

# Self-Respect Movement

[UPSC Notes]

## What was Self-Respect Movement?

The Self-Respect Movement was established in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu to establish a society where disadvantaged castes would have fair human rights and opportunities. It also encouraged backward castes to value themselves in a caste-based society where they were viewed as at the bottom of the social scale.

- S Ramanathan started the self-respect movement against Brahminism in Tamil Nadu, India.
- The campaign had a massive effect not only within the state of Tamil Nadu but also in foreign nations with considerable Tamil populations like Malaysia and Singapore.

The Self-respect movement gave rise to various political parties in Tamil Nadu, including the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), which split out from the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (D.M.K.) in 1972. Both organizations have a social democratic leaning and are populists.

## Meaning of the Self Respect Movement

The Brahmins' monopoly on power and influence steadily diminished due to E.V.R. 's never-ending anti-orthodoxy crusade. People were inspired by a notion of self and, more importantly, self-confidence as they prepared to fight the Brahmins' systemic racism.

- As a result, inter-caste and interreligious weddings were encouraged, and marriages without a Brahmin priest were legally done.
- The very first state after freedom to pass legislation allowing Hindu marriages without a Brahmin priest there was Tamil Nadu.
- Additionally, the system of giving Harijan members monopoly seats in municipal councils was abolished.
- The Self Respect Movement's continued support led to the name panels of the hotels being changed from "Brahmins Hotel" to "Vegetarian Hotel."
- People started to be proud of losing their caste name.

## Self-Respect Movement Objectives

The three main goals of the Self Respect Movement were eliminating Brahminical authority, employment equity for women and underrepresented groups, and the revival of the Dravidian languages, including Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, and even Tamil.

The movement's supporters laid forth their objectives in the two pamphlets "Namathu Kurikkol" and "Tiravitakkalaka Lateiyam." The group's primary goals were as continues to follow:

- To create a society wherein lower castes enjoy the same fundamental rights as higher castes, equality is the central part of the society. Discrimination should not be supported and followed.
- Attempting to give each individual the same opportunities for development and growth so that they can be treated equally by living in the same society.
- The creation of a particular society that is fair enough and peaceful, in addition to the total elimination of untouchability. So that everybody living in the community should feel free.
- It aspired for a social transformation in which everyone naturally experiences friendship and a sense of belonging.
- To develop schools and colleges and build homes for the homeless, orphans, and widows.
- It should forbid building new temples, mutts, kings, or Vedic institutions. The movement aimed to abolish behaviors like using one's family name as their given name and other similar, thoughtless customs.

## Self-Respect Movement in India

The Self-Respect Movement was a feminist revolution, a Dalit resistance, and an avant-garde movement all rolled into one. India's history is loaded with collectively fought battles such as communal uprisings and freedom campaigns. There were no coordinated campaigns to defend oneself. The Self Esteem Movement was unique in its goals and played a significant role in Dalit history.

### India's First Fight for Dignity In 1925

E.V. Ramaswamy initiated the movement. This movement was initiated in Tamil Nadu, where it had a massive effect, by S. Ramanathan in 1925.

- The very changing Self Respect Movement, commonly referred to as the Dravidian Movement, advocated equal rights for the destitute group and the struggle for women's rights.
- However, the group's founders said it was vital to fight for the "self-respect" of members of the backward caste in India.
- Ramanathan and Periyar Ramaswamy were inspired by the emphasis on self-worth in Tamil literature, including Tan-Maanam or Suya Mariyadai, as they strove to promote the notion of developing one of the most critical factors that self-respect in people will eradicate discriminatory practices.

Periyar, in particular, thought that political freedom advocates like Gandhi and Nehru did not permit individual liberty. He held that self-freedom is where true freedom is found. India was striving for political independence, but that freedom did not let widows remarry or for anybody to

marry the partner of their choice without penalties. For these freedoms, the Self-Respect Revolution was fought.

The movement's main demands were equality for men and women, economic parity in society, a promise of all Indians' friendship, and widespread unanimity regardless of caste, religion, or varna. Chastity was vehemently opposed because, according to the movement's women, "chastity is the way women are confined within the systems of chattel slavery."

A manifesto of this kind in 1925 was many years ahead of its time. The streets were filled with men and women yelling slogans and demanding what they had always been due. The simple act of the lower caste reclaiming their identity in public, loud and fearless, was a move in the right direction toward looking forward to having.

## **Self-Respect Movement and Feminism in India**

Women activists, who were very well-known, Veeramal and Annai Meenanmbal, were two women leaders of the movement. They kept bugging Periyar to learn more about the rights of Dalit women. A significant portion of the organization worked to end societal discrimination against women and seek rights for women. The founders of the self-respect movement promoted permanent birth control for women during a period.

On the other hand Gandhi was adamantly opposed to any birth control for women. In actuality, the construction of the ego marriage system was one of the group's most effective stages.

Women participated actively in the Vaikom Satyagraha which came in the 1920s to demand equal access for individuals from all castes in public areas. The group was headed by Nagammai, a well-known social crusader and reformer who eventually rose to the post of editor of Kudi Arasu, the monthly publication that used to support the Self Respect Movement. As part of an Anti-Arrack struggle, Nagammai often organized women's organizations to protest toddy stores in Erode. Gandhi acknowledged that there was little he could do about the picketing's occasional violent outbursts and accepted the reality that the cause was "in the arms of the women from Erode," a testament to the tenacity and tenacity of their organization.

### **Movement for Self-Respect Based on Feminist Principles**

The Self-Respect Movement has strong feminist ideals in addition to anti-caste beliefs. It advocated a culture in which a person's decisions regarding her sexual, psychological, and women's health were her own. When she observed much discussion about anti-conception medicines across the country, Periyar's policy offered women access to contraceptives and long-term birth control. The group's feminist ethos pushed for equal rights for women to choose their partners, get a divorce, and also get married.

The Self Respect Movement aimed to drastically alter heterosexual relationships by eliminating gender conventions and hierarchies. It clarified how important it is for men and women to divide household chores and parenting duties.

## **Political Freedom and Self Respect movement**

Political freedom was defined as a lack of tyranny or coercion, satisfaction of enabling environment for a person, or the lack of primal urge life factors, including economic coercion, in a society.

Within a set of laws and organizations, political freedom necessitates a specific social and legal status. That legal standing is typically described as a different set of rights. Social systems both recognize and limit various rights.

Marriages based on race are publicly displayed to the world. This concentrate on a specific self-respect campaign that will never be fulfilled until Indian approves gay marriage.

However, it is still true that the Self-Respect Movement's unshakable principles and demands opened the path for genuine democracy.

## Other Self Respect Movement Objectives

The devadasi system, popular in the country's eastern and southern regions, was one of the movement's main aims. The temple god required women between the ages of Seven to thirty-six to dedicate their lives to him by engaging in various tasks.

- At first, being a devadasi was regarded as a respected position. S
- till, later, during the colonial period, the devadasi system was condemned for participating in prostitution by having given birth to several children for priests and high net-worth individuals.
- The devadasi system also isolated these women from society.

The movement subsequently included women from all backgrounds who actively participated in demonstrations for human rights. The Self-Respect Movement's main objective was to alter society positively. It impacted people from all walks of life by pushing against gender equality and criticizing the caste at the time.

## Modern Applicability of Self-Respect Movement:

- To achieve his goal of freeing the society from certain harmful social customs which are known as Dharma and Karma. Periyar came up with the idea of setting up a self-respect movement.
- A very well anti-caste movement that has put India's social structure into doubt, the Self-Respect Movement has grown in popularity.
- The movement emphasized inter-caste marriages while also emphasizing women's bodily liberty.
- A society where women could make their sexual, reproductive, and physical decisions was what the feminist movement campaigned for. In India, the movement represented a defining moment for feminism.
- It gave top priority to ensuring that women had access both to contraception and long-term pregnancy prevention.
- The Self-Respect Marriage System was among the major social revolutions brought about by the self-respect revolution.

## Some Important Aspects of Self Respect Movement

There are few other notable points about the Self Respect Movement

### **Brahmins were impacted**

To promote the promotion of self-respect for people in India's caste-based system, it fought the hegemony of Brahmins as the higher caste. According to the movement, one can only build individuality when they have earned esteem.

The movement's primary objective was to attain equality in all areas of life. It aimed to rid society of detrimental social customs upheld by religion and caste, perpetuating a cycle of discrimination, including caste-based hiring practices and lower castes.

Due to casteism, which prevented people from acting according to logic, comprehension, and perspective, people were pushed to behave irrationally.

### **Self-respecting organizations**

One of the qualities of the most important services societal changes brought about by the Self-Respect Movement was the legislation of self-respect weddings, which allowed marriages to begin without the presence of a Brahmin priest because most ceremonies were conducted in Sanskrit, a language that even the majority of people did not understand. So rituals were based on rigid obedience.

### **Inter-caste and Inter-religious**

According to the movement, which advocated inter-caste and inter-religious weddings in which one must be permitted to meet the person of one's desire, marriages shouldn't be restricted by class. Many young girls were bereaved due to the prevalence of child brides; the self-respect weddings also applied to widows' remarriage.

The campaign was successful in attracting a sizable female audience as a result. Inter-caste marriages grew due to Tamil Nadu being one of the first states to allow Hindu marriages to occur without requiring a Brahmin priest to attend.

## Self-Respect Movement: D.M.K. and AIADMK

Although Periyar never meant it to, this movement did turn political. Even as the movement became more political, its leaders became more hungry, and corruption started to surface. The Dravidian movement formed the foundation for the two biggest political parties in the state of Tamil Nadu, the D.M.K. and AIADMK. These political parties have ruled Tamil Nadu for about fifty years. Undoubtedly, these organizations have significantly contributed to social progress, but in recent years, gaining public support, including using vote-banking strategies, has become their main priority.

Unfortunately, the bulk of the popular movements in our nation, which have big aspirations to transform our society fundamentally, seem to have strayed from such ideals.

## South India changes after the Self Respect Movement

- **Social and religious advances:** Hindu weddings performed without a Hindu priest are now lawful due to this trend. The first county to do so in the nation. Additionally, this group opposed the Devdasi system, caste system prejudice, and widow marriage.
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- **Political changes:** They helped the people of Tamil Nadu feel more nationalistic. E.V. Ramaswamy argued that true intellectual liberation could lead to full liberty.
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- **Self-Respect League Establishment:** The self-respect league was formed throughout Tamil Nadu during the movement. After that, many well-known people joined the league to further the Periyar movement. The team's inaugural National Conference took place on November 27, 1927. In that organization, thirty-two resolutions were approved while E.V. Ramaswamy was president.
- Hinduism is opposed since, in Periyar's opinion, religion is indeed the source of all social ills and that without deconstructing religious superstition, society cannot be reformed. He began criticizing Hinduism since it resulted in the development of the whole caste.
- He began contesting his Brahmins' supremacy since they were seen as the guardians of the Hindu religion.

**Other factors contributing to the Self Respect Movement's failure included:**

**The Congress Party's popularity is increasing gradually. Incorrect depiction of the Dalits group in the campaign Image of Justice party as wealthy landlord groups. Also, the power abuse and corruption is increasing.**