

# Department of Employment and Training

## TNPSC GROUP II MAINS - UNIT II

**Course :** TNPSC Group II Mains Material

**Subject :** Tamil Society

**Topic :** Socio Political movements of 19th and 20th centuries, Vallalar's Samarasa Sutha Sanmarga Satya Sangam

### Table of Content

<b>Social Reform Movements.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Efforts to Eradicate Caste.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Role of the British East India Company.....	4
Role of Christian Missionaries.....	4
<b>Social Reformers of Tamil Nadu.....</b>	<b>4</b>
a) Ramalinga Swamigal (Vallalar).....	4
b) Iyothee Thassar.....	5
c)Ayya Vaikundar.....	5
<b>Hindu Progressive Improvement Society.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Brahmo Samaj, 1864.....	7
Madras Brahmo Samaj.....	8
Veda Samaj (1864).....	8
<b>Theosophical Society.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Socio Political movements of 20th centuries.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Labour Movements in Tamil Nadu.....	11
Women's Movements in Tamil Nadu.....	11
Self-Respect Movement.....	12
Abolition of Devadasi System.....	12
<b>Practice Questions:.....</b>	<b>12</b>

### © Copyright

The Department of Employment and Training has prepared the Competitive Exams study material in the form of e-content for the benefit of Competitive Exam aspirants and it is being uploaded in this Virtual Learning Portal. This e-content study material is the sole property of the Department of Employment and Training. No one (either an individual or an institution) is allowed to copy or reproduce the matter in any form. The trespassers will be prosecuted under the Indian Copyright Act. It is a cost-free service provided to the job seekers who are preparing for the Competitive Exams.

**Director,  
Department of Employment and Training.**

## First Quarter of the Nineteenth Century:

- Emergence of an English-educated intelligentsia closely associated with British administration and trade.
- Influence of Christian missionaries began to make an impact.
- Bengal was the first province to be affected by British influence.
- British administration, English education, and European literature brought new ideas that challenged traditional knowledge.
- New ideas included rationalism, human progress, evolution, and natural rights associated with the Enlightenment.
- The spread of printing technology played a crucial role in the diffusion of these ideas.

## British Perspective on Indian Society:

- The British characterized Indian society as being trapped in superstition and obscurantism.
- They criticized practices like idolatry, polytheism, sati, and the caste system.
- The British argued that without their intervention, India could not overcome these social evils.
- This self-serving argument was used by missionaries and Utilitarians to justify British rule.

## Complexity of Indian Society:

- India in the early nineteenth century was diverse, with varying conditions across regions.
- Social and cultural evils had been fought by Indian reformers for centuries.
- The advent of British Enlightenment ideas posed a new challenge for reform.

## Emergence of Reform Movements:

- Reform movements aimed at challenging traditional institutions and advocating for modernization.
- The spread of Western education, new economic forces, growth of nationalist sentiment, and European influence contributed to the rise of these movements.
- The movements were unified by rationalism, religious universalism, and humanism.
- Reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy repudiated the infallibility of the Vedas, and Syed Ahmed Khan emphasized that religious tenets were not immutable.

## Classification of Reform Movements:

- Reformist Movements: Focused on rational changes and reforming social practices.
- Revivalist Movements: Sought to revive and purify religion, often relying more heavily on tradition.
- Both types of movements sought to address social ills like caste and gender inequality using religious legitimacy.

## Social Reform Movements:

- Initially, these movements had a narrow social base, largely among the upper and middle classes.
- Over time, they expanded to lower strata of society to reconstruct the social fabric.
- Intellectual debates, public arguments, tracts, and journals helped spread new ideas.

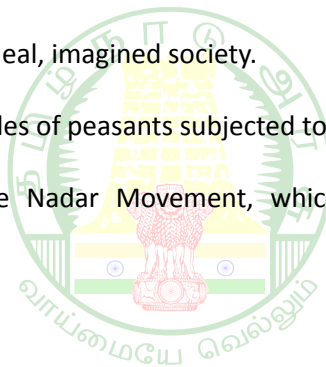
- Organizations like the Social Conference, Servants of India, and Christian missionaries played a key role in giving impetus to the reform movements.

#### Role of the National Movement:

- By the twentieth century, the national movement provided leadership and organization for social reforms.
- The national movement helped in furthering the reach and impact of the reform movements across Indian society.

### Social Reform Movements

1. **Revolutionary Movement:**
  - Aimed at transforming society based on specific goals.
2. **Revivalist Movement:**
  - Seeks to restore past ideals, institutions, and traditions.
  - Can be reactionary or reformative.
3. **Resistance Movement:**
  - Opposes social or cultural changes within society.
4. **Utopian Movement:**
  - Aspires to create an ideal, imagined society.
5. **Peasant Movement:**
  - Focuses on the struggles of peasants subjected to exploitation and bonded labor.
6. **Social Equality Movement:**
  - Examples include the Nadar Movement, which fought against social injustice and inequality.



### Efforts to Eradicate Caste

#### Opposition to the Varna System

The caste-based Varna system took root and flourished in Tamil Nadu after the arrival of the Aryans. This system received substantial support from the Pallava, Chola, and Nayaka rulers. During the Pallava period, Brahmins were given special respect and social priority. Mahendravarman I, originally a Jain, converted to Shaivism and promoted the Varna system. Subsequent Pallava rulers, as well as the Pandya and Chola kings, were instrumental in strengthening caste distinctions.

Historian A. Ramasamy opines that "the influence of Tamil Brahmins, who had been living in Tamil Nadu since the Sangam era, waned, while the prominence of North Indian Brahmins who migrated later increased." The four-century-long Bhakti movement, which thrived during this period, justified and upheld the caste system rather than eliminating it. The Nayakas, Nawabs, and Marathas also accepted and continued the caste system as it was practiced.

After the arrival of the British, efforts to reform the caste-based Varna system began to emerge.

#### Role of the British East India Company

The East India Company, which gained a foothold in Tamil Nadu by the late 17th century, introduced a common Western education system accessible to all. They allocated funds for education, established institutions, and spread literacy. Alongside, literature, scientific knowledge, and education flourished simultaneously.

When the Company government directly participated in the growth of education in Tamil Nadu, significant progress occurred at all levels—primary, secondary, higher secondary, colleges, and universities. Women's education also received encouragement. This resulted in heightened social awareness among the educated, contributing to their active participation in Tamil Nadu's socio-religious reform movements.

### **Role of Christian Missionaries**

Christian missionaries who came to Tamil Nadu concentrated their efforts on marginalized, ostracized, and neglected communities that had been excluded due to the caste system. They engaged in religious outreach, converted many, and gave a voice to the voiceless. These missionaries provided shelter, social status, and recognition to those who had been labeled as "untouchables."

They also significantly contributed to the education, health, and overall upliftment of oppressed communities, as well as to women's progress, abolition of slavery, and famine relief activities. Resolutions condemning the caste system were passed. The socio-religious reform movements that emerged and grew in modern Tamil Nadu owe much to the contributions of Christian missionaries. In essence, the counter-response to their religious propaganda and conversion activities spurred societal and religious reformation.

### **Role and Activities:**

#### **1. Educational Initiatives:**

- Missionaries established schools for socially and economically disadvantaged groups, providing access to modern education.
- They emphasized the education of marginalized communities, including women and orphans, often neglected by the Company government.
- Boarding schools became a haven for destitute widows and orphans, particularly during the frequent famines of the 19th century.

#### **2. Social Reform:**

- Advocated for the civil rights of marginalized communities, including access to public roads and the right for women to wear upper garments.
- Promoted economic upliftment through employment in state services.

#### **3. Humanitarian Efforts:**

- Organized famine relief, offering shelter and support to affected populations.
- Many people converted to Christianity during famines, notably in regions like Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

#### **4. Religious Work:**

- Despite an initial ban on missionary activities in Company-controlled territories, missionaries like William Carey, Joshua Marshman, and William Ward worked from the Danish colony of Serampore.
- Their activities laid the foundation for modern Protestant missionary work in India.

#### **5. Influence on Society:**

- By introducing modern education and promoting reforms, missionaries helped address societal decadence, countering colonial narratives of cultural inferiority.
- Their efforts often provided marginalized groups with cultural and social confidence.

### Challenges Faced:

#### 1. Policy of Neutrality:

- The East India Company's official policy of neutrality towards native religions initially barred missionaries from operating in their territories.
- Fear of repeating the Portuguese experience of forced conversions influenced this stance.

#### 2. Orthodox Resistance:

- Missionary activities, particularly proselytization, were often met with resistance from orthodox elements within Indian society.

#### 3. Limitations:

- Earlier missionary efforts by the Portuguese and others had limited geographic and demographic impact.

### Impact on Indian Society:

- Christian missionaries played a pivotal role in modernizing education, supporting social reforms, and aiding underprivileged communities.
- Their activities, though sometimes controversial, were integral to the broader social reform movements of the 19th century in India.

### Social Reformers of Tamil Nadu

#### a) Ramalinga Swamigal (Vallalar)

**Ramalinga Swamigal** (1823–1874), popularly known as Vallalar or Ramalinga Adigal, was born in Marudhur, near Chidambaram. After his father's demise, his family relocated to Chennai. Despite lacking formal education, he attained immense knowledge and scholarship. Vallalar emphasized compassion and responsibility among living beings, advocating the view that those without compassion are clouded in wisdom.

He introduced the concept of **jeevakarunya** (compassion for living beings), extending his kindness to humans, animals, and even plants. In 1865, he established the **Samarasa Vedha Sanmarga Sangam**, later renamed **Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Satya Sanga**, meaning "Society for Pure Truth in Universal Self-hood."

In response to the devastating famine of 1866 in South India, Vallalar established a **free feeding house at Vadalur** in 1867, which served people of all castes. His teachings and philosophy are preserved in his collection of songs titled **Thiruvavutpa** (Songs of Grace). The **Satya Gnana Sabha** at Vadalur stands as a monument to his spiritual and reformatory mission.

#### b) Iyothee Thassar

- **Pandithar Iyothee Thassar** (1845–1914) was a radical Tamil scholar, writer, journalist, Siddha medicine practitioner, and socio-political activist. Born in Chennai, he was proficient in Tamil, English, Sanskrit, and Pali. He campaigned for the emancipation of "untouchables," striving for a casteless society and condemning caste-based discrimination.
- Thassar emphasized education as a tool for empowerment and helped establish schools for "untouchables." He founded the **Advaidananda Sabha**, advocating for temple entry rights for the marginalized. In 1882, along with John Rathinam, he started the **Dravida Kazhagam** and launched the **Dravida Pandian** magazine in 1885.
- In 1891, he formed the **Dravida Mahajana Sabha** and organized its first conference in the Nilgiris. Disillusioned with Hinduism due to its reinforcement of caste, he embraced Buddhism in 1898 under the influence of Colonel H.S. Olcott, a Theosophist. He founded the **Sakya Buddhist Society** in Madras the same year to propagate rational and spiritual ideals.
- Thassar also started the **Oru Paisa Tamilan**, a weekly journal, in 1907, which he published until his death in 1914. His contributions remain a significant chapter in Tamil Nadu's social reform movements.

### c)Ayya Vaikundar

Ayya Vaikundar (1809–1851) is a revered figure in southern Tamil Nadu, celebrated for his pioneering role in social and religious reform. His mission focused on dismantling caste-based discrimination, promoting equality, and fostering social harmony. Through his teachings and community initiatives, Vaikundar established a foundation for inclusive societal progress.

- **Birth:** Ayya Vaikundar was born in 1809 in southern Tamil Nadu.
- **Mission:** He challenged entrenched social hierarchies and caste-based oppression, envisioning a society based on equality, fraternity, and inclusivity.
- **Legacy:** His life's work positioned him as a spiritual leader and reformer, deeply rooted in Tamil cultural and scriptural traditions.

### Contributions to Social Equality

#### 1. Community Initiatives

- **Samapanthi-Bhojana (Equality Feasts):** Organized community meals where people of all castes shared food together, breaking caste barriers.
- **Muthirikinaru (Shared Wells):** Promoted the sharing of water resources among all communities, symbolizing equality and cooperation.

#### 2. Educational and Social Empowerment

- **Education:** Advocated for education among marginalized communities to uplift them socially and economically.
- **Simplified Customs:** Simplified marriage rituals to reduce financial burdens and ensure accessibility for the oppressed.

#### Religious Reforms

- **Inclusive Practices:** Introduced rituals like *Thottu Namam* (symbolic markings) to emphasize equality before divinity, irrespective of caste.

- **Community Worship Spaces:** Established temples (*Pathis* and *Nizhal Thangals*) open to all, where congregational worship and devotional singing (*Nadai*) were practiced.
- **Festivals:** Initiated *Ayyavazhi* festivals to unite followers in spiritual gatherings.
- **Arulnool and Akilathirattu Ammanai:** Authored holy texts central to *Ayyavazhi* followers, offering guidance on leading a virtuous life.

## Hindu Progressive Improvement Society

### Journalism Efforts

- During the late 19th century, efforts to revive Hinduism began in Tamil Nadu.
- Key newspapers:
  - **Carnatic Chronicle** (1833) and **Native Interpreter** (1840): Published articles and news related to social and religious issues but avoided controversial topics.
  - **Gazulu Lakshmanarasu Chetty** purchased *Native Interpreter* in 1844 and renamed it *Crescent*. He used it to highlight the values and greatness of Hinduism, marking the first formal attempt towards Hindu reform.

### Initial Efforts

- **Srinivasa Pillai** established the *Hindu Progressive Improvement Society* in November 1852.
- Objectives:
  1. Promotion of women's education.
  2. Advocacy for widow remarriage.
  3. Improvement of the lives of marginalized communities.

### Udaya Sooriyan Newspaper

- **Venkata Rayulu** launched *Udaya Sooriyan (Rising Sun)* in July 1853 to discuss social reform issues.
- Initiatives:
  1. Establishing schools for marginalized children.
  2. Advocating for the Widow Remarriage Act.
  3. Creating reading rooms and debating societies for Hindus.
- Venkata Rayulu Naidu passed away in 1863. He is remembered as a pioneer of social reform and an inspiration for later self-respect movements.

## Brahmo Samaj, 1864

### Sridharalu Naidu

- **Sridharalu Naidu** from Cuddalore was inspired by the Brahmo Samaj, founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Kolkata in 1828.
- He sold his property to travel to Bengal, where he stayed for a year to study the Brahmo Samaj's activities and learn Bengali and Sanskrit.

### Madras Brahmo Samaj



- Upon returning to Madras, Sridharalu Naidu actively propagated the ideas and reformist principles of the Brahmo Samaj.
- In 1864, **Keshab Chandra Sen**, a prominent Brahmo leader, visited Madras and delivered lectures, participated in debates, and engaged with Hindu religious leaders.
- His visit inspired educated Hindus to rethink traditional Hindu doctrines and practices.

## Veda Samaj (1864)

### Philosophy of Reconciliation

- Dissatisfied with the radical ideas of the Brahmo Samaj, a group of reformist Hindus in Chennai established the **Veda Samaj** in 1864.
- Veda Samaj was a reinterpretation of the Brahmo Samaj principles tailored for Tamil society.
- The aim was to implement the moderate ideas of the Brahmo Samaj while remaining within the framework of Hinduism, thereby creating a middle path of reconciliation.

### Activities and Initiatives

Under the leadership of **Sridharalu Naidu**, Veda Samaj adopted the core principles of the Brahmo Samaj and implemented them with necessary modifications. Key contributions included:

1. Advocacy for the **Brahmo Marriage Act**, leading to its enactment.
2. Conducted the **first non-ceremonial marriage** in South India in 1871.
3. Established branches of Veda Samaj in various locations across South India.
4. Translated Brahmo Samaj literature into Tamil and Telugu, spreading reformist ideas.
5. Revived the Tamil magazine *Tattvabodhini* and started the *Indian Mirror* newspaper to propagate reformist ideals.
6. Promoted progressive social reforms, including:
  - Opposition to idol worship.
  - Elimination of caste distinctions.
  - Advocacy for widow remarriage.
  - Abolition of the devadasi system.
  - Prohibition of dowry and other social evils.
  - Promotion of women's education and opposition to prostitution.

**Sridharalu Naidu** also published the monthly magazine *Brahma Deepika* and wrote two plays, *Brahma Deepika* and *Dampachari Vilasam*, to convey social and religious reformist messages. He dedicated his life to the cause of Veda Samaj until his death in 1874.

## Theosophical Society

### Propagation and Outreach

- The **Theosophical Society** was founded on **November 17, 1875**, in New York by **Madame H.P. Blavatsky** (a Russian) and **Colonel H.S. Olcott** (an American).
- They arrived in Bombay, India, on February 16, 1879, and undertook extensive tours across the country.



- During their visit to Tamil Nadu in **October 1881**, they traveled to Thoothukudi and Tirunelveli, where they found active branches of the Theosophical Society. Hindu religious leaders welcomed them warmly, while Christian missionaries opposed them.

### Establishment in Chennai

- After their nationwide tour, Blavatsky and Olcott arrived in Chennai in **1882**.
- They organized the annual meeting of the Theosophical Society and moved its **international headquarters** from Bombay to Adyar, a southern suburb of Chennai.

### Growth of the Society

- After establishing the headquarters in Adyar, Blavatsky and Olcott focused on expanding the society's activities and membership.
- They published *The Theosophist* (founded in 1879), which gained popularity in Chennai.
- The society attracted many educated Brahmins, non-Brahmins, traders, and affluent individuals, who also provided generous financial support.
- The society promoted universal brotherhood, religious tolerance, and a deeper understanding of Indian philosophy, contributing significantly to the intellectual and spiritual revival in Tamil Nadu and India.

### Activities of the Theosophical Society

The **Theosophical Society** was founded with three primary objectives:

1. **To act as a center for universal brotherhood**
  - It aimed to propagate the idea that all human beings are brothers, transcending differences of race, creed, and caste.
2. **To study and compare world religions, philosophies, and sciences**
  - The society sought to find unity among religions and explain their foundational principles.
3. **To discover the hidden laws of nature**
  - It explored the natural laws governing life and the universe to enlighten people.

**Madame Blavatsky** aligned herself with Indian traditions, especially Hinduism.

- She praised the spiritual heritage of India, asserting that Indians were far more advanced in spirituality than Europeans.

**Colonel Olcott** propagated the greatness of Indian religious scriptures and emphasized the role of religion in fostering national identity.

After Olcott's death in 1907, **Annie Besant** became the leader of the Theosophical Society.

- Under her leadership, the society expanded its influence and gained widespread popularity among the masses.
- Her active involvement in the Indian freedom movement elevated the society's stature further.

## Socio Political movements of 20th centuries

### Anti Caste Movement



#### Rettaimalai Srinivasan (1859–1945)

- Born in Kanchipuram, he fought for **social justice, equality, and civil rights** of marginalized communities.
- Honored with titles such as **Rao Sahib, Rao Bahadur, and Divan Bahadur** for his contributions.
- Authored "**Jeeviya Saritha Surukkam**" (1939), one of the earliest Tamil autobiographies.
- Founded the **Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha** (1893) and served as president of several caste-related federations.
- Collaborated with **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**, participated in **Round Table Conferences**, and signed the **Poona Pact (1932)**.






#### M.C. Rajah (1883–1943)

- A leader of the **depressed classes**, he began as a teacher and wrote textbooks.
- A founding member of the **Justice Party** and the first elected **Legislative Council Member** from the depressed classes in **Madras Province**.
- Served as **Deputy Leader of the Justice Party** and founded the **All India Depressed Classes Association (1928)**.

#### Periyar Self-Respect Movement

1. **Casteless Society:**
  - Advocated for the abolition of caste distinctions and a society based on equality.
2. **Self-Respect and Rationality:**
  - Emphasized self-respect and rational thinking as fundamental rights for all.
3. **Women's Emancipation:**
  - Promoted the education and empowerment of women, fighting against their subordination.
4. **Self-Respect Marriages:**
  - Supported marriages based on mutual respect, free from caste-based restrictions.
5. **Opposition to Superstitions:**
  - Focused on promoting rational thought and eradicating superstitions from society.

<p><b>Labour Movements in Tamil Nadu</b></p> 	<p>The <b>First World War (1914–18)</b> significantly impacted industrial growth in India, creating a demand for workers in war-related industries. However, after the war, many industries faced retrenchments as wartime needs declined, while high prices persisted, sparking the growth of the labour movement.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Formation of Unions:</b> In 1918, the <b>Madras Labour Union</b>, India's first organized trade union, was established with leaders like <b>B.P. Wadia</b>, <b>M. Singaravelar</b>, and <b>Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundaram</b> contributing to its formation.</li> <li><b>All India Trade Union Conference (AITUC):</b> The first AITUC conference took place in <b>Bombay (1920)</b>, where resolutions were discussed on labour rights, including protection from police interference, unemployment registers, compensation for injuries, and health insurance.</li> <li><b>M. Singaravelar (1860–1946):</b> A pioneer in the labour movement in the <b>Madras Presidency</b>, M. Singaravelar was an intellectual who advocated <b>Buddhism</b>, was familiar with several languages, and wrote about prominent thinkers like <b>Karl Marx</b> and <b>Albert Einstein</b>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In 1923, he organized the first-ever <b>May Day</b> celebration in India.</li> <li>He was a leader of the <b>Communist Party of India</b> and published the Tamil newspaper <b>Thozhilalan (Worker)</b> to address workers' issues.</li> <li>He was also aligned with <b>Periyar</b> and supported the <b>Self-Respect Movement</b>.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<p><b>Women's Movements in Tamil Nadu</b></p> 	<p>In the early 20th century, several women's movements and organizations were established in Tamil Nadu to address women's empowerment. Key among them were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Women's India Association (WIA) (1917):</b> Founded by <b>Annie Besant</b>, <b>Dorothy Jinarajadasa</b>, and <b>Margaret Cousins</b> at <b>Adyar, Madras</b>, WIA focused on issues such as <b>personal hygiene, marriage laws, voting rights, childcare</b>, and women's roles in public life. The association published pamphlets and bulletins in various languages to highlight these issues.</li> <li><b>All India Women's Conference (AIWC) (1927):</b> Formed by WIA to address <b>women's education</b> and advocate for government policies for women's upliftment.</li> </ol>

	<p><b>Self-Respect Movement</b></p> <p>The <b>Self-Respect Movement</b>, led by <b>Periyar E.V. Ramasamy</b>, aimed at <b>gender equality</b> and <b>gender sensitization</b> in society. The movement provided a platform for women to voice their concerns. Prominent women activists included <b>Muthulakshmi Ammaiyar, Nagammai, Kannamma, Nilavathi, Muvalur Ramamirtham, Rukmani Ammal, Alarmelmangai Thayammal, Neelambikai, and Sivakami Chidambaranar</b>.</p> <p><b>Abolition of Devadasi System</b></p> <p>One significant issue addressed by the women's movements was the <b>devadasi system</b>, where young girls were dedicated to Hindu temples to serve as temple dancers and caretakers. This system, originally meant as a form of religious service, became corrupted, leading to widespread abuse and exploitation of women. <b>Dr. Muthulakshmi Ammaiyar</b> led the campaign for its abolition. The efforts culminated in the enactment of the <b>Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act in 1947</b>, which legally abolished the practice.</p>
---	--

### Practice Questions:

1. How did Vallalar's philosophy of *jeevakarunya* (compassion for living beings) influence his actions, such as the establishment of the Samarasa Vedha Sanmarga Sangam and the free feeding house in Vadalur?
2. How did the efforts of leaders like Rettaimalai Srinivasan, M.C. Rajah, and Dr. Muthulakshmi Ammaiyar contributed to the social reforms and empowerment of marginalized communities and women in Tamil Nadu during the 20th century?