

**A Study of the Impact of Periyar's Kudi Arasu Magazine in  
Women Development**

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**Abstract**

Media has become an integral part of our lives and has become very powerful after the revolution of communication technology. The wider influence of media is reflected in the ideologies of the society. In the last century the print media played a major role in freedom struggles and social reformation movements across the country. In India also media played foremost role in freedom struggle. Thousands of books and periodicals were published to safeguard and glorify all the age old Varna-dharma system of this country

Periyar E.V. Ramasamy great sociologist, human emancipator and freethinker emerged in Tamil Nadu as a vociferous fighter for social justice. To propagate his ideologies in the said fields he published many periodicals and 'Kudi Arasu' [1925-1948] is one among them Periyar was strongly criticized all the traditional beliefs, customs, practices and activities which conventionally practised in the soil. It gives more attention to women

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empowerment. Periyar strongly believed without women emancipation there will not be real changes in the society. On this basis Considerable sizes of space were devoted for women related news in Kudiyarasu magazine.

**Key words:** Periyar, Kudi Arasu, Gender, Women Development, women Emancipation, , Social change.

## Introduction

A galaxy of social reformers and a few reform-minded elites emerged in the Nineteenth Century, to remove societal obstacles that stood in the way of women's identity, emancipation and development. Of all the reformers, Periyar E.V.Ramasamy (E.V.R.) alone attacked, for the first time, the ideological basis of the "enslavement of women" in society through his journals. In 1925, he started his Kudi Arasu, (People's Rule) Periyar paid much attention to the liberation of women, gender representation in his magazine

E.V.R took up the cause of women as his life mission right from the day when he entered the public service. Through propaganda tour and platform speeches and through social organizations like Self - Respect Movement and Dravidar Kazhagam, E.V.R. courageously met the forces of orthodoxy and reactionaries. In his magazines hundreds of Self-Respect leaders, both

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men and women, contributed articles on the modernisation of the society and social reforms against the established social order.

## **Periyar E.V. Ramasamy [1879-1973]:**

E.V. Ramasamy Periyar, humanitarian thinker a fighter for social justice. As he happened to reside in Tamil society, it was quite natural for him to take on all the social ills which were prevalent during his time. He was very keen in ensuring that caste-based discrimination was rooted out of society and in ensuring that a sense of equity pervades the society cutting across the male-female gender disparity and the tendency to treat women as slaves. Ironically enough, there are very few people who had studied and completely understood Periyar's reformist thoughts.

## **Backdrop in which 'Kudi Arasu' was launched:**

The worst shame in world history is untouchability which was strictly followed in the hamlet named *Vaikom* coming under the then *Tiruvudangur* (Travancore) Province under the British India where in the so-called 'low-caste' people were not allowed to use the roads surrounding the popular Mahadeva Temple. T.K. Madhavan, a Congress leader and a disciple of Sri Narayana Guru, came

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forward to challenge this practice/custom at a time when very few dared to protest against this disparity. He launched a huge protest on 30.3.1924. Protesters were arrested and put behind bars. Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Narayana Guru had lent their support to the protest.

Thousands of people were arrested even as the non-violent protesters were brutally attacked by the police under the British regime. It was at that time that the Kerala Congress Party sought help from Periyar, who was a prominent leader of the Congress Party in Tamil Nadu. Periyar responded to the call and visited Vaikom along with his female family members. Involving himself, his family seriously in the protest, he woke up people from a deep slumber as he instigated them to stand-up against the unacceptable social evil of untouchability.

The protest became deep-rooted as Periyar was arrested and lodged at the *Tiruvidangur* Central Prison. Print media in Kerala and the rest of the country, sans Tamil Nadu, covered Periyar's Vaikom protest prominently. The protest finally came to an end in 1925. This happens to be the first-ever successful non-violent protest held in a huge manner in the country. The protesters later awarded the title of '*Vaikom Warrior*' to E.V.R. Periyar.

The Vaikom struggle seeking social justice to the under-privileged sections of the society went by and large unnoticed in Tamil Nadu with only one or two

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journals reporting about the protests. When he was arrested by the police of Chennai Provincial Government, he was quick to find out that the press was supporting the Govt. and that it was consciously blocking news about non-Brahmins from appearing in print. This made him realize the significance of launching his own journal. Thus Kudi Arasu born.

### **Objective of launching Kudi Arasu:**

Six months after the launch of Kudi Arasu, the editorial of its issue dated 01.11.1925 said “It’s been six months since the journal was launched; the journal should contribute to implement Mahatma Gandhi’s dream of ‘Swaraj Nirman’ and for the liberation of non-Brahmins and the so-called untouchables paving way for them to lead a life of self-respect. That would be the real Swaraj (self-rule) where everybody is treated and lives equally and the oppressed classes are retrieved their due space in society.” Thus, this provides ample proof of Kudi Arasu’s primary objective.

Periyar stood for a gender equal egalitarian society. There are articles and debates on women’s right, women’s property, child marriage, equal status of women cadres, appropriate conjugality, birth control, education, and employment, women in politics, gender equality and justice for women in all walks of human life and activities. All the inequalities among genders are manmade to retain his superiority in society. Kudi Arasu proclaimed this in its issue dated 22.08.1926. “People with

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wisdom would agree to the fact that the Almighty didn't create the irregularities among men and women; except for their physiques, how can anyone find a difference in the courage or knowledge of men and women? This is almost impossible. Both men and women comprise geniuses and great courage-filled souls as well as cowards and idiots." At this period Periyar was not an atheist. This magazine was a tool to bring out a change in the mindset of people.

## **Review of Literature**

Periyar had expressed his views particularly on women emancipation and other subjects against the traditional views of this county. Only limited scholars researched on his views and simply termed him as radical feminist. Periyar's feminist views are also welcomed by some scholars. Pasu. Gowthaman (2017) observes that 'we should say that the important reason for the historical success of the conceptions of Periyar is that he had understood the Indian conditions very minutely. Prof.N.Muthumohan in his epilogue of a book contains Periyar's writings (2017) says, "Periyar had defined the concept of women's liberation after taking into consideration of the social conditions and he further states that the denial of orthodoxy is the actual emancipation of women"

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## Methodology of the Study

The Kop man's theory of collective action frame is used in this analysis. As per researches these theory operates in three stages from preparing the readers for the media text, and to take media text into field of action. They operate with three variables namely diagnostic, prognostic and motivational. Diagnostic frame is the frame in which the problem and the reason for the problem are constructed. Prognostic frame is the frame in which the solution for the above said problem, the ways to reach that solution and the plans are put forward with the tactics of prediction. Likewise, Motivational frame is the frame in which the appeal is made for the field work to establish the self-identity.

## On Women's Rights and emancipation

E.V.R did a lot for the women's rights. He said that each woman should learn an appropriate profession for herself, so that she could also earn. If she was able to take out a living at least for herself, no husband would treat her as a slave. He strongly viewed that at present, women in India experienced much worse suffering and humiliation and wanted such slavish situation to be changed. Periyar said "if women have to live on terms of equality with men, they must have the liberty, kind of education and work suitable to the knowledge, ability and taste". He added that women should not listen to religious instructions, which preached against them. E.V.R. focused on the fact that the slavish

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attitudes, timidity, superstitious beliefs, obstinacy in adopting traditional customs were all due to religion.

E.V.R advocated that women should develop their physical strength like men, take exercise and get trained in the use of weapons. They should be able to protect themselves from sexual assault. They should be also militarily trained so that they could serve the nation in times of crisis. He condemned men for the low status of women. He pointed out that men were responsible for keeping women as decorated animals. He floated the idea that adorning women with costly dress and jewels was not better than giving them education, knowledge and self-respect. Periyar called upon women to discard their golden jewellery and be emancipated.

## **Property Rights for women**

The Self-Respect Conference held in Tirunelveli, on 28 November 1927, E. V.R as President, pleaded with the Government "to give equal rights to women like men to inherit or possess property as that would make them economically independent". "In Hindu families, where the widows refused to remarry, they should be given right to property of their deceased husbands". "Properties in Hindu families should be equally distributed between men and women, without any sex discrimination". E.V.R. appealed to the Central Government to pass social legislations aiming at establishment of social equality in the society.

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Women did not have equal rights with men in the family whereas the Self-Respect Marriages are based on the recognition of equal rights of women in owning or inheriting property and also in sharing rights equally with men in running the family. In 1937, the Government of India passed the Hindu Women's Right to Property Act in the Central Legislative Assembly. E.V.R commended this act in the editorial of Kudi Arasu.

## **Marriage, re - marriage, widow marriage and child bearing**

E.V.R was vehement on accepting the words 'Wedding' or 'Marriage'. It is a contract for companionship in life. For such a contract, registration is enough proof. The other marriage ceremonies meant waste of mental effort, time, money, enthusiasm and energy. The wedding should be contracted only on the principle of equality on all aspects between the couples

According to Periyar, "because of the problems of child bearing, women are unable to demonstrate that they can live without men. As men have no such burden, they are free to declare that they can live without women. Besides, the problems of maternity compel women to seek the help of others and this gives rise to male domination. Therefore, for true emancipation of women, they should be completely freed from the compulsory obligation of child bearing on the basis of blind believes.

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E.V.R. also proposed changes in several aspects of marriage. He gathered statistics from the 1921 Census Report of India and highlighted the plight of 26,37,788 widows in the country. He viewed that widow non-marriage was perpetuated by men. He further said that "this wicked enslavement of half of the human race is due to the fact that men are physically a little stronger than women". True to his stand, he championed the cause of widows by arranging several widow marriages, popularizing them and helping the widows in the society to attain a new lease of life.

E.V.R emphatically supported the rights of women to divorce when they could not get along with their husbands. Divorce was not allowed in the past according to the laws of the land. For instance, he put a question before the people thus: "If a man can marry again at the instance of the death of his previous wife, why can not a woman remarry at the death of her husband?".

## **Participation of Women in Public Life**

In the Nineteenth Century, the politics in India underwent a drastic change. The political movements against foreign rule emerged. Though the political scenario changed, the status of women remained unchanged. The participation of men in political movements against foreign rule was more. Women found it difficult to participate in the public life due to social restrictions. In Periyar's self-respect movement large number of women participated. A.Singaravelu an

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early leader of the communist movement in India said, “It is rare to find women in other movements who are skilled in public oratory as they are in self-respect movement. During the last fifty years, the Indian National Congress could produce only one Sarojini Naidu.” Quates S.Ananthi in her article “women question in Dravidian movement” [1991]. The Self-Respect Movement provided equal opportunities to women in political arena. In most of the self-respect conferences the women were presided, apart from women conferences in venues.

## **First Anti-Hindi Agitation and the women**

Immediately after assuming the Government in 1937, the Congress Ministry announced the introduction of compulsory Hindi in the schools of Tamil Nadu. The Tamils vehemently opposed the compulsory introduction of Hindi. Periyar E.V.R. started anti-Hindi campaign against compulsory Hindi in 1938. The government arrested thousands people and put behind bars. Women and Mothers went to jail with their kids. Comparatively, they were less in number but in enthusiasm, they were equal to men. The Kudi Arasu published the photographs of arrested women, with their babies. The journal published the particulars of imprisoned women, with photographs regularly.

When women’s organizations urged for the voting right, the Kudi Aarasu extended its full-fledged and unconditional support to the cause of women

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enfranchisement. Madras was the first Presidency in India which passed a resolution in favour of women's franchise. The Kudi Arasu insisted on women voters registering themselves on or before 20 June 1936. By late 1936, the Government had announced that the general elections to the new legislatures would be held in February 1937. But the political parties were not ready to field women candidates. They fielded women candidates only in the reserved constituencies. The Kudi Arasu published the names of these women candidates irrespective of their parties. In municipal councils also; women councillors worked effectively and Kudi Arasu highlighted the services of women councillors

## Conclusion

The need of the hour is to identify those loopholes or limitations which are observing the realization of representation of women in social life. Without women's equal participation, there will not be any social change in the society. "When women move forward the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves". The development and empowerment of Women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of

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self-decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality.

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