

SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENT IN THE 19th
CENTURY TAMIL NADU AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO
NATIONAL INTEGRATION

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Introduction:

Problem of integration is common to any country where people belonging to varied cultures live. India is no exception. In the Independent India, national integration is the crying need as disintegrating forces are discernible in certain quarters. But compared to the present position, in the nineteenth century, India had a semblance of unity, thanks predominantly to the Social Reform Movement. In this paper, an attempt is made, in a brief compass to study the contribution of the Social Reform Movement that touched the fringes of Tamil Nadu, to National Integration.

India known for its geographical unity has continued to maintain it right from the ancient period. Dr. Zakir Hussain, the late President of India, compared India's unity to a 'Boquet of flowers of different hues, shapes and sizes in which each flower maintains its uniqueness and blends into the whole.'¹ Saints and sages have proclaimed the oneness of Bharadvarsha and Bharad Khanda. Poets had sung the glories of this ancient land stretching from the Himālayas in the North and Cape Comorin

in the South. In the second century B.C. Prakrit became the court language of the rulers and in the subsequent period Sanskrit replaced it. Sanskrit influenced the regional languages of India including the Dravidian tongues which helped to promote integration. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata have been read with avid interest by all Indians alike. They were read with as much interest in the South as in the North. They became the common heritage of the people irrespective of the language in which they were written. Valmiki and Kampan, Tulsidas and Potana, Kalidasa and Bharavi, Rabindranath Tagore and Bharati were not only national poets but also world poets. Adi Sankara promoted the unity of India by founding monastic orders in the four borders of the country such as Badrinath in the North, Sringeri in the South, Dwaraka in the West and Puri in the East. He underlined the relation between Jivatma and Paramatma as being one. He aimed to bring the entire India under one umbrella of spirituality. In the 12th century A.D. Ramananujacharya propounded the theory of Visishtadvaita proclaiming that man was a limb of God. It spread to other parts of India also. In the 13th century A.D. Madhvacharya spread among the people the philosophy of Dvaita. In the modern period Swami Vivekananda had emphasized the significance of National

Integration by making constant tours in the country.

Indians had demonstrated their unity of strength when the Chinese and the Pakistanese attacked India in 1962 and 1965 respectively.

Religion has also promoted unity. As Hinduism is not dogmatic, it advocates many paths for the realization of the Ultimate Reality. In the Rig Veda, we find sages declaring 'Reality is one, the wise call it by various names, 'what is one, they envisage in different modes.' The same idea is expressed in subsequent literature, not only in Sanskrit, but also in other languages. The similies of the differently coloured cows yielding the same white milk, of the different rivers flowing towards and dissolving in the same ocean, are given to illustrate the non-duality of religion.²

Languages also had contributed to National Integration. Those who were conversant with more than one Indian language had been struck with wonder that almost all sayings and proverbs in one Indian language had reverberations in the other Indian languages, including Dravidian tongues.

Pilgrims and merchants who travelled various parts of India made cultural contacts with the people of the respective regions.

Festivals also had helped integration. The Durga Pooja of Bengal had been celebrated as Navaratri in the South. Shivarathri, Ramanavami, Gokulakshmi, Vinayaka Chaturti, Deepavali and a host of other festivals have been common to all Indians for thousands of years. Pilgrim centres like Kashi and Rameswaram, Dwaraka and Puri have helped the evolution of a common culture for the whole of India throughout ages. The celebrations of Independence, Republic and Gandhiji's birthdays have also been the contributory factors in this direction. Christian and Muslim festivals are also celebrated throughout India. In the opinion of K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, "From the prehistorical times to the present day, there has been no period when the two regions (North and the South) did not influence each other politically and culturally and on at least three occasions before the advent of British rule both the North and the South formed parts of a single empire embracing nearly the whole of India."³

Thus right from the remote past, a fundamental unity of culture developed in India transcending region, religion, race, language and environment. It is against

this background only that we will have to study the contribution of Tamil Nadu to National Integration.

Contribution of Tamil Nadu to National Integration:

Tamils, imbued with broader vision, considered the whole world as one family. Kanian Poonguntanar, a Sangam Tamil poet, declared that 'all regions are our own and all people are our kinsmen' (யாதும் ஊரே யாவரும் கேளிர்) Thirumoolar another Tamil poet who lived in the 5th century A.D. held that 'God is one and all people belong to one human family.' (ஒன்றே குலமும் ஒருவனே தேவனும்).

The fusion of the Aryan and the Dravidian cultures could be seen from the Sangam literature roughly ranging from 4th century B.C. to 4th century A.D. Sangam poems refer to Vedic gods like Indra, Yama, Vishnu, Siva and Balarama. The Dravidian God Muruga was identified with Subramanya, the son of Siva. In fact, Hinduism did not divide the Indians into Dravidians and Aryans. It laid the foundation upon which the superstructure of the common Dravidian - Aryan consciousness was built. Tamil kings like Pandiyan Nedunchezhian and Rajendra Chola went upto the Himalaya and Gangetic regions. They attempted to bring about a united India by means of conquest. The Tamil kings,

the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas had promoted cultural unity among themselves.

The Bhakti Movement started in the 7th century A.D. by the Saivite and the Vaishnavite saints spread to North India also. Chaitanya in Bengal and Ramananda in Maharashtra became the votaries of the Movement.

When India came under the control of the British in the 18th century, India in a sense became politically united. The English language kindled the flame of nationalism. In the opinion of R.C. Majundar, "this unity was undoubtedly nurtured in the nineteenth century by a uniform system of administration, easy means of communication and the spread of education on modern lines."⁴ When the English introduced reforms, the natives resented it which resulted in the Social Reform Movement. Thus the Social Reform Movement in India was the brain-child of Indian renaissance that took its advent in Bengal in the nineteenth century. It was partly due to Western education and partly due to indigenous factors. The Indian leaders absorbed whatever that could be taken from their ancient culture and synthesized it with the thoughts and ideas of the West. Hence, the Indian Renaissance Movement is a synthetic restatement containing the best of the Indian and Western thoughts. Thus, it is called

revivalism encompassing modern values and ideas needed for the times, along with reviving the great seminal ideas of the old Indian thoughts.

Christian Missionaries converted many Hindus into Christians. They levelled scathing attack on Hindu religion, its customs and traditions. Charles Grant, a Missionary described the Hindu religion as "idolatory with all its rabble of impure deities, its monsters of wood and stone, its false principles and corrupt practices, its delusive hopes and fears, its ridiculous ceremonies and degrading superstitions, its lying legends and fraudulent impositions."⁵ Alexander Duff, another Missionary wrote in his book, "India and Indian Missions" that "Of all the systems of false religion ever fabricated by the perverse ingenuity of fallen men, Hinduism is surely the most stupendous."⁶ At this critical juncture in India's history, a new middle class group consisting of landlords, businessmen and intellectuals emerged in Bengal. Though small in number, they wielded tremendous influence over the Bengali society. They aimed to remove the disabilities that encrusted the Hindu society such as Sati, infant-marriage and enforced widowhood and slavery. Thus,

the wholesale condemnation of the Christian Missionaries against the Hindu religion and its institutions led to the emergence of the Social Reform Movement. It was said that fear of Christian Missionaries was the beginning of much social wisdom among Indians. Educated youths of Calcutta were fired by unbounded enthusiasm which manifested itself in the birth of mighty socio-religious reform bodies like the Brahmo Samaj (1828), the Prarthana Samaj (1867), the Arya Samaj (1875), the Theosophical Society (founded in New York in 1875, shifted to Bombay, India in 1879) and the Ramakrishna Mission (1897).*

* Though every century in India witnessed the emergence of Social and Religious Reform Movements, it became an organised movement only in the nineteenth century. Thus, R.C. Majumdar observes that "The nineteenth Century was the great dividing line and these hundred years changed the face of India." R.C. Majumdar (Ed.) The History and Culture of the Indian People, Vol.X, British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance, Part II, (Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1981), p.96. Thus a United India, socially conducive, became the fertile field for promoting National Integration. The social legislations passed to wipe out the excrescences such as Sati, infant-marriage and slavery came to be introduced into Tamil Nadu also. Moreover, social reform associations which were started in the Madras Presidency during this period became the corollary to the Indian National Social Conference founded in 1887. Thus, the Indian National Social Conference, like the Indian National Congress founded in 1885, promoted forces of National Integration. A co-mingling of people and the resultant cultural cohesion came into being in the wake of the founding of Social Reform Associations in various parts of the country.

educated youths of Bengal published two journals, "Parthenon" and "the Bengal Spectator" which became their mouth-piece. These journals made a vehement attack on the Hindu religion and its customs. This spirit of enquiry and free-thinking led to the protest against orthodoxy. Some even went to the extent of repudiating Hinduism. It was against this background that Indian Social Reform Movement took its advent in Bengal. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of the Brahmo Samaj has been rightly called the Father of Modern India. Western education, Western science, astronomy, surgery and social sciences came to be percolated into India through Bengal. Thus, Calcutta became the springboard of Indian Renaissance. Yet it could not be called renaissance in comparison to the one that took place in Europe during the Medieval period. It was only revivalism, for as N. Subrahmanian has pointed out, "... the past has always been with us: we have never parted company with it. We are trying to see if certain new values coming to us for the first time now can be fitted on to the corpus of the old."⁷

In order to realize their objective, the social reformers therefore began to start associations with a view to creating a consciousness among the people so that

these evils might be gradually eradicated.⁸ References may be made to the Indian National Social Conference founded in 1887 and the Madras Hindu Social Reform Association founded in 1892.

Tamil Nadu and The Social Reform Movement:

India being a country of cultural unity, the social disabilities that prevailed in other parts of the country, existed in Tamil Nadu also. The Christian Missionaries converted thousands of low caste Hindus to their fold. Societies like the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, London Missionary Society, Wesleyan Mission, the Free Church Mission of Scotland and the Church Missionary Society undertook the task of spreading the Gospel in Tamil Nadu. As in Bengal, there took place a clash between the two cultures, resulting in the birth of Social Reform Movement in Tamil Nadu. Educated Tamils, with a view to preserving the purity of the Hindu religion, effected changes in social institutions such as infant-marriage and enforced-widowhood, infanticide, devadasi system, slavery and untouchability. These measures were the offshoot of the Social Reform Movement that took its advent in Bengal in the nineteenth century.

Sati:

It is said that Social Reform Movement in Modern India started with the Anti-Sati Movement, for Sati was the first social evil to be discussed by the social reformers. Sati prevailed in Vedic period. In Tamil Nadu it existed during the Sangam period. During the nineteenth century numerous instances of Sati took place in Tamil Nadu. Sati stones are to be seen in various parts of Tamil Nadu bearing testimony to the prevalence of Sati. Its chief centres were Tanjore, Pudukottai, Coimbatore and Salem. C.M. Lushington, the Acting Magistrate of Tanjore reported to the Madras Government in 1813 that one hundred widows were feared burnt alive in various parts of the Tanjore district between 1806 and 1813.⁹ He recommended that "prohibition of this practice would give universal satisfaction." Raja Ram Mohan Roy, published his Tracts on Sati in 1818 and 1820. In his Tracts Ram Mohan Roy held that the widows did not become satis of their own accord, but they were induced by their relatives to do so.¹⁰ Lord William Bentinck who took over charge as Governor-General in July 1828 made his motto as "British Greatness founded on Indian Happiness." He prepared a Minute which stated that "To consent to the

consignment year after year of hundreds of innocent victims to a cruel and untimely end when the power exists of preventing it is a predicament which no conscience can contemplate without horror."¹² Based upon Ram Mohan Roy's Tracts and Bentinck's Minute, Act no.XVII was passed on December 4, 1829 declaring that, "the practice of Suttee, or burning or burying alive the widows of Hindus, is hereby declared illegal, and punishable by the Criminal Courts."¹³ This Act came into force in the Madras Presidency in 1830. In the opinion of R.C. Majumdar, the abolition of Sati gave a fillip to the movement for social reform.¹⁴ Reformers could now concentrate on other problems such as infant-marriage and enforced-widowhood, restriction on temple entry and slavery.

Infant-Marriage and Enforced Widowhood:

The abolition of Sati led to the problems of the widows. Widowhood consisted of two types - infant-widowhood and adult widowhood. It was the problem of the infant widows that caused concern to the social reformers. In the Madras/^{Presidency} infant-marriage prevailed among Brahmins, Kshatriya and Chettis. Brahmins had their children married between the ages of 6 and 7 which

increased the percentage of widows.¹⁵ In 1881 the total number of Hindu girls married in the Madras Presidency was 157,466 and the number of widows in the same year was 5,621.¹⁶ Similarly, an estimated number of 434 girls below 10 years of age were married out of whom 16 became widows.¹⁷ Thus, the problem of widow marriage engaged the attention of social reformers who made the Widow Re-Marriage Movement popular in the Madras Presidency.

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) of Bengal spearheaded the Widow Re-Marriage Movement which gained momentum. His hard efforts bore fruit when the Widow Re-Marriage Reform Act No.XV was passed in 1856. This Act declared that no issue should be declared illegitimate on the ground that the woman had been previously married or betrothed to another person, who was dead at the time of such marriage.¹⁸ The grateful women of Calcutta perpetuated his memory by imprinting on the borders of their sarees the first line of a song "May Vidyasagar live long".¹⁹ As a follow-up action, the first widow marriage was celebrated in Calcutta on December 7, 1856 under the auspices of Vidyasagar. During that period, seventy widow marriages took place at Calcutta.²⁰

In Tamil Nadu, the first widow re-marriage *took* place at Salem in 1858. Widow re-marriage associations were established in various parts of the Presidency. Mention may be made of the Widow Re-Marriage Society (1873) at Nagercoil, the Madras Hindu Widow Marriage Association (1874), the Hindu Women's Re-Marriage. Association (Madras), (1882), the Madras Hindu Social Reform Association (1892) and the Rajahmundry Widow Marriage Association (1897).

Social Reform becoming a National Movement: Birth of the Indian National Social Conference, 1887

When the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885, its leaders felt the need for giving importance to social reform also. With this end in view, Mahadev Govind Ranade delivered a lecture on social reform at its first session at Bombay in 1885. In its second session held at Calcutta in 1886, its leaders such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Budruddin Tyabji and W.C. Banerji emphasised the need for discussing social matters as part of the Congress programme. In its third session held at Madras in 1887, it was finally decided by leaders like Raghunatha Rao, M.G. Ranade, Narendranath Sen and Janakinath Ghose that a separate conference should be held for the social progress of the country.²¹ Thus as a parallel association to the Indian National Organisation, the Indian National Social

Conference came into existence in 1887. Madras had the honour of hosting its first session in December 1887. T. Madhava Rao was its President, Raghunatha Rao, its General Secretary and M.G. Ranade, its Vice-President. It was decided to hold annual conferences in different parts of the country to discuss matters such as sea-voyages, inter-caste marriages, enforced-widowhood and ill-assorted marriages.²² It was also decided to hold provincial conferences to expand the scope of social reform. Thus, by founding the Indian National Social Conference, M.G. Ranade made the Social Reform Movement a national movement. At its third session in Bombay in 1889, the Indian National Social Conference under the Presidentship of Justice Telang, passed a resolution to prevent early consummation of marriage and fix fourteen as the age of marriage for girls.²³ However, the age-limit was fixed at 12 when the Age of the Consent Act was passed in 1891, thanks to the efforts taken by B.M. Malabari, a social reformer from Western India. Charles H. Heimsath has justified that with the passage of the Age of the Consent Act, the "... social reform movement achieved national recognition and hencefortheth social reform question was inescapably a part of national ideologies."²⁴

In 1903 N. Subba Rao and his fellow Theosophists founded the Madras Hindu National Association²⁵ as a

splinter group from the Madras Hindu Social Reform Association founded in 1892 by G. Subramania Iyer. Its main object was to introduce social reform on national lines.²⁶ It was decided to train Pandits, Priests and Preachers so that reform could be effected by way of removing social disabilities.²⁷

Temple Entry:

The fulcrum of the Social Reform Movement shifted its centre of activities from the welfare of women to that of the Depressed Classes. Low caste Hindus in Tamil Nadu particularly the Nadars, a community known for its hard work and industry, were not allowed to enter the temples to worship gods and goddesses. They agitated for temple entry at Tiruchendur in 1872, at Madurai Meenakshi temple in 1874, at Thiruthangal in 1876/78, at Gollapatti in 1885, at Tiruchuli in 1890, at Ettaiyapuram in 1895, at Kamudhi in 1897 and at Sivakasi in 1899. Of all these agitations, the agitation at Sivakasi in 1899 was the most important one. The Nadars desired to enter the local Viswanathaswami Temple which action was objected to by the Maravas (a marauding tribe) and the Vellalas, a land-owning community. On June 6, 1899 the Nadars faced the opposition of anti-Nadar combination of 10,000 men. The battle ended

in favour of the anti-Nadar combination. 886 Nadar houses were destroyed²⁸ and 25 Nadars were killed.²⁹ In 1910 the Nadars to promote their welfare, founded an organisation, Nadar Mahajana Sangam, at Madurai.

At the dawn of the 20th century, the Temple Entry Movement gained all-India status. It was first started in Travancore in 1919 by the Ezhavas, a low caste community in Kerala. The Congress made Temple Entry Movement a vehicle for the promotion of the welfare of the Depressed Classes. Thus, the Temple Entry Movement was appended to the national movement which made it an all-India movement. In 1923 the Indian National Congress at its Kakinada session passed a resolution favouring the entry of the Harijans and other Depressed Classes into temples. In 1924 E.V. Ramasami Naicker (1879-1973) popularly known as 'E.V.R.' or 'Periyar' (Great Soul) spearheaded an agitation at Vykam, Travancore, seeking the rights of Harijans to use the road leading to the temple. E.V.R. succeeded in his mission when the temples in Travancore were thrown open to all Hindus irrespective of their castes. In the opinion of K.K. Pillay, it marked an "... epoch in the History of Hinduism, and has set an inspiring example to the rest of India."³⁰ Following

this, a few temples were thrown open to all Hindus in Tamil Nadu in 1939 by means of Act No.XXII known as the Temple Entry Act.³¹ Finally, all the temples were thrown open to all sections of the Hindu community in 1949 by means of the Madras Temple Entry Authorization (Amendment) Act.³² Thus, Temple Entry formed an important phase in National Integration.

Slavery:

Those Depressed Classes who were allowed to enter temples, still could not get social status. They were groaning in the rock bottom of the society. Being economically poor, they remained as slaves. Slavery consisted of two types: Domestic slavery and Agricultural slavery. Slavery abounded in Tanjore, Madura, North Arcot, South Arcot, Salem, Coimbatore, Trichinopoly and Tinnevely. In 1819 at North Arcot, a mother sold her two sons for two pagodas, one rupee and nine fanams (approximately 9 rupees)

Unlike the abolition of Sati, infant-marriage and temple entry for which private individuals like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, B.M. Malabari and Mookka Nadan took up the initiative, the initiative for the abolition of slavery was taken up by the Government itself. The social environment in which the slaves languished

motivated the government to improve their condition and emancipate them from the fetters of serfdom.

In Bengal, the first attempt to abolish slave trade was taken by Warren Hastings in 1774 who prohibited slave trade, Lord Cornwallis who succeeded him, continued the policy till 1789. In 1811 the Bengal Government passed a legislation prohibiting importing of slaves. In 1832, the sale and purchase of slaves from one district to another was prohibited, but their sale within the district was allowed. Following the Bengal Government, the Government of Fort St. George prohibited all traffic in slaves in 1790.³⁴ In order to enforce the law effectively, a reward of 30 pagodas was offered for the discovery of every offender.³⁵

The dawn of the nineteenth century witnessed a series of enactments curbing slavery. Following England, which abolished Slave Trade in 1808, the Government of India enacted the Slave Trade Felony Act doing away with slave trade. It declared slave trade in the British Empire a great offence. In 1809 another Act was passed (Act No. XI of 1809) which declared slave trade to be unlawful. In 1811, the exportation of slaves was made an offence.³⁶ In 1812 slave trade was punished with a fine.³⁷ But these

legislations were of little effect. Consequent on the ineffectiveness of the statutes, the Supreme Government at Calcutta, empowered the Magistrates to arrest any person dealing in human trade and send them up for trial.

The Anti-Slavery Movement which gained momentum in England during the 1830's and the subsequent passing of the Act of 1833 to abolish slavery in India,³⁸ the Act V of 1843 which statutorily put an end to slavery in India,³⁹ the recommendation of the Select Committee, 1837 and the Indian Penal Code Act of 1860⁴⁰ - all these developments were responsible for the abolition of slavery in India. In the opinion of R.C. Majumdar, the abolition of slavery formed one of the causes of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 as it deprived the Masters of their slaves.⁴¹ The anti-slavery laws passed by the British Government in India indirectly promoted national integration as it was applicable to all the slaves existing in the country.

St. Ramalinga:

Saints also played a notable role in promoting national integration. St. Ramalinga (1823-1874) was one such saint who aimed to integrate all souls. His concept of integration transcended region, religion, nation, caste

or colour. Such an integration alone could thrive long. Wars come because of national interests and so the saint felt that the best remedy for the malady that afflicts the mankind is the Universal Integration.

Ramalinga's philosophy mainly consisted of four aspects: Jeevakarunya (compassion for all souls), Anmaneya Orumaippadu (Oneness of soul in love) and Suddha Sanmarga (Unity of all religions).

Imbued with the spirit of humanism, Ramalinga put into practice his ideals of compassion and love to all living beings.⁴² With this end in view the Saint founded in 1865 the Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Sanga.⁴³ People were admitted into it irrespective of caste and creed. As Tagore did in Calcutta, he found the entire universe as one entity. He sought to build upon Jeevakarunya, the brotherhood of all men which he gave the name Anmaneya Orumaippadu (Oneness of soul in love). He appealed to all people to free themselves from caste and religious sentiments "and practice Jeevakarunyam which is the only prerequisite for entering into Suddha Sanmarga or the True Path for attaining grace."⁴⁴ It was the time when Tamil Nadu was in the grip of religious tension. There was a constant fight between the Saivites, Vaishnavites, Jains,

Buddhists and Muslims. He therefore aimed at creating a society without caste and religious feuds which he named Suddha Sanmarga (Pure Path). According to him, religions are path-ways to reach God and so there should be no religious fanaticism. He says:⁴⁵

"Every religion is sustained by the grace of God
I have understood this truth,
Hence all religions have my acceptance,
Have I ever thought of discriminating religion and religion."

He felt that religion, instead of uniting men, had sown the seeds of discord. Therefore, the Saint aimed at the integration of all religions.

In his great Appeal the Saint says that religions and castes are positive hindrances to the realization of God.⁴⁶ He prays that God should grace humanity with love and unity.⁴⁷ All human beings were manifestations of God and so it is improper to distinguish them as high and low. The Saint felt deep sorrow for the miserable lot of the people as they were divided by caste system. He condemned it as a bondage to be broken.⁴⁸ All the treatises on four-fold castes and orders of life are but childishness.⁴⁹ Instead of uniting men, the four-fold castes divided them as poles apart which hinders social cohesion of people. He

declared in a forthright manner that blind faith and superstitious beliefs enjoined by false scriptures should be discarded so that they could never raise their head.⁵⁰ He had no respect for those scriptures which brought about confusion in the minds of men and thus sowed disunity in their ranks. He pleaded that everyone should have a pure approach for understanding things in their perspective. He held the view that no social reform could be beneficial to the society without cleansing the religious base. So he added a very significant adjective 'Suddha' (Pure) to the already existing Sanmarga Path with a view to cleansing Hindu religion of its narrow outlook and sectarian behaviour. He evolved his 'True Path' rid of out-worn dogmas and meaningless ritualisms which have deluded the minds of the people. Says he:⁵¹

"Discarding all distorting faiths and beliefs,
to evolve a common 'True Path'
that would vouchsafe to all afresh
the nectar of immortality."

The Saint also condemned the superstitious beliefs of the Vedas and the Puranas. To him, therefore, the four Vedas, the Agamas and the Shastras did not form the true and the only wisdom:⁵²

"The four Vedas, the Agamas, and all these
Shastras

Do not become our own wisdom

But remain only outside ourselves as our wisdom
for the market."

The Saint attacked the lop-sided structure of the society in which the rich became richer and the poor became poorer. Seized with compassion, he was unable to stand the tedium of sufferings and distress of the people. He cried in agony:⁵³

"I cannot for a moment put up with the trials,
and tribulations of the people in this world,
I cannot any longer see or hear anybody in
distress."

He felt aggrieved at seeing poor people being suppressed by the rich people who squeezed the blood of the poor. Unable to bear the pangs of agony, he shed tears which mingled in the sea.⁵⁴ He aimed to create a society in which all people would lead a happy, prosperous and contented life. It should have no economic inequality.⁵⁵

"Middle class, poor, rich, everyone should
through harmony ensure social happiness."

In this context he resembled Karl Marx and Mahatma Gandhi who aimed at creating a society free from economic exploitation. Such a society alone could thrive long.

To put into practice his teachings, Ramalinga founded at Karunguli in 1865 the Satya Sanmarga Sanga in which people were admitted irrespective of caste or religion. The objectives of the Sanga were: Teaching and Jeevakarunya, abolition of meat-eating, animal sacrifices and superstitious beliefs and casting away off 'Jati' (Caste) and 'Varuna' (Colour) differences and bring about unity among people of all creeds by making them realise the oneness of all souls in love. In 1867 the Saint founded the Satya Dharumachalai (Feeding Centre for the poor) for the purpose of feeding the poor which tradition is still maintained. In 1872 the Saint established the Satya Gnana Sabai (Hall of Wisdom for Universal Worship). He felt that God could be worshipped in the form of Light. The temple was designed in the shape of a full-blown lotus flower representing the human body, the temple of God. A five-foot high mirror and an oil lamp were installed in the sanctuary. Seven curtains (black, indigo, green, red, yellow, white and mixed colour) representing seven illusions, were placed in front of the glass. Each screen indicated an illusion that the Suddha Sivam or Para Sivam (Pure Siva) could be attained only after passing through these illusions. The implication of the Light worship is that God is in the body of every human being.

In order to realize an integral view of religions, the Saint created the concept of one God who was given the name Arutperunjothi. To him, the whole mankind is a single body, single 'jothi' (Effulgence of God). The whole world was one family. The United Nations whose aim is to form the World Government may be said to be the manifestation of the Saint's dream.⁵⁶ If everyone tried the True Path of Sanmarga, it was possible for one world to emerge - a world based upon social and economic equality. His message was of Universal nature, to Universal man for Universal peace, harmony and happiness through simple practice of love.⁵⁷ When people fought against one another on caste or religion, Ramalinga introduced a new way of worship to bind them together with love and spirituality.⁵⁸ In his philosophy, ignorance is metaphysically represented as darkness whereas the illuminating spiritual knowledge is represented as Light.⁵⁹ He gave the concept of "Arutperunjothi" (Supreme Grace of Light) to the form of new God who was not only the True Reality but also the manifestation of compassion. He yearned to promote unity among many cults, creeds and sects by giving them the true spiritual vision. He aimed to create one Religion, one Reality and one Society.⁶⁰ Thus Ramalinga formed an integral part of the renaissance movement in Tamil Nadu in the nineteenth century and contributed to spiritual unity of the country.

Hindu Revivalism:

St. Ramalinga was not the only voice of revivalism in the nineteenth century Tamil Nadu. Revivalist ideas which were gradually awakening in Tamil Nadu came from all over India and even from the West. Revivalism was the reinforcement of Hindu religious tenets in Social Reform. It also meant the revival of the Hindu tradition and also modifying some aspects of Hinduism in the light of the changing conditions. As observed by Sri Aurobindo, it satisfied the " ... old mentality and the new, the traditional and the critical mind. This in itself involves no mere return, but consciously or unconsciously hastens a restatement."⁶¹ The Indian leaders absorbed whatever that could be taken from their ancient culture and synthesized it with the thoughts and ideas of the West. Hence, the Indian Renaissance Movement is a synthetic restatement containing the best of the Indian and the Western thoughts. In other words, the soul of the old civilization was to be preserved in all its essential nature and at the same time, it was to be adaptable to new situation that emerged in the wake of the Western education.⁶²

Revivalist ideas changed many of the out-worn traditional outlook, especially with regard to religion,

the position of women and the Depressed Classes in the Tamil Society. These changes sprang up when traditional society was breaking down and the modern Tamil society was fast emerging. The main torch-bearers of the Revivalist Movement were the Brahmo Samaj (1828), the Prarthana Samaj (1867), the Arya Samaj* (1875), the Theosophical Society (founded in New York in 1875, shifted to Bombay, India in 1879) and the Ramakrishna Mission (1897). The Brahmo Samaj was the first attempt to found a new spiritual religion based upon original Hindu theism. It was a protest movement of the educated elite against the dogmas and superstitions of Hindu religion. In 1864 a branch of the Brahmo Samaj was opened at Madras by Sridharlu Naidu.⁶³ The first Brahmo marriage was solemnized by Sridharlu Naidu on 29 December, 1871. Branches were opened at Coimbatore (1880), Cuddalore (1905), Tinnevely and Trichinopoly. It performed widow marriages in the Madras Presidency. In the social field, besides lessening the intensity of the caste system, the Brahmo Samaj did constructive work for ameliorating the condition of the Depressed Classes. In

*A branch of the Arya Samaj was opened in Madras in 1920 by Rishi Ram. It had a girls' school, a primary school, homoeopathic and Ayurvedic dispensaries and the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic School in Madras - S.P. Sen (Ed.), The North and the South in Indian History: Contact and Adjustment, (Calcutta, 1976), p.153.

Viresalingam Pantulu's Theistic High School, several Harijan students studied. The great achievement of the Brahmo Movement lies in the fact that it arrested conversion to Christianity in Tamil Nadu..

The Theosophical Society was one of the foremost revivalist bodies that came to Tamil Nadu in the nineteenth century. It was founded in 1875 by Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky in New York.⁶⁴ It was shifted to Bombay in 1879 from where it was shifted to Adyar, Madras in 1882. Its objective was to diffuse knowledge of the laws which govern the Universe.⁶⁵ Branches were opened all over the Presidency. By 1884, the Theosophical Society had 80 branches in South India, with its members and sympathisers running into thousands. Olcott and Blavatsky started Sanskrit schools at Triplicane, Mylapore and Black Town⁶⁶ to promote Vedic learning. In 1884 at the annual conference of the Theosophists at Adyar, a resolution was passed to the effect that an "Aryan League of Honour" should be established in all centres to promote the cause of regeneration.⁶⁷ Col. Olcott started schools for Pariah children in 1894 at Adyar.⁶⁸ By 1901, 384 boys and 150 girls studied in these schools. Annie Besant (1847-1933), who came to India in 1893 wielded greater influence over the Theosophical Society. She reminded Indians that they

should get back to their past glory. She goaded the Indians to get them mentally prepared to play an important role in national life. In her first lecture delivered at Tuticorin, she said that India's past glory could be got back only by the revival of her philosophy and culture.⁶⁹ She advocated abolition of caste system. She believed that the caste system had injured the national spirit and also the nation's unity. She advocated abolition of child-marriage also.⁷⁰ She emphasized the fact that common people should be educated so that they could rebuild the nation. She also held that there should be no racial distinction between peoples of various countries. She wanted that people of all walks of life should join together under one umbrella - the Indian National Congress for all-round progress.⁷¹

In 1904 Annie Besant and her associates, N. Subba Rau and Rangacharya founded the Madras Hindu Association with a view to raising the age of betrothals for boys and girls.⁷² In 1917-18 she founded the Women's Indian Association at Adyar for the promotion of women's welfare, which, in 1927 blossomed into the All India Women's Conference. The formation of the Madras Hindu Association was a landmark in the Revivalist Movement in Tamil Nadu as it, in the opinion of Heimsath, "... admirably reconciled revivalist and social reformers."⁷³

In 1886 the Saiva Siddhanta Sabha was established at Tuticorin for the promotion of Saivism. In 1887 Sivasankara Pandiah started the Hindu Tract Society in Madras to spread the philosophy of Hinduism.⁷⁴

The Ramakrishna Mission, a religious and charitable institution, founded by Ramakrishna Paramahansa and reshaped by Swami Vivekananda in 1897, held that service to man was service to God. It emphasized that change of heart was essential for social change. It defended Hinduism from the onslaughts of Christianity. A branch of the Ramakrishna Mission was opened at Mylapore in March 1897 "for the attainment of one's own liberation as well as to get equipped for the amelioration of the world in all possible ways by following the path laid down by Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna Deva."⁷⁵ Its main objective was to promote the study of Vedanta as propounded by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and was practically illustrated by his own life and of comparative theology in its widest form."⁷⁶ Branches were also opened at Nattarampalli, Arasampatti, Barur, Krishnagiri and Dharmapuri. It did commendable educational and social work in Tamil Nadu.

Thus, as a result of the Revivalist Movement, Hinduism began to acquire new strength. Farquhar has rightly

said that "... everything oriental was glorified as spiritual and ennobling, while everything Western received condemnation as hideously materialistic and degrading."⁷⁷ It created a new social awareness that kept itself above narrow religious, caste consciousness. For example, the Theosophical Society rejected caste system and encouraged the marriage of virgin widows. Vivekananda restored Hinduism to its purity and heralded a new era. For the first time, the country projected a United Social Movement. It also changed the Tamils' style of thinking. It introduced new concepts, rejuvenated ancient ideals and injected new blood. It disseminated spiritual knowledge to the people irrespective of their castes and religions and set up educational institutions for imparting secular education.

By the end of the nineteenth century, revivalism became the major principle of the Indian Social Reform Movement. In 1897 Narendranath Sen, the President of the Indian National Social Conference, declared in unequivocal terms that social reform meant nothing more than a return to the social structure that was built up in ancient India.⁷⁸ With N.G. Chandavarkar's succeeding M.G. Ranade upon the latter's death in 1901 as President of the Indian National Social Conference, a new blood was injected into social

reform.⁷⁹ In 1904 Chandavarkar declared that if social reformers were to follow Western ideas instead of proceeding on "national lines," he would repudiate their Movement. He also maintained that reform should be aimed at restoring India's ancient ideals which alone should form the programme of the reformers. To quote him: "I am one of those who cling to the belief that all reform to be productive of good and lasting must begin by taking into account the past history of the people for whom it is meant and it ought to regulate itself on lines which do not conflict with their highest and noblest ideals."⁸⁰

At the Indian National Social Conference held in Benares in 1905, it was decided that the principles of social reform should be linked with Sanatana Dharma. At the Conference held in 1907, the Chairman of the Reception Committee noted that "Reform is not revolution, it is not innovation, or an apish imitation of foreign ideals. To be effective with the general masses it must aim at ideals which we call our own."⁸¹ Accordingly, local and provincial social reform associations were formed throughout the presidency with the objective of "advance along national lines."

Conclusion:

With the dawn of the twentieth century, two opposing trends were discernible in the political domain of Tamil Nadu. One was the Congress-dominated Indian Nationalism. The second one was the Dravidian Movement which was diametrically anti-Aryan Movement. With the coming into existence of Annie Besant in the Tamil Nadu politics in 1916 and with her Home Rule Movement, the Non-Brahmin Movement gained momentum. Leaders like P.T. Chetty and T.M. Nair felt that the Non-Brahmin communities were subservient to Brahmin domination which prompted them to start the South Indian People's Association in 1916, subsequently to be renamed as the South Indian Liberal Federation and the Justice Party. Its chief objectives were "to create and promote the education, social, economic, political, material and moral progress of all communities in South India other than Brahmins."⁸² The Dravidian Movement became anti-God Movement when E.V.R. started the Dravidar Kazhagam (Dravidian League). Soon after Independence, it became even anti-Indian Political Movement under C.N. Annadurai. However, the Chinese invasion of India in 1962 sounded a warning to the disintegrating forces and the subsequent action taken by the Government of India to promote national integration

changed the psychology of the Dravidian Movement which began to work for the first time since then for a federal set-up.

The division of India on linguistic basis has become a bane rather than a boon. Language disputes, border disputes, water disputes and communal disputes have become irritants to the nation's solidarity. Though, after Independence, castes have lost their rigours, they are yet a force to reckon with. National Integration is a pre-condition to social and economic integration.

The velocity with which our freedom fighters were motivated with the feeling of oneness to gain political freedom had been totally absent among their successors after Independence, to gain social and economic freedom. Regional rivalries and frustrations regarding the pace of economic development and establishment of public sector undertakings are undermining national unity.⁸³ Consensus on a national language is still eluding. Making all the 14 Indian languages as the official languages, as in Sweden, with English as the link-language, may be one of the ways through which the gordian knot could be cut. Emotional integration of various sub-nationalities is the cherished goal of the Government but it remains a distant dream. The linking of

waterways from one part of the country to another will be of little avail, unless it is comented by a sense of commitment for unity on the part of the people. Mere economic planning, or social achievement, science or technology could not guarantee national unity, unless they are tinged with patriotic fervour and fellow-feeling. The tragedies of two Germany, two Korea and two Vietnam should be the grim reminders. Thus, unless a fundamental community of interests and fellow-feeling come to be shared by the people and differences are settled amicably on mutual consent as if they cropped up in a family, there could be no real national integration.⁸⁴ A just social order based upon equality of opportunity should be ensured.⁸⁵ People should strive hard to understand each other more intimately and unitedly work for the cherished goal⁸⁶ keeping in view the dictum of Poet Tagore:

"Where the mind is without fear,
 And the head is held high,
 Where knowledge is free,
 Where the world has not been broken up into
 fragments by narrow domestic walls,

 Into that Heaven of Freedom,
 Let my country awake."

Thus, compared to Free India's problem of National Integration, the nineteenth century India was relatively united, thanks predominantly to the Social Reform Movement and Tamil Nadu in no less a degree contributed to India's integration - a legacy to be followed for future guidance.

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