

by the supernatural presence of the healer, Shanti induces him to renounce the garb of a sannyasi because they have won the battle and do not want a share in the kingdom. Instead, she accompanies Jibananda on their 'great departure' (mahaprasthan), somewhat reminiscent of the final journey of the Pandavas. While Draupadi was a mere camp follower of her five husbands, the first to fall on the way, the neo-positivist heroine of Bankim marches abreast with her fellow traveller husband in their joint quest for the welfare of the motherland. Their final departure though depicted in supernatural terms is seen as the last act in the heroic defence of the motherland.

*Then the two arose, hand in hand they disappeared on that moonlit
night into infinity.*

*Alas, will the like of them ever appear again?
Sons like Jibananda, daughters like Shanti?*

The restoration of order in the torturous situation of a colonial society transforms the man-woman relationship into an allegory of heroism that crosses the boundaries of naturalism. The novel begins to aspire to the condition of the epic.

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PERIYAR, WOMEN AND AN ETHIC OF CITIZENSHIP

V. Geetha

Placing Periyar

From his earliest days in public life, Periyar was wary and contemptuous of politics, the realm of power, contention, manipulation and machinations, of office, honours and authority. When he launched the Self-Respect Movement in 1925, he consciously chose to work in what we today refer to as civil society. Then, this was a restricted space, held captive to colonialist 'native'

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CITIZENSHIP

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intelligentsia. This colonial subject, male, upper caste and middle class, on his way to becoming a nationalist, dominated civic life in the Tamil country as elsewhere; a civic life, devoted to ideas, agitations, meetings, mobilization of men and resources which engaged the colonial state in a vigorous dialogue, confronting it with its professed commitment to progress and freedom. These articulate and earnest men fashioned for themselves a sober, solemn subjectivity, anticipating an ideal of citizenship, which, in the years to come, would find its most lofty expression in the Constitution of free India. But in the 1920s and 1930s, this ideal was only in the making and was subject to the attractions of that curious admixture of politics and piety which Gandhi embodied in his person and utilized to justify his practice. The colonialist (nationalist) subject's dream of a modern, free nation was riddled with fantasy and nostalgia, elements which were crucial to Gandhi's vision of free India, of a Hind Swaraj.

Periyar, iconoclastic, sensitive to caste as a system of inequality and cruelty, was initially a fellow traveller with these dreamers of modern India: he was much influenced by the Gandhi of the mid- and late-1920s, inspired by the ideals of non-cooperation and constructive work. However, he inflected the Gandhian ideal in his own terms. As he wrote in the very first issue of his remarkable weekly, *Kudi Arasu*:

A sense of self-respect and fraternity must arise within human society. Notions of high and low amongst men should disappear. A sense of the unity of all humankind must dawn in each of us. Communal confrontations must cease to be. In the course of propagating these ideals, we will not hesitate to take on friend or foe if they range themselves against us and criticize us through word and deed. (Anaimuthu 1974, xxiv)

Periyar's re-reading of Gandhi was particularly evident in his definition of untouchability. It is clear from his pronouncements of this period that he held the abolition of untouchability to be contingent on the attainment of self-respect by the 'adi dravidas'. Thus, he would imprecate, rage, cajole and persuade adi dravidas to fight an oppression which inhered as much in their felt lowliness, as it did in those social and economic structures which utilized their labour and cast them aside as untouchable (*Kudi Arasu*, 24 May 1925; 21 June 1925). Periyar also made it clear that the liberation of other non-brahmin castes lay in the liberation of the adi dravidas (Anaimuthu 1974, 404). This anti-caste, egalitarian vision sustained Periyar's work and thought, even after he broke faith with Gandhi. This happened in 1927, after Gandhi had expressed at a public meeting in Mysore his faith in the norms of 'varnadharma'. Periyar had been uneasily aware of Gandhi's peculiarly convoluted arguments about caste and untouchability, and *Kudi Arasu* carried a courteous but firmly-voiced criticism of Gandhi's stance in this respect in late 1925. The critic, one Pandit Dharma Deva Siddhanta

Alangarar, had remarked that by endorsing 'varna' differences, Gandhi was creating obstacles in the way of the one objective dear to his heart: the abolition of untouchability (*Kudi Arasu*, 13 September 1925).

After 1927, Periyar undertook a systematic, relentless campaign against the Mahatma's politics of piety on the one hand and, on the other hand, chose to work in those very spaces Gandhi had recognized as pertinent, both for the transformation of Hindu (and by implication, Indian) subjectivity and the dawning of Hind Swaraj. These were spaces constituted by the interlinked realms of consciousness, communication, sexuality and identity. To re-work and reclaim these spaces for a radical utopia, Periyar founded the Self-Respect Movement in 1925 and worked hard to advance a counter to both the lures of the Gandhian Congress as an institution and nationalism as an ideology. He rejected the latter's claims as the ethic of our times and chose, instead, to create a social and cultural movement of revolt—against caste, brahminism, religion and the rule of men over women. Periyar's antagonism as well as affiliation to Gandhi needs to be understood if we are to map the coordinates of his distinctive ethic. Besides, Periyar's life, world view, practice and ideas represent, in their complex articulation with one another, an experience, a consciousness, a politics that modern India did not choose and, as such, indicate choices which the so-called makers of modern Indian consciously eschewed and actively cast aside.

Where Gandhi looked to an abiding and deeply felt religious faith, experienced by him, at least, as an ineffable inner voice, an instruction from a morally sensitive conscience, to sustain political and social activism, Periyar trusted to reason. Defined by him as an intelligence which sought to splice apart and critically examine all sorts of phenomena, this reason existed in his lexicon as an adjunct of a fearless, questioning self; which was determined to claim its autonomy and dignity in a society which, for centuries, had subjected either to the brahmin's cunning power, divisions of caste and to notions of intellectual and ethical lowliness. Describing his epistemology, as it were, he once observed that he had always tried to go beyond appearances to get at the truth behind phenomena. As far as he was concerned, it was his power of rationality which helped him do this (Anaimuthu 1974, 2009). It was for this reason that Periyar praised and upheld the example set by the Buddha. He remarked that the Buddha had counselled men to use their minds and follow the dictates of their intelligence. He had also asked men to exercise their freedom to reject what their rational minds could not comprehend or accept, such as heaven, hell, salvation and differences between human beings, such as brahmin, shudra and panchama (Anaimuthu 1974, 307).

What was 'truth' to Gandhi, directing him to offer satyagraha in various instances, was sophistry to Periyar: for, as he observed, the 'truths' which the Mahatma claimed for his own cannot be considered given and universal. For Periyar, truth was essentially relative and subjective and he did not imagine

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that there existed a surefire test that would help one ascertain what was truth and what was not in any given instance. The 'triumph of truth', Periyar argued, represented, more often than not, a triumph of cunning and authority. For one was as likely to submit to a regimen of truth, as to be convinced of it. For his own ideas, Periyar made no absolute claims and insisted they were to be accepted or discarded by subjecting them to rational and critical scrutiny at various moments in time. If Gandhi rested his 'truth' in a transcendence he believed to exist, Periyar refused to rest his arguments in anything but the claims of the oppressed in the here and now (*Kudi Arasu*, 6 September 1931).

Where Gandhi demanded penitence and sacrifice, as for example, with the practice of untouchability, and insisted that only a morally active and repentant self can bring about social reform, Periyar advocated resistance and struggle, often urging his self-respecters to bring to the fore those antagonisms and contradictions in caste society and act on them. This was particularly evident in Periyar's remonstrance to the *adi dravidas*. Rather than appeal to their felt lowliness he sought to provoke their sense of defiance and anger. He upbraided them for referring to upper caste men as 'swamis', and for letting themselves be convinced that their physical condition—of dirt, ill-health and sickness—was because they had not worked enough to lift themselves out of their misery (Anaimuthu 1974, 56). He implored them to look to and understand the system which required their labour and therefore kept them confined to a position of abject lowliness (Anaimuthu 1974, 71–72).

Where Gandhi communicated through complex metaphors drawn from the language of faith and devotion, appealing to the meditative self, Periyar spoke as a pedagogue, a teacher, who sought to expound ideas and encourage discussion, debate and dialogue. Periyar was given to concluding his addresses with an entreaty: his listeners were to think through whatever they had heard at the meeting and decide for themselves if there were reason and justice in the things which had been told them.

Where Gandhi looked to Tolstoy, the righteous prophet, Periyar invoked Socrates; to the 'ashram' with its experiments in truth, was counterpoised the 'agora', that public and civic space to which all manner of people could claim access and rights. The Self-Respect Movement in fact caused the agora to come into existence for hundreds of ordinary people; *adi dravidas* and women not only attended self-respect meetings in large numbers but took part and addressed the movement's several conferences.

Gandhi's piety and transcendence committed him and the Indian National Congress to a politics which commanded mass devotion, but, which, in the final analysis, was dictated by the hegemonic demands of a multi-layered Congress leadership and the material interests of a confident and growing bourgeoisie (Ghosh 1989, 1995). Periyar's reason and commitment to the agora of the here and now left him with a constituency

that was shifting, and which existed as a whole only in terms of that large and complex non-brahmin historic bloc Periyar attempted to build and re-build. Sometimes this bloc appeared divided and internally inconsistent, as when rich non-brahmins found themselves being criticized for their class biases by young self-respecters committed to socialism. At other times, there ensued arguments between believers and atheists; between those who were convinced of the cultural worth of saivism and those who felt all religious ideas and institutions were inexorably brahminical. Yet, Periyar's catholic non-brahminism and his anti-caste mission held this unwieldy bloc together, especially at those strategic and crucial moments when the larger interests of all non-brahmins were at stake, as during the anti-Hindi agitations and when the Congress ministry—formed after the 1935 elections—tried to impose an educational system that would allow youngsters to practise the caste vocation of their fathers. For Gandhi, for all that piety and faith, the here and now of politics proved determinate, whereas for Periyar, committed to the present and scorning transcendence, the future seemed to hold infinite promises.

Gandhi imaged the socially conscious and active subject of history as a devout upper caste Hindu, essentially noble and pious, who, of his own volition, would surrender his privileges and usher in change, conferring, as it were, equality and self-respect on those whom, until recently, he had imposed his logic of difference and exclusion. This subject was to attain his own in history through a conscious re-making of his subjectively through specific acts of penance and sacrifice. He had to discover the untouchable in himself, suffer his indignity as his own and thereby cleanse himself of disgust, prejudice, fear and hatred. Likewise, by spinning, wearing khadi and working with his hands, he was to acknowledge and make his own the labour and life of the Hindu peasant and weaver. At another level, he was expected to reexamine his sexual identity, since it was a particular deployment of masculinity, premised on desire, its satiation and the eruption of desire again, which forced men to think dark thoughts, bred incontinence in all aspects of life and, thereby, urged them onto unethical action. The 'brahmacharya vrata', which Gandhi counselled to his male disciples, why even to Congressmen, rested on a particular vision of femininity: if men were to renounce desire, and forswear the excess and violence which desire propelled into existence, women had to rework the terms of conjugality. They were to transform the passive virtues, conventionally associated with them, patience, sacrifice, rectitude and suffering, into active ones and use them in the cause of the nation. Women, for Gandhi, were the ideal satyagrahis, natural political subjects in the Gandhian narrative of satyagraha. They were not to be bound by their domesticity, but neither were they to discard their duties. In effect, they were to assume responsibility for the nation, as they did for the home and family.

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sexuality. For him the lowest of the low in caste society, adi dravidas and women, were the natural subjects of history. But their emancipation and self-fulfillment in history were possible only if the entire social order of caste was stood in its head. That is, Periyar did not trust to the enabling power of individual consciousness alone to bring about transformation. Consciousness was for him always already collective. Entire communities of the oppressed, all those non-brahmin communities which stood shamed and humiliated by brahminism and caste, and women everywhere, were to create their own history, by responding in anger, in defiance and in unison, in full knowledge of what held them in thrall to an unjust social order. On the one hand, this meant a renunciation of caste with all its privileges, an abjuring of that religious faith which legitimized caste and a re-making of society along non-hierarchical lines. On the other hand, this required a remaking of masculine and feminine subjectivities, so that the much desired self-respect, mutuality and freedom Periyar sought out as the defining premises of his utopia, could be grounded in primary human relationships. Thus, reason and critique, desire and freedom, mutuality and reciprocity constellated into a figuration for Periyar, in which could be traced those new structures of feeling he wished to cultivate in his fellow beings. For him, the emergence of a social order rested as much on such structures of feeling as they did on transformed material structures and social relationships. [. . .]

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HER-SELF: GENDER AND EARLY WRITINGS OF MALAYALEE WOMEN

J. Devika

Writing to C.W.E. Cotton, agent to the governor of the Madras Presidency in response to his inquiries regarding a certain Lakshmikutty Amma from Travancore (Tiruvitamkooor), M.E. Watts, the dewan of Travancore, remarked: 'This clever young Nair lady has got on by her own efforts. She is headstrong, mannish and full of the perfervid spirit that espouses lost causes'. The young lady in question was the daughter of a retired senior official in the Travancore Education Department, and had taught at Queen Mary's College, Chennai