



Periyar -An Advocate of Property Rights to Women

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Abstract : *Periyar E.V.Ramasamy Naicker was a social reformer and a crusader for the liberation of the women from the male dominated Hindu society. He continuously voiced for the upliftment of the women and enhancement of their status. Because of the continuous prppaganda of the Periyar, many ills connect with women began to erode in the orthodox Hindu society. He insisted property and inheritance right to the women and argued that it was necessary to women to raise theft status.*

Keywords: *Periyar, Kudi Arasu, Dravidian , Puratchi, Hindu.*

1. INTRODUCTION

At the Self-Respect Conference held in Tirunelveli, on 28 November 1927, EV.R as President, pleaded with the Government “to give equal rights to women like men to inherit or possess property as that would make them economically independent”. On that occasion, among other resolutions, the following two resolutions were passed to give effect to women rights.

1. “In Hindu families, where the widows refused to remarry, they should be given right to property of theft deceased husbands”.

2 “Properties in Hindu families, should be equally distributed between men and women, without any sex discrimination”

E.V.R. emphasized the need once again in his editorial in KudiAj-asu in December, 1929 thus; “Like men, women also should have property rights and like women, men also should have all virtues and good character and laws enforcing these changes should be made without any delay.”¹

The philosophy of Self-Respect E.V.R. refers to the assertion of one’s individuality against exploitation, discrimination and injustice. According to him, if women did 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 Virudunagar, which was covered by Kudi Arasu, E.V.R. thundered, “The parents of this bride should give a share of theft property to her. Like men, women too have right to property and right to work. If not, how will women live with self- respect in the society?”²

Then Kiwi Arasu wrote that E.V.R’s followers should set an example to others by adhering to the ideology of the Self- Respect Movement. E.V.R. praised highly a bridegroom who, in his marriage held in September 1939 at Nagercoil, registered a property worth of Rs. 5000/- in the bride’s name.³ Following this, Kudi Arasu wrote that, E.V.R. appealed to the Central Government to pass social legislations aiming at establishment of social equality in the society. Among other reforms, he added, the Government could introduce a legislation giving equal property rights to women.⁴

E.V.R. showed keen interest in meetings in which focused on thoughts related to women welfare. In October 1930, in Madras, under the Presidentship of T.R.Venkatarama Sastri and in the presence of former Advocate General and Law Member of the Madras Government, Narayana Kurup, a great gentleman, addressed large gatherings in which the problems and rights to women had been focused. In the meeting, a consensus was arrived at regarding the need to give women the right to own and inherit property, the right to alimony and the widows’ right to the property of their deceased husbands even after remarriage. E.V.R. gave wide coverage to this meeting in his journal, KudiArasu thus: “It



is the duty of those who work for the liberation of women to see women shedding fear and servile attitude that stand in the way of their securing their right to property.”⁵

E.V.R. did not fail to criticize the government if the latter hesitated to support any legislation regarding social issues. Harbilas Sarada introduced in the Central Legislative Assembly in 1932, a bill for securing right of Hindu widows to claim the property belonging to their husbands. It was opposed even by the Government on the grounds that the three Hindu members, who took part in the debate, were against it. E.V.R. was enraged over the stand taken by the Government. He expressed his views in *Dravidan* thus; “The objection of the Government to this bill has no doubt caused much dissatisfaction to all persons. It is indeed regrettable that the Government did not help the progress of the country by accepting at least bills introduced in the Legislative Assembly for effecting social reforms. Though they do not grant all facilities for such reforms, at least, they should not have opposed the bill while sympathizing with its object iicwords”.⁶ In fact, E.V.R. had an unflinching faith in the British Government in India that they alone could introduce reforms, and did not expect anything from the sanatanists and orthodox reactionaries.

E.V.R 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 rembeve those ills by passing social legislations.⁷ While detailing some of the rules and regulations for the conduct of Self- Respect Marriages, E.V.R wrote in *Puratchi* in June 1934 thus: “As per the old marriage system, women did not have the right to property. They did not have equal rights with men in the family whereas the Self- Respect Marriages are based on the recognition of equal rights of women in owning or inheriting property and also in sharing rights equally with men in running the family”.⁸

In 1937; the Government of India passed the Hindu Women’s Right to Property Act in the Central Legislative Assembly. E.V.R commended this act in the editorial of *Kudj Arasu* thus: “The Bill forwarded by Bhagawan Das, was at last put into an Act against strict orthodox opposition and at least it has established the necessity of Hindu women’s right to property on a firm ground”.⁹

At a marriage held at Kanchipuram in June 1940, E.V.R. as a common man urged the need to give women equal share in the family property like their male counterparts. It was given wide coverage in *Kudi Arasu* thus : “If we give 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 will not be any profit or loss in the family”.¹⁰ Thus, through *Kudi Arasu*, E.V.R. drew the attention of the masses to the point that the people should recognise the rights of women to property.”¹¹

E.V.R did not accept the notion that women in society have been the real stumbling block to progress. On the other hand, he strongly viewed that if the right to education, property owning and inheriting rights are given to women, they would not wish to confirm their lives to the kitchens, bedeck themselves with jewels and end up with innumerable problems or marriage.

REFERENCES

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7. *Kudi Arasu*, 29 May 1932 and 16 June 1935.
8. *Ptiratchi*, 17 June 1934.
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10. *Ibid.*, 30 June 1940.
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