

**PERIYAR : SPEECHES AND WRITINGS**

**RELEASE OF THE BOOK**

**PERIYAR THIDAL: 2.4.2005**

**Address by Dr. V.C. Kulandaisway**

I am extremely happy to participate in this pleasant function. I must sincerely congratulate Dr.K.Veeramani and the Periyar Self Respect Propaganda Institution for having brought out the revised edition of the publication entitled, "Collected Works of Periyar".

I am particularly thankful to the publishers for utilising as an introduction to this volume. a brief biographical note written by me I cannot possibly think of a greater recognition, may I say greater honour than this for my writing.

The Tamils from their distant past have not been good in their sense of history. They have not recorded, even briefly, the life history of a great poet and philosopher like Valluvar. The Greeks and Romans with whom the ancient Tamils had contact have recorded the lives of their poets, philosophers and kings who lived long before Christ. We do have accounts of the lives and works of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Cicero.

When we come to recent years in India. We have the writings and reported speeches of Mahatma Gandhi in 100 volumes. In the case of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar I am aware that 18 volumes in English and 34 volumes by way of translation in Tamil have appeared. The work is being continued.

Periyar and Anna dominated the Tamil Nadu scene; the Twentieth Century in Tamil Nadu was virtually Periyar's era. I know that sporadically, a number of books containing the writings and speeches of Periyar and Anna have appeared. But something like the series that we have for Mahathma Gandhi; that we have for Swamy Vivekananda or that is being done for Dr. B.R. Ambedkar have not appeared. It is my considered opinion that the entire writings and speeches of Periyar, barring repetitions must be published with appropriate introduction to indicate the background and context. A similar project is needed for Anna. These two giants of men have considerably shaped and moulded the course of events and left an indelible stamp in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Tamil Nadu after Periyar and Anna was very different, because of them, from what it was before their advent in the public scene. Periyar, if all his writings and history of his activities are preserved, will emerge, as days pass on, much bigger than the canvas in which we have painted him now: much greater than the image that we have of him. News papers in the libraries will decay and crumble; microfilms are difficult to access; printed volumes in the first instance and digital CD's in the next step will be the only way to preserve his memories and message for posterity.

Nearly 2000 years after the days of valuvu, long after many have interpreted, and commented on Kural, we see to-day new meanings, new messages in Kural. The same may happen in the case of Periyar. The duty of the present generation is that we bequeath to the future generations the writings and speeches of greatmen and women that they may interpret according to their own light.

You and I need not conclude that we have fully understood him. It is the characteristic of great men and women that they turn out to be much bigger than their image when they lived. There is more meaning in their message than what may be seen by the contemporary world.

Periyar was a rationalist; was also a nationalist; the founder of self respect movement; the promoter of Justice party; the founder of Dravidar Kazhagam; uncompromising champion of women's freedom; a tireless fighter for social justice; a relentless crusader against superstitions and meaningless rituals – God took, according to our puranas 10 avatars in 10 different births; but periyar took in one single birth more than 10 avatars. But in all these roles, there was one common core; a common thread; It was humanism. Periyar was the greatest humanist that we have seen in the last century.

Some accuse him of hating a community. He was above caste; above religion; above race and language; even above national boundaries. A universal humanist he was; how can he hate any community? What need was there for him to hate any community. As a humanist, he was for the depressed; he was for the downtrodden; he certainly opposed those who perpetrated this condition. He condemned those who came in his way when he was endeavouring to find a solution for their uplift. He did not condemn a community, but any community; not an individual, but every individual who sought to obstruct the path of progress; who sought to perpetrate the oppression.

His role in the freedom struggle has not been fully understood; I may even say, was misunderstood, or was misrepresented. Leaders of Congress fought for political freedom from foreign rule; the leftists fought for freedom from economic exploitation by the capitalists and the landed aristocracy; Periyar was not against any of these; he was a congressman; he was a promoter of communism; he wanted to add one more dimension to the freedom struggle; he wanted them to fight simultaneously for freedom from the tyranny of the caste system which afflicts this society like cancer. Periyar was more ambitious; his agenda was more comprehensive.

We can now see that Periyar stands vindicated. If you view the political scene, if you see the issues highlighted in the elections in every state from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas, social justice, social issues dominate the platform.

I may try to give an example: we have to-day a large number of universities in the country; the number of universities named after Dr. Ambedkar is more than the number of universities named after Mahatma Gandhi; or the number of universities named after the great leader Nehru. What is the reason? Like Periyar, Ambedkar stood for freedom against social tyranny. Today social problem dominates the political scene more than any other issue; it will continue to exert a pervasive influence for decades to come.

Everyone of you here knows Mandal Commission. To day Mandal Commission symbolizes social justice. The appointment of Mandal commission would not

have been possible, but for a constitutional amendment approved by the parliament in 1951. The question now is how was this amendment made?

Communal representation in education and employment was in vogue in the former Madras presidency since 1929. When the new constitution was adopted, it prohibited any discrimination in the name of caste, class, religion or race. Communal G.O., was held by the High court of Madras as ultra vires the constitution and was struck down. The Government appealed against the judgement to the Supreme Court. It upheld the ruling of the Madras High Court. Periyar started a massive agitation against the judgement and demanded an appropriate amendment to the constitution. The then congress leader of Tamil Nadu, Thiru Kamaraj supported. At Delhi, the then P.M. Nehru and the Law Minister Dr. Ambedkar reacted favourably and ultimately the constitution was amended to provide for the protection of the interests of educationally and socially backward classes. It is under this amended clause of the constitution that Mandal Commission was appointed. If Mandal was the author of the Mandal Commission report, Periyar was the father of the Mandal Commission report

Periyar was a great champion of women's freedom; women's rights. I may say in all fairness and without any exaggeration, that he was the greatest champion of women's education, women's emancipation and women's empowerment in the country. No leader came out so openly and so forcefully in favour of family planning, widow remarriage. If the feminists of this country are to choose one as an icon for their movement, it must undoubtedly be Periyar. It we look at the new

generation of women, you will see evidence of Periyar's movement. In the colleges and universities of Tamil Nadu, we have today out of every 100, students who are 52 women. Women outnumber men in so vital a field as higher education. What more do you need for women's liberation. There is no liberating force more effective than education. An educated woman is a liberated woman.

Some hold the view that while Periyar's life mission was eradication of caste system, he did not succeed in his mission. Caste system still persists. Contrary to this belief, it is my considered opinion that there is unquestionable evidence of his achievement. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the name of every male individual in Tamil Nadu, ended with the caste suffix – Ayyar, Ayyangar, Nadar, Naidu, Mudaliar, Gounder and so on. If we take the prominent congress leaders of that time, we have Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar; Dr. P. Varadharajulu Naidu, V.O. Chidhambaram Pillai, A. Vaidynatha Ayyar; O.P. Ramasamy Reddiar; K. Kamaraj Nadar. and even Periyar was E.V. Ramasami Naicker. Even today we have caste suffix against the names of all North Indian leaders – Lalu Prasad yadhav; Mulayam Singh Yadhav; Somnath Chatterjee; Murali Manohar Joshi, Atal Behari Vajpeyai and so on – Yadhav, Chatterji, Joshi, Vajpeyi: all are caste names. Even in Andhra, we have Reddy ; Naidu ; The present A.P. C.M is Rajasekara Raddy ; the former C.M. was Chandra Babu Naidu. Even in Kerala, Nair and Menon are common suffixes.

In Tamil Nadu, you cannot come across any leader worth the name ending with the caste suffix. Even a leader like Kamaraj Nadar, who was for long known as

Kamaraj Nadar, came to be known in his own life time only as Kamaraj . Is not this a success for Periyar's movement against the caste system?

Lastly, more than any thing else I must record the fact that Periyar is a real role model for leaders in public life. He is an epitome of :

- i. Selflessness
- ii. Hard work
- iii. Life without any divide between-word and deed. i.e., preaching and practising.

His selflessness was of the extreme kind: he was not after power. Twice he was offered, what was then called the Prime Minstership of the sprawling Madras Presidency – once in 1940 and again in 1942. He declined. He was not even after fame. He was not concerned with being hailed as a Martyr or Thiyagi. Whether one called him a martyr or a traitor, a hero or a coward, he was unperturbed by either the praise or the blame. He went on his mission like a real saint; a real Sanyasi.

He was hardwork personified. In his 93<sup>rd</sup> year, he toured for 183 days and delivered 249 speeches; in his 94<sup>th</sup> year, i.e., the last year of his long career, he toured for 177 days and delivered 229 speeches. At 93 or 94, what personal ambition there could be for an individual? What self-interest one could entertain? It is selfless hardwork beyond our comprehension; beyond comparison. If I am to use an orthodox expression it is superhuman.

His was a life of simplicity; economy was the cornerstone of his virtue: He did not preach asceticism, but his was the life of real ascetic. His was a long public life with no divide between word and deed.

His was personally a life of real renunciation, total dedication, simplicity, sterling character and absolute honesty with no variance whatsoever between private practice and public declaration.

He was Periyar not only as a reformer, as a revolutionary, as a crusader – but also in his personal life as a man, he was Periyar – a real role model for men and women in public life.

Collected Works of Periyar

Release of the Book

02-04-2005

1. Periyar Series
2. 2. Humanist
3. No hater of any community
4. He was misunderstood
5. Reservation ; Mandal
6. Women's freedom
7. Caste system
8. Role Model, 183,177; 249:229



