

## 6. 19<sup>th</sup> AND 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENTS IN TAMIL NADU

### Learning objectives

1. Acquires knowledge about the social reform movements in Tamilnadu during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
2. Understands the ideas of the reformers like Vallalar and Periyar.
3. Assess about the contributions of the reform movements.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the society was influenced by radical thinkers due to the impact of western education. Tamilnadu showed the tendency for social change and reform movement. Many social evils like sati, polygamy, child marriage, untouchability, female infanticide were practiced in the state. In order to eradicate these social evils many social reform movements emerged in Tamilnadu. Following were the factors responsible for the emergence of reform movement.

### Causes for the social reform movements

**1. Western education:** The spread of Western education created awareness in the minds of the people. The ideas of equality, democracy and liberty had influenced the people of Tamilnadu. They started questioning the superstitious beliefs and social evils that prevailed in our society. This led to the social reform movements in Tamilnadu.

**2. Caste system:** Tamil society was highly influenced by the 'Varnashrama' system. Accordingly, people belonging to the higher castes ill treated and humiliated the backward and depressed class people. So the reformers wanted to free them from the miseries.

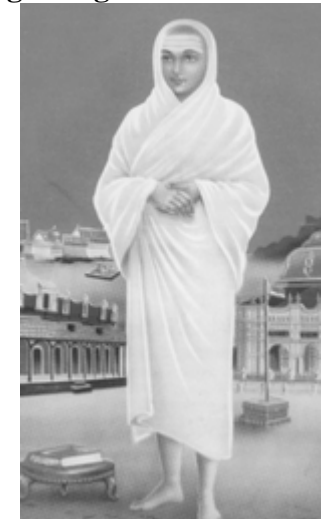
**3. Economic condition:** The British rule in Tamilnadu drained the economy to a great extent. Further they exported the raw materials like cotton and iron to their county. So this policy had suppressed the development of trade, commerce and small industries of Tamilnadu. This kind of economic exploitation also led to the reform movement in Tamilnadu.

**4. Influence of European movements and ideas :** The Renaissance, reformation, Geographical discoveries made the people to think in the lines of equality, liberty and fraternity. The French revolution and the Russian revolution also influenced the people . The people induced by the spirit of equality, started protesting against orthodoxy rituals and traditions in Hinduism.

**5. Role of press:** The press played a dominant role in creating awareness in the minds of the people. It awakened the masses towards the path of progress.

### Samarasa Sutha Sanmarga Sangam

**Ramalinga Adigal (1823-1874):** Samarasa Sutha Sanmarga Sangam was started by Ramalinga Adigal popularly known as Vallalar. He was born in 1823 at Chinnamarudur near Chidambaram. He possessed spritual experiences from his childhood onwards. He loved solitude and spent most of his time in the temple. He underwent spritual experiences till the age of 23. He lived near Mint in Madras.



**Ramalinga Adigal**

Now Mint is called Vallalar Nagar. After his saintly life, he moved to Vadalur and started a socio-religious organisation in 1867. This was known as Samarsa Sutha Sanmarga Sangam.

### **Important teachings of Vallalar:**

1. Form of God is Arutperunjothi (Supreme grace of light).
2. Love is the master key to spirituality.
3. Religious ceremony has no meaning.
4. Meditation is the form of prayer.
5. Realisation of truth in all religions.
6. Caste and other social divisions have no meaning.

**Services of the Samarasa Sutha Sanmarga Sangam:** This Sangam aimed for the religious unity and communal harmony in the society. He severely condemned the rituals and caste beliefs. He promoted the universal love and brotherhood. He believed hunger and poverty are the greatest ills of the society.

In order to conduct prayer, he built a Sathyagnana Sabha. He also founded Sathya Darma Sala at Vadalur for feeding the poor. The Sathya Dharma Sala provides food to everyone, irrespective of caste and religion throughout the year. Vallalar showed his love and mercy not only on human beings but also on plants, insects, birds and animals. This is called “Jeeva Karunya” (Mercy to life)

### **NON BRAHMIN MOVEMENT**

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century communal clashes occurred between the brahmins and the non-brahmins. The brahmins occupied almost all the important key posts in the administration. The British gave them jobs though they constituted only 3% of the total population.

**Origin of the Justice party:** The non-brahmins were not given proper position in the Government and due recognition in the society. Hence the non-brahmins of Tamilnadu joined together under the leadership of Dr. Natesa Mudaliyar. The first meeting was held at his house in Triplicane, Chennai in 1912. This resulted in the formation of “**Chennai Dravida Sangam**”. He opened a hostel for non-brahmin students in 1912 at Madras.

and formed South Indian Liberal Federation in 1916. They published ‘Dravidian’ in Tamil, ‘Andhra Prakasika’ in Telugu and “Justice” in English. Later in 1917, this association was called as the Justice Party.

**South Indian Liberal Federation was renamed as Justice Party.**

In the 1920 elections, Justice Party came to power. Subburayalu Reddiar became the Chief Minister of the Madras Presidency. After 1923 elections, Justice party Ministry was formed. In the 1926 elections the Justice Party failed miserably. Gradually the party lost its power and met a final blow in the 1937 elections.

### **Achievements of the Justice party:**

1. During the Justice Party Government, all the communities shared the official and administrative benefits. The Justice party for the first time issued communal G.O. in 1921 and 1922 .
2. The staff selection Board was established in 1924 for the selection of the Government officials without any bias. On the basis of this, for the first time in India, Public Service Commission was established in 1929.
3. To encourage higher education Andhra University and Annamalai University were started in 1929.
4. The Hindu Religious Endowment Act was passed in 1921. Accordingly, non-brahmins were to be appointed as Archagas in the temple.
5. This party worked for the welfare of women. Hence by the Act of 1921, women were given Voting rights.

### **Fall of Justice party:**

The Justice Party lost its power and popularity in due course of time. The party was in power when the country faced severe economic depression. The party participated in the ministry and administration when there was an opposition against the British Imperialism. So the

party lost the mass support. The party also lost its original disciplined and committed leaders. Hence it became unpopular.

**Self respect movement:** The brahmins dominated the administration in the British period. The non-brahmins were denied their chance in the administration. As they were treated badly, they started a self respect movement to maintain the respect. E.V.Ramasamy championed the cause of the Self-Respect Movement.

### Life history of E.V.Ramasamy

E.V.Ramasamy popularly known as EVR/Periyar was born on 17<sup>th</sup> September in the year 1879 at Erode in a wealthy family. His father

was Venkatta Naicker and mother Chinna Thayammal. He married Nagammai at the age of 19. He lived a very simple life.

**Emergence of self-respect movement:** EVR participated in the Non-co-operatin Movement against the British. He left the Indian National Congress in 1925 at the Kancheepuram session on the issue of communal representation. Then he started the self-respect movement in 1925. He started 'Kudiyarasu' a Tamil weekly in 1925 and 'Revolt' an English Journal in 1928 to propagate his ideas.



### Aims of the self-resepect movement:

- i) To promote rational thinking, self-respect and self-confidence.
- ii) To protect the rights of the non-brahmins.
- iii) To eradicate the social evils like injustice to women.
- iv) To abolish superstitious beliefs.

### Achievements of the Self-Respect Movement

**i) Temple entry movement:** Vaikom is a place in Kerala, where the people of downtrodden community were prohibited to enter into

the temple. So Periyar started his struggle against the Government of Travancore in 1924. But the Government impriosned him. In spite of this, he continued his struggle. So the Government of Travancore issued an order allowing the downtrodden community into the temple. Hence Periyar was given the title "Vaikom Hero".

**ii) Social reforms:** The Movement severely opposed the system of untouchability in Tamilnadu. With the support of Justice party, the Anti-untouchability Act was passed in 1930. The movement also laid the foundation for casteless society in Tamilnadu. EVR worked for the inter-dining by abolishing the Gurukula system at Seranmadevi near Tirunelveli.

**iii) Welfare of women:** The movement passed a number of resolutions for the passing of legislations. The most important legislations were Widow Remarriage Act, Women's Right to property Act, Abolition of Devadasi Act, etc.

In the Women's conference held at Madras in the year 1938, EVR was given the title "Periyar".

**Devadasi system:** Devadasi system is one of the social evils in Tamilnadu. According to this system, the young women were dedicated to temples and were called 'Temple girls'. This highly degraded the women. Great leaders like Periyar and Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy severely opposed this system. At last with the earnest effort made by Dr.Muthulakshmi, the system of Devadasi was abolished by the Act of 1930.

**Dowry system:** One of the burning evils in Tamilnadu is Dowry system. In the beginning Dowry meant gifts and presents voluntarily given to a girl by her parents at the time of marriage. But later it is made complusary and turned as a cruel practice. This system lead to female infanticide, bride burning and other cruelties against women.

Many social reformers like EVR, Dr. MuthulakshmiReddy, Ramalinga Adigal, G.Subramaniya Iyer, Bharathi, Bharathidasan fought

for the eradication of this evil. The Government of India also passed the Dowry Prohibition Act in 1961. (Amended in 1984) to punish the Dowry seekers.

Mass Media like Newspaper, TV, Radio, Cinema etc., also trying to generate public consciousness against this evil practice. Besides, many women's organisations like Women Indian Association, National Council for Women, Democratic Women's Association, etc., also play a vital role in uprooting this social evil.

**Learning outcome:**

1. Understood the social evils that prevailed in Tamilnadu during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
2. Learnt the services of the Social Reformers.
3. Acquired knowledge to oppose the social evils.

**SELF EVALUATION**

**I Choose the Correct Answers:**

1. The Samarasa Suttha Sanmarga Sangam was founded by -----  
(a) Periyar (b) Vallalar (c) Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy  
(d) T.M.Nair
2. The Non-Brahmin students Hostel was organised in Chennai by-----.  
(a) Thiyagaraya Chetty (b) C.Natesan (c) Subburayalu  
(d) T.M.Nair
3. The Staff Selection Board was established in -----  
(a) 1931 (b) 1924 (c) 1920 (d) 1917.
4. In the year 1920, Elections Justice Party came to power under  
(a) T.M.Nair (b) Subbarayalu Reddy (c) Sankaran Nair  
(d) Thiyagaraya Chetty.

5. The Dowry Prohibition Act was passed in -----  
(a) 1971 (b) 1961 (c) 1981 (d) 1969.

**II Fill in the Blanks:**

1. Ramalinga Adigal was born at -----.
2. Hero of Vaikom was -----.
3. The South Indian Liberal Federation was renamed as -----
4. ----- was a Tamil weekly started by Periyar in 1925.
5. By the Act of 1930 ----- was abolished.

**III Match the following:**

- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Ramalinga Adigal    | Justice Party          |
| 2. Sathya Dharma Sabha | Devadasi system        |
| 3. EVR Periyar         | 'Jeeva Karunya'        |
| 4. 1925                | Vadalur                |
| 5. Muthulakshmi Reddy  | Self-Respect Movement, |

**IV Answer the following briefly:**

1. Who was called as Vaikom Hero? Why was he called so?
2. Give short note on Samarasa Suttha Sanmarga Sangam.
3. Mention the aims of the Self - Respect Movement.
4. What are the causes for the fall of the Justice Party?
5. Write a note on the Dowry Prohibition Act.

**V Answer in detail:**

1. Explain the causes for the rise of Social Reform Movements in Tamilnadu.
2. Examine the achievements of Justice Party.
3. What are the achievements of Self-Respect Movement?

**PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES**

1. Discuss about the teachings of Ramalinga Adigal.
2. Enact a Drama depicting the evils of the Dowry System.
3. Debate on the reforms of Periyar.