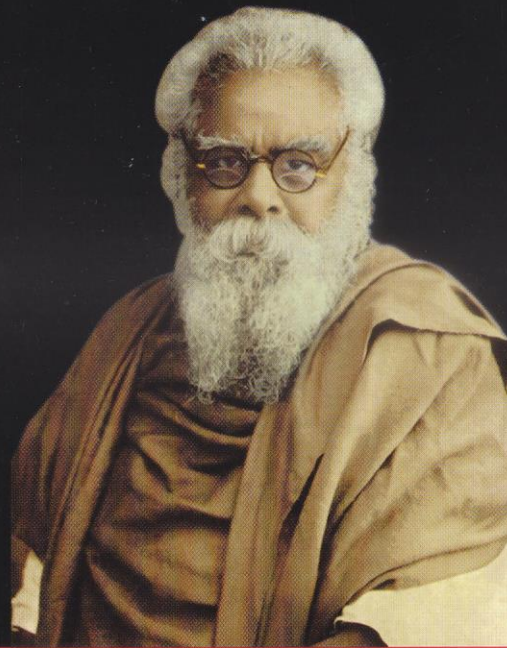




People's Education Society's

**Dr. Ambedkar College Of Commerce & Economics**

(Opp. Wadala Bus Depot, Mumbai - 400 031.)



**Periyar**  
and  
**Women's Question**

*compiled and edited by*  
**Lalitha Dhara**

The People's Education Society  
was founded by

Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar  
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It runs eleven schools, fifteen colleges  
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This book has been brought out with the blessings  
of the current  
Governing Body Members.

October 2012



People's Education Society's  
Dr. Ambedkar College of Commerce & Economics

# Periyar and Women's Question

compiled and edited by  
Lalitha Dhara

with the support and cooperation of  
Principal Dr. S.R.Kamble

for  
Women Development Cell, Dr. Ambedkar College Unit

*This book is dedicated to  
the great emancipators of women*

*Mahatma Jotiba Phule*

*Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule*

*Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj*

*Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar*

*Periyar E. V. Ramasamy*

*and*

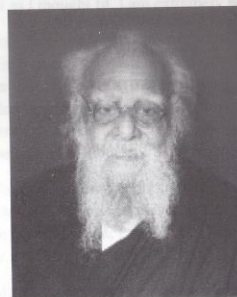
*to women everywhere,  
struggling for emancipation*

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**My capacity is limited but my love for  
humanity is boundless.**

**- Periyar**

## PERIYAR



**(17.09.1879 - 24.12.01973)**

## UNESCO CITATION ON PERIYAR



PERIYAR, THE PROPHET OF THE NEW AGE;  
THE SOCRATES OF SOUTH EAST ASIA;  
FATHER OF THE SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENT;  
AND ARCH ENEMY OF  
IGNORANCE,  
SUPERSTITIONS,  
MEANINGLESS CUSTOMS  
AND BASE MANNERS.

UNESCO  
27-6-1970

UNESCO MANDRAM AWARD was given to PERIYAR on 27th June 1970 at Chennai under the Presidentship of the then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With deepest respects to

Tathagata Bhagwan Gautam Buddha, Mahatma Jotiba Phule, Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule, Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.

I consider myself fortunate to be teaching in an institution founded by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. If I were teaching elsewhere, perhaps the thought of bringing out this booklet would not have occurred to me...

Principal Dr. Siddharth Kamble trusted me enough to promptly sanction the book when I approached him with a proposal. He also gave me complete freedom to shape it as I thought fit. I am extremely grateful to him.

I received immense affection and warmth when I visited Periyar Thidal, Chennai, for carrying out my research in connection with this book. Dr. K. Veeramani was very welcoming, encouraging and supportive. He also gave me blanket permission to reproduce from their publications. I owe this booklet entirely to his warmth and generosity. I cannot thank him enough. I hope this book meets his expectations.

I remember with fondness the entire library staff of Thidal – Isai Inban, Rajavel, Ramesh; Mr. Seetaraman, manager; Mr. Kumaresan, Gen. Sec., Rationalist Forum; Mr. Udumalai, Periyar Web Vision; the canteen staff who served lovely masala wadas and piping hot filter coffee.

I am grateful to Mr. G. Olivannan, publisher, Emerald, for granting us permission to edit, rearrange and use the material from his publication, Periyar on Women's Rights. I hope justice has been done to the same.

I am equally grateful to Mr. Valasa Vallavan, editor of Tamizh Kudiarasu Pathippagam for permission to reproduce an article from their publication, Periyar and Self- Respect Philosophy. He was also kind enough to send me an article by V. Geetha from his archives, which has added immense value to this book. I thank him and Ms. Geetha profusely.



I am thankful to Ms. S. Anandhi for her well- researched article.

I thank authors Vasantha Kandasamy, Florentin Smarandache, K.Kandasamy for letting me use an extract from their book 'Fuzzy and Neutrosophic analysis of Periyar's views of untouchability'.

My office colleague R. D. Karnik helped me with computer-related work. His cheerful disposition and unconditional support kept up my spirits. I cannot thank him enough.

I am particularly grateful to Mr. Gawde of Amar Printers who displayed keen interest and commitment in the project, from the very first book to this one. I consider him a partner in this venture.

I cannot end without placing on record my indebtedness to my friend; Dr. Uday Mehta - retd. vice-principal of Mithibai college & HOD, Sociology; for inspiring me with his own writings and praxis and for encouraging me throughout.

Lalitha Dhara

October, 2012

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The last article traces Periyar's fight against untouchability as practiced in religion, society, education, politics and in the economic sphere.

By the end of this section one is bound to be somewhat familiar with Periyar and Periyarism. However this familiarity would be partial and incomplete without delving into the next part titled, 'Periyar and gender sensitivity' which highlights Periyar's path-breaking gender contribution.

This section begins with V.Geetha's brilliant and insightful analysis of Periyar's understanding and critique of Brahmanic Patriarchy, his feminist reply to it and his life-long engagement with feminist politics titled, 'Periyar and Women's Question – Towards an understanding'.

This section ends with S. Anandhi's well-researched article titled, 'Periyar's Self-Respect Movement and Women's Question' wherein she describes and analyses Periyar's feminist praxis. The subject matter is divided into four parts - The Self-Respect Movement, its extension - The Self-Respect Marriages, the activities of the women activists within this larger movement and their gender consciousness.

The third and last part is titled Periyar Feminism. It contains three sections. The first is a reproduction of a series of essays collectively titled, 'Periyar Speak', on different aspects of women's oppression and are extracted, with some re-arrangement, from the book 'Periyar on Women's Rights', compiled by K. Veeramani, translated into English by R. Sundara Raju.

These essays are parts of speeches made by Periyar during Self-Respect marriage ceremonies or from his writings in Kudi Arasu (Republic) weekly, 1925 to 1949 or Vidudalai (Liberation) daily, 1937 onwards as translated and reproduced in the above publication.

One is astounded by the depth and width of his exploration of the woman's situation in the Indian context, triple sandwiched as she is by caste, class and gender. He digs into and dissects every aspect of her being and existence, diagnoses the root cause of the problem with surgical precision and prescribes the pill and tonic – bitter as it might be! His insights into the workings of Brahmanic Patriarchy – how it originates, perpetuates and pervades – is truly astounding, leading the women to confer the title of Periyar – The Great One – on him at one of their conferences, a title that stuck during his life time and after.

These are only a select few from the vast collection of his gems.

During his life span of 94 years, Periyar wrote extensively in his various dailies, weeklies and monthlies. His speeches also were reported word to word in these papers and journals. Much of what he spoke and wrote was on gender issues and the women's question. He was preoccupied, nay obsessed, with gender equality. While some of his thoughts on gender are reproduced in the previous section, a lot of them aren't as the English translations are not readily available. A list of the topics which Periyar has spoken or written about on gender, throughout his life, is given in the next section titled, 'Periyar Range'. A run through the topics itself will enable us to appreciate the depth and extent of his involvement with each and every aspect of women's situation.

The Self-Respect Movement used to hold conferences of men, women, youth - jointly and separately in different parts of the state. These used to be invariably organized by women who would also preside over it and move the resolutions at the end. And what radical resolutions they were! Even by the standards of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The next section titled, 'Periyar Resolve' reproduces the resolutions passed, relating to women empowerment, in the various conferences under the leadership of Periyar. These resolutions give a fair idea of how seriously the organizers took the women's question. The reader can also judge for herself or himself the radical nature of the Movement.

By the time you complete this part, you would be completely sold out on Periyar Feminism - a unique, original and seminal contribution from this non-conformist, irreverent messiah who straddled the twentieth century like a colossus.

Afterword by Lalitha Dhara attempts to trace the USP of Periyar, the Revolutionary Prophet, in respect of his feminist praxis.

Through this booklet, I have tried to present a comprehensive picture of Periyar's mighty contribution to the cause of Indian women's liberation. I sincerely hope I have succeeded in my mission.

The Women Development Cell, Dr. Ambedkar college unit, has embarked on a rather ambitious project of bringing out a series of booklets on 'Women's Question' in the Indian context to place at the disposal of teachers of Humanities, Gender and Foundation Courses at the

undergraduate level so that our students may become aware of our feminist heritage & history.

This is the fourth in the series.

Happy and fruitful reading!

**Lalitha Dhara**

**NB :** Despite my best efforts to make this booklet error-free, some mistakes must surely have crept in. My apologies for the same. I welcome your feedback, comments, suggestions on my work. You can send your feedback to my e mail address: [lalid02@yahoo.com](mailto:lalid02@yahoo.com)

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