

# Department of Employment and Training

## TNPSC GROUP II MAINS - UNIT II

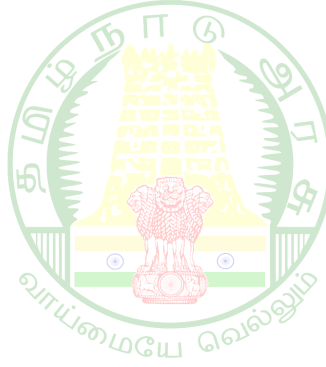
**Course:** TNPSC Group II Mains Material

**Subject:** Tamil Society

**Topic:** Impact of Rationalism Movement- Self-Respect Movement

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**Director,  
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## Tamil Renaissance:

The Tamil Renaissance marked a transformative period in Tamil Nadu's socio-cultural and intellectual history. Spurred by colonial influences, printing technology, and the rise of humanistic ideals, it shaped the region's identity, language, and literature.

### 1. Advent of Printing Technology

- **First Tamil Book:** *Thambiran Vanakkam* (1578), printed in Goa.
- **Printing Press in Tranquebar:** Established by Ziegenbalg in 1709.
- Early publications included religious texts, followed by secular works and classical literature.
- Notable early publications:
  - *Thirukkural* (1812)
  - Rediscovery of Tamil classics by scholars like C.W. Damotharanar and U.V. Swaminathar.

### 2. Rediscovery of Tamil Classics

- published:
  - *Silapathikaram*, *Manimekalai*, *Purananuru*, and *Pathitirupathu*.
- Contributions by scholars:
  - **C.W. Damotharanar:** Edited Tamil grammar and literary texts.
  - **U.V. Swaminathar:** Revived ancient Tamil classics and highlighted Tamil's historical richness.

### 3. Linguistic Research

- **F.W. Ellis** (1816): Proposed the Dravidian languages as distinct from the Indo-Aryan family.
- **Robert Caldwell** (1856): Authored *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages*, establishing Tamil's antiquity and its unique linguistic identity.

### 4. Rise of Dravidian Consciousness

- Intellectuals highlighted the egalitarian and casteless nature of Tamil society.
- **Manonmaniam Sundaranar:** Expressed Dravidian pride in the Tamil invocation song.
- **Maraimalai Adigal:** Led the *Tani Tamil Iyakkam* (Pure Tamil Movement), advocating for the removal of Sanskrit influence and promoting a distinct Tamil cultural identity.

## Social Reform Movements

### 1. Prominent Social Reformers

- **Ramalinga Adigal (Vallalar):** Criticized religious orthodoxy and promoted humanism.
- **Iyothee Thasa Pandithar:** Advocated for equality and Buddhism.
- **Periyar E.V. Ramasamy:** Championed self-respect, gender equality, and anti-caste ideology.
- **M. Singaravelar:** Promoted socialism and communism.

### 2. Role of Women

- **Neelambikai:** Contributed to the *Tani Tamil Iyakkam*, compiling a Tamil dictionary free of Sanskrit words.

## Cultural and Political Impact

### 1. Revival of Tamil Literature

- Rediscovery of Sangam literature fostered a strong cultural identity.
- The renaissance rekindled interest in Tamil history, arts, and music, with figures like Abraham Pandithar contributing to Tamil musicology.

### 2. Dravidian Movement

- Emerged as a defense against Brahmin dominance.
- Organizations like the Madras Non-Brahmin Association (1909) and Madras United League (1912) supported non-Brahmin causes, eventually leading to the growth of Dravidian political ideology.

## Self-Respect Movement (1925–1935)

E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, born in Erode, began his association with the Indian National Congress at the age of 28 (1907). He actively participated in Congress sessions and became the chairman of the Erode Municipal Council in 1919. However, he resigned to focus on the Congress movement. He enthusiastically participated in Mahatma Gandhi's **Non-Cooperation Movement** and led **liquor shop picketing** in Erode. Periyar even cut down his own coconut trees to promote Gandhi's Khadi program and campaigned against foreign cloth.

In 1922, he was jailed for his involvement in liquor shop protests in Coimbatore. Periyar became the president of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee in 1924 and participated in the **Vaikom Satyagraha** in Kerala to fight against untouchability. He also opposed caste discrimination at the **Searanmadhavi Gurukulam**, which barred non-Brahmins.

Periyar continuously advocated for caste-based reservations in Congress annual meetings. Frustrated by the Congress's rejection of his demands, Periyar left the party in 1925 and started the **Self Respect Movement**.

## Objectives of the Self-Respect Movement

At the Self-Respect Movement conference in Chengalpattu in 1929, Periyar introduced the **15-point program** to guide the movement. These principles were:

1. **Equality:** All humans are born equal and should not face discrimination based on caste.
2. **Reject caste-based texts:** Avoid following religions, Vedas, shastras, and epics that propagate caste hierarchies.
3. **Oppose the varna system:** Reject divisions such as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras, and Panchamas.
4. **Abolish untouchability:** Ensure equal access to public facilities such as wells, schools, streets, temples, etc.

5. **Legislation:** The government should enact laws to eliminate caste and religious discrimination.
6. **No caste identifiers:** Prohibit the use of caste titles or symbols.
7. **Women's rights:**
  - Set the minimum age for marriage at 16.
  - Allow women and men to divorce if they are incompatible.
  - Support widow remarriage and inter-caste marriages.
  - Encourage individuals to choose their own spouses.
8. **Simplified marriage ceremonies:** Marriages should be inexpensive, brief, and limited to one day.
9. **Temple reform:** Avoid unnecessary expenditure on temple rituals. Use temple resources for education, research, and industrial development.
10. **Eradicate superstitions:** Eliminate outdated practices and beliefs.
11. **Empower women:** Provide women with property and employment rights. Encourage women to become teachers.
12. **Education for marginalized groups:** Educate marginalized communities and provide them with government land for livelihood.
13. **Opportunities for non-Brahmins:** Remove obstacles and ensure fair opportunities for non-Brahmin youth in education and employment.
14. **Mother tongue in education:** Promote primary education in the mother tongue and avoid spending public funds on non-governmental educational institutions or foreign languages. Reserve government funds for higher education only for marginalized students under a reservation policy.
15. **Non-discrimination in public places:** Ensure no discrimination in hotels or other public spaces.

Periyar emphasized that such ideas had been proposed by earlier reformers and were already being practiced in progressive countries. By dedicating his life to these principles, he sought to instill a sense of dignity and self-respect in individuals.

According to Periyar, the Self-Respect Movement was established to awaken **human dignity, pride, and rational thinking**.

## Reformed Program of the Self-Respect Movement

The work plan of the **Self-Respect Movement**, based on principles of egalitarianism, was revised by Periyar to include the following objectives:

1. **Freedom from British Capitalist Rule:** Liberate India from exploitative British rule.
2. **Debt Cancellation:** Abolish the nation's debts.
3. **Nationalization of Key Industries:** Bring all industries, railways, banks, shipping, and transport systems under national control.
4. **Collective Ownership of Land and Resources:** Transfer ownership of agricultural lands, forests, and other natural resources to the public.
5. **Debt Forgiveness for Farmers and Workers:** Cancel all debts owed by peasants and laborers to landlords and moneylenders.
6. **Abolition of Forced Contracts:** Nullify all forms of bonded labor agreements.
7. **Worker and Peasant Governance:** Replace princely states and feudal systems with direct governance by workers, peasants, and laborers across India.
8. **Improved Worker Conditions:** Reduce working hours for laborers to 7 hours, increase wages, and provide facilities such as libraries, hospitals, and recreation centers for their well-being.

9. **Employment Assurance:** Guarantee a livelihood for the unemployed through government support.
10. **Eradication of Superstitions:** Legally eliminate irrational beliefs and outdated practices.

This reformed agenda reflected Periyar's broader vision for national progress and equality.

## Formation of the Socialist Party

Periyar was critical of political parties, believing they were tools used to suppress the social, religious, and economic rights of the common people. To counter this, he proposed forming a political organization within the **Self-Respect Movement** called the **Socialist Party**. Periyar envisioned this party as a means to achieve social reform and equality.

The key aspects of the **Socialist Party's agenda** included:

1. **Universal Suffrage:** Grant voting rights to all adults for legislative, municipal, taluk, and district board elections.
2. **Liberation from Caste, Religion, and Economic Exploitation:** Work to free the masses from oppressive caste and religious structures, as well as economic disparities.
3. **Public Ownership of Essential Services:** Ensure that industries and transportation systems serving public needs are not monopolized by private individuals.
4. **Fair Land Distribution:** Secure equitable land rights for landless agricultural laborers.
5. **Utilization of Temple Revenues:** Use temple resources for public welfare, including education, healthcare, housing, and shelters for orphaned children.
6. **Removal of Caste and Religion from Government Records:** Eliminate references to caste and religion in official documents, and bar individuals who promote caste or religious divisions from public service roles.
7. **Decentralized Administration:** Transfer control of public services like transportation, housing, milk distribution, and healthcare to local bodies.
8. **Participation in Elections:** Field candidates in elections to legislatures and municipalities under the party's banner.
9. **Accountability of Candidates:** Require candidates to pledge allegiance to the party's principles before contesting elections.

Periyar outlined this political strategy through propaganda, legislative engagement, and publications, such as the editorial in *Kudi Arasu* (January 1, 1933).

## Ideals of the Self-Respect Movement

1. **Casteless Society:** Advocated for a society free from caste-based hierarchies and birth-based privileges.
2. **Women's Rights:** Emphasized women's education, property rights, the abolition of the devadasi system, and the right to divorce.
3. **Rationality and Self-Respect:** Declared rationality as a fundamental human right, prioritizing it over self-rule.
4. **Education:** Promoted compulsory elementary education to combat illiteracy, which was seen as a root cause of women's subordination.

5. **Self-Respect Marriages:** Introduced weddings without rituals, focusing on equality and rationality.

### Periyar E.V. Ramasamy: Life and Contributions

- **Early Life:** Born in 1879 in Erode to a wealthy family, Periyar's exposure to orthodox Hindu practices during his pilgrimage to Varanasi led to his disillusionment with religion.
- **Vaikom Satyagraha:** Periyar played a key role in the temple-entry movement in Kerala, earning him the title *Vaikom Virar* (Hero of Vaikom).
- **Critique of Discrimination:** Resigned from the Congress due to its support of caste-based practices in the Cheranmadevi Gurukulam.
- **Mass Communication:** Published journals like *Kudi Arasu* (1925), *Revolt*, and *Viduthalai*, fostering rationalist thought and social awareness.
- **Collaboration with Reformers:** Supported Dr. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* and worked with Singaravelar, a pioneer of Buddhism and communism in South India.
- **Opposition to Hindi Imposition:** Led the anti-Hindi agitation (1937–39), opposing Rajaji's efforts to introduce Hindi in Tamil Nadu schools, shaping the region's linguistic politics.
- **Formation of Dravidar Kazhagam (DK):** Merged the Self-Respect Movement with the Justice Party in 1944, transforming it into a strong anti-caste and rationalist political platform.
- **Campaign Against Kula Kalvi Thittam:** Opposed Rajaji's vocational education scheme, which Periyar criticized as caste-based, leading to its withdrawal.

### Periyar as a Feminist

- **Advocate for Gender Equality:** Condemned patriarchy, child marriage, and the devadasi system, advocating for women's education and empowerment.
- **Right to Property:** Argued for women's inheritance rights, which culminated in the Tamil Nadu Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 1989.
- **Marriage Reform:** Suggested replacing patriarchal terms like "giving in marriage" with terms that reflect equality, like *valkaithunai* (companion).
- **Key Work:** Authored *Why the Woman is Enslaved?*, challenging gender biases and advocating women's liberation.

**Kudi Arasu** was the official newspaper of the **Self-Respect Movement**. Usually, Periyar wrote a column and expressed his opinion on social issues in each of its issues. He frequently wrote columns under the pseudonym of **Chitraputtiran**.

### Achievements of the Self-Respect Movement:

1. **Reduction of Brahmin Dominance:**
  - The privileges, special status, and reverence traditionally given to Brahmins diminished.
2. **Reform in Religious Rituals and Practices:**
  - Festivals, fasts, and religious ceremonies lost their traditional prominence.
  - The influence of priests and religious intermediaries was curtailed, exposing the rigidity of rituals.

3. **Abolition of Caste and Untouchability:**
  - Caste-based discrimination was reduced, and untouchability was strongly opposed.
  - Widows were given the right to remarry.
4. **Temple Entry Rights:**
  - Access to temples was granted to all, irrespective of caste.
5. **Promotion of Equality:**
  - The movement encouraged individuals to identify themselves as "Indians," advocating the removal of caste-based surnames.
6. **Encouragement of Civil Marriages:**
  - Registered marriages gained popularity.
  - Self-respect marriages, which rejected caste and religious constraints, became common.
7. **Social Equality in Public Spaces:**
  - Segregation in public places such as hotels, railway stations, and rest houses was abolished.
8. **Representation through Reservation:**
  - The implementation of caste-based reservations ensured fair political and social representation for marginalized communities.
9. **Advancement of Women:**
  - The movement emphasized education and property rights for women, fostering their empowerment.
10. **Foundation for Dravidian Movements:**
  - The Self-Respect Movement laid the groundwork for the formation of the Dravidar Kazhagam and later the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK).

The anti-Hindi agitation (1937–39) had a big impact on Tamil Nadu's politics. Periyar was imprisoned for his role in the movement. When he was still in jail, Periyar was elected the president of the Justice Party. Thereafter, the Justice Party merged with the Self-Respect Movement. It was rechristened as **Dravidar Kazhagam (DK)** in 1944.

### Practice Questions:

1. What were the key objectives of the Self-Respect Movement introduced by Periyar in 1929?
2. How did Periyar's Self-Respect Movement address women's rights and gender equality?