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SOCIAL REFORMERS OF MODERN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

NOTES

During the 19th century, India witnessed socio-religious awakening. The Hindu mind that had been moulded for centuries by a fixed set of religious ideas and social conventions was exposed to new ideas and new ways of thinking. It was the result of the Western impact on India. As a result, the rigid rituals blindly followed in religion and traditional beliefs started losing their influence on the masses. The contact with the West opened the Hindu mind to the social evils and set in motion a number of social reform movements.

There was also an awakening among the depressed classes who had for centuries been exploited and oppressed by the upper castes. Several traditional beliefs and practices were discarded and new customs, practices, institutions and values were adopted. Indians who came under the influence of Western ideas and culture became aware of the existing social evils like child marriage, taboos against widow remarriage and inter-caste marriage, inter-caste dining, seclusion of women, and untouchability. This awareness led to a revolt against traditional beliefs and that was the first step towards reforms in social, religious and political spheres of life. In this book, *Social Reformers of Modern India*, we will discuss the contribution of different social reformers to reform Indian society, such as Ambedkar, Narayana Guru, Vallalar, Periyar, and others.

This book is divided into fourteen units that follow the self-instruction mode with each unit beginning with an Introduction to the unit, followed by an outline of the Objectives. The detailed content is then presented in a simple but structured manner interspersed with Check Your Progress Questions to test the student's understanding of the topic. A Summary along with a list of Key Words and a set of Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises is also provided at the end of each unit for recapitulation.

BLOCK - I
ORIGIN OF CASTE SYSTEM AND
SOCIAL CUSTOMS

*Origin and Growth of
Caste System*

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**UNIT 1 ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF
CASTE SYSTEM**

Structure

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Origin and Growth of Caste System: Historical Background of the Indian Social Structure
- 1.3 Indian Society before the Advent of the British
- 1.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The caste system in Indian society is believed to have originated in the four varnas and could also have been a result of socioeconomic factors that developed over time. This system is primarily based on the division of people into separate castes based on their occupations and is highly exploitative as it has prevented people from the lower castes from living a life characterised by dignity, freedom and equal opportunities. This unit traces the origin of the caste system and its growth over time in addition to the social customs practised in Indian society during the colonial rule.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the historical background of the Indian social structure
- Analyse the origin and growth of caste system
- Discuss the social customs practiced in Indian society before the British such as Sati, child marriage and untouchability

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1.2 ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF CASTE SYSTEM: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE INDIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The word 'caste' is used in English as well as in Indian languages but it is not an Indian word. The word is derived from the Portuguese '*Casta*' which means breed, race, lineage and it originally means unmixed or pure. In Indian languages, the terms *Jati* and *Varna* are used to denote a caste in Indian languages but there is no exact translation in Indian language.

In 1932, G.S. Ghurye, who was a sociologist, said that many people had studied about the definition of caste and attempted to formulate one but a general definition was not available. The phenomenon of defining caste is so complicated that any attempt to give a definition is bound to fail. But if we look at the other side, due to lack of precision about the usage of the term, most of the literature on the subject is marred.

Ghurye explained that the definition given by him is applicable people across India. But it is also true that the theme was variable as it varied with variation in the region. The model given by Ghurye included the following six characteristics:

1. The society was segmented into different groups which were based on the birth of the members.
2. The hierarchical system was applied in the society. The head of this system were the Brahmins and this system was disputed in various places. In the most of the linguistic areas, everyone acknowledged the gradation in the hundreds of castes.
3. Upper caste people had made a number of rules to impose restrictions on the social interaction among people and formulated a different set of customs which decided the kind of food and drinks to be accepted by the upper caste people from the lower caste people.
4. There was also a segregation where the individual castes lived together and the central location was given to the dominant castes to reside at and the other castes lived in the periphery of the place. Members of the lower castes were restricted from using streets and water wells meant to be used by the upper castes. For example, the people belonging to the upper caste like Brahmins were not permitted to use the streets of the lower caste people. The impure caste people were not allowed to draw water from the wells used by the members of the other caste.
5. Occupations were generally inherited as there was a lack of unrestricted choice of profession. Caste members restricted their own members from taking up certain professions they considered degrading. Ghurye explained that this type of caste system was not present in the larger part of India. At those places, the four castes i.e. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras were present. The people belonging to the first category were priests, those

in the second category were Kings or warriors, Vaishyas constituted people engaged in agriculture, business and trade and the Shudras constituted the lower most strata of society as they were made to do menial jobs.

6. There was a system of endogamy which means that there were restrictions on the marriage of the person of one caste into another caste. But in some situations, hypergamy was also allowed. The rigidity on the intermarriage of the persons belonging to the different sub-castes was less than the marriage between the members of different castes in some regions. In some cases of endogamy, the marriage within a sub-caste was the principal characteristic of caste society.

The model of caste given by Ghurye was criticised by the scholars and the criticism was based on his reliability on the British India Census Reports. The Superior-Inferior racist theory given by H.H. Risley and then fitting this theory on the definition of the prevalent colonial orientalist perspectives on caste.

In 1932, Ghurye explained that the colonial construction led to divisions and lobbying of the British officials for favourable caste classification in India. This was done by them for availing economic opportunities, but this practice led to the new complexity in the concept of the caste system. Graham Chapman and others have reiterated the complexity, and they note that there are differences between theoretical constructs and the practical reality.

Modern Perspective of Definition of Caste

According to Ronald Inden, who was an Indologist, there is no such definition of caste which is universally accepted by people. He explained this by giving an example of the thoughts of European documenters. According to them, caste corresponds with the endogamous *varnas* which were referred in ancient Indian scripts and the meanings of these correspond in the sense of estates. To later Europeans of the Raj era, it was endogamous *jatis*, rather than *varnas*, that represented caste, such as the 2378 *Jatis* that colonial administrators classified by occupation in the early 20th century.

According to the professor of comparative religion, Arvind Sharma, caste refers to both *Varna* and *Jati* synonymously. But according to Indologists, there is a considerable caution in this respect as the concepts are quite distinct while relating with this concept. In this, he agrees with the Indologist Arthur Basham, who noted that the Portuguese colonists of India used *casta* to describe clans, tribes or families. This name was stuck and it became usual for the Hindu social group. For the remarkable proliferation of castes in eighteenth and nineteenth century in India, the authorities accepted the traditional view. The traditional view explained that under the caste system a process of intermarriage and the subdivision of more than three thousand castes of India had evolved from the main four castes and this term was used for both *Varnas* and *Jatis*. But this is a false terminology as the castes go on rising and falling with time in any society. Old castes die out and new castes are formed. But one thing is very clear that despite this change, the main caste system consisting of four castes in the society is stable and continues to exist. There are

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never more or less than four and for over 2,000 years their order of precedence has not altered.

According to sociologist Andre Beteille, in classical Hindu Literature, *Varna* played mainly the role of castes but in present times, *Jati* has taken over the same role. If we have to compare *Varna* and *Jati*, the main difference between them is that *Varna* represents the closed collection of social orders and *Jati* is completely open-ended thought of as a natural kind in which the members share a common substance. According to the need of the society, a number of new *Jatis* can be added. For example, tribes, denominations, religious sects, linguistic minorities or nationalities etc. Thus in English, Caste is not an accurate representation of *jati*. Ethnicity, ethnic group and ethnic identity would be better terms.

Flexibility

According to Anne Waldrop, although the view of the outsiders explains the term 'Caste' as a static phenomenon of stereotypical tradition bound India but the empirical facts describe the term as a radically changed factor. The viewpoints of different Indians are different from each other. When we discuss caste in the terms of politics in modern India in which the jobs and school quotas are reserved on the basis of caste of different people, then this subject is a controversial and more sensitive subject.

Many sociologists like Damle, M.N. Srinivas have discussed regarding the rigidity in the caste system and they believe that the caste hierarchies are flexible and mobile.

Origin of the Caste System

In ancient and medieval India, there are mainly two perspectives regarding the origin of the caste system and these are focused on socio-economic factors and ideological factors.

According to the ideological factors, the caste system is based on the four *varnas*. Dumont articulated this theory and this theory was popular during the British Colonial Era and the scholars of that period believed in this theory. According to Dumont, the system was thousand years old and continues to be the reality of today's society as well. This theory is explained on the basis of the ancient law book *Manusmriti* and it disregards the political, economic and historical evidence.

While the other theory of thought is based on the socio-economic factors and according to this theory, the social and economic factors are the main basis of the caste system of any society. In India also the main root of the caste are the political, economic and material factors. This theory was popular among the scholars of the Post-colonial era. In that era, scholars like Marriott, Berreman and Dirks explained that the caste system is an ever-evolving reality. The examination of the political, economic and material historical factors which are verifiable and the study of historical evidence of actual practice can be helpful in understanding the social reality of this system. The theory is mainly based on the historical evidences of the ancient India and Medieval India which is mainly between the twelfth and eighteenth

centuries that is the Muslim Rule era and the policies of colonial British rule which falls between eighteenth century to mid twentieth century.

The first theory was based on religious anthropology and this theory disregarded that the historical evidences are the derivative of this tradition or that the historical evidences are secondary to this tradition. The second theory is based on the sociological evidence and this theory tries to understand the historical circumstances. The second theory criticised the first one on the fact that this theory has decontextualised and dehistoricised Indian society.

Ritual Kingship Model

With reference to the George L. Hart, Samuel explained the central aspects of Indian caste system. According to him, the Indian caste system has originated from the Ritual Kingship System, this system existed prior to the arrival of Buddhism, Jainism and Brahmanism in India. The literature from *Sangam* Period which falls between third to sixth centuries CE, the above system is seen in South Indian Tamil literature. The Indo-Aryan Varna Model is discarded by this theory on the basis of caste and this theory is mainly centralised on the powers of the King. The King is supported by a group of ritual specialised persons of the society who belong to the low social status and the rituals of those persons are considered polluted with their ritual occupations. Hart describes that the model provided the topic of pollution of the members of the society who belonged to the low status groups. According to Samuel, the caste model of the Hart envisions “the ancient Indian society consisting of a majority without internal caste divisions and a minority consisting of a number of small occupationally polluted groups”.

Vedic Varnas

In the period between fifteen hundred BC to five hundred BC, the *Varnas* originated in Vedic society. There were four groups, first three of which were named *Kshatriyas*, *Brahmins* and *Vaishyas* which were parallel with the Indo-European societies and the *Shudras* were the Brahmanical invention of North India. In Hindu religious texts, the Varna system is propounded and is known as an idealised human calling. The *Purusha Sukta* of the *Rigveda* and *Manusmriti*'s comments on it, being the oft-cited texts. Counter to these textual classifications, many revered Hindu texts and doctrines question and disagree with this system of social classification.

The *Varna* verse used in *Rigveda* is questioned by the scholars. According to them, *varna* is used only once in *Rigveda*. Later on, the *Purusha Sukata* had been added into the *Rigveda* and most probably it is treated as a charter myth. The professors of Sanskrit and religious studies, Joel Brereton and Stephanie Jamison, state, “the *varna* system seems to be embryonic in the *Rigveda* and, both then and later, a social ideal rather than a social reality”. In contrast to the lack of details about the *varna* system in the *Rigveda*, the *Manusmriti* includes an extensive and highly schematic commentary on the *varna* system, but it too provides “models rather than descriptions”. Susan Bayly summarises that

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Manusmriti and other scriptures helped elevate Brahmins in the social hierarchy and these were a factor in the making of the *varna* system, but the ancient texts did not in some way “create the phenomenon of caste” in India.

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Jatis

According to professor of philosophy and religious Studies, Jeaneane Fowler, it is impossible to know about the reason and process of existence of the *jatis* in the society. On the other hand, according to Susan Bayly, the *jati* system came into existence during the pre- independence era, due to poverty, volatile political environment, lack of institutional human rights, economic insecurity as it offered a source of advantage.

Dipankar Gupta, who was a social anthropologist, described that the guilds developed in the Mauryan period and these guilds crystallised into *Jatis*. There was emergence of feudalism in India during post-Mauryan times and in seventh to twelfth centuries, it finally crystallised but there is a dispute among different scholars regarding the development of *Jatis* in the history of India. Professors of History, Thomas Metcalf and Barbara Metcalf write, “One of the surprising arguments of fresh scholarship, based on inscriptional and other contemporaneous evidence, is that until relatively recent centuries, social organisation in much of the subcontinent was little touched by the four *varnas*. Nor were *jatis* the building blocks of society.”

Arthur Basham discusses *varnas* and rarely talks about *jatis*, not even as a system of groups within the *varnas*. He concludes that “If caste is defined as a system of group within the class, which are normally endogamous, commensal and craft-exclusive, we have no real evidence of its existence until comparatively late times.”

The Varna System and Untouchable Outcastes

In the vedic texts, the practice of untouchability and the concept of untouchable people was not mentioned. The rituals described in the Vedas ask the king and the nobles to eat with the common people in the same vessel. Some of the professions are ridiculed in the Vedas but the practice of untouchability is not described in them.

In *Manusmriti*, the concept of outcastes had been mentioned and it suggests that they may be ostracised. In the post-vedic texts, the discussion of outcastes is entirely different from the discussion done in colonial era Indian Literature.

During the period between 1500 B.C.-1000 B.C., that was the time of *Rigveda*, the *varnas* were mainly of two types i.e. *Arya Varna* and *Dasa Varna* and this division was based on tribal division. The *Arya Varna* belonged to the noble people of the society and the *Dasa Varna* to the rival tribal like *dasa*, *pani*, etc. Many *dasas* gave rise to the servant class in the society. The *rigvedic* society was not divided on the basis of the occupation of the people of the society. A number of crafts were practised by many artisans and husbandmen. The metal workers and the *rathakara* hold a position of great importance in the society and

no stigma was attached to them but similar observations were held for the weavers, carpenters etc. during the end of the *Atharvaveda* period, there was emergence of the new class distinction in the society. The Dasas were renamed as Shudras and they were distinguished as slaves, a new meaning given to the Dasas. The Aryas were renamed as the Vaishyas which means the members of the tribe. The new elite class of Kshatriyas and the Brahmins were renamed as the new Varnas. The Shudras were not only the erstwhile dasas but also included the aboriginal tribes that were assimilated into the Aryan society as it expanded into Gangetic settlements. There is no evidence of restrictions regarding food and marriage during the Vedic period.

In the early Upanishdas, the Shudras are described as the nourisher which means that they were the tillers or the labourers of the soil. They were not the tax payers and they were gifted lands and are said to be given away along with the lands. Shudras also included a number of artisans. In the social rituals, the Kshatriyas and the Brahmins were given a special position and this distinguished them from the Shudras and the Vaishyas. The Vaishya is said to be “oppressed at will” and the Shudra “beaten at will.”

Pali Buddhist texts supplement our knowledge of this period. The Brahmanical text describes the four-fold *varna* system whereas the Buddhist texts represents a different picture of the society based on the *Kula, Jati* and occupation. In the Buddhist text, the Kshatriyas and the Brahmins are explained as the *Jatis* and not as *Varnas*. They are known as the people of *Jatis* of high ranks. The lower *jati* people were called *chandals* and their main occupations were hunters, sweepers, weavers etc. The concept of *Jatis* and *Kulas* was the same. The people who belonged to high *kulas*, were engaged to take up occupations like trade, agriculture, accounting etc. and the people belonging to the low *kula* were forced to do jobs like sweeping, basket weaving etc.

In the Mahabharata, there are two models of the *varna* system. The first model explains that the *varna* is a colour-based system. Bhrigu explained that “Brahmins’ *varna* was white, Kshatriyas’ was red, Vaishyas’ was yellow, and the Shudras’ black”. But Bharadvaja questioned this description. According to him, colours are seen among all the *varnas*, that desire, anger, fear, greed, grief, anxiety, hunger and toil prevail over all human beings, that bile and blood flow from all human bodies, so what distinguishes the *varnas*? The Mahabharata then declares, “There is no distinction of *varnas*. This whole universe is Brahman. It was created formerly by Brahma, came to be classified by acts.” In the Mahabharata, the people who are inclined to pleasure, anger and boldness are Kshatriyas, who are inclined to the rearing of cattle and ploughing are Vaishyas, and Shudra are those who are inclined to courteousness, violence and impurity. The Brahmins are the people dedicated to pure conduct, truth and austerity. In the Mahabharata and pre-medieval era Hindu texts, according to Hildebeitel, “it is important to recognise, in theory, *varna* is non-genealogical. The four *varnas* are not lineages, but categories”.

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1.3 INDIAN SOCIETY BEFORE THE ADVENT OF THE BRITISH

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Let us discuss some of the customs of Indian society before the arrival of the British.

Untouchability

The feature of untouchability was an extremely cruel attribute of the caste system. In the society of India, the people who worked in unclean, polluting and ignominious occupations were considered to be untouchables because they could pollute others. The society gave them almost no rights. They were treated in different ways in different parts of India. In some regions, the attitude towards them was very strict and harsh while in the other regions, the harshness and strictness were less.

Even in the regions where the strictness was less, their houses were situated far from the settlements of the higher communities. The untouchables were not allowed to touch the people from the higher classes. The houses of the higher-class people could not be entered by them. They were also prohibited from entering the temples. They could not use the same wells used by the upper-class people. Even on public occasions and events, they had to sit at a distance from the higher-class people. In the regions where the attitude towards them was extremely severe, even a contact with their shadow was considered as polluting. It was so bad that if there were a contact between a member of the higher class and the untouchable, the higher-class person would be considered to be defile and he would have to be purified by washing himself or immersing himself in water. In such societies, the process of purification from the pollution would require religious ceremonies. If the house of the upper-class member would be entered by an untouchable or if anything would be touched by him then, the places where he stepped or touched would be cleaned.

In those days in many cases, if an untouchable associated himself with an upper-class person, then he was beaten and even murdered for it. In some upper class *Jatis*, there was also a practice that when the high *Jati* members would go on the streets they would send their servants before them to announce their arrivals so that the untouchable people could clear the street for them.

Anyone who worked in any kind of polluting job would be considered an untouchable by the orthodox Hindus and so they did not have any contact with them. The orthodox rules stated that anyone who did not belong to the four *Varnas* was a foreigner and so untouchable.

The Non-Hindus and the Caste System

According to Hindu religion, any person who did not belong to the four varnas was an untouchable and an outcast. This made all non-Hindus and foreigners untouchables. Non-Hindus and foreigners receive different treatments in different

parts of India. Hinduism was adopted by some of the foreigners and they became a part of the upper-class Hindus.

In Rajasthan, the Rajputs belong to the Kshatriya Varna or the Warrior caste. More than any other Indian *Jati*, Rajputs represented the warrior castes of India. Almost all Indian communities that are considered to be warrior communities claim to have a Rajput ancestry. However, many believed that some foreign invaders of Ancient India like Greeks, Huns, Scythians, etc. became Hindus, acquired the status of Kshatriyas and integrated in the Rajput community.

In the western part of India, the Konkanastha Brahmins are also believed to not be of Indian descent. According to a legend of Hindus, Parshuram, an avatar of Lord Vishnu, found some dead bodies on the Konkan beach which had been washed to the shore. Parshuram gathered them on a pyre in order to cremate them. These dead bodies were not dead but unconscious and they woke up on the pyre. These people were converted to Hinduism by Parshuram and they were made Brahmins. Regarding the origin of these Konkanastha Brahmins, there are other theories also. Many Konkanastha Brahmins have grey, green eyes. Some claimed them to be Vikings or having some other European origin. There is also a Jewish community in the Konkan coast called Benne Israel. It is claimed that these Jews were from the 'lost tribes'. Even these Jews reached India after their ship was wrecked near the coast of Konkan and It might be possible that the Jews' and the Konkanastha Brahmins' descendent were of the survivors of the same ship. There is also one more origin that they had not been converted by Parshuram but by a Brahmin from that area. These Jews however, do not have grey-green eyes like the Konkanstha Brahmins do.

In India, the status of followers of different faiths is entirely different in different parts. For example, the Jews in West India had a low status than the Jews of South India. The Jews in Kerala were the businessmen and even they ruled over small kingdoms. They had servants to announce coming to the streets to move away the low caste people. Mainly there were three Jewish communities in India.

The Muslims who came to India were strong physically and tried to change the religion of the Indians forcefully. Hindus were considered at a higher level of Indian society. Among the Muslims, there were two classes- the upper class which was known as Shareef jat and the lower class which was called the Ajlaf jat. Upper class include the Muslims who had come from the foreign countries and the lower caste Muslims were those who had converted from the lower class.

Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism were established on the basis of religion but they oppose the caste system. Although they marry within their community lines, the Buddhists have the status in the society according to the community they belong to. For example, the Mahar community of west India were untouchables. About 7% of the population of India is tribal people who are scattered all around India and they prefer to live in the forests, jungles or the mountains of India. They are not interested in any caste system. They survive on agriculture, hunting, fishing, also from robbing, stealing etc. they have different gods and different beliefs.

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Social Custom: Sati - The burning of the widow

In India, there was a Hindu custom known as Sati in which the widow was burnt with her dead husband. This was represented as a voluntary Hindu act and it was supposed that after the death of her husband, the woman voluntarily decides to end her life but the reality was that she was forced to kill herself and even dragged to the lighted pyre of her husband.

In Hindu custom, the word Sati is not used for a woman who commits suicide on the pyre of her dead husband. The first woman was the consort of lord Shiva who is known as Sati. She burnt herself in pyre because her father had not given lord Shiva the respect which he deserved being her husband and she prayed to reborn as the new wife of Shiva which was known as Parvati.

In Hindu literature, the other lady who was given the title of Sati was Savitri. After the death of her husband Satyavan, when the lord of death- Yama came to take his soul, she begged him to take her life instead of her husband. Savitri followed Yama until he agreed to restore the life of Satyavan. In Hindu mythology, these two women symbolized the truthful Indian wife and they were given the name of Sati which means righteous but there is no Hindu literature which explained the process of committing suicide on the pyre of her dead husband. This custom was evolved from the social background and regarding its origin, there are different theories. According to one theory, the wealthy husbands were poisoned by their wives to marry their real lovers and this custom was developed to prevent this. According to another theory, there was a jealous queen who believed that the dead kings were welcomed by *apsaras* in heaven after death. Therefore, when her husband died, she chose to be burnt along with her dead husband.

This is true that Sati is an Indian custom and also a Hindu custom but all Hindus did not practice it. This custom was popular among Greeks, Egyptians etc. According to a theory, the Scythians invaders of India brought the custom of Sati in India. When they arrived in India, they started cremating the dead instead of burying them. In 1829, this custom was outlawed but it had not vanished completely even in 1987 in a village of Rajasthan. An 18 years old widow committed Sati. In October 1999, a woman jumped on her husband's pyre and the incident was declared a suicide.

Child Marriage in India

In India, child marriage originated more than 1000 years ago when Muslims came here. The invaders raped unmarried Hindu girls or carried them off due to which the Hindus started marrying their daughters from their birth so that they can protect them from the Muslims. According to many scholars, the status of women in India deteriorated under Muslim rule. There was a rise in child marriages but before the nineteenth century, child marriage was common all over the world.

From two hundred B.C. to 700 A.D., young men and women were given complete liberty to choose a partner and to enter into romantic relationships and

there was no fear of censure or scandal regarding these. But from the Middle Ages, as governments and states came into existence, there was the development of political system in the society and the Indian society modified gradually. With this modification, lifestyle and opinion of people changed and it became complex from a simple form and the restrictions on the freedom were imposed. With this, women lost their freedom and they were forced to follow the rules and change their behaviour. They had to follow the family rules thereby maintaining discipline and take care of the honour of their clan. Young women were considered to be irrational in love and irresponsible. Their parents started marrying them at an early age so that they can protect them from any type of scandal. The age at which the girl was to be married differed and it was rare for girls younger than 12 to be married in antiquity. Nevertheless, girl brides became younger towards the Medieval period, and it became increasingly common for girls as young as six or eight to be married in Indian society. The main concern of negotiation before marriage was the compatibility between the families of the boy and the girl who were to be married. The argument behind this was that the persons who know each other from childhood till the age of marriage will develop a deeper understanding, love and affection. Owing to these reasons, the elders came to the conclusion that the marriages at early age will be successful. But the daughter stayed with their parents until her puberty.

During the time of the Delhi Sultanate, Muslim Sultans ruled the country and political atmosphere was not good. The practice of child marriage was prevalent and the status of women was very low. In Rigveda and Atharvaveda, it is clearly mentioned that during the vedic period, girls were married before their maturity age. According to a book on Tamil grammar, the age of marriage for a boy is 16 years and for a girl, before 12 years. In South India, there used to be a candle light ceremony for girls aged 7 to 9 years and it was held just before their marriages. The parents who indulged in the practice of child marriage were often poor and took this step for the better future of their daughters.

In India there is a common practice of dowry where the bride's family gives wealth to the groom. It is very common in India and it is also suggested that this practice creates a lot of pressure and fear of late marriages. In other words, it encouraged early marriages. Another reason for child marriage is poverty. In some parts of India, the personal laws of Muslims are the main reason for child marriage.

Check Your Progress

1. Where has the word 'caste' been derived from?
2. What was the criticism of Ghurye's model of caste based on?
3. What is the main difference between *varna* and *jati*?
4. How did the *jati* system come into existence as per Susan Bayly?

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1.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The word caste is derived from the Portuguese '*Casta*' which means breed, race, lineage and it originally means unmixed or pure.
2. The model of caste given by Ghurye was criticised by the scholars and the criticism was based on his reliability on the British India Census Reports.
3. The main difference between *Varna* and *Jati* is that *Varna* represents the closed collection of social orders and *Jati* is completely open-ended thought of as a natural kind in which the members share a common substance.
4. According to Susan Bayly, the *jati* system came into existence during the pre- independence era, due to poverty, volatile political environment, lack of institutional human rights, economic insecurity as it offered a source of advantage.

1.5 SUMMARY

- In 1932, G.S. Ghurye, who was a sociologist, said that many people had studied about the definition of caste and attempted to formulate one but a general definition is not available.
- The hierarchical system was applied in the society. The head of this system were the Brahmins and this system was disputed in various places. In the most of the linguistic areas, everyone acknowledged the gradation in the hundreds of castes.
- There was a system of Endogamy which means that there were restrictions on the marriage of the person of one caste into another caste. But in some situations, hypergamy was also allowed.
- In 1932, Ghurye explained that the colonial construction led to the divisions, lobbying and livening up of the British officials for favourable caste classification in India. This was done by them for availing economic opportunities, but this practice led to the new complexity in the concept of the caste system.
- According to the professor of comparative religion, Arvind Sharma, caste refers to both *Varna* and *Jati* synonymously. But according to Indologists, there is a considerable caution in this respect as the concepts are quite distinct while relating with this concept.
- According to the need of the society, a number of new *Jatis* can be added. For example, tribes, denominations, religious sects, linguistic minorities or nationalities etc. Thus, in English, Caste is not an accurate representation of *jati*. Ethnicity, ethnic group and ethnic identity would be better terms.

- With reference to the George L. Hart, Samuel explained the central aspects of Indian caste system. According to him, the Indian caste system has originated from the Ritual Kingship System, this system existed prior to the arrival of Buddhism, Jainism and Brahmanism in India.
- In Hindu religious texts, the Varna system is propounded and is known as an idealised human calling. The *Purusha Sukta* of the *Rigveda* and *Manusmriti*'s comments on it, being the oft-cited texts.
- There was emergence of feudalism in India during post-Mauryan times and in seventh to twelfth centuries, it finally crystallised but there is a dispute among different scholars regarding the development of *Jatis* in the history of India.
- During the period between 1500 B.C.-1000 B.C., that was the time of *Rigveda*, the *varnas* were mainly of two types i.e. *Arya Varna* and *Dasa Varna* and this division was based on tribal division.
- The Brahmanical text describes the four-fold *varna* system whereas the Buddhist texts represents a different picture of the society based on the *Kula*, *Jati* and occupation.
- In the society of India, the people who worked in unclean, polluting and ignominious occupations were considered to be untouchables because they could pollute others. The society gave them almost no rights.
- Among the Muslims, there were two classes- the upper class which was known as Shareef jat and the lower class which was called the Ajlaf jat. Upper class include the Muslim who had come from the foreign countries and the lower caste Muslims were those who had converted from the lower class.
- According to a theory, the Scythians invaders of India brought the custom of Sati in India. When they arrived in India, they started cremating the dead instead of burying them.
- In India, child marriage originated more than 1000 years ago when the Muslims came here. The invaders raped unmarried Hindu girls or carried them off due to which the Hindus started marrying their daughters from their birth so that they can protect them from the Muslims.

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1.6 KEY WORDS

- **Endogamy:** It is the custom of marrying only within the limits of a local community, clan, or tribe.
- **Hypergamy:** It is a term used in social science for the act or practice of a person marrying a spouse of higher caste or social status than themselves.
- **Indology:** It is the academic study of the history and cultures, languages, and literature of India and as such is a subset of Asian studies.

1.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the segregation of individual castes that lived together.
2. What does caste, according to European documenters, correspond to?
3. List the two categories of *varna*.
4. Who was Sati?
5. When and why did child marriage originate in India?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the characteristics of Ghurye's model of 'caste'.
2. Elaborate upon the Ritual Kingship Model.
3. Explain the description of *varnas* in the Mahabharata.

1.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 2 IMPACT OF BRITISH EDUCATION: CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

*Impact of British
Education – Christian
Missionaries and their
Contributions*

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Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Contribution of Christian Missionaries to Education in India
 - 2.2.1 Christian Missionaries and Social Reforms
- 2.4 Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions
- 2.5 Summary
- 2.6 Key Words
- 2.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 2.6 Further Readings

2.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we introduced you to the historical background and origin of the Indian caste system, as well as certain negative social customs that developed over time in India such as Sati, child marriage and untouchability. In this unit, we will discuss the impact that Western education by Christian missionaries had on Indian society.

By the nineteenth century Indian culture had become a mixture of magic, animism and superstition. The social conditions in society were equally depressing. The most upsetting was the situation of women. The birth of the girl child was unwelcome; she was considered a burden on her family. Endeavours to kill female new-born children upon entering the world were not uncommon. In addition, the practice of Sati, a custom of burning wives on the funeral pyre of their husband, was also rampant. If they were able to resist the social pressure to commit Sati, they were sentenced as widows to long lasting wretchedness, disregard, neglect and humiliation. Another weakening element was the caste system. The framework stratified society into a hierarchy where the lower castes were oppressed by those who were ‘higher’ born. The caste system heaped various indignities and humiliation on the lower castes. Moreover, the caste system was not restricted to Hindus only. The followers of Muslim and Sikh religion, also began to practice certain caste practices. On the whole, Indian society was begging for reform.

Under East Indian Company rule, very few steps were taken to educate the Indian masses. A few notable exceptions were endeavours by individuals such as

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Warren Hastings who set up the Calcutta Madrasah in 1780 and Jonathan Duncan, who established the Sanskrit School in 1791. Education in India under official sanction began after the renewal of the East India Company charter in 1813, which allowed Christian missionaries to preach their religion in India. Here we will examine the history and impact of Christian missionary education in India.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Analyse the Indian education system during the British colonial period
- Examine the British education policy regarding the welfare of Indians
- Describe the role of Christian missionaries in developing the education system in India

2.2 CONTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES TO EDUCATION IN INDIA

It is generally accepted that St. Thomas, the pupil of Jesus, first introduced the Christian faith in India almost 2,000 years back. However, the Indian Subcontinent would not experience the impact of Christianity, until a lot later with the appearance of the Europeans. The Portuguese started to arrive in India from 1498. In 1542, the Jesuit Francis Xavier, an ecclesiastical diplomat, showed up and started the sincere efforts to disseminate Christian beliefs among the Indian masses. Protestant service in India was first started in Tranquebar by two German Pietists, Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Henry Plutschau.

European missionaries considered Christianity to be a better religion than the ones that were practiced in India and wanted to spread it through westernization which, they accepted, would demolish the confidence of the locals in their own religion and culture. They also believed that if the masses converted to Christianity, it would make Indians better clients for European products. They also held the firm belief that British supremacy in India was fundamental for their missionary activities.

Role in Education

Christian evangelist movements in India by and large laid the foundation of high-quality schools in India. The influence of Christian missionaries does not end there. Along with the newly introduced school system came print machines, which were useful in the dispersal of writing. R.L. Rawat, in his *History of Indian Education*, suggests that India will always be obliged to these teachers for the creation of

reading material, word references, and syntaxes, and for their enthusiastic quest for educational advancement.

In the sixteenth century, it was the Jesuits who at first set up Christian establishments of learning. They were followed by the German Tranquebar instructors. Later, Friedrich Schwartz began Christian schools in both vernacular tongues and in English. William Carey and the British Baptists who appeared in Calcutta in the late eighteenth century, initiated modern education in North India. By 1818, there were 111 schools spread all over the East India Company areas.

With the renewal of the British East India Company's contract in 1813 and the appearance of a large group of British missionaries, there was a rapid increase of schools and print machines all over India. The primary Western-type postsecondary school, Serampore College, was established in 1818. The American Mission opened schools for young men in Bombay from 1815, and in 1829, John Wilson made sure that a school was likewise set up in Bombay for young ladies.

The appearance in Calcutta of Alexander Duff in 1830 denoted the start of another way to deal with learning, to be specific, English-language instruction. Duff was dazzled with “the shining possibilities of Christianity in [India],” and with what he alluded to as “a definitive evangelisation of India.” Duff contemplated the subject of what was to be the future language of learning in India, pondering over which would end up being the “best instrument” of liberal and illuminated training. Of course, Duff's plan to set up an English-language school was, from the start, disputable. There was huge resistance to his plans, yet soon Duff's unobtrusive investigation caught the attention of the privileged elites of Indian society. Duff's work was an extraordinary achievement and brought about the extension of English-language education all through British India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, at the essential, optional, and college levels; in time, English turned into the genuine most widely used language of India.

Christians were, in addition, pioneers in the field of female instruction. A lot of this work was taken up by the spouses of early teachers, and by women preachers, of whom there were many. In the nineteenth century, the ordinarily acknowledged view in India was that proper instruction was not for women of any sort, significantly less for those from good families. In 1834, it was reported that only 1 per cent of Indian women could read and write.

Language and Literature

Christians have additionally made a huge commitment in India in the fields of dialects, writing, and news-casting. Constanzio Beschi (1680–1747) improved Tamil in sequential order characters, making them more reasonable for the print machine. He additionally delivered a fourfold Tamil word reference, which was partitioned

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by words, equivalents, classes, and rhymes. Priest Robert Caldwell's (1815–1891) *Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages* and G. U. Pope's (1820–1908) interpretations of works of art of Tamil writing into English are vital. Vedanayagam Pillai (1824–1889) and H. A. Krishna Pillai (1827–1900) are two other Christian essayists who created a portion of the primary Tamil novels.

The French minister Francis Mary of Toure started deal with Hindustani as right on time as 1680, forming an enormous word reference named *Thesaurus Linguae Indianae*. Present day Hindi, the public language, was created out of Hindustani. Henry Martyn and a Dr. Gilchrist, an educator of Hindustani and an American Presbyterian minister, and the Reverend S. H. Kellogg all added to the arrangement and advancement of Hindustani. Kellogg, indeed, drew in excess of twelve lingos together to help with making what is today known as Hindi. He created in 1893 *A Grammar of the Hindi Language*, which is still available for use. William Carey and his Baptist associates, starting in 1818, were the first to deliver periodicals, diaries, and a paper. Their distribution, the Friends of India, lived on and is currently 'English every day', the Statesman, distributed from Calcutta and New Delhi.

Jawaharlal Nehru in his *Discovery of India* acknowledges the contribution of the early missionaries, especially the Baptists of Serampore, concerning the shift from the dominating influence of both Sanskrit and Persian. The printing of books and papers by the missionaries along with English-language instruction, most likely broke the hold of these two languages, says Nehru, and permitted local dialects to arise and bloom. While Nehru saw no trouble in evangelists managing the major languages, he notes that they, "even laboured at the dialects of the primitive hill and forest tribes. The desire of the Christian missionaries to translate the Bible into every possible language thus resulted in the development of many Indian languages. Christian mission work in India has not always been admirable or praise worthy...but in this respect, as well as in the collection of folklore, it has undoubtedly been of great service to India."

2.2.1 Christian Missionaries and Social Reforms

A matter of worry among Christian missionaries during the British period was the act of child marriage, whereby unions were made among Hindus between children as young as five years old. Carey's answer was to advance female schooling. Child marriage was authoritatively prohibited in 1929. Christians from that point forward put forth a purposeful attempt to advance the endorsement of widow remarriage.

Missionaries were likewise associated with rural development. Here the work of the Allahabad Agricultural College, established in 1910, and the Bethel Agricultural Fellowship established close to Salem, Tamil Nadu, in the mid-1960s,

are notable. Their points were to help and improve the profitability of farmers. K. T. Paul had comparable concerns and thought of what he called “rural remaking.”

From the very beginning, missionaries were shocked at the social evils that endured in India, including the act of sati (the immolation of widows on their spouses’ burial service fires), the executing of outcasts, and the penance of children. The missionary William Carey was forceful from his appearance in 1793 on any issue that he felt required change. With the help of General Lord Wellesley, Carey helped put in laws that would make the murder of children for any reason a crime punishable by death.

Carey utilized his writings to bring forth issues of philanthropic concern. The principal issue of the *Friend of India* conveyed a thorough report of a real sati. By 1814, Ram Mohan Roy joined Carey in the mission against sati. Equipped with records of 438 widow burnings, Carey and his Serampore partners entreated the public authority to disallow the ritual by law. Initially, they faced huge resistance by Hindus. However, by 1829 Lord William Bentinck was finally able to outlaw the practice for good.

Pressure Created by Missionaries for Education on British Government in India

Enlightened Indians and missionaries started exerting pressure on the government to promote modern, secular western education since, as they thought that western education was the remedy for social, economic and political ills of the country. Christian missionaries thought that modern education would destroy the faith of Indians in their own religions and they would take to Christianity. But Serampore missionaries were, in particular, very enthusiastic about spread of Education.

Charter Act of 1813

The Charter Act of 1813 incorporated the principle of encouraging education among Indians and promoting knowledge of modern science in the country. The Act directed the company to sanction one lakh rupees annually for this purpose. However, even this petty amount was not made available till 1823, mainly because of the controversy raged on the question of the direction that this expenditure should take.

Meanwhile, efforts of enlightened Indians such as Raja Rammohan Roy bore fruit and a grant was sanctioned for Calcutta College set up in 1817 by educated Bengalis, imparting English education in western humanities and science. The Government also set up three Sanskrit colleges at Calcutta, Delhi and Agra.

Orientalist-Anglicists Controversy

Within the general committee on public education, the Anglicists argued that the government spending on education should be exclusively for modern studies. The

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Orientalist said while western science and literature should be taught to prepare students to take up jobs, emphasis should be placed on expansion of traditional Indian learning.

Even the Anglicists were divided over the question of medium of instruction—one faction was for English Language as the medium, while the other faction was for Indian languages (vernaculars) for the purpose. But the British were focused on English language, and not on vernacular, native languages or regional languages.

Lord Macaulay’s Minute (1835)

This famous minute settled the row in the favour of the Anglicists. The limited government resources were to be devoted to teaching of western sciences and literature through the medium of English languages alone. Lord Macaulay held the view “Indian learning was inferior to European learning”.

According to him:

- English education should be imparted in place of traditional Indian learning because oriental culture was ‘defective’ and ‘unholy’.
- He proposed the inclusion of a few upper and middle class students in education.
- In the course of time, education would trickle down to the masses. This was called infiltration theory.
- He wished to form a class of Indians who were Indian in colour and blood but English in taste and affiliation.

Thus, he wanted only those people to be educated who would obey the British government.

Wood’s Dispatch (1854)

In 1854, Charles Wood prepared a dispatch on an educational system for India. It is called the “Magna Carta of English Education in India.” It was also known as the Wood’s Dispatch. The recommendation of the Wood’s Dispatch were as follows:

- Regularize education system from the primary to the university levels.
- Education system was to be set up in every province.
- Affiliated private school could be granted aids.
- Education of women should be emphasized.
- Indians were to be educated in English and their native languages.
- University of Madras, Calcutta and Bombay were set up by 1857.
- University of Punjab-1882, University of Allahabad -1887.

This dispatch asked the government to take up the responsibility of education of the people.

- An agriculture institute was started at Pusa (Bihar) and Roorkee.

The ideals and methods of Wood's dispatch dominated the field for five decades which saw rapid westernization of the education system in India, with educational institutes run by European headmasters and principals. Missionary's enterprises played their own part. Gradually, private Indian efforts also appeared in the field. The British Crown took over from the East India Company in 1857. Few years later, the Hunter Education Commission was established in 1882.

Hunter Education Commission (1882)

Earlier education schemes had neglected primary and secondary education. The British government appointed a commission under the chairmanship of W.W. Hunter in 1882, to review the progress of education in the country since the dispatch of 1854. The Hunter Commission was mainly focused on primary and secondary education.

The recommendations of the Hunter Commission were as follows:

- To educate effectively, secondary (High school) education should have two divisions:
 1. Literary –leading up to university
 2. Vocational –for commercial careers
- To draw attention to inadequate facilities for female education, especially outside presidency towns and make recommendations for its spread.
- To recommend transfer of control of primary education to newly setup district and municipal boards.
- To emphasize that state's special care is required for extension and improvement of primary education, and that primary education should be imparted through vernacular.

The next two decades saw rapid increase in the number of Indians attending schools.

University Act, 1904 (Raleigh Commission)

The Raleigh Commission was setup in 1902 under Governor General Lord Curzon to know about the condition and prospect of universities in India and to suggest measures in their constitution and working. The Indian Universities Act was passed in 1904.

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The recommendations of the Raleigh Commission were as follows:

- To give more attention to study and research in universities.
- To ensure that more fellows of universities were appointed by the government and increase the number of students in universities.
- University had to give the power of veto to the Governor.

Curzon justified greater control over universities in the name of quality and efficiency, but actually sought to restrict education to incline the educated towards loyalty to the government. Gopal Krishna Gokhale called it a “retrograde measure” of the education commission. Nationalists saw it as an attempt to strengthen imperialism and to sabotage nationalist feelings.

Government Resolution on Education Policy (1913)

In 1913, the governments passed a resolution on education policy that recommended the promotion of policies to remove illiteracy. Provincial governments were instructed to take early steps to provide free elementary education to the poorer and more backward sections. Private efforts were to be brought in for this and the quality of secondary schools was to be improved. A university, it was decided, was to be established in each province and teaching actions of universities were to be encouraged.

Saddler University Commission (1919-1919)

It was set up to study and report on problems of Calcutta University. Their recommendations were applicable more or less to other universities also.

The recommendations of the Saddler Commission were as follows:

- School course should cover 12 years. Students should enter university after an Intermediate stage (rather than metrics) for a three year degree course in university.
- To prepare students for university stage
- To relieve universities of a large number of below university standard students.
- To provide collegiate education to those not planning to go through the university stage.
- Promotion of female education, scientific and technological education, teachers training including those for professional and vocational colleges.

In the period from 1916 to 1921, seven new universities were established in many places of India including Mysore, Banaras, Aligarh, Lucknow, Dacca, Patna, and Osmania. In 1920, the government recommended the Saddler report to the provincial government.

Hartog Committee for Education, 1929

Hartog Committee was set up to report on development of education, its main recommendations were:

- An emphasis on primary education
- Only deserving student should go in for high school and intermediate stage, an average student should be diverted to vocational courses after the eighth standard

Wardha Scheme of Basic Education, 1937

The main principle behind the Wardha plan of essential schooling was learning through exercises. It depended on Gandhi's ideas published in a progression of articles in the weekly *Harijan*. Gandhi believed that western training created a gap between the informed minority in India and the uninformed majority. The arrangement of the plan was as below:

- Teaching to be in Hindi from Class 2 to 7 and in English simply after Class 8
- The first seven years of schooling should be free and mandatory and in the mother tongue.

Sergeant Plan of Education, 1944

The Plan was worked out by the central advisory of education in 1944. It recommended:

- Pre-schooling for three to six years age group
- Free elementary education for children in the age group of six to eleven
- Adequate technical, commercial and arts learning
- Eradication of intermediary course

Check Your Progress

1. Who started Protestant service in India?
2. When did 'The American Mission' open schools in Bombay?
3. Which principle did 'The Charter Act of 1813' incorporate?
4. List two recommendations of the Wood's Dispatch.

2.4 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS' QUESTIONS

1. Protestant service in India was first started in Tranquebar by two German Pietists, Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Henry Plutschau.

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2. The American Mission opened schools for young men in Bombay from 1815 and in 1829.
3. The Charter Act of 1813 incorporated the principle of encouraging learned Indians and promoting knowledge of modern science in the country.
4. Two recommendations of the Wood's Dispatch were:
 - Regularize education system from the primary to the university levels.
 - Education system was to be set up in every province.

2.5 SUMMARY

- It is generally accepted that St. Thomas, the pupil of Jesus, first introduced the Christian faith in India almost 2,000 years back. However, the Indian Subcontinent would not experience the impact of Christianity, until a lot later with the appearance of the Europeans.
- Christian evangelist movements in India by and large laid the foundation of high-quality schools in India.
- In the sixteenth century, it was the Jesuits who at first set up Christian establishments of learning. They were followed by the German Tranquebar instructors.
- With the renewal of the British East India Company's contract in 1813 and the appearance of a large group of British missionaries, there was a rapid increase of schools and print machines all over India.
- The appearance in Calcutta of Alexander Duff in 1830 denoted the start of another way to deal with learning, to be specific, English-language instruction.
- Jawaharlal Nehru in his *Discovery of India* acknowledges the contribution of the early missionaries, especially the Baptists of Serampore, concerning the shift from the dominating influence of both Sanskrit and Persian.
- Enlightened Indians and missionaries started exerting pressure on the government to promote modern, secular western education since, as they thought that western education was the remedy for social, economic and political ills of the country.
- The Charter Act of 1813 incorporated the principle of encouraging education among Indians and promoting knowledge of modern science in the country.
- The Anglicists argued that the government spending on education should be exclusively for modern studies. The Orientalist said while western science and literature should be taught to prepare students to take up jobs, emphasis should be placed on expansion of traditional Indian learning.
- Lord Macaulay's Minute (1835) settled the row in the favour of the Anglicists. The limited government resources were to be devoted to teaching of western sciences and literature through the medium of English languages alone.

- In 1854, Charles Wood prepared a dispatch on an educational system for India. It is called the “Magna Carta of English Education in India.”
- The British government appointed a commission under the chairmanship of W.W. Hunter in 1882, to review the progress of education in the country since the dispatch of 1854. The Hunter Commission was mainly focused on primary and secondary education.
- The main principle behind the Wardha plan of essential schooling was learning through exercises. It depended on Gandhi’s ideas published in a progression of articles in the weekly *Harijan*.

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2.6 KEY WORDS

- **Animism:** It is a belief that perceives all things—animals, plants, rocks, rivers, weather systems, human handiwork, and perhaps even words—as animated and alive.
- **Evangelicalism:** It is a worldwide trans-denominational movement within Protestant Christianity that maintains the belief that the essence of the Gospel consists of the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, solely through faith in Jesus’s atonement.
- **Magna Carta:** Magna Carta, which means ‘The Great Charter’, is one of the most important documents in history as it established the principle that everyone is subject to the law, even the king, and guarantees the rights of individuals, the right to justice and the right to a fair trial.

2.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a brief note on the filtration theory.
2. Why was the Calcutta Madrassa established?
3. What was the Wardha Scheme of Basic Education?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Analyse the provisions of the ‘Wood’s Dispatch’.
2. Discuss the views of the Anglicists and the Orientalists regarding the introduction of modern education in India.
3. Describe the various education commissions set up by the British.
4. Discuss the role played by Christian missionaries in developing the modern education system in India.

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2.6 FURTHER READINGS

- Gupta, Krishna. 1996. *Social Equality and the Indian Constitution*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Co.
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UNIT 3 PHULE AND AMBEDKAR

Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Jyotirao Phule (1827-1890) and B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956): Revolutionary Social Reformers
 - 3.2.1 Satya Shodak Samaj (Society for the Search of Truth)
- 3.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 3.4 Summary
- 3.5 Key Words
- 3.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 3.7 Further Readings

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3.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you learnt about the role of Christian missionaries in the development of modern education system in India. In this unit, we will discuss two of the most important social reformers of Indian society, i.e., Jyotirao Govindrao Phule and B.R. Ambedkar. Phule in the 19th Century and Ambedkar in the 20th Century were two reformers who attacked the caste system prevalent in Indian society. Their contributions to the weakening hold of caste in India cannot be understated. They also fought against the oppression faced by women in society. We will discuss their views and achievements on these issues.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the life of Jyotirao Phule
- Describe Phule's role as a social reformer of Indian society
- Discuss Ambedkar's contribution towards improving the life of the so-called untouchables in Indian society
- Examine the social status of Dalits in Hindu society

3.2 JYOTIRAO PHULE (1827-1890) AND B.R. AMBEDKAR (1891-1956): REVOLUTIONARY SOCIAL REFORMERS

Jyotiba Phule was born on 11 April, 1827 in Satara district. He belonged to the Mali community. His father was a vegetable vender at Poona. Jyotiba Phule's mother passed away when he was hardly one year old. After completing his primary

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education, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule had to leave the school and help his father by working on the family's farm. In 1841, he got admission in the Scottish Mission's High School at Poona. It was the turning point in his life as it brought him in contact with ideas on humanity through his Brahmin friends and missionaries. An agonizing experience that he faced when he was young was the oppression he faced by the upper castes when he was invited to one of his Brahmin friend's wedding. Realising that Jyotiba belonged to the Mali caste which was viewed as substandard by the Brahmins, the family members of the groom attacked him. After this occurrence, Jyotiba decided to work to oppose the caste privileges of the upper caste and the oppression faced by the Shudra community. For the duration of his life, Jotirao Phule battled for the liberation of the lower castes in Indian society.

Jyotirao Phule or Mahatma Jotiba Phule, as he is popularly known, was the first person in modern India to launch a movement for the liberation of caste-oppressed toilers and women irrespective of caste. What social reformers like Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati and Vivekananda were to the upper castes, Phule was to the freedom struggle of India's long-suppressed humanity. Phule was inspired by the egalitarian philosophy of Buddha and Kabir and was an admirer of the emergent liberal democracies of the west and the ideology of social revolution.

Phule presented a socio-cultural analysis that attacked the caste-vama domination. He saw Brahmanism both as the ideological and institutional system of monopolizing knowledge and power by a particular class which excludes, divides and dominates other groups in the society. He argued that even before trying to overturn the material power of the upper castes, it was necessary to step out of the ideologies of Brahmanism for which proper access to knowledge was an essential prerequisite. He thought if both Women and sudratisudhra do not get education, they would not be able to emancipate themselves. So he started a massive work of education by starting various schools in and around Poona. Phule exposed the Brahmanical pretensions and appreciated the Christian missionaries for their noble work in school education. He termed this understanding of knowledge as Tiritiya ratna, the 'third eye', which was the means to end Brahmanic hegemony.

Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar (1891-1956)

Babasaheb Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was a scholar, a social reformer and a leader who dedicated his life to eradicating social inequality in India. He established an India of equals, a country which provided greater opportunities for people who were historically disadvantaged. His family was from the Mahar caste and came from the Ambavade town of Mandangad taluka in the Ratnagiri area of Maharashtra. Nonetheless, he was born in the military cantonment town of Mhow, presently in Madhya Pradesh on 14 April 1891 as his dad was then a Subedar Major with the Mahar Regiment of the Indian Army.

Until the nineteenth century the anti-caste movement was viewed more in the socio-economic perspective. The emergence of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar as the leading pioneer against caste and untouchability transformed the vision and outlook

of the anti-caste movement in India. His approach towards social reforms was not just anti-caste but also the annihilation of caste. Dr. Ambedkar himself belonged to an untouchable community and thus had an implicit understanding of exploitation and discrimination faced by the untouchable community. He entered into the limelight in the early 1920s. For him to initiate a movement, he sensed that there is a necessity to analyse Hindu society from a critical approach. His understanding of equality and justice was exemplary. He viewed justice through a social perspective; hence, the primary objective of his movement was the attainment of social justice.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar stated that, 'caste in India means an artificial chopping off population into fixed and definite units, each one prevented from fusing into another through the custom of endogamy. Thus the conclusion is inevitable that endogamy is the only characteristic that is peculiar to caste and if we succeed in showing how endogamy is maintained, it shall practically have proved that genesis and also the mechanism of caste.'

Transformation along Revolutionary Lines: Destruction of Caste, Superstition and Inequality

Since there is a long debate regarding the origin of the word caste therefore it is very difficult to define the caste properly but most of the sociologists agree that caste is a social institution and it derives the sanction from intimately interwoven and a complex Hindu religion in which membership of caste is compulsory and it is not a matter of choice. According to Risley, 'A caste may be defined as a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name claiming common descent from mythical ancestor, human or divine professing to follow the same hereditary calling and regarded by those who are competent to give opinion as forming a single homogeneous community. The name generally denotes or is associated with a specific occupation. A caste is almost invariably endogamous in the sense that a member of the large circle, but within the circle there are usually a number of smaller circles each of which is also endogamous.'

If a person born into it then, according to the Vedas, he is not allowed to change his caste. From the very beginning it was practically impossible for individuals to change their caste. Each caste boasts of a peculiar tradition of culture and tries to preserve it tenaciously as they wanted to maintain the hierarchy of their caste. The lower caste could not change their status and thus their existence throughout centuries was one of oppression. The customs and contemporary style of living of Dalits was different from the other customs given in those books for upper caste like Brahmins or Kshatriyas.

The caste system associated the individual member of a caste with some rules which must be observed by him or her in the matter of food, marriage, birth, imitation and death. As far as the duty of a member of a caste is concerned, the first reference we get is from the Rigveda where it is stated that the Brahmin is made for teaching, the Kshatriyas is for securing the land and life, Vaishya is for trading and Shudra is for service of the rest the three castes. The Dalits are said to

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have no caste as they are not seen by any as being part of human culture, thus, they were called untouchables. Dalits conducted work that was considered “impure”. Work that included the transfer of human waste or the treatment of cadavers.

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The fundamental basis of the caste system is set on the division of caste based on traditional occupation by birth. A person belonging to one caste cannot perform the duties of another caste as it is an obligatory and endogenous system. Therefore, there is a strict division of occupation based on the profession by birth. Particularly, Dalits have been denied and restricted from performing and taking jobs related to food production.

The law book of Manu known as the ‘Manusmriti’ shows another set of stringent prohibition for lower caste people during the period from 200 B.C to 200 A.D. As a result of incursion of foreign elements such as the Bacterians, the Greeks, Sakas, Parthian and Kushanas and due to this, the proliferation of caste, Manu desperately tried to preserve Brahmanical society and put rigorous measures against Shudras so that they could not incorporate with the foreign elements. Manu made a greater use of varnashankara (intermixture of varnas) than was done by his predecessors. Manu also gave a list of ‘Jatis’.

The term ‘Dalit’ is more as an idea and in its presents application originates in the writings of one Jyotiba Phule, who had coined the term “Dalit” (downtrodden or oppressed) and second, Dr. Baba Saheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar.

Determined to Emancipate the Lower Castes and Women from Social Oppression

The American born Indian scholar and sociologist Gail Omvedt argues that, the law of Manu treats women as Shudras or Dasa irrespective of their caste and Varna. Phule’s thoughts on women was very surprising as he considered women, including Brahmin women as *shudratrishudra*. Phule himself received the child of a Brahmin widow as his own child. Gail Omvedt pointed out that Phule didn’t utilize the normal word “manus” (person), yet demands utilizing ‘stree-purush’, consequently underlining sex separation, while arguing for equivalent and normal common freedoms for men and women.

Phule was convinced that the family and marriage framework should be improved altogether. As a radical scholar, Phule knew about that a transformation in social relations must be achieved among Brahmin and non Brahmin. However, such a transformation could not be achieved unless there was an egalitarian relationship between men and women. Phule accepted that as long as there was disparity between men and women in the family, the institution oppression of lower castes would not end.

Elite social reformers such as Ram Mohan Roy criticized the degenerated form of Hinduism, while Phule attacked it from its very inception and showed that Brahmins had deceived lower castes throughout history. He interpreted Hinduism as a relation based on Varna and caste system devised by the cunning Brahmins to

deceive the lower castes. Phule did not dismiss the general concept of religion or dharma. He attempted to take care of all inclusive religion dependent on the standards of freedom and equity. His Sarvajanik Satya Dharma put accentuation on truth looking for without the guide of any Guru or text. His strict thoughts were unquestionably influenced by Christianity, yet he never supported change since he was additionally influenced by the writings of Paine, who had pointed out various deformities in Christianity.

Phule's general religion was liberal and in numerous regards altogether different from conventional religions. His religion was mostly and essentially worried about common issues. He had imagined a family where every individual from that family may follow his own religion. In this ideal family, a spouse may grasp Buddhism while her better half may be a Christian and youngsters may follow different religions since there may be a trace of validity in all the strict writings and sacred texts and subsequently one of them couldn't guarantee a definitive truth.

The social category of 'women' has differed and varied across time and space. In the context of Indian society, caste, class, and patriarchy are, among others, three hierarchical axes of social structure which are crucial to the understanding of gender relations and the oppression of caste Hindu, Shudra, and Dalit women. In this context, there are clearly defining ways in which Dalit women are oppressed not only because they belong to lower caste. Untouchable women suffer multiple discriminations at the intersection of caste and gender discrimination. Phule strongly advocated female emancipation and female education and also established a school for girls in Poona. He also actively supported the widow remarriage movement and opposed polygamy and child marriages.

Ambedkar's Priority to Social Reform

Ambedkar's main focus was the upliftment of Dalit and untouchable people in Indian society. He understood that the most persecuted segment of the general public was that of the untouchables. He demanded the advancement of this segment as a condition for the improvement of Indian culture. To make a feeling of self-declaration among the untouchables, they must be given their own personality. This errand of their psychological freedom was satisfied by Ambedkar's analysis of Hinduism. He addressed the most essential component of Hinduism: the authority of the Vedas and Shastras. He contended that the Hindu religion was just a bunch of important principles and guidelines. It was without any philosophical premise. He exhibited that Hinduism had come to be related to Chatuwarna and Brahminism. By Brahminism he implied refutation of the soul of equity. Therefore, social empowerment is a way to uplift the marginalized section from their state of poverty. Social empowerment helps develop a sense of self-confidence and self-sufficiency among the weaker sections of the society. They need good health, housing, water, land, healthy food and education, etc., because they have abilities of all different kinds. Human need firstly health and education. Secondly, they have social needs. This means that human beings need social involvement, a sense of identity, social

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belonging, and leadership relations. The third was psychological needs like self-respect, self-possession, the capability to envision and desire to a better future. Thus, social upliftment is meant to bring about a more equal and just society by giving access to better education, housing, jobs, and other benefits to the poor.

Removing to Untouchability from Indian Society

The contribution of Ambedkar towards the upliftment and dignity of the Dalit community is remarkable and phenomenal. The amount of injustice, cruelty, oppression and suppression faced by Dalits was simply unbelievable and unforgivable. Ambedkar tried his best to eliminate the hierarchy based caste system. Ideas of high and low had crept into the Hindu society; Ambedkar suffered because of this; he also fought hard against such differences; later, he became the first Law Minister in free India. The credit for making a law and creating the necessary atmosphere to wipe out 'Untouchability' goes to Ambedkar.

Self-respect among Untouchables Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Ambedkar stated that the 'Untouchables' are Hindus. Therefore, the doors of temples should open to them. If the Hindus can touch the Christians and the Muslims, why should they not touch the people who are themselves Hindus and who worship the Hindu Gods? This was Ambedkar's argument. He gave a call that people who practice and support 'Untouchability' should be punished. Some people argue that the 'Untouchables' were not yet fit for equality. The Hindus say that they want independence and democracy. How can a people who have temple upon all the liberties of a backward group aspire to democracy?

In 1927, there was a big conference. It resolved that there should be no caste differences in the Hindu Dharma and that people of all castes should be allowed to work as priests in temples. The Chowdar Tank dispute went to the court. The court decided that tanks are public property. The 'Untouchables' who have been subjected to humiliation for hundreds of years should find justice. For this purpose Ambedkar indicated a few clear steps. No section of the Hindus should be kept out of temples. There should be more representatives of the 'Untouchables' in the legislatures. The government should not nominate these representatives. The people should elect them. The government should employ the 'Untouchables' in larger numbers in the army and the police department.

3.2.1 Satya Shodak Samaj (Society for the Search of Truth)

Mahatma Jotiba Phule established the Satya Shodhak Samaj (Society of searchers of Truth) in 1873 for the upliftment of shudras and other lower castes against mistreatment and misuse by the upper castes in Maharashtra. Its enrollment was available to all. Mahatma Phule was its first President and financial officer. There were 316 individuals from the Satya Shodhak Samaj in 1876. The Samaj was against the social acts of untouchability and casteism and

the customary nature of religion. Phule was against child marriage and the practice of sati. Phule opened many schools and colleges for girls and untouchables. He was a staunch supporter of widow remarriage.

Satya Shodhak Samaj propounded the spread of levelheaded reasoning and dismissed the requirement for a Brahman clerical class as instructive and strict pioneers. He eagerly contradicted useless customs and any delegate among god and individual. Satya Shodhak Samaj accepted neither in the station framework nor in the fundamental four-overlay division of society. Satya Shodhak Samaj came up short on the help of significant intelligent people. Their rationalist were straightforward and genuine worker. Their language was the language of the individuals, their places of publicity were the corn-gathering places.

The Satya Shodhak Samaj attempted to subvert the social and strict approval for priesthood by leading customs and services without Brahmins. In its assault on the caste framework it drew from both Western realism just like native wellsprings of social revolt like the Bhakti. Phule respected Western values as he trusted that they would assist with freeing the Shudras and the lower castes. To be sure, he once said “the creator has intentionally sent the English to free the debilitated Shudras from the servitude of the cunning Aryas”.

The Satya Shodhak Samaj as a lower caste body had an incredible job in separating the boundaries among the Marathas and the making of the Maratha personality. Its commitment to the arising control of the Marathas in the political scene and their upward portability in societal position was no small one.

Principles

- Deny the supremacy of the scriptures
- Use equality to attack the caste system
- Improve the status of lower caste people in Indian Society
- To educate and empower Dalits

Achievements

Maharama Jyotiba Phule and Dr. Ambedkar, both were successful in improving the life of untouchables in the social, political and economic sphere. Their ideas helped shaped free India’s constitution. In fact Ambedkar is known as the father of the Indian Constitution. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution provides that “The state shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India”. Article 17 describes that nobody is an untouchable in India. And in this article provides rules and law about untouchability. The Constitution abolishes “Untouchability” and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of “Untouchability” shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law. The Article of 338 and Part of XVI, of the Indian Constitution, deals with National Commission of Scheduled Castes.

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Check Your Progress

1. When was Jyotiba Phule born?
2. Who first coined the term 'Dalit'?
3. When was the Satya Shodhak Samaj established?

3.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Jyotiba Phule was born on 11 April, 1827 in Satara district. He belonged to the Mali community.
2. The term 'Dalit' originates in the writings of Jyotiba Phule, who had coined the term to mean the downtrodden or oppressed.
3. Mahatma Jotiba Phule established the Satya Shodhak Samaj (Society of searchers of Truth) in 1873 for the upliftment of shudras and other lower castes against mistreatment and misuse by the upper castes in Maharashtra.

3.4 SUMMARY

- Jyotiba Phule was born on 11 April, 1827 in Satara district. He belonged to the Mali community. His father was a vegetable vender at Poona. Jyotiba Phule's mother passed away when he was hardly one year old.
- After completing his primary education, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule had to leave the school and help his father by working on the family's farm. In 1841, he got admission in the Scottish Mission's High School at Poona.
- Jyotirao Phule or Mahatma Jotiba Phule, as he is popularly known, was the first person in modern India to launch a movement for the liberation of caste-oppressed toilers and women irrespective of caste.
- Babasaheb Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was a scholar, a social reformer and a leader who dedicated his life to eradicating social inequality in India.
- Until the nineteenth century the anti-caste movement was viewed more in the socio-economic perspective. The emergence of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar as the leading pioneer against caste and untouchability transformed the vision and outlook of the anti-caste movement in India.
- Since there is a long debate regarding the origin of the word caste therefore it is very difficult to define the caste properly but most of the sociologist agree that caste is a social institution and it derives the sanction from intimately interwoven and a complex Hindu religion in which membership of caste is compulsory and it is not a matter of choice.

- If a person born into it then, according to the Vedas, he is not allowed to change his caste. From the very beginning it was practically impossible for individuals to change their caste.
- Phule's thoughts on women was very surprising as he considered women, including Brahmin women as *shudratrishudra*.
- As a radical scholar, Phule knew about that a transformation in social relations must be achieved among Brahmin and non Brahmin. However, such a transformation could not be achieved unless there was an egalitarian relationship between men and women.
- Ambedkar's main focus was the upliftment of Dalit and untouchable people in Indian society. He understood that the most persecuted segment of the general public was that of the untouchables.
- The contribution of Ambedkar towards the upliftment and dignity of the Dalit community is remarkable and phenomenal.
- Mahatma Jotiba Phule established the Satya Shodhak Samaj (Society of searchers of Truth) in 1873 for the upliftment of shudras and other lower castes against mistreatment and misuse by the upper castes in Maharashtra.

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3.5 KEY WORDS

- **Varna:** It is a Sanskrit word with several meanings including type, order, colour, or class, and was used to refer to social classes in Hindu texts like the *Manusmriti*.
- **Untouchable:** It refers to a member of the lowest-caste Hindu group or a person outside the caste system, contact with whom is traditionally held to defile members of higher castes.
- **Dalit:** The term comes from the Hindi word *dalan*, meaning oppressed or broken.

3.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the life of Jyotiba Phule.
2. Which essential component of Hinduism did Ambedkar address?
3. Write a short note on the achievements of Ambedkar and Phule.

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Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the rules regarding the expected behaviour of untouchables in the nineteenth century.
2. Explain Ambedkar's contribution towards the upliftment of the dalits and the poor.
3. Discuss the work of the Satya Shodak Samaj.

3.7 FURTHER READINGS

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BLOCK - II
UNTOUCHABILITY AND SOME SPECIAL REFORMS

B. R. Ambedkar

UNIT 4 B. R. AMBEDKAR

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Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Dr. B.R. Ambedkar
- 4.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 4.4 Summary
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- 4.7 Further Readings

4.0 INTRODUCTION

As you learnt in the previous unit, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar advocated dalit rights in India. He launched the dalit movement in 1955 which sought to reject the caste system, empower the Dalits and provide them with equal rights like the upper castes. He converted to Buddhism along with a large number of followers to disassociate with Hinduism, the main cause of their misery and exploitation. He was highly educated and went on to become the first Law Minister of free India and continued to pave the way for attainment of equal rights for the lower castes. He advocated education as the means for development of the oppressed classes as it would bring them out of the realm of ignorance thereby making them capable of building up better lives for themselves. In this unit, an analysis of Ambedkar's early life and education, his role in the dalit movement and the aims of Sainik dal have been discussed.

4.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Analyse the life and education of B.R. Ambedkar
- Discuss the role of Ambedkar as crusader for the rights of the oppressed and the maker of the Constitution
- Describe the aims and work of the Sainik Dal
- Examine the connection between Ambedkar and Buddhism

4.2 DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR

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The full name of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar was Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. He was born on 14th April, 1891 and died on 6th December, 1956. He was also popularly known as Babasaheb Ambedkar. He was a well-known Indian economist, jurist, social reformer and politician. He had inspired the movement of the Dalit Buddhists and started a campaign against the discrimination in society against the Dalits (untouchables). He also supported the rights of labourers and women. When India became independent, he became the first minister of Law and Justice and so he was the maker of the constitution of the country and could be called the Republic of India's founding father.

He was a very dedicated student and had earned doctorates from the University of London and the Columbia University in the subject of economics. He also gained a reputation as a scholar for his research in political science and law. In the initial part of his career he was a lawyer, professor and economist but at the later stages of his career he became more involved in politics. He became involved in negotiations and campaigning for the independence of India. He published journals and advocated the social freedom and rights of Dalits and so his contribution to the establishment of the state of India was immense. He converted to Buddhism in 1956 and the mass conversion of Dalits was initiated by him.

The Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award was conferred upon Dr. BR Ambedkar posthumously in 1990. The legacy of Ambedkar includes various depictions and memorials of our great culture.

Life & Education

Dr. BR Ambedkar was born in Mhow on 14th April 1891, a military cantonment situated in Central India which is now in the state of Madhya Pradesh. His father –Ramji Maloji Sakpal was an officer in the army and had served at the rank of Subedar. His mother was Bhimabai Sakpal and her father was Laxman Murbadkar. Dr. BR Ambedkar was their last child. Ambedkar's father was of a Marathi background and basically belonged to a town named Ambadawe in Mandangad taluka which is situated in Ratnagiri district of the state of Maharashtra. His family was a dalit or low caste and in the initial part of his life he suffered socio economic discrimination and was treated as an untouchable. The ancestors of Dr. BR Ambedkar had served in the Mhow cantonment of the British Indian Army. Although Ambedkar did attend school, he and other people of his community were treated as untouchables and faced discrimination even at the hands of his teacher who paid less attention to him and also made him sit outside the class. Even for drinking water they had to depend on someone from the higher caste to pour it into their vessels. For Dr. BR Ambedkar, it was the peon of the school who did it but if her were not present, then Dr. BR Ambedkar would have to go thirsty for the day. In one of his writings later on he had said that the situation was “No peon, No water”. He would have to sit on a gunny sack which he would bring from his home and take it back.

In 1894, his father retired and after two years the family moved to Satara. In Satara, Ambedkar's mother did not survive long and so he and his two brothers, Baram and Anandrao along with his two sisters, Manjula and Tulasa were taken care of by their paternal aunt. From the children, only Dr. BR Ambedkar could progress to high school after passing his examinations successfully. Although his surname was Sukpal, his father used Ambadawekar as his surname which meant that he belonged to and was originally from the village of Ambaawe in Ratnagiri district.

His teacher Krishnaji Keshav Ambedkar who was a Devrukhe Brahmin, later made him change his name from Ambadewekar to Ambedkar in the records of the school.

Ambedkar had been a diabetic since 1948 and was bedridden due to the side effects of his medicines from June to October 1954. On 6th December, 1956, he died in his home in Delhi. Before his death, he completed the final manuscript of his work - *The Buddha and His Dhamma*.

On 7th December his cremation was organised with Buddhist traditions in the Dadar Chowpatty beach and more than 5 lakh grieving people attended it. On 16th December 1956, a conversion program was organised and many of his followers accepted Buddhism at the same place. Ambedkar's resting place is Chaitya Bhoomi and it is the most visited death memorial in India. The death anniversary of Ambedkar is celebrated every year here and it is called the Mahaparinirvan Diwas. This place is visited by lakhs of people this year and respects are paid to him. His daughter-in-law Meera Yashwant had inaugurated the Chaitya Bhoomi on 5th December, 1971.

Ambedkar's second wife Savita Ambedkar who was also known as Maisaheb Ambedkar died in 2013 and his son who was known as Bhaiyasaheb Ambedkar died in 1977. The socio-religious movement of Dr. BR Ambedkar was continued by both of them and his son had also worked as the 2nd President of the Buddhist Society of India from 1957 to 1977 and had also been the member of the Maharashtra Legislative Council from 1960 to 1966. His grandson Prakash Yashwant Ambedkar has been chief-adviser of the Buddhist Society of India and has lead the *Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi*. He has also been a part of both houses of the Parliament of India. The younger grandson of Ambedkar is the leader of the Republican Sena.

There are many handwritten drafts and transcripts which are not finished and were found among the papers and notes of Dr. BR Ambedkar. They have been slowly made available. *Waiting for a Visa* which could have been written in 1935-36 is an autobiographical work of the children of the ghettos of India who were also called untouchables.

Ambedkar's memorial was established at what was his residence at 26 Alipur Road, New Delhi. On Dhamma Chakra Pravartan Din mentioned before and on the death and birth anniversaries of Ambedkar there is a gathering of lakhs of people at his Nagpur & Mumbai memorials respectively, where there are

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hundreds of bookshops set up and books are sold. The message he gave his followers was- “educate, agitate, organise!”

Modern India has been deeply affected by the legacy of Ambedkar as a socio-political reformer. The political spectrum has respected his socio-political thoughts after independence. The initiatives taken by him have affected the numerous spheres of life and have brought a transformation in the way we approach legal, social and economic incentives, education and socio-economic policies.

It is because he had a reputation of being a scholar that when India became free, he was appointed as the chairman of the committee in-charge of drafting the constitution and also became the first law minister of India. He was a great critic of the caste difference in the society and advocated the freedom of the individual. Many believers of the caste system of the society then did not like him for his views. The philosophy of the Buddhists got revived in India & abroad when he converted to Buddhism.

In his honour many public institutions are named. The Sonegaon Airport in Nagpur was renamed as Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar International Airport. In his honour we also have Ambedkar University, Delhi & Dr. B. R. Ambedkar National Institute of Technology, Jalandhar.

His house in London where he lived as a student was acquired by the Maharashtra government to be eventually converted into a museum-cum-memorial to Ambedkar.

In 2012, he was voted as the greatest Indian in a poll which was organized by CNN IBN & TV18. Here 2 crore votes were cast and he was ahead of Nehru and Patel in the voting. Regarding him the notable Indian economist Narendra Jadhav had said that he was “the highest educated Indian economist of all times.” Amartya Sen had said that Ambedkar is “father of my economics”, and “he was highly controversial figure in his home country, though it was not the reality. His contribution in the field of economics is marvellous and will be remembered forever.”

A tall bronze statue of Ambedkar which was 12 feet tall was installed in the Parliament of India on 2nd April, 1967. The then president of India Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan had unveiled the statue sculpted by B.V. Wagh. A portrait of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar painted by Zeba Amrohawi was unveiled by the then prime minister V.P. Singh and it is placed in the Parliament House’s Central hall. Another portrait of Ambedkar is put in the Parliamentary Museum and archives of the Parliament House.

Dedicated to his birthday, stamps were issued by the India Post in 1966, 1973, 1991, 2001, and 2013, and featured him on other stamps in 2009, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2020.

He was criticised by many to focus more on the caste system and not on the nationalist movement. Some have also criticised him for neglecting the building of an organization.

The political philosophy of Ambedkar has given rise to many workers' unions, publications and political parties especially in Maharashtra.

In modern times many human rights activists have organised mass conversion ceremonies while emulating the Nagpur ceremony of 1956 in Nagpur. He is also regarded as a Bodhisattva by many Indian Buddhists. In Hungary, the Romani people have drawn a similarity between the downtrodden people of India and their own situation. They drew comparison with Ambedkar and converted to Buddhism.

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Dr. BR Ambedkar's Education

Post-secondary education- Ambedkar's family moved to Mumbai in 1897 and he joined Elphinstone High School where he was the only untouchable student. He married Ramabai in 1906 when he was 15 years old in an arranged marriage.

He passed his matriculation exam in 1907 and then joined Elphinstone college which was affiliated to the University of Bombay. He became the first person from his caste to reach that level and so when he had cleared his English IVth standard exams, his community's people were rejoicing and Dr. BR Ambedkar did not then consider it to be a great accomplishment because other communities were in a much better state education wise. A public ceremony was, however, evoked to celebrate his success and it was in this ceremony that he was gifted a biography of the Buddha by Dada Keluskar who was his family friend and also the author of the book.

He obtained a degree in Economics & Political Science in 1912 from the University of Bombay and took up employment in the state government of Baroda. Hardly had his family moved to Baroda when he had to return to Mumbai to see his sick father who eventually died on Feb 2nd, 1902.

Postgraduate studies at Columbia University

At the age of 22, Ambedkar moved to the USA in 1913. The Baroda State Scholarship had been awarded to him of £11.50 per month for the next 3 years and Sayajirao Gaekwad III (Gaekwad of Baroda) had established this scheme to help deserving candidates to study at Columbia University in New York City.

There he put up in the rooms at Livingston Hall where he met a Parsi named Naval Bhathena who would eventually go on to be his lifelong friend.

In June 1915, he passed his MA exam and majored in Economics and other subjects of Anthropology, Philosophy, History and Sociology. A thesis named 'Ancient Indian Commerce' was presented by him. John Dewey and his work on democracy influenced Ambedkar.

His second thesis was completed in 1916 for another MA named – 'National Dividend of India - A Historic and Analytical Study'. He presented a paper named 'Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development' in a seminar that the anthropologist Alexander Goldenweiser conducted.

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Postgraduate studies at the London School of Economics, University of London

He enrolled at Gray's Inn for the Bar course and also in the London School of Economics and here he began his work on a doctoral thesis. He returned to India in June 1917 because the scholarship for Baroda had stopped. Unfortunately his book collection which was dispatched on a different ship was lost because the ship was torpedoed by a German submarine.

Within 4 years he returned to London after getting permission and on getting the first opportunity in 1921, he completed his master's degree. The title of his thesis was -"The problem of the rupee: Its origin and its solution". He completed his D.Sc in Economics in 1921 that the University of London awarded him. He was called to the Bar by Gray's Inn in the same year. His 3rd doctorate was from Columbia in 1952 and the 4th was from Osmania in 1953 which were conferred honoris causa.

Crusader for the rights of the oppressed

Dr. BR Ambedkar was Ramji and Bhimabai's 14th ward. He was a Mahar by caste. In those days the Mahars were considered belonging to a low caste and the people of the higher caste used to consider them to be untouchables or Dalits. This caste mainly used to be found in the Maharashtra state. Both Ambedkar's grandfather and father had served in the army and so Ambedkar was from a financially well off family yet he had to suffer a lot of social oppression because of the caste he belonged to because of which the caste ridden society looked down upon him. Even from an early age, Ambedkar experienced discriminatory treatment due to his low caste.

He could not sit with the high-class children in the classroom on chairs but outside the class on gunny bags. He could not mix with other children or even have water like them. His teachers would not check his notebooks fearing that by doing so they would get polluted. It is from this early age and experience that Ambedkar realised how the social system of discrimination was so oppressive.

In Maharashtra's Satara district, he did his initial education and then shifted to Bombay. He passed his BA examinations in 1912. From the prestigious Elphinestone College, he secured a distinction and a scholarship from Baroda State's Maharaja with the condition that for ten years he would work for the Baroda state in the years to come. With the scholarship he went to the Columbia University in the USA. Then he shifted to the UK and here he took admission in the University of London. Here he could meet people of different races and nationalities and he learnt a lot from them.

During the 1946-1951 period, he joined Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru's union cabinet but he resigned on September 27, 1951 as a protest against the deferment of the discussion in the parliament of the Hindu Code Bill mainly because of the then due 1952 election. For Ambedkar, the bill was very important as it would have reformed

the proposals of monogamy, divorce and marriage. Although his health had started to fail he continued his struggle for the rights of the Dalits. He had converted to Buddhism in October, 1956 but expired in Dec 1956.

Ambedkar's Movement for Human Rights

In the late 19th century, many leaders of India like Jotiba Phule (1827-1890), Ramaswamy Naicker (1879-1973) and Narayan Guru (1854-1928) belonged to the lower castes. They struggled for the honour of the lower castes throughout the country and among them Ambedkar was at the forefront.

After he returned from the USA and the UK after he finished his studies there, Ambedkar joined the state service of Baroda as per the conditions of his scholarship granted to him by the Gaikwad family that was ruling at that time. The scholarship had provided finance to his studies abroad. He worked as secretary in the defence office of the Maharaja of Baroda State.

He had to face many insults despite having foreign education only because he belonged to the lower caste. The peons would hurl files at him because he was a Dalit. They would also not serve him water and in official functions or in the officer's club, he had to sit in a corner far away from others because they were of higher castes. It became difficult for him to find a house on rent as a government bungalow was not allotted to him. He had to put up in an inn run by Parsis. However, when they came to know that he was from the lower castes, they attacked him and made him vacate the premises. However, he had to request them to allow him to stay for a week more but they did not agree and that day Ambedkar spent most of the day in a public garden and eventually he got so frustrated that he left for Bombay on the 9 PM train.

It was humiliating experiences like these which made Ambedkar's determination more intense to work to protect the rights of the lower caste people and to uplift their status more intense. In Bombay he started his legal practice in 1924 and to uplift the Dalits he founded the *Bahishkrit Hitkarni Sabha* (Depressed Class Institute). This was a start of a movement that looked into the cause of the downtrodden and so the consciousness of the Dalits was roused by him and the struggle to eradicate discrimination of the Dalits, to claim equality of opportunity, status and treatment, to enjoy all rights equally (economic, social and political) and respect for the dignity of all persons, started. Many considered him to be a crusader for the social rights of the lower classes in India.

The belief of the Hindus then was that "All human beings are not born equal". This belief had created the caste-based discrimination that was prevalent in those days. They were discriminated against and many acts of violence such as killing, beating, rape, torture, humiliation etc. had to be faced by them. Rabindranath Tagore was also against such values and he had written - We do not value Hinduism, we value human dignity... We want equal rights in the society. We will achieve them as far as possible while remaining within the Hindu fold or if necessary by kicking away this worthless Hindu identity.

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Ambedkar also keenly supported the liberation of women. According to him, the Varna system was the reason for the oppression against women and Dalits. He questioned Manusmriti (Laws of Manu), the law book (Dharam-Shastra) of Brahminic Hinduism and attributed to Manu, the legendary first man and the one who had given the laws. According to the book, every human being had to enact a definite role in the society which had been allotted to him or her in the society on the basis of his/her birth in a social class and stage of life. These laws were against the interests of women and the lower class people. According to it, the re-marriage of widows was prohibited. According to him the subjugation of women was mainly because of the Manusmriti. The Dalits were encouraged by him to embrace Buddhism and get free from the caste system which subjugated them. He also advocated that one should be free to choose one's own faith. After becoming a Buddhist, he had said, "[U]nfortunately for me I was born a Hindu Untouchable... I solemnly assure you I will not die as a Hindu." Till his death he had practiced Buddhism since 1956.

He also wrote about the French Revolution's ideas of equality, liberty and fraternity. He felt that the Russian and the French revolution could not realise the 3 ideas mentioned above. He felt that only the way of Buddha could help realise them.

Means and Ends for Struggle: He used many means to safeguard Dalit rights. A movement was launched by him against the Dalit discrimination and he created public opinion through his writings in the various public periodicals such as Equality Janta, Bahishkrit Bharat and Mook Nayak which he had started to protect the rights of the Dalits.

Many movements were also launched by him and one memorable struggle was the one in Travancore named Vaikom Satyagraha in which he asserted the Dalits' right to worship without hindrance in the Hindu temples. One more important movement was the Mahad March in which he asserted the legal rights of the Dalits to take water from the Chowdar tank. In 1896, in Mahad, the Chowdar tank had been made public and in 1923, a resolution was passed by the Bombay Legislative Council to allow the Dalits to also use the places of public watering. A resolution was passed by the Mahad Municipality on 5th Jan, 1927 that it had no objection if the dalits also made use of the tank. However, the higher caste people were reluctant to allow the use of the tank to the dalits. A resolution was passed soon after this in a two-day conference of the Dalits of the Colaba district. Between 18-20th March, a conference was convened by Ambedkar on this issue. The conference encouraged the dalits to use the Chowdar Tank and make use of the water that was also rightfully theirs. The higher caste Hindus realised that they had lost and the dalits began using the tank as per the rights given to them.

One more movement relating to temple entry took place in Nasik's Kalaram Temple which is in Maharashtra state. A conference was convened on the issue on 13th Oct, 1935. Here Ambedkar put forward the immense sacrifices made by the depressed classes and the painful experiences that they had to undergo in order to be treated as human beings.

Ambedkar also raised his voice for the peasants and workers. In the decades of 1920's and the 1930's he took up the cause of the tenants from both the Hindu Kunbis and dalit Mahars in Maharashtra's Konkan region, through his Independent labour party that had been founded by him. The party took the help of the radicals who were in the Congress Socialistic Party then to organise a march for peasants in 1938 to Mumbai and twenty thousand peasants participated in it making it the region's biggest pre-independence peasant mobilisation. In the same year a strike was organised by Ambedkar with the support of the Communists to protest against a bill which the British government was planning to bring which would curb any labour strikes. Ambedkar was on the forefront to condemn the bill and he argued in the assembly that the right to strike was the same as the right to freedom of assembly.

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The Makes of the Indian Constitution

During the British Raj in 1919 the Montague-Chelmsford Reform started to meet the demand to protect and safeguard the depressed class (Now called Scheduled castes). In this struggle, Ambedkar had a close involvement in the fight to provide the depressed class of people, a solid statutory safeguard. In London, at the round table conference, he participated as a delegate and here he asked that a separate electorate be provided for the dalits. It is because of Ambedkar that in the Constitution of India in 1949, he ensured that the welfare of the depressed classes was assured in the form of reservation in educational, employment and legislative fields.

The dalit cause was championed by Ambedkar and he was successful in making the movement of the scheduled classes revolutionary in Pan-India. It is because of him that the depressed class people of India can live in India today with poise and confidence although there are still some oppressions that they have to face. Yet the concept of equality is steadily and forcefully seeping into the society.

After drafting the constitution of the country, Ambedkar was invited by the Government of India led by the Congress to become the law minister and he accepted the post. He was subsequently appointed the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee, and was appointed by the Assembly to write India's new Constitution. Regarding the Indian constitution it was said by Granville Austin - 'first and foremost a social document'. 'The majority of India's constitutional provisions are either directly arrived at furthering the aim of social revolution or attempt to foster this revolution by establishing conditions necessary for its achievement.'

Ambedkar prepared the text that gave the constitutional protections and guarantees for a wide range of civil liberties for the individual citizens including the outlawing of all forms of discrimination, the abolition of untouchability & freedom of religion.

Arguments were put forward by Ambedkar in support of the social and economic rights of women and the Assembly supported him in the introduction of a system of reservation of jobs in colleges, schools and civil services for the members of the other backward class, scheduled tribes and scheduled castes. This system was similar to the affirmative action. It was hoped by the Indian lawmakers that

there will be an eradication of the lack of opportunities for the lower classes and the socio-economic inequalities with the help of these measures. On 26th November 1949, the constituent assembly adopted the Constitution.

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Article 370 of the Constitution of India was opposed by him because a special status was granted by it to the Jammu and Kashmir state and he did not approve of it. It is reported by Balraj Madhok that he had clearly said to Sheikh Abdullah, the Kashmiri leader, “You wish India should protect your borders, she should build roads in your area, she should supply you food grains, and Kashmir should get equal status as India. But Government of India should have only limited powers and Indian people should have no rights in Kashmir. To give consent to this proposal, would be a treacherous thing against the interests of India and I, as the Law Minister of India, will never do it.” So Sheikh Abdullah had to approach Nehru who directed him to Gopal Swami Ayyangar, who in turn approached Sardar Patel, saying Nehru had promised S.K. Abdullah the special status. The article was passed by Patel when Nehru was on a foreign tour. The day when the discussion was held on the article, Krishna Swami Ayyangar had to do all the arguments as Ambedkar chose to keep quiet on the questions asked.

In the debates of the Constituent assembly, Ambedkar showed his intent to transform the society of India and wanted the adoption of the Uniform Civil Code. In 1951, he resigned from the cabinet because his draft on the Hindu code bill which advocated the equality of gender in the laws of marriage and inheritance.

In 1952, he independently contested the election in the Lok Sabha but a lesser known Narayan Sadoba Kajrolkar defeated him in the Bombay (North Central) constituency. Ambedkar got 123,576 votes and Narayan Sadoba Kajrolkar got 138,137 votes. In March 1952, he was appointed to the Rajya Sabha and he remained there till his death.

Sainik Dal (Social Equality Army)

In January 1920, a weekly newspaper in Marathi named Moolnayak was started by him to further the cause of the oppressed class of people. After his doctoral research because of which he got a D.Sc in economics in 1923 from the London school of economics, his first organisation was launched by him to further the struggle against the practice of untouchability in July 1924 and he founded the “Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha”. Many meetings were held by the Sabha of the untouchables in various parts of Bombay Presidency in order to make them aware of the poor conditions and problems of the oppressed people. The Chavdal Taleh satyagraha held at Mahad in 1927 was its first major effort to mobilise people. Ambedkar also started a fortnightly in April 1927 named Bahishkrit Bharat which was an open forum in which the difficulties of the untouchable communities was discussed and they were encouraged to struggle against the practice of untouchability. To promote the idea of equality in society the Samaj Samta Sangh was founded in Sept 1927. In 1928 another fortnightly named Samta was launched. It was during this time that Ambedkar was appointed as the member of the Bombay

Legislative Assembly. We could view the formation of the Samta Sainik Dal in 1927 in this context. In those starting days, Ambedkar fully concentrated on awakening, organising and mobilising the depressed classes against the injustice in the society due to the caste system of the Hindus. He had the need for volunteers who could reach the message throughout the county and make the movement stronger. During the Mahad Chowdhar tale of Satyagraha, he got his first group of volunteers in 1927. Here the main role was of comrade RB More who was a staunch communist and a close associate of Ambedkar.

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President of the All India Depressed Classes Association: Ways and Means to Abolish the Practice of Untouchability

The greatest challenge faced by the communists and the Harijan Welfare Programme of Gandhiji came from Ambedkar who was a Mahar by caste. The main aim of the programme was the integration of the untouchables into the Indian society not in accordance with the traditional ways but by a modern way in which they would be given equal political, legal and economic rights and they would not be expected to do demeaning duties only because they belonged to a low caste.

It is because of his programme that there was a rejection in the entire country towards all types of feudal bondage that the dalits had to bear and ranged from wearing of the prohibited colour like red, to a demand for separate electorates, to the burning of Manusmriti, to mass campaigns and the breaking of restrictions of the use of temples.

This programme was against the radicals and the Congress and tended to verge almost on separatist and loyalist lines. In the 1920's he launched his main untouchability movement in Maharashtra and that movement exists in different forms even today and can be seen in all parts of India.

Ambedkar and Buddhism: At a point of time he did consider converting to Sikhism because it preached opposition to oppression and so it was more for the leaders of the scheduled castes but after he met the leaders of the Sikhs he felt that the oppressed classes would only be second rated in the Sikh religion. In 1950 he started considering Buddhism and also went to Sri Lanka and attended the World Fellowship of Buddhists. He dedicated a new Buddhist vihara near Pune and made an announcement regarding the book on Buddhism that he was writing and said that once the book would be written, he would formally become a Buddhist. In 1954, he visited Burma twice and the second time to attend the third conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Rangoon. Ambedkar founded the Bharatiya Bauddha Mahasabha in 1955 which is also known as the Buddhist Society of India. His work 'The Buddha and his Dhamma' was finally completed in 1956 and got published after his death.

He met Hammalawa Saddhatissa, the Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka and then organised a formal ceremony for his supporters and himself on 14th Oct 1956 in Nagpur. In a traditional manner he accepted the Five Precepts and Three Jewels from a Buddhist monk. Both he and his wife got converted and then he went ahead

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to convert around five lack supporters who gathered around him. After the Five Precepts and Three Jewels, he prescribed twenty two vows for the converts. He went to the capital city of Nepal, Kathmandu and attended the 4th World Buddhist Conference. Because of his death, his work on The Buddha or Karl Marx and “Revolution and counter-revolution in ancient India” could not be completed.

Check Your Progress

1. Where was Dr. B. R. Ambedkar born?
2. Who made Ambedkar change his name?
3. Why did Ambedkar consider the Hindu Code Bill important?
4. Name some periodicals through which Ambedkar launched a movement for Dalit rights.
5. Why was Article 370 opposed by Ambedkar?

4.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Dr. BR Ambedkar was born in Mhow on 14th April 1891, a military cantonment situated in Central India which is now in the state of Madhya Pradesh.
2. His teacher Krishnaji Keshav Ambedkar who was a Devrukhe Brahmin, later made him change his name from Ambadewekar to Ambedkar in the records of the school.
3. For Ambedkar, the Hindu Code Bill was very important as it would have reformed the proposals of monogamy, divorce and marriage.
4. A movement was launched by Ambedkar against the Dalit discrimination and he created public opinion through his writings in the various public periodicals such as Equality Janta, Bahishkrit Bharat and Mook Nayak which he had started to protect the rights of the Dalits.
5. Article 370 of the Constitution of India was opposed by Ambedkar because a special status was granted by it to the Jammu and Kashmir state and he did not approve of it.

4.4 SUMMARY

- He had inspired the movement of the Dalit Buddhists and started a campaign against the discrimination in society against the Dalits (untouchables). He also supported the rights of the labour and women.
- Dr. BR Ambedkar was born in Mhow on 14th April 1891, a military cantonment situated in Central India which is now in the state of Madhya

Pradesh. His father – Ramji Maloji Sakpal was an officer in the army and had served at the rank of Subedar.

B. R. Ambedkar

- From the children, only Dr. BR Ambedkar could progress to high school after passing his examinations successfully. Although his surname was Sukpal, his father used Ambadawekar as his surname which meant that he belonged to and was originally from the village of Ambaawe in Ratnagiri district.
- It is because he had a reputation of being a scholar that when India became free, he was appointed as the chairman of the committee in-charge of drafting the constitution and also became the first law minister of India.
- He obtained a degree in Economics & Political Science in 1912 from the University of Bombay and took up employment in the state government of Baroda.
- His second thesis was completed in 1916 for another MA named – ‘National Dividend of India - A Historic and Analytical Study’.
- During the 1946-1951 period, he joined Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru’s union cabinet but he resigned on September 27, 1951 as a protest against the deferment of the discussion in the parliament of the Hindu Code Bill mainly because of the then due 1952 election.
- In the late 19th century, many leaders of India like Jotiba Phule (1827-1890), Ramaswamy Naicker (1879-1973) and Narayan Guru (1854-1928) belonged to the lower castes. They struggled for the honour of the lower castes throughout the country and among them Ambedkar was at the forefront.
- Ambedkar also keenly supported the liberation of women. According to him, the Varna system was the reason for the oppression against women and Dalits. He questioned Manusmriti (Laws of Manu), the law book (Dharam-Shastra) of Brahminic Hinduism and attributed to Manu, the legendary first man and the one who had given the laws.
- One more important movement was the Mahad March in which Ambedkar asserted the legal rights of the Dalits to take water from the Chowdar tank.
- In the decades of 1920’s and the 1930’s he took up the cause of the tenants from both the Hindu Kunbis and dalit Mahars in Maharashtra’s Konkan region, through his Independent labour party that had been founded by him.
- Article 370 of the Constitution of India was opposed by him because a special status was granted by it to the Jammu and Kashmir state and he did not approve of it.
- Ambedkar also started a fortnightly in April 1927 named Bahishkrit Bharat which was an open forum in which the difficulties of the untouchable communities was discussed and they were encouraged to struggle against the practice of untouchability.

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- Ambedkar founded the Bharatiya Bauddha Mahasabha in 1955 which is also known as the Buddhist Society of India. His work 'The Buddha and his Dhamma' was finally completed in 1956 and got published after his death.

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4.5 KEY WORDS

- **Bodhisattva:** In Mahayana Buddhism, it refers to a person who is able to reach nirvana but delays doing so through compassion for suffering beings.
 - **Untouchability:** It is the practice of ostracising a minority group by segregating them from the mainstream by social custom or legal mandate.
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4.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on Ambedkar's studies at London School of Economics.
2. What did Ambedkar do right after returning from the UK?
3. Write a short note on the Mahad Satyagraha.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Elaborate upon the problems faced by Ambedkar initially due to his caste.
 2. Discuss Ambedkar's arguments attacking the *Manusmriti*.
 3. Describe the organizations established by Ambedkar for the dalit cause.
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4.7 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 5 SHRI NARAYAN GURU

Structure

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Shri Narayan Guru (1854–1928)
- 5.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 5.4 Summary
- 5.5 Key Words
- 5.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 5.7 Further Readings

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5.0 INTRODUCTION

Narayan Guru was a spiritual leader and social reformer born in Travancore in 1855. He led a struggle in Kerala for the rights of the lower castes such as the ezhavas and the pulayars. He performed several public acts attacking this discrimination, the first being the consecration of the idol of Lord Shiva in 1888 at Aruvippuram. The most remarkable movement in this direction was the Vaikom Satyagraha which was intended at providing the right to people of lower castes to pass through the road that led towards Vaikom temple and also to enter into the temple like the upper castes. An overview of his work and achievements has been provided in this unit.

5.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the role of Shri Narayan Guru as a social revolutionary of Kerala
- Analyze the early life and career of Shri Narayan Guru
- Describe important social movements led by Narayan Guru such as Vaikom Satyagraha and the work of the SNDP Yogam

5.2 SHRI NARAYAN GURU (1854–1972)

Let us first discuss Narayan Guru's early life and career.

Early Life and Career

On 28th August, 1855 in the village of Chempazhanthy, near Thiruvananthapuram, in the erstwhile state of Travancore, in British India, the couple Madan Asan and Kutiyamma were blessed with a baby boy who they named Narayan Guru. The family belonged to the Ezhava caste. Narayana Guru's initial education was in the

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way of a gurukula under Chempazhanthi Mootha Pillai. He lost his mother at the age of 15. He went to Travancore at the age of 21 to study from Raman Pillai Asan who was a scholar in Sanskrit and from him he learnt the Upanishads, the Vedas and the logical rhetoric and literature of Sanskrit. In 1881, he came back to his village because his father became very sick and here he started a school for the village and started teaching the village children. They used to call him Nanu Asan. After a year he married Kaliaamma but he had no interest in a married life and he instead dedicated his life towards making reforms in the society.

He left his home and went on long journeys covering Tamil Nadu and Kerala and he met a religious and social reformer named Chattampi Swamikal during these journeys and he introduced him to Guru Ayyavu Swamikal who taught him yoga and meditation. His wanderings continued and in Maruthwamala he reached the Pillathamdam cave. Here he set up a hermitage and for eight years he practiced yoga and meditation.

He visited Aruvippuram in 1888 and here he meditated for some time when he was staying there. He took a piece of rock from the river and consecrated it as Lord Shiva's idol and since then the place has become Aruvippuram Shiva temple. Later on, this act was termed as Aruvipuram Pratishta and this enraged the upper caste Brahmins who challenged his authority to consecrate an idol. The reply he gave them was that that was not a Brahmin Shiva but an Ezhava Shiva and his reply later on became the quote used in the fight against casteism. The Shri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP Yogam) was founded here on 15th May, 1903. The organisation came into existence mainly because of the efforts of the founders Narayana Guru and Padmanabhan Palpu, (also known as Dr. Palpu)

In 1904 he shifted his base to Sivagiri and here he started a school for the students who belonged to the oppressed classes of the society and in the school there was free education provided without caste discrimination. However he had to wait for 7 years for a temple to be built there. In 1912, the Sarada Mutt was built. Temples were also built by him in places such as Mangalore, Kozhikode, Thalassery, Anchuthengu, Kannur and Thrissur and it took him to places such as Sri Lanka where he finally visited in 1927 as the SNDP Yogam's anniversary was being celebrated.

After the final visit, he fell ill and had to undergo treatment at places such as Palakkad, Thrissur, Aluva and Chennai in the end. Many ayurvedic physicians namely Thycauttu Divakaran Moos, Panappally Krishnan Vaidyar & Cholayil Mami Vaidyar and allopathic physicians namely Palpu, Krishnan Thampi and Noble (A European physician) tried to give him treatment. In the end, he had to return to Sarada Mutt and here at the age of 78, he passed away on 20th September, 1928.

Social Revolutionary of Kerela: Social Reforms

In the 19th and 20th centuries, casteism was practiced and many oppressed classes such as the Pulayars, Paraiyars, Ezhavas and other tribal communities had to suffer

discrimination at the hands of the Brahmins and upper caste people. The consecration of the Shiva idol was the first act of Narayana Guru against this casteism. He went on to consecrate forty-five more temples in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The consecrations were not necessarily idols. There was a slab on which the words, Truth, Ethics, Compassion and Love were inscribed or a mirror or an Italian sculptor's sculpture or a vegetarian Shiva were among the consecrations. They strongly preached religious tolerance and compassion in his works of note. In *Anukampadasakam*, he extolled many religious figures such as the Buddha, Adi Shankara, Krishna and Jesus Christ.

Vaikom Satyagraha

In the Vaikom Satyagraha, there was a protest by the oppressed castes in Travancore against the practice of untouchability in the Hindu community. It is believed that the protest started when an upper caste person stopped Narayana Guru from passing through a road which lead to the Vaikom Temple. This made his disciples Muloor S. Padmanabha Panicker & T. K. Madhavan petition the Sree Moolam Popular Assembly in 1918 for rights to enter the temple and worship without discrimination to one's cast. Many people including KP Kesava Menon and K Kelappan formed a committee and the Kerala Paryatnanam movement was announced with Mahatma Gandhi's support. The agitation soon became a mass movement and it successfully ensured that all temples and roads leading to the temples would be opened to people of all castes and classes. The Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936 was also influenced by this protest.

The famous Malayalam poet Muloor S. Padmanabha Panicker wrote:

Long ago on the streets of Vaikom in a rickshaw,

The great sage Sree Narayana was going,

An idiot born as god on earth,

Came up and ordered the rickshaw to withdraw.

Protests by Ezhavas

The issue was first taken up by the Ezhavas in 1905. This issue regarding the use of public road by the avarnas around the temples was taken up in the Travancore Legislature by the Ezhava representatives, Kumaran Asan, Kunju Panicker and Kochu Kunjan Channar. The issue was not taken up by the authorities for discussion and they adamantly argued that it was a religious topic. Asan again raised the question in 1920-21 and a decision was taken that the notice boards would be shifted a little so that the avarnas could access some parts of the road.

SNDP's organising secretary TK Madhavan felt that that it was an unacceptable compromise. He wanted to demand outright temple entry, but he was denied permission to even introduce the resolution in the Legislature. He however accepted that the first step had been taken and the SNDP Yogam's one

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main activity became to agitate against the prohibition of the usage of the roads around the temple.

Sivagiri Pilgrimage

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His 3 disciples namely Mulloor S. Padmanabha Panicker, T. K. Kittan Writer & Vallabhasseri Govindan Vaidyar, conceived the idea of the Sivagiri pilgrimage which he approved in 1928 along with his own recommendations. According to him, the main aim of the pilgrimage should be to provide technical training, trade, handicrafts, agriculture, organisation, devotion to God, cleanliness and education. He advised Writer and Vaidyar to organise series of lecture on the themes and laid importance to the practice of the themes so that the Sivagiri pilgrimage becomes purposeful. The project got delayed until 1932 because of his death and then it was undertaken from Elavumthitta in Pathanamthitta District.

Writings and Philosophy

The forty-five works written by him and published were in Tamil, Sanskrit and Malayalam languages and they include the 100 verse poem named Atmopadesa (Eatakam and Daiva Dasakam). Three major texts namely Ozhivil Odukkam of Kannudaiya Vallalaar, Thirukural of Valluvar & Ishavasya Upanishad were also translated by him. The motto propagated by him was 'One God for All' (Oru Jathi, Oru Matham, Oru Daivam, Manushyanu). In Kerala, it has become a popular saying. Adi Shankaracharya's non-dualistic philosophy was also furthered by him and he brought it into practice by adding the concepts of universal brotherhood and social equality.

All Religions' Conference

In 1923 he organised an All Region Conference at Alwaye Advaita Ashram which was the first of its kind in India. He wanted to prevent to conversion of the people of his community because they were the most vulnerable and at the entrance of the conference there was a message - We meet here not to argue and win, but to know and be known. The event has become an annual event since then and the Ashram organises it annually.

History of SNDP Yogam

The Shri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam has risen in Kerala with the rise of the oppressed classes. The Ezhava community has grown from being a food gathering society to an important part of the society. This organisation is the pioneer in having the vision of Kerala as a whole. Earlier organisations represented only part of Kerala, say, Malabar.

Caste System in Kerala

In the 1890's untouchability and the caste system were very strong in Kerala. The works to get the rights of the Ezhava community were started by Dr. Palpu. After

the Malayali Memorial Revolt in 1891, he took the initiative of leading his community. It was tried by him to make an organisation named 'Ezhava Sabha'. A bye law of it was created by him and published in a newspaper named 'Malayali' which was published from Thankussery. The movement did not succeed although he organised meetings at Mayyanad and Paravur.

Sree Narayana Guru and SNDP Yogam

Narayana Guru was the noble and great power who strived to bring social and spiritual awakening of the community. He installed a rock from the Neyyar River on the Sivaratri day of the Kumbha month in 1888 at Aruvippuram and that was the start of the silent revolution in Kerala's history. The social revolution created by it destroyed the old social system of Kerala.

Soon Aruvippuram turned into a pilgrimage centre and sacrifice would be offered there on full moon day. Kumar Asan, the disciple of the Guru, started giving food to the pilgrims and this became a practice known as Vavoottu Yogam and in 1889, an organisation named Aruvippuram Kshetra Yogam got formed.

In 1903 a special meeting of Aruvippuram Kshetra Yogam was organised. They decided to change into a bigger Yogam for the material and religious progress of the Ezhavas. So they registered the organisation as Aruvippuram Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam in accordance to the Indian Companies Act, No.6, 1882 and the Guru became its president. The Guru remained as the permanent chairman of the Yogam and the post of general secretary was held by Devan. N. Kumaranasan till 1919 except in 1904. Legally, the SNDP Yogam was registered as a limited company and in all the clauses of the registration, there was no mention of castes. It had 11 signatories and the first was the most trusted disciple of the Guru, P Narayana Pillai who was the resident of the Siva temple. P Narayan Pillai and Moorkoth Kumaran had also installed the Guru's first idol at Thellecherry.

Involvement of the Indian National Congress

In 1921, T.K. Madhavan had a meeting with Gandhiji at Tirunelveli in which he apprised him about the plight of the Ezhavas and how SNDP had taken great steps in this regards as they had achieved school admission. Gandhiji felt that the time was right to seek entry into the temple. Gandhiji assured that he would write to the State Congress Committee to take up the issue.

In 1923, the AICC meeting was attended by Madhavan in the company of KP Kesava Menon and Sardar Panikkar. A pamphlet was printed by him: A request to the Indian National Congress on behalf of the untouchables of India. He tried his best to explain to the members that untouchability needed to be eradicated. The Congress's members felt that in their constructive programmes they would lend their full support to the Vaikom movement and the task was assigned to the KPCC Kerala Provincial Congress Committee.

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The KPCC met in Ernakulam in 1924 in accordance with the Kakinada Congress resolution and the Untouchability Abolition Committee (UAC) was formed in which there were T. K. Madhavan, K. Kelappan (convener), Kurur Nilakantan Namboothiri, K. Velayudha Menon & T.R. Krishna Swami Iyer. A Publicity Committee of five members including T. K. Madhavan was also formed.

The publicity committee and the KPCC on 28th February 1924, reached Vaikom and a huge public meeting was held and the UAC was requested publicly by Madhavan to get the prohibiting notice boards removed from the roads that were around the temple. It was resolved by the committee to take the procession of the Avarnas on the very next day of the Pulaya Mahasabha meeting through the roads.

The decision's news spread very fast and it got mixed reactions. The high caste Hindus who kept mum during the meeting did not like the fact that a procession would be undertaken as per the decision of UAC & KPCC.

They met the congress leader in their camp along with a tehsildar, a police inspector and a local magistrate and suggested that the activity be postponed. They assured that the procession would be a success and no communal tensions would happen. They only wanted some time. Realising the situation, the congress felt that the time would help them to prepare properly in launching the agitation. The date was decided on 30th March, 1924 and it was decided that the procession would be taken out. The local magistrate was afraid of communal tensions and he issued orders that prohibited the procession. So the UAC decided to send only 3 volunteers daily and not the entire procession. From all castes, the volunteers were chosen.

They set up a Satyagraha ashram about one furlong south of the temple. From different parts of the country, volunteers came and filled the ashram. The Satyagraha's venue was fixed at the western road where there was a board on which it was written - "Ezhavas and other low castes are prohibited through this road"

Armed with lethal weapons, hundreds of policemen were keeping guard on all times in order to stop the Satyagraha. When the Satyagraha began on 30th March, the 1st batch that came forward included Venniyil Govinda Panicker (Nair) & Kunjappu (Pulayan), Bahuleyan (Ezhava). They had been told to keep calm and offer no resistance even if provoked. The Satyagrahis wore Gandhi caps, khadi and garlands along with the Congress flag. They shouted "Satyagraha ki jai, Mahatma Gandhi ki jai." They stopped at a distance of fifty feet from the prohibiting board. They were all arrested, convicted, sentenced to jail, fined & got extra imprisonment when they refused to pay the fine. In the evening there was a procession and public meeting, protesting against the arrest. The meetings got a wide publicity and people from all directions started thronging there. The inspiring speeches in the meetings rejuvenated them and the leaders returned again to start the routine the next morning.

The Satyagraha did stop temporarily for 2 days on 5th and 6th April so that a compromise could be reached between the Congress and the caste Hindu leaders but the Satyagraha was resumed when the talks failed. On 7th April, K. P. Kesava Menon (KPCC president) and T. K. Madhavan courted arrest. On 7th Aug 1924, Moolam Thirunal, the Maharajah of Travancore expired and in his place his niece, Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bayi, came to power. As part of her installation durbar, she released all the prisoners. At the end of the Vaikom Satyagraha, she played an important role after she met Gandhiji.

Till 10th April this struggle continued, when a new tactic was used by the police of having the roads barricaded to ensure that the Satyagrahis cannot reach the roads that were disputed. The police did not arrest the Satyagrahis and they started fasting. However, Gandhiji did not approve of fasting as it did not confirm to his Satyagraha theory. The police soon started feeling that they were committing a mistake of not arresting the Satyagrahis and they wanted to use force to stop the agitation. The police allied with the conservatives and soon the conservatives took over and they started committing the atrocities on the Satyagrahis while the police watched keeping mum. The conservatives also had the support of the ruling Maharaja of Travancore - Sree Moolam Thirunal. He condemned the Satyagraha, even his minister Divan Raghvaiah made a speech in the Travancore legislature where he made a strong defence for the rights of the upper class people and criticised the Satyagraha.

The Last Days of Guru

Narayana Guru fell seriously ill in Feb 1928 and this news spread very quickly throughout Kerala even though he had been seriously sick before too but people anticipated the worst this time. His problem with piles grew and his problems got complicated due to urinary problems. His condition kept on deteriorating despite getting the best treatment. Both allopathic and ayurvedic treatment had been given to him in combination and separately but in vain. After a long period of suffering he attained Samadhi on 20th September, 1928 at 3.30 PM. He was seventy two then. Two days before his death, he had told his disciples that he was experiencing calmness. Seeing his end near, his disciples conducted prayers and read out passages from the scriptures. The great religious text, the Yoga Vasishtam was being read by Swami Vidyananda. The text talks about the freedom of the soul. The Guru expired when the portion of the freedom of the soul was reached. This was reported by one of his disciples who was present there – Swami Guruprasad. To attend the consignment of his mortal remains, a huge number of people attended and put up at Sivagiri. The huge attendance was accommodated and fed without any hitch and the disciples could not understand how that had happened.

That night, the bhramacharis, sanyasis and hundreds of attendees fasted and prayed the whole night. The next day, in the evening, a huge procession took the palanquin which was decorated with flowers to the bower of the Vanajakshi temple. The procession chanted hymns and devotional songs while mourning his

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death. The procession wended its way to the spot at 5.00 PM which was prepared especially for the Samadhi.

The grave consecrated was 7 feet deep and 20 sq feet square. In the centre was a pit 5 feet deep and five feet square. The body was in the sitting pose when lowered and the pit was filled with sandalwood, camphor and salt and only the head was visible. The head was also covered the next day at dawn and then a slab was used to cover the entire pit. Mantras were chanted and prayers went on and, in the end, the proper funeral rites were performed. Till 45 days after the Samadhi, the advaita sanyasis continued to perform the special prayers.

In Kerala, the Theosophical Society's journal had written "Kerala has been plunged into darkness by the demise of the great Rishi on the 20th of September, 1928. He has been placed by the people on a pedestal equaling that of Sankara Acharyar and Tunchath Acharyar, two other great sages of Kerala. White Sankara Acharyar was ill-treated by Keralites and Thunchath Acharyar received his due exalted position centuries after his demise, nobody in India in the last few centuries, has received the brilliant, long-standing, broad-based, unparalleled respect from everyone in the land as Sree Narayana Guru did, even while he was alive. . . For the enlightened of Kerala, he has been a Patanjali in Yoga, a Sankara in Jnana, a Manu in social law, a Bhuddha in tyaga , a Nabi in steadfastness and a Jesus in humility. He has passed on from the realm of humanity to that of the immortals. "For future generations, he will be one among the Avatars (incarnations)."

So we can see that the Guru was loved by the people of the lower castes and also appreciated by the people of the upper castes. On the other hand, Gandhiji received many letters urging him to call off the agitation. From Kerala, two advocate brothers Vancheeswara Iyer and Sivarama Iyer had a meeting with Gandhiji and they tried to convince him that as the roads were private property, the Satyagraha was irrelevant.

When all the leading newspapers in India started reporting the news, funds started coming to the movement in Vaikom. To feed the Satyagrahis, the Akalis came from Punjab to open free kitchens. Many non-Hindus like Abdul Rahman (the Editor-in-Chief of The Young India), Bhajematharam Mathunni and George Joseph (Kerala) were also willing to help but Gandhiji refused their help and explained the reason of his refusal in his articles in Young India on 1st May 1924 and 24th April 1924. He wrote "As for accepting assistance from Hindus from outside, such acceptance would betray unreadiness on the part of the local Hindus for the reform. If the Satyagrahis have the sympathy of the local Hindus, they must get locally all the money they need."

On 6th April 1924, he wrote to George Joseph: "As to Vaikom, I think you shall let the Hindus do the work. It is they who have to purify themselves. You can help by your sympathy and your pen, but not by organizing the Movement and certainly not by offering Satyagraha. If you refer to the Congress resolution of Nagpur, it calls upon the Hindu Members to remove the curse of untouchability. I

was surprised to learn from Mr Andrews that the disease had infected even the Syrian Christians”

However, George Joseph got the letter after he had been arrested for offering Satyagraha. On Gandhiji's word, even the Akalis withdrew. Gandhiji talked about untouchability in his book for which he said - "Untouchability is the sin of the Hindus. They must suffer for it; they must pay the debt they owe to their suppressed brothers and sisters. Theirs is the shame and theirs must be the glory when they have purged themselves of the black sin. The silent loving suffering of one pure Hindu as such will be enough to melt the hearts of millions of Hindus, but the sufferings of thousands of non-Hindus on behalf of the untouchables will leave the Hindus unmoved. Their blind eyes will not be opened by outside interference, however well intentioned and generous it may be, for it will not bring home to them their sense of guilt. On the contrary, they would probably hug the sin, all the more, for such interference. All reforms to be sincere and lasting must come from within."

As the camp had two hundred volunteers, it became difficult to manage them after some time. When it came to the notice of Gandhiji, we can see from the Congress records and the Belgaum congress records that one thousand rupees per month was sanctioned from the party's funds. The movement also got mental support from important people like Swami Shraddhananda & Vinoba Bhave who had also visited the spot.

The role of Shri Narayana Guru in Vaikom Satyagraha

The Guru had before this never been active in any activities of the Indian National Congress before but he did get involved in the Vaikom Satyagraha and provided his full cooperation to it. The main reason for this was that the movement was to purge the Hindu society of its malpractices and this was what he was attempting to do with his messages and actions.

Due to some reason a misunderstanding arose between the Guru and Gandhiji with regards to how the movement was to be conducted. One of the dialogues of the Guru with the General Secretary of the SNPD was misinterpreted and it led Gandhiji to believe that the Guru was not accepting his ideals. It also had once happened that it was suggested to Gandhiji to withdraw support to the movement as the Thiyyas' spiritual leader was urging his followers to use violence, which is against the principles of Satyagraha.

Regarding the movement, the Guru had a deep discussion with T K Madhavan, his favourite lifeline, even before TK Madhavan and Gandhiji had met. Another discussion of the Guru was with KM Keavan who at that time was SNPD's General Secretary when the launch of the Satyagraha had happened. It was apparent that the methods of Gandhiji were different although his intent was the same. Their main objective was that there should be human equality and eradication of untouchability. The main aim of the movement was very simple – the attainment of the right to use the public road that was around the temple.

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Guruji and Gandhiji did agree here but the suggestion of Gandhiji was that the access to the road should be gained and then the temple should be entered and the Guru wanted that without stopping they should gain entry into the temple. Gandhiji felt that the Guru was advocating violence because according to the Guru, the barricades should be scaled which was open violence. However, even the Guru was following the Gandhian way but in a faster manner. It was akin to the Dandi March initiated by Gandhiji. Both of them believed in the same thing – practical wisdom and idealism. The Guru never argued with Gandhiji regarding this.

Near Vaikom there was his Vellore Mutt in which he offered the Satyagrahis to set up their Head office. He made a personal contribution of one thousand rupees which was a big amount in those days to fund the struggle and he also set up a special collection box at Sivagiri. To work for the Satyagraha, he deputed two of his favourite disciples - Kottukoikal Velayudhan & Swami Sathyavathan.

On 27th September 1924, the Satyagraha was at its highest level and Guruji reached the venue in Vaikom by boat. At the jetty, thousands waited to receive him and welcomed him with a multicoloured garland of khadi yarn and was also presented with the second khadi towel woven at the Satyagraha Ashram, the first one was sent to Mahatma Gandhi. The Guru joked that he would volunteer Satyagraha and wear the khadi yarn.

The public meeting held the next day was presided over by him and there he prayed for the well-being and good health of Mahatma Gandhi. Swami Sathyavathan commented that it was fortunate to have Guruji with them but to this the Guru suddenly got up and said that he was there not only to participate but also to pray. He then stood up and meditated for a few minutes while the entire crowd waited. That was the only time he had prayed in public.

He stayed in the Ashram for 2 days, he joined community meals and saw all the arrangements. He made the volunteers feel that they were in the presence of an elderly and intimate leader and not a formal visitor. His appreciation and presence would rejuvenate their sense of commitment and spirits. Here the SNDP had happily provided manpower for the task and till the Satyagraha lasted, it provided it with support. After independence, a school was started in the place of the ashram as a memorial to the great movement. The name of the school is Sathyagraha Memorial Shri Narayana Higher Secondary School (S M S N H S S) and SNDP manages it.

The Savarna Procession

In the movement, it was felt by Gandhiji that for the movement to be successful, it was important to get the support of the Savarnas. So he gave a suggestion to the leaders of the Vaikom movement that they could hold a procession consisting of only Savarnas march to the capital- Trivandrum to show their unity with the Avarnas and give their cause their full support. About five hundred Savarna men took out a

procession on 1st November, 1924 from Vaikom and Mannathu Padmanabhan, who led them, was the top leader of the Nair Service Society. The procession got a spontaneous welcome at all places. As the procession moved, its numbers increased as more people joined it. The procession stopped at Sivagiri and the Guru was paid homage to and his blessings were received. On 12th November 1924, the procession reached Trivandrum and more than five thousand men gathered and celebrated as if a huge victory had been achieved. Under the leadership of Perumal Varadarajulu Naidu, a procession of around a 1000 men had gathered there on the same day after starting from Suchindram. The meeting that was thus held was very huge.

Final Actions

A delegation led by Changanasseri Parameswaran Pillai waited on the Regent Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bayi on 13th November, 1924 and submitted a memorandum which had been signed by twenty-five thousand Savarnas. It read – “We the undersigned members of the deputation, loyally and respectfully beg leave to approach your Gracious Highness with the humble prayer that the roads around the Vaikom temple walls, and all other roads similarly situated in other parts of the State may be thrown open to all classes of Your Gracious Highness’ subjects, without distinction of caste or creed.”

The memorandum did not get the desired results. The Maharani left the issue to the discretion of the legislature. So the then SNDP Secretary N. Kumaran (Later he became High Court Judge) moved it in the legislature on 7th February, 1925. The resolution read -”All roads around the temple at Vaikom, and similar roads all over the state of Travancore must be open for travelling for people of all castes and creeds.”

However the resolution could not win with a 22 to 21 vote and this affected the morale of the Satyagrahis and the orthodox Hindus felt elated. The sinking morale was uplifted by Gandhiji by requests to remain peaceful and patient. Hirelings were hired by the leader of the orthodoxy, Indanthuruthil Namboothiri, to beat up the Satyagrahis. They were thrown in waters up to their necks and strong irritants mixed with lime were poured into their eyes. The police kept mum when this was happening as they had been told secretly to not help. It was written by Gandhiji in *Young India*, “The Travancore authorities may, however, be respectfully told that the Congress cannot watch barbarity with indifference. The letting loose of the goondas on the devoted heads of the Satyagrahis, is bound to gather the Satyagrahis, the full weight of all-India public opinion”.

With this in the entire state there were protests and big temples of the Savarnas were boycotted due to which their funds came down. So meetings were organised by the Savarna Mahajana Sabha against the Satyagraha at their strongholds. There was an increase in tensions at that period and the volunteers of the Satyagraha started feeling that violence was making their movement weak.

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For Gandhiji, it became important to visit the area where his Satyagraha principle was being used. On 10th March 1925, he came down to Vaikom. His son Ramdas Gandhi, his secretary Mahadev Desai, C. Rajagopalachari and Alladi Krishnaswamy came with him. He motivated them by telling them about the principles followed by Satyagrahis and how suffering played an important role in it. For this a high level of patience was needed. Gandhiji wanted the orthodox to understand and compromise. His secretary sent an invitation to Idanthuruthil Devan Neelakandan Namboothiri, the leader of the Savarnas to meet him. The leader was haughty and he refused and said that if they wanted to meet him then they should come to meet him at his home. So Gandhiji and his followers went to his home the next day. Gandhiji and his followers were made to sit outside and the Savarnas sat inside as Gandhiji was believed to be a Vysya and so of a lower caste. In the 3 hour meeting, Gandhiji made 3 proposals which were practical. They were –

1. At Vaikom there was the unapproachability practiced which was not mentioned anywhere in Hindu scriptures. The Savarnas felt that the custom was laid down by Adi Shankaracharya. So Gandhiji proposed that the Smritis of Adi Shankaracharya should be scrutinised by a Hindu Pandit who was impartial and if there is no such custom mentioned then the practice should be withdrawn.
2. The second proposal was that from the Savarnas, a referendum could be taken and if the Savarnas' majority would allow the roads to be opened then the practice should be stopped.
3. Arbitration was the 3rd proposal. On the behalf of the Satyagrahis, Gandhiji would appoint one Pandit and the Savarnas would appoint a Pandit on their behalf and the two would discuss the case with the umpire as the Divan of Travancore. The winner's decision would be accepted by all.

The Savarnas were of the strong opinion that the Avarnas were suffering because of their past Karmas and so they did not accept any of the proposals given by Gandhiji. There was no compromise.

In the end, Gandhiji wrote to WH Pitt, the then Police Commissioner of Travancore to put an end to the injustice. Pitt agreed to make the Government withdraw the prohibitory orders and remove all the barricades with the condition that the Satyagrahis would not cross the point where the board was. This was the final settlement.

Many people feel that for the lower caste people, this was an incomplete success and they still did not get access to the eastern road which was the most important. This was also not good for Muslims and Christians as they lost their freedom to have full access to all the roads around the temple.

Now the eastern road was blocked to them. Because of the gates, which remained closed the members of the Devaswam Board and the inmates of the temple who used the eastern road as thoroughfare were denied the opportunity.

This was a good opportunity to rise in Kerala for the Indian National Congress. The Congress was well known only by the upper caste people of Malabar before this and the lower class people did not have much interest in them. However a drastic change came about due to the Vaikom movement and many joined the congress especially due to the motivation of T.K. Madhavan.

The Vaikom movement also brought about better communal harmony. The movement had Christians, Sikhs, Muslims, Avarnas and the Savarnas come together. In fact, the Savarnas lead the movement till the Satyagraha was required and this brought about a unity in the people.

One more benefit of the movement was that here the principles of Satyagraha as propounded by Gandhiji got tested and it turned out to be effective.

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Check Your Progress

1. How did Narayan Guru attain his initial education?
2. Name the physicians who treated Narayan Guru.
3. Who took up the issue regarding the use of public road by the *avarnas* around the temples?
4. Whom did the first batch of Vaikom Satyagraha include?
5. Why did Narayan Guru get involved in the Vaikom Satyagraha and provided his full cooperation to it?

5.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Narayana Guru's initial education was in the way of a gurukula under Chempazhanthi Mootha Pillai.
2. Many ayurvedic physicians namely Thycauttu Divakaran Moos, Panappally Krishnan Vaidyar & Cholayil Mami Vaidyar and allopathic physicians namely Palpu, Krishnan Thampi and Noble (A European physician) tried to give him treatment.
3. The issue regarding the use of public road by the *avarnas* around the temples was taken up in the Travancore Legislature by the Ezhava representatives, Kumaran Asan, Kunju Panicker and Kochu Kunjan Channar.
4. When the Satyagraha began on 30th March, the first batch that came forward included Venniyil Govinda Panicker (Nair) & Kunjappu (Pulayan), Bahuleyan (Ezhava).

5. The main reason for Narayan Guru's involvement in Vaikom Satyagraha was that the movement was to purge the Hindu society of its malpractices and this was what he was attempting to do with his messages and actions.

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5.4 SUMMARY

- Narayan Guru's family belonged to the Ezhava caste. Narayana Guru's initial education was in the way of a gurukula under Chempazhanthi Mootha Pillai. He lost his mother at the age of 15.
- He visited Aruvippuram in 1888 and here he meditated for some time when he was staying there. He took a piece of rock from the river and consecrated it as Lord Shiva's idol and since then the place has become Aruvippuram Shiva temple.
- The consecration of the Shiva idol was the first act of Narayana Guru against this casteism. He went on to consecrate forty five more temples in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.
- In the Vaikom Satyagraha, there was a protest by the oppressed castes in Travancore against the practice of untouchability in the Hindu community.
- The issue was first taken up by the Ezhavas in 1905. This issue regarding the use of public road by the avarnas around the temples was taken up in the Travancore Legislature by the Ezhava representatives, Kumaran Asan, Kunju Panicker and Kochu Kunjan Channar.
- The forty-five works written by him and published were in Tamil, Sanskrit and Malayalam languages and they include the 100 verse poem named Atmopadesa Geetakam and Daiva Dasakam.
- In 1903 a special meeting of Aruvippuram Kshetra Yogam was organised. They decided to change into a bigger Yogam for the material and religious progress of the Ezhavas. So they registered the organisation as Aruvippuram Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam in accordance to the Indian Companies Act, No.6, 1882 and the Guru became its president.
- The publicity committee and the KPCC on 28th February 1924, reached Vaikom and a huge public meeting was held and the UAC was requested publically by Madhavan to get the prohibiting notice boards removed from the roads that were around the temple.
- The Satyagraha's venue was fixed at the western road where there was a board on which it was written - "Ezhavas and other low castes are prohibited through this road"
- On 7th Aug 1924, Moolam Thirunal, the Maharajah of Travancore expired and in his place his niece, Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bayi, came to power. As part of her installation durbar, she released all the prisoners.

- From Kerala, two advocate brothers Vancheeswara Iyer and Sivarama Iyer had a meeting with Gandhiji and they tried to convince him that as the roads were private property, the Satyagraha was irrelevant.
- Gandhiji talked about untouchability in his book for which he said - "Untouchability is the sin of the Hindus. They must suffer for it; they must pay the debt they owe to their suppressed brothers and sisters.
- One of the dialogues of the Guru with the General Secretary of the SNDP was misinterpreted and it led Gandhiji to believe that the Guru was not accepting his ideals.
- Near Vaikom there was his Vellore Mutt in which he offered the Satyagrahis to set up their Head office. He made a personal contribution of one thousand rupees which was a big amount in those days to fund the struggle and he also set up a special collection box at Sivagiri.
- Gandhiji gave a suggestion to the leaders of the Vaikom movement that they could hold a procession consisting of only Savarnas march to the capital-Trivandrum to show their unity with the Avarnas and give their cause their full support.
- The Vaikom movement also brought about better communal harmony. The movement had Christians, Sikhs, Muslims, Avarnas and the Savarnas come together. In fact, the Savarnas led the movement till the Satyagraha was required and this brought about a unity in the people.

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5.5 KEY WORDS

- **Casteism:** It refers to one-sided loyalty in favour of a particular caste. It leads the members of one caste to exploit the members of other caste for their own vested interest in the name of superiority or inferiority.
- **Communalism:** It is a term used in the world to denote attempts to construct religious or ethnic identity, incite strife between people identified as different communities, and to stimulate communal violence between those groups.
- **Savarna:** It is a Brahmin gotra that comprises of Kanyakubja Brahmins who are the descendants of sage Savarna Muni.

5.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on Narayan Guru's Aruvipuram Pratishta.
2. How did the Vaikom Satyagraha start?
3. What was the main aim of the Sivagiri pilgrimage?

4. Write a short note on the 1924 meeting of the KPCC.
5. Why did the savarnas not accept the proposals given by Gandhi?

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Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss Narayan Guru's consecration of temples.
2. Analyze the changes made in the Yogam from 1903 onwards.
3. Examine the three practical proposals made by Gandhi regarding Vaikom Satyagraha.

5.7 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 6 AYYANKALI

Structure

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Ayyankali (1863-1941)
- 6.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 6.4 Summary
- 6.5 Key Words
- 6.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 6.7 Further Readings

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6.0 INTRODUCTION

Ayyankali was a social reformer from Travancore who fought for the rights of untouchables. He belonged to the Pulayar community, the members of which were considered untouchable. Despite coming from a well to do family, Ayyankali and his siblings were encouraged to engage in agriculture. The pulayar community was oppressed and discriminated against especially by the Nairs, who were an upper caste. Several movements were initiated by him for the upliftment of untouchables such as the temple entry movement and school entry movement among many others. Ayyankali's efforts and achievements have been discussed in this unit.

6.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the struggles led by Ayyankali for the rights of the untouchables such as the Temple Entry Movement, School Entry Movement, etc.
- Examine Ayyankali's meeting with Mahatma Gandhi
- Analyse the principles and achievements of Ayyankali

6.2 AYYANKALI (1863-1941)

Let us first discuss his early life.

Early Life

Ayyankali is also known as Ayyan Kali or Ayyakali. He was born on 28th August, 1863 and he went on to become the social reformer who would strive for the upliftment of the lower class, deprived and untouchable people of British India in Travancore which was a princely state back then. His relentless efforts motivated

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many transformations that would go on to improve the lower class people who we nowadays refer to as Dalits.

He was born in Travancore's Thiruvananthapuram district's Venganoor area. He was born in the Pulayar community to Mala and Ayyan and he was one of their 8 children. His community was considered to be untouchable even though he was not born in poverty and his family was quite well to do. His family had been given 5 acres of land by a landlord who had been grateful to them and the children of the house had been motivated to take the occupation of agriculture which had been customary for his family.

Struggle for Social Justice

Ayyankali was a social reformer who worked for the advancement of deprived untouchable people in the princely state of Travancore, British India. His efforts influenced many changes that improved the social well-being of those people, who are today often referred to as Dalits. In those days, the members of his community were usually bonded labour or even slaves of the upper class people.

The region in which he was born is now a part of the Kerala state of India and this place was usually heavily affected by the divisions of castes and regarding this Swami Vivekananda had once said that it was a mad house of castes. In that kingdom, the Pulayars had been considered to be the lowest caste in the kingdom and the discrimination that they had to face because of it used to be very oppressive and bad especially from the strong caste of Nairs. Regarding this, the professor Robin Jeffery who specialised in the modern politics and history of India, quotes a Christian missionary's wife. In 1860 she had written of the complex special code that:

... a Nair can approach but not touch a Namboodiri Brahmin: a Chovan [Ezhava] must remain thirty-six paces off, and a Pulayan slave ninety-six steps distant. A Chovan must remain twelve steps away from a Nair, and a Pulayan sixty-six steps off, and a Parayan some distance farther still. A Syrian Christian may touch a Nair (though this is not allowed in some parts of the country) but the latter may not eat with each other. Pulayans and Parayars, who are the lowest of all, can approach but not touch, much less may they eat with each other.

Ayyankali had seen the social injustice his community had to face all his life and he decided to make a group with his friends from his community who would join him. This young group would come together every day after finishing their work and dance and sing to folk music. In this they would raise protests against the situation that the community was in. Many joined the group and they threatened and challenged the members of the higher castes whenever an opportunity presented itself. They would even resort to physically attacking them. It was his popularity that made him earn the names of Moothapullai and Urpillani. He married in 1888 to Chellamma and eventually went on to father 7 children.

Chaliyar Riot

Ayyankali dressed up in the traditional dress of the Nairs one day in 1893 in order to provoke them. By doing so, he challenged the social conventions that applied

to untouchables and the lower caste people. He also rode on the road on a bullock cart that he had bought. Even this was against the social conventions of the time as wearing the particular dress and travelling on road was a privilege only meant for the high class people.

In continuance with the defiance, he went to a marketplace at Nedumangad. These acts of defiance have been described by Kanadasamy and Nisar as -"laying claim to the public space". These acts emboldened the other oppressed communities of Travancore to initiate more such acts of protests in other places such as Kazhakkootam.

The Chaliyar riots are the outcome of the protest marches which happened on a continual basis. These marches started getting violent and the result was that by the beginning of the 20th century, the Pulayars had gained access to most of the roads of the state of Kerala although they still could not use the ones which lead to the temples of the Hindus.

In 1904, the speech of the famous reformist, Ayyavu Swamikal was heard by Ayyankali and the speech inspired him. Ayyavu Swamikal was a Hindu sanyasi and he strongly advocated that it was time when the divisions of castes that existed among the Hindus should be finally broken. He felt that if the divisions would not break then the lower caste Hindus would convert to Christianity. Ayyankali and some of his friends established a branch of Swamikal's Brahma Nishta Matam organisation in Venganoor. The activities of Narayana Guru discussed in the previous chapter also inspired him because he had done much for the Ezhava community. It needs to be noted here that the philosophy of both the social reformers who were contemporaries was not the same so their approach to the issue differed. Narayana Guru had tried to have an alliance between the other untouchable communities like the Pulayars and the Ezhavas but the opposition to it had been very violent from the Ezhavas and until Ayyankali appeared on the scene, the Pulayars remained devoid of a voice.

Ayyankali also wanted his community to get access to education. From around the mid of the 19th century, some Pulayars did get access through the activities of London Missionary Society and Colonial Missionary society. However, for that, the Pulayars needed to convert to Christianity if they wanted to attend the schools and there were instances where the cost of supplying teachers was offered by the Pulayars to them. Even though Ayyankali was not a literate, he strongly believed that there should be full access of education to the children and for that the untouchables should be allowed to get education in Government schools.

At that time, the government was trying to approach social welfare with modern ways. After 1895, many public schools had given admission to the communities considered to be untouchables with a limited scope to primary admission. In 1904, the state funding became effective. However, even when the government schools had been directed to give admission to untouchable people after 1907, the officials of the schools found reasons on the basis of which they could refuse admission to the students. So in that year, Ayyankali founded the

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Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (SJPS) (Association for the Protection of the Poor) which was based on his experience of Brahma Nishta Mattam. SJPS mainly launched a campaign to get the untouchable students access to primary admission and also contributed funds to set up schools that were operated by Pulayars in the interim. Support was given to this endeavour by both Christians and Hindus.

Ayyankali had made an attempt to enrol a girl from the Pulayar community in a government school. This gave rise to violent acts from the upper caste people who got enraged at this act. They burned down the building of the school in the Ooruttambalam village. To counter this, Ayyankali organised the first strike of the region's agricultural workers. The workers stopped the work that they were doing in the fields that were under the ownership of upper caste people. Eventually, the restrictions on education were completely removed by the government who had to accede to the just demands.

Ayyankali was also important in the challenge faced by the Pulayan against the traditional stricture that levied a prohibition to the community's female members from covering their body's upper part with clothes when they were even in public. The high caste Hindus were adamant that the custom was important as the difference between the high and the low status of the low caste women is maintained in this manner. However, this tradition was strongly opposed by many Christian missionaries and untouchable groups in the 19th Century. The Nadar community had been able to finish the practice through the Channar revolt but only for themselves. This had happened before the birth of Ayyankali but the discriminatory code continued to affect the Pulayars until 1915-16.

School Entry Struggle

Although there was a humbling of landlords but the bureaucrats of the higher castes were still adamant. The masses of the lower castes were very happy with the developments however there was still a long way to go for them. The entry of the untouchables to the schools met with prejudices. To highlight this a progressive thinker like Ramakrishna Pillai, editor of Swadeshabhimani, came out against the order with, '...to put together those who have been cultivating their brain for generations with those who have been cultivating their fields is like putting a horse and buffalo in the same yoke.' Ironically he was the one to publish the biography of Marx in Malayalam.

A problem started in Balaramapuram's Ooroot Amblam School, when Ayyankali reached there with a five year old girl named Panchami to get her admission. She was the daughter of Poojari Ayyan. There he had to face the diku thugs who were waiting for them. So there was a fight that followed with them. At around the same time, a riot started between the Nairs and the Pulayars at the road junction. The Pulayar huts were attacked and their houses were plundered where their bullocks, goats and fowls were taken away by the Nairs. The men were belaboured and the women were molested. To escape the wrath, the Pulayars had to hide in the fields. The Pulayars who did fight had to meet death. The riots did end but temporarily created serious repercussions in Ooroot Ambalam

Kunathukaal, Perumbazhuthoor, Venganoor, Marayamuttam etc. Subsequently the riot was known as the Pulaya Mutiny and this fight of the lower castes for an independent society became serious.

‘Adha-sthitha’ Dalits’ Own School – Although the government had put in its best efforts, the Dalits did not get the kind of admission that they had wanted. Ayyankali wished that someday they would be able to gain access to education without being dependant on the dikus. The Department of Education gave them permission to start a school. So subsequently the Dalits established their first school in Venganoor. Most of the teachers did not want to join the school as they feared that they could get killed by the people of the higher castes and the challenge was that none of the Dalits was educated enough to be a teacher. Even when the government offered nine rupees instead of six for educating the Dalit children in their school they could not easily find a teacher. After an extensive search, they found a teacher named Parameshwaran Pillai. He was from Kaithamukku which is in Thiruvananthapuram. He was convinced to join the school. However there was a challenge. He did enter the school but he remained reluctant and entered as if it were a dump of garbage. His socio-cultural reflexes got the better of his progressive intellectualism when the reality of the society appeared in front of him. He had fear and his fear began to get evident. This problem started to get acute. Soon from all around the school, hooting started. The opponents of the school did not want to stop the cacophony. There followed jostling and pushing. Some even came forward to assault him and he started feeling extremely afraid. Even in the atmosphere which was stained with fear, the classes continued. One night, the school was destroyed and the next day it got built up again. Despite heavy opposition to the school, the school was continued with great efforts. To protect the life of the master, he would be escorted home by bodyguards. The school got destroyed 5 times but the education did not get sacrificed. Riots happened each time the school got destroyed. Many a times the master feared for his life and wanted to give his resignation. He was however assured and pacified by Ayyankali that his life would not be put in danger and that the body guards given to him would protect him.

Meeting with Gandhiji

Gandhiji was the contemporary of Ayyankali. He had launched a struggle against the foreigners who were looting the country of its assets and the fight was to free India from the chains of the British Empire. Gandhiji had travelled all across India and would praise the Temple Entry Proclamation of Shri Chitra Thirunaal Maharaja of Kerala. He felt that the proclamation made by the Maharaja was unobtrusive and an unexpected event. Gandhiji had a competitor in the Maharaja who was the Ruler-Reformer.

Gandhiji had known of the untouchable, illiterate, genius Ayyankali. He had in his knowledge all that had been done by him for the untouchables and for the people of the state of Kerala. In 1937, Gandhiji came to meet Ayyankali, at Venganoor. Venganoor was situated in a tiny corner of Kerala. On meeting him, Gandhiji embraced him and made him sit close to him. Gandhiji was considered to

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be an 'Avtara Purusha' of India and many high class people did not like that he sat with a low caste Ayyankali.

Gandhiji said to him, "I know about all the work you have been doing. Good. I am also of your age. We both are fighting for freedom. Continue your work." Gandhiji's compliment thrilled him. Gandhiji continued, "How are things here?" Ayyankali replied, "Mahatmaji. I will not forget your kindness. We have won the freedom to study in schools. Now we have gained the right to enter temples for puja and prayers..." The accuracy by which all important points were put forward by Ayyankali, impressed Gandhiji. Then Gandhiji asked, "What else do your people want?" Ayyankali requested, "I want to see at least ten B.A. graduates before I die." To this Gandhiji replied, "Your desire will be fulfilled very soon. Continue with your work fearlessly."

After that many harijan hostels were started at the education centres of Travancore. A person named M.N. Govindan Nair was the warden of the hostel in Thiruvananthapuram. He went on to become Kerala's chief minister.

At that moment, the thoughts of Gandhiji may have gone back to the time he had spent in the Yerwada Jail and recollected the events in the courtyard under a mango tree. There Dr. BR Ambedkar who was considered to be the depressed classes of India's uncrowned king because of his tireless struggle for their upliftment, had signed the Poona Pact in 1932 which was historic and cooperated with Gandhiji. The British had offered an award in which the untouchables had been considered to be different from the Hindus and Gandhiji had seen this as a ploy to create a rift in the society. He had gone on a fast unto death for the same and for the Award in Aga Khan Palace. However, Dr. BR Ambedkar had a difference of opinion here. Regarding that episode ex-congress MP C Narayana Pillai and the disciple of Gandhiji had said, "It was only after this clash with Ambedkar that Gandhiji took to activities concerned with the uplift of untouchables,"

Principles & Achievements

Ayyankali had been a pioneer in the movement against casteism. As mentioned before, he had taken his bullock cart through the public roads of Venganoor and defied traditional norms because he opposed the practice of keeping the low caste people away from public amenities. The high class people had attacked him even physically but that had not weakened his resolve. He stood up against them.

He strongly wanted that the children of the Dalits should get access to education. For this purpose, he also started a school for them at Venganoor which was destroyed five times but he ensured that the school was set up again. He also led a strike in Venganoor in 1907 to protest against this and the strike lasted for around a year. In the strike on his call, all agricultural work was stopped until their demands were met. In the strike, education was only one of his demands, his main demands were as under:

- (a) Stoppage of the practice of not giving tea in tea shops to Dalits who were given tea till then in coconut shells;

- (b) Right to education for the Dalit children;
- (c) Resting time for workers during work hours; and
- (d) Replacement of the system of wages in kind by payment of cash.

Ayyankali's first success was that the high caste people started taking notice of him. In Kerala, it was mainly the Nair community. Various methods and means were employed by them to snub his efforts and bring the workers under them but Ayyankali made them realise that they would face dire economic consequences if they did not meet with the demands of the workers. They were humbled in a way by Ayyankali and this was a great achievement.

A great achievement of Ayyankali was that the fight for human rights was spearheaded by him. Various low caste people's voice was then getting reached to the higher authorities and even in many documents of international human rights even before their adoption. He also ensured that public places were for all and he put forward the rights of the workers at a time when there were no unions for workers in the state. It must also be mentioned here that he did it all despite his illiteracy. He was later recognised by the then rulers for his leadership abilities and was nominated in 1910 to the assembly of Travancore namely, Sri Moolam Legislative Assembly. He was also supported & praised by Shri Narayana Guru and other social reformers of that time. Eventually the Dalits could freely walk on public roads in 1900 and their children could go to schools in 1914. The Dalit women also could cover their upper body parts and all of this was because of his efforts.

He could gather support because of his dynamic personality. Even the members of the upper communities, including some well-known landlords who were Praja Sabha's members at that time gave him support.

The Pulaya community's elders still fondly remember the Panthi Bhojanam which was organised by a member of the Praja Sabha and a well-known landlord of that time Pallithanam Luca Matthai (Pallithanathu Matthaichen) who was from Kuttanad. In those days Luca Matthai was also well-known by the local people as Kuttanadu's Kayal Raja. He gave active support to Ayyankali although he belonged to an orthodox Syrian Christian family. He gave active support to Ayyankali in his endeavour to eradicate the inequalities of the society that existed in those days.

Ayyankali and his followers were received by him with a huge procession of snake boats and hundreds of other boats to Nalukettu Tharavad and had lunch with them. In that function, many well-known people of the upper castes also participated and proclaimed that they were against casteism.

In 1905, the Sadhujana Paripalana Sangham (Association for the Welfare of the Poor) was also founded by Ayyankali and here he was successful in getting the 6-day week for the agriculture labour on 18th June, 1941.

Ayyankali's thoughts influenced many other sects of the society. Kerala's Chief Minister had once commented on his contribution and also saw similarity between Narayana Guru and him. Different sections of the society remember him on his birth anniversary.

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Unfortunately his memory was lost by the public for some time and after forty years, his service to the society was evaluated and recognised again.

Comrade EMS Namboodirippadu spoke about the agricultural labour strike of 1907 which was historical. He spoke at the Kumaran Asan Memorial Lecture in March 1980 and spoke about how Ayyankali had led it. He said "...in 1907-8 Ayyankali organised the agricultural workers' strike. He brought together the unorganised and splintered people and made them conscious of organisational power."

A trust named Sri Ayyankalli trust was set up with the support of KP Madhavan, PK Chathan Master, K.K. Balakrishnan etc. With affection and love, a life size bronze statue of Ayyankali was made by Ezra David who had also made a Krishna Menon statue in New Delhi. Ayyankali's statue travelled all the way from Chennai to the length of Kerala in a victory procession. Many newspapers gave extensive coverage to the procession. The people of Kerala opened their hearts and lined the roads to pay homage to the 'victor over fate: "...where the chariot of history etched indelible marks of monarchy and upper caste oppression.'" and was unveiled in the traffic island at Vellayambalam junction by the Prime Minister of India on 10 November, 1980.

Vellayambalam Junction is in an elite Nair upper middle class area. It is at the meeting point of roads from the Padmanabha Swamy Temple & Kaudiyar Palace so when the Maharaja has to pass from that area for his prayers, the statue of Ayyankali has to be crossed by him.

Sree Narayanaguru devotee K Kartikeyan who runs the Kerala Kaumudi Paper had written regarding the unveiling of "a statue of the unforgettable revolutionary of Kerala."

Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the erstwhile prime minister of India had once said, "He is the outcome of his people's enthusiasm for equality. This great son of India was the one who sacrificed his life for the well-being of his society. His qualities were too great to be contained in Kerala only. His ideas and ideals are still valid. That is the reason why I offered to unveil this statue. I am against setting up of statues in principle. So I have declined invitations to unveil statues."

"Untouchability is a deep blemish in the soul of India. It is only untouchability that has kept India backward so far. And it was in Kerala that untouchability was most acute. At the same time it was Kerala that gained fame by its Temple entry proclamation. Equality and Freedom are indivisible. Without equality there cannot be genuine freedom. Our leaders fought against the evil of untouchability. It was through leaders like Mahatma Gandhi that the toughest battle against untouchability were fought. The struggle for freedom must start from within the society. That was what Ayyankali did. It was due to incessant struggles of Gandhi, Ambedkar and Ayyankali that the landless poor (harijans) were liberated."

"The first leader of people led liberation and revolution."

“If singing praises of Ayyankali and unveiling of his statue is to have any meaning, allotment of land for the tenants and pension for agricultural labour is a must. Ayyankali was not only a leader of his own community but also an unshakeable guide and commander of the working classes. Ayyankali and Sree Narayan Guru, by their ant- caste domination struggles were important factors that led Kerala people to their progressive outlook today.

“Only Kerala has been delivered of mass murder of the poor and burning of their villages in the country. That is because of the social reconstruction through revolutionary changes. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Dayananda Saraswati, Vivekanand etc. were Ayyankali’s contemporaries. Unlettered Ayyankali was a totally different kind of player in the same league. Perhaps he was the greatest leader of that particular period.

“This ‘mahapurush’ organised his people for gaining social justice and human rights into a body named ‘Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham’ in 1907. Sensibly led by Ayyankali, the organisation gained whatever social changes it could for all to see.

“It was his organisational genius that left its indelible stamp on the agrarian movements of Kerala which subsequently fell into the hands of Communist Parties.”

Kallada Sasi, a poet who fluttered out of the water logged rice fields of Kerala, wrote in golden letters the following words...

“From this Kurukshetra of multicoloured rose Ayyankali the Heralding Conch.”

Pulaya Temple Entry Movement

A huge campaign was going on to bring reforms in Travancore and many prominent reformers like Ayyankali were playing a major role. Support was also being asked for from the upper caste Hindus so that the practice of untouchability stops and the low caste people like the Pulaya are allowed to enter the temples. The regent of the prince of Travancore Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bayi refused but the prince to whom she was a regent, promised Gandhiji that it would happen in his reign. It is believed that it was the legal skills of Ayyankali that helped in overcoming legal difficulties that would arise. He had already foreseen the objections that would be raised and handled each one of them. He was also able to ensure that the actual declaration or proclamation of the opening of temples was known beforehand to a few people.

Check Your Progress

1. Who was Mahatma Ayyankali?
2. Who was Ayyavu Swamikal? What did he advocate?
3. Why did Gandhiji go on a fast against the British award for the untouchables?
4. Name the association founded by Ayyankali in 1905.

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6.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Mahatma Ayyankali (also Ayyan Kali) (28 August 1863 – 1941) was a social reformer who worked for the advancement of deprived untouchable people in the princely state of Travancore, British India.
2. Ayyavu Swamikal was a Hindu sanyasi and he strongly advocated that it was time when the divisions of castes that existed among the Hindus should be finally broken.
3. The British had offered an award in which the untouchables had been considered to be different from the Hindus and Gandhiji had seen this as a ploy to create a rift in the society. He had gone on a fast unto death for the same and for the Award in Aga Khan Palace.
4. In 1905, the Sadhujana Paripalana Sangham (Association for the Welfare of the Poor) was also founded by Ayyankali.

6.4 SUMMARY

- Mahatma Ayyankali (also Ayyan Kali) (28 August 1863 – 1941) was a social reformer who worked for the advancement of deprived untouchable people in the princely state of Travancore, British India.
- Ayyankali dressed up in the traditional dress of the Nairs one day in 1893 in order to provoke them. By doing so, he challenged the social conventions that applied to untouchables and the lower caste people.
- Narayana Guru had tried to have an alliance between the other untouchable communities like the Pulayars and the Ezhavas but the opposition to it had been very violent from the Ezhavas and until Ayyankali came to the scene, the Pulayars remained devoid of a voice.
- In 1907 Ayyankali founded the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (SJPS) (Association for the Protection of the Poor) which was based on his experience of Brahma Nishta Mattam. SJPS mainly launched a campaign to get the untouchable students access to primary admission and also contributed funds to set up schools that were operated by Pulayars in the interim.
- A problem started in Balaramapuram's Ooroot Amblam School, when Ayyankali reached there with a five year old girl named Panchami to get her admission. She was the daughter of Poojari Ayyan. There he had to face the diku thugs who were waiting for them.
- Gandhiji had known of the untouchable, illiterate, genius Ayyankali. He had in his knowledge all that had been done by him for the untouchables and for

the people of the state of Kerala. In 1937, Gandhiji came to meet Ayyankali, at Venganoor.

- He strongly wanted that the children of the Dalits should get access to education. For this purpose, he also started a school for them at Venganoor which was destroyed five times but he ensured that the school was set up again.
- Ayyankali's first success was that the high caste people started taking notice of him. In Kerala, it was mainly the Nair community.
- In 1905, the Sadhujana Paripalana Sangham (Association for the Welfare of the Poor) was also founded by Ayyankali and here he was successful in getting the 6-day week for the agriculture labour on 18th June, 1941.
- A huge campaign was going on to bring reforms in Travancore and many prominent reformers like Ayyankali were playing a major role. Support was also being asked for from the upper caste Hindus so that the practice of untouchability stops and the low caste people like the Pulaya are allowed to enter the temples.

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6.5 KEY WORDS

- **Pulayars:** These were an untouchable caste in Hinduism, forming one of the main social groups in modern-day Kerala and Karnataka as well as in historical Tamil Nadu or Tamilakam.
- **Poona Pact:** It was an agreement between Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar on behalf of depressed classes and upper caste Hindu leaders on the reservation of electoral seats for the depressed classes in the legislature of British India government in 1930.
- **Harijan:** It means 'children of God' and was a term first used by Gandhi to refer to Dalits in 1932. He used the word to bring the untouchables closer to God, and thereby to those who believed in God, which was the rest of Hindu society.

6.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What did Ayyankali do in 1893 to provoke the Nairs?
2. Write a short note on Ayyankali's acts of defiance.
3. List the demands of Ayyankali's strike of 1907.
4. What was Ayyankali's first success?
5. Write a short note on the Pulaya temple entry movement.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the series of events leading up to the Chaliyar riots.
2. Elaborate upon Ayyankali's struggle for running a school for the lower castes.

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6.7 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 7 VAIKUNDA SWAMI

Structure

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 Vaikunda Swamigal (1808-1851)
 - 7.2.1 Struggle for Social Equality, Samattva Samajan and Birth of a New Sect
- 7.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 7.4 Summary
- 7.5 Key Words
- 7.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 7.7 Further Readings

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7.0 INTRODUCTION

Vaikunda Swamigal or Ayya Vaikundar is considered to be Lord Vishnu's tenth avatar who worked for the rights of the lower castes in Travancore. He is considered to be a healer and preacher who worked in a devoted manner for the rights of the untouchables in the society of Kerala. He is accredited with the development of a new sect called Ayyavazhi, the followers of which hold their own beliefs and ideas regarding faith. In this unit, an analysis of Vaikunda's efforts and achievements has been provided.

7.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Analyse Vaikunda Swamigal's life and teachings
- Discuss Swamigal's struggle for social equality
- Describe the birth of a new sect Ayyavazhi

7.2 VAIKUNDA SWAMIGAL (1808-1851)

Vaikunda Swami was a pioneer in leading the social reforms movement and starting a political struggle, religious transformation and a social renaissance in India. He was one of the first to lead the social revolution in the southern parts of India, especially Kerala. Many great thinkers and researchers consider him to be a miracle worker, a healer and a teacher. It is also said that he was the front runner of movements of social equality and human rights. Many social changes in south India got affected by his teachings due to which many self-respect and social movements started such as the temple entry agitation, upper cloth agitation and many others launched by great reformers like Ayyankali and Sree Narayana Guru as mentioned in the previous unit.

Life and Teachings

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The exact date of birth of Vaikunda Swamigal is not clear but many historians argue that he was born in 1808 where as many say that he was born in 1809. In the Akilam (the religious book of Ayyavazhi) we do not directly find a reference to the date but it is estimated on the basis that when he was taken to Tiruchendur for treatment as he was sick, his age at that time was 24 years. That date has been accurately mentioned in the Akilam as 20th Masi 1008 M.E which falls on 4th March 1833. Even his exact date of birth is debated. Many feel that it is 19th April and many feel that it is 12th March. He was Ponnnumadan-Veyilal's second son.

The villagers and his parents felt that in his face as a child there was some spiritual significance and during the naming ceremony the elders suggested that he should be named Mudisoodum Perumal (Lord Vishnu with Crown) but the name could not be given to him because in those days the people of the lower castes were disallowed from keeping names of rulers or gods and so the move was opposed by the upper caste people and they insisted that the name be changed immediately. So he was renamed to Muthukutty as they feared being oppressed. Many historians feel that the name Muthukutty which has a prosaic tone, was given by the officials whereas others believe that the officials had not given this name. They had only been against the name 'Mudisoodum Perumal', they never suggested this alternative. There is also a belief that maybe when Vaikunda Swamigal was taking admission in school which was a traditional one, and was known as Thinnai Palli, the teacher did not like his name and he changed it to Muthukutty himself. There is also a belief that the name had been adopted by the villagers in accordance with the norms of their society then as the lower castes of the Travancore had to use differential language and different set of names to signify their differential social status from the upper classes. Again, there is also a belief that the Poovandar, the umbrella bearer of the King of Travancore, changed the name with his direct orders as the name had the suffix 'Perumal' (Vishnu) to Muthukutty.

He was very religious although he did not like practices and rituals and his worship used to be simple. His ideas, acts and thoughts were also very revolutionary from his childhood. He was Lord Vishnu's staunch devotee and to offer his regular prayers, he had set a pedestal at his home on which he would regularly offer his prayers. At Marunthuvazh Malai, he would regularly meditate during the evenings. He had a multifaceted personality and was an expert in many ancient arts including martial arts. He was also well-known for his oration. It is not very clear whether he was an advocate for the inter-caste marriages or supported a class less society but he strongly wanted that in the society there should not be any discrimination based on the caste of a person and the society should endeavour for the upliftment of the downtrodden. He opposed the poor manner in which the lower class people were treated.

He married a woman from Puviyoor, Agastheeswaram, named Thirumalammal whose husband had deserted her. Some also believe that he did

not marry her and she was there only to serve him and support him in his activities. He continued his early life as a Palmyra Climber and as an Agricultural labourer. At the age of 22, he fell ill.

There is also a narrative that when he was 16 years, old the upper class people got irritated by his views and activities that were inclusionary and they got jealous of the popularity that he was gaining. So out of frustration they decided to use clandestine means to get him killed. They pretended to accept his views and pretended to celebrate his preachings and him. At Marunthuvazh Malai, he was invited to a banquet and here he was given poisoned food. The poison did not affect him immediately but its effects gradually built up in his body with the passing of each day. When the effects got extremely severe, he was bed ridden and the pain he suffered was intense. The villagers became anxious over his sickness.

Gradually when he reached the age of twenty-four, his mother Veyilal said that Lord Vishnu had instructed her that he would be cured of the ailment if on the 19th of Masi 1008 M.E., he was brought to the festival at Tiruchendur. His kith and kin and also his villagers started the journey and carried a cradle with him to the festival and reached in the late hours of 15th Masi 1008. M.E. It is vividly clear that Veyilal, the mother of Vaikundar accompanied him. But very few accounts suggest that Ponnu Madan and Thirumalammal were along with him during his journey. Authors Kasi Udhayam & Krishna Nathan have claimed that Vaikunda's wife and father were with him on their way to Tiruchendur.

After taking their meals they did take rest at an alongside village. It made everyone feel surprised because the moment he got there, he started walking fast along with everyone else at a time when confined to his cradle and could not even put his foot on the ground. It was believed by them that his mother's dream had come true. On 19th Masi 1008 M.E., they reached Tiruchedur and they took part in the festival there.

Regarding the events of Vaikunda's passage towards the sea, there is a conflict. Some feel that the incident is that one night when Veyilal was awake, Vaikunda started walking towards the sea swiftly. Veyilal started screaming and running behind him. This awakened the relatives and even they started running behind Veyilal towards the shore of the sea and then they all saw that Vaikunda disappeared into the sea. According to one more narrative, when the group was taking dip in the holy sea, they realised that Vaikunda was missing and they could not find him for hours. Some authors say that a massive wave had carried him. This happened on 1st March and the group started convincing Veyilal to go back to her home. However Veyilal could not go without Vaikunda and she waited there on the sea shore crying for him.

On 20th Masi 1008. M.E, i.e. 3 days after the event, Vaikunda was seen rising from the horizon in the early hours of the morning. It is suggested by the writer Ponnu that during the auspicious occasion of the Mahamaham, Vaikunda had taken rebirth (suggesting the date of the event on 5 March, 1833).

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It is suggested by few authors that the event was also witnessed by the relatives but others suggest that only Veliyalal could witness it because she was the only one who had waited for him at the sea shore for 3 days. Seeing Vaikunda come back she had become very excited. However in the words that he had uttered when he had come back, he had made a proclamation to her that he was not her son anymore. He also made the revelation “Until the year ‘One thousand and Eight’ you were known to be my mother and now I had born as the son of Narayana for fulfilling the needs of Santror and to rule them forever.”

After proclaiming so, Vaikunda headed for Kanyakumari. There he gave instructions to people to give up religious ceremonies and rituals and reached Poovandanthope. It appears that a few incidents happened on the way in which he was ill-treated but there were also incidences where people received him warmly. It is said that he performed many miracles on the way. Amalan, a writer says that Vaikunda put up at Udangudi on Masi 21 and reached Poovandanthope on 22 Masi 1008 M.E. The incident that had happened at Thiruchendur had become a news that had reached all the nearby villages and people started referring to him as – Ayya - means Father in Tamil.

To reveal his arrival, he also travelled northwards to many parts of Tirunelveli to have his arrival revealed. He travelled northwards up to Kadambankulam, through Pillaiyar Kudiyiruppu, Avaraikulam, Vadakkankulam, and Pambankulam. Kadambankulam was the northernmost venue where he had reached during his travel and today it is recognised that it is among the rare Nizhal Thangals which face geographic north. 5 Seedars were selected by him. Two among them Bheeman Seedar and Dharma Seedar had been chosen before his northward arrival. He had identified Arjunan Seedar during the travel and the other two Nakulan Seedar and Sahadevan Seedar were selected after the travel. In very few sources do we find the documentation of his northward travel episode.

He returned to Swamithope by December 1833 after concluding his travel and started his penance. From mid-December 1843 to mid-January 1835, during the auspicious month of Margazhi, his first phase of penance started. The 1st phase of the penance lasted for 2 years from January 1843 to December 1835 and this phase has been called- Yuga Thavasu, the intention of which was to end the rule of the forces of evil (Kali) and for the subsequent closure of the Kali Yuga. This Yuga Thavasu was performed in a pit six feet deep in a standing posture. During this phase, he did not speak much and it is believed that he did not consume food. In the second phase, the main dedication is towards the abolishment of the caste-based system and other discriminations among the communities of human beings and for Santror’s upliftment. Even this phase was of two years. It started in December 1835 and lasted till December 1837. It was performed in the sitting posture on the ground level. Only rice gruel was taken by him. However, according to some sources, he took fruits and milk during that phase.

By January 1838, he began his third phase of penance. In this last phase, he mainly focussed on women upliftment so that the progeny becomes better. He

performed this phase on a pedestal that was raised. The king of Travancore interrupted it otherwise it was also intended to continue for two years.

It was around this time that people started considering him to be their saviour as many miracles started happening around him. When people started hearing about the miracles they were overjoyed and people from the surrounding villages started to visit Swamithope with a belief that he would be able to address their grievances. It is believed that he had cured many ailments in this period. Many mysterious influences and experiences started getting witnessed by people when they stood in front of him. According to some accounts, the upper class people of those days also tried to lessen his popularity. It is also believed that demons had been incinerated by him and the power of the sorcery, witchcraft etc. had been seized by him in the presence of his devotees.

He considered himself to be a mendicant. His worshippers addressed him as Narayana Pandaram. In those days, he preached ideas that were revolutionary and which are considered to be unparalleled in history. The importance of Love, Truth and Charity was emphasised by him and the values were inducted into the rituals by him. In most of his rituals and teachings that he advocated, the implications were both social and religious. Historically, the rituals were viewed or used to destroy the discriminations that existed in the society in those days which were mainly caste based so that those who were sociologically ill-treated and downtrodden could be uplifted. Some examples of this include unifying various castes through Muthirikkinaru, courage and self-respect through head gear, eliminating untouchability through Thottunamam, spiritual and physical cleanliness through Thuvayal Thavasuvu and charity on food as 'Anna Dharmam'. People were greatly excited due to his doctrines which were revolutionary in nature and they felt ready to struggle for their rights. It is at this time that he is believed to have incinerated the demons and also seized the strength of sorcery, witchcraft etc. in the presence of his devotees.

Vaikunda's teachings created a ripple among the masses and this had a huge impact on the social and religious arena of the 19th century of South Tirunelveli and South Travancore. The backward classes began to question the severe oppression that they had been facing without raising their voices till then. For the upper class people, this was a huge challenge to their beliefs and they felt that if the social system would get destroyed then their status in the society would get challenged. The king of Travancore received many complaints in this regard from the people of the upper class against the activities and teachings of Vaikunda. Initially the king ignored the protests but the pressure increased. The issue was brought before the king Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma once again during his visit to Suchidrum. He strongly believed in the caste system. The king could not believe that Vaikunda was the avatar of Vishnu because Vaikunda belonged to a community that was outside the caste fold. The king was also misled by Vaikunda's claim that Vaikunda would become the undisputed king of the world and rule it. The king considered this to be a provocation from Vaikunda and felt that he would plot a

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revolt against the kingdom. He feared a revolution and immediately sent his armed forces to get Vaikunda arrested. The armed forces were confronted by a large gathering around Vaikunda. Vaikunda requested them to not get violent and to allow the army to reach him. He was arrested by the soldiers and taken to Suchidram.

He was brought in front of the king at Suchidram. The king decided to test Vaikunda's supernatural ability because he doubted Vaikunda's divinity. He hid his ring in his hand and asked him to name it. Vaikundar remained silent and preferred not to answer. The king got him imprisoned immediately. His confinement was filled with sewage infested with worms. He was also asked to drink alcohol and in the alcohol poisonous herbs were mixed. This did not affect Vaikunda and this was a miracle. For two days, he remained imprisoned and then the king ordered that he be taken to the capital of Travancore – Thiruvananthapuram. The forces headed to Thiruvananthapuram through Chungankadai, Parvathipuram, Kottar and reached Thuckalay. At Manalikkara, he was kept imprisoned that night. The next day, via Balaramapuram, he was taken by the soldiers to Thiruvananthapuram and jailed in an open prison at Singaratope. Vaikunda was followed by jubilant followers all through his way and stayed in the prison premises.

Many people rushed to Singrathope when the imprisonment period was going on to get blessed by him. Vaikundar had to face severe cruel treatments and tribulations. However, he continued healing and preaching there too. He performed many miracles in the prison. There were various attempts made to burn him down in Chilli godown and lime kiln. Miraculously he overcame all this. Finally, they threw him in a cage of a tiger who was hungry in front of the public, army staff and administrators. The tiger did not jump on him to kill him. To provoke the tiger, one soldier tried to prod it with a spear. The spear was caught hold by the tiger and immediately left it abruptly when the abdomen of a priest was ripped off and the priest had to die on spot. The king was shocked by the event and he believed that divine wrath would be fetched due to the killing of the priest. Vaikunda was released immediately with the condition that he would only be active and preach in his community only. He refused to accept the condition and also refused to get himself released. His main mission was the equality and betterment of all castes and so the royal writ was torn by him into pieces. He made a proclamation that his release would only be accepted by him after the imprisonment period had completed.

In jail he remained a prisoner for a full 110 days and was then released once the term ended in March's first week. The fame of Vaikunda got enhanced due to the event all over the kingdom. His followers carried him back as a procession and they reached Poovandanthope on 19 Masi 1013 M.E (1 March, 1838), a day before the 5th anniversary of his incarnation.

He decided to fulfil his penance as the third phase of his Tavam had been disrupted by the king. 700 families were directed by him to undertake Thuvayal Thavasu (The washing penance). The penance was concluded by them in two phases. The first phase was conducted at Vakaipathi and lasted for six months

and the second phase was conducted at Muttapathi and lasted for six months again. At the same time, the final phase of Tavam of Vaikunda was completed by him at Poovandanthope. When the Tavam concluded, Muthirikkinaru was consecrated by him and it became the first ever well of South India which could be used by people of all castes. It is also believed that the second Vinchai was received by him from Lord Narayana at Theerthakkarai, Muttapathi. He then moved westwards to a place which we now know as Ambalapathi.

He portrayed himself at Ambalapathi as a reigning kind under a grand roof which was similar to the one at the palace of Travancore. It is also believed that he unified many deities into himself thereby conducting a grand ceremony. After that foundation stones for many Nizhal Thangals were laid by him throughout South Tirunelvely and South Travancore, he took his last breath on 21 Vaikasi 1026.M.E. At Poovandanthope, his 'sacred golden body' was interned. The place is now the Palliyarai of Swamithope Pathi.

Struggle for Social Equality, Samattava Samajam and Birth of a New Sect

Regarding the teachings, there were two levels of understanding which were the principles of righteousness and a concrete activity of almsgiving or charity. The followers had a strong principle belief that the main motive of the mission of Vaikunda was to ensure that the evil forces of Kali would get destroyed and Dharmam would get established. In Akilathirattu, it is said that even when the people used to listen to him, they would get a realisation that Dharmam was getting fully established and the evil forces of Kali were getting withdrawn. Transposed to the social plane, this principle of Dharmam was considered as the mission of "protecting or salvaging the lowly, the oppressed." As a practical activity, Dharmam meant almsgiving and charity. They believed that that was the way by which God would be found. People were taught to be charitable and give material goods in charity without any type of discrimination among those who would receive the charity.

Courage and Fortitude

An important part of Lord Vaikunda's teaching was symbolic actions for the purpose of impounding the powers of those practicing black magic and incinerating the evil spirits. The main purpose of this was to make the ordinary people more courageous. He also taught directly on fortitude and courage. He instructed people not to be afraid of temporal powers of inimical or malignant character or any supernatural power. They were instructed to not fear anyone else but Vaikunda who would always be present with them and give them strength. They were told that "it was fortitude that would make them rule the earth" and that because of this, they were not to be intimidated by any exploiter.

Living with Dignity

In Akilathirattu, we find a verse that often gets repeated - "If you live with dignity and self-respect, the Kali would destroy itself". This instruction is important as

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according to Akilathirattu, one of the main missions of Lord Vaikunda was the destruction of Kali. In the book we find special importance given to the direction that people should live with dignity. For example, in the narrative regarding the origin of the Santror Makkal as the children of Narayana gave the people a divine pedigree. This story is powerful as it drives home the message that the people were a respected humanity. In his life, some of the rituals which came up were intended at spreading the message of human dignity. One example of this ritual is wearing a piece of headgear during worship.

Against Caste-Discrimination

The imagination of his followers was projected by Akiathirattu for the creation of an ideal society where there was no discrimination on the basis of castes. While giving an account of the past, Akilattiattu spoke of an age when people lived as one family and there was no discrimination on the basis of castes. It was Kalineesan who was responsible for dividing people on the basis of caste. It also spoke of a future when all people would be ruled equally by Vaikunda. Some verses from Akilathirattu are as follows:

“Cast away the eighteen castes and the demons into the mountain, fire and the sea”

“Do not discriminate between the powerful and powerless”

“The caste would disappear by itself”

It points to the fact of a considerable indoctrination against the inequalities of castes.

Against Political Oppressors

He also criticised political oppression which existed during that period. It can be seen when the Thiruvinthankur king was characterised as Kalineesan who represented the evil forces and the British were characterised as Venneesan, which means the wicked white. According to him, the rule of the Kali was perpetrated by Kalineesan as he exploited the labour of the people through levies, systems of oozhiyam and the imposition of the caste system which were discriminatory. According to him, the king is the main reason for the oppression and issued admonitions to him to revoke the measures that were exploitative. In the gatherings of Ayyavazhi, one could repeatedly hear the slogan which had political overtones. It was a declaration by Vaikunda that the king would be dethroned by him and under a single umbrella he would rule the country. He had made many accusations before but the declaration was extremely serious in those days.

Against Economic Exploitation

In the gatherings, the severe exploitation that the labour class had to face which had made them strongly discontented was expressed in the form of poetic lamentations and they were commented upon and repeated. Three pages of

Akilathirattu are devoted to lamenting upon and enumerating the many measures imposed on the hard working labour class in order to exploit them, especially the Chanars. A number of oppressive taxes were listed. The taxes were imposed on items such as firewood and the implements of the people's occupation. A variety of taxes imposed on land & cultivation were also spoken about and explained how the oozhiyam system had made the poor people burdened. The Akilathirattu makes a very telling statement in which this accusation is summarised - "the treacherous neesan squeezed out the labour and its produce from the Santror."

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In certain verses of Arul Nool and Akilathirattu, there are some instructions given. In a verse of Akilathirattu, it is written - "Whoever makes an earning, let him rule over it and no one need be lightened of another." The proclamation made in another verse is- "Tell that there is no Services to be paid anymore." In some verses the followers are exhorted to take actions which are revolutionary.

For example, a section in Arul Nool goes as follows:

My child, born to rule the world, rise and awake
The arrogant mean is waging a war
Come my son, to raise an army to incinerate this world
Dignified as you are, the ignominy is intolerable
I brought a paisa by carrying on my head a heavy load
He snatched away even that one paisa
Did you take birth when such a cruel king is ruling?
Against puja, blood-sacrifice, and offerings to temples

A strong admonition was also offered by Lord Vaikunda to the followers of Ayyavazhi against undertaking blood sacrifices to keep the evil spirits appeased and making offerings to temples. The instruction was to forsake the worship of devil by giving up worship of idols and sacrifices of pigs, roosters and goats to deities or offer fried meat, eggs and other eatables which were present in the Ayyavazhi explicitly.

Lord Vaikunda also offered a strong admonition to the followers of Ayyavazhi against conducting Puja (making offerings to temples and undertaking blood sacrifices to appease evil spirits). This admonition is repeated in several places in Akilattirattu and Arul Nool. Instructions to give up "devil worship," idol worship, sacrifices of goats, roosters and pigs to deities, offerings of eggs, fried meat and other edibles were explicitly present in Ayyavazhi.

There were some folk practices that the people used to follow then which included the offering to evil spirits called cetikkuk or the offering to demons called peikkuk kotullal. The people were asked by him to stop the observation of the practices. He gave them a main instruction that there were no demons or devils and that sorcery and witchcraft had no effect.

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Condemnation of the Priests

Lord Vaikunda and other important people of Ayyavazhi also strongly condemned the way the Brahmins had been dominating the society. A statement given by Vaikunda which is found in Patthiram “We come to intimidate the veta Brahmins.” In Thingal patham we find another statement in which it is written - “Those who wear a tuft (Brahmins) will not remain on this earth any longer”. There were also many mythical episodes in which it may not be explicitly implicating the Brahmins but they are clear and their message is well understood. For example, in a mythical narrative, the Brahmins are blamed for drinking the whole nectar which was for all human beings and so they will be condemned to grow as Palmyra trees on earth.

In another episode, the immoral and corrupt practices of the Brahmins are alleged by the Brahmin priests at Thiruchendur and Srirangam is very clear. The followers of Ayyavazhi were asked to take the mantle of priesthood and replace the Brahmins.

Denunciation of Idolatry

Ayyavazhi became the only religious system in India to condemn idol worship. In its view, leading all sort of ritualistic meaningless practices and giving rise to superstition, the worship of idols helped the priests exploit the ignorance and illiteracy of the common people. So Vaikunda condemned the idol worship and directed his followers to resist and detest the same.

In those days of Lord Vaikunda, the people belonging to lower castes of South Travancore were prohibited from entering the temples. So they had to make small pyramids of brick or mud and would have to pray to them. Lord Vaikunda felt that these practices were not civilised and a new way of worship was put forward by him. In the social and cultural history of Travancore, this served as religious reformation. Many verses of the Ayyavazhi strengthen the view of Lord Vaikunda.

Nizhalthankals

After the trial with the king of Travancore had happened at Vaikunda, many religious centres were built as his instructions to spread his teachings which were known as Nizhalthankals. This is called as religious schools by Akilattirattu Ammanai. Regarding this worship, a lot has been spoken about by the reports of the LMS.

The official language of worship is Tamil and Lord Narayana is the object of worship with the trinity of Mahesh, Narayana and Brahma. The Nizhalthankals were established in Pambankulam, Kadambankulam, Vadalivilai, Sundavilai, Paloor, Agastheeswaram & Chettikudiyiruppu. They were established during Vaikunda’s period per Akilam. Throughout India, a large number of Thangals were established and in India there are more than eight thousand centres of worship.

The Nizhalthankals became an important factor in the religious and social lives of the people. When the people were brought here, there was no distinction of castes. The formalities and mode of worship in these centers were revolutionised.

Sacred Well

Swamithoppe Pathi, Swamithoppu-pathi, Manavai-pathi, Detchana-pathi or Thamarai-pathi is for the Ayyavazhi the main pathi and the Tavam's sacred venue. Swamithope is regarded as the main among the Pancha pathi and the main centre of the Vaikunda's incarnational activities.

According to the legends of the Ayyavazhi, Lord Vaikunda is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu and at Poovanthanhoppe, he had carried out his Tavam which made many followers get attracted to it from all over India. When Lord Vaikunda breathed his last, it is believed that he was interred there and he was enveloped by a constructed pathi which was square shaped. According to the holy book of the Ayyavazhis - Akilathirattu ammanai, the temples are referred to as Thoppuppathi.

A large mirror and two oil lamps ((kuthuvilakku), an elunetru, are contained in the Palliyarai. There is also a raised pedestal which is covered with kavi cloth. In the temple, some articles have also been preserved which are believed to have been used by Lord Vaikunda. They include a pair of wooden sandals and a rattan cane (perampu). Inner corridors surround the Pallayarai.

At a distance of fifty feet from the Palliyari, there is a fifty-five feet tall flagmast. There is Unpanpurai at the north of the flagmast. Here food is cooked and distributed to the devotees. Three hundred meters from the main Pathi, there is a common well. According to Akilattirattu Ammanai, bath is taken by eighteen castes in the well. In the extreme east there is Paal Kinaru, in the north there is Vatakku Vasal and to the west of the Palliyari there is Karuda medai which is also called Sivaye Medai. Outer corridors surround all these. Near the outer corridors, there is also Amman sannathi's & a Sivalinga. At the spot where the Tavam had been performed by Lord Vaikunda, there is a bell tower above it. The ten incarnations of Lord Narayana are carved on the door of Swamithoppe Palliyarai.

Equal Status for Women

As mentioned before in the third phase of the penance that began in Jan 1838 performed by Lord Vaikunda, the main aim was to uplift the women and better the progeny. This phase was performed on a raised pedestal. This phase was interrupted by the king of Travancore but was later on completed by him.

Check Your Progress

1. Why could the name Mudisoodum Perumal not be given to Vaikunda?
2. When had Vaikunda taken rebirth as per the writer Ponnu?
3. What were rituals historically used for?
4. What was an important part of Lord Vaikunda's teaching?
5. What is the main pathi for the Ayyavazhi?

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7.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. The name Mudisoodum Perumal (Lord Vishnu with Crown) could not be given to Vaikunda because in those days, the people of the lower castes were disallowed from keeping names of rulers or gods and so the move was opposed by the upper caste people and they insisted that the name be changed immediately.
2. It is suggested by the writer Ponnu that during the auspicious occasion of the Mahamaham, Vaikunda had taken rebirth (suggesting the date of the event on 5 March, 1833).
3. Historically, the rituals were viewed or used to destroy the discriminations that existed in the society in those days which were mainly caste based so that those who were sociologically ill-treated and downtrodden could be uplifted.
4. An important part of Lord Vaikunda's teaching was symbolic actions for the purpose of impounding the powers of those practicing black magic and incinerating the evil spirits.
5. Swamithoppe Pathi, Swamithoppu-pathi, Manavai-pathi, Detchana-pathi or Thamarai-pathi is for the Ayyavazhi the main pathi and the Tavam's sacred venue.

7.4 SUMMARY

- The exact date of birth of Vaikunda Swamigal is not clear but many historians argue that he was born in 1808 where as many say that he was born in 1809.
- He was very religious although he did not like practices and rituals and his worship used to be simple. His ideas, acts and thoughts were also very revolutionary from his childhood. He was Lord Vishnu's staunch devotee and to offer his regular prayers, he had set a pedestal at his home on which he would regularly offer his prayers.
- Regarding the events of Vaikunda's passage towards the sea, there is a conflict. Some feel that the incident is that one night when Veyilal was awake, Vaikunda started walking towards the sea swiftly. Veyilal started screaming and running behind him.
- Amalan, a writer says that Vaikunda put up at Udangudi on Masi 21 and reached Poovandanthoppe on 22 Masi 1008 M.E.
- 5 Seedars were selected by him. Two among them Bheeman Seedar and Dharma Seedar had been chosen before his northward arrival.

- By January 1838, he began his third phase of penance. In this last phase, he mainly focussed on women upliftment so that the progeny becomes better. He performed this phase on a pedestal that was raised.
- He considered himself to be a mendicant. His worshippers addressed him as Narayana Pandaram. The importance of Love, Truth and Charity was emphasised by him and the values were inducted into the rituals by him.
- Vaikundar had to face severe cruel treatments and tribulations. However, he continued healing and preaching there too. He performed many miracles in the prison. There were various attempts made to burn him down in Chilli godown and lime kiln.
- He decided to fulfil his penance as the third phase of his Tavam had been disrupted by the king. 700 families were directed by him to undertake Thuvayal Thavasu (The washing penance). The penance was concluded by them in two phases.
- The followers had a strong principle belief that the main motive of the mission of Vaikunda was to ensure that the evil forces of Kali would get destroyed and Dharmam would get established.
- While giving an account of the past, Akilattiattu spoke of an age when people lived as one family and there was no discrimination on the basis of castes. It was Kalineesan who was responsible for dividing people on the basis of caste.
- A variety of taxes imposed on land & cultivation were also spoken about and explained how the oozhiyam system had made the poor people burdened. The Akilathirattu makes a very telling statement in which this accusation is summarised - "the treacherous neesan squeezed out the labour and its produce from the Santror."
- Ayyavazhi became the only religious system in India to condemn idol worship. On its view, leading all sort of ritualistic meaningless practices and giving rise to superstition, the worship of idols helped the priests exploit the ignorance and illiteracy of the common people.

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7.5 KEY WORDS

- **Ayyavazhi:** It is a henotheistic belief that originated in South India. It is cited as an independent monistic religion by several newspapers, government reports, journals, and academic researchers. In Indian censuses, however, the majority of its followers declare themselves as Hindus.
- **Akilam:** It is the first among the seventeen parts of Akilathirattu Ammanai, the religious book of Ayyavazhi. This section includes the Kappu, the very first part; it tells of the Detchanam, and describes the political and sociological situation in the early world.

7.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the poisoning episode of Vaikunda.
2. List the parts of Tirunelveli through which Vaikunda travelled northwards.
3. How were the five seedars selected by Vaikunda?
4. Where did Vaikunda conduct his three phases of Tavam?
5. Write a short note on Vaikunda's condemnation of the priests.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the theories regarding Vaikunda's name change.
2. Elaborate upon Vaikunda's phases of penance.
3. Analyze the action taken by the King of Travancore on Vaikunda.

7.7 FURTHER READINGS

- Gupta, Krishna. 1996. *Social Equality and the Indian Constitution*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Co.
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BLOCK - III
VALLALARS PRINCIPLES AND
SELF RESPECT MOVEMENT

NOTES

UNIT 8 VALLALAR

Structure

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Objectives
- 8.2 Vallalar's Life and Principles
- 8.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 8.4 Summary
- 8.5 Key Words
- 8.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 8.7 Further Readings

8.0 INTRODUCTION

'Vallalar', a term of Tamil language, is used by people of different agricultural castes who reside in the South Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Northeastern parts of Sri Lanka. Ramalinga Swamigal, known as Vallalar was one of the famous Tamil poets and belongs to a line of Tamil saints known as 'Gnana Siddhar'. They preached the 'suddha sanmarga sangam' through which he endeavored to eliminate the caste system.

8.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Examine the role of Vallalar in South India
- Analyse Periyar's self-respect movement

8.2 VALLALAR'S LIFE AND PRINCIPLES

Ramalinga Swamigal, also known as Vallalar, was born on 5th October, 1823 at Marudhur, a village near Chidambaram which lies in the present day Cuddalore district of Tamil Nadu. He was interested in meditation and did not give much emphasis to formal education thus leading him to live a spiritual life.

Ramalinga renounced the world at the young age of thirteen and evolved in his spiritual journey from being a devotee of Shiva to worshipping the formless.

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He advocated a casteless society because of the adverse effects of the caste system on society. He opposed superstitions and rituals and forbade killing of animals for the attainment of food. He condemned inequality based on birth and advocated feeding the poor as the highest form of worship. To achieve all these objectives, he established different organisations like ‘Suddha Sanmarga Sathya Sangam’ meaning ‘society for pure truth in universal self-hood’. He also established ‘The Sathya Dharma Salai’ in Vadalur, a facility serving free food without any caste destinations and opened the ‘Sathya Gnana Sabha’ (Hall of True Knowledge).

As we know, he advocated feeding the poor as the highest form of worship. To fulfill this objective, he established his mission in 1867 to feed the poor. Through this mission, he dedicated himself for a selfless service to the human beings at large, and towards doing good to them when they suffer from hunger, thirst, disease, ignorance, poverty and tear and also regarding killing and taking flesh.

Sathya Dharma Salai

In 1867, he set up an office serving free food named “The Sathya Dharma Salai” in Vadalur. There all individuals are served free food with no station differentiations. The land for the office was given by kind, liberal individuals and the enlisted records are accessible for seeing by the guests. The free office proceeds with its administration till right now. Ramalinga hated individuals eating non-veg nourishments, about which he said: “When I see men feeding on the coarse and vicious food of meat, it is an ever-recurring grief to me”

One of the primary objectives of Ramalinga Swami was to help feed the poor. Ramalinga had a direct relationship with Shaiva faith. Ramalinga and his followers published the first major volume of his poems as Thiruvartup. Ramalinga established the Almshouse of unity in 1867 for the help of the poor. He emphasizes that poor have ‘unmatched honor’. He addressed his concern for these hungry poor in his founding of the Almshouse of unity.

It is clear from Ramalinga’s verses that he observed hunger and poverty first hand, which is ‘Whenever I saw plants, withering and dried up, I also withered. I saw people, associated with hunger and terribly weary, going to every house, yet their hunger was not removed, and my heart suffered intensely. Those who suffer with relentless disease, I saw them of me and my heart trembled. I saw those people, poor and of unmatched honor, their hearts weary, and I grew weak’. This verse is extraordinary for Ramalinga’s expression of empathy for the poor, weary, diseased, and hungry whom he encountered.

Suddha Sanmarga Sathya Sangam

Ramalinga established different organizations like ‘Suddha Sanmarga Sathya Sangam’ meaning ‘society for pure truth in universal self-hood’. He opened the “Sathya Gnana Sabha” (Hall of True Knowledge) at Vadalur on January 25, 1872. One of the primary teachings of Vallalar is ‘Service to mankind is path of moksha’. He declared that death is not natural and that our life’s first priority should be to

fight death. He declared religion in itself is darkness. He laid a very great emphasis on being vegetarian. He said God is 'Arut Perum Jothi' who is personification of mercy and knowledge. He said the path of compassion and mercy are the only path to God. Through this mission, he dedicated himself towards selfless service to the human beings at large, and to do well to them when they suffer from hunger, thirst, disease, ignorance, poverty and tears.

The Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Movement was one of the most important factors in the religious history of the nineteenth century Tamil Nadu. It was spiritual in its content but it had its own overtones in the field of social reform also. It was not only a new religion but also a new spiritual movement with due emphasis on social problems. It wanted everyone not to confine themselves within the limits of anyone religion but to rise to such high spiritual realms, as to shed all differences of caste, creed, religion, nationality and to experience the ultimate reality.

The Sanmarga Movement stood for only one God. He should be worshipped in the form of Effulgence of Light with true love. Petty gods and deities should not be worshipped. For that remembrance he lighted a lamp at Vadalur Asramam. Meat should not be eaten. Sacrifice of living creatures should not be performed in the name of these gods. No difference of caste, religion, sect, etc. should be observed. Every life should be held in as much regard as one's own life on the basis of Universal brotherhood. The Universal brotherhood is extended to animals and even to plants. Feeding the hungry is the key to the kingdom of Heaven. The dead should not be cremated, but should be buried, which is the Dravidian culture. All superstitious beliefs, customs and practices should be given up.

Deepajothi Worship

Vallalar established the Jyoti Darshan in 1972. He advocated the philosophy of worshipping the flame of a lighted lamp as a symbol of eternal power. This practice that is followed by his followers is called as Deepajothi Worship. Deepa indicating the Lamp and the Jothi indicating the flame of the lighted lamp.

The meaning to this way of thinking is that Ramalinga thought that all will evaporate from this Maya World as a fire and he additionally demonstrated that in his temple, the focus was not on offerings, oblations, and customs. Rather, by focusing on the fire of the lit light alone, one could get educated and the dimness of obliviousness eliminated.

Thiruvarutpa

On 25 January 1872, Râmalingam opened the "Sathya Gnana Sabha" (Hall of True Knowledge) at Vadalur. One of the essential lessons of Valallar is "Administration to Living Beings is the way of Liberation/Moksha". He pronounced that demise isn't characteristic that our life's primary goal ought to be to battle passing. He proclaimed religion in itself a dimness. He laid an incredible accentuation on being vegan. He said God is "Arul Perum Jothi" who is exemplification of

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Grace or benevolence and information. He said the way of sympathy and kindness are the solitary way to God.

Ramalinga's *Thiruvartuppa*, a book of devotional poems in Tamil was published in 1867 which became a landmark in the history of his legacy and community. Ramalinga's writings were famous in the metropolis of Chennai and in the area in which he lived. These students had worked for years to publish his poems on a large scale. They presented the work of Ramalinga in an authoritative Shaiva text. Focusing on the choices that Ramalinga and his followers made regarding the material form, organization, and content of the 1867 publication, they used print as a tool to gain religious and textual authority. As a technology new to mass religious communications in South Asia, print provided novel possibilities for canonical claims, especially for religious leaders like Ramalinga, who was without the backing of long-standing and powerful Shaiva institutions that dominated Tamil literary production and status through at least the end of the nineteenth century.

Ramalinga's next re-visitations are on the subject of solidarity between creatures. He stresses that empathy is a fundamental part of enlightened morals, and he attests that information, supportiveness, and solidarity won't be found in a world without sympathy. He talks in expansive terms of the solidarity between various kinds of creatures, however he obviously has as a primary concern social solidarity, adding that without empathy, the great treatment of powerless creatures by the solid will be annihilated by such feelings as jealousy. For instance, he noticed that the woods is ignoble, loaded with creatures like tigers and lions that do not have any sympathy for different creatures. Spots where individuals need empathy are comparatively without an enlightened ethics. While above we saw Ramalinga maintain the shastric thought of the ravenous as dishonorable heathens, here he changes the connection between the commendable and contemptible 38 section 2 into one between the solid and the frail. Temperance rises out of sympathy and involves the collaboration—without a doubt, solidarity—between the powerless and poor. Despite the fact that he doesn't unequivocally make reference to class and rank now, it appears to be certain that he has as a main priority the social divisions of the sort that were fortified by setting up Shaiva practices of giving, thus this entry can be perused as an inconspicuous investigation of Shaiva conventionality.

Spiritual

The word Spiritual means the matter and the relation to spirit. Any peaceful activity or experience can be claimed as spiritual. It is a concept of people treating it in different ways. Some people believe that spirituality is a part of religion, while others who are not religious claim to have spiritual experiences. Spirituality may include search for god, the supernatural, a divine influence in their lives, or information about the afterlife, and how to best deal with each. Many philosophers work to find answers to spiritual influences. Throughout the world however, philosophers have often had ideas about spirituality.

Otherworldliness and religion can be difficult to distinguish yet there are some lovely characterized contrasts between the two. Religion is a particular arrangement of coordinated convictions and practices, generally shared by a network or gathering. Otherworldliness is a greater amount of an individual practice and has to do with having a feeling of harmony and reason. It additionally identifies with the way toward creating convictions around the importance of life and association with others. One way that may assist you with understanding the connection among otherworldliness and religion is envisioned as a round of football. The principles, officials, different players, and field markings help manage you as you play the game likewise religion may direct you to discover your otherworldliness. Kicking the ball around a recreation center, without playing on the field or with all the standards and guidelines, can likewise give you satisfaction and fun and still communicate the substance of the game, like otherworldliness throughout everyday life.

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Different Types of Spirituality

The different types of spirituality are as follows:

Mystical Spirituality: It is based around a longing to move past the material world, past the faculties, conscience and even past time. This methodology focuses on close to home connections and a feeling of solidarity with all things.

Authoritarian Spirituality: It is an especially solid type of otherworldliness based around a requirement for definition and rules. This kind of otherworldliness is especially basic in explicit strict practices.

Intellectual Spirituality: It focuses on building knowledge and understanding of spirituality through analysing history and spiritual theories. This approach can be found in the study of religion, also known as theology.

Service Spirituality: It is a common form of spirituality in many religious faiths. This is predominantly built around serving others as a form of spiritual expression.

Social Spirituality: It is frequently drilled by individuals who experience a profound inclination in the organization of others. Social help is regularly seen as one of the significant parts of otherworldliness all in all.

Love and Unity

Love can be said to be a strong and positive mental state, the deepest interpersonal affection, to the simplest pleasure. The sense of love can differ from person to person such as a love of a mother differs from the love of a spouse. Love can also refer to a feeling of strong attraction and emotional attachment. Love can be both positive and negative. Positive love includes human kindness, compassion and affection while negative love includes selfishness and egotism. Love has been postulated to be a function that keeps human beings together against menaces and to facilitate the continuation of the species.

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On the off chance that the importance of life lies in the shared objective of people, at that point there appears to be no uncertainty about what this is. What everybody makes progress toward is bliss. ‘Satisfaction’, no doubt, is a weak, occasion camp kind of word, suggestive of hyper smiles and horsing around about in a kaleidoscopic coat.

Yet, as Aristotle perceives in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, it works as a sort of gauge in human existence, as in you can’t sensibly inquire as to why we should try to be cheerful. It’s anything but a way to something different, as cash or force for the most part may be. It is more similar to needing to be regarded. Craving it simply is by all accounts part of our inclination. Here, at that point, is a basic term of sorts. The issue is that it is so urgently vague. The possibility of bliss appears to be both crucial and vacuous. What is considered as satisfaction? Consider the possibility that you discover it in threatening old women. Somebody who is resolved to turn into an entertainer may spend vain hours trying out while living on a concession. For a large part of the time she is on edge, discouraged, and somewhat eager, she is not what we would usually call happy, her life is not pleasant or enjoyable, yet she is, so to speak, prepared to sacrifice her happiness to her happiness.

At the time of Thiruvartuppa’s publication, print become the most widespread medium for textual transmission. Print also served a variety of religious groups and audiences – elite, popular, orthodox and heterodox – which used the technology to produce and distribute text across vast distances and to diverse social groups. The printing press was accessible to anyone who had the money to utilize it. In doing so, it offered the potential to transform the relationships of authority between established religious institutions and leaders on the one hand, and those who were articulating new religious visions from the institutional margins, on the other.

Check Your Progress

1. When and where was Vallalar born?
2. What did Vallalar oppose?
3. State one of the essential lessons of Vallalar.
4. What does intellectual spirituality focus on?

8.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Vaallalar was born on 5th October, 1823 at Marudhur, a village near Chidambaram which lies in the present day Cuddalore district of Tamil Nadu.
2. He opposed superstitions and rituals and forbade killing of animals for the attainment of food.

3. One of the essential lessons of Vallalar is “Administration to Living Beings is the way of Liberation/Moksha”.
4. Intellectual spirituality focuses on building knowledge and understanding of spirituality through analysing history and spiritual theories.

Vallalar

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8.4 SUMMARY

- Ramalinga renounced the world at the young age of thirteen and evolved in his spiritual journey from being a devotee of Shiva to worshipping the formless.
- As we know, he advocated feeding the poor as the highest form of worship. To fulfill this objective, he established his mission in 1867 to feed the poor.
- In 1867, he set up an office serving free food named “The Sathya Dharma Salai” in Vadalur. There all individuals are served free food with no station differentiations.
- Ramalinga had a direct relationship with Shaiva faith. Ramalinga and his followers published the first major volume of his poems as *Thiruvartpa*. Ramalinga established the Almshouse of unity in 1867 for the help of the poor.
- He laid an incredible accentuation on being vegan. He said God is “Arul Perum Jothi” who is exemplification of Grace or benevolence and information. He said the way of sympathy and kindness are the solitary way to God.
- Ramalinga’s *Thiruvartpa*, a book of devotional poems in Tamil was published in 1867 which became a landmark in the history of his legacy and community.
- He talks in expansive terms of the solidarity between various kinds of creatures, however he obviously has as a primary concern social solidarity, adding that without empathy, the great treatment of powerless creatures by the solid will be annihilated by such feelings as jealousy.
- Spirituality may include search for god, the supernatural, a divine influence in their lives, or information about the afterlife, and how to best deal with each.
- Social spirituality is frequently drilled by individuals who experience a profound inclination in the organization of others.
- What everybody makes progress toward is bliss. ‘Satisfaction’, no doubt, is a weak, occasion camp kind of word, suggestive of hyper smiles and horsing around about in a kaleidoscopic coat.

NOTES

8.5 KEY WORDS

- **Dalit:** It is a name for people belonging to the lowest caste in India, characterized as “untouchable”.
- **Moksha:** It refers to liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth (samsara) in Indian philosophy and religion.
- **Spirituality:** It is the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things.

8.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Which organizations did Vallalar establish to achieve his objectives?
2. Write a short note on the ‘Sathya Dharma Salai’.
3. What does spirituality include?
4. List any two types of spirituality.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss Ramalinga Swami’s initiatives to feed the poor.
2. Elaborate upon Vallalar’s thoughts on solidarity between creatures.

8.7 FURTHER READINGS

- Gupta, Krishna. 1996. *Social Equality and the Indian Constitution*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Co.
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UNIT 9 PERIYAR E.V.RAMASWAMY (1879-1973)

*Periyar E.V.Ramaswamy
(1879-1973)*

NOTES

Structure

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Objectives
- 9.2 Periyar's Early Life and Association With The Indian National Congress
 - 9.2.1 Vaikom Satyagraha (1924-25)
- 9.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 9.4 Summary
- 9.5 Key Words
- 9.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 9.7 Further Readings

9.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you learnt about the Ramalinga Swamigal, also known as Vallalar, one most famous Tamil Saints and also one of the greatest Tamil poets of the 19th century. In this unit, the discussion will turn towards Periyar Ramaswamy. Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, commonly known Periyar, was an Indian social activist and politician who started the Self-Respect Movement and Dravidar Kazhagam. He is known as the 'Father of the Dravidian movement'. During his long life, he was a fierce critic of Brahminical dominance in Tamil society, as well as gender and caste inequality. In this unit, we will examine his early life, his association with the Indian national Congress during the freedom movement as well as his famous Vaikom Satyagraha. In the next unit, we will go on to discuss his Self-Respect Movement and the Justice Party.

9.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss Periyar's association with the Indian National Congress
- Describe the Vaikom satyagraha

9.2 PERIYAR'S EARLY LIFE AND ASSOCIATION WITH THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

Thanthai Periyar was born on September 17, 1879 in Erode in the British colonial Madras presidency. Periyar's father was the priest Venkatappa Naicker and mother Chinnathyee, Muthammal. He had one elder sibling named Krishnaswamy and two sisters named Kannamma and Ponnuthoy. His married Nagammai at the age of 19 and had his second marriage was in 1948 to Maniammai.

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The Brahmins set up the Varnashrama Dharma wherein people were categorized as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. The beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of different socio-cultural movements for the reorganization of Tamil society. Periyar's thoughts on religion were based on rationalism as he opposed the oppressive caste system, untouchability and repudiation of women's rights. He advocated women's liberation and widow remarriage but vehemently opposed child marriage. Moreover, he emphasized on the need for making equal opportunities available and accessible for non-Brahmins in order to end the domination of the upper classes.

Periyar began his political career as a Congress representative in Erode. He was a member of the Indian National Congress in 1919, but resigned in 1925 as he felt that the party was only playing sectarian politics. He was the chairman of Erode Municipality and undertook Constructive Programs spreading the use of Khadi, picketing toddy shops, boycotting shops selling foreign cloth, and eradicating untouchability. In 1921, Periyar was imprisoned for picketing toddy shops in Erode. When his wife as well as his sister joined the agitation, it gained momentum, and the administration was forced to come to a compromise. He was again arrested during the Non-Cooperation movement and the Temperance movement. In 1922, Periyar was elected the President of the Madras Presidency Congress Committee during the Tirupur session where he advocated strongly for reservation in government jobs and education. His attempts were defeated in the Congress party due to a strong presence of discrimination and indifference.

Gurukulam Incident

In a place called Cheranmadevi in Tirunelveli district, a residential school, also known as Gurukulam, was started with help from the Tamil Nadu Congress. The school was operated by the nationalist chief V.V.S Iyer in Tirunelveli. On receipt of a complaint, Periyar found that Brahmin children and Non-Brahmin children were given food in separate places. He advised Iyer to treat children alike and not instill communalism into them by putting them into separate groups. Iyer refused to listen to Periyar's advice.

Periyar went on to confront Gandhi over separate dining places for Brahmin and non-Brahmin students. The arrangement for separate dining places for Brahmin and non-Brahmin students was implemented by him which was strongly opposed by Periyar. For resolving the issue, Gandhi proposed a compromise saying that not dining together with members of another community is not a transgression and some consideration could be given to their fear and reluctance. Consequently, a discontented Periyar left the birthday celebrations.

When Periyar had joined the Congress in 1919, he believed that the prominent people in that organization were enlightened and hoped that with their co-operation, he could get rid of the practice of untouchability. Periyar unsuccessfully tried to pass a resolution regarding communal representation five times. In 1925, Periyar made the last and sixth attempt at getting the Tamil Nadu Congress to pass the resolution regarding communal representation at a conference held in

Kanchipuram in 1925. However, he did not succeed and in utter disgust, he left the Congress and associated himself with the Justice Party and the Self-Respect Movement which aimed at developing a sense of self-respect among the lower castes and achieving an equal status for them in society.

The Justice Party had been demanding a better representation for non-Brahmins in government and issued an order to implement it after coming to power in the Madras Presidency. Periyar's prominence spread far and wide with his Vaikom Satyagraha of 1924, a movement demanding the right of all the lower castes to pass through the roads leading up to the Shri Mahadeva temple in Vaikom. Periyar participated in the agitation and was arrested twice. He came to be known as Vaikom Veerar (Hero of Vaikom). Through the 1920s and 1930s, he remained active in driving social as well as political change in the Tamil territory and challenged the conservatism of the Congress. He recreated a new Tamil identity which was based on an egalitarian ideal and opposed the identity created by the Congress. He contended that social status and caste system were imported into the Tamil region with the coming of the Aryans, who spoke Sanskrit and came from North India.

During the thirties, while Congress followed the policy of imposing Hindi, he drew a parallel with Aryanisation asserting that it has turned into an assault on the Tamil sense of identity and pride. Under his leadership, the Dravidian movement had become a fight for the Tamil identity. During the 1940's, Periyar launched Dravidar Kazhagam, which promoted an impartial Dravida Nadu including Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, and Kannada framework. The Dravidian linguistic changed into the dream on which he based his concept of a Dravida countrywide identity. Those contemplations had an original affect at the molding of the political character and convention of the Tamil talks in Madras Presidency. Periyar passed away in 1973 at the age of 94.

Periyar's thoughts and ideas have been arranged into a collection of diaries and periodicals which have been distributed by examining different books by different researchers regarding the subject matter based on Periyar's social musings. The current investigation recognizes around ten significant issues on social development on which Periyar talked ceaselessly for bringing about change in society such as the caste system, women's maturity, Hindi opposition and rationalism, false notion obliteration, Justice Party, EVR and Kula Kalvi Thittam, hereditary schooling policy, and anti-Brahmanism.

9.2.1 Vaikom Satyagraha (1924–25)

On 30th March 1924, Satyagrahis by the name of Kunjappu, Bahuleyan and Venniyll Govinda Panicker strolled connected at the hip towards a notification board that read, "Ezhavas and other low standings are disallowed through this street." The police officers watching the street would stop the three men and ask them their rank. Kunjappu would announce his Pulayan caste, Bahuleyan would attest his Ezhava position and Venniyll Govinda Panicker would declare he was a Nair. Kunjappu and Bahuleyan would be denied passage on the reason that they were lower castes.

*Periyar E.V.Ramaswamy
(1879-1973)*

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The Ezhavas first took up the issue in 1905. The Ezhava representatives in the Travancore Legislature (Kochu Kunjan Channar, Kunju Panicker and Kumaran Asan) raised the question of use of the public roads around the temples by avarnas. The authorities remained adamant and refused to take up the matter even for discussion because it was considered a religious question. In 1920–21, representative Asan also raised the question and it was decided to shift the notice boards a little so that some parts of the roads would be accessible to the avarnas.

The three men would, in any case, persevere, and they would be captured. As each man got captured, more Satyagrahis would have their spot, denoting the beginning of the Vaikom Satyagraha: one of Kerala's first coordinated movements against Hindu upper castes to gain access to public roads leading to temples in Vaikom, Travancore

Women assumed an extraordinary position in the Vaikom Satyagraha, with the huge scope investment of women being seen unexpectedly during the Satyagraha. This denoted the entry of women into the socio-political awareness of the country.

The Satyagraha also built a bridge between the social justice and independence movements in India, by bearing testament to the efficacy of non-cooperation as a mode of protest, while also rallied princely states like Travancore into the burgeoning freedom struggle. But most notably, it opened an insulated and unquestioning country's eyes to the realities of caste at a time when national harmony in the name of the freedom struggle had assumed precedence over daily human right violations taking place in its name.

Periyar's Role in the Vaikom Satyagraha

The Vaikom Satyagraha had begun on March 30 with the active support of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee. As he was then the president of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, Periyar was at the forefront of the protest. Due to his activities, he was arrested twice by the authorities. To mobilize support, he visited villages in and around Vaikom and delivered public speeches in several towns. His campaign tour stretched to Thiruvananthapuram and even further to Nagercoil. Periyar in his speeches made a cogent and compelling case for it. He used his wit and folk logic to punch holes in the argument of the orthodox.

As president of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee Periyar was part of every consultative meeting, peace committee, campaign party, etc., including the eight-member deputation constituted to meet the Diwan. Every major personality who came to Vaikom met with Periyar. The Satyagraha ended in partial victory in November 1925: three out of four streets were thrown open.

Check Your Progress

1. When was Periyar born?
2. Why did Periyar resign from the Congress?

9.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

*Periyar E.V.Ramaswamy
(1879-1973)*

1. Thanthai Periyar was born on September 17, 1879 in Erode in the British colonial Madras presidency.
2. Periyar was a member of the Indian National Congress in 1919, but resigned in 1925 as he felt that the party was only playing sectarian politics.

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9.4 SUMMARY

- Thanthai Periyar was born on September 17, 1879 in Erode in the British colonial Madras presidency.
- The beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of different socio-cultural movements for the reorganization of Tamil society.
- Periyar's thoughts on religion were based on rationalism as he opposed the oppressive caste system, untouchability and repudiation of women's rights.
- Periyar began his political career as a Congress representative in Erode. He was a member of the Indian National Congress in 1919, but resigned in 1925 as he felt that the party was only playing sectarian politics.
- In a place called Cheranmadevi in Tirunelveli district, a residential school, also known as Gurukulam, was started with help from the Tamil Nadu Congress. The school was operated by the nationalist chief V.V.S Iyer in Tirunelveli.
- On receipt of a complaint, Periyar found that Brahmin children and Non-Brahmin children were given food in separate places.
- The arrangement for separate dining places for Brahmin and non-Brahmin students was implemented by him which was strongly opposed by Periyar.
- For resolving the issue, Gandhi proposed a compromise saying that not dining together with members of another community is not a transgression and some consideration could be given to their fear and reluctance. Consequently, a discontented Periyar left the birthday celebrations.
- He left the Congress and associated himself with the Justice Party and the Self-Respect Movement which aimed at developing a sense of self-respect among the lower castes and achieving an equal status for them in society.
- The Vaikom Satyagraha had begun on March 30 with the active support of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee. As he was then the president of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, Periyar was at the forefront of the protest.
- To mobilize support, he visited villages in and around Vaikom and delivered public speeches in several towns.

- As president of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee Periyar was part of every consultative meeting, peace committee, campaign party, etc., including the eight-member deputation constituted to meet the Diwan.

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9.5 KEY WORDS

- **Ezhava:** The Ezhavas are a community with origins in the region of India presently known as Kerala, where in the 2010s they constituted about 23% of the population and were reported to be the largest Hindu community.
 - **Egalitarian:** It is a belief in human equality especially with respect to social, political, and economic affairs.
 - **Rationalism:** It is the practice or principle of basing opinions and actions on reason and knowledge rather than on religious belief or emotional response.
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9.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the early life of Periyar.
2. Write a short-note on the Gurukulam Incident.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Examine Periyar's association with the Indian National Congress.
 2. Describe the Vaikom Satyagraha and Periyar's role in it.
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9.7 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 10 SELF RESPECT MOVEMENT AND THE JUSTICE PARTY

NOTES

Structure

- 10.0 Introduction
- 10.1 Objectives
- 10.2 Periyar and Justice Party
- 10.3 The Self-Respect Movement: Aims and Work
- 10.4 Answers to 'Check Your Progress' Questions
- 10.5 Summary
- 10.6 Key Words
- 10.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 10.8 Further Readings

10.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you learnt about the early life of Periyar and his association with the Indian National Congress. In this unit, we will discuss the Self-Respect Movement and the Justice Party. Also called the Dravidan Movement, the Self Respect Movement demanded equal rights for the backward caste, with a focus in the rights of women. Most importantly though - as the leaders of this movement professed – the movement fought for the people of the backward caste to have “self-respect” in the society.

The Justice Party was established on 20 November 1916 in Victoria Memorial Hall in Madras by Dr C. Natesa Mudaliar and co-founded by T. M. Nair and P. Theagaraya Chetty as a result of a series of non-Brahmin conferences and meetings in the presidency. During its early years, the party was involved in petitioning the imperial administrative bodies and British politicians demanding more representation for non-Brahmins in government. The Justice Party was isolated in contemporary Indian politics by its many controversial activities. It opposed Brahmins in civil service and politics, and this anti-Brahmin attitude shaped many of its ideas and policies. In 1939, Periyar became the head of the Justice Party, and in 1944, he changed its name to Dravidar Kazhagam

10.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the development of the Self-Respect Movement in the Madras Presidency

- Explain the aims and objectives of the Self-Respect Movement
- Discuss the achievements of the Justice Party

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10.2 PERIYAR AND JUSTICE PARTY

In 1916, the Justice Party was established by Dr C. Natesa Mudaliar and co-founded by T. M. Nair and P. Theagaraya Chetty. In December 1916, the party released its manifesto which was non-Brahmin in nature. The anti-Brahmin nature of the party helped ferment the Dravidian movement later on. After the implementation of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms and the system of diarchy in the Madras Presidency, the Justice Party came to power.

The reasons behind the popularity and acceptability of the Justice Party in Tamil Nadu can be explained by discussing the social order in Tamil society at the society. The Brahmins, who constituted less than 3.2 percent of the total population, had control over all government positions. They were also the main perpetrators of repression and injustice to other communities. The Justice Party held that this domination of Brahmins by society had led to the development of Brahmins in all fields including education and politics while neglecting the non-Brahmins. Thus, it was imperative to establish an organization that provides communal representation. The politics of the Justice Party argued that a working class society and politics were essential for the unification of Non-Brahmins. The Justice Party policies upset the perceived social order and expanded the antagonism between the Brahmins and Non-Brahmins in Tamil society.

Periyar joined the Justice Party after quitting the Indian National Congress for what he felt was its upper caste bias. By 1938, Periyar had become the President of the Justice Party. In 1944, he transformed the Justice Party into the social organization known as 'Dravida Kazhagam'.

The main contribution of the Justice Party in its initial years in power was social justice. Women were given voting rights and the mid-day meal scheme was introduced. It also introduced communal G.O. to legislate reservations. Another important development was that Dr. Muthulashmi Reddy, a leader of the Justice Party, became the first woman legislator in India. Her efforts led to the abolition of Devadasi system in India.

The Justice Party and Dravidar Kazhagam were the political archetypes of the current day Dravidian parties, for example, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK) which have ruled over Tamil Nadu without disturbance since 1967.

Contribution of Justice Party

- The Justice Party secured political representation for Non-Brahmins in Madras Presidency.

- The party was in conflict with Gandhi for his praise for Brahminism (Varna system).
- The Justice Party fought against Brahmins for its political rights in the field of administrative services and other job opportunities.
- The Justice Party is known for the introduction of caste-based reservation and educational and social reforms.

Achievements

- Empowerment of lower classes
- It gave reservations to various communities in government jobs and other sectors.
- Legislation that endorsed Dalits to use public places without discrimination and to attend parliamentary meetings.
- Dalits could get entry into temples.
- Conducted marriages without Brahmin priests and increased acceptance of inter-caste marriages called self-respect marriages.
- The abolition of the Devadasi system in temples.
- The party also played a vital role in allowing women to contest elections paving way for Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy to become the first woman legislator in India.
- Initiating the mid-day meal scheme

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10.3 THE SELF-RESPECT MOVEMENT: AIMS AND WORK

The self-respect movement is a south Asian movement, started in 1925 by S. Ramanathan. This movement was headed by Periyar in India, particularly in Tamil Nadu. The influence of the movement can be seen not just in Tamil Nadu but also in countries with large Tamil populations, such as Malaysia and Singapore. It was established to destroy the Hindu social order dividing people on the basis of caste and religion.

This Movement focused on Self-Respect at social and political levels. The primary aim of this Movement was to disseminate valuable information on political schooling, to permit individuals to carry on with an existence of independence from servitude, to get rid of a wide range of unnecessary traditions, unimportant functions and offbeat convictions in the public eye, to destroy untouchability, to give equivalent rights to women, and so on.

Periyar's philosophy of self-respect is based on his image of an ideal world and a universally accepted brotherhood. It is a philosophy which preaches that

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human actions should be based on rational thinking. Further, it is an outcome of the natural instinct of human beings to examine every object and action with a spirit of inquiry. The philosophy of self-respect should also refuse to submit to anything irrational as equivalent to slavery because it preaches that human actions should be guided by reason. Further, the notion of right and wrong should evolve from rational thinking and the conclusions drawn from reason should be respected under all circumstances.

Freedom means respect to thoughts and actions which is considered 'right' by human beings on the basis of 'reason'. Therefore, there is not much difference between 'freedom' and 'self-respect'. It was the basis of Periyar's appeals to people to develop self-respect.

Periyar preached that there should not be any monopoly by any section of the society on the grounds of belonging to a priestly class, such as in the case of India done by the Brahmins. According to him, the priestly class dictates the social conscience and defines public mores and instils a feeling of diffidence among the other communities at large, thereby depriving them of self-respect. It is by imbibing the feeling of diffidence that they claim to belong to a 'superior' community with the privilege of conducting religious rituals and customs. This perception of superiority has been perpetrated to practice many inhuman practices such as forbidding certain people from using tanks, wells and at times even the streets. This led to certain sporadic incidences of violence and atrocities based on the social hierarchy of caste and discrimination prevalent in the country. Therefore, it is Periyar's concept of self-respect which calls for agitations against these unjust restrictions. It certainly helped in eliminating such evils especially in south India.

Objectives of Self-Respect Movement

The objectives of the self-respect movement were to:

- End Brahmanical dominance.
- Change the social structure and provide equal rights.
- End untouchability and establish a united society.
- Encourage people to abolish the caste system and titles.
- Demand equal respect and opportunities for women. As the movement advocated the upliftment of women, it laid emphasis on women's education. However, ultimately it did not prove to be effective as far as gender equality was concerned.

Impact of the Self-Respect Movement

The impact of the Self-Respect Movement were as follows:

- Hindu marriage became legal without the presence of Hindu priest. It also promoted widow marriage.

- The movement inculcated nationalist feelings among the masses of Tamil Nadu.
- It led to the establishment of self-respect league in Tamil Nadu. Its first National conference took place on 27 November, 1927. Thirty-two resolutions were passed in this league.
- The supporters of the movement started opposing Hindu religion since the caste system was the result of Hinduism. Brahmins were regarded as the custodians of Hindu religion that is why the supremacy of Brahmins was also questioned.

Limitations

The limitations of the movement were as follows:

- The movement failed to liberate women as well as the lower castes. It could not ensure equal rights for them.
- The ambit of the movement was confined only to Tamil Nadu.
- The movement may have succeeded in reducing the dominance of the upper castes in administration; however, it strengthened the middle castes which were the backbone of the rural economy.
- Without proper land reforms, the control of rural economy by the middle castes kept the lower castes in a continued state of suppression.

The Self-respect Movement played an essential role in the history of Tamil Nadu. In present times, Tamil Nadu exercises a proper balance of power between different castes and religions the contribution of which can be attributed to Periyar. These social reforms were effective and enormous which has made his legacy everlasting.

Check Your Progress

1. Who established the Justice Party?
2. What was the main contribution of the Justice Party in its initial years?
3. Who was the first female legislator in India?
4. List two objectives of the Self-Respect Movement.

10.4 ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’ QUESTIONS

1. In 1916, the Justice Party was established by Dr C. Natesa Mudaliar and co-founded by T. M. Nair and P. Theagaraya Chetty.

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2. The main contribution of the Justice Party in its initial years in power was social justice.
3. Dr. Muthulashmi Reddy, a leader of the Justice Party, became the first woman legislator in India. Her efforts led to the abolition of Devadasi system in India.
4. Two objectives of the self-respect movement were to:
 - End Brahmanical dominance.
 - Change the social structure and provide equal rights.

10.5 SUMMARY

- In 1916, the Justice Party was established by Dr C. Natesa Mudaliar and co-founded by T. M. Nair and P. Theagaraya Chetty.
- The anti-Brahmin nature of the party helped ferment the Dravidian movement later on.
- The reasons behind the popularity and acceptability of the Justice Party in Tamil Nadu can be explained by discussing the social order in Tamil society at the society.
- The Brahmins, who constituted less than 3.2 percent of the total population, had control over all government positions.
- The politics of the Justice Party argued that a working class society and politics were essential for the unification of Non-Brahmins.
- By 1938, Periyar had become the President of the Justice Party. In 1944, he transformed the Justice Party into the social organization known as ‘Dravida Kazhagam’.
- The self-respect movement is a south Asian movement, started in 1925 by S. Ramanathan. This movement was headed by Periyar in India, particularly in Tamil Nadu.
- The influence of the movement can be seen not just in Tamil Nadu but also in countries with large Tamil populations, such as Malaysia and Singapore.
- Periyar’s philosophy of self-respect is based on his image of an ideal world and a universally accepted brotherhood. It is a philosophy which preaches that human actions should be based on rational thinking.
- Periyar preached that there should not be any monopoly by any section of the society on the grounds of belonging to a priestly class, such as in the case of India done by the Brahmins.
- The self-respect movement demanded equal respect and opportunities for women. As the movement advocated the upliftment of women, it laid

emphasis on women's education. However, ultimately it did not prove to be effective as far as gender equality was concerned.

- The movement may have succeeded in reducing the dominance of the upper castes in administration; however, it strengthened the middle castes which were the backbone of the rural economy.

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10.6 KEY WORDS

- **Self-Respect Movement:** It is a South Asian movement with the aim of achieving a society where backward castes have equal human rights, and encouraging backward castes to have self-respect in the context of a caste-based society that considered them to be a lower end of the hierarchy.
- **Diarchy:** It was a system of double government introduced by the Government of India Act (1919) for the provinces of British India.
- **Land reforms:** It involves the changing of laws, regulations or customs regarding land ownership. Land reform may consist of a government-initiated or government-backed property redistribution, generally of agricultural land.

10.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. List the objectives of the self-respect movement.
2. Discuss the achievements of the Justice Party.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe the contribution of E. V. Ramasamy Periyar to the self-respect movement.
2. Elaborate upon the role of the Justice Party in Tamil Nadu.

10.8 FURTHER READINGS

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BLOCK - IV
DRAVIDA KAZHAGAM AND
ITS CONTRIBUTION TO DEPRESSED CLASS

Dravida Kazhagam

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UNIT 11 DRAVIDA KAZHAGAM

Structure

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Objectives
- 11.2 Periyar's Sacrifices for Freedom Movement
- 11.3 Dravidar Kazhagam: Aims and Principle
- 11.4 Split in Dravidar Kazhagam
- 11.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 11.6 Summary
- 11.7 Key Words
- 11.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 11.9 Further Readings

11.0 INTRODUCTION

The Dravidar Kazhagam movement was founded by E. V. Ramasamy (Periyar) in 1944 to signify the idea of equality, opposing casteism including untouchability from the Madras Presidency. The roots of this movement lie in the Self-Respect Movement and the Justice Party which claimed to promote similar interest. The primary purpose of the movement was to secure the complete independence of Dravidian Republic. This movement gave birth to many other political parties including Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. In this unit, we will study about the struggles of Periyar for the Freedom Movement along with the aims and principles and later the split of the Dravidar Kazhagam.

11.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the struggles and role of Periyar in the Freedom Movement
- Discuss the causes of formation of the Self-Respect Movement
- Explain the aims and principles of Dravidar Kazhagam party

**11.2 PERIYAR'S SACRIFICES FOR FREEDOM
MOVEMENT**

In 1918, Periyar became the Chairman of Erode Municipality. Despite his serious disdain towards the Hindu religion and its framework especially the brutal way of

*Self-Instructional
Material*

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Brahmins applying ‘Distance’ to smother the Dravidian race, the chief productivity and the unwavering genuineness of E.V.R. got the honours of numerous posts in different public establishments. Periyar was made Honorary Magistrate by the British Government. He held numerous privileged positions like the President, the Secretary, the Vice-President and so on in 29 different public establishments, for example, District Board, Taluk Board, Urban Bank, Religious Davasthanam (Trust), Public Library, War Recruitment Committee, Association of Agriculturists, Association of Merchants, Mahajana School Committee etc. Many fundamental government assistance plans such as the drinking water plan were implemented successfully by him. During his Chairmanship of Erode Municipality, the fellowship between him and C. Rajagopalachariyar (Rajaji) bloomed, who later became the Governor General of India.

In 1919, P. Varadharajulu Naidu and C. Rajagopalachariyar convinced Periyar to join the National Congress party which was led by M.K. Gandhi. Leaving the Chairmanship of Erode Municipality, Periyar enlisted himself in the Congress party.

The Self-Respect Movement and Justice Party merged together under the leadership of Periyar and the merger was given the name Dravidar Kazhagam in 1944. Its headquarters were at Chennai (Tamil Nadu). The party adopted its official flag in 1944, which had a red circle with a black background. The black colour represented the deprivations and the indignities that the Dravidians had to face under the strict Hindu religion while the red colour represented the tireless efforts taken to eliminate the ignorance and blind faith among people and to free them from any kind of mental and materialistic exploitation.

The movement laid the foundation of Tamil people involvement into politics and enthused a new Tamil spirit that later on led to the formation of many parties and challenged the stronghold of the Indian National Congress. It also gave rise to the spirit of unity amongst the Dravidians, especially the ones opposing Hindi language in the seventies. The party adopted a hard line approach towards casteism and the idea of untouchability and was often involved in the mass attempts to change the system.

The Founder of Self-Respect Movement

In December 1925, at Kancheepuram, Periyar coordinated a meeting of Non-Brahmins. He announced that the distinction of racial personality between the Dravidians and the Aryans (Brahmins) had existed from ancient times and moreover its commonness in the Congress Party couldn't at all be denied.

Thus, he focused on the need of convincing the Dravidians to save the self-respect of their race, language, and culture which had been debased by the Brahminical strength of their caste system and odd notion of Hindu religion. In this manner Periyar started the Self-Respect Movement in 1925 after his exit from the Congress Party. In 1929, he took interest in numerous Non-Brahmin Conferences held at different places in Tamil Nadu and proliferated the standards of his Self-Respect Movement to enliven the Dravidian race as well as to liberate them from the servitude of Brahmins. Furthermore, in 1927 Periyar met the Congress chief

M.K. Gandhi at Bangalore and emphatically contended that unless the toxic standing framework called 'Varnashrama Dharma' was removed, the destruction of untouchability determinedly rehearsed by the Brahmins couldn't at all be made conceivable. In addition, he decidedly disclosed to Gandhi that prior to battling for the opportunity of India, three compromising wrongs viz., (1) The Congress Party (Under the order of more Brahmin office conveyors), (2) Hindu religion with its position framework and (3) the Dominance of Brahmins in the general public ought to be stopped first. At the point when the strike of the labourers of the Railway workshop at Nagappattinam broke out, Periyar, as the ally of workers was captured and shipped off to prison. With the active help of Periyar, S. Muthaiya (Mudaliar), a Minister in the P. Subbarayan's Independent Government, actualized the Communal Reservation plan of the Justice Party.

In 1928, Periyar published an English magazine under the title '*Revolt*' and in February 1929, the principal common meeting of Self-Respect Movement was coordinated by Periyar at Chengalpattu. The meeting was managed by W.P.A. Soundara Pandian. Periyar presented another pragmatist marriage framework called 'Dignity Marriage' in which all the strict customs and articulation of 'Mantras' by Brahmins in Sanskrit ought to be illegal. It would be sufficient for the new couple to laurel one another and announce the wedding assertion in their mother tongue. The marriage ought not to be orchestrated affectedly yet ought to be extremely monetary. These were the conditions set by Periyar for his reformatory wedlock framework. By this new marital course of action, he secularized the marriage. Any individual regardless of any religion could lead the marriage by asking the lady of the hour and the groom to trade wreaths and make a statement for turning into life-accomplices. Other than this new wedding framework, Periyar also encouraged inter-caste marriages and widow marriages.

Most Dravidian parties are branches of Dravidar Kazhagam (DK). In addition, there are a couple of different partys in Tamil Nadu that didn't emerge from DK straightforwardly. By and by, both the previous and the last are considered as Dravidian parties on account of the similitude of their beliefs and objectives. Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and its political opponent All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) have been the significant players among the Dravidian parties since the mid-1960s.

Since 1967, the DMK and the AIADMK have been forming governments in Tamil Nadu. These two partys are political opponents. Notwithstanding political unions with the DMK or AIADMK, since the 1990s no other ideological group has won more than a couple of seats in the Indian parliament or the state legislature. Since 1996, individuals from the DMK and AIADMK have held a portfolio in the cabinet of the Indian government. Another Dravidian party is Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. Political media is inescapable in Dravidian legislative issues, with five of the seven boss clergymen from these partys being straightforwardly engaged with Tamil cinema, either as content scholars or entertainers. As of late TV stations possessed by these partys have been utilized for political publicity purposes.

An early pioneer in Dravidian governmental issues was Iyothee Thass in the late nineteenth century. His endeavours united the lower station Dravidians with

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the foundation of the Dravida Mahajana Sabha association in 1891. A significant jump in Dravidian governmental issues was the creation of the Madras United League by non-Brahmin erudite people, who considered the predominance of Brahmins in common organization a danger to the non-Brahmin's share. The League was started at first as a workgroup that helped non-Brahmin understudies in Madras with the help of Dr C. Natesan. It later developed into an ideological group under the endeavours of pioneers like C Natesa Mudaliar, Sir Pitti Theagaroya Chetty and Dr T. M. Nair. The party was named *South Indian Liberal Federation (S. I. L. F.)* popularly known as the Justice Party.

Dravidar Kazhagam Party

The next few years saw a decline in the Justice Party's popularity. In 1938, the then severely debilitated party looked for the initiative of Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, a head of the Dravidian Movement, who turned into its leader. In 1944, Periyar changed the name of the party to Dravidar Kazhagam, 'Dravidian Organization' in English. This move was opposed by certain individuals from the Party who kept challenging decisions as the Justice Party under the administration of P. T. Rajan until 1957. Periyar as the leader of Dravidar Kazhagam thought that challenges in decisions would prompt tradeoffs in standards and pulled out Dravida Kazhagam from parliamentary legislative issues.

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam ('Munnetra' in a real sense signifies 'to bring forward') was shaped. Instead of DMK's dark flag, red was given equivalent significance with the dark in the new party's image indicating its leanings towards socialism. The DMK and its young chiefs got the creative mind of countless youngsters. In the General Election of 1957, the DMK fared well and came out as a serious party and Annadurai and Sampath were chosen as its interim chiefs to the Legislative Assembly and the Lok Sabha, respectively. It was not some time before indications of a split in the D M K became prominent. Some saw their thoughts aligned with Annadurai and others saw their thoughts aligned with Sampath. During his stay in Delhi as Member of the Lok Sabha, Sampath acknowledged two things: one, that Northerners were not as awful as he had assumed; two, that a Dravida Nadu which included Andhra, Kerala and Mysore other than Madras was ludicrous. He likewise despised the incessant hooliganism of his party men. He needed party technique to be made more equitable. Most importantly, he needed party's assets.

Check Your Progress

1. Which privileged positions did Periyar hold in his lifetime?
2. Which flag did the Dravidar Kazhagam party adopt?
3. On what needs did Periyar focus after coordination a non-Brahmins meeting?
4. Which compromising wrongs were needed to be stopped according to Periyar?

11.3 DRAVIDAR KAZHAGAM: AIMS AND PRINCIPLE

The primary purpose of the Dravida Kazhagam was to secure the complete independence of a Dravidian Republic; it was completely opposed to Brahmanical, social, political and ritual dominance of Southern India. It retains the similar ideas and values which Justice Party had. The movement wanted to eliminate the caste, class and creed divide amongst people to foster a balanced society.

The movement works towards the elimination of inequality to ensure that men and women have equal opportunities towards all aspects of life and eradicating the superstitions beliefs based on religion. The party requested the people of Tamil Nadu to reject the caste system and untouchability because these were against the equality of human kind, rationalism, scientific temper and humanity. It requests the government to amend Article 17 of the Constitution which contains the term 'Caste' as it can provide real democracy.

The party urges the government of Tamil Nadu to take immediate legal action against caste, fanaticism, communalism and any of such kind. It condemns the use of caste identity for political gains.

The party is of the view that dividing people as Dalit and non-Dalit will have adverse consequences on the society and it will hinder the view of social emancipation. It also condemns the killing of inter caste lovers and couples and the party is desirous of creating an awareness among the people in this regard by asking the government to take a serious view of such offences.

The party urges the members of the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes and other backward classes to undertake agitations for their rights. It also warns them of the varna-caste system. The party also requests the leaders of these marginalized communities to behave with social responsibilities without any amount of division, discrimination and enmity among themselves.

11.4 SPLIT IN DRAVIDAR KAZHAGAM

The split in Dravidar Kazhagam was due to the different in the thoughts of two political leaders namely, Annadurai and Periyar. It led to the formation of another political party known as DMK in 1949. Given below are some of the differences between the two:

- In 1945, Periyar in a conference asked its volunteer force 'Dravidian Liberation Army' to wear 'black shirts' to differentiate them from others. Anna did not like this idea of wearing black shirt and it was also supported by some of the members of the party.
- Annadurai wrote plays like *label Vendaam* and *Raja part Rangaduri* as an indirect warning to Periyar.

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- Periyar and Annadurai had differences even over freedom and independence. Periyar was of the view that after independence, the country would fall into the hands of Bajaj's and Birla's which would work as British agent. While Annadurai was of the view that colonial rule was going to be wiped off and it would be a joyous occasion even for the Dravidians too as one of their enemies would be leaving now.
- The marriage of Periyar and Maniammal led to the final breakdown of Dravidar Kazhagam. Annadurai formed DMK at Robinson Park at Chennai.

Check Your Progress

5. What was the primary purpose of the Dravida Kazhagam?
6. What does the Dravida Kazhagam party urge the government of Tamilnadu?
7. Which factor led to the final breakdown of Dravidar Kazhagam?

11.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Periyar held numerous privileged positions like the President, the Secretary, the Vice-President and so on in 29 different public establishments, for example, District Board, Taluk Board, Urban Bank, Religious Davasthanam (Trust), Public Library, War Recruitment Committee, Association of Agriculturists, Association of Merchants, Mahajana School Committee etc.
2. The Dravidar Kazhagam party adopted its official flag in 1944, which had a red circle with a black background.
3. Periyar focused on the need of convincing the Dravidians to save the self-respect of their race, language, and culture which had been debased by the Brahminical strength of their caste system and odd notion of Hindu religion.
4. Periyar decidedly disclosed to Gandhi that prior to battling for the freedom of India, three compromising wrongs viz., (1) The Congress Party (Under the order of more Brahmin office conveyors), (2) Hindu religion with its position framework and (3) the Dominance of Brahmins in the general public ought to be stopped first.
5. The primary purpose of the Dravida Kazhagam was to secure the complete independence of a Dravidian Republic; it was completely opposed to Brahmanical, social, political and ritual dominance of Southern India.
6. The Dravida Kazhagam party urges the government of Tamil Nadu to take immediate legal action against caste, fanaticism, communalism and any of such kind. It condemns the use of caste identity for political gains.
7. The marriage of Periyar and Maniammal led to the final breakdown of Dravidar Kazhagam.

11.6 SUMMARY

- In 1918, Periyar became the Chairman of Erode Municipality. Despite his serious disdain towards the Hindu religion and its framework especially the brutal way of Brahmins applying 'Distance' to smother the Dravidian race, the chief productivity and the unwavering genuineness of E.V.R. got the honours of numerous posts in different public establishments.
- In 1919, P. Varadharajulu Naidu and C. Rajagopalachariyar convinced Periyar to join the National Congress party which was led by M.K. Gandhi. Leaving the Chairmanship of Erode Municipality, Periyar enlisted himself in the Congress party.
- The Self-Respect Movement and Justice Party merged together under the leadership of Periyar and the merger was given the name Dravidar Kazhagam in 1944.
- Periyar started the Self-Respect Movement in 1925 after his exit from the Congress Party. In 1929, he took interest in numerous Non-Brahmin Conferences held at different places in Tamil Nadu and proliferated the standards of his Self-Respect Movement to enliven the Dravidian race as well as to liberate them from the servitude of Brahmins.
- Periyar decidedly disclosed to Gandhi that prior to battling for the opportunity of India, three compromising wrongs viz., (1) The Congress Party (Under the order of more Brahmin office conveyors), (2) Hindu religion with its position framework and (3) the Dominance of Brahmins in the general public ought to be stopped first.
- In 1928, Periyar published an English magazine under the title 'Revolt' and in February 1929, the principal common meeting of Self-Respect Movement was coordinated by Periyar at Chengalpattu.
- Most Dravidian parties are branches of Dravidar Kazhagam (DK).
- An early pioneer in Dravidian governmental issues was Iyothee Thass in the late nineteenth century. His endeavours united the lower station Dravidians with the foundation of the Dravida Mahajana Sabha association in 1891.
- The Madras United League by non-Brahmin erudite people was started at first as a workgroup that helped non-Brahmin understudies in Madras with the help of Dr C. Natesan. It later developed into an ideological group under the endeavours of pioneers like C Natesa Mudaliar, Sir Pitti Theagaroya Chetty and Dr T. M. Nair.
- The split in Dravidar Kazhagam was due to the different in the thoughts of two political leaders namely, Annadurai and Periyar. It led to the formation of another political party known as DMK in 1949.

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11.7 KEY WORDS

- **DMK:** Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam is a political party in India, particularly in the state of Tamil Nadu and union territory of Puducherry.
- **Justice Party:** It was a political party in the Madras Presidency of British India. It was established on 20 November 1916 in Victoria Memorial Hall in Madras by Dr C. Natesa Mudaliar and co-founded by T.M. Nair.
- **Dravidians:** It refers to a linguistic group originating in South Asia who predominantly speak any of the Dravidian languages.
- **Caste:** It is a form of social stratification characterized by endogamy, hereditary transmission of a style of life which often includes an occupation, ritual status in a hierarchy, and customary social interaction and exclusion based on cultural notions of purity and pollution.

11.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What did the flag of the Dravidar Kazhagam party represent?
2. What were the conditions set by Periyar for his reformatory marriage framework?
3. What do you mean by the term ‘Munnetra Kazhagam’?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe the contributions of Periyar for the upliftment of Dravidian society.
2. Explain the aims and principles of the Dravida Kazhagam.
3. How did the split in Dravidar Kazhagam take place? Explain.

11.9 FURTHER READINGS

- Gupta, Krishna. 1996. *Social Equality and the Indian Constitution*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Co.
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UNIT 12 SERVICES OF PERIYAR TO TAMIL SOCIETY

*Services of Periyar to
Tamil Society*

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Structure

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Objectives
- 12.2 Ethnic Leadership and Social Change in Tamil Nadu
- 12.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 12.4 Summary
- 12.5 Key Words
- 12.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 12.7 Further Readings

12.0 INTRODUCTION

E. V. Ramasamy, a social reformer, evolved a model for social transformation and organized social reform movements to experiment the model in Tamil society. He evolved his model on the basis of his wide experiences in society and on the basis of rational analysis of the western model of social change. The elements of the model are diametrically opposite to the values practiced in Tamil society in the course of history since time immemorial. E.V.R.'s model found difficulty in disseminating the new values which were deemed unpalatable to the society. Since the Tamil society had deep religious and cultural moorings, people did not relish the popularity of E.V.R. Hence his movement met a stiff resistance from the Tamil society. However, it progressed well with the support of new elites. Having realized the difficulty of disseminating the values, a group parted away from the parent body and formed an ethnic political party Dravida Munnetra Kahagam (DMK). The values evolved by the party are of the nature of using the sentiments of the people on culture and tradition for its purpose. The new values that emerged are quite opposite to the values of E. V.R. In the later years due to the split in the ethnic political party (DMK) a new party was formed (All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam-AIADMK). It developed new profiles which are purely political by mixing up the values of Hindu religion and Tamil culture. It has reached the original stage where from Periyar started his task. And all these developments are due to the personality cult deliberately developed by the leaders in the later years. In this unit, we will study about the services of Periyar to Tamil society.

12.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the reformative goals of Periyar for Tamil's society
- Describe the thoughts and ideas of Periyar on the marriage system
- Explain the steps taken by Periyar for gender equality and education and employment of women

12.2 ETHNIC LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN TAMIL NADU

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E.V.R made an analysis of the Dravidian culture and recognized the components which were influencing it. Furthermore, based on his examination he offered answers for changing the current demand to empower the general public in order to develop and thrive. The political researchers who had given recognition to Raja Rammohan Rai and Dayanandha Saraswathi, Gokhale and Tilak in the Modern Indian Political and Social thought, have not given due place to E.V.R. Even the local researchers faced hindrance in their research of Periyar's work, however they were enlivened to write on E.V.R. after a thorough research and study. Since E.V.R.'s work has so far remained a neglected area in higher level academic deliberations, it is now taken up for discussion.

Periyar's Reformatory Goals for Tamil's Society

E.V.R. set his reformatory goals on the basis of his perception about the socio-economic conditions of the people. He examined the public pride and advancement of the Western nations and wanted that Dravidian Society also should copy the western model for its encouragement. With an unbiased attitude, he unequivocally expressed, "I want to change our general public in all regards to the degree of English talking nations." Consequently, he made an analysis of the foundations for the backwardness of the Dravidian public. He distinguished religion, caste, eccentric convictions, and ignorance, as the components influencing the financial advancement of the individuals. In this manner, he felt that these elements ought to be cleared out. Consequently he needed to change the general public into a casteless, libertarian culture without any social difference. He contrasted the Indian sub-mainland and the landmass of Europe. He differentiated the trademark highlights which caused underdevelopment here from those conditions prevailed in western culture. With respect to the success of Europe, he reviewed a large number of its positive qualities as well. Western culture has totally arranged their schooling towards logical reasoning and objective action and wiped out the eccentric convictions. It is liberated from the universality of religion and social inequality. Thus, in the model of the west EVR found ways and means to transform the Dravidian society. Yet he developed his own analysis of the Dravidian society.

Women rights and women empowerment occupies first and prominent place among all other social reform activities of Periyar E.V.R. There are so many writers, who wrote many books especially on the issue of Periyar E.V.R.'s views and services for the upliftment, empowerment and emancipation of women. K. Veeramani one of the prominent disciples of Periyar, collected and published a separate volume in Tamil with regard to Periyar E.V.R.'s speeches and writings on women empowerment and women rights. A study of Periyar E.V.R.'s speeches and writings in various journals and periodicals was published by Periyar E.V.R. himself and by studying various books compiled by various scholars on the subject matter of Periyar E.V.R.'s views on women rights, the present study identifies about ten important issues on women rights which Periyar E.V.R. continuously

talked about and worked for the upliftment of women. They are: chastity, marriage system, gender equity, women education and employment, property rights to women.

*Services of Periyar to
Tamil Society*

Views on Marriage System

Periyar firmly accepted that mistake; sensation of powerlessness, misery, and aggressive behaviour at home exacted on women by their spouses, and different sufferings by women drove them to petition God for their salvation. He battled against the conventional act of marriage. He felt that however organized relationships were intended to empower a couple to live respectfully all throughout life, at the same time, in the assessment of Periyar, it was sort of a control to oppress women. He seriously censured the idea of kid relationships and child marriage that prevailed during that time. It was believed by the traditionalists that arranging marriages to the girls after they had attended puberty would be a sin and would also be a crime.

Another practice, he emphatically censured which is common even today, is the endowment framework where the girl's family should give the husband a colossal instalment alongside brilliant gems. The reason for this was to help the recently married couple monetarily, however in numerous cases shares were abused by spouses. The result of this maltreatment led to the misuse of the lady of the hour and in specific conditions, resulted in passing the share of the recently hitched spouse. There have been situations where women have been killed, ruined, and consumed alive on the grounds because the family of the lady couldn't make the settlement installment to the spouse. He strongly opposed this abuse of innocent women in the name of dowry and condemned this activity as inhuman.

Equality and Gender

It is to be mentioned that from the start of his early political career, Periyar showed evinced interest in providing gender justice and social empowerment to women. To accomplish his objective of gender uniformity Periyar conducted endless public gatherings, a few state level meetings, and stated a ton of goals of gender equity for women and furthermore passed numerous goals against the informal practice and the standard of religion and society which are corrupting in nature. In the primary Provincial Self-Respect meeting held in Chengleput in February 1929, Periyar arranged and passed the accompanying goals for the foundation of gender equity. Empowering women ought to be supported by the public authority in every government division. The government should reserve half of seats to women in all administration arrangements. It should offer training to women in-your-face responsibilities to wipe out the distinguishing proof of more fragile gender. The government should find a way to grant specialized training to women and make them fit for taking care of the cutting edge innovation. The Chengleput gathering was considered as a pioneer in supporting the gender equity and other social privileges of women. Further this gathering was additionally adulated by the promoters of social equity who upheld that there should be an active participation of women in government business and social transformation development programmes.

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Women Education and Employment

Periyar always felt that for the liberation of women from social restraints there is a requirement of giving them an equal opportunity of education. According to Periyar, women themselves should emerge from the obligation of servitude, without any help from men, given that proper education is provided to them. He unequivocally proposed for giving reservation to girls in schools and women at work. He further demanded that in government service, women should be allowed to be given the roles of ministers and other decision-making authority. Periyar gave more significance to the schooling of a girl child than the training for the male youngster. According to Periyar, if there are two children in a family, one boy and another a girl, and the family can afford schooling and education of just one kid, then this opportunity should be given to the girl child. Periyar further thought that if a boy child is given the opportunity of schooling and education, that schooling will assist him in building up his character which will help him to expand his monetary position, whereas if a girl child is given the same opportunity, then it will encourage her not only to build up a financial position but also make her capable to be useful for the general public and to solve many of the existing social evils.

Need for Change in the Lifestyle of Society and Women

Periyar as a progressive women's activist essayist and as a humanist was profoundly disappointed with the then awful state of women whose lives were restricted by social and religious restraints. He knew that there was a need to improve the self-confidence of women by educating them, and giving them the rights to business, property, social correspondence as well as political rights. Periyar assessed that it would be an ethical obligation with respect to the guardians in providing schooling to their girl child. In the assessment of Periyar, some guardians wrongly accepted that if girls were to be schooled, they would compare themselves with men. He said that it was an absurd and devilish thought. No parent needed be restless about it as the informed women cannot be effectively misled by any misleading men. It would be a pitifully terrible thing, if guardians keep their girl child uninformed because of this insignificant explanation. At a discourse conveyed by Periyar at the Prize Distribution work in the Municipal School for Girls at Karungal Palayam, Erode, he expressed that young women ought to be taught the dynamic and fiery activities like running, high hop, long bounce, wrestling etc. It is important and a necessity for the women to get strength and fortitude in standard with men. Their time and energy ought not to be squandered in light distractions like Kummi (bunches going all around, applauding musically) and in Kolattam (hitting with sticks musically), and improvement of home and themselves.

Check Your Progress

1. On what basis did E.V.R. set his reformative goals?
2. Which ten important issues on women rights did Periyar continuously talk about and work on?
3. What did Periyar do to accomplish his objective of gender uniformity?

12.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. E.V.R. set his reformatory goals on the basis of his perception about the socio-economic conditions of the people.
2. E.V.R. Periyar talked about ten important issues on women rights and worked on them for the upliftment of women. They are: chastity, marriage system, gender equity, women education and employment, property rights to women.
3. To accomplish his objective of gender uniformity Periyar conducted endless public gatherings, a few state level meetings, and stated a ton of goals of gender equity for women and furthermore passed numerous goals against the informal practice and the standard of religion and society which are corrupting in nature.

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12.4 SUMMARY

- E.V.R made an analysis of the Dravidian culture and recognized the components which were influencing it. Furthermore, based on his examination he offered answers for changing the current demand to empower the general public in order to develop and thrive.
- E.V.R. set his reformatory goals on the basis of his perception about the socio-economic conditions of the people. He examined the public pride and advancement of the Western nations and wanted that Dravidian Society also should copy the western model for its encouragement.
- He contrasted the Indian sub-mainland and the landmass of Europe. He differentiated the trademark highlights which caused underdevelopment here from those conditions prevailed in western culture.
- Women rights and women empowerment occupies first and prominent place among all other social reform activities of Periyar E. V.R.
- Periyar E.V.R. firmly accepted that mistake; sensation of powerlessness, misery, and aggressive behaviour at home exacted on ladies by their spouses, and different sufferings by ladies drove them to petition God for their salvation. He battled against the conventional act of marriage.
- Another practice, he emphatically censured which is common even today, is the endowment framework where the lady's family should give the husband a colossal instalment alongside brilliant gems.
- The Chingleput gathering was considered as the pioneer one in supporting the gender equity and other social privileges of ladies. Further this gathering was additionally adulated by the promoters of social equity who upheld that

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there should be an active participation of women in government business and social transformation development programmes.

- According to Periyar, women themselves should emerge from the obligation of servitude, without any help from men, given that proper education is provided to them. He unequivocally proposed for giving reservation to girls in schools and women at work.

12.5 KEY WORDS

- **Salvation:** It is the state of being saved or protected from harm or a dire situation.
- **Gender equity:** It refers to the fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs

12.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. How was the Chengleput gatherings considered as a pioneer in supporting the gender equity and other social privileges of women?
2. Why did Periyar feel the need for changing the lifestyle of society and women?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Analyse Periyar's views on marriage in the context of current times.
2. Explain the thoughts of Periyar on women education and employment.

12.7 FURTHER READING

- Gupta, Krishna. 1996. *Social Equality and the Indian Constitution*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Co.
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UNIT 13 AYOTHIDAS PANDITHAR: CONTRIBUTIONS

Ayothidas Pandithar:
Contributions

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Structure

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 Objectives
- 13.2 Ayothidas Pandithar (1845-1914): Pioneer of the Dravidian Movement
- 13.3 The Connection of Buddhist History and Dalits
- 13.4 Dravida Mahajan Sabha: Principles and Aims
- 13.5 *Oru Paisa Tamilan*
- 13.6 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 13.7 Summary
- 13.8 Key Words
- 13.9 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 13.10 Further Readings

13.0 INTRODUCTION

Tamil Nadu holds a special place in Indian Dalit political history. Since the end of nineteenth century, different intellectuals and pioneers were instrumental for the rise of numerous developments/affiliations and magazines. After B.R. Ambedkar's political appearance, his counterparts from Tamil Nadu – M.C. Rajah (1883-1943), Rettaimalai Sreenivasan (1859-1945), Meenambal (1904-1992) and N. Sivaraj (1892-1964) worked along with him. Iyodhee Thass Pandithar (1845-1914) was without question a pioneer among these leaders. When the Chennai Education Society was founded in 1812, inspired by Kolkata's Asiatic Society (1784) and Chennai district collector Ellis was gathering significant Tamil writings, Kanthappan gave the exemplary Tamil literature *Thirukkural*. Iyodhee Thass and his contemporary Rettaimalai Sreenivasan's work is a source for a basic methodology towards patriotism and for the analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the rise in patriotism. Voices on reservation, reasonable reasoning and hostile to Brahmin developments that later turned into the structure for twentieth century Tamil Nadu politics issues could be seen in the works of educated Dalit people. Recent studies have also shown that their work has essentially added to Tamil Nadu's extraordinary political personality that is seen today. In this unit, we will study in detail about the contributions of Ayothidas for the upliftment of the Depressed Class.

13.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the life events of Ayothidas Pandithar which made him a great Dalit activist

Self-Instructional
Material

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- Describe the contributions of Ayothidas in reform works for the Depressed Class
- Explain the principles and objective of the Dravida Mahajana Sabha and the Advaidananda Sabha

13.2 AYOTHIDAS PANDITHAR (1845-1914): PIONEER OF THE DRAVIDIAN MOVEMENT

Brought into the world in 1845 to a family that had the sponsorship of traditional training and experts of Siddha medication from Chennai, Iyodhee Thass' grandfather Kanthappan was a head servant at the homes of the British who employed Dalits as their butlers.

Iyodhee Thass was a critic of the notion of India being proposed during the time of freedom movement. He opined that it would only benefit the Brahmanical political class. At the point when the Swadeshi Movement got violent during the Bengal partition in 1905 and its impact being felt in Tamil Nadu, Iyodhee Thass unequivocally restricted it.

As Ooty came to be the midyear capital of the Madras administration, workers serving the British were moved and Kanthappan was also transferred to the hill station. Iyodhee Thass, who spent his childhood in Ooty, started his social work by organizing the tribal population. Afterward, it prompted the establishing of Dravida Pandian magazine and the foundation of Dravida Mahajana Sabha that pursued land, training and other social liberties of the individuals.

Generally known as a social reformer, Iyodhee Thass's contribution to the cultural sphere is noteworthy. During the time when Buddhism was going through the period of renaissance, he played a key role in the development of Buddhism in Madras. Two general approaches also came along with this: restricting its scope to only spiritual and scholarly purposes and another for social changes. Iyodhee Thass opted for the latter.

While Buddhism pulled in many pioneers and intelligent people across the nation, Iyodhee Thass' methodology remained different through his proof based strategy and documentation of Buddhism. Tamizhan magazine shows his contributions on Buddhist writings.

Iyodhee Thass contended that writings, sculptures and other obvious proof might have been demolished because of religious attacks, yet the life practices inspired by the Buddhism remain as an evidence. He also said that people who opposed and tried to eliminate Buddhism distorted its existing framework or enforced new forms.

In 1898, Iyodhee Thass set up a society for Buddhism in Chennai and its branches at various places. To oversee and co-ordinate the working of the society,

he started a weekly magazine, Tamizhan in 1907. However, its working was soon hindered because of his death in 1914. Later, its operation was renewed by others.

Besides considering engravings, sculptures and abstract content, Iyodhee Thass also took into account the beliefs, traditional folklore and festivals. Modern history also shows that Buddhism at a point of time was spread across India. Buddhism spread not only through statues but through the life practices and some incomprehensible forms by people, which are aspects of a definite culture.

In Tamil Nadu, he referred to sanctuaries like Madurai Pandi Munni and Salem Thalaivetti Munneswaram where decapitated sculptures of Buddha were replaced with local deities. Iyodhee Thass observed inconsistencies not just in these sculptures, but also in other aspects of the society. According to Iyodhee Thass the deposits of Buddhism remain in Hindu festivals.

Iyodhee Thass was one of the first intellectuals to view the Dalits as a set of highly educated people with high conduct. The colonial period's printing press and his scholarly approach to traditional literature contributed to the alternative history.

An Anti-Caste Discourse in Tamil

His contribution give recorded proof to the anti-caste discussion. He says that Dalits have always been viewed as low in the order and questions how a segment of the society could be deprived of basic things from the earliest point of human civilization. He suggested that caste was created by the people, so there was a possibility of amending it.

Iyodhee Thass' battle was philosophical. There has been no better Tamil scholar who comprehended the reasons and the social system that works on the commands given by the oppressor to the oppressed, thus giving an alternate history.

At first, he saw Dalit history and Buddhist history from different perspectives but later after analysing both from the same perspective, he found that the reflection of degradation of Buddhism Dalits. He saw the resurgence of both Buddhism and Dalits from a single perspective and found himself to be related with Buddhism. It was 58 years after Iyodhee Thass took to Buddhism that Ambedkar converted to Buddhism.

Despite his major contribution to reform works, his efforts were soon forgotten. In late 1990s Gnana Aloysius' compilation of Iyodhee Thass' work gave encouragement to Tamil Dalit politics and called for a number of political discourse and debates. From giving a core ideological influence to the political group Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), his influence has gradually discovered its place in the mainstream. Prominent Tamil writers Jeyamohan and Vinayaka Murugan made Iyodhee Thass a character in their books *Vellaiyaanai* and *Valam*, respectively. Reference to Iyodhee Thass can also be found in movies like *Madras*, *Kabali* and *Kaala* coordinated by PA. Ranjithe.

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13.3 THE CONNECTION OF BUDDHIST HISTORY AND DALITS

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Iyodhee Thass contended that somewhere between the early and modern times, distortions would have occurred. He says due to the reversal of power structures, the early Buddhists were considered untouchables. This distortive procedure was discriminatory.

Iyodhee Thass recommended that the caste discrimination can be annihilated by identifying the time when it happened first along with the cause and then finding its solution. He also advocated that the oppressed and wretched people should realise the teachings of Buddhism of ancient times and thus he tried to build modern politics on the basis of the framework of Buddhism.

He believed that people accepting and following a definite set of beliefs without any reasoning gave rise to the practice of untouchability. Some people were considered a disgrace to the society on the ground of following Buddhism. Iyodhee Thass attempted to break the fabricated beliefs and stories through Tamil Dalit literature.

He evaluated the distortion of the birth history of Thiruvalluvar in many Tamil bhakti books like Sekkizhar's Periya Puranam and Harichandra Puranam. He actively participated in creating an alternate history. His magazine Tamizhan discusses, under the series Indra Desa Sarithram (1912), the low-graded politics from Dalits' viewpoints. His book Adhivedam (1912) gives a detailed account of the life history of Buddha. Being highly proficient in Tamil, he composed writings to books written by Tamil classical writers Thiruvalluvar and Avvaiyari. There is a tradition that considers Thiruvalluvar a priest from the Paraiyars – a Dalit subcaste. This leads Iyodhee Thass to relate Thiruvalluvar, a pioneer of Tamil writing, as an early Buddhist.

13.4 DRAVIDA MAHAJAN SABHA: PRINCIPLES AND AIMS

On 1st December 1891, under the leadership of Iyodhee Thass the Dravida Mahajana Sabha was formed at Ooty. Ten resolutions were passed which included the demands for civic rights, educational concessions, removal of certain objectionable rules in jail manual, economic advancement of the Depressed Classes, due share in appointment in government services including that of village offices. After the first state level Conference, Ayothidas sent a copy of the resolutions to the Congress Party which did not take any action. Annoyed by this, he remarked that the Indian National Congress was only a Bengali Brahmin Congress. He became a great Dalit activist and guided his people to the path of progress. In June 1907, he started the Oru Paisa Tamilan magazine till his death in 1914.

The Advaidananda Sabha

Ayothidas became a popular leader of people in Northern Tamil Nadu. At the age of twenty-five, he established 'Advaidananda Sabha'. The objectives of the Sabha were two fold. One was the prevention of the proselytizing activities of the Christian missionaries. The second was to find out the emancipatory potentials of the Advaitic tradition in undermining varna discriminations. His involvement with the reform and welfare works for the Depressed Classes led him to refute the imposed identity of Hinduism. In 1881, he demanded that the aboriginal and 'outcaste' communities be recorded as 'original Tamils' and this was followed by a declaration in 1886 that the original inhabitants of this area were not Hindus. He urged 'the so-called untouchables to register themselves as casteless Dravidians in the very first census makes Tamil Dalits the true descendents of the anti-Brahmin.

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13.5 ORU PAISA TAMILAN

Oru Paisa Tamilan was a Tamil language weekly magazine, which was distributed and edited by Ayothidas, a Dalit activist. It began its distribution on 9 June 1907 in Royapettah. Thass resuscitated Tamil Buddhism through his writings. He and others wrote a few articles critical of Hinduism and Brahminism. The magazine had the dialogues of Tamil Nationalism and laid the foundation for the Dravidian politics.

The very first issue of *Oru Paisa Tamilan* (19 June 1907) begins with an invocation to God, the Government, Tamil, the nation, foreign countries and the English and Dravidian newspapers (including the Standard, Times, Hindu, Indian Patriot, Uberal, Swadesamitran, Vikatan, Nalindhiya, Andhra Prakasika, Poologa Vyasan and Tamil Madhu). In a beautiful couplet, he expresses the emotional and social importance that could be attached to the magazine: he who knows the worth of the Oru Paisa Tamilan will value it as one crore (10 million) gold coins. From 26 August 1908, it started to be published under the name, Tamilan.

Aside from his preoccupation with the rediscovery of the first Tamil-Buddhist identity, his different concerns include the issues of the Indians for South Africa, rank framework among the Catholic Christians, the issues of agribusiness in the Madras Presidency, arrangement of justices and area authorities, the working of the Dravida Mahajana Sabha, the nonappearance of delegates in the Legislative Assembly to review the complaints of poor people, etc.

He was also liable for starting a content change in the Tamil language. For that he referred to prove from old engravings and palm-leaf compositions. He put his plans to commonsense use by utilizing the improved content in his own newspaper.

Women Liberation in Tamil and its Impact

Ayothidas' newspaper was also used to further the cause of women and to uncover the sufferings they went through in Hinduism. He accused the system of child

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marriage, the disparity in the treatment of men and women, the restrictions of widowhood (like the necessary shaving of hair, white garments, denial of pillow to lay her head on), the issues faced by the married women, remarriage and so on.

In an essay, 'The desires of Indian men and the difficulties of women', Iyothee Thass wrote: "It is an ideology of present day Hindus that men can fulfill all their desires, but only women should undergo suffering." He further added: "while a man can marry 100 wives even when his wife is alive, a woman cannot remarry even when her husband is dead." While talking about the plight of women, he criticized the root of caste – Hindu patriarchy.

During this critical period, a dozen of Tamil journals were published by the Depressed Class intellectuals in Tamil Nadu. The most notable among these journals are *Suriyodayam* (Sun Rise) (1869), *Panchama* (The Outcaste) (1871), *Sugirdavasani* (1877), *Dravidapandian* (later Dravidan) (1885) *Dravidamitran* (1885), *Anror Mitran* (1886), *Mahavikatatoothan* (1888), *Paraiyan* (1893), *K.Swappaneswari Ammal* and several others which vehemently criticized casteism, brahmanism, manudharma, Kalpa Sutra, etc., They also up their attacks against social evils that were rampant in the Hindu Society. They stood for the liberation of the women and the Depressed Classes from the tradition bound Hindu Society.

In the Indian setting, the 'Planned Castes' of today are the 'Depressed Classes' of yester years. The term 'Depressed Classes' started to be utilized in official areas in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. These Depressed Classes shared certain basic highlights of separation, debasement and abuse because of derisive treatment they endured on account of caste Hindus for many years. 'Untouchability' and 'isolation' were the two essential attributes of the people belonging to this class. As indicated by B.R. Ambedkar, by the fourth century A.D., the untouchability, a terrible social shame got organized and the 'hatred people' were treated as having a place with 'fifth varna'.

The term 'Depressed Classes' is comprised of two words 'Depressed' and 'Classes'. The former is the descriptive word type of action word 'Depressed Classes' which intends to push down and the latter is the plural of class which suggests 'One wide gathering of individuals who have normal lifestyle and have political or monetary similitude and equivalent economic wellbeing and comparative interests.' Thus in the conventional speech the Depressed Classes should mean a gathering of individuals pushed down. The untouchables were called Depressed Classes. The term Depressed Classes is utilized to portray the lowest class of people in the Hindu system. Romans had their slaves, Spartans their helots, British their villains, Americans their Negroes, Germans their Jews and Indians their depressed individuals who were considered as low classes and were considered below the Sudras who were at the lowest level in Hindu varna system. In the Puranas they were called, Aaprusyas, Avarnas, Chandalas, Svapachas, Antyajas, Jabawans, Varishals, Antyawasi, Antya and Bhang.

Ayothidas asked the so-called untouchables to enlist themselves as casteless Dravidians in the first census to counter Brahmin inheritance. The Dravidar Kazhagam was established by Rev. John Ratnam of the Wesleyan Mission as early as 1886. Iyothee Thass was associated with him in starting a news magazine called the Dravida Pandian.

*Ayothidas Pandithar:
Contributions*

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Check Your Progress

1. Name the two general approaches that came along with Buddhism.
2. What did Iyodhee Thass do to oversee and co-ordinate the working of the society for Buddhism?
3. When was the Dravida Mahajana Sabha formed?
4. What was *Oru Paisa Tamilan*?
5. Which were the two essential attributes of the people belonging to the Depressed Class?

13.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The two general approaches that came along with Buddhism are: restricting its scope to only spiritual and scholarly purposes and another for social changes.
2. To oversee and co-ordinate the working of the society, he started a weekly magazine, *Tamizhan* in 1907.
3. On 1st December 1891, under the leadership of Iyothee Thass the Dravida Mahajana Sabha was formed at Ooty.
4. *Oru Paisa Tamilan* was a Tamil language weekly magazine, which was distributed and edited by Ayothidas, a Dalit activist.
5. 'Untouchability' and 'isolation' were the two essential attributes of the people belonging to the Depressed Class.

13.7 SUMMARY

- During the time when Buddhism was going through the period of renaissance, Iyodhee Thass played a key role in the development of Buddhism in Madras. Two general approaches also came along with this: restricting its scope to only spiritual and scholarly purposes and another for social changes. Iyodhee Thass opted for the latter.
- Iyodhee Thass contended that writings, sculptures and other obvious proof might have been demolished because of religious attacks, yet the life practices inspired by the Buddhism remain as an evidence.

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- In 1898, Iyodhee Thass set up a society for Buddhism in Chennai and its branches at various places. To oversee and co-ordinate the working of the society, he started a weekly magazine, Tamizhan in 1907.
- Modern history also shows that Buddhism at a point of time was spread across India. Buddhism spread not only through statues but through the life practices and some incomprehensible forms by people, which are aspects of a definite culture.
- Iyodhee Thass was one of the first intellectuals to view the Dalits as a set of highly educated people with high conduct. The colonial period's printing press and his scholarly approach to traditional literature contributed to the alternative history.
- It was 58 years after Iyodhee Thass took to Buddhism that Ambedkar converted to Buddhism.
- Despite his major contribution to reform works, his efforts were soon forgotten. In late 1990s Gnana. Aloysius' compilation of Iyodhee Thass' work gave encouragement to Tamil Dalit politics and called for a number of political discourse and debates.
- Iyodhee Thass recommended that the caste discrimination can be annihilated by identifying the time when it happened first along with the cause and then finding its solution. He also advocated that the oppressed and wretched people should realise the teachings of Buddhism of ancient times and thus he tried to build modern politics on the basis of the framework of Buddhism.
- His magazine Tamizhan discusses, under the series Indra Desa Sarithram (1912), the low-graded politics from Dalits' viewpoints. His book Adhivedam (1912) gives a detailed account of the life history of Buddha.
- Oru Paisa Tamilan was a Tamil language weekly magazine, which was distributed and edited by Ayothidas, a Dalit lobbyist. It began its distribution on 9 June 1907 in Royapettah. Thass resuscitated Tamil Buddhism through his writings.
- Ayothidas' newspaper was also used to further the cause of women and to uncover the sufferings they went through in Hinduism. He accused the system of child marriage, the disparity in the treatment of men and women, the restrictions of widowhood (like the necessary shaving of hair, white garments, denial of pillow to lay her head on), the issues faced by the married women, remarriage and so on.
- In the Indian setting, the 'Planned Castes' of today are the 'Depressed Classes' of yester years. The term 'Depressed Classes' started to be utilized in official areas in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.
- Ayothidas became a popular leader of people in Northern Tamil Nadu. At the age of twenty-five, he established 'Advaidananda Sabha'. The objectives

of the Sabha were two fold. One was the prevention of the proselytizing activities of the Christian missionaries. The second was to find out the emancipatory potentials of the Advaitic tradition in undermining varna discriminations.

*Ayothidas Pandithar:
Contributions*

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13.8 KEY WORDS

- **Dravida Mahajan Sabha:** In 1886, Iyodhee Thass issued a revolutionary declaration that Scheduled caste people (Dalits) were not Hindus. Following this declaration, he established the “Dravida Mahajana Sabha” in 1891.
- **Untouchability:** It is the practice of ostracising a minority group by segregating them from the mainstream by social custom or legal mandate. The term is most commonly associated with treatment of the Dalit communities in the Indian subcontinent who were considered “polluting”.

13.9 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. How did Iyodhee Thaas contribute to alternative history of the south?
2. What did Iyodhee Thass suggest to annihilate caste discrimination?
3. Name the Tamil journals published by the Depressed Class intellectuals in Tamil Nadu.
4. What was the objective of the ‘Advaidananda Sabha’?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe the contributions of Ayothidas for the empowerment of women.
2. What is a Depressed Class? Explain.
3. Illustrate the life journey of Ayothidas from his childhood to becoming a Dalit activist.

13.10 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 14 AYOTHIDAS AND BUDDHISM AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEPRESSED CLASS MOVEMENT

*Ayothidas and Buddhism
and his Contribution to
the Depressed Class
Movement*

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Structure

- 14.0 Introduction
- 14.1 Objectives
- 14.2 Overview of Ayothidas and Buddhism
- 14.3 Contribution of Ayothidas
- 14.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 14.5 Summary
- 14.6 Key Words
- 14.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 14.8 Further Readings

14.0 INTRODUCTION

Iyodhee Thass was born in Mylapore, Chennai. He learnt Tamil and English apart from acquiring expertise in native medicine. He then moved to Ootacamund where he practised medicine for 17 years before returning to Chennai circa in 1893. Iyodhee Thass stated that he had his first insight into the Buddhist origins of outcastes in an old palm-leaf manuscript titled Narada Purana Sungai. Towards spreading his new revelation he had begun ‘a Buddha Sungum’ in Ootacamund. It was during that time when he came in contact with the theosophist, Colonel H.S. Olcott (1832–1907), who was in Chennai at that point. Through Olcott he interfaced with two Buddhist researchers from Sri Lanka. One was Anagarika Dharmapala of the Maha Bodhi Society of Ceylon, who forged a Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarian identity in Sri Lanka. The other was an old Sinhala priest ‘Gunaratnaswami’ (Gunaratne). In July 1898, Iyodhee Thass went with Olcott and the Buddhist ministers to Lanka, tended to certain gatherings at Colombo and Kandy, prior to getting back to Chennai on September 5, 1898. In this unit, we will study about the contributions made by Ayothidas for the removal of Hindu varna system and the dictatorial treatment of Brahmins and the Depressed Classes movement.

14.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the contribution of Ayothidas for the annihilation of the caste system
- Explain the role of Buddhism in preventing social atrocities on Dalits

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14.2 OVERVIEW OF AYOTHIDAS AND BUDDHISM

Pandit Ayothidas in the last decade of the 19th Century was a writer, journalist, social reformer, Siddha Physician and Tamil and Buddhist Scholar. He edited and published *Thamizhan*, a journal devoted to social reform for eight years. He opposed Brahminism Vedic rituals and untouchability. He championed communal representation, women's rights, self-respect, rationalism, etc. But, unfortunately the world of Tamil scholarship purposely ignored his contribution to Tamil life and thought.

Only Ayothidas suffered this ignoring. Subramania Bharathiyar, V.O.Chimdambaram Pillai, Singaravelach Chettiar, Pandit U.V. Saminatha Iyer, Thiru.V.Kalyanasundara Madaliar, Pandithurai Thevar, Mahavidwan Raghava Iyengar who lived during the same period in the Madras Presidency were honoured for their scholarship and patriotism. Ayothidasar's contribution in various fields did not receive due recognition because he belonged to the Paraiyan caste.

We may say that incredible personalities who lived in two distinct occasions and places think same while working on finding a solution of a similar issue. Tamil social reformers from nineteenth-century like Pandit Iyothee Thass and western taught academic from the twentieth century such as Babasaheb Ambedkar Maharashtra grasped Buddhism to show that it was the best way to demolish the rank framework. The two of them understood that the rise of casteism started with the fall of Buddhism and this process could be reversed by reviving the Buddhism.

Pandit Iyothee Thass (1845-1914) was born in a Dalit family in Royapettah in Chennai. He was a Siddha specialist and a knowledgeable Tamil researcher. He was an expert in the traditional astrology and palm-leaf manuscript reading. In 1870, Iyothee Thass established Adhvaidhananda Sabha (viewed as the first foundation building activity of his life), in Uthagamandalam, where he was raised. In 1891, he set up an association called the Dravida Mahajana Sabha, and on December 1, 1891, he coordinated the First Conference in the interest of the Sabha at Ooty in Nilgiris locale. In that meeting, ten resolutions were passed which included the law to punish those who mocked untouchables by calling them Pariahs, law to establish separate schools and giving grants for the education of untouchable kids, law to provide work to educated untouchables, and representation of untouchables in District Boards and Municipal Boards.

These resolutions were sent to the Indian National Congress and the Mohammedans' Association on 21st December 1891. In 1896, Reverend John Ratnam and Iyothee Thass started a journal 'Dravida Pandian' in a joint cooperation. Another interesting piece of information is that, Reverend John Ratnam and Iyothee Thass set up a movement under the name of Dravida Kazhagam in 1882, (G. Aloysius, Nationalism without a Nation in India, Oxford, 2000); however, this fact was concealed and consequently no one now remembers Iyothee Thass as the pioneer of the Dravidian movement or anti-Brahmin movement

Returning to Buddhism for Dalits and annihilating the Caste System

*Ayothidas and Buddhism
and his Contribution to
the Depressed Class
Movement*

Pandit Iyothee Thass exhorted the Dalits to embrace Buddhism for annihilating the system of caste. With this objective he constructed an alternative history with the help of Tamil literature and folk traditions of Tamil. He exhibited that the untouchables were the Buddhists and untouchability was forced upon them since they refused to follow the practices of the Hindu Brahmins. He said that the Buddhism was the first anti-Brahmin movement of Indian history. So, he told the Dalits to convert themselves to their native religion, Buddhism.

In 1898, Iyothee Thass visited Sri Lanka with Panchama School Head Master Krishnasamy and there he converted himself to Buddhism.

Buddhism

Soon after converting into Buddhism, Iyothee Thass established 'The Sakya Buddhist Society' in 1898, at Royapettah, Madras. In 1907, he started a journal 'Oru Paisa Tamilan' as an organ of this organization. All his social and religious activities starting from 1907 were recorded in the diary until his passing on 5 May, 1914. Iyothee Thass had a close relationship with Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (an American military official, who established the Theosophical Society) and the Theosophical Movement in Adyar. Colonel Olcott writes:

The problem of the origin and religious heredity of the Pariahs of southern India was so important, that I was determined to bring the communities into relation with the High Priest Sumangala, so that in case they were proved to have been original Buddhists their communities might be brought into close connection and under surveillance of the Buddhists of Ceylon. (Theosophist Magazine, April-June 1914, p. 315)

The Sakya Buddhist Society's branches were established not just in Thiruppattur and Vellore in Madras administration, they were also set up abroad, for example, in Natal in South Africa, Rangoon and Sri Lanka where Dalits had moved as workers. Essentially, the parts of the Sakya Buddhist Society were set up in Champion Reefs, Marikuppam, Kolar Gold Fields close to Bangalore, at that point part of the royal province of Mysore, where Dalits had settled as diggers. The oppressed saw colonial rule a chance to come out from the abuse of casteism. They worked for the annihilation of caste system by using the tool of converting themselves into Buddhism.

Sakya Buddhist Society began organizing discussions on Buddhism called Buddha Dhamma Pirasangam (proclaiming of Buddhism conventions) in the nights. These lectures were held till late at nights. The people working in and managing the offices at different places published the reports about the activities of the society in Tamilan. Many learned people dedicated themselves to spreading the standards and preaching of Buddhism under the guidance of Iyothee Thass. Large number of individuals partook in the Buddhist customs, celebrations and festivities. The cultural life of Dalits became Buddhist and during the life events of birth, marriage, funeral, etc., Buddhist rituals were practiced. The names of the people who embraced the Buddhism were also published in Tamilan (24 Aug, 1912). For example how successful the efforts of the society were, Dalits there got themselves

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categorized as a separate category of ‘Buddhists’ in the 1911 Mysore decennial census report.

The Construction of Casteless Identity

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In 1881, when the colonial Government planned to carry out the second census, registration officials classified Depressed Classes as a new category within the Hindu religion. At the time, Iyothee Thass gave a memorandum to the British India Government requesting that the people of Depressed Classes in Tamil speaking land should be considered as Adi-Tamilar and not as Hindus. In the years to come, the population counting department favoured the Hindu varna system, i.e., categorizing people on the basis of established customs and religion. Therefore, people from different castes started establishing their caste associations so that they can aggrandize their caste status in the census enumeration. It may sound an exaggerated statement but it is a historical fact that every non-Brahmin caste aggrandized its caste position either with Kshatriya or with Vaishya. But Iyothee Thass addressed the untouchables to record their religion as Buddhism, which strictly denounced the Hindu varna system. He termed Dalits as Casteless Dravidians (Sathi Pethamatra Dravidar) as they were outside the caste system.

Iyothee Thass named the local occupants who followed Buddhism as Yatharththa Brahmana (genuine Brahmins). Prior to the attack of the Aryans, these local Budhdhists were the priests themselves. But the attacking Aryans replicated some ceremonial practices of the local Budhdhists and began to swindle the individuals out of egotistical intentions. So they were called Vesha Brahmana (pseudo Brahmins) by Iyothee Thass. He was also critical of ‘non-Brahmin’ as a political class. He argued how they could consider themselves non-Brahmin while following the principles of rank based Hindu varna system.

Check Your Progress

1. Why did Ayothidas’ contribution not receive recognition?
2. What did Iyothee Thass do in Sri Lanka in 1898?

14.3 CONTRIBUTION OF AYOTHIDAS

During the crucial time of modernization of Indian society, Iyothee Thass, a Dalit intellectual was able to use one of the tools of modernity, i.e., print medium, to express his views and opinions. So far in Indian historiography only two views – nationalistic and imperialistic are given importance; but during the same period there existed an independent view that of Dalits which was neglected in all historiography. Utilizing print medium for the assembly of Dalits is very intriguing in light of the fact that in popular understanding, Dalits are viewed as ignorant and uninformed. Here it is important to list out a couple of assessments of Iyothee Thass which involved a conspicuous spot in the Tamilan. He criticized the claim of the Indian National Congress that it was the representative of Indians. He never accepted that Home Rule would bring any change in Dalits’ lives. He focused more on social reforms as opposed to political change.

The death centenary of C. Iyodhee Thass Pandithar (1845-1914) has passed practically unnoticed. Yet, for a couple of Tamil magazines and some Dalit intellectuals, nobody appears to have remembered it.

Iyodhee Thass Pandithar was an intellectual who anticipated Dr. B.R. Ambedkar by two generations. In fin-de-siècle Tamil Nadu, Iyodhee Thass forged a radical identity for Dalits. He argues that they were the first Buddhists who were disparaged as ‘untouchables’ by Brahmins for opposing the casteism. When Buddhism was in pragmatic obscurity (and what small amount was known about it was mediated by Orientalist curators), he reinterpreted Indian and Tamil history through Buddhism. His efforts to resuscitate Buddhism radicalized a large number of Adi Dravidars — the first Dravidans.

For long Ayothidas was little more than a footnote in the history of the Dravidian movement. People knew of him through tantalising references in the great Tamil writer and political personality, Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar’s classic autobiography. In the wake of Dr. Ambedkar’s birth centenary, the Dalit movement in Tamil Nadu, for long subsumed within the non-Brahmin movement, made its mark. In 1999, G. Aloysius, following his spearheading monograph on Iyodhee Thass’ movement (*Religion as Emancipatory Identity: A Buddhist Movement among the Tamils Under Colonialism*, 1998), distributed a copy of his works from *Tamilan*, the weekly that Iyodhee Thass started to publish in 1907 until his demise. These volumes have been the major philosophical reserve for the Dalit intellectual movement in Tamil Nadu for the last decade.

In mid-1898, the Government of Madras noticed from occasional newspaper reports that certain non-Brahmins were attempting to establish that they were once Buddhists. The issue came in the knowledge of the Commissioner of Police, who then took action. The police functionary, who made the enquiries, was on the mark when he noticed that the caste inabilities were behind the claim to a Buddhist identity. Despite commenting disparagingly that they were ‘acting like Buddhists’, he appropriately noticed their desire to be ‘liberated from all the narrow mindedness of caste’ and be ‘free from all the intolerance of casteism’.

As the Indian nationalist struggle progressed in the 20th century, Ayothidas’ loyalist position was confirmed. He found an agent in the colonial state, who would create the necessary conditions for the upliftment of Dalits. He being a staunch critic of the Indian National Congress named it ‘the Brahmin Congress’.

Hindu society is stratified into numerous hierarchical layers. These layers are sealed and are called castes. The Hindu faith upholds the myth of the divine origin of the caste system. The social structure of Indian society witnessed caste segregation, economic disparities and religious anomalies. Based upon the varna system, the Hindu society was divided into four classes, viz., the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vysyas and Sudras.

With the expansion of the education system after 1890s the educated non-Brahmin middle class migrated towards Madras, the centre of political and administrative activities, to fulfill its aspiration of sharing power and influence with the Brahmins on a more equitable basis. A group of non-Brahmin landlords were able to maintain their dominant position in rural areas. But in cities, the over

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representation of Brahmins in government posts, especially from the nineteenth century onwards, accentuated the difference between Brahmins and non-Brahmins and added to latter's frustration. It is one of the main reasons for the development of a political awareness among non-Brahmins, initially those belonging to the forward castes like Vellalas. The early non-Brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu was more elite based than in Maharashtra with the relatively high-caste Vellalas and other non-Brahmin landlords and professionals from Telugu and Malayalam speaking regions who were able to confront the Brahmins on their own footing, increasingly without having to build a mass movement.

Check Your Progress

3. Why did the educated non-Brahmin middle class migrate towards Madras after 1890s?
4. In which hierarchical layers is the Hindu society stratified?

14.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Ayothidas' contribution in various fields did not receive due recognition because he belonged to the Paraiyan caste.
2. In 1898, Iyothee Thass visited Sri Lanka with Panchama School Head Master Krishnasamy and there he converted himself to Buddhism.
3. With the expansion of the education system after 1890s the educated non-Brahmin middle class migrated towards Madras, the centre of political and administrative activities, to fulfill its aspiration of sharing power and influence with the Brahmins on a more equitable basis.
4. Hindu society is stratified into numerous hierarchical layers. These layers are sealed and are called castes. Based upon the varna system, the Hindu society was divided into four classes, viz., the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vysyas and Sudras.

14.6 SUMMARY

- Pandit Ayothidasar in the last decade of the 19th Century was a Writer, Journalist, Social reformer, Siddha Physician and Tamil and Buddhist Scholar. He edited and published *Thamizhan*, a journal devoted to social reform for eight years. He opposed Brahminism Vedic rituals and untouchability.
- Ayothidas' contribution in various fields did not receive due recognition because he belonged to the Paraiyan caste.
- Tamil social reformers from nineteenth-century like Pandit Iyothee Thass and western taught academic from the twentieth century such as Babasaheb Ambedkar Maharashtra grasped Buddhism to show that it was the best way to demolish the rank framework.

- Pandit Iyothee Thass (1845-1914) was born in a Dalit family in Royapettah in Chennai. He was a Siddha specialist and a knowledgeable Tamil researcher. He was an expert in the traditional astrology and palm-leaf manuscript reading.
- In 1870, Iyothee Thass established Adhvaidhananda Sabha (viewed as the first foundation building activity of his life), in Uthagamandalam, where he was raised. In 1891, he set up an association called the Dravida Mahajana Sabha, and on December 1, 1891, he coordinated the First Conference in the interest of the Sabha at Ooty in Nilgiris locale.
- Pandit Iyothee Thass exhorted Dalits to embrace Buddhism for annihilating the system of caste. With this objective he constructed an alternative history with the help of Tamil literature and folk traditions of Tamil.
- In 1898, Iyothee Thass visited Sri Lanka with Panchama School Head Master Krishnasamy and there he converted himself to Buddhism.
- In 1907, he started a journal 'Oru Paisa Tamilar' as an organ of this organization. All his social and religious activities starting from 1907 were recorded in the diary until his passing on 5 May, 1914.
- Sakya Buddhist Society began organizing discussions on Buddhism called Buddha Dhamma Pirasangam (proclaiming of Buddhism conventions) in the nights.
- In 1881, when the colonial Government planned to carry out the second census, registration officials classified Depressed Classes as a new category within the Hindu religion. At the time, Iyothee Thass gave a memorandum to the British India Government requesting that the people of Depressed Classes in Tamil speaking land should be considered as Adi-Tamilar and not as Hindus.
- Iyothee Thass termed Dalits as Casteless Dravidians (Sathi Pethamatra Dravidar) as they were outside the caste system.
- Ayothidas criticized the claim of the Indian National Congress that it was the representative of Indians. He never accepted that Home Rule would bring any change in Dalits' lives. He focused more on social reforms as opposed to political change.
- As the Indian nationalist struggle progressed in the 20th century, Ayothidas' loyalist position was confirmed. He found an agent in the colonial state, who would create the necessary conditions for the upliftment of Dalits. He being a staunch critic of the Indian National Congress named it 'the Brahmin Congress'.
- With the expansion of the education system after 1890s the educated non-Brahmin middle class migrated towards Madras, the centre of political and administrative activities, to fulfill its aspiration of sharing power and influence with the Brahmins on a more equitable basis.

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14.7 KEY WORDS

- **Brahminism:** It is the complex sacrificial religion that emerged in post-Vedic India (c. 900 BC) under the influence of the dominant priesthood (Brahmans), an early stage in the development of Hinduism.
- **Theosophical Society:** The Theosophical Society, founded in 1875, is a worldwide body with aim to advance the ideas of Theosophy in continuation of previous Theosophists, especially that of the Greek and Alexandrian Neo-Platonic philosophers dating back to 3rd century AD.
- **Nationalist:** It refers to a person who strongly identifies with their own nation and vigorously supports its interests, especially to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations.

14.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What did the ten resolutions passed in the first conference of the Dravida Mahajana Sabha include?
2. What did Pandit Iyothee Thass exhort the Dalits?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe the contribution of Ayothidas for the removal of caste system.
2. Why do we not find the mention of Ayothidas among other social reformers of those times? Explain.

14.9 FURTHER READINGS

- Gupta, Krishna. 1996. *Social Equality and the Indian Constitution*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Co.
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