



ENRICHMENT OF WOMEN IN TAMILNADU: MISSION OF PERIYAR

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ABSTRACT

Periyar E.V.R's views and services for the upliftment of women from the beginning of his political career to his death at his age of seventy four. It is generally accepted fact that the oppression of women has been a chronic and deep-rooted malady all over the world whether it is categorized as developed country or it is branded as developing country or it is existing as underdeveloped condition. The condition of women has continued to be far from satisfactory in India too. Early nineteenth century saw the emergence of various socio-religious reform movements in India. In the social sphere, there were movements of caste reform or caste abolition, equal rights for women, and a crusade, against social and legal inequalities. Interestingly, the enlightened individuals of the male section took the lead in initiating efforts to abolish laws and customs, which suppressed the women in society. If the girls today outshine the boys in every examination results in Tamil Nadu, in academic excellence, the credit should go to the social reform workers like Periyar E.V.R. and others.

KEYWORDS: Legal Inequalities, Interestingly, Periyar, Excellence

INTRODUCTION

Periyar E. V. Ramasamy (September 17, 1879 – December 24, 1973), also known as Ramaswami, EVR, Thanthai Periyar, or Periyar, was a Dravidian social reformer and politician from India, who founded the Self-Respect Movement and Dravidar Kazhagam.

He advocated for the rights of women and was considered ahead of his time as well as controversial. Throughout the Indian sub-continent today, women continue to be marginalized in various ethnic and religious groups. During the early part of the twentieth century there have been

many agitations against British rule (external) and injustices committed amongst the people of the sub-continent (internal).¹ With all this, women's rights have been left in the dark. Periyar stated that, "political reformers are agitating that the privilege of administering "India" should go to "Indians". Social reformers are agitating that communal divisions and differences should be done away with. But nobody takes notice of the great hardship suffered by one section of women. Intelligent people will agree that the creator has not endowed men and women with different faculties. There are, in men and women, intellectuals, courageous people, as well as stupid and cowardly people. While this is the case, it is unfair and wicked on the part of the haughty male population to continue to denigrate and enslave the female population."¹

Periyar has explained that it is extremely cruel on the part of the Hindu brethren to witness the gradual destruction suffered by one half of their society, without taking any action. This apart, men and women are both human beings. The difference in physical features will not change the human quality. The difference in intellect and physical strength which we find among men can be found among women also. Practice improves the position equally in both men and women.

Just as there are foolish people, weaklings and people with bad qualities among men, among women also there are likely to be people belonging to these categories.

PERIYAR AND WOMEN RIGHTS

Women rights and women empowerment occupies first and prominent place among all other social reform activities of Periyar E.V.R. There are so many writers on Periyar, who wrote many books especially on the issue of Periyar E.V.R's views and services for the upliftment, empowerment and emancipation of women. K.Veeramani one of his prominent disciples of Periyar, collected and published a separate volume in Tamil with regard to Periyar E.V.R's speeches and writings on women empowerment and women rights. A studying Periyar E.V.R's speeches and writings on various journals and periodicals published by Periyar E.V.R. himself and by studying various compiled books by various scholars on the subject matter of Periyar E.V.R's views on women rights, the present study identifies about ten important issues on women rights by which Periyar E. V. R. continuously talk, write and worked for the upliftment of women.² They are as follows,

PERIYAR E.V.R'S VIEWS ON PROPERTY RIGHTS TO WOMEN

Periyar E.V.R. considered the grant of property rights to women, is a very significant and urgent matter to be implemented first. Periyar E.V.R. when he published his book in 1942 entitled “Pen Yen Adimaiyaanaal?”(Why Women Became Slaves?), he wrote a separate chapter under the title, “Penkalukkaana Sothurimai” (Property Rights to Women). This fact itself reveals that how Periyar E.V.R. showed evinced interest in granting property rights to women. Periyar strongly believed that if women are to be liberated and if they have to enjoy all rights in par with men, if they have to be respected as a fellow human being, if they have to be enjoy all the worldly available happy affairs, they (Women) should be given property rights of parents in par with the male heirs of the family. In this book itself Periyar happily appreciated the proposals of the then Mysore samasthan, (a separate independent state of the then period) which published detailed provisions of giving property rights to women. Further Periyar appreciated an another provision of the proposal of Mysore Kingdom (samasthan), which says that ‘if a husband is supposed to be affected of some dangerous and contagious diseases or if a husband is having some concubines and having some illegal and extra marital

affairs, the wife of that disease affected or illegal extra marital sexual relation affair husband, should be given the right of divorcing or that wife should be given the right of compensation from that husband. He criticized the Hindu activists of the then period that they opposed and made stumbling block against the Child Marriages Prevention Act of the British rulers.³ Periyar requested and appealed the women that they should immediately involve and start an agitation to acquire their property rights.

- ✓ Chastity
- ✓ Marriage System
- ✓ Gender Equality
- ✓ Women Education and Employment
- ✓ Property Rights to Women
- ✓ Widow Remarriage
- ✓ Pregnancy, Childbirth and Family Planning
- ✓ Injustice against Women done by Epics, Puranas, Manudharma and other Religious
- ✓ Literatures
- ✓ Need for Change in Life Style of Women
- ✓ Other Important Measures needed for the Upliftment of Women.

PERIYAR E.V.R.'S VIEWS ON GENDER EQUALITY

It is to be mentioned that starting from his early political career

itself Periyar E.V.R. showed evinced interest in providing gender justice and social empowerment of women. To achieve his goal of gender equality Periyar E.V.R. convened innumerable public meetings, several state level conferences, and passed a lot of resolutions for demanding gender justice to women and also passed many resolutions against the unscientific practice and the rule of religion and society which are degrading women. In the first Provincial Self-Respect conference held in Chengleput in February 1929, Periyar E.V.R. prepared and passed the following resolutions for the establishment of Gender justice.

- ✓ The Government should make education as a fundamental right of women.
- ✓ Empowerment of women should be carried out by the government through providing employment opportunities with priority in the entire government department.
- ✓ The Government should reserve fifty percent of seats to women in all government appointments.
- ✓ The Government should give Training to women in hard core jobs to eliminate the identification of weaker sex.
- ✓ The Government should take necessary steps to impart technical

education to women and make them capable of handling the modern technology. This Chengleput conference was considered as the pioneer one in advocating the gender equality and social rights of women. Further this conference was also praised by the advocates of social justice as turning point for entry of more and more women into government employment and also to enter into social reformation movement.⁴

WIDOW-REMARRIAGE

On the remarriage of widows, Periyar states that among the atrocities perpetrated by the Hindu male population against women, here we have to consider the treatment meted out to widows alone. If a girl loses her husband, even before knowing anything of worldly pleasures, she is compelled to close her eyes to everything in the world and die broken-hearted. Even in Periyar's community at the time, there were widowed girls below the age of 13 years. Periyar stated how it is a touching sight to see the parents of those widowed children treating them like untouchables.³

He goes on to say that whatever may be the reason for the present state of the Hindu society, my firm belief that

the low position given permanently to widows may prove to be the reason for the utter ruin of the Hindu religion and the Hindu society.

If we try to find the reason for such conduct, we will have to conclude that they instinctively feel that women are slaves, subservient to men and that they must be kept under control. That is why these people treat women like animals. They seem to feel that giving freedom to women is equivalent to committing a very serious crime. The result of this attitude is that there is no independence or freedom to one half of the human race. This wicked enslavement of half of the human race is due to the fact that men are physically a little stronger than women. This principle applies to all spheres of life and the weaker are enslaved by the stronger.⁵

If slavery has to be abolished in society, the male arrogance and wickedness which lead to the enslavement of women must be abolished first. Only when this is achieved, the tender sprouts of freedom and equality will register growth.

One of the reasons why Periyar hated Hinduism and the orthodoxy practiced in the name of Hinduism was

the practice of child marriage. Many of the girl children who were married before they were ten or twelve years old became widows before they knew the meaning of the word.

PERIYAR E. V. R 'S VIEWS ON WOMEN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Periyar E.V.R. always viewed that for the emancipation women there is a need for creating equal opportunities for women to get their education. According to Periyar, women themselves should come out of the bond of slavery, without the support of any men, provided that if they were given the opportunity of getting their education. He strongly viewed that as there is a reservation system existing for the socially backward sections of the people, there must be fifty percent of reservation should be provided for women in education and employment.⁶ He further insisted that in the entire government ministry, women were to be included equally as ministers. Periyar gave more importance to women child for education than the education for the male child. According to Periyar, if a man was given the opportunity He used to say that if there are two children in a family, i.e., one

male child and another female child, if that family is able to provide education for only one child, that opportunity for getting education should be given only to the female child.⁷ Periyar E.V.R further opined that if a male person is supposed to get education, that education will be helped him to develop his personality and also will be helped him to increase his financial position, but at the same time if a female child is given the opportunity of getting education, that educational knowledge will definitely helped her not only to develop her economic position but also will be helpful for the society, to solve many of the existing social evils.⁸

CONCLUSION

Periyar E.V.R. even from his early political career onwards consistently showed a full-pledged interest in the liberation, emancipation and upliftment of women. It is to be noted here that when nobody showed interest in the women empowerment issues in the 1920s and 1930s, it was Periyar who waged a war against the male dominated traditionalistic society and achieved a lot in his aim of empowering women. Any neutral researcher who compares the condition of women in the beginning of the 20th century i.e., in 1920s when Periyar

E.V.R. started his early political career and the condition of women at the time of the death of Periyar E.V.R. in 1970s, that researcher can easily identify and acknowledge the clear-cut variations in the development and empowerment of women in the socio-political and economic fields. With the result of the tireless, continuous and consistent services of Periyar E.V.R. towards women empowerment, the women of the Tamil society were awakened and began to claim their rights in all walks of life. This great achievement of Periyar E.V.R. Through his revolutionary means of leadership is totally incomparable with any leaders.⁹

It is to be noted here that Periyar E.V.R.'s services and his achievement in witnessing the results of his leadership during his own lifetime has been recognized and appreciated by many neutral indigenous researchers and also by the foreign scholars like Eugene Irschick, David Wash brook, Anita Diehl, etc. But at the same time, 'the role played by Periyar E.V.R. as a Feminist is not yet recognized by many of the so called women's movements and also by some so-called reform associations in India, because they are led and dominated by some women who belong to the upper caste and upper

class, the supremacy of whom was challenged by Periyar E.V.R'. Thus, the multi-dimensional role played by Periyar E.V.R. for the emancipation of women rights made him to call as the 'Pioneer of Feminism' in India. The uniqueness of the leadership of Periyar E.V.R. and his feminist ideology is to be understood from his innate sense of gender equality and social justice.¹⁰ The Women can get back their rightful place in society if law is properly enforced to check male superiority. Periyar advocated that Women have to step in and involve themselves for their liberation and not solely depend on males.

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