



DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY LOYOLA HISTORY ASSOCIATION (2024-25)

Prof. Hiralal Gupta Endowment Lecture

The Prof. Hiralal Gupta Endowment Lecture on Periyar and Recent Political Debate was held on 27th February at Yedanapalli Hall (YD Hall), Loyola College, Chennai. The event was organized by Dr. P.J. Biju Joseph (Assistant Professor, Department of History) and Mr. B. Naresh. The Chief Guest, B. Kolappan, Senior Journalist from The Hindu, arrived at 12:30 PM. The session began with the invoking of God's blessing with prayer song by the department choir and followed by the welcome address by Dr. A. Arputha Selvi, Head of the Department. The introduction to chief guest was delivered by Dr. P. Biju Joseph, followed. Dr. Antony Samy, former Head of the English Department, felicitated the Chief Guest.



The speaker, B. Kolappan, began his lecture by emphasizing that this year marks the 100th Year Celebration of the Self-Respect Movement. He spoke about Periyar's consistency and inconsistency on various issues, pointing out that Periyar initially had links with the Congress in Erode and even established the first Hindi teaching school there. However, he later took a strong anti-Congress stance, especially criticizing Brahmin dominance within the party.

The speaker mentioned that Periyar implemented Gandhi's demand for an anti-alcohol movement and actively participated in the Vaikom Temple Entry Movement. He also noted that Periyar called Independence Day a "Black Day" due to what he saw as Congress' Brahminical control.



Chief Guest Felicitation by Dr. Antony samy



Discussing Periyar's stance on language, the speaker noted that Periyar had controversial views on Tamil. He referred to Tamil as a "Kattumirandi" (barbaric) language, but later wrote a book explaining why he called Tamil a barbaric language. The speaker explained that Periyar criticized works like Silappathikaram, Thirukkural, and Sangam literature, arguing that these texts were used to reinforce caste hierarchies. However, Periyar valued English for its scientific temper and advocated for a simplified and modernized Tamil that would be accessible to all. The speaker also highlighted Periyar's reforms in the Tamil alphabet and his criticism of the Bhakti movement, which he viewed as a Brahminical tool to maintain caste dominance.

On the topic of social justice, the speaker pointed out that Periyar was the first leader to address caste-based salary inequality among teachers. He mentioned Periyar's famous quote, "எந்தசாதி இருந்தா எனக்கு என்ன" (What does it matter which caste one belongs to?), emphasizing Periyar's commitment to eradicating caste discrimination.

Regarding Periyar's political actions and views, the speaker elaborated on Periyar's crucial role in political reservation. He stated that 77% of government jobs were occupied by Brahmins, and Periyar campaigned against this dominance. He also touched upon Periyar's discussions with Jinnah regarding Dravidistan and his complicated relationship with the DMK. The speaker quoted Periyar's description of the DMK as "Kaavali Payya" (watchman boy), highlighting his disillusionment with the party. The lecture further covered Periyar's opposition to temple worship, with the speaker noting that Periyar encouraged Dalits to convert to Islam as a means of social liberation.



The speaker then discussed Periyar's influence on media and scholarship, referencing Mythili Sivaraman's book, *Haunted by Fire: Essays on Caste, Class, Exploitation, and Emancipation*. He pointed out that Sivaraman observed how newspapers of Periyar's time failed to give adequate attention to his speeches and writings. The speaker also mentioned that Periyar's publication translated Bhagat Singh's essay "Why I Am an Atheist" into Tamil, and that he encouraged Jeevanandham to take up the translation work.

The lecture concluded with a Q&A session, where the speaker addressed various queries from the audience. The event ended with the Vote of Thanks, delivered by Rev. Dr. Arockiasamy J, Coordinator of the History Department (Shift-II).