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## Kudiarasu, The Mourthpiece Of Periyar E.v.ramasamy Naicker

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**Abstract:**

*E.V.Ramaswamy Periyar (1879-1973) is immortal. His ideas and thoughts on human rights and social issues are getting popular and stronger every passing day. He joined the Congress and actively involved himself in Non-Co-operation Movement. He upheld the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi in his life mission. He was associated with toddy shop agitation, propagation of Kadhar and Vaikom Satyagraha. He held many public postings in Erode Town. He represented the cause of the depressed classes and non-Brahmins in the Congress Activities. He even urged communal representation to the non-Brahmins in the Congress organizational set up.*

The unresolved Seranmahadevi Gurugulam issue had represented one of the serious threats to Periyar's non-Brahmin cause and self-respect. In a later stage, he disliked Gandhi's stand on the caste system and he strongly opposed the Varanashrama System which was backed by Gandhi. To ventilate his ideas, opinions, messages and philosophy, Periyar realized the need of the print media

### GENESIS AND NATURE OF KUDIARASU

Some factors are attributed for the dawn of the newspaper Kudi Arasu by Periyar. During 1924-1925 Va-Ve-Su Iyer started Bala Bharathi, Tamil Kurukulam, and Bharathi Vithiya Asharamam. In these organisations the caste discrimination was practiced. It made Periyar start a newspaper to ventilate his opinion against caste practices. Periyar also wanted to spread his rationalist thoughts through a newspaper. He opposed Ramayanam and Bharatha Manunithi. During 1900 - 1920 the Hindus started various sangams like Varunasharama Protection Sangam, Sanathana Dharma Sangam and Sanathana Sangam. These Sangams promoted the puranas, epics, rituals, old customs and conventions and superstitious ideas. To oppose these things strongly, Periyar realized the necessity of print media.<sup>1</sup>

The objective of the Kudi-Arasu was to teach equality, brotherhood, self-respect among the Indians particularly Tamils.<sup>2</sup> In the Periyar Rationalism Library and Research Centre at Chennai, 17,126 pages of Kudi-Arasu have been preserved. The Kudi Arasu inculcated new awakening and self consciousness among the Tamils in the fields of political, economic, social, language, religion etc.

Kudi Arasu was published from 2.2.1925 to 5.11.1949. It was registered three times under the Press Act of the Government of India. They are R.M. 2041, 1925- 1942, R.M.4593, 1943 - 1948 and R.M.4900 1948 - 1949

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Periyar started Kudi-Arasu along with V.M.Thanga Perumal. Both of them owned it from 2-5-1925 to 12-7-1925. On 6-3-1926 V.M.Thanga Perumal passed away. Then Periyar alone ran it. In 1935 Periyar participated in the Anti-Hindi Agitation and was arrested and was imprisoned. Periyar's elder brother E.V.Krishnaswamy took the responsibility of the Kudi Arasu.. When Periyar was released, he undertook the charge of the journal.

Kudi Arasu was published by Periyar for a total period of twenty-four years. It was banned by British Government on various occasions for various reasons, particularly in the years 1934, 1941, 1942, and 1943. In Kudi-Arasu Periyar gave importance to the Bharathi's poem and Thirukural.

On April 18, 1925 the head office of Kudi-Arasu was commissioned by Periyar at Erode and at some times this office was also worked at Chennai. The cover page of Kudi Arasu had the sentence "Mahatma Gandhi Valka (Live Long)", and at some times 'Khadar Valka (Live Long)'. Later on that slogan ceased. Sometimes, the cover page had photos of Bharatha Matha, sometimes of Mahama Gandhi weaving posture and at sometimes the working posture of labourers.

Kudi-Arasu published each week only on Sunday from 2-5-1925 to 1943 and on Saturday from 23.10.1943 to 1949. The pages of Kudi Arasu changed from time to time according to the necessity. At the initial period it was started with the total pages of 16 and then the number of pages differed. In 1929, 14 Pages, 1930 -20 Pages, 1931- 21 Pages, 1932-25 Pages, 1943-12 Pages, 1948- 16 Pages, and in 1949- it has 8 pages.

The price of Kudi Arasu also differed from place to place. It cost one anna for the local, and one and half anna for other places. The annual subscription for the inland circulation was three rupees and for the other countries it was four rupees. In 1948 the annual subscription increased to seven rupees for inland, and nine rupees for other countries. One page advertisement rate in the Kudi Arasu at the initial period was eight annas but later it was increased at rupees five. In the year 1926, Periyar requested each reader to encourage minimum three persons to purchase Kudi Arasu.<sup>3</sup>

Periyar also started other journals also to spread his ideas to the people. Notable among them were Revolt 07.11.1928, Puratchi, 26.11.1933, Pagutharivu 26.03.1932, Viduthalai 01.06.1935, Justice 1935, Unmai 14.01.1970 and Modern Rationalist, 1971.<sup>4</sup>

#### PERIYAR'S STRUGGLE THROUGH KUDIARASU

In Kudi Arasu (People's Government).Periyar wrote a series of articles in it exposing the evil minded and mischievous propaganda of the Brahmins. In his editorial on Kudi Arasu on December 16, 1926, he traced the history of different nations pointing out that there had been evil forces everywhere who were opposed to the formation of a society based on equality. He condemned those who criticized the communal representation. They have not given any alternative proposal acceptable to all the communities. They exhibit their insincerity in advocating socialism. They show their disinterestedness in solving the problems facing all the communities.

Periyar openly said "Eight crores of Muhammadans were for communal representation. Under these circumstances what was wrong on the part of Non-Brahmins in demanding the communal representation? Why should the Brahmins stands in the way? Their conduct clearly indicates their ambition to prolong their monopoly and domination in all walks of life."<sup>5</sup> He expressed his opinion on the Brahmin domination in Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (TNCC) and about the Varnashrama Dharma and wanted to get rid of caste system and the establishment of a casteless society. Hence he hardened his attitude and concluded that Gandhi was in favour of caste system and thereafter decided not to support his social philosophy.<sup>6</sup> Writing in Kudi Arasu on April, 13, 1926, Periyar condemned the British Government and the Brahmins for putting hurdles in realizing communal representation. The Brahmins opposed the policy purely out of self-interests. The British tried to prolong their rule in India by creating a split amongst the different Indian communities.<sup>7</sup>

Addressing a mass gathering at Coimbatore on June 13, 1926, Periyar declared that there would be no salvation to the non-Brahmin communities without attaining social justice. He called the Congress in the South as the Brahmin Congress and warned that unless it became a true representative of Congress, it will serve the interests of the Brahmins only.<sup>8</sup> In another editorial written in Kudi Arasu on November 21, 1926, EVR demanded reservation in administration besides in the legislature<sup>9</sup> Periyar emphasized in his editorial in Kudi Arasu in December .1929 thus : 'Like men the women should have property rights and like women, the men should have all virtues and good character and laws enforcing these should be made without and delay.'<sup>10</sup>

The self respect philosophy of Periyar referred to the assertion of one's individuality against exploitation, discrimination, and injustice. According to him, if the women do not have the right to property

that would be against their self-respect. Hence while speaking on the occasion of a marriage in July 1930, at Virudhunagar, EVR thundered the parents of the bride should be given a share of their property to her. Like men the women too have right to property and right to work.<sup>11</sup>

Periyar appealed to the Central Government to pass social legislations aiming at establishment of social equality in the society. Among the other reforms, he added that the Government could introduce a legislation giving equal property rights to women like men.<sup>12</sup>

Periyar gave wide coverage to the property right to women in his news paper Kudi Arasu: "It is the duty of those who work for the liberation of women to see women that they stopped shedding tear and servile attitude that stand in the way of their securing their right to property."<sup>13</sup> Periyar realized that the denial of some rights to women such as right to own or to inherit property, right to widow remarriage and the right to divorce would lead to other social evils like prostitution. Hence, to eradicate these ills from society, he stressed the need to address those ills by passing social legislations.<sup>14</sup>

In 1937, the Government of India passed the Hindu Women's Rights to property Act in the Central Legislative Assembly. Periyar commended this act in the editorial of Kudi Arasu thus, "The bill forwarded by Bhagawandas was at last put into an Act against strict orthodox opposition and at least it has established in necessity of Hindu Women's Right to property on a firm ground".<sup>15</sup> He said that if we gave a share of our property to our daughters, the daughters-in-law will also bring in their share of property to our family. In such a case there would not be any profit or loss in the family.<sup>16</sup>

Periyar drew the attention of the masses to the point that the people should recognise the rights of women to property.<sup>17</sup> He worked for the eradication of child marriage and popularizing widow marriage.<sup>18</sup> He emphatically supported the rights of women to divorce when they could not get along with their husband. He also strongly condemned polygamy<sup>19</sup> and the barbarous practice of child marriage and the denial of education to girl children.<sup>20</sup>

Periyar spoke for the cause of the workers at Cochin Workers Conference on September 5, 1933 and proved himself that he was the beacon light by framing an elaborate programme for the welfare of all kinds of workers.<sup>21</sup> He made brutal attack on rotten society through the way of reason, intelligence and rationalistic approach. His self-respect theory of rights did not make him a mere social reformer but a 'Remaker of Egalitarian Society'.

Periyar's service to the human society is multi-dimensional. He had absolute courage and a clear plan of action. He had the courage of lion and vigorously spread his message to the nook and corner of the nation. What Spark was to Lenin, what Harijan was to Gandhi, what Muk Nayak to Ambedkar, was Kudi Arasu to Periyar. For a few years, from the first issue the Kudi Arasu, in its front page carried the message of poet Subramania Bharathi stating that all are one caste and one race and observing caste mean a great sin.<sup>22</sup>

After 1925, Gandhi openly viewed the need of caste difference for the establishment of social order and regulation of the society. Thenceforth Periyar strongly opposed this Gandhian approach and wanted the abolition of Varnashrama Dharma.<sup>23</sup> EVR continued his tirade against caste, by taking an anti-Gandhi and anti-Congress stand. He along with his followers publicly decried and denied caste difference and other discriminations at the first Provincial Self-Respect Conference which was held at Chengleput in 1929.<sup>24</sup>

Kudi Arasu published the names of Self-Respecters who denounced Brahminism and ultimately caste, following the foot steps of Periyar who relinquished his caste appellation in 1927. Periyar appealed to his followers that they should not mention their caste appellations at the time of enumeration, instead they should address themselves rationalist.<sup>25</sup> At a Christian Girls School, in Trichy, a Self-Respecter found that there prevailed discrimination between the low caste Christians and high caste Christians. It was a practice against Christian principles. To highlight the issue, the Self-Respecters ridiculed to issue a separate Bible for them.<sup>26</sup> A section of the depressed class converted Christians held a conference on July 23, 1933, at Tiruchi under the presidentship of Altons Lahesh and passed a resolution stating that the high caste Christian derived maximum benefits at the cost of the depressed class Christians. The Self-Respecter, Neelavathi and M.A.Muthiah Chettiar spoke in the conference deploring the injustice meted out to the depressed Class Christians and the conference endorsed the self-respect ideals.<sup>27</sup> The followers of Periyar conducted several inter-dining social meal gathering in various parts of Tamil Nadu. At one of them convened under the auspices of the Nagapatinam Youth Association on January 2nd, 1927, about a hundred people from different communities assembled and inter-dined. There the depressed class people served the meals to all the people.<sup>28</sup>

At another instance on April 24, 1932, A.R.Sivanandam the President of the Coimbatore Self-Respect league arranged an inter-dining of all people irrespective of any caste. On that occasion, nearly about hundred persons interdined without any discrimination.<sup>29</sup> Periyar's followers agitated against the Railway Restaurants run by Brahmins, for there food and other refreshments were not served to the non-

Brahmin and low caste people. K.A.P.Viswanathan and Manavai Paramasivam and host of other self-Respecters marched to hotel named Brahmin at Big Bazaar Street in Tiruchi and insisted on its proprietor to remove the name board bearing the discriminatory note that Brahmins alone are entitled to take meals in the hotel. The proprietor came forward to serve food to all without any distinction.<sup>30</sup>

The Kudi Arasu deplored the Social disabilities from which the people suffered highly. Kudi Arasu even appealed both the Brahmins and the high caste non-Brahmins to end the practice.<sup>31</sup> In 1931, at Villipuram, Chenglput district, a Nadar community member was prevented by Brahmins from carrying water from Municipal well situated in Brahmin Street. He was stabbed and a result of it, the Nadars of that area protested against it.<sup>32</sup>

It was usual for Periyar to write many special articles in Kudi Arasu stressing the need of removal of the practice of untouchability. In one of the articles Periyar viewed that the primary duty of the non-Brahmins was to abolish or to do away with untouchability because in the development of the untouchables lies the development of the non-Brahmins. The non-Brahmins can achieve progress if only the untouchability is totally removed from the scene.<sup>33</sup>

To mobilize the support of a section on the depressed classes who were disappointed at Gandhi's Stand on Varnashrama Dharma., Periyar started giving more coverage to the Adi-Dravida meetings and speeches in the columns of Kudi Arasu. Even the name of the Social Reformers, who worked for the upliftment of the Adi-Dravidas were referred to.<sup>34</sup> At the second Untouchability Abolition Conference held in Madras on February 6 and 10, 1929. Periyar was invited to speak on the occasion. Periyar was given an opportunity to pass resolution it reads: "For the development of human society and ultimately to the nation, on humanitarian grounds the evils of untouchability from which larger section of population suffers should be done away with and the eyes of such helpless people to be opened."<sup>35</sup> This resolution was seconded by Geetha Rangiah Naidu. The resolution passed at the First provincial Self-Respect Conference gave an impression to the Depressed Class Community and the opponents of the Congress Party that Periyar was really 'the Messiah of the Untouchables in Tamil Nadu'.<sup>36</sup> At another instance Periyar declared open the South Arcot District Adi-Dravidas Conference held at Kallakurichi on June 12, 1929 and spoke thus: "Like the untouchables the bulk of the non-Brahmins also suffer from the social indignities at the hands of the Brahmins. We the untouchable society should confront the Brahmins and Brahminism."<sup>37</sup>

Thus Kudi-Arasu highlighted Periyar's ideas on socialism, reforms, labour movement, communal rights, education, employment, mechanism, caste system, language problem etc. Through Kudi Arasu Periyar spread his social philosophy, economic vision, and political ideology among the rural masses and inculcated self-respect and the feeling of oneness..

#### END NOTES

- 1.Kudi Arasu, 02, May 1925
2. *ibid*
3. Compiled Data available in Periyar Rationalism Library and Research Centre at Chennai
4. Pandian, M.S.S., Brahmin & Non-Brahmin, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2007, p.211..
5. *ibid.*, 21, November 1926
6. *ibid.*, 28, August 1927
7. *ibid.*, 13, April, 1926
8. *ibid.*, 13, June, 1926.
9. *ibid.*, 21, November 1926
10. *ibid.*, 29 December 1929
11. *ibid.*, 28, July 1930
12. *ibid.*, 5, October, 1930
13. *ibid.*, 26, October, 1930
14. *ibid.*, 29, May, 1935
15. *ibid.*, 7, February 1937
16. *ibid.*, 30, June, 1940
17. *ibid.*, 18, March, 1947
18. *ibid.*, 22, August, 1926
19. *ibid.*, 26, October, 1930
20. *ibid.*, 22, August, 1926.
21. *ibid.*, 10, September, 1933
22. *ibid.*, May, 1925
23. *ibid.*, 16, October, 1930
24. *ibid.*, 18, May, 1930.
25. *ibid.*, 25, December, 1927.
26. *ibid.*, 28, August, 1932.

27. ibid., 6, August, 1933.
28. ibid., 16, January 1927.
29. ibid., 1, May, 1932.
30. ibid., 2, October 1927.
31. ibid., June, 1931.
32. ibid., 12, July, 1931.
33. ibid., 15, November, 1925.
34. ibid., 15, January, 1928.
35. ibid., 17, February, 1929.
36. ibid., 24, February, 1929.
37. ibid., 16 December, 1929.