

Evolution of 19th & 20th Century Socio – Political Movements in Tamil Nadu

- Ramalinga Swamigal Popularly known as Vallalar, Ramalinga Swamigal or Ramalinga Adigal (1823–1874), was born in Marudhur, a Village near Chidambaram.
- After his father’s death, his Family moved to his brother’s House at Chennai.
- Despite having no formal education, he gained immense scholarship.
- Ramalinga emphasised the bonds of responsibility and Compassion between living beings.
- He expressed the view that ‘those who lack compassion for suffering beings are hard-hearted, their Wisdom clouded’.
- He showed his compassion and mercy on all living beings including plants. This he called jeevakarunya.
- He established the Samarasa Vedha Sanmarga Sangam in 1865 and it was renamed “Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Satya Sanga” which means “Society for Pure Truth in Universal self-hood”.
- Ramalinga also established a free feeding house for everyone Irrespective of caste at Vadalur (1867), in the Wake of a terrible famine in south India in 1866.
- His voluminous songs were compiled and Published under the title Thiruvartupa (Songs of Grace)
- **Ramalinga bore witness to hunger and Poverty in the country:** “I saw poor people, emaciated 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 in front of me and my heart trembled.
- I saw those people, poor and of unmatched Honor, their hearts weary, and I grew weak.”

Iyothee Thassar Pandithar

- Iyothee Thassar (1845–1914) was a radical Tamil Scholar, writer, siddha Medicine practitioner, Journalist and socio-Political activist.

- Born in Chennai, he was fluent in Tamil, English, Sanskrit and Pali languages.
- He Campaigned for social justice and worked for the emancipation of the “untouchables” From the caste clutches.
- He worked for the Construction of a casteless identity and Castigated caste hegemony and untouchability.
- He considered education as an important tool for empowerment and became the driving force behind the establishment of several schools for the “untouchables” in Tamil Nadu.
- Pandithar Iyothee Thassar founded the Advaidananda Sabha to raise the voice for the Temple entry of the “untouchables”.
- In 1882, John Rathinam and Iyothee Thassar established a movement called, Dravida Kazhagam and Launched a magazine called Dravida Pandian in 1885.
- He founded the Dravida Mahajana Sabha in 1891 and organised the first Conference of the association at Nilgiris.
- Pandithar Iyothee Thassar was disappointed with the Hindu dharma, which served as the Basis for propagating and validating caste in Hindu society.
- Influenced by the Theosophist Organizer, Colonel H.S. Olcott, he went to Sri Lanka in 1898 and converted to Buddhism.
- In the same year, he founded the Sakya Buddhist Society at Madras to construct the rational religious philosophy through Buddhist religion.
- He started a weekly journal, Oru Paisa Tamilan, in 1907 and published it until his Demise in 1914.

Emergence of Dravidian Movement

- In order to protect and promote the Tamil identity, culture, socio-political and economic interest of non-Brahmins, a movement called ‘Dravidian Movement’ was started in Madras Presidency by a Group of non – Brahmins.
- Dravidian and Non-Brahmin Identity in 1801 Madras Presidency was Formed by the colonial regime as a Multilingual province (Tamils, Telegus, Malayalees, Kannadigas and Tulus).

- India's diversity could be noticed in the Political developments of the Madras Presidency.
- In Bengal and in the rest of North India a Sanskrit and Vedic centered Indian culture was projected, besides an Indo-Aryan or Indo-German group of Languages were acknowledged.
- Non-Vedic, Non-Sanskrit cultures were not Recognized.
- The deciphering of Brahmi Script in 1837 by James Prinsep and Researches on south Indian languages (Ellis in 1816 and Caldwell in 1856) came to establish that Indian culture was not Homogeneous; and there existed a (Non-Aryans) group of languages and countries. Buddhist and Dravidian traditions also existed in India.
- In the south, especially in the multi-lingual Madras Presidency, Theories on Dravidian group of language and Dravidian cultural heritage led to Assertion of Dravidian identity among the Non-Brahmin.

Two factors

- Brahmins claiming Superiority over Non-Brahmins and
- Brahmins monopolizing educational and Employment opportunities transformed.
- The Dravidian identity into Non-Brahmin Identity. (In Maharashtra too Mahatma Jyotiba Rao Phule launched a Non-Brahmin movement on similar lines).
- In The middle of 19th century Dravidian also indicated the Non-Brahmins in south India.
- The Non-Brahmins of the Madras Presidency had a grievance that the emerging Nationalist leaders paid no heed to non-Brahmin issues.
- In 1852 Gajulu Lakshmi Narasu Chetty expressed this grievance, Seceded from British Indian Association and Floated his own organization named Madras Native Association.
- In the post-mutiny Period, the non-brahmin leaders undertook social reforms rather than political reforms.

- After the introduction of Minto-Morley Reforms in 1909 the non-brahmin leaders Of Madras Presidency began to protest the inadequate representations to them in Education and employment.
- Sir Alexander Gordon Cardew, a member of Governor’s Executive Council submitted Statistical details (1913) to prove that The Brahmins who formed only three Percent of the population cornered most of the opportunities.

Justice Party

- The major political organization of that time, Indian National Congress was Dominated by Brahmins had refused to Consider the demands of non-brahmin Members.
- Thus, the non-brahmin leaders of Madras Presidency began to think of Floating a non-brahmin political organization.
- The prospects of political Reforms after the First World War, and the Possibilities of representing institutions Stimulated their move.
- In 1916 Dr. T. M. Nair, Pitti Theagarayar and Dr. C. Natesan founded The South Indian Liberal Federation to promote and safeguard the socio-Economic political interests of the non-Brahmin.
- This South Indian Liberal Federation (SILF) came to be popularly known as the “Justice Party” named after the English journal Justice.
- Through their relentless efforts they secured reservation of seats for the non-brahmin in the Elections to the legislative council.

Under The 1919 Act

- The main objectives of the Justice Party (JP)
 - To create and promote the Educational, Social, Economic, Political and material Progress of all communities other than Brahmins of South India.
 - To work for non-Brahmins upliftment Through Constitutional government.
 - To make the government truly a Representative government.
 - To create public opinion in favour of non-Brahmins demand.

- Montagu Chelmsford reforms 1919 Introduced dyarchy in the presidencies by which a few departments were earmarked for Indian ministers chosen from the elected members.
- In the first Elections under dyarchy in 1920, the Indian National Congress as a part of the Non-Co-operation Movement boycotted the elections, but many congressmen contested the elections under different Banners.
- The Justice Party won majority of the seats and A. Subbarayalu became the First Chief Minister and after his Death, Raja of Panagal became the Second Chief Minister of Madras in 1921.
- Periyar E.V. Ramasamy Considered the Decision of Rajaji's Government to impose Hindi as a compulsory Subject as a move to Establish 'North Indian Imperialism' and destroying the Tamil Language and culture.
- Periyar, further, maintained that the imposition of Hindi was a calculated effort to subordinate the Dravidians in order to ascertain the Supremacy of the Aryan Brahmins.
- Madras Presidency has witnessed Massive anti-Hindi agitations and Periyar was imprisoned by the provincial Government.
- It is significant to note that in Fifteen years he went to jail twenty- three Times and got the nickname as 'jailbird' (Siraiparavai).
- In 1938, Periyar was imprisoned for his Anti-Hindi agitation and then he was elected as the president of Justice Party.
- In the same year, the Justice Party passed a resolution that Tamil Nadu Should be made as a separate state loyal to British government and it should be under the direct control of the Secretary of State for India.
- Periyar E.V.Ramaswamy who played a pioneering role in the Madras Presidency Congress, had tried his best to make the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee adopt Resolutions in favour of proportional Representation for the non-brahmins in political arena.
- He gave an effective Leadership to the Vaikom Sathyagraha and Campaigned against caste-discrimination in the Cheranmadevi Gurukula, founded by congress.

- When all his efforts failed to make Congress adopt his programme, he left congress and launched the ‘Self-respect Movement’ in 1925.
- He shunned electoral Politics, instead campaigned for social Reforms, especially for eradication of Caste system, removal of indignities and Gender based restrictions on women, and rejection of hereditary priesthood.
- The self-respect movement carried on a vigorous campaign against age old Superstitious beliefs and practices in Every sphere and questioned the role of religion in justifying and sustaining such Irrational traditions and inequalities.
- The Self Respect Movement campaigned for Rationalism, and against denial of dignity and equal status of individuals (including Women) under the garb of tradition and Religion.
- The Self Respect Movement ordained its members to give up caste surname and Caste-religious identities; it introduced the Self-respect marriages.
- It fought against Not only untouchability but even against the caste-system and the caste based disabilities and indignities imposed on Individuals.
- The Self Respect Movement Propagated not merely better treatment of women, but for equal rights, equal status an equal opportunities for women.
- Self Respect Movement’s role in “Women Liberation” was unparalleled and for that E.V.Ramaswamy was given the title “Periyar” in a women’s conference.
- Periyar’s journal ‘Kudiarasu’ ‘Revolt’ and Later ‘Viduthalai’ carried on the effective Propaganda of self-respect ideals.

Singara Velar (1860-1946)

- The emergence of Swadeshi and Home Rule movement in India in the initial part of 20th century aroused the thirst for freedom.
- Reforms were made in Hindu religion in Accordance with the existing society.
- These Movements played a key role in creating the Feeling of Indianness and Nationalism in the Political Scenario.
- But these movements are religious in Nature.

- Moreover, those who participated in these movements are from upper social Class.
- Freedom sought by these people are Political in nature neglecting the interests and economic upliftment of farmers and labourers.
- This affected the majority Indians who are poor and belong to farmers Community.
- Further, caste discrimination Existed within Congress Party.
- Particularly, In Tamil Nadu there existed a clear difference between brahmins and non-brahmins.
- In this context, Singaravelar played a Pivotal role in spreading rational ideas and scientific perception in to politics.
- He also played a key role in connecting welfare of Farmers and workers in to freedom struggle and spreading socialist thinking in to Politics.
- More labour Organizations emerged to protect the rights of working class.
- These organizations were headed by Thiru. V. Kalyanasundaranar and D. Varadharajalu in the Madras presidency.
- It was Singaravelar who took major efforts in the emergence of labour organizations in Madras presidency.
- Singaravelar wanted to sensitize the workers on politics and wanted to engage them in the freedom struggle.
- But Congress Party did not accept this idea of Singaravelar.
- Singaravelar criticised it vehemently and send Telegraphs to Congress high command, following this, he wrote a letter to Mahatma Gandhi.
- Further, he also wrote about this Issue on the popular dailies Swadesamitran, The Hindu, and magazines like Navasakthi.
- In 1923, it was he, who organized the First May Day celebrations in Chennai.
- In The same day, he announced the formation of Labour-farmer political party.

Tamil Renaissance:

- The cultural hegemony of colonialism and the rise of humanism brought several Changes in the socio-cultural life of the Indian subcontinent.

- Modern Tamil Nadu too experienced such a historical transition.
- Tamil Language and culture played a significant role in their identity construction.
- The introduction of Printing press, linguistic research on Dravidian Languages, etc...
- Underpinned the process of Tamil renaissance.
- Although religious literature was taken up predominantly for publication in the early years after the advent of printing Technology, things began to change gradually.
- Works that can be described as secular were taken up for publishing.

Advent of the Printing Technology:

- Tamil was the first non-European language that went into print.
- As early as in 1578, Tamil book, Thambiran Vanakkam, was published from Goa.
- In 1709, a full-fledged printing Press had been established Thanks to Ziegenbalg in Tranquebar.
- Thirukkural was one of the earliest Tamil literary texts to be published in 1812.
- This led the resurgence of Interest among Tamil scholars in publishing the more ancient Tamil classics around that period.
- In the nineteenth century, Tamil scholars Like C.W. Damostraranar (1832–1901), and U.V. Swaminathar (1855–1942) spent their Lifetime in the rediscovery of the Tamil classics.
- C. W. Damostraranar collected and edited Different palm-leaf manuscripts of the Tamil Grammar and literature.
- His editions included such texts as Tolkappiyam, Viracholiyam, Iraiyanar-Akapporul, Ilakkana Vilakkam, Kaliththokai and Chulamani. U.V. Swaminathar, A student of Meenakshisundaranar, took Efforts to publish the classical texts such as Civakachinthamani (1887), Paththupattu (1889), Chilapathikaram (1892), Purananuru (1894), Purapporul-Venpa-Malai (1895), Manimekalai (1898), Ainkurunuru (1903) and Pathitrupathu (1904).

- The publication of these ancient literary Texts created an awareness among the Tamil People about their historical tradition, language, Literature and religion.
- Modern Tamils founded their social and cultural identity on the ancient Tamil classics, collectively called the Sangam Literature.
- In 1816, F.W. Ellis (1777–1819) who founded the College of Fort St George, Formulated the theory that the south Indian languages Belonged to a separate family which was unrelated to the Indo-Aryan family of Languages. Robert Caldwell (1814–1891) expanded this argument in a book titled, a Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages, in 1856.
- He established the close affinity between the Dravidian languages in contrast with Sanskrit and also established the antiquity of Tamil.
- Tamil intellectuals of this period identified the Fundamental differences Between Tamil/ Dravidian/ Egalitarian and Sanskrit/ Aryan/ Brahmanism. They argued that Tamil was a Language of Dravidian people, who are non-Brahmin and their social life was casteless, gender-sensitised and egalitarian.
- Tamil renaissance contributed to the origin and growth of Dravidian Consciousness in the Tamil country.
- These Ideas are exemplified in the Tamil invocation Song in the play, Manonmaniam written by P. Sundaranar (1855–1897) Ramalinga Adigal (1823–1874), popularly Known as Vallalar, questioned the existing Hindu religious orthodoxy.
- Abraham Pandithar (1859–1919) gave prominence to Tamil music and published books on the history of Tamil Music.
- C.W. Damotharanar, U.V. Swaminathar, Thiru Vi. Kaliyanasundaram (1883–1953), Parithimar Kalaingar (1870-1903), Maraimalai Adigal (1876–1950), Subramania Bharathi (1882–1921), S. Vaiyapuri (1891–1956), and the Poet Bharatidasan (1891–1964), in their own Ways and through their writings, contributed to the revival of Tamil literature.

- Meanwhile, M. Singaravelar (1860–1946) an early pioneer in Buddhist revival, promoted communism and socialism to counter the colonial power.
- Pandithar Iyothethassar (1845–1914) and Periyar E.V. Ramasamy (1879–1973) held high the radical philosophy to defend the rights of the socially underprivileged and marginalised Section of the people.

V.G. Suryanarayana Sastri (Parithimar Kalaigar):

- V.G. Suryanarayana Sastri (1870-1903), Born near Madurai, was Professor of Tamil at the Madras Christian College.
- He was one of the earliest scholars to identify the influence Of Sanskrit on Tamil, and adopted a pure Tamil name for himself: Parithimar Kalaigar.
- He was the first to argue that Tamil is a classical language, and demanded that the University of Madras Should not call Tamil a vernacular language.
- Influenced by Western literary models, he introduced the sonnet form in Tamil.
- He also wrote novels and plays, and a number of Essays on science.
- Tragically, he died at the young age of 33.

Maraimalai Adigar:

- Maraimalai Adigar (1876–1950) is considered the father of Tamil linguistic purism and the founder of Tani Tamil Iyakkam (Pure Tamil Movement).
- He wrote commentaries on the Sangam texts, Pattinappalai and Mullaipattu.
- As a Young man, he worked in a journal, Siddhanta Deepika.
- Later he served as a Tamil Teacher in the Madras Christian College for Many years.
- He was inclined towards non-Brahmin movement.
- His teachers such as P. Sundaranar and Somasundara Nayagar were Key influences in his life.

Tani Tamil Iyakkam (Pure Tamil Movement):

- Maraimalai Adigar promoted the use of pure Tamil words and removal of the Sanskrit influence from the Tamil language.
- The movement made a great impact on Tamil Culture especially in language and literature.

- His daughter Neelambikai, played an important Role in its foundation. He changed his own Name Vedachalam and took on the pure Tamil name of Maraimalai Adigal.
- His journal Jnanasagaram was renamed Arivukkadal and His institution, Samarasa Sanmarga Sangam, was re-christened as Pothu Nilai Kalakam.
- Neelambikai compiled a dictionary that provided pure Tamil equivalents to Sanskrit Words that had crept into Tamil vocabulary.

Rise of the Dravidian Movement:

- The Dravidian Movement emerged as a defence of the non-Brahmins against the Brahmin dominance.
- An organisation called the Madras Non-Brahmin Association Was founded in 1909
- To help the non-Brahmin students.
- In 1912 C. Natesanar, a medical doctor, founded the Madras United League, later renamed as Madras Dravidian Association to support Dravidian uplift.
- The organisation focused on educating and supporting non-Brahmin Graduates and conducting regular meetings to Share their grievances.
- Meanwhile, Natesanar founded a hostel, the Dravidian Home, at Triplicane (Madras) in July 1916 to address the Lack of hostels for the non-Brahmin students which hindered their educational development.
- In addition, the home had a literary society for the benefit of non-Brahmin students.

South Indian Liberal Federation (Justice Party):

- On 20 November 1916 around 30 prominent non-Brahmin leaders including Dr. C. Natesanar, Sir Pitti Theyagarayar, T.M. Nair and Alamelu Mangai Thayarammal came Together to form the South Indian Liberation Federation (SILF).
- In the meantime, at a Meeting held in the Victoria Public Hall the Non-Brahmin Manifesto was released in December 1916.
- The manifesto articulated the Voice of the non-Brahmin communities.

- **The association started publishing three Newspapers:** Dravidian in Tamil, Justice in English and Andhra Prakasika in Telugu, to propagate the ideals of the Party.
- The first election, under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, was held in 1920 after the introduction of the Dyarchy form of Government in the provinces.
- The Justice Party Won the election and formed the first-ever Indian Cabinet in Madras.
- A. Subbarayalu became the Chief Minister of the Madras Presidency and the party formed the government during 1920–1923 and 1923–1926.
- In the context the Congress Party boycotting the legislature, the Justice Party continued to remain in office till 1937 elections were held.
- In the 1937 elections the Indian National Congress contested the Elections for the first time and trounced the Justice Party.

Programmes and Activities:

- The Justice Party is the fountain head of the non-Brahmin Movement in the country.
- The Justice Party government widened Education and employment opportunities for the majority of the population and created Space for them in the political sphere.
- The Justicites removed the legal Hindrances restricting Inter-caste marriages and broke the barriers that prevented Depressed Classes from the use of public Wells and tanks.
- The Justice Party government ordered that public schools accommodate the Children of the Depressed Classes.
- Hostels were established for the students belonging to this social group in 1923.
- In the meantime, The Madras legislature under the Justice Party government was the first to approve Participation of women in the electoral politics in 1921.

- This resolution created space for Woman and thus facilitated Muthulakshmi Ammaiyar to become the first woman legislator In India in 1926.
- The Justice Party worked towards legislating Provisions for communal representation – Reservations for various communities.
- Two Communal Government Orders (16 September 1921 and 15 August 1922) were passed to ensure equitable distribution in appointments among various castes and communities as a Part of achieving social justice.
- The Justice Party rule established the Staff Selection Board in 1924 for the selection of government Officials and encouraged all the communities to share the administrative powers.
- In 1929, The Government of British India adopted the Pattern and established the Public Service Commission.
- The Justice Party further concentrated on Reforms in religious institutions.
- The Justice Party Introduced the Hindu Religious Endowment (HRE) Act in 1926 and enabled any individual, Irrespective of their caste affiliation, to become a member of the temple committee and govern the resources of the religious institutions.

Rettaimalai Srinivasan:

- Rettaimalai Srinivasan (1859–1945), was born in 1859 at Kanchipuram.
- He fought for social justice, Equality and civil rights of the marginalised in the caste order.
- He was honoured with such titles As Rao Sahib (1926), Rao Bahadur (1930) and Divan Bahadur (1936) for his Selfless social services.
- His Autobiography, Jeeviya Saritha Surukkam (A Brief Autobiography), Published in 1939, is one of the earliest Autobiographies.
- Rettaimalai Srinivasan who had experienced the horrors of untouchability Worked for the progress of the deprived Castes.
- He founded the Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha in 1893.
- He served as president of the Scheduled Castes' Federation and the Madras Provincial Depressed Classes' Federation.

- A close associate of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, He participated in the first and second Round Table Conferences held in London (1930 and 1931) and voiced the opinions of the Marginalised sections of the society.
- He was a Signatory to the Poona Pact of 1932.

M.C. Rajah

- Mylai Chinnathambi Raja (1883–1943), popularly known as M.C. Rajah was one of the prominent leaders from the “depressed Class”.
- Rajah started his career as a teacher and wrote different Textbooks for schools and colleges.
- He was one of the founding members Of the South Indian Liberal Federation (Justice Party).
- He became the first elected Legislative Council Member (1920–26) from the depressed classes in Madras province.
- He Functioned as the Deputy Leader of Justice Party in the Madras Legislative Council.
- In 1928, he founded the All India Depressed Classes Association and was its long time leader.

Labour Movements in Tamil Nadu

- The First World War (1914–18) provided stimulus to industrial growth in India.
- These industries, catering to war Time needs, had employed a huge number of Workers.
- At the end of the War there were Retrenchments across the industries, as the War time requirements receded.
- Combined With high prices, this gave a momentum to the labour movement.
- B.P. Wadia, M. Singaravelar, Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundaram and others initiated the formation of labour Unions in the Madras Presidency.
- In 1918, India’s first organised trade union, the Madras Labour Union, was formed.
- The first All India Trade Union Conference (AITUC) was held on 31 October 1920 in Bombay.

- The delegates discussed several Resolutions.
- These included a demand for Protection from police interference in labour Disputes, the maintenance of an unemployment Register, restriction on exporting foodstuffs, Compensation for injuries, and health insurance.

M. Singaravelar:(1860–1946),

- He was a Pioneer in the labour Movement activities in The Madras presidency.
- He was born in Madras and graduated from The Presidency College, University of Madras.
- He advocated Buddhism in his early life.
- He knew many languages, Including Tamil, English, Urdu, Hindi, German, French and Russian and wrote about the ideas Of Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer and Albert Einstein in Tamil.
- He organised the First ever celebration of May Day in 1923.
- He was one of the early leaders of the Communist Party of India.
- He published a Tamil newspaper, Thozhilalan (Worker) to address the problems of the working class.
- He was closely associated with Periyar and the Self-Respect Movement.

Language Agitation before Indian Independence:

- In general, language is a dominant symbol of identity and it is associated with culture and Sentiments of any society.
- Tamil regained its prominence in the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.
- Maraimalai Adigal's Pure Tamil Movement, the language Reforms of Periyar and Tamil Isai Movement Helped to galvanise the Tamil language.
- Tamil renaissance that led the Dravidian Consciousness made a great intervention in the development of modern Tamil language and its art forms.
- Agamic temples did not permit rituals in Tamil.
- Tamil songs had a Marginal place in musical concerts.

- Abraham Pandithar systematically studied the history of Tamil music and attempted to reconstruct the ancient Tamil musical system.
- He founded the Tanjore Sangitha Vidya Mahajana Sangam in 1912 and it became the kernel of the Tamil Isai Movement (Tamil Music Movement).
- The Movement gave importance to the singing of Tamil compositions in music concerts.
- The First Tamil Isai Conference was held in 1943, to discuss the status of Tamil music.
- The implementation of Hindi as a Compulsory language in Tamil Nadu, at various Points of time, was seen as a threat to Tamil Language and culture.
- Periyar declared that the introduction of Hindi over Tamil would deny the Dravidians of their job opportunities.
- Maraimalai Adigal pointed out that the Tamil Language would suffer with the introduction of Hindi.
- The anti-Hindi campaigners considered it an ideological battle against Brahminism and the hegemony of Sanskrit over Tamil.

Women's Movements:

- There were several streams of women's Movements and organisations established in the early twentieth century to address the Question of women empowerment in Madras Presidency.
- Women's India Association (WIA) And All India Women's Conference (AIWC) are the important among them in Tamil Nadu.
- WIA was started in 1917 by Annie Besant, Dorothy Jinarajadasa and Margaret Cousins at Adyar, Madras.
- The Association published Pamphlets and bulletins in different languages.
- To detail the problems of personal hygiene, Marriage laws, voting rights, child care and Women's role in the public.
- In the meantime, WIA formed the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) in 1927 to address the problem of Women's education and recommended that the Government implement various policies for the Uplift of women.

- Women’s liberation was one of the important Objectives of the Self-Respect Movement.
- Self-Respecters led by Periyar E.V.R. worked for gender Equality and gender Sensitisation of the society.
- The movement provided a Space for women to share their ideas.
- There were several women activists in the movement.
- Muthulakshmi Ammaiyar, Nagammai, Kannamma, Nilavathi, Muvalur Ramamirtham, Rukmani Ammal, Alarmelmangai Thayammal, Nilambikai, and Sivakami Chidambaranar are Prominent among them.
- There was a custom of dedicating young Girls to the Hindu temples as a servant of God, known as devadasi.
- Though intended as a service to God it soon got corrupted leading to extensive immorality and abuse of the Women.
- Dr. Muthulakshmi Ammaiyar was in the forefront of the campaign pressing for a Legislation to abolish this devadasi system.
- The Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act 1947 was enacted by the government.
- In 1930, Muthulakshmi Ammaiyar introduced in the Madras Legislative Council a Bill on the “prevention of the dedication of women to Hindu temples in the Presidency of Madras”.
- The Bill, which later became the Devadasi Abolition Act, declared the “pottukattu ceremony” in the precincts of Hindu temples or any other place of worship unlawful, gave legal sanction to devadasis to contract Marriage, and prescribed a minimum punishment of five years’ imprisonment for those found guilty of aiding and abetting the devadasi system.
- The Bill had to wait for over 15 years to become an Act.