

CONTRIBUTION OF PERIYAR E.V. RAMASAMY FOR WOMEN UPLIFTMENT**N. TAMILMANI, Dr.B.SURESH KANNAN**

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the social and cultural practices that perpetuated the inferior status of women in India, particularly within the context of traditional Hinduism. It discusses how, for centuries, women were confined to domestic roles, with limited access to education and no rights to family property. The text critiques the orthodox view that justified these practices through the Manu Dharma code, which Periyar vehemently opposed. He condemned the code for its treatment of women as inferior and worse than animals, criticizing practices like child marriage, where girls were married off at a young age and deprived of education or personal agency. Periyar's criticism of Hinduism and its orthodox practices centered on the harm these traditions caused to women, particularly in the form of child marriages and the resulting early widowhood. The passage underscores Periyar's commitment to challenging these social injustices and advocating for the empowerment and rights of women.

INTRODUCTION**Status of Women in Indian society:**

Just as he was particular that the social difference between men and women should decrease gradually and ultimately disappear, he was emphatic that the common practice of giving a lower status to women in the Indian society should disappear. For ages women in India had been confined within their homes and it was taken for granted that bringing forth children and cooking for the family were their only duties. Very few families cared to educate their girl children. Even those families stopped girls from schools when they attained puberty. Women were further denied the right to any part of the family property. The orthodox people justified their attitude to women by saying that they followed Manu dharma.

Periyar said that any code that advised men to treat their women folk as worse than animals was a barbarous code and could be respected only by barbarians. Those who professed to follow the code of Manu got their girls married even when they were innocent children. The moment the innocent girl child was married she became the property of the husband's family. The education of such girl children was out of the question. Even when the girls were ten or eleven years old, they were expected to attend to all items of work in their husband's family. One of the reasons why Periyar hated Hinduism and the orthodoxy practiced in the name of Hinduism was the barbarous 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 Widow.

Abolition of Devadasi system (the system of dedication of girls to temples);

The Devadasi system, a deeply rooted practice in Tamil society, involved dedicating young women to temples, where they were often exploited for the sexual gratification of men in the name of religion. This practice not only degraded women but also perpetuated a cycle of social injustice and immorality. Dr. Muthulakshmi, a pioneering social reformer, proposed the abolition of the Devadasi system in 1930 to the Madras Legislative Council. However, it was only under the Premiership of O.P. Ramasamy Reddiyar in 1947 that the bill was finally passed. During the legislative discussions, Periyar, a strong advocate for social reform, condemned the system as a disgrace to Hinduism. He argued that the practice of keeping women as the common property of temples was a severe insult to women, and that it promoted immoral behavior among men, leading to a breakdown of ethical standards in families. This view was challenged in the Assembly by Mr. Satyamurthi Iyer, an orthodox Congress member, who defended the tradition as part of Hindu customs. In response, Dr. Muthulakshmi, with Periyar's support, retorted that if the system was truly sacred, then upper-caste women should be made to serve as Devadasis instead of the lower-caste women who had been exploited for years. This bold statement shifted the tide of the debate, and the bill was passed on October 9, 1947, marking a significant victory for women's rights and social justice. Dr. Muthulakshmi and reformers like Periyar played a crucial role in this landmark achievement, ensuring the enactment of a law that abolished the Devadasi system and protected the dignity of women.

Women's Education;

Periyar E.V. Ramasamy's fundamental philosophy was centered on the belief that all men and women should live with dignity and have equal opportunities to develop their physical, mental, and moral faculties. He was committed to eradicating all forms of unjust discrimination and promoting social justice and a rational perspective. According to Periyar, society must ensure equal rights for all its members to enjoy the benefits of resources and development, with their participation in governance and administration reflecting their proportional strength in the population. A key element of his philosophy was the advocacy for a rational, intellectual freedom and a healthy worldview, which would lead to the dismantling of hierarchical, birth-based caste systems. Periyar's efforts were instrumental in introducing policies such as job reservations in government administration in Madras province (now Tamil Nadu) in 1928, aiming to empower marginalized communities. Moreover, Periyar emphasized the importance of education as a tool to promote equality, advocating for an educational system that taught the principle that all living beings are equal. He believed that education should aim to make individuals self-sufficient and independent, equipping them with the knowledge necessary for a dignified and respectful life in any society. Teachers, according to Periyar, had the responsibility to ensure that the education they provided enabled students to achieve personal and societal independence..

Periyar's views on Education;

Periyar what are the view that children possess the ability to think and should be Periyar E.V. Ramasamy strongly believed that education should be a tool for fostering critical thinking, intellectual independence, and social equality. He opposed the idea that education should be a mere process of memorization, as it does not equate to intelligence or true learning. Periyar emphasized that being educated was not limited to passing exams but to

developing one's ability to think rationally and independently. He pointed out the flaws in the education system, particularly its failure to be democratic, as it predominantly benefited certain privileged classes while excluding women and the downtrodden. Periyar believed that education should be accessible to everyone, and that it was the responsibility of the government to ensure equal educational opportunities for all citizens, irrespective of their social or economic background.

A key aspect of Periyar's philosophy was his advocacy for women's education. He believed that women, who constitute half of the population, should not be denied education, as it would hinder societal progress. He argued that educated women could contribute significantly to society and their families, not just as caretakers, but as equal partners in all aspects of life, including employment and social development. Periyar called for the abolition of practices like early marriage and the dowry system, which he saw as consequences of women's lack of education and financial independence. He also opposed the traditional segregation in schools for boys and girls, insisting on coeducation as a means of fostering equality and mutual respect.

Periyar's emphases on education for women was rooted in his belief that an educated woman would be empowered to secure her own livelihood, escape societal subjugation, and contribute to the nation's progress. He argued that women should be given equal opportunities for employment, particularly in government jobs, and that half of the positions available to men should be reserved for women. Periyar also criticized the influence of religion and superstition in education, advocating for a rational, secular approach that would focus on intellect and humanism rather than dogma.

In conclusion, Periyar E.V. Ramasamy's views on education were revolutionary for his time. He championed a rational, inclusive, and progressive educational system that would empower all individuals, particularly women, to become self-reliant, independent, and active participants in society. His call for educational reform was not just about improving literacy rates, but about fostering intellectual freedom, social equality, and a fairer, more just society..

Property Rights for Women:

Hindu women's right to property has been evolved out of continuing struggle between patriarchal Indian society and modern progressive forces of India. The right of Hindu women to inherit property has been restricted from the beginning of the Indian culture, though women were not completely stopped from inheriting properties, their share was negligible in amount. In the contemporary Hindu law of property inheritance is largely influenced by ancient rules and regulations, in ancient India property inheritance rights were largely influenced by two Hindu law schools as enforced in different parts of the country respectively Dayabhaga School of law and Mitakshra school of law. Both these schools didn't provide much property rights to women, but they were given somewhat greater rights under Dayabhaga than Mitakshara.

Social Justice for Women;

Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, a staunch rationalist and social reformer, was deeply committed to securing equal rights for women in society. He forcefully argued that women should be seen as equals to men and that they should be given access to quality education, the right to own property, and the freedom to live a life of dignity, free from subjugation. He was critical of the way men treated women as their property, subjecting them to slavery and

cruelty. He observed that women, especially in India, were treated far worse than even the lowest castes, and this unequal treatment led to the deterioration of society as a whole. He believed that the oppressive system existed solely because of the ingrained beliefs that men were superior and that women were created solely to serve men.

Periyar also spoke out against the institution of marriage, which he believed was often built on the premise of a woman's submission to the man. He emphasized that marriages were arranged based on whether the woman would be obedient and serve as a "slave" to the husband. He criticized the traditional notion that the woman's role was to serve the husband without question, which perpetuated the idea that women were inferior and subservient. Periyar contended that this hierarchical and oppressive structure was a significant hindrance to the progress of society, as it denied women the right to express themselves, contribute to public life, and live freely.

He also addressed the issue of superficial appearances and materialism, particularly among wealthy women who, despite their education and wealth, perpetuated traditional gender roles. Periyar believed that these women, obsessed with beauty, jewelry, and fashion, failed to challenge their inferior status in society. He argued that true emancipation for women could only be achieved when they recognized themselves as equal to men and when society stopped defining women solely in terms of their physical appearance and their roles as wives and mothers.

A central issue for Periyar was the concept of chastity, which he saw as an unfair double standard imposed on women. While chastity was demanded of women, it was not expected of men. He argued that this double standard was rooted in the belief that women were the property of men and that their chastity was a reflection of their value. Periyar rejected this idea, claiming that both men and women should be held to the same standards of conduct, and that the concept of chastity should not be used as a tool of oppression.

Periyar was also critical of the societal norms that confined women to their domestic roles. He recognized that the heavy burden of childbearing and motherhood contributed to women's dependency on men, but he believed that this dependency could be reduced if women were given equal access to education, employment, and opportunities for personal development. He argued that if women were allowed to participate fully in the workforce, including in jobs traditionally reserved for men, such as police work, they would become more independent and could begin to challenge the patriarchal structure of society.

Furthermore, Periyar advocated for reforms such as the abolition of child marriages, the right to divorce, widow remarriage, and the freedom for individuals to choose their life partners, irrespective of caste. He believed these reforms would significantly reduce social evils like prostitution, as women would no longer be trapped in oppressive marriages or denied opportunities for education and personal growth.

Periyar also suggested that women's emancipation was not just about individual freedoms but about the collective transformation of society. He argued that men's purported efforts to liberate women were often insincere and merely reinforced women's subjugation. True liberation, he believed, would only occur when women were able to break free from superstition, inequality, and social constraints. He was a strong proponent of women receiving education that fostered rational thinking and independence, rather than being subjected to the superstitions and limitations of traditional roles.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Periyar E.V. Ramasamy's views on women were revolutionary for his time. He called for a complete overhaul of the social, cultural, and legal systems that restricted women's rights and freedom. He believed that for women to become true equals of men, society had to provide them with the same opportunities for education, property rights, and participation in all aspects of public and private life. He stressed that until women were liberated from their traditional roles and given equal status, society as a whole would continue to stagnate and decline. Periyar's ideas on women's rights were not just about improving their conditions, but about creating a more just, rational, and progressive society for all.

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