committee was chaired by K Kelappan; the rest of the members were T K Madhavan, Velayudha Menon, Kurur Neelakantan Namboodiripad and T R Krishnaswami Iyer. In early 1924, they decided to launch a 'Keralaparyatanam' to gain temple entry and also the right to use public roads for every Hindu irrespective of caste or creed.

The movement gained all-India prominence and support came from far and wide. The Akalis of Punjab lend their support by setting up kitchens to provide food to the Satyagrahis. Even Christian and Muslim leaders came forward for support. This was shunned by Gandhiji who wanted the movement to be an intra-Hindu affair. On advice from Gandhiji, the movement was withdrawn temporarily in April 1924. After the talks with caste-Hindus failed, the leaders resumed the movement. Leaders T K Madhavan and K P Kesava Menon were arrested. E V Ramaswamy (Periyar) came from Tamil Nadu to give his support. He was arrested.

On 1 October 1924, a group of savarnas (forward castes) marched in a procession and submitted a petition to the Regent Maharani Sethulakshmi Bai of Travancore with about 25000 signatures for temple entry to everyone. Gandhiji also met with the Regent Maharani. This procession of savarnas was led by Mannath Padmanabhan Nair. Starting with about 500 people at Vaikom, the number increased to about 5000 when the procession reached Thiruvananthapuram in November 1924.

In February 1924, they decided to launch a 'Keralaparyatanam' to gain temple entry and also the right to use public roads for every Hindu irrespective of caste or creed.

In Vaikom, a small town in Kerala state, then [Travancore](#), there were strict laws of [untouchability](#) in and around the temple area. *Dalits*, also known as [Harijans](#), were not allowed into the close streets around and leading to the temple, let alone inside it. Anti-caste feelings were growing and in 1924 Vaikom was chosen as a suitable place for an organised [Satyagraha](#). Under his guidance a movement had already begun with the aim of giving all castes the right to enter the temples. Thus, agitations and demonstrations took place. On 14 April, Periyar and his wife Nagamma arrived in Vaikom. They were immediately arrested and imprisoned for participation. In spite of Gandhi's objection to non-Keralites and non-Hindus taking part, Periyar and his followers continued to give support to the movement until it was withdrawn. He received the title *Vaikom Veeran*, given by his followers who participated in the [Satyagraha](#).^{[36][37][38]}

The way in which the *Vaikom Satyagraha* events have been recorded provides a clue to the image of the respective organisers. In an article entitled *Gandhi and Ambedkar, A Study in Leadership*, [Eleanor Zelliot](#) relates the 'Vaikom Satyagraha', including Gandhi's negotiations with the temple authorities in relation to the event. Furthermore, the editor of E.V. Ramasamy's *Thoughts* states that Brahmins purposely suppressed news about E.V. Ramasamy's participation. A leading Congress magazine, *Young India*, in its extensive reports on Vaikom never mentions E.V. Ramasamy.^[34]

In Kerala, a committee was formed comprising people of different castes to fight untouchability in the region. The committee chaired by K Kelappan, composed of T K Madhavan, Velayudha Menon, Kurur Neelakantan Namboodiripad and T R Krishnaswami Iyer. In February 1924, they decided to launch a 'Keralaparyatanam' to gain temple entry and also the right to use public roads for every Hindu irrespective of caste or creed.

Self-Respect Movement

Periyar and his followers campaigned constantly to influence and pressure the government to take measures to remove social

inequality,(abolish untouchability, manual scavenging system etc) even while other nationalist forerunners focused on the struggle for political independence. The Self-Respect Movement was described from the beginning as "dedicated to the goal of giving non-Brahmins a sense of pride based on their Dravidian past".^[39]

In 1952, the *Periyar Self-Respect Movement Institution* was registered with a list of objectives of the institution from which may be quoted as

for the diffusion of useful knowledge of [political education](#); to allow people to live a life of freedom from slavery to anything against reason and [self respect](#); to do away with needless customs, meaningless ceremonies, and blind [superstitious beliefs](#) in society; to put an end to the present social system in which [caste](#), religion, community and traditional occupations based on the accident of birth, have chained the mass of the people and created "superior" and "inferior" classes... and to give people equal rights; to completely eradicate untouchability and to establish a united society based on [brother/sisterhood](#); to give [equal rights](#) to women; to prevent [child marriages](#) and marriages based on law favourable to one sect, to conduct and encourage love marriages, widow marriages, inter caste and inter-religious marriages and to have the marriages registered under the [Civil Law](#); and to establish and maintain [homes for orphans](#) and widows and to run educational institutions.^[34]

[Propagation](#) of the philosophy of *self respect* became the full-time activity of Periyar since 1925. A Tamil weekly [Kudi Arasu](#) started in 1925, while the English journal *Revolt* started in 1928 carried on the propaganda among the English educated people.^[40] The *Self-Respect Movement* began to grow fast and received the sympathy of the heads of the Justice Party from the beginning. In May 1929, a conference of Self-Respect Volunteers was held at Pattukkotai under the [presidency](#) of S. Guruswami. K.V. Alagiriswami took charge as the head of the volunteer band. Conferences followed in succession

throughout the [Tamil districts](#) of the former Madras Presidency. A training school in Self-Respect was opened at Erode, the home town of Periyar. The object was not just to introduce social reform but to bring about a [social revolution](#) to foster a new spirit and build a new society.^[41]

International travel (1929–1932)

Between 1929 and 1935, under the strain of [World Depression](#), political thinking worldwide received a jolt from the spread of international communism.^[9] Indian political parties, movements and considerable sections of leadership were also affected by inter-continental ideologies. The Self-Respect Movement also came under the influence of the leftist philosophies and institutions. E.V. Ramasamy, after establishing the *Self-Respect Movement* as an independent institution, began to look for ways to strengthen it politically and socially. To accomplish this, he studied the history and politics of different countries, and personally observed these systems at work.^[9]

E.V. Ramasamy toured [Malaya](#) for a month, from December 1929 to January 1930, to propagate the *self-respect* philosophy. Embarking on his journey from [Nagapattinam](#) with his wife Nagammal and his followers, E.V. Ramasamy was received by 50,000 [Tamil Malaysians](#) in [Penang](#). During the same month, he inaugurated the Tamils Conference, convened by the Tamils Reformatory Sangam in [Ipoh](#), and then went to Singapore. In December 1931 he undertook a tour of Europe, accompanied by [S. Ramanathan](#) and Erode Ramu, to personally acquaint himself with their [political systems](#), [social movements](#), way of life, economic and [social progress](#) and administration of public bodies. He visited Egypt, Greece, Turkey, the Soviet Union, Germany, England, Spain, France and Portugal, staying in Russia for three months. On his return journey he halted at [Ceylon](#) and returned to India in November 1932.^[9]

The tour shaped the [political ideology](#) of E.V. Ramasamy to achieve the [social concept](#) of Self-Respect. The communist system in the Soviet Union appealed to him as appropriately suited to deal with the social ills of the country. Thus,

on [socio-economic](#) issues Periyar was [Marxist](#), but he did not advocate for abolishing [private ownership](#).^[42] Immediately after his return, E.V. Ramasamy, in alliance with the enthusiastic communist, M. Singaravelar, began to work out a [socio-political](#) scheme incorporating socialist and self-respect ideals. This marked a crucial stage of development in the *Self-Respect Movement* which got politicised and found its compatibility in Tamil Nadu.^[9]

Opposition to Hindi

In 1937, when [Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari](#) became the [Chief Minister](#) of [Madras Presidency](#), he introduced Hindi as a compulsory language of study in schools, thereby igniting a series of anti-Hindi agitations.^[13] [Tamil nationalists](#), the Justice Party under Sir [A. T. Panneerselvam](#), and E.V. Ramasamy organised [anti-Hindi protests](#) in 1938 which ended with numerous arrests by the Rajaji government.^[43]

During the same year, the slogan "Tamil Nadu for Tamilians"^[44] was first used by E.V. Ramasamy in protest against the introduction of Hindi in schools. He claimed that the introduction of Hindi was a dangerous mechanism used by the Aryans to infiltrate Dravidian culture.^[44] He reasoned that the adoption of Hindi would make Tamils subordinate to the Hindi-speaking [North Indians](#). E.V. Ramasamy claimed that Hindi would not only halt the progress of Tamil people, but would also completely destroy their culture and nullify the progressive ideas that had been successfully inculcated through Tamil in the recent decades.^[45]

Cutting across party lines, [South Indian](#) politicians rallied together in their opposition to Hindi.^[45] There were recurrent [anti-Hindi agitations](#) in 1948, 1952 and 1965.^[46]

As President of the Justice Party (1938–1944)

A political party known as the *South Indian Libertarian Federation* (commonly referred to as *Justice Party*) was founded in 1916, principally to oppose the economic and political power of the Brahmin groups. The party's goal was to

render [social justice](#) to the non-Brahmin groups. To gain the support of the masses, non-Brahmin politicians began propagating an ideology of equality among non-Brahmin castes. Brahmanical priesthood and [Sanskritic social class-value hierarchy](#) were blamed for the existence of [inequalities](#) among non-Brahmin *caste* groups.^[12]

In 1937, when the government required that Hindi be taught in the school system, E.V. Ramasamy organised opposition to this policy through the *Justice Party*. After 1937, the [Dravidian movement](#) derived considerable support from the student community. In later years, opposition to Hindi played a big role in the [politics of Tamil Nadu](#). The fear of the Hindi language had its origin in the conflict between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. To the [Tamils](#), acceptance of Hindi in the school system was a form of bondage. When the *Justice Party* weakened in the absence of mass support, E.V. Ramasamy took over the leadership of the party after being jailed for opposing Hindi in 1939.^[11] Under his tutelage the party prospered, but the party's conservative members, most of whom were rich and educated, withdrew from active participation.^[12]

Dravidar Kazhagam (1944–onwards)

Formation of the *Dravidar Kazhagam*

At a rally in 1944, Periyar, in his capacity as the leader of the Justice Party, declared that the party would henceforth be known as the [Dravidar Kazhagam](#), or "Dravidian Association". However, a few who disagreed with Periyar started a splinter group, claiming to be the original Justice Party. This party was led by veteran Justice Party leader [P. T. Rajan](#) and survived until 1957.

The *Dravidar Kazhagam* came to be well known among the urban communities and students. Villages were influenced by its message. Hindi, and ceremonies that had become associated with Brahmanical priesthood, were identified as alien symbols that should be eliminated from Tamil culture. Brahmins, who were regarded as the guardians of such symbols, came under

verbal attack.^[12] From 1949 onwards, the *Dravidar Kazhagam* intensified social reformist work and put forward the fact that superstitions were the cause for the degeneration of Dravidians. The *Dravidar Kazhagam* vehemently fought for the abolition of untouchability amongst the *Dalits*. It also focused its attention on the liberation of women, women's education, willing marriage, widow marriage, orphanages and mercy homes.^[47]

Split with Annadurai

In 1949, E.V. Ramasamy's chief lieutenant, Conjeevaram Natarajan Annadurai, established a separate association called the *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* (DMK), or Dravidian Progressive Federation.^[12] This was due to differences between the two, while Periyar advocated a separate independent Dravidian or Tamil state, Annadurai compromised with the Delhi government, at the same time claiming increased state independence.^[48] E.V. Ramasamy was convinced that individuals and movements that undertake the task of eradicating the social evils in the Indian sub-continent have to pursue the goal with devotion and dedication without deviating from the path and with uncompromising zeal. Thus, if they contest elections aiming to assume political power, they would lose vigour and a sense of purpose. But among his followers, there were those who had a different view, wanting to enter into politics and have a share in running the government. They were looking for an opportunity to part with E.V. Ramasamy.^[citation needed] Thus, when E.V. Ramasamy married Maniammai on 9 July 1948, they quit the *Dravidar Kazhagam*, stating that E.V. Ramasamy married Maniammayar who was the daughter of Kanagasabhai when he was 70 and she 32. Those who parted company with E.V. Ramasamy joined the DMK.^[24] Though the DMK split from the *Dravidar Kazhagam*, the organisation made efforts to carry on E.V. Ramasamy's Self-Respect Movement to villagers and urban students. The DMK advocated the thesis that the Tamil language was much richer than Sanskrit and Hindi in content, and thus was a key which opened the door

to subjects to be learned.^[12] The *Dravidar Kazhagam* continued to counter Brahminism, Indo-Aryan propaganda, and uphold the Dravidians' right of [self-determination](#).^[49]

Later years

In 1956, despite warnings from [P. Kakkan](#), the President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, Periyar organised a procession to the Marina to burn pictures of the Hindu God Rama.^[50] Periyar was subsequently arrested and confined to prison.^[50]

The activities of Periyar continued when he went to Bangalore in 1958 to participate in the All India Official Language Conference. There he stressed the need to retain English as the Union Official Language instead of Hindi. Five years later, Periyar travelled to North India to advocate the eradication of the caste system. In his last meeting at [Thiagaraya Nagar](#), Chennai on 19 December 1973, Periyar declared a call for action to gain social equality and a dignified way of life. On 24 December 1973, Periyar died at the age of 94.^[24]

Principles and legacy

Periyar spent over fifty years giving speeches, propagating the realisation that everyone is an equal citizen and the differences on the basis of caste and creed were man-made to keep the innocent and ignorant as underdogs in the society. Although Periyar's speeches were targeted towards the illiterate and more mundane masses, scores of educated people were also swayed.^[51] Periyar viewed reasoning as a special tool. According to him, all were blessed with this tool, but very few used it. Thus Periyar used reasoning with respect to subjects of social interest in his presentations to his audiences.^[51] Communal differences in [Tamil society](#) were considered by many to be deep-rooted features until Periyar came to the scene.^[52]

The bedrock of E.V. Ramasamy's principles and the movements that he started was rationalism. He thought that an insignificant [minority](#) in society was [exploiting](#) the [majority](#) and trying to keep it in a subordinate position

forever. He wanted the exploited to sit up and think about their position, and use their reason to realise that they were being exploited by a handful of people. If they started thinking, they would realise that they were human beings like the rest, that birth did not and should not endow superiority over others and that they must awaken themselves and do everything possible to improve their own lot.^[51]

Likewise, E.V. Ramasamy explained that wisdom lies in thinking and that the spear-head of thinking is rationalism. On caste, he stated that no other living being harms or degrades its own class. But man, said to be a rational living being, does these evils. The differences, hatred, enmity, degradation, poverty, and wickedness, now prevalent in the society are due to lack of wisdom and rationalism and not due to God or the cruelty of time. E.V. Ramasamy had written in his books and magazines dozens of times of various occasions that the British rule is better than self-rule^[53]

E.V. Ramasamy also blamed the capitalists for their control of machineries, creating difficulties for the workers. According to his philosophy, rationalism, which has to lead the way for peaceful life to all, had resulted in causing poverty and worries to the people because of dominating forces. He stated that there is no use of simply acquiring titles or amassing wealth if one has no self-respect or scientific knowledge. An example he gave was the West sending messages to the planets, while the Tamil society in India were sending rice and cereals to their dead forefathers through the Brahmins.^[53]

In a message to the Brahmin community, Periyar stated, "in the name of god, religion, and sastras you have duped us. We were the ruling people. Stop this life of cheating us from this year. Give room for rationalism and humanism".^[54] He added that "any opposition not based on rationalism, science, or experience will one day or another, reveal the fraud, selfishness, lies and conspiracies".^[54]

Self-respect

on his image of an ideal world and a universally accepted one. His philosophy preaches that human actions should be based on rational thinking. Further, the outcome of the natural instinct of human beings is to examine every object and every action and even nature with a spirit of inquiry, and to refuse to submit to anything irrational as equivalent to slavery. Thus, the philosophy of self-respect taught that human actions should be guided by reason, right and wrong should follow from [rational](#) thinking and conclusions drawn from reason should be respected under all circumstances. Freedom means respect to thoughts and actions considered 'right' by human beings on the basis of 'reason'. There is not much difference between 'freedom' and 'self-respect'.^[55]

Periyar's foremost appeal to people was to develop self-respect. He preached that the Brahmins had monopolised and cheated other communities for decades and deprived them of self-respect. He stated that most Brahmins claimed to belong to a "superior" community with the reserved privilege of being in charge of temples and performing [archanas](#). He felt that they were trying to reassert their control over religion by using their superior caste status to claim the exclusive privilege to touch idols or enter the sanctum sanctorum.^[52]

Women's rights

As a [rationalist](#) and ardent social reformer, Periyar advocated forcefully throughout his life that women should be given their legitimate position in society as the equals of men and that they should be given good education and have the [right to property](#). He thought age and social customs was not a bar in marrying women. He was keen that women should realise their rights and be worthy citizens of their country.^[56]

Periyar fought against the orthodox traditions of marriage as suppression of women in Tamil Nadu and throughout the Indian sub-continent. Though [arranged marriages](#) were meant to enable a couple to live together throughout life, it was manipulated to [enslave](#) women.^[57] Much worse was the

practice of child marriages practised throughout India at the time. It was believed that it would be a sin to marry after puberty.^[58] Another practice, which is prevalent today, is the [dowry system](#) where the bride's family is supposed to give the husband a huge payment for the bride. The purpose of this was to assist the newly wedded couple financially, but in many instances dowries were misused by bridegrooms. The outcome of this abuse turned to the exploitation of the bride's parents wealth, and in certain circumstances, lead to [dowry deaths](#).^[59] There have been hundreds of thousands of cases where wives have been murdered, mutilated, and burned alive because the father of the bride was unable to make the dowry payment to the husband. Periyar fiercely stood up against this abuse meted out against women.^[60]

Women in India also did not have rights to their families' or husbands' property. Periyar fought fiercely for this and also advocated for women to have the right to separate or divorce their husbands under reasonable circumstances.^[60] While [birth control](#) remained taboo in society of Periyar's time, he advocated for it not only for the health of women and population control, but for the [liberation of women](#).^[61]

He criticised the hypocrisy of [chastity](#) for women and argued that it should either apply also to men, or not at all for both genders.^[62] While fighting against this, Periyar advocated getting rid of the [Devadasi](#) system. In his view it was an example of a list of degradations of women, attaching them to temples for the entertainment of others, and as temple prostitutes.^[63] Further, for the liberation of women, Periyar pushed for their right to have an education and to join the [armed services](#) and the police force.^{[62][64]}

According to biographer M.D. Gopalakrishnan, Periyar and his movement achieved a better status for women in [Tamil society](#). Periyar held that, in matters of education and employment, there should be no difference between men and women. Gopalakrishnan states that Periyar's influence in the [State departments](#) and even the Center made it possible for women to join police departments and the army. Periyar also spoke out against [child marriage](#).^[52]

Social reform and eradication of caste

Periyar wanted thinking people to see their society as far from perfect and in urgent need of reform. He wanted the government, the political parties and social workers to identify the evils in society and boldly adopt measures to remove them.^[65] Periyar's philosophy did not differentiate social and political service.^[66] According to him, the first duty of a government is to run the social organisation efficiently, and the philosophy of religion was to organise the social system. Periyar stated that while Christian and Islamic religions were fulfilling this role, the Hindu religion remained totally unsuitable for social progress. He argued that the government was not for the people, but, in a "topsy-turvy" manner, the people were for the government. He attributed this situation to the state of the social system contrived for the advantage of a small group of people.^[66]

One of the areas of Periyar's focus was on the upliftment of rural communities. In a booklet called *Village Uplift*, Periyar pleaded for rural reform. At that time rural India still formed the largest part of the Indian subcontinent, in spite of the ongoing process of urbanisation. Thus, the distinction between rural and urban had meant an economic and social degradation for rural inhabitants. Periyar wanted to eradicate the concept of "village" as a discrimination word among places, just as the concept of "outcast" among social groups. Periyar advocated for a location where neither the name nor the situation or its conditions imply differences among people.^[67] He further advocated for the modernisation of villages by providing public facilities such as schools, libraries, radio stations, roads, bus transport, and police stations.^[68]

Periyar felt that a small number of cunning people created caste distinctions to dominate Indian society, so he emphasised that individuals must first develop self-respect and learn to analyse propositions rationally. According to Periyar, a self-respecting rationalist would readily realise that the caste system had been stifling self-respect and therefore he or she would strive to get rid of this menace.^[69]

Periyar stated that the caste system in South India is, due to Indo-Aryan influence, linked with the arrival of Brahmins from the [north](#). Ancient [Tamil Nadu](#) (part of [Tamilakkam](#)) had a different stratification of society in four or five regions (*Tinai*), determined by natural surroundings and adequate means of living.^[70] Periyar also argued that birds, animals, and worms, which are considered to be devoid of rationalism do not create castes, or differences of high and low in their own species. But man, considered to be a rational being, was suffering from these because of religion and discrimination.^[71]

The [Samathuvapuram](#) (Equality Village) social equality system introduced by the [Government of Tamil Nadu](#) in the late 1990s is named after Ramasamy.^[72]

Tamil language and writing

Periyar claimed that [Tamil](#), [Telugu](#), [Malayalam](#), and [Kannada](#) came from the same mother language of [Old Tamil](#). He explained that the Tamil language is called by four different names since it is spoken in four different Dravidian states. Nevertheless, current understanding of [Dravidian languages](#) contradicts such claims. For example, the currently known classification of [Dravidian languages](#) provides the following distinct classes: Southern (including Tamil–Malayalam, Kannada and Tulu); Central (including Telugu–Kui and Kolami–Parji); and, Northern (including Kurukh–Malto and Brahui).

With relation to writing, Periyar stated that using the Tamil script about the arts, which are useful to the people in their life and foster knowledge, talent and courage, and propagating them among the masses, will enlighten the people. Further, he explained that it will enrich the language, and thus it can be regarded as a zeal for Tamil.^[73] Periyar also stated that if words of North Indian origin (Sanskrit) are removed from Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam, only Tamil will be left. On the Brahmin usage of Tamil, he stated that the Tamil spoken by the [Andhras](#) and the [Malayali people](#) was far better than the Tamil spoken by the Brahmins. Periyar believed that Tamil language will make the Dravidian people unite under the banner of Tamil culture, and that it will make

the Kannadigas, Andhras and the Malayalees be vigilant. With regards to a Dravidian alliance under a common umbrella language, Periyar stated that "a time will come for unity. This will go on until there is an end to the North Indian domination. We shall reclaim an independent sovereign state for us".^[74]

At the same time, Periyar was also known to have made controversial remarks on the Tamil language and people from time to time. On one occasion, he referred to the Tamil people as "barbarians"^[75] and the Tamil language as the "language of barbarians".^{[76][75][77][78][79]} However, Anita Diehl explains that Periyar made these remarks on Tamil because it had no respective feminine verbal forms.^[34] But Anita Diehl's explanation doesn't match with Periyar's own explanation. Periyar himself explained reasons many times in his speeches and writings, for instance, an excerpt from his book *Thamizhum, Thamizharum* (Tamil and Tamil people) reads, "I say Tamil as barbarian language. Many get angry with me for saying so. But no one ponders over why I say so. They say Tamil is a 3,000 to 4,000 years-old language and they boast about this. Precisely that is what the reason why I call Tamil as barbarian language. People should understand the term primitive and barbarism. What was the status of people living 4,000 years ago and now? We are just blindly sticking to old glories. No one has come forward to reform Tamil language and work for its growth."^[80]

Periyar's ideas on [Tamil alphabet](#) reforms included those such as the reasons for the vowel 'ஈ' (i) having a cursive and looped representation of the short form 'இ' (I).^[clarification needed] In [stone inscriptions](#) from 400 or 500 years ago, many [Tamil letters](#) are found in other shapes. As a matter of necessity and advantage to cope with printing technology, Periyar thought that it was sensible to change a few letters, reduce the number of letters, and alter a few signs. He further explained that the older and more divine a language and its letters were said to be, the more they needed reform. Because of changes brought about by means of modern transport and international contact, and happenings that have attracted words and products from many countries,

foreign words and their pronunciations have been assimilated into Tamil quite easily. Just as a few compound characters have separate signs to indicate their length as in ' கர ', ' கே ' (kA:, kE:), Periyar questioned why other compound characters like ' கி ', ' கீ ', ' கு ', ' கூ ' (kl, ki:, kU, ku:) (indicated integrally as of now), shouldn't also have separate signs. Further, changing the shape of letters, creating new symbols and adding new letters and similarly, dropping those that are redundant, were quite essential according to Periyar. Thus, the glory and excellence of a language and its script depend on how easily they can be understood or learned and on nothing else"^[34]

Thoughts on the Thirukkural

Main article: [Thirukkural](#)

Periyar hailed the *Thirukkural* as a valuable scripture which contained many scientific and philosophical truths. He also praised the secular nature of the work. Periyar praised [Thiruvalluvar](#) for his description of God as a formless entity with only positive attributes. He also suggested that one who reads the *Thirukkural* will become a [Self-respecter](#), absorbing knowledge in politics, society, and economics. According to him, though certain items in this ancient book of ethics may not relate to today, it permitted such changes for modern society.^[81]

On [caste](#), he believed that the *Kural* illustrates how [Vedic](#) laws of [Manu](#) were against the [Sudras](#) and other communities of the Dravidian race. On the other hand, Periyar opined that the ethics from the *Kural* was comparable to the Christian Bible. The Dravidar Kazhagam adopted the *Thirukkural* and advocated that *Thiruvalluvar's Kural* alone was enough to educate the people of the country.^[81] One of Periyar's quotes on the *Thirukkural* from *Veeramani's Collected Works of Periyar* was "when Dravida Nadu (Dravidistan) was a victim to Indo-Aryan deceit, *Thirukkural* was written by a great Dravidian *Thiruvalluvar* to free the Dravidians".^[81]

Periyar also asserted that due to the secular nature of Thirukkural, it has the capacity to be the common book of faith for all humanity and can be kept on par or above the holy books of all religions.

Self-determination of Dravida Nadu

The Dravidian-Aryan conflict was believed to be a continuous historical phenomenon that started when the Aryans first set their foot in the Dravidian lands. Even a decade before the idea of separation appeared, Periyar stated that, "as long as [Aryan religion](#), Indo-Aryan domination, propagation of Aryan [Vedas](#) and Aryan "Varnashrama" existed, there was need for a "Dravidian Progressive Movement" and a "Self-Respect Movement".^[82] Periyar became very concerned about the growing North Indian domination over the south which appeared to him no different from foreign domination. He wanted to secure the fruits of labour of the Dravidians to the Dravidians, and lamented that fields such as political, economic, industrial, social, art, and spiritual were dominated by the north for the benefit of the North Indians. Thus, with the approach of independence from Britain, this fear that [North India](#) would take the place of Britain to dominate [South India](#) became more and more intense.^[83]

Periyar was clear about the concept of a separate nation, comprising [Tamil](#) areas, that is part of the then existing Madras Presidency with adjoining areas into a federation guaranteeing [protection](#) of [minorities](#), including religious, linguistic, and cultural freedom of the people. A separatist conference was held in June 1940 at Kanchipuram when Periyar released the map of the proposed *Dravida Nadu*, but failed to get British approval. On the contrary, Periyar received sympathy and support from people such as [Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar](#) and [Muhammad Ali Jinnah](#) for his views on the Congress, and for his opposition to Hindi. They then decided to convene a movement to resist the Congress.^{[82][84]}

The concept of *Dravida Nadu* was later modified down to Tamil Nadu.^[85] This led to a proposal for a union of the Tamil people of not only [South India](#) but

including those of Ceylon as well.^[86] In 1953, Periyar helped to preserve Madras as the capital of Tamil Nadu, which later was the name he substituted for the more general Dravida Nadu.^[87] In 1955 Periyar threatened to burn the national flag, but on Chief Minister Kamaraj's pledge that Hindi should not be made compulsory, he postponed the action.^[34] In his speech of 1957 called *Suthantara Tamil Nadu En?* (Why an independent Tamil Nadu?), he criticised the Central Government of India, inducing thousands of Tamilians to burn the constitution of India. The reason for this action was that Periyar held the Government responsible for maintaining the caste system. After stating reasons for separation and turning down opinions against it, he closed his speech with a "war cry" to join and burn the map of India on 5 June. Periyar was sentenced to six months imprisonment for burning the Indian constitution.^[88]

Advocacy of such a nation became illegal when [separatist](#) demands were banned by law in 1957. Regardless of these measures, a *Dravida Nadu Separation Day* was observed on 17 September 1960 resulting in numerous arrests.^[89] However, Periyar resumed his campaign in 1968. He wrote an editorial on 'Tamil Nadu for Tamilians' in which he stated, that by nationalism only Brahmins had prospered and nationalism had been developed to abolish the rights of [Tamils](#). He advocated that there was need to establish a *Tamil Nadu Freedom Organization* and that it was necessary to work towards it.^[90]

Anti-Brahmanism vs. Anti-Brahmin

Periyar was a radical advocate of [anti-Brahmanism](#). Periyar's ideology of anti-Brahmanism is quite often confused as being anti-Brahmin. Even a non-Brahmin who supports inequality based on caste was seen as a supporter of brahmanism. Periyar called on both Brahmins and non-Brahmins to shun brahmanism.

In 1920, when the Justice Party came to power, Brahmins occupied about 70 percent^{[25][91]} of the high level posts in the government. After reservation was introduced by the Justice Party, it reversed this trend, allowing non-Brahmins

to rise in the government of the Madras Presidency.^[91] Periyar, through the Justice Party, advocated against the imbalance of the domination of Brahmins who constituted only 3 percent^{[25][92]} of the population, over [government jobs](#), [judiciary](#) and the Madras University.^[92] His Self-Respect Movement espoused rationalism and [atheism](#) and the movement had currents of [anti-Brahminism](#).^[93] Furthermore, Periyar stated that:

"Our [Dravidian movement](#) does not exist against the Brahmins or the Baniyas (a North Indian [merchant caste](#)). If anyone thinks so, I would only pity him. But we will not tolerate the ways in which Brahminism and the Bandiaism^[clarification needed] is degrading Dravidanadu. Whatever support they may have from the government, neither myself nor my movement will be of cowardice".^{[94][95]}

Periyar also criticised [Subramanya Bharathi](#) in the journal *Ticutar* for portraying Mother Tamil as a sister of Sanskrit in his poems:

"They say Bharati is an immortal poet....Even if a rat dies in an akrakāram, they would declare it to be immortal. ... of Tamilnadu praises him. Why should this be so? Supposedly because he sang fulsome praises of Tamil and Tamilnadu. What else could he sing? His own mother tongue, Sanskrit, has been dead for years. What other language did he know? He cannot sing in Sanskrit. ... He says Tamilnadu is the land of Aryas."¹
