

**Middle-Class Women In Tamilnadu:
Perspectives on Women's Liberation
(1890-1920)**

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D E C L A R A T I O N

Certified that the dissertation entitled "Middle-class women in Tamil Nadu : Perspectives on Women's Liberation (1890 - 1920)" submitted by Miss. S. Anandi is in fulfilment of eight credits out of the twenty six credits for the degree of Master of Philosophy of this University. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University and is her own work.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ARL	- Adyar Research Library.
BCAS	- Bulletin for Concerned Asian Scholars.
CSSH	- Comparative Study in Society and History.
EPW	- Economic & Political Weekly.
IESHR	- Indian Economic Social History Review.
ICHR	- Indian Council of Historical Research.
IHR	- Indian Historical Review.
ISR	- Indian Social Reformer.
JNUL	- Jawaharlal Nehru University Library.
MMAL	- Marai Malai Adigal Library.
MIDSL	- Madras Institute of Development Studies Library.
NMML	- Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.
NNR	- Native Newspaper Reports.
NLR	- NEW Left Review.

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A Note on Translation

The Translation of Tamil sources mentioned in the text has been done by me. Bharathi's work such as Bharathiyarin Kavidaigal, Penkalukku Katturaigal have been given in the footnotes for the sake of convenience as Selected Poems and Essays for women respectively.

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INTRODUCTION

This study is a preliminary attempt to deal with the condition of Middle-class women in Tamil Nadu for the period 1890 - 1920.

The late 19th and the early 20th centuries were a significant phase in the history of Modern India. This period witnessed a strong socio-cultural reform movement in which the 'women's question' was given importance. This period witnessed the emergence of women's movement in many parts of India and the development of women's consciousness about women.

While in the mid 19th century and afterwards the emphasis was given to political struggle against imperialism, in the late 19th century and in the early 20th century the national regeneration was sought through social reform activities, which were mainly concerned about women's development, and the harmony in the family. The pioneering efforts made during this period, subsequently led to the development of movement for emancipation of women in the later years.

This period was also significant from the point of the colonial government's attempts to introduce various legislations such as Age of consent Bill, post-puberty, marriage bill etc.

With the advent of English education, modern capitalist enterprises, land reforms, improved communication, there emerged a new middle-class, who mainly occupied themselves in the government services white-collar professions etc. It was a section of this class which became a vanguard of all progressive movements in India.

This educated, enlightened group incorporated certain concepts like equality, progress, liberty, humanism, reason as the basis of thought process and nationality. They believed that the social reforms can bring about changes in the society, such as eradication of the obscurantist practice and traditional beliefs.

These reformers and other middle-class men's perception about social changes, especially their ideas about women's liberation and the consciousness of educated middle-class women about women's problems, have been studied here.

There are very few works on the condition of middle-class women for this period. For Tamil Nadu there is virtually none.

The work of C.S. Lakshmi¹ on women in literature is a study of Tamil novels mainly written by women.

1. C.S. Lakshmi, Face behind the Mask : Women in Tamil Literature, 1985.

She has attempted to locate the feminist consciousness in the writings of women. Apart from this work, there is virtually no work done on the theme related to women in Tamil Nadu for this period.²

The term Tamil Nadu has been used to denote 12 Tamil speaking districts of Madras Presidency such as Madras, Chingleput, North Arcot, Salem, Coimbatore, South Arcot, Tanjore, Trichirapoly, Madurai, Ramnad, Nilgiris and Tinnelveli. In 1911, there were 17 million people with Tamil as their Mother Tongue. Madras was the Centre of social reform activities in this period, where social reform conferences, womens India Associations, and various small women's associations and widow's home were active. There was some ^{women's} journals published from Madras. Though Madras city had many Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada speaking people, it was the Tamils who monopolised the educational facilities and administrative and political opportunities.

This study has been divided into four main chapters. The first chapter deals with the occupations of middle-class women in both learned professions and in other occupations. It also attempts to analyse the changing nature of occupational position of middle-class women and

2. Another work on Tamil Nadu women, V. Rajalakshmi - political behaviour of women in Tamil Nadu, 1985. This study mainly deals with political participation of women during the national movement period and after. This work however does not deal with the social condition of women, such as familial relationships.

how new employment opportunities for women did not bring about change in the social status of women.

The second chapter deals with the social condition of women as prevailed in this period. An analysis of the position of women in the family as wives, mothers and daughters, the conceptions and values attached to women's role etc. has been made here.

The third chapter describes the perceptions of male reformers' and the middle-class men's about women's problems. This will be a study of how social changes especially the position of middle-class women was sought within the existing patriarchal system and how reform activities ended up in emphasising women's traditional roles in the family.

The fourth chapter attempts to find out the changing role of women in this period and the development of their consciousness. An analysis about their activities and consciousness has been made in this chapter.

As far as the source materials are concerned, the archival sources, do not throw any light on the lives of women in this period. The Vernacular journals devoted to women's cause like Vivekabodini, Chakravartini, Anandabodini, Vivekachindamani, and Suguna bodini ³

3. These journals clearly mentioned in the cover page that they have been started to raise the consciousness of both men and women for the elevation of Hindu women. (a) Chakravartini, edited by C. Subramania Bharathi (A Tamil Monthly) 1906 onwards. (b) Suguna bodini - fortnightly for Hindu ladies. started from 1889. (c) Vivekabodini, from Mylapore, Madras. This journal states that women too write for their magazine but they had refused their names to be published in the Journal.

and the vernacular Newspaper Swadesa Mitran,⁴ covered a vast range of subjects of interest to women. Many of them were instructive about how women could lead a peaceful family life; others gave guidance in cooking painting, child-caring etc. They also carried informative articles about women of ancient India, travel news, moral values etc. However, they do not give a picture of Tamil society as a whole and the position of women as existed in that society.

Apart from the Journals and the Newspaper, there were novels written by women and men taking up issues like child-marriage, widow-remarriage, the problem of dowry etc., Many of them focussed on the relationship between Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in family.

Autobiographies and biographies of women should generally provide a greater wealth of information about the inner feelings and social reality of the individuals and of the society, although the few biographies collected for this study did not really serve any purpose as information or source material. Major issues like

4. The Tamil Newspaper Swadesa Mitran was edited by G. Subramania Iyer. This was started as a bi-weekly newspaper and then became a daily newspaper, it contained in almost all issues, a separate page for women.

man-woman relationship, sexuality, femilial problems. etc., were absent in them.⁵ Even the information on the various caste conferences does not provide us with information on the condition of various caste women.

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5. One reason could be the belief that private life of women should not be let out or published. Another reason could be that having recently stepped into a public sphere the women themselves gave greater importance in their writings to their public life and preferred not to speak about their problems on the domestic front.

CHAPTER IOCCUPATIONAL PATTERNS OF WOMEN

In this chapter an attempt is made to present a profile of economic position of women in Tamil speaking areas of the Madras Presidency for the period 1890-1920. The discussion is confined to the occupational status of middle-class women who were a minority but played an important role in society in this period as intellectuals, as philanthropists, and as social reformers.

This chapter also attempts to analyse the changing nature of occupational position of women by focussing on the new professions to which they entered as a consequence of education. But these new employment opportunities for women did not immediately bring about change in the social status of women. As Jane Lewis points out, the changes of "status within the middle-class did not affect the prescription meted out to middle-class women."¹ The practices like sex segregation in employment, the idea of separate sphere for women etc., continued as before. With the result potentially liberating developments were not realised. However the status of the

1 Jane Lewis, Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual divisions & social changes, 1984, p. 81.

population of any given society is intimately connected with its economic position. The patterns of occupations, participation in economic activities and relationship with the labour market affect the social and political activities of a particular group. It is to be noted that the "patterns of women's activity in turn are greatly affected by social attitudes and institutions which stem from the social ideology concerning basic components of status in any given period."² It is also true that the economic roles and rewards allocated to men and women separately reflect and perpetuate a system and exploitation.

The existing literature on women's studies and some historical works done on the condition and status of women for this period (late 19th century and early 20th century) tends to ignore the necessity of studying the economic position of the women of various classes. Therefore, works on women's studies do not offer an insight into the occupational patterns of middle-class

2 Leela Dube et.al., Towards equality, Report of the Committee on Status of Women in India, 1974. p. 148.

women.³ The vernacular literature of this period, also does not throw much light on this aspect.

The main sources, used to get a picture of women's occupational patterns for this period are census reports and District Gazetteers. Various limitations, however, exist in using census reports as primary source material for analysing women's occupational patterns. The most important of them is that the process of accumulating, arranging and analysing census data was not a value-free exercise, especially with regard to the work of women.⁴

3 Few works can be cited as examples : Kumari Jayawardena, Feminism & Nationalism in the Third World, 1986; Pratima Ashthana, Women's Movement in India, 1974; Kiran Devandra, Status and position of women in India, 1985; Meredith Bothwick, Changing role of women in Bengal 1849-1905 1984. All the above mentioned works mainly deal with the problems of middle-class women, without, however defining the economic position which is essential to study their condition in a given society.

However for the post-independence period we have numerous works on the employment of women, women's economic role, etc. For example : Margaret Mead, Male & Female, 1950; Ester Boserup, Women's role in economic development, 1970; D.R. Gadgil, Women in the working force in India, 1965. Apart from these books, we have reports, conference papers written on economic condition of women.

4 Edward Higgs, "Women, occupation and work in the 19th century censuses", History Workshop, No. 23, Spring 1987, p.60.

The census reports invariably measure the level of employment of men and tend to ignore the inter-changeable role of women as housewives and gainful workers. Thus they excluded women's household chores from the category of productive work for "it was being argued that many women would be counted twice, as housewives and as specific occupationist."⁵ Thus for 1891-1920, no entry was to be made for wives and daughters who were engaged in domestic labour at home. Unpaid helpers and self-employed categories, who had no attachment to labour market, had been left out in the census enumeration of occupation. In short, as Higgs points out, "Women tended to be defined as dependents, whatever their productive functions whilst men were classified according to the nature of their labour."⁶ Thus it fails to reflect the economic situation prevailing in that period. Another problem with the census reports' was the classification of occupations. Only the occupation which had money value in the market were entered as economic activity. Thus considerable number of middle-class women who engaged themselves in philanthropic and voluntary social service, activities were not included in the census reports' enumerations of women's occupations.

5 Jane Lewis, op.cit., p. 146.

6 Edward Higgs, op.cit., p. 60.

The difficulties involved in enumerating female occupations were many, especially in a society where majority of women were illiterate and where "female sex (was) regarded as unimportant or there was a desire to maintain the privacy and seclusion of women."⁷ Moreover, the figures in the occupational tables were constructed by male enumerators who themselves has certain preconceived notions about the position of women in society.⁸ The technical errors in the classification of various categories of occupations have hampered the assessment about women's economic role. For example, the classification of categories like Medicine, Law, Books & prints was different for each census reports. As Higgs states the headings under which individual occupations were classified together and the very classification of occupations, under various headings changed from census to census.⁹ Thus we do not find common categories to compare 1901 and 1921 occupation patterns. Often in the census reports, the women who carry on occupations through agents, servants, etc., are also shown as actual workers. Thus we are misled when calculating the female actual workers. Again here another limitation faced by us is that we do not have the wage statistics for both men

7 Census report of India 1891, Madras, Vol. XV, p. 120.

8 Edward Higgs, op.cit., p. 60.

9 Ibid., p. 62.

and women. The census reports on women's activities only describe them in relation to those of men and never on their own.¹⁰ In the absence of information on the income categories, the related position of women's civil condition and employment and age specific employment categories, we are forced to analyse only the comparative position of men and women in the given occupations (i.e. sex ratio). The statistics of 1891 census on occupation categories are ambiguous.¹¹ Therefore we take 1901 as a base year to analyse the trend in the occupational position of women.

Since the census reports do not classify the occupational status of both men and women in terms of class categories, but only in terms different castes, it is very difficult to ascertain the middle-class women's occupations. It becomes necessary, therefore, to first define what exactly we mean by middle-class, to analyse its composition, and to categorise in general as to what can be considered as middle-class occupations. Only then

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- 10 Due to the absence of wage statistics we have been forced to classify women belonging to the households of middle class men, ipso facto, as women of middle-class.
- 11 Census of India, Madras 1891, vol. XI. The Report says that enumeration of occupational categories in 1891 was a "total failure", since there was no distinction made between the dependents and actual workers. Thus unimaginable number of females returned under each occupation. Since they were actually dependents, included in the worker's category. For example, under the category of Army -150 females were returned while the Army till 1921 had no female workers.

will it be possible to talk in terms of this middle-class women. In 1911 the Tamil speaking areas including Madras city, consisted of twelve districts, which had 17 million people whose mother-tongue was Tamil.¹² There were also considerable number of Telugu speakers in these areas. The average female population for the total Tamil speaking areas was 1020 per 1000 males in 1891 which increased to 1027 per 1000 males in 1901. In 1921 not only the overall population growth declined, the female population ratio per male also considerably (compared to 1891 ratio) went down. But the total female population in the 9 districts, except Nilgiris, Chinglepet and Madras, was always higher than the male population.¹³

With the growth of western education, modern capitalist enterprises, land reforms, new legal administration, improved communication and commercial progress, there emerged in the last quarter of the 19th century, a new middle-class "which shared a common economic interest, mode of behaviour, and traits of character."¹⁴ They expressed their status mainly through their standard of life, Nature of occupation and wealth. The composition

12 Census of India, Madras 1911, Report, Part I, Vol. XII, p. 140.

13 Census of India, Madras 1921, Table II, p. 4.

14 B.B. Misra, Indian Middle-class Their growth in Modern Times, 1961, p.3.

of this middle-class was as complex as that of caste groups. The new class consisted of the following occupational groups:¹⁵

- 1) The white-collar professional class, which included government civil servants, lawyers, doctors, teachers, publishers and journalists. They constituted the bulk of the Indian middle-class;
- 2) The joint peasant proprietors, the holders of the middle-grades of property tenures of land, tenants etc;
- 3) Traders, merchants, agents in trading firms and financial concerns, including money-lenders and bankers;
- 4) Clerks, assistants and other non-manual workers;
- 5) Philanthropists, officers in educational and social association bodies etc.

Though elsewhere in India the new class-comprised of people of all castes and different creeds, in South India, until the beginning of the 20th century the professional class was constituted of those who ranked high in the social and caste hierarchy. Irschick clearly

15 This classification of middle-class has been done, based on the work of B.B. Misra, *Ibid*; B.M. Bhatia, "Growth and Composition of Middle class in South India in the 19th century", *IESHR*, No. 2, Vol. 4, 1965.

points out that the Tamil Brahmins in Madras and in other Tamil speaking areas became the sole representatives of the middle-class as they were unusually given high position, in the social hierarchy.¹⁶ He remarks that the Madras bureaucracy until the 19th century was dominated by 'Desatha Brahmins'. Though they comprised only 3.2% of the total population, three-fourths of the occupations were in their hands. They also slowly strengthened their position by occupying great majority of administrative and educational position in almost all districts, especially in Tanjore & Trichinopoly. By the beginning of the 20th century there were more non-Brahmins who having acquired vernacular and English education emerged as professionals. The Vellalas who predominated in agriculture went in for village services as revenue collectors, peasant proprietors and some times as 'dobhashas'.

However, it is highly improper to apply this generalisation in terms of caste-class to women, since the elevation of particular caste groups in the socio-economic hierarchy through occupational mobility, did not result in the simultaneous progress of women's education or in the improvement of women's occupational position in

16 Eugene F. Irschick, Politics and Social Conflicts in South India, The non-Brahman movement and Tamil separatism 1916-1929, 1969, p. 5.

these caste groups. Very few conclusions can be drawn from the statistics available on the occupational positions of various caste groups. To some extent it can be said that as Brahman men dominated in many professions, Brahman women also began to constitute important members of these professions, for more than in the case of other caste women (except European and Eurasian women). However the Brahman population was much less than other caste population. This is obvious from the following statistics on Brahman women's education and occupation.

Table I.1 follows.....

EDUCATION OF WOMEN AMONG VARIOUS CASTES AND OCCUPATIONAL POSITION OF

WOMEN AMONG VARIOUS CASTES

Table I.1

Educated of Women among the Selected Castes.¹⁷

CASTES	1901			1911			1921		
	Male	Female	Ratio	Male	Female	Ratio	Male	Female	Ratio
Brahman	60,821	4,951	8.1	1,71,616	28,951	16.9	1,83,084	48,055	26.2
Chetti	21,998	317	1.4	66,957	2,083	3.1	54,915	2,417	4.4
Kallan	21,061	381	1.8	40,689	1,129	2.8	42,223	1,442	3.4
Vellala	36,860	1,283	3.5	3,06,678	22,920	7.5	3,17,949	33,731	10.6
Kammalan	18,752	302	1.6	71,930	2,271	3.1	72,908	3,583	4.9
Shanan (Nadars)	22,121	875	4.0	-	-	-	64,873	4,850	7.5

Note: The table has been made for selected castes. The educated women among the Brahman were numerically much higher than any other castes. The Ratio of female literates per 100 males was also higher than any others castes. This was true in the case of occupations. The following table for particular 3 occupations will show how Brahman women were well placed in their professions compared to other castes.

¹⁷ Census of India, Madras 1901, Vol. XV-A 1911. Vol. XII, Part I, 1921 report.

Table I.2Occupational position of women in 3 Professions in 1921¹⁸

Caste	Banks, Credit exchange etc.		Medicine		Instructions	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Brahman	2,195	820	944	32	6,513	313
Chetti	3,825	1,457	380	130	120	218
Kallan	69	51	83	55	135	5
Kammalan	478	601	507	87	481	23
Vellala	3,324	1,199	2,347	120	2,655	209
Nadar	365	288	429	178	164	18

Though the Vellala and Chettiar women were numerically large in bank and credit exchange occupation, they did not necessarily have formal education. Considering the small number of Brahman population, their occupation ratio was much higher than the other castes' occupation ratio.

But in the early 20th century the occupational position of non-Brahmans went higher and their female education too witnessed a steady growth. The classification of occupational and education status of middle-class becomes much more complex in the absence of categorisation of women according to their income or wage. As it was said earlier, the works on the making of middle-class or the emergence of middle-class conveniently ignored the gender aspect. As Catherine Hall points out, "The middle-class is treated as male and the account of the formation of middle-class consciousness is structured around a series of public events in which women played no part."¹⁹

Women in Learned Professions:

With the advancement of specialised skill and education and with the growth of technology, though it happened at a very slow pace, the practice of taking up professions gained importance. For women of middle-class this meant merely involving themselves with the outside world and the

19 Catherine Hall, "Gender divisions & class formation in the Birmingham middle-class 1780-1850", in Raphael Samuel (ed.), People's history & Socialist theory, 1981, pp.164-65.

number of women entering the new professions was however few and it was only a symbolic representation as many women, even after education preferred to remain as wageless helpers at home.

One of the first impacts of colonial rule in India was the establishment of the press in the various places all over India. Following this, there emerged new professions which included book sellers, agents, publishers and stationers, newspaper proprietors, managers and sellers, authors, editors and journalists and later stenographers etc.

Even in the first half of the 20th century there were hardly any female publishers or writers in most of these districts except for Madras city where there were 19 females in 1901. It is true that most of the presses in India were controlled by Europeans and Christian missionaries. But even among the Indians involved in these, the gap between men & women was very wide. Among women, with very few of them educated, it was very rare and daring to venture into these new professions.

Thus we find, for the whole of Tamil speaking areas there were only 6 females employed as book sellers and publishers,²⁰ while 446 males were employed under the same

20 The total number of female who went in for this profession and for other professions like authors, editors, etc. are given in a separate table and the number of females per 100 males in this professions are also given for 1901, 1911 and 1921. Table showing various occupations with female-male ratio, has been given.

category. In the much more coveted jobs like that of editors and journalists, only in Madras city there were 2 females, for Madras was in many ways a focus for political social & journalistic activities. The city had 98 females employed in all these above profession in 1911, which however became reduced to 38 in 1921, even as the total female population of Madras city increased to 250,804 in 1921.

As Irschick remarks,²¹ Tamil Brahmins were in preponderance employed as authors and journalists and this was true of women also.

Professors, teachers & clerks:

One of the important aspects of missionary activities in India was opening up of schools for girls and a few training schools to train women for teaching. Next to money lending and midwifery, more women went for the teaching profession and among them native christians were more in number. This preference may be due to high status accorded to teaching in Indian society and middle-class families preferred to see their women in this profession which also gave women more time for household duties.²² The table given below indicate the position of women in this profession.²³

21 Irschick, op.cit., p. 16.

22 Leela Dube, et.al., Towards equality, op.cit., p. 206.

23 Census of India, Madras, few years, 1901, 1911 and 1921.

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Table I.3

Women Professors, teachers and clerks in these Institutions :
In the 3 Census Years (1901, 1911, 1921)

Districts	No. of female workers	No. of female per 100 male (ratio)	Female Literate (Ratio)	No. of female workers	Ratio	Literacy Ratio	Female workers	Ratio	Literacy Ratio
Madras	594	30.2	25.0%	737	34.9%	30.5%	780	32.9%	29.4%
Chingleput	178	11.4	6.9	214	12.3	9.1	353	20.2	10.9
North Arcot	160	8.5	5.0	214	11.4	5.7	328	24.4	7.7
Salem	135	9.6	5.7	212	19.9	5.6	473	27.5	8.3
Coimbatore	187	8.3	5.6	328	15.4	7.3	261	16.8	11.0
South Arcot	91	4.8	3.8	159	7.1	4.9	95	6.1	6.9
Tanjore	224	6.6	3.9	257	7.0	7.0	260	10.0	9.9
Trichi	102	6.4	5.5	301	15.1	7.8	321	16.1	10.4
Madurai	256	11.4	4.6	231	15.0	5.2	431	24.1	6.6
Tinnelveli	509	22.4	8.9	582	19.6	11.3	398	20.8	9.1
Nilgirs	104	54.7	28.7	132	62.8	31.0	139	70.9	11.3
Rannad	-	-	-	188	10.6	3.9	139	3.5	6.2

The growth of female employment in this profession was very slow and minimal for the period from 1901-1921. Madras city as a great educational centre of south India, with many important colleges oriented to the needs of Tamil surpassed all other districts in providing employment to a larger number of females. The ratio of female to male varied from 30.9% in 1901 to 32.9% in 1921. The total female literates for the total female population in Madras city was much higher than other districts (9%). By 1911, 6 Brahman girls had passed their F.A. examination.²⁴ Next to Madras, in Tinnelveli, a district where the christian missionary activities were very strong and influential, the number of females mainly christians and Nadars who went in for the teaching profession, was the highest. (22.4% in 1901 and 20.8% in 1921.) In Nilgiris again, due to the immigration of Eurasians and Christians, we have 54.7% of the females per 100 males employed in educational institutions, while female christian literacy ratio, here was only 29% (per 100 males). However in other districts the number of women entering into this profession was extremely low compared to their menfolk. One reason could be that there were no training centres in many of the districts to train women

24 Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial series, Madras, Vol. I, p. 506.

like that of teachers training centres etc.²⁵

Lawyers and Law agents:

This profession was completely monopolised by men of that period, there being no female lawyer even at the district courts. However there were female clerks and petition writers, very few in numbers and in Madras city alone : only 26 in 1901.

Medical Practitioners:

This includes midwives, nurses and compounders who constitute the largest of this category. Midwives who were to be found in large numbers in the rural areas did not always have formal education in medicine. It is only in this category, we find more women occupied than men. However the census data do not differentiate between the educated and uneducated midwives. Thus it is very difficult to assess the status of education or literacy rate of these women. However there were only very few medical specialists or practitioners, with a diploma in medicine, like oculists or dentists. There were only 13 female practitioners with

25 It is to be noted that in the late 19th century opposition to the intrusion of Western culture was much stronger, which was reflected in the form of preventing girls to enter missionary institutions and conversions. The continuous debate on missionary education and strong opposition meetings were held all over Madras.

diploma. The following table will give the position of female in medical profession.²⁶

Table I.4

Number of Female Medical Practitioners in 1901, 1911, 1921

Occupation	1901			1911			1921		
	Male	Female	Ratio	M	F	R	M	F	R
Medicine	9,982	1,265	35.8	12,865	4,226	32.8	13,621	6,513	47.8
Midwives	-	2,313							

Bankers and Moneylenders:

Most of the women who were occupied in this profession were rural based moneylenders who might not have had formal education. Generally, during this period moneylending business was done by wealthy banking commercial section of the society called the Nattukotai Chettis, who were to be found in large numbers in Madurai. It was their women who were occupied with moneylending business in the rural areas, who might be also partial agriculturists.²⁷

²⁶ Census of India, Madras, for years 1901, 1911, 1921 Tables.

²⁷ B.E. Misra says that money lenders included all castes and professions, i.e., "A group of persons who had money to lend." Misra, op.cit., p. 278.

As Irschick points out, in those Tamil speaking areas two-thirds of the available positions in the above professions were occupied by the Brahmans, Vellalas and Chettis.²⁸

Table I.5

Castes	<u>Bank & Credit Exchange in 1921</u>		
	Male workers	Female workers	Ratio
Brahmin	2,195	820	
Chetti	2,825	1,457	
Vellalas	3,324	1,199	
Kamalan	478	60	
Nadar	365	288	
Kallan	69	51	

For the whole of Tamil speaking areas the ratio of females employed increased to 61.1 in 1911. It reduced to 31.0 in 1921. There were ^{no} females employed as Bank clerks, as cashiers / as bill collectors in these years. /or

28 Irschick, op.cit., p.13.

Table I.6

Women workers in Bank & Credit Exchange in the 3 Census years
(1901, 1911 & 1921)

Years	Male	Female	Ratio
1901	13,035	5,762	44.2
1911	15,420	9,422	61.1
1921	21,864	6,787	31.0

In the colonial period, employment in the government services especially as civil servants were completely monopolised by Europeans and Anglo-Indians. They were appointed in large numbers even at the municipal levels or at district levels as deputy collectors. The higher posts in Railways, telegraphs and telephone offices were held for the most part by the Europeans until 1921. In the latter professions they mainly figured as superintendent and deputy superintendents while Indians were employed at the lower levels as clerks, post masters or messengers.

A knowledge of English, essential for government services, prevented Tamil women entering into these professions. If they were employed, then they were taken only as clerks or in some other lower categories. It is to be noted that there were only 24 females in 1921, employed under the category of service of the state in Madras city²⁹ while there was no female employed in post office & telegraph

office in 1901. In 1921, 103 females were employed in all these professions. There were 12 female stenographers and public scribes in 1911 and 23 private clerks in 1901.

Agriculture:

The major economic activity of women in India was in this section. Almost 85% of the female population worked in the agricultural fields, mostly as field labourers and in some other unspecified works. Considerably large number of middle-class women in the rural areas were tenants, and cultivators, sometime small landholders or absentee landlords.³⁰ Here again one has to note the limitation in the census reports, which classified both male and female by their primary activity and missed the overlapping nature of agriculture with non-agricultural occupations. We do not have substantial statistics or information to establish a quantified relationship between status in the social hierarchy and the relative economic position in the agricultural system. To an extent it is possible to assume that the traditional agricultural landholders' caste like that of vellala in most of the Tamil areas even

30 "Cultivators include absentee landowners who do not cultivate their own lands by themselves or cultivate it with hired labourers, lease holders and tenants of different categories." Towards equality, - Report of the Committee on the Status of Women, p. 162.

in this period controlled most part of the land, though the Nattukotai Chettis (the traditional banking community) and the Nadars acquired lands in many parts of the down south. In fact when the Nattukotai chettis moved away to other countries like Malaysia and Singapore for trading purposes the patta of the lands were often transferred in the name of their womenfolk. Very often this did not mean acquirement of property for women, since these lands or property for women, since these lands or property would be given to the male member of the family or sons. The Table given (next page) represent and distribution of land-holding among the middle-class women.³¹

31 Census of India, Madras, for years 1901, 1911 and 1921.
Imperial & Provincial tables.

Table I.7

The Table given below represent and distribution of landholding among the middle-class women.

Year	Female cultivating land owners	No. of Female per 100 male	Female Non-culti land owners	Ratio	Culti-vating tenants (Female)	Ratio	Non-culti-tenants	Ratio
1901	17,70,500	67.2	31,648	47.4	2,27,749	47.5	1,893	36.3
1911	14,94,044	58.3	44,222	50.6	3,31,642	47.6	8,569	41.2
1921	9,45,063	44.6	1,63,965	54.2	-	-	1,02,261	54.7

Total female employed (only middle-class) in Agriculture were 20,61,790 in 1901 which declined to 10,43,457 in 1921. However the ratio of female per 100 male in non-cultivating owner's sector and in the non-cultivating tenants category increased over the periods from 47.4% to 54.2%. In Madurai, Ramnad and in Salem there seem to be large number of females occupied in the Agriculture sector. In Madurai the ratio of female was 86.4 per 100 males in 1901 and the Salem it was 84.4%.

Industry:

The majority of women in the Modern Industrial Sectors were employed only as unskilled labourers. Significant number of them were taken only as textile operatives in Textile Industries. For example, they were employed in cotton spinning, sizing and weaving and very often they were occupied with preparation and supply of material substances. In the food industries they were employed as rice pounders, huskers and grinders in large numbers, more than male labourers. (In Madras city there were 1,623 females were employed in this sector while male numbered 265). Another section where women were employed as manual workers was in the industries concerned with refuse matters e.g. as sweepress and scavengers. However, these women

belong to the lower classes.

The middle-class women in this period found no place in the Modern Industries. In the late 19th century and early 20th century as B.B. Misra notes³² the Europeans and Anglo-Indian elements were the only ones employed in the sections of direction, supervision and even as clerks. Indians employed were infinitesimally very small, when compared with the total population of the country. If they were employed, they occupied only subordinate and some clerical positions. For example, in Madras Leather Industry there was no Indian employed for the higher posts and there were only 4 native clerical staff. Women, however, were totally absent, an indication that even given the fact that the number of middle-class men employed here was low, the gap is still there.

District-wise Variations:

In this section, an attempt has been made to find out the variations in the occupational pattern of middle-class women in the 12 districts.³³ In Madras city the total female (middle-class) occupied in the learned profession was 1,141 which was 0.45% for the total female population

32 B.B. Misra, op.cit., p. 252

33 A table has been given in the appendix, for the occupational patterns in each district.

of Madras city which was 252,616. This city had the highest number of female employed in many learned and artistic professions, which needed at least primary education and above. The Nilgiris had the higher number of females occupied in the teaching profession than in any other professions. The ratio of female teachers per 100 male teachers was 57.2 in 1901, 62.8% in 1911 and 70.9 in 1921. Chingleput district had only 651 females employed in learned profession, (0.10% for the total female population) while in the agriculture there were 80,020 females were employed. There were considerably large number of women occupied themselves as music composers and singers in this area. (598 females in 1901, the ratio was 77.8 per 100 males and it was 1,079 in 1911. The ratio was 142.1 per 100 males). North Arcot had more number of females occupied in Agriculture than in any other learned profession. In Tanjore women were employed in large number in agriculture as well as in many other professions. The total number of female employed in all the professions was 2,049 (0.19% for the total female population was very high - 1,178,606). Many women were employed as moneylenders and were more in number than the males (1901 - 1,720 - 116.9%; 1911 - 2,538 - 105.7%). Similarly Tanjore being noted for its encouragement of musical learning, there were the highest number of females employed

in this profession (1911 - 1258 and in 1921 - 2079) .
 Madurai again had the highest number of female employer
 in moneylending (1911 - 1,239 the ratio was 26.1% per
 100 males), and even in music composing (1911 - 1,570 -
 79.4%) . Tinnelveli had more number of women employed
 in teaching profession (1901 - 429, 1911 - 499 and in
 1921 - 582, though the ratio per 100 males was very low) .

Literacy and Occupation:

It is essential to compare the literacy rate of middle-class women and the economic role they played in these years, from 1901 to 1921, to see whether the improvement in literacy rate resulted in the rise in economic status of women. What one finds is that during this period, more importance has been given to 'leisure' as status symbol among the middle-class women replacing women's public world of work. Thus while literacy rate of women went up as education became more and more a status symbol, the occupations connected with education, did attract atleast many literate middle-class women.³⁴

34 A Table has been given in the appendix.¹ Comparison of literacy rate of women with the occupational position has been made. It is difficult to classify occupations which needed literary skills and other occupations census report enumerations do not have different categories for the above 2 categories. Those who can read and write were considered as literates here. The ratio of female literates per 100 male literates among the Hindus was very low, which varied from 2.6% in 1891 to 7.4% in 1911.

Moreover the majority of middle-class women were employed in the white-collar professions and in the government services.

In order to compare the literacy rate and occupational position, it is necessary to look into the development of women's education in these years in all the Tamil speaking areas. In all these districts, in the early years of the 19th century education was entirely imparted in the indigenous institutions,³⁵ except for few missionary schools. However, with the increase in number of missionary activities in all these areas, the institutions for educating girls also increased. For example, in Salem the number of educational institutions³⁶ for girls increased from 5 to 37 and the scholars from 218 to 2,891 between 1901-1911. Similarly in Madurai in 1901-1902 33 primary schools were opened with one training centre for mistresses. Among the girl students, 105 girls belonged to the more backward devadasi community.³⁷ The ratio of English educated females also rose, though it was minimal (21% to 22%).

35 Tanjore District Handbook, 1957.

36 District Gazetteer for Salem, Vol. I, Part I, Madras, 1918.

37 District Gazetteers for Madurai, 1960.

In 1901 the number of women who were educated varied from 9% to 0.4% in these areas while the occupation rate of female for the total female population varied from 0.4% to 0.1%. This trend continued even in 1921, which clearly indicates, that middle-class women who were educated remained as housewives or in doing some domestic service as wageless helpers in this period.

A table has been given below³⁸ to differentiate the literary rate of middle-class women among various religions for the 3 census years (1891, 1901 and 1911).

Table I.8

Years	Hindus			Muslims			Christians		
	Male	Female	Ratio	M	F	R	M	F	R
1891	10,97,808	30,927	2.6	82,489	5,336	6.5%	56,703	22,972	40.5
1901	11,96,204	56,117	4.6	92,665	4,401	5.8	67,033	32,487	48.4
1911	12,24,706	91,308	7.4	105,890	6,375	6.0	84,375	42,939	50.8

The ratio of female literates per 100 male literates among the Hindus was low, which varied from 2.6% in 1891 to 7.4 in 1911. Why there was a minimal rate of economic

38 Census of India, Madras, for years 1891, 1901 & 1911.

participation of women outside their house? Many reasons can be attributed to this. (1) Women's education had been seen more as a measure for promoting social justice and family welfare.³⁹ For example, the curriculum for girls in schools, emphasised 'only cooking, painting and to develop themselves, as dutiful wives and daughters.'⁴⁰ (2) Many educated women themselves did not consider the importance of women's economic independence and went for doing some voluntary works or philanthropic works and otherwise confined themselves to household duties.⁴¹ The women activists' emphasis was also not on bringing women to the labour or employment markets. They rather viewed unpaid domestic work as a 'progressive development' bringing women more leisure and greater comfort.

The impact of this disparity between education and employment rate created a separate sphere for men and women of middle-class. The professional and white-blouse work employers tended to play a more direct and central role in maintaining patterns of sexual segregation than they

39 It would be appropriate to quote the census report on women's education. "For though a spirit of enlightenment is abroad there will arise a plaguy doubt as to the reality of these schools returns. One cannot help a suspicion that in many a case a daughter appears in a school return merely as an advertisement of the liberalism her parent."

40 Swadesamitran, 11 June, 1895. See a Letter to the Editor.

41 Achalambigai Ammal, Kalvi, 1912.

did in manual work.⁴²

The development of a new middle-class and new occupations for women did not bring about much changes in the social hierarchy, based on caste or culture. The emergence of new middle-class further encouraged the gender divisions which was prevailing earlier within the caste system.⁴³

Thus we find the conservative structures imposed on the various castes women in the rural areas were directly imposed on middle-class women without any changes. For example, the emphasis on purity and pollution, pati-vrata was applied strictly to middle-class women.

No doubt, middle-class women's occupational position did undergo certain changes over these period of 20 years (from 1901 -1921). The trend can be seen if we review the statistics provided for all the occupations. There was a marginal increase in teaching and in medicine, which was not due to the 'liberalising influence of British imperialism, but from the need of middle-class women's education and health care. Even in this colonial period, the economic system only encouraged male workers and discriminated against women as was the case in the traditional India.

42 Lewis, op.cit., p. 195.

43 Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, Daughters of Independence - Gender, caste & class in India, 1986, p.73.

Thus we find, the ratio of female workers in relation to male workers had declined in almost all professions, except in teaching and in medicine. In short as Miranda Chaytor remarks, "Women's areas of influence and responsibility were subordinate to and controlled by men's ... the boundaries of women's lives were set locally and nationally by institutionalised sources of power from which these were excluded."⁴⁴

Even today, despite the fact that in Madras and in other parts of Tamil Nadu, there had been increase in economic participation of women outside their homes. The vast majority of educated middle-class women are still confined to domestic activities as wageless helpers.

44 Alice Clark, Working Life of Women in the 17th century 1982 edition. See the introduction by Miranda Chaytor and Tane Lewis, p. xxxv.

Table No. 1. Literacy rate and Occupation rate (which needed education) mainly Learned Professions with female population.

Districts	1901			1911			1921		
	Female Population in No.	Literacy rate in No. (per 10,000)	Total Female Population - Occupation rate in No.	Pop.	Literacy per 10,000	Occup.	Popl.	Literacy per 10,000	Occup.
Madras	2,52,616	914 (9.0%)	1141 (0.45%)	2,52,195	12.89 (12.8%)	2082 (0.82)	2,50,804	1394 (13.9%)	1386 (0.55%)
Chingleput	6,49,693	100 (1.0%)	651 (0.10)	7,00,367	148 (1.4%)	626 (0.08)	7,40,516	183 (1.8%)	730 (0.08)
North Arcot	8,85,602	63 (0.6%)	518 (0.05)	9,91,131	78 (0.7%)	658 (0.06)	10,34,507	102 (1.0)	643 (0.06)
Salem	9,97,451	39 (0.39%)	368 (0.03)	10,34,736	46 (0.4)	433 (0.04)	10,61,009	71 (0.7)	1108 (0.10)
Coimbatore	10,04,168	55 (0.5)	496 (0.04)	10,72,147	86 (0.8)	952 (0.08)	11,13,677	140 (1.4)	1538 (0.15)
South Arcot	10,60,178	54 (0.5%)	512 (0.04)	11,89,759	80 (0.8%)	704 (0.05)	11,67,671	117 (1.17)	627 (0.05)
Tanjore	11,78,606	80 (0.8)	2049 (0.19)	12,39,605	153 (1.5)	3255 (0.26)	12,09,563	225 (2.2)	1892 (0.18)
Trichi	8,75,795	67 (0.6)	476 (0.05)	9,42,157	118 (1.1)	1309 (0.13)	9,70,948	160 (1.6)	851 (0.08)
Madurai	8,71,475	60 (0.6)	1555 (0.17)	9,81,818	89 (0.8)	977 (0.09)	10,19,614	108 (1.0)	1214 (0.11)
Ramnad	8,06,194	47 (0.4)	-	8,76,974	83 (0.8)	1829 (0.20)	9,03,218	121 (1.2)	1592 (0.17)
Tinneveli	8,54,363	174 (1.7)	1795 (0.21)	9,24,986	260 (2.6)	2716 (0.29%)	9,74,681	194 (1.9)	2716 (0.27)
Nilgiris	51,534	494 (4.9)	258 (0.46)	55,109	636 (6.3)	154 (0.27)	59,501	215 (2.1)	175 (0.29)

Source: Census of Andia. Madras, for the years 1901, 1911 & 1921

Table No. 2. Showing the various Occupations with Male, Female, Ratio for the whole Tamil Areas (1901, 1911, 1921).

Occupations	1901			1911			1921		
	Male	Female	Ratio%	Male	Female	Ratio%	Male	Female	Ratio%
Agriculture (Land holders and Tenants)	31,82,168	20,61,790	64.8	28,17,132	17,96,105	63.7	21,94,702	10,43,457	47.5
Agents, Managers of Landed Est.,	-	-	-	8,711	738	8.4	4,602	528	11.4
Bankers Money Lenders	13,035	5,762	44.2	15,420	9,422	61.1	21,864	6,787	31.0
Medicine (Midwives)	9,982	1,265 2,313	35.8	12,865	4,226	32.8	13,621	6,513	47.8
Law	10,248	27	0.2	6,801	1	-	8,359	-	-
Post Office Telegraph Telephone		7		7,249	62	0.8	6,388	103	1.6
Booksellers Pub. Agents	446	6	1.3	1,330	1,351	10.1	1,453	38	2.6
Newspapers Managers Authors, Editors	138	5	3.6	163	1	0.6	195	11	5.6
Professors Teachers	19,625	2,428	12.4	24,122	3,641	15.0	19,569	3,860	19.7
Clerks & Sewak	787	103	13.0				1,559	108	6.9
Admn. Officials	159	9	5.6						
Architects Engineers & Employees	-	-	-	5,321	27	0.5	4,952	100	2.0
Music Composers Singers etc.	-	5	-	15,618	7,417	47.4	11,544	7,759	67.2
Astronomers Astrologers etc.	3,676	129	3.5	5,126	305	6.0	4,115	509	12.3
Public Scribes Stenographers	407	-	-	311	12	3.8	213	2	0.9
Reporters S. Writers	23	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Private clerks	7,175	23	0.3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Private Lithographers	-	-	-	-	-	-	7,150	25	0.3
Public Admn. Service of State	-	-	-	-	18+1	-	25,917	24	-

Source: Census of Andhra, Madras for the years 1901, 1911 & 1921.

THE CONDITION OF WOMEN IN TAMIL NADU (1890-1920)

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse the condition of middle class women in the Tamil speaking area of the Madras Presidency for the period, 1890-1920. The 'condition of women' has been seen in the context of social liberation of women which meant freedom from exploitation of women's labour, body and mind as well as freedom from the traditionally prescribed value-system and roll-models.

In the patriarchal society of Tamil speaking areas, the world of 'culture' belonged to men. Women, on the other hand led lives that appeared to be irrelevant to the articulation of the social order.¹ "Their status is derived from their stage in a life-cycle, from their biological functions, and in particular from their sexual or biological ties to particular men."² Women's lives were seen as part and parcel of family unit and domestic work. Keeping this in mind, the problems of Hindu urban and rural middle class

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1. For general ideas on the question refer Juliet Mitchell - Women's Estate, 1971. p. 99
 2. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "Women, Culture and Society : A Theoretical Overview", in Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Lamphere in Woman, Culture and Society, 1974, p. 30.
 3. Women of Lower Classes enjoyed economic independence and were considerably freer than the higher classes. This was true of various low caste vs higher castes. Edgar Thurston, Caste and Tribes of South India, 1907.

women, such as child-marriage, harrassment of widows, the demand for the fidelity of the wife and illiteracy of women have been discussed in this chapter. The period (1890-1920) given here is not clearly marked by any public events. The dates are taken simply as convenient cut off points.

In any given society, the social roles and powers of women vary distinctly. For example, their public status, their cultural definitions and the nature and quality of their activities vary significantly according to their class position.³ It is therefore important to distinguish women according to their class position. Women of middle-class in this period was conditioned by the stereotyping of images. For example, the image of women as stated in the ancient period, such as pure, chaste, dutiful and impure etc. had been carried forward to Modern India. without changes.

It is not, however, to suggest that there were no changes occuring in women's life during this period. There was a slow-improvement in women's educational status, in employment opportunities and in women's activities outside the homes. There were also some efforts by women themselves to raise their consciousness about various social problems.

These are all indication of women's changing position.⁴ However, at home the man-woman relationship and the problem of male domination had not changed much during this period.

Reform Activities:

As far as the native reform activities are concerned, there was no strong movement in Madras, with regard to women's issues comparable with the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, etc. However, the debates and discussions on the subjects like child-marriage, widow-remarriage and domestic reform, kept reform activities alive. Also, Madras witnessed two women's social reform organisations, the women's India Association and the Indian Ladies Magazine, founded in 1911, 1917, 1901 respectively. These associations had undertaken some of the problems faced by middle-class

In order to understand the problems faced by women it is necessary to trace the role-model assigned to women in ancient times and how certain taboos and norms remained unchanged in late 19th century. This can be done by

4. See chapter I and IV. This trend was not peculiar to the Tamil speaking areas. Meredith Bothwick and Madhukiswar argue for Bengal and Punjab that the similar trend was seen in this period. Meredith Bothwick, Changing role of women in Bengal, 1849-1905, 1982; Madhukiswar, "Daughters of Aryavartna", TASHR, Vol. XXIII, No.2. 1982.

examining some of the Tamil literature of ancient times.⁵

The life in ancient Tamilnadu was divided into Agam (the interior) and puram (the exterior). Agam in literature mainly dealt with domestic life, while puram contained the details of external activities, like wars, etc.⁶ A large number of Tamil poems in this period, had love as their main theme. The woman in all these literary works has been mentioned as lover, wife and mother. The concept of feminine beauty was also given much importance in all these literary works. For example, Tiruvalluvar (in his section on love) remarks that the ideal woman pleases the five senses. Describing the charming beauty of a man's lady love he says, "Her beauty/of rich gold, her teeth like pearls, she is /is fragrant, her eyes dart forth glances like a lance : O' what a varied charm my beloved has !"⁷

The poets of this period often dealt with the theme of kalavu (clandestine love) and how the girl in love suffered when separated from her lover or how the mother went through a trauma when she came to know about her

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5. One has to keep in mind that the literature not only Reflects the age and must have also been influenced by the social situation that existed as well as changing times. Some of the literary works of ancient times like Tirukkural, Sirupancha Mulam, Agam Nannuru and puranannuru are taken for discussion here.
 6. C.S. Lakshmi, "Tradition and Modernity of Tamil Women Writers", Social Scientist, April 1976, vol. 4, No. 9, p.37.
 7. Tiruvalluvar's Kural quoted by K.K. Pillai, A Social History of the Tamils, vol. I, 1975, p. 341.

daughter's kalavu life as she was afraid about the public slur.

From these poems, one could assume that the practice of keeping the girl under seclusion after her attaining puberty was quite common even in the sangam period. In one sangam poem, the girl's foster mother states that the girl had passed the stage of a petai (innocent child) and attained the stage of petumbai (full blown girl) and that she must be under seclusion. K.K. Pillai states that in later times the attainment of puberty was followed by certain ceremonies - a purificatory and ceremonial bath and feast for the neighbours and relatives.⁸ In the family the girls who had attained puberty and even married women were kept in isolation or seclusion during their menstruation period. They were called in sangam period as kalandoda magalir (one who does not mix with people).

The emphasis on chastity, one man and one love for a woman were insisted even in this period. A woman who went into kalavu life was expected to marry the same person and the violation of which was followed by severe punishments.⁹

8. K.K. Pillai, op.cit., p. 350.

9. Ibid., p. 355.

In the conjugal relationship, emphasis was given to karpu or chastity of women as an important moral code but not for menfolk. Tiruvalluvar emphasised that wives are house-makers and husband worshippers. In one kural he states that a chaste wife who worshipped not God but her husband, could even command the rains to come with the power of her chastity.¹⁰ However, the fact that men escaped all rigid moral codes is clear from the fact that they were allowed to have sexual relationship with the prostitutes or parathaiyar especially during the pregnancy of their wives.¹¹

Sirupancha Mulam, another important literary work categorized the important duties of wife in the family and stressed her subordination to her husband. Implicit obedience to the husband even if he is harsh and oppressive and the partaking of the remnant of the food left over by the husband were prescribed for the household women.¹²

There was a lot of importance attached to the manliness or physical strength of a man. This is proved by the festival of Bull-fight (Jallikkatu). During this festival the man had to prove his valour before he takes the girl as a wife.¹³ Along with such festivals the ritualistic

10. Kural, 55, quoted by C.S. Lakshmi, op.cit., p. 38

11. K.K. Pillai, op.cit., p. 374.

12. Sirupancha Mulam, 53, quoted by K.K. Pillai, op.cit., p.387.

13. B.S. Baliga, District Gazetteer of Madurai, 1960.

marriage and customs like bride-price also indicated the inferior position of women.

How did women in Ancient Tamil Society respond or perceive the prescriptions meted out to them? There is hardly any evidence in the literary works about women's resistance against the rigid moral codes or discipline laid down for them. They rather tried to preserve their modesty as much as possible. For example, the seclusion of woman was rigidly followed by women and if any stranger came home, the wife or any woman at home sent their children to invite them. They also addressed the strangers through some intermediary often an inanimate object like a pillar.¹⁴

By expressing specific cultural understandings the Ancient Tamil society provided stereotypes of female images such as pure virgin, chaste wife, honoured mother, Kaligala Magalir or dreadful widows, parataiyar or prostitutes, impure woman or kalandoda magalir, etc.

The Social Structure of the Tamils
in the late 19th Century :

A description of the Tamil social structure would involve producing a profile about the complexity of caste and class composition, the socio-economic position

14. Puram 86, quoted by K.K. Pillai, op.cit., p. 385.

of the Tamil people, the family structure (the aspects of male domination at home), cultural norms and ideologies (including the myths related to women) which reinforced the existing structure.

In the ancient period the social status of a particular group determined its level of power and authority in the society. In the colonial period, along with the above hierarchical status, the newly acquired class position determined its role which in turn, determined the structure of women's decision making power. Thus the gender division built up within the caste system were not destroyed under the class structure, but were strengthened with some changes. Traditionally, social economic and political power largely coincided with the caste structure which was arranged in the hierarchical order. But in the late 19th century with the sanskritization process and the development of the emerging new social class is resulting from the British conquest brought certain changes in the Tamil society.¹⁵

Similarly the ideologies or the cultural stereo-types which were supposed to keep women in their place, like the domesticity of women, chastity, etc. were also carried over without much changes; and the various myths regarding women were reinforced through Tamil Novels, stories,

15. See Chapter I Occupational patterns of women.

etc.¹⁶ Nalayini, Damayandhi, Adirai, Savitri and Sita were used as models to carry out the propaganda of pativrath ^{and} patibhakti, etc. Nalayini was praised for she made no complaint about the miserable life she had to lead with the lepro husband and rather felt happy to him. About Damayanthi it was said that with her pativrath, she could burn a hunter who approached her with several designs. Adirai had immolated herself, the moment she heard about the death of her husband. She was praised for her pati bhakti and chastity, which according to mythology brought back her husband.¹⁷

These myths were repeated in Tamil literature and the reform activities emphasised these qualities in women as essential on the ground that they preserved the pride of the family.

The patriarchal structure of Tamil society by which men dominated over women's labour, body and mind, also succeeded in formulating particular taboos and norms

16. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo & Lamphere ed., op.cit., p. 12. Lamphere states that in numerous South American societies, myths that tell of women's mythic dominance and further capitulation to masculine rule, are used by men to assert their independence and to legitimise their authority.

17. Subramaniya Siva Nalina Sundari (Novel), 1984. p. 140.

which forced women to subordinate themselves to men.¹⁸

The study of specific cultural norms and various customs in the Tamil society of the late 19th Century gives us an idea of this.

The various taboos attached to women's activities was different for each caste depending on their hierarchical position in the society. The Tamil Brahmans, the vellalas (the peasant proprietors) the Mudaliars and the Chettiars (the commercial banking community) attached various taboos to women's role in family and society. The level of purity and pollution norms in each caste depended on the caste hierarchical order.¹⁹

In all these castes, the birth of the male child was hailed and welcomed and a woman who gave birth to a male child was praised and respected in the society.²⁰ Not so if a female child was born. The girls had only one option; of becoming a 'little mother' and consequently of being absorbed into womanhood.

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18. a) Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, op.cit., p. 19. Rosaldo argues that the cultural systems give authority and value to the roles and activities of men and she says that cultural expressions of sexual asymmetry is universal in all societies.
- b) Ellen Ross and Rayna Rapp. "Sex and Society : A Research Note from Social History and Anthropology", Comparative Study of Society and History, 1981. They argue that "Sexuality's biological base is always experienced culturally, through a translation...sex feels individual or at least private, but those feelings always incorporate the roles, definitions, symbols, meanings of the world in which they are constructed".
19. M. Allen, "The Hindu view of women", in Allen and Mukerjee, (ed) Women in India and Nepal, 1982, p. 6.
20. Panditha Kamabhai, The Hindu High-caste women, 1901.

The clear cut differentiation of domestic and public life of men and women, which formulated the many aspects of human social structure and psychology was formed out of these cultural norms and customs. As Rosaldo notes in most traditional societies, a good part of a woman's life was spent in giving birth to and raising children.²¹ This is applicable to the Tamil speaking areas also. Early marriage was prevalent among all castes. It was very difficult to find a girl unmarried above the age of five. Thurston argues that there was a reason for such early marriages. He says that in the management of the temple arrairs, only a married person had voice and power and was allowed to get a share of the temple income. Therefore, early marriage was an economic necessity. Moreover, no one was permitted to seek divorce.²² Among the Kallans of Tanjore or Madurai infanticide was quite common which was done when a village woman or man took a vow in front of the public or in revenge.²³ Sometimes the widows were allowed to remarry and if childless they invariably did so. (However, this custom slowly departed due to sanskritisation process and due to the infiltration of upper caste taboos into the

21. Rosaldo, op.cit., p. 23.

22. Edgar Thurston, op.cit., Vol. I. p.38.

23. District Gazetteers of Madras, Madurai, Vol. I, p.75.

lower castes' culture.) The correct match for a widowed woman was her late husband's brother. The ceremony of such a remarriage was simple and sometimes conducted only in the evening, in contrast to the auspicious morning marriages.²⁴

F.R. Hemingway notes that in Trichinopoly, among the upper castes, betrothal takes place very early, even on the day the girl is born. Sometimes a girl is bespoken even before she is born.²⁵ Among the Brahmins and the Vellalas the perfect match for the marriage of the girl was the maternal uncle or her cousin. The married girls or women may not address their husbands and other elderly family members at home by their names. She herself was given a new name in her husband's place to indicate that she has become part and parcel of her husband's family and has no connection with her parents. Her independent identity was never recognised. Thurston notes that so much importance was given or attached to the new name of the married woman that it completely ~~ousts~~ the former name.²⁶ The elaborate marriage ceremonies

24. Edgar Thurston op.cit., Vol. II, p.206.

25. District Gazetteers of Madras, Trichy, p.94. 1907.

26. Edgar Thurston, Ethnographic notes in South India, 1907, p. 533.

only emphasised the fact that women would be subservient as wives and become part and parcel of her husband's property, with no identity of her own. Placing the bride's foot on a mill-stone by the bride-groom indicated that the bride was expected to be as 'fixed in constancy as the stone', with regard to her married relationship, with her husband and other family members of her husband.²⁷

The Nature of the Family and its Structure:

It is essential to define what constituted the middle-class family and how it served as an oppressive and male dominated institution where women were only seen as acquisition of men.²⁸ This would help us to establish women's role in family as wives, mothers and daughters. The nature and organisation of the family as an unit, in this period, has determined women's role and behavioural pattern of others in the society.

Here, we consider the family as only a cultural creation and not as a natural phenomenon. Rayna Rapp correctly points out that "unless we develop a more critical awareness of the family as a social not a natural unit

27. Ibid., pp. 1-2.

28. Juliet Mitchell, Women's Estate, 1971, p. 106. She argues that the idea of complementarity of men's role in production and natural phenomenon of women's role in reproduction has attained great force because of seeming universality of the family as a human institution.

we run the risk of mechanically assigning it to either cause or effect in the study of social change."²⁹

In this period (late 19th century) the form and role of family has been juxtaposed with the character and role of women. It is the function of ideology to present these social types as an aspect of nature itself.³⁰

In the late 19th century a new ideology related to the family was stressed by the new middle-class which was based on privatisation of the family. With the importance of personal life and with the new regulation and respectability, the familial ideology underwent changes. Barret remarks that the family was not a pre-given or natural entity and only the bourgeoisie ideologies gave a hegemonic definition of family life such as the close unit kinship, family, male as bread-winner, wife and children as totally dependent members, thus family as providing private life in contrast to the public life.³¹

29. Rayna Rapp quoted by Michele Barret, Women's Oppression Today : Problems in Marxist feminist Analysis, 1980, p.188.

30. Barret points out that the family consists two forms of people living together. Kinship ties in the family might or might not be based on blood relationship or co-residents not necessarily linked up by ties of marriage etc. A family could also be referred to as the persons of the same blood living under the same house. For example the parents and children. The family in the Tamil society consisted of both the form of people living together. p. 201.

31. Ibid., p. 204.

Thus family as a cultural entity also provides an ideological means such as romantic love, paternalism, feminine qualities, self-sacrifice, chastity, masculine dominance and financial support. All these conceptions led to the characterization of gender and sexuality.

Barrett makes the distinction between the construction of gender within families and the social construction of gender within the ideology of familialism.³² Such distinctions become impossible in the Tamil society for reasons (a) we do not have a clear picture of what exactly the middle-class women did at home and their domestic works and their role as such is not clear. (b) very often the ideology of the family is intensively articulated and does not vary much from the family system as such. In the case of the Tamil society, the gender socialisation and variations were bred from the childhood at every house.

The aspect of family-household structure which was related to the patterns of property relations and inheritance, involved peculiar marital customs and relationships, spacial segregation at home for men and women,³³ the relationship

32. Ibid., p. 206.

33. Juliet Mitchell, op.cit., p.100. She argues that theoretical analysis and revolutionary action must destructure and destroy the inevitability of the combination of permanence of women's place as mother and the family.

between wives and husbands and other family members, sexual relations, health status and rituals done at home, etc.

Problems of Child marriage

An attempt has been made here to analyse the institutional complexes and basic conceptions related to the condition of women in society. Child-marriage was one form of institutionalized social custom that exerted the greatest pressure on women's role and status and structured the subordinate and subjugated position of women.

The problem of child-marriage is linked with the general conceptions about women prevailed in this period. i.e., this problem is directly connected with the values and attitudes attached to various stages of women's life. For example, the general conception of marriage as the only destiny for a women; women being viewed only as dependents and thus *need* to be protected by their husband; the purity-pollution aspect of women in the society etc.,

It is essential here to describe the condition of the child wives as it existed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A demographic picture about the children who were married off from the age of 5 years to 14 years would show the incidence of early marriages.

Table II.1: Civil condition of male and female between 1-14 age group in the Tamil speaking areas

Year	Married between 1-14 years (age)			Widowed (1-14 years)		
	Male	Female	Ratio	Male	Female	Ratio
1891	65	713	826	16	137	856%
1901	1855	2091	101.1%	27	394	1459%
1911	180	1438	800	2	26	1300%

Source: The Census of India, Madras, for years 1891, 1901, 1911 and 1921.

The figures given here clearly show that more number of female children were married off at the age of 1-14 years than the male children which would also mean that the female children were very often married to elderly men of 30 years or more. In the North Arcot alone 835 females per 10,000 females were married off between the age one to fourteen years in 1891. In 1901 this number increased to 1994.

Since lot of value and importance attached to the child-marriage any family which had children unmarried at the age of 5 or 7 years was ridiculed and outcasted. In his autobiography U.V. Swaminatha Iyer states that in

his days, boys and girls getting married very early was very common among all castes. He further says that if a boy or a girl was not married off at a very young age, it was a shame to the family.³⁴

The general tendency among the parents of young girls was to arrange their daughters marriage as early as possible, if it would fetch rich alliances or for other peculiar reason like fulfilling the desire of the older generations at home who insisted on seeing their young girls as 'little mothers'.³⁵ Numerous problems existed due to the child-marriage, such as polygamy, forcible consummation, illtreatment of the child-wives, early widowhood etc.

In this period, very often the young girls were married as second wives to men of 30 or 40 years. Polygamy as an accepted custom led to the increase in child-marriage.³⁶ Such child-marriages and disparity of age between bride and bridegroom were very much influenced by the economic position of the classes.³⁷

34. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, EnnCharitram (My history), 1950. p. 161.

35. Swadesa Mitran, Editorial 1890.

36. Swadesa Mitran, 14 May, 1887.

37. Ibid., Editorial, June, 1890.

In the Tamil Society, there was no custom of sending the child-bride to her husband's place until she attained puberty.³⁸ However a few reported cases of forcible consummation, soon after the attainment of puberty in this period, stresses the fact that in practice many girls were sent to their husband's house. Such forcible consummation often resulted in early pregnancy and even in the death of child-wives.³⁹

The plight of the child-wives and the child-widows were pathetic and numerous instances of harrassment of young wives were reported during this period.⁴⁰ For example in many Brahmin families child-wives committed suicide in order to escape from the illtreatment in their in-laws house.

Moreover the child-marriage left a state of confusion in the minds of young children. For example U.V. Swaminatha Iyer states in his autobiography, that he was not happy about his marriage and neither he was sad about it.⁴¹ Many children both male and female did not even know what the marriage meant in one's life.

38. Ibid., Editorial 25 June, 1890.

39. Ibid., Editorial 17 Oct. 1890. A. Madhaviah, Muthu Meenakshi (Novel) 1903, p. 36. He portrays in his novel, how the heroine, a young child-wife has been forced into puberty and further into early consummation, by forcing her to drink the poisonous or bitter milk or some ugly things (even insects).

40. Swadesamitran. Editorial. 31 March 1891.

41. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, op.cit., p. 171.

The available literary works clearly show the plight of child-wives and their early widowhood. Vedanayagam Pillai⁴² was the first one to write about the problem of child marriages in his novels and in the short stories. In one of his novel, Suguna Sundari⁴³ he portrays how a girl being a small child and ignorant of marriage has been forced into it. In the novel, the girl asks her mother in the following way :

Daughter : In our home, why so much of festivity?

Mother : Tomorrow is your marriage.

D : What is marriage?

M : Marriage means tying a Tali around the neck; like the one tied around my neck.

D : You can tie that tali for me in a minute why then so much of celebrity at home?

M : A tali or the marriage badge cannot be tied by a woman, only a man can do that.

D : So, let father or brother tie the tali for me.

M : No, only a man who would become your husband should tie tali for you and you must show all your respect and fear for that man.

42. Vedanayagam Pillai was born in the year 1826 at Trichirappalli. At the age of ten, a desire to acquire knowledge of English made him to learn it informally from Tyagapillai. He was the Mayuram Munsif for a long time and wrote many of his novels based on the prevailing social condition in that town. He strove for changes mainly through his intellectual works.

43. Vedanayagam Pillai, Suguna Sundari (a social novel) 1979, p. 80,81.

This dialogue between the daughter and mother clearly shows how young girls from their early years have been nurtured to become mothers and wives, even before they knew their roles in the family. It is also clear that very often women themselves reinforced such oppressive institutions without knowing how harmful it was for them.

Similarly, A. Madhaviah^a in his novel Muthu Meenakshi portrays the customs of child marriage in a young wife. He compares the forcible child-marriage to the meat market where the goats are mercilessly taken to the butcher's shop.⁴⁴ He shows how a young girl of 9 years old being married to an old man of 40 years and how she has been forced into early consummation.⁴⁵

The problem of child-marriage cannot be viewed as an isolated problem of the society or of a particular caste. It has to be seen in connection with the values and conceptions attached to women in this period.

The nature of family organisation and specific cultural stereotypes encouraged child-marriages. An adolescent girl is taught early to limit her movements, to walk modestly and never to run. Her sex is the stuff of the devil. The young girls ultimately were given the only option of becoming a 'little mother' and as a

44. A. Madhaviah, op.cit., pp. 38, 41.

45. Ibid., p. 36.

consequence she was absorbed into motherhood without any effort.⁴⁶

There were other peculiar notions related to women's life that led to the development of child-marriages. The notion of relative purity was one of them. Allen states that "child marriage ensures that when the girls begins to menstruate, she has a husband capable of transforming her destructive capability into generative power".

Another reason was that the marriage was seen as the ultimate destiny for women. For example, the society never allowed women to remain unmarried after the prescribed age. The general character of the Brahmin family was that both women and man of the family discussed for hours, the marriage of their young daughters.⁴⁷ Cross-cousin marriage, another aspect peculiar to South India, also encouraged child-marriages. It was believed that marriage among the cousins would strengthen the family ties between the blood related groups and would safeguard family properties.

46. Ellen Ross and Rayna Rapp, op.cit., p. 55. They point out that in the villages of South-eastern France, similar custom of referring young married girls as little mothers, soon after they enter their husband's family, prevailed. They remark that such a kin term conveys not only the centrality of producing further heirs for the stern family but the desexualisation of the conjugal dyad as well.

47. SwadesaMitrān, Editorial, 1887.

From late 19th century onwards, the reformers severely condemned the practice of child-marriage. Lectures were given by them to raise the consciousness of the masses with regard to marriageable age,. All of them went back to shastras and vedas to state that there was no such practice of child-marriage in ancient India.⁴⁸ All of them stated that this unhappy practice is clearly opposed to Manu's teaching who prescribed a form of marriage rituals unsuited for the marriage of mere children and one which pre-supposed an adult-bride, since a Brahmin youth should not enter upon matrimony before he has studied the vedas for 12 years.

In the provincial social reform conference held in Madras, G. Subramania Iyer moved the resolution condemning the child-marriage. He stated that "the greater evil of our social fabric was the system of early marriage which led to weak progeny and which took away all opportunity of educating girls in the manner in which the girls in European countries were trained."⁴⁹

All these reformers believed that only the government measures and legislation could curb child-marriages. They supported the Age of Consent Bill of 1891. The Bill clearly stated that no man was allowed to have intercourse with a woman less than 12 years old and even if a woman was married

48. Swadesamitran, 30 Jan. 1905.

49. Indian Social Reformer, 13 May, 1899.

off before she attained puberty, the husband was prohibited from having intercourse with her. Violation of these norms would be considered as forcible consummation and severe punishments would be given.

Widowhood:

This section deals with taboos and rituals attached to widowhood and how they hampered the freedom and independence of women.

Even in the ancient Tamil society, the widows were subjected to several taboos and restrictions. K.K. Pillai states that there are several references in the purananuru anthology to the practice of Tonsure of widows as a sign of mourning. The widows were called kalikala magalir⁵⁰ and they were forced to abandon their ornaments. The widows were considered as bad omen and their entry into the family festival and religious ceremonies were considered inauspicious and therefore prohibited.

In the early and even in the late 19th century, some like the kallans, the kammalans etc., allowed the widows to remarry. For example, in Trichy, the majority of the widows were allowed to remarry. There was no Tonsure of widows among the Vellalas and the Kallars.⁵¹ However

50. K.K. Pillai, op.cit., p. 391.

51. Edgar Thurston, Caste and Tribes in South India, op.cit., Vol. II, p. 370. and Madras District Gazetteers Madurai, Vol. I, p. 95.

the widows lot was miserable due to their subjection to several inhibitions and restrictions.

One of the serious impact of child-marriage was the growing number of child-widows. It is necessary to give a comparative picture of children who were married off at the age of 1-14 and children who became widows in these age group. If we look at the table given (II.1) it is very clear that there were more of child-widows than child wives. For example, in 1891, the ratio of female children per 100 male children who were widows between the age of 1-14 was 856. While the female children who were married off at the same age was 826. The ratio increased very high in 1901 and in 1911. These facts clearly indicate that many female children were married to old men of 50 or 60 years.

The table given below giving statistics regarding widowhood in general, (as per 100 males) shows a shocking discrepancy **between** men and women.

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Table II.2

Distribution of Civil Condition of 10,000 of each sex at certain
Ages in Tamil Speaking areas for 3 Census Years.

	All ages			0 - 15 years			15-40 years			40 and over		
	Male	Female	Ratio	Male	Female	Ratio	Male	Female	Ratio	Male	Female	Ratio
1891 Married	4258	4313	101	65	713	826	8147	8147	150	9043	5145	57
Widowed	343	1946	567	16	137	856						
1901 Married	4055	4102	101.1	1855	2091	101.1	5628	8011	142	8471	3331	45
Widowed	470	1817	491	27	394	1459	219	1106	505	1275	6101	479
1911 Married	4230	4330	102	180	1438	800	5820	8070	137	8430	4070	48
Widowed	380	1770	466	2	26	1300	190	1000	526	1310	5830	445

Source : Census of India, Madras, for the years 1901, 1911 and 1921.

For 100 widowers there were 567 widows in 1891 at all ages. It decreased slowly to 491 in 1901 and to 466 in 1911. Since remarriage was not permitted for widows, in 1911 there were 1106 widows of between 15-40 years for 100 widowers and in 1911 1000 widows for 100 widowers. The table clearly shows that there were very few females who got married after the age of 40 and above.

A widow was ordered to wear distinctive clothes, symbolising her degraded position. The widow was generally called kari mundai to indicate her Tonsured head and sometime there was a term used for widow prani i.e. animal.⁵² Vedanayagam Pillai states that the widow's status was deplorable and pathetic. Since she lost all her luxurious and enjoyable life with the death of her husband She was treated as a wageless labourer and as one who had no feelings and senses.⁵³

The cultural elaboration of the duties of the 'widow' were given much more importance than that of the widower. It was thought that the widows were allowed to live only to mourn the death of their husbands all through their lives. The rituals of mourning associated with women is evident from the fact, that though men take active part in the rituals

52. Harper, in his description about the condition of South Indian Widows, mentions the term 'prani'. Harper quoted by Allen, Hindu view of women, op.cit., p. 8.

53. Vedanayagam Pillai, Pen Madhimalai, Pen Kalvi and Pen Manam 1907, p. 120.

of mourning, women cry longer, compose special songs or anthology for the dead person and gather all women to cry loudly.⁵⁴ Women were rather forced to show severe mourning in front of a dead body. Among the higher castes a widow had to observe the mourning for a year and a widower only for 13 days.

The plight of widows is portrayed beautifully in A. Madavaiah's novel Muthu Meenakshi. In this novel the heroine who becomes widow illustrates how she was forced to do all works at home and how she was not allowed to eat only once in a day that too with the left over food. She was not allowed to see any men at home and some time even the married women. For her sight was considered inauspicious. She was blamed for any diseases that occurred to anyone at home for the poor harvest, for the cow not giving milk, and so on.

The level of illtreatment meted out to a widow depended on the status of her husband in the family. Madhaviah in his novel describes how a widowed daughter could escape much of the burdensome works and was not cursed for anything inauspicious that happened at home and how she was even treated with care which the widowed daughter-in-law could attain.⁵⁵

54. Tanjore District Hand Book, 1957.

55. A. Madhavaiah, Muthu Meenakshi, op.cit., p. 57.

Tonsure of widows, though prevalent only among the Brahmins, (among them also one section - Tenkalai Brahmins, do not have this custom)⁵⁶ this custom had the support of orthodox Hindus who argued that if a widow was allowed to grow her hair, she might attract more men, leading to prostitution. Long hair was considered a mark of beauty and thus it was considered that a wife by removing her hair after her husband's death shows her deep mourning.⁵⁷ However, widowers never had to follow ^{any} such practice and were allowed to remarry as many times as they wanted.

In the beginning of the 20th century the reformers advocated remarriage of childless widows, education of widows, etc. Subramania Bharathi thought that by allowing widows to remarry any one of their choice at any age, the number of widows and their sufferings could be reduced. He demanded that all widows, irrespective of their castes should be allowed to remarry.⁵⁸

It was thought that the child-widows should be taught various professional arts which would help in their economic independence and in the upbringing of their children.⁵⁹

56. Rama Roshi and Jonna Liddle argue that the British's attempt of enforcing Brahmin written law as the sole legal authority of all the Hindus, had brought strictures on lower caste women which was previously suffered only by women of higher caste, such as early marriages, ill-treatment of widows, etc. Economic and Political Weekly, Vol xx, No 43, Oct, 1985. p. 73.

57. Swadesa Mitran, 5 August 1890.

58. Subramania Bharathi- Essays for Women (1910-1920) 1935. p. 119.

59. Swadesa Mitran, letters to the Editor, 12 May 1905.

In 1912 'Sharadha home' was started by sister Subalakshmi, as an Ashram for the widows containing 6 widows and in 1913 the Egmore Widows' ashram was started by the British government. Educating the widows was the main aim of these Ashrams. Much earlier than these Ashrams, Veerasalingam Panthulu opened a Hindu Widow's Home at Madras in 1902. The widows in this home were financed by the National Indian Association of London.⁶⁰

The Remarriage of widows was allowed only if the widow was a child or a woman with no children. This has been clearly stated by the reformers. The Editor, Indian Social Reformer, clearly states that "nobody wants every widow to get remarried except for the young widows". While he also criticised sister Subalakshmi for she declared that her Ashram had nothing to do with the remarriage of widows.⁶¹ Sister Subhalakshmi who also was reluctant about the Ashram widow's remarriage,⁶² states that the above statement of hers is meant to keep out meddlesome people of the male sex from troubling her with application for marriage.

60. Indian Social Reformer. "The Victoria Hindu Widow's Home at Madras", 2 Aug. 1903.

61. Ibid., 22 June, 1913. Editorial.

62. Ibid., 30 June, 1913. A Reply by sister Subhalakshmi Ammal.

However, one does not know whether the Tamil widows, except Subhalakshmi protested seriously against such harrassments, gaging them mentally and physically in a limited world. It is also highly difficult to identify how many widows turned to prostitution or converted themselves to some other religion or christianity.⁶³ Going to pilgrimage to avoid harrassments at home at that too at the old age, was the only option left before them and many of them adopted this choice.

Woman and household duties:

This section attempts to throw some light on the powers of women at home and their limitations. The issues discussed are women's general condition at home as wives, mothers and daughters and how their position within the family structure had continued without any change. An attempt is also made to study the conceptions and values attached to women's work at home. No doubt there was an inevitable disjunction between the stereotyping done about women's work and role at home and the exact condition of women.

From the available literary sources it is very difficult

63. Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi notes that many high caste widows especially child-widows were either abandoned or subjected to such abuse that they were forced to leave home. Most of these girls and women had no alternative but to support themselves through prostitution. Economic and Political Weekly, 1985. op.cit., 1985.

to picturise what exactly middle-class women as wives sisters and mothers did at home. Some literary works give a picture of middle-class women as decorative and idle craving for western culture.⁶⁴

For example, Subramaniam Siva has portrayed his heroine Nalina Sundari as lazy, decorative, and spending her time in beautifying herself. In some others women are shown as influential person at home, being responsible for the entire household duties and some times taking responsibilities of landed estates.⁶⁵ Vedanayagam Pillai and has portrayed his heroines Gnanambal /Sundaratu Anni as efficient and clever managers of landed estates and household duties.

A commemorative volume brought out for a Vellala women (Valli) states that Valli was not only an efficient housewife but looked after the lands and cultivated efficiently as an able Mirasdar and took utmost care for her son's education. She showed interest in peace and wanted the German war to be stopped.⁶⁶ There are also few literature which give accounts of the dominance of women at home and

64. Subramaniam Siva, Nalina Sundari, 1913.

65. Vedanayagam Pillai, Pradhapha Mudaliar Charitram, 1879.

66. Annai Valli Ninaivu Malar. (No date given) pp.4,5.

and their indomitable power as housewives despite their economic dependence.⁶⁷

The status of a housewife depended very much on her role at home as an efficient hostess, relationship with other families especially during the festivals, and her ability to socialise with the other families. On this model, she was ordered to show utmost interest in welcoming and providing hospitality to the guests and relatives who come home.⁶⁸

As a wife, a woman was expected to be generous. She was ordered to work hard at home like a servant, preserve patience like the earth, satisfy her husband in the bed, to be an efficient adviser to her husband and take utmost care in her beauty in front of her husband to please him.⁶⁹

It was not always true that deviations from the above qualities was met with severe punishments. The wives at time did retaliate and sometime non-cooperate with others in the family for fulfilling their desires. The best way they could express their dissatisfaction over certain

67. Pandit S.M. Nadesa Shastriar, Thalayanai Mandiropadesam (Novel) 1901.

68. Murugadasa Swami, Mahatir Illkanam, 1917, p.2.

69. Swadesa Mitran, 16 July, 1987.

decisions made without their influence was by refusing to cook or yell loudly at members of the family. For example, there is a letter written to the editor of Swadesa Mitran which states how women pretend to have headache, rolling down lazily on the bed, when there are lot of guests at home which demands her careful household work.

These tactics by women had the effect even though indirectly of intruding into the authority of the male members. But one has to keep in mind that these actions of women only indicate their helplessness and to make their influence accepted and acknowledged.

The work of the middle-class women varied according to the economic position of the family. The rich middle-class family carried out household chores through the servants while poor ones, through the women at home. The work varied from hard works which needed no managerial abilities like carrying water from the long distances, grinding flour, cleaning the house washing utensils, washing clothes, etc.⁷¹ with some power and authority like account-keeping, running the family business (many chetti women were efficient moneylenders and Vellala women as Mirasdars)

70. Lamphere, op.cit. states that in a society where the authority is shared by men and women, women did not have the need to play behind the screen and there was always a strong cooperation among women. p.10.

71. Murugadasa Swami, Mahalir Illakanam, p.10. op.cit.

like running small local stores and controlling the family expenditure.

In the late 19th and 20th centuries with the emergence of victorian image of women with leisure at home, middle class women tended to do less work at home. Swadesa Mitran states that earlier these women spun cotton at home and occupied with millions household chores like that of pickle-making, etc.⁷²

The level of work done by the wife was often associated with purity and pollution aspect of the family, while the male activities both at home and outside was given greater importance. The social system itself gave authority and value to such activities.⁷³ Women at home were generally considered impure due to their menstruation and giving birth to children and were separated during these days from other members of the family. They were prohibited from performing any rituals except cleaning and washing.⁷⁴

The development of social hierarchy itself was based on the purity-pollution aspect of women. The number of ^{decided} days these women were secluded as impure/the honour and status of the family and their menfolk and it was this belief

72. Swadesa Mitran, Editorial, 16 April, 1903.

73. Rosaldo, op.cit., pp. 18,19.

74. Swadesa Mitran, 23 March 1905.

which led to encouragement of child marriage for girls and harrassment and social isolation of widows.⁷⁵

Rosaldo notes that the seclusion of women during menstruation at times led to the relief from the daily rigorous household duties, inspite of the ideological implications of such practices.⁷⁶

These household chores, monotonous and nothing to do with intellectual development, were boring, tiresome unproductive and served no purpose at all.⁷⁷ It would be apt to point out here what Lenin said about the degrading routine of household work : "You all know that even when women have full rights, they still remain factually down-trodden because all houseworks are barbarous, most arduous and sometimes petty which no way help to promote the development of women".⁷⁸

Joint Family system and Motherhood:

In this section, an attempt is made to define the relationship among women at home and how motherhood emerged as important stage in woman's life. The joint family system, consisting of 10 to 12 or more members, did not vanish with the growth of a new- middle-class. In these families, neither men nor women socialised as individuals but as family members in a hierarchical order with particular

75. Allen and Mukherjee, (ed) op.cit., p. 5.
 76. Rosaldo, op.cit., p. 38. She suggests that the idea of purity and pollution may also be used as a basis for assertions of female solidarity, power or value. For example women may gather in menstrual huts to relax or to gossip, creating a world free from control/men. /by
 77. S.M. Nadesa Shastriar, Thalayanai Mandiropadesam (Novel) op.cit., p. 57. He portrays in his novel, the boredom a woman goes through the household chores.
 78. Lenin, quoted by Juliet Mitchell, op.cit., p. 102.

status assigned to everyone.⁷⁹ There was growing dissatisfaction about this system over the years both among men and women, since in most of the families women were dependent economically and assigned to do household chores. Women at home viewed themselves just as men did. Among them also their relationship was based on men's status in the family.

Women never saw themselves as women in the family but as wives, sisters and mothers and thus within the system they tried to exercise power over each other. This domestic orientation of women is felt to be the important factor in understanding her social position contrasted to the extra-domestic, political spheres of activity and interest associated with men.⁸⁰

Within the family, the mother as an elderly person was given considerable respect and freed from daily household duties once the daughter-in-law arrived. The mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship determined the power and influence of a mother.⁸¹ Revolving around this hierarchical relationship, women at home adopted various methods to exercise influence over others, while the power and authority were in the hands of the men.

79. C.S. Lakshmi, Face behind the Mask, 1984, p. 236.

80. Juliet Mitchell, op.cit., p. 100.

81. T.K. Narayana Swami Pillai - Mami, Marudiar Vazkai, 1992.

Women only worked to influence them and thus came into conflict with each other.

Motherhood was praised and idealised. It was only in this stage of life, woman could have some say in the decisions of home and even in public. She was glorified for her self-effacing and compassionate nature. It was thought that the role of mother is itself an authority conferred on women.⁸² Women were made to feel ashamed if she could not or did not have the desire to become a mother.

However, her power and influence were only informal and sometime rendered meaningless in the patriarchal society. A woman with only daughters could never exercise power or influence as she had not given birth to a son.⁸³

Honouring the mother, quite common in this society, had even led to the transfer of some lands in her hands or bought in her names (in the case of Chetti women) as a mark of reverence.⁸⁴ But such activities were very rare and sometimes the land might be in the name of the women with no power to cultivate them. The cultivation generally done by male members of the family. And again one has to notice the contrast between great power exercised or held by women on the whole in patriarchal societies.

82. C.S. Lakshmi op.cit., p. 127.

83. Rosaldo op.cit., p. 25.

84. District Gazetteers of Madras, Madurai, 1960.

A few elder women were seen as repositories of knowledge and their advice was sought and heeded by men and women. But at the same time power and influence exercised by these women relative to men of their age and social status was very low and lacked any public recognition.⁸⁵

Sexuality:

In this section, an attempt is made to discuss the man woman relationship in the family as expressed through sex-segregation and separate sphere for women and how sexuality had been the **tabooed** topic in this period.

From the available literature of late 19th century and early 20th century, it is easy to locate how sex-segregation and the control of women by men were given architectural expression in the construction of household.⁸⁶ The kitchen, breakfast room women's own living room were (very often the store room served as living room for women) the domain of women, whereas **the** reception room, front courtyard and other outer lawns of the house served as male's territory.

85. Rosaldo op.cit., p. 21.

86. The portrayal of separate spheres for men and women at home is clear from the novels written at the period for e.g. (1) R.R. Rajam Iyer - Kamalambal charitram (Novel) 1896. Madras.

(2) A. Madhaviah, Muthu Meenakshi, op.cit.,

In many families the husband-wife relationship was limited to nocturnal experiences and men never sought women's companionship for her intellectual capacities but only used her as sexual object.

It was because of this highly structured and limited inter-action between the women and men, there existed a separate world for each and that women formed informal group of their own and interacted mostly with women. As Rosaldo points out the very opposition between domestic and public activities of women and men provided the basis of a structural framework which classified the place of male and female in psychological, cultural, social and economic aspects of human life.⁸⁷

Due to the lack of education, women of the middle class families found difficulties in conversing with men equally and the colonization process itself widened the gap between the domestic and public sphere which required women to train themselves to put a different persons in front of their husbands⁸⁸ such as caring, sympathetic, sincere and patient. It was due to the lack of communication, for being uneducated, these women, apart from suffering from the sense of inferiority had the desire to earn the sympathies and admiration of their educated husband.⁸⁹

87. Rosaldo, op.cit., p.23.

88. Meredith Botwick, "The Bhadra Mahila and changing conjugal relations in Bengal 1850-1900" in Allen & Mukerjee ed. Women in India & Nepal, op.cit.,

89. Ibid., p.109.

The careful control over female sexuality was considered important aspect of family life and a symbol of male honour. Sexual restraint in women was too rigid and it was not for women to show any eagerness for sexual life or for the company of men. By this process many women came to accept the remoteness and emptiness of married life as given. As C.S. Lakshmi points out that to many Tamil women "sex was the sting of the scorpion to be borne by the all tolerant women on the path to deification".⁹⁰

Women were revered for their infidelity purity and passivity. Women themselves thought that it was innocence of sexuality which keep women pure. As the woman becomes mother or widow she is not only expected to control her sexual desires but she is revered for her purity since her sexual activities are nil.⁹¹ However, for men, there was no such rigid sexual life and he was free to approach the prostitutes or parathaiyar with no social banishments and even here the wife was condemned for not being sexually combatible enough to prevent her husband from going to other women.⁹²

90. C. S. Lakshmi - op. cit., P. 6

91. Rosaldo op.cit., p.28

92. Swadesa Mitran, July 1887.

Such rigorous life pattern for women was often hellish, which even led to unhappy marital life for many men and women. Alarmelmangai states that the restraint and rigorousness led many women to hide truths from husband to survive in the family life.⁹³ The natural outlet for all these tensions and escalated conflict was ^{to} gather with other women in the neighbourhood and gossip about their husbands, families and surroundings.⁹⁴ Since sex was considered a taboo for many women, their desire about sex was only expressed through frank sexual talks. Sexual gossip in itself served as an important function for many women and was more common during the marriages, etc.⁹⁵ Their consciousness about sex was very much heightened because of their heavily repressed sexual life.⁹⁶

Chastity:

Based on the concept of rigid sexual life for women, four main virtues were attributed to women. They were, fear (acham), ignorance (madam), shyness (nanam), and impurity (payirppu). It was said that these feminine virtues are needed for a good character of women.⁹⁷ In late 19th century the intellectuals emphasised these four

93. Rosaldo, op.cit., p.28

94. Swadesa Mitran, July 1887.

95. Swadesa Mitran, 7th July 1908. A reply by Alarmelmangai to the Editor.

96. Meredith Borhwick, Changing role of Women in Bengal, op.cit., pp.^t26.

97. Selected poems of Subramania Bharathi, A section on Women 1981. pp.208

feminine virtues as essential in women's life.

The poems and other literary works stressed the point that a man however rich and high in his status needs a wife who has the above four characters, otherwise, he would be like a tree without flower. King without the country, a deadbody without life.⁹⁸

The chastity of the wife was given more importance in the ancient period. Tiruvalluvar, for example states in his poems that a woman might have education, wealth and a command over everyone. But if she does not possess chastity, she would be abused and cursed by the society. The unconditional obedience as related to chastity was expected from a good wife.⁹⁹ It was not for the wife to question the bad characters of her husband but to shower love and affection unconditionally on him. They were ordered to respond to the personal needs of those around at home. Their public image is more difficult for them to manipulate or control. Women were told to possess modesty and in order to be 'cultured' and sophisticated. They were taught how to speak indirectly only to indicate their needs or to put forward their decisions. While men were masters of an allusive, formal style in their speeches and never expected to be polite in their

98. Swadesa Mitran, Editorial, July 1987.

99. Vivekabodhini, No. 1, July 1908, pp.27.

linguistic practices. Women were in effect 'made 'cultural idiots' and were not expected to correct the abusive language used by a man, but only reply back in polite language.

Chastity and pati bhakti¹⁰⁰ were equally important for women and served as a check on the moral character of women. While men were not rigorously controlled by such virtues, women were abused and outcasted for violating such morality. There was always suspicion about women who were strong and vocal enough to express their desire and concerned about her beauty and it was thought that these women were violators of chastity.¹⁰¹ For women, it was thought, only the fate decides about her relationship with husband and thus she had only the option of praying to God to possess a good charactered husband. The religious rituals like Varalakshmi Puja Thiruvilaku Puja, stressed the importance of chastity and pati-bhakti.

It was considered unnatural for men to loose their masculinity or independence by obeying women's orders at home. What Srinivas observed among the Coorg village as practice was applicable to the Tamil areas also. A 'manly' husband kept his wife under control. She was not supposed

100. Elizabeth Leigh Stutchbury states that the relationship between the husband and wife in the late 19th century India was the same as that between the God (Siva) and the devotee, Elizabeth, /"Blood, Fire and Mediation- Human Sacrifice and widow Burning in 19th Century India", article in Allen and Mukherjee, op.cit., p.35.

101. Swadesa Mitran, Editorial, 1895.

to talk back to him or sulk or nag unduly. A son or brother if demanded partition of the joint-family's estate was accused of being under the influence of his wife or her relatives".¹⁰²

Men's attempt to secure control over biological reproduction and in turn over women, was given justification through the linguistic expressions. Anmai (in Tamil) meant energy, courage, manliness and the capacity to control others. Penmai, on the other hand, meant patience and obedience.¹⁰³ The women who were weak in their physical construction were considered to be weak in their mental capabilities.¹⁰⁴

Engels correctly pointed out that in the (Bourgeois) society the relationship between the husband and wife rested on the chastity and fidelity of the wife, who was to provide a maleline for the inheritance of property and in turn the bourgeoisie demonstrated to the world its ability to sustain a population of non-employed wives. He regarded this as a form of prostitution. In turn, he emphasised, that "the wife... differs from the ordinary courtesan only in that she does not hire out her body... but sells it into slavery once for all."¹⁰⁵

103. Viswanatha Pillai, Tamil-English Dictionary, 1972. There were other words like pedhaiyar (simpletons) Anangu (beauty and fear) were suffixed with women.

104. Swadesa Mitran, letters to the Editor, 1887.

105. F. Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, 1977, pp. 71.

Women remaining unmarried (a virgin who had no desire to become a wife) was considered as a source of omen or devil in the society. In one of Pandit Visalakshiammal's novel, the heroine who desired to become a sanyasini, was told by other married women that for women it is a duty to marry a man.¹⁰⁶

In retrospect, what one notices is that this was the society which constructed dual images of women to preserve patriarchy. On the one hand women were considered the property of men as a sexual object and on the other hand they were revered and respected for their chaste motherhood qualities. Through this Madonna/whore dichotomy men tried to control the families and ensured its sanctity through their authority.

The ideas of sexual differences and justification for the domination of men in the family was mediated through medical doctors and health care advices, for women.¹⁰⁷ It was thought, tirelessness, caring for everyone at home and partaking the left over meals which would keep a housewife healthy. Literature giving guidance to women that how she should take care of herself during the child birth and pregnancy has in abundance for this period.¹⁰⁸

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106. Pandit Visalakshmi Ammal, Saraswathi, pp. 71. ¹⁹⁰⁵
107. Suguna Bodhini, pp. 123. 1889 Issue.
108. Suguna Bodhini, Anandha Bodhini, Vivekabodini, etc. and other Tamil Journals contained articles about Medical care etc.

It was thought that every women should be taught midwifery and other medical practices. One reason for this demand of women nursing themselves without any male doctor could be due to the increasing realisation that middle-class women should not be exposed to outsiders and thus secluded from men other than the family members. Whether there was any attempt at birth control in the late 19th and early 20 th centuries is unpredictable. Since all aspects of sexuality was taboo in this period we do not get material to understand this aspect.

Dowry System and Puberty Celebrations:

In this section, an attempt is made to study the various customs during marriage, essentially bride-price, and dowry system and other celebrations and how they served the purpose of keeping women subservient in the families and in their relationship with others in the society. Earlier in the form of bride-price, girls were sold off for certain amount given by the bridegroom's family, which was an indication of giving away the daughter for which the compensation being paid in the form of bride price.

The literature giving detailed account of bride price the amount paid etc. is enormous in this period. For example, A. Madhaviah's novel, Muthu Meenakshi, describes

how polygamy itself was encouraged through bride-price. An old man could attract the young bride's family through large sum of bride price.¹⁰⁹ The bride price custom itself had led to the harrassment of young wives who have been bought. And forcible consummation was possible due to the insistence of elderly members of the family to utilise the money spend on the bride through early consummation and thus to get the progenitor as early as possible. The level of bride-price was determined by the amount of work the wife had to do at her new house.¹¹⁰ Moreover, bride price was only a symbolic gesture of giving money to bride's family. The family of bride in turn had to part with huge amount of money during their daughter's puberty celebrations, child-birth etc. by sending various gifts to the in-laws' house.

In the early 20th century, dowry system became an important practice in the marriages. Its earlier form in the name of Stridhanam or seer, attributed importance to the qualities of the bridegroom and his economic status. In Madurai, and Ramnad districts dowry has been considered as a debt to be given to the husband's house. How women

109. A. Madhavaiah, op.cit., p. 3.

110. A. Madhavaiah, Muthu Meenakshi, op.cit., p. 50.

were harrassed for not bringing enough seer to her husband's place, has been clearly portrayed in Rukmani-yammal's letter to the Editor of Swadesa Mitran. In her interview with a mother who paid huge amount of a dowry or seer o reveals that even the poor middle-class family had to prepare themselves to provide Rs. 300, silver vessels, gold ornaments, etc.¹¹¹ The celebration, when the girls, attained puberty was an occasion for considerable expenses. Based on the pollution concept the girls were separated during first menstruation. The period of seclusion and distance of separation varied among different castes depending sometime on their economic condition.¹¹² As ~~Ferro~~ Luzzi points out in many poor families the relatives have to be fed during this ceremony and till the necessary money available to celebrate it, the girl might have to continue with seclusion which then ends only with a ceremony. In some families, however, for the pragmatic reason of needing helping hand in household chores the seclusion of girls might end in 3 or 4 days. Alarmelmangai observed that some poor people even borrowed money and others borrowed jewelleries to celebrate this occasion.¹¹³

111. Swadesa Mitran, 2 Feb.1905. Rukumani Ammal's letter The woman who was interviewed by Rukumani Ammal states that for her daughter's marriage she had to give Rs. 300/- some silver plates, 5 silver cup and saucers and for Diwali festival, gold ring, silk clothes etc.

112. Tanjore District Handbook., 1957.

113. Ferro Luzzi quoted by Joycelyn Krygier, "Caste and Female Pollution" ; . in Allen and Mukerjee, ed. Women in India and Nepal, op.cit., p.86.

The Bourgeois ideology of the new middle-class instead of destroying the feudal society's practice of keeping women subservient and subordinate, reinforced it with some modernisation. The images of women such as pure virgins, honourable mothers dutiful wife etc. served the interest of the male-dominated society.

It was a part of the above, the idea of women's power at home came to be considered important. In this argument, women's subservience in production is obscured by their assumed dominance in their own world, i.e. the family,

One has to keep in mind clearly the distinction between authority and power. The power exercised by women might have some influence over men at home but that itself cannot explain the cultural position accorded to such women in the society.

As Rosaldo notes that women in the society might have some influence or the right to make decisions. But the social norms specify the limits of such power exercised by women. If women happened to be powerful or influential they were called disruptors and deviators from the socially accepted norms and thus condemned.

However, in the process of explaining the subservient role of women, one should not under estimate the women's decision making roles in the family.

In this period, the sexual difference between men and women was considered natural and thus the separate sphere was recommended for both. Despite some improvement in women's education and employment, the general conceptions about women and the taboos attached to their activities did not change in this period. Rather it was reinforced to ensure the existence of peaceful patriarchal families.

Moreover, the kind of situation in which women were living led them to see every woman in relation to men and just as how men viewed them. This in turn helped the strengthening of the patriarchal society.

PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN'S LIBERATION IN
TAMIL NADU, 1890-1920

The late 19th and the early 20th century Tamil Nadu, just like the other parts in India, witnessed a regeneration and redefinition in the realm of culture, through various reform activities. During this period, the condition in which women had led their lives drew particular attention.

In this chapter an attempt is made to study the reformer's perception about women's liberation¹ and the complexity involved in their attitudes towards the problems faced by women. Here one has to examine why the so-called 'women question' became an important aspect of the reform movement and formed the central part in the reformer's perception about social change and modernisation.

The late 19th and the early 20th centuries witnessed various changes related to the rise^{of} new classes. These changes did not bring about the total restructuring of the society. For example, the traditional role of women as wives and

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1. What we study as particular reformer's perception in this chapter would be the perceptions of the class he belonged to i.e. middle-class and the socio-economic and political situation in which he was placed. In turn what we observe is the linkage between the perceptions of the individual and the group structure, as reflected in the group's movements. For argument of this sort, Refer, Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia - An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge, 1979, p. 3.

mothers in a patriarchal society was not abandoned, instead was reinforced, in this period. The impact of increasing leisure of middle-class women and separation of home and workplace was to be felt in the dissatisfaction of middle class men. It was one reason why 'women's question' attracted attention. However the way in which the women's issues were dealt with were quite complex.

Another reason why the reformers² concentrated on women's liberation was the growing intrusion of colonial culture and ideology. The British administration and the christian missionaries attempted to hegemonize the 'natives' through their cultural values and ideas. This hegemonization of culture, in the eyes of 'natives' had the intention of destroying the indigenous culture. Thus the reformers were drawn to a struggle against the influence of alien culture. Simultaneously some of them who had admiration for western values tried to bring about modernisation into the Tamil Nadu by bringing about changes, in the existing social beliefs and practices.

The Indian reformer's views on women's question were very much similar to those of the Enlightenment philosophers^o of England. The general humanitarian zeal and reform, by bringing an end to obscurantist ideas and by

2. In this study, reference has been made to few reformers like Vedanayagam Pillai, Subramania Bharathi, Srinivasa Shastri, and G. Subramania Iyer. They have been taken here as the representatives of Tamil reformers and their views have been discussed widely.

appealing to human reason were their characteristics.³

Whether it was religious, caste or national issues or ideas of 'natural gender division' they appealed to human reason and advocated certain changes in the general social situation. According to them men and women were basically different in their character and temperament due to their physical differences.⁴ Thus for them the women's liberation was directly connected with passivity, unconditional love, chastity, subservience to husband, dutiful to their children and innocence about sexual feelings etc.⁵ They refused to accept any activities of women which led to the losing of moral values and chastity.

While the reformers challenged women's traditional role and beliefs, they accepted some of the values inherent in the traditional conception of motherhood. Their efforts to modernise women in the image of victorian women along with traditional virtues resulted in the neglect of women's own personality and they ignored the aspect of women's individual qualities and development.⁶ It was this perception which strengthened the separate sphere ideology and the reformer's ideal of masculinity (Anmai) and

3. For the views of enlightenment philosophers of England refer, Olive Banks - Fares of Feminism. A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement, 1981, p.7.
4. Swadesa Mitran, 14 May, 1887.
5. Suguna bodini (Journal in Tamil) 1889. "Duties of a Married women" - Sugageevini, p. 123.
6. A good example would be the speeches and writings of the educated women of early 20th century who could think in terms of being an efficient wives and talented Mothers.

femininity (Penmai).

This chapter examines the perspectives on problems like women's education, child-marriage, widow-remarriage, women's position in the families etc. in the light of the general ideas mentioned above.

Perspectives on Women's Education

In this section an attempt is made to study the reformer's quest for women's education. The complexity involved in their ideas about women's education, and how their general perceptions about women as domestic oriented, had influence on their ideas about women's education, have also been studied.

Following the colonisation of Madras, the indigenous educational system which imparted education to girls at home, suffered serious neglect. There is some evidence that the imperial rule resulted in the decline of women's education and women's general situation. B.S. Baliga clearly shows that in Tanjore and Madurai districts, in the beginning of the 19th century education on a large scale was imparted through indigenous informal ways. In Tanjore in the early 19th century, education was imparted through indigenous

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7. Since only a few literary sources are used, this work seems to be only tentative. If further research done on the same theme, using wide varieties of materials such as biographies and autobiographies mainly of women, the interpretation given here can be challenged.

institutions, a large number of them, funded by Sarabhoji Raja (the Royal family of Tanjore) and by the students themselves.⁸ These schools though intended for Brahmins had 17,582 students who were taught Hindu theology, astronomy etc, out of which 154 were girls students. In Madurai in 1823 there were 13,781 pupils in the indigeneous schools of which 105 were girls belonging to the devadasi community.⁹

When the British started showing more interest in girl's education, many government schools were opened in all Tamil speaking districts but with half-hearted attempts, since the government did not want to spend much money on women's education.¹⁰ Moreover many orthodox Hindu families refused to send their daughters to the government or missionary schools, since there was widespread fear that women would lose their morality and chastity, if they studied in missionary schools.¹¹ Neither the stipend nor the opportunity of employment as teachers could persuade these families to send their wards. However the Christian

8. B.S. Baliga, The Tanjore District Handbook, 1957, p.273.

9. B.S. Baliga, The District Gazetteer for Madurai, 1960, p. 266.

10. Swadesa Mitran, 7 June 1890, A letter to the Editor.

11. Madhu Kiswar points out for Punjab that there were few instances where women had been victimised by their families for being given shelter and protection by the missionaries along with stipends or employment, which served a threat to the Hindu way of life. Madhu Kiswar, "Arya Samaj and Women's education - Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandar", EPW, vol. XXI, No. 17, April 26, 1986. pp. 9,10.

zenana education, teaching women at home, was widely accepted and was given great support by many middle-class, families. It was missionary education on the one hand and orthodox oppositions to women's modern education on the other hand that stimulated reformer's activities for women's education.

The reformer like Vedanayagam Pillai, G. Subramania Iyer and few others condemned the illiteracy of middle class women and demanded at least primary education to be imparted to them. They explained how education can enable women to be efficient mothers and wives and enable them to help men in their activities.¹² It was not however possible for them to bring every girl to school. Even among the middle class families, there was a strong opposition to women's education. Many Hindu families reacted sharply against the reformer's attempt to educate women.¹³ Their argument was that education for women would only lead to increase in prostitution and that educated women might use their literary skills to write love letters to men, other than her husbands or to pre-marital love-affairs. They argued that education itself can act as an

12. Malavika Karlekar argues that in Bengal the Brahmos advocated a limited education for girls which would serve the purpose of making women intelligent companions, mothers for the next generation, p. 25.

Malavika Karlekar, "Kadambini and the Bhadrakalok - Early Debates over Women's Education in Bengal", EPW, Vol. XXI, No. 17, 26 April 1986.

13. Swadesa Mitran, Editorial, 31 August 1906.

impediment to women's household duties. They considered women's ignorance as their ornament and said that it should therefore, not be destroyed with education. According to them a woman cannot certainly preserve her chastity if she has to study with men and debate with them in public.¹⁴

The Reformers strongly condemned and objected to the above notions. They in turn stressed that only educated women would be able to run the family efficiently as mothers, wives and daughters by taking care of every one at home, showing utmost care to their health etc.¹⁵ They assumed that a literate woman would obey the orders of her husband and help him in his outside activities.¹⁶

Vedanayagam Pillai was one of the earliest social reformers of the Tamil districts who exposed women's problem in his novels, poems and other writings. The problem of women's education was highlighted in the first Tamil novel written by him in 1879 and in his second novel

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14. Ibid., 16 June 1887. A letter to the Editor.
15. Swadesa Mitran, 1887 (date not known), Letter to the Editor. The various letters written to the editor with regard to women's education show that keen awareness existed about the lack of education and how they demanded women's own response to their education.
16. Vedanayagam Pillai, Pen Kalvi, 1907, p.32.

in 1887.¹⁷ In these two novels he stressed the importance of women's education and he showed how education enabled women to run the family efficiently. He portrayed his heroines, Gnambhal and Suguna Sundari, as showing utmost interest in education, in the Dharma Shastras and Needhi Shastra learnings and in various other arts, which raised their status and they were shown as being respected by everyone in the village.

In Pen Madhi Malai, Pen Kalvi and Pen Manam written in 1907, in prose-poetry form, Pillai explained the necessity of women's education.¹⁸ He believed that women themselves should demand education from men at home. Thus in Pen Madhi Malai (Women's intelligence) he says through a women characters :

With illiterate men, you educated lot feel uncomfortable to establish friendship. But aren't you ashamed of being the husbands of these illiterate wives?

... Is it dangerous for us to have intellectual education?

Is it not dangerous and madness to have ignorant women as your wife?

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17. Vedanayagam Pillai, Pratapa Mudaliar Charitram, 1879 (1976) and Vedanayagam Pillai, Suguna Sundari, 1887.(1976)
18. Vedanayagam Pillai, Pen Madhi Malai, Penkalvi and Pen Nanam, 1907.

Is it true that education is only a male property?

...Should we lead this beast-life, if we had education?

Could we ever have good-manners and characters without education?

We are not fond of petty luxuries like jewels, clothes, etc. and we only need education to help you men in your professions, to educate our children and to inculcate good manners in them.¹⁹

Pillai's ideal woman asserts that education for women would help them to run a peaceful life, to keep good account of the family expenditures, to do needle works and to do efficient caterings. She further asserts that education would make a woman realise that her husband is the lord, saviour and every thing.²⁰

In his other writing (Pen Kalvi), Vedanayagam asserted that women should be educated only to inculcate them with God-fearing nature, good character and not for their employment outside their homes.²¹ According to him, women ought to be taught the essence of religion and other moralities. He also demanded that women change or modernise themselves

19. Ibid., pp. 18 -20.

20. Ibid., p. 20.

21. Ibid., (Pen Kalvi), p. 22.

like the victorian women. Since they preserved their feminine virtues, such as chastity, respect for elders. It was these aspects of victorian women which attracted him much.

Vedanayagam Pillai demanded education for women only to make them realise their duties at home ^{and} to respect men to subordinate themselves in all possible ways to suppress their desires and freedom in conformity with patriarchal values. The purpose behind women's education, argued Vedanayagam, was "to make women as personal secretary of their husbands, talented accountants and efficient health advisers to everyone at home".²² Education, he thought would dissuade women's from indulging in unnecessary gossip and instead inspire them to read valuable religious books. What one notices in his literary works and other writings is the influence of evengelical ideas on women's liberation.²³ A converted Christian himself, he was never against missionary attempt to spread education among the 'natives' and rather emphasized the religious education for women.

22. Ibid., p. 32.

23. The Evengelical ideas on women's liberation were mixed with the ideas of revivalism. Women's independence became one of the aspect of social and moral reform. For more about Evengelical ideas, Refer Olive Banks, Faces of Feminism.. A Study of feminism as a social Movement. 1981. p. 13.

Vedanayagam Pillai's attempt to reform the condition of women, were within the patriarchal values, indeed with some 'modernisation'.²⁴ To the reformers the modernisation efforts did not involve a total change in the society but meant the Bourgeoisification of their culture without challenging the traditional relations of family or society which subordinated women.²⁵

Ideas similar to these of Vedanayagam Pillai were widely held by the middle class. A letter written to the editor of Swadesa Mitran stressed that the education of women would remove the problem of women wasting their time in gossiping as it would train them to read useful and valuable books on pati-Bhakti and chastity. He further pointed out how the ancient literate women were ready to give away their life to preserve chastity.²⁶

Several correspondents in Swadesa Mitran contrasted the qualities of educated women with those who were illiterate. An illiterate woman has been portrayed as generally preventing her husband's happiness, being unable to provide harmonious and peaceful life to everyone at home, using abusive languages in front of everyone, and

24. Madhu Kiswar, op.cit., p. 10. She argues that education for women was advocated primarily as a means to bridge the mental gap between husbands and wives, mothers and sons.

25. Atluri Murali, "Perspectives on Women's Liberation - Andhra in the 19th and early 20th centuries", p. 100, Studies in History, Vol. 3, No. 1, Jan-June, 1987.

26. Swadesa Mitran, 11 June 1895. A letter to the Editor.

indulging in gossips, thus being disliked by everyone.²⁷
 In contrast, educated women were portrayed as efficient wives who undertook all kinds of suffering to bring peace and love in the family, sexually satisfy their husbands and prevent them approaching the prostitutes.

While idealism of home and love were emphasised, there was a sharp reaction against the influences western culture coming through missionary education. A writer in *Swadesa Mitran*, opposed Christian education imparted in missionary school as it tended to convert Hindu women to Christianity.²⁸ The threat for Hinduism and native culture was strongly felt.²⁹ The two Mudaliar girls who were converted to Christianity in 1895 created a tumultuous uproar. The Editor of *Swadesa Mitran* argued that women were the preservers of Hindu religion and rituals which would be destroyed if the native girls were sent to the

27. Swadesa Mitran, 5 July 1895. A letter to the Editor.

28. Swadesa Mitran, 12th July, 1895. A letter to ^{the} Editor.

29. This was not peculiar to Tamil Nadu alone. All over India greater alarm was raised against the proselytising zeal of the missionaries. Madhu Kiswar notes that in Punjab Lala Munsiram (Swami Shraddhanand) was horrified at the conversion efforts of the missionaries after hearing his daughter singing a couplet learnt from the mission school. He immediately thought of an indigenous Hindu school for women. Madhu Kiswar, op.cit., p.10.

missionary schools. He further claimed that the Christian priests who received full support of the British government have converted the native girls in an uncivilized way. He urged the 'natives' to start their own schools to teach pati-bhakti and chastity to the native women.³⁰ Similar awareness and understanding was prevalent among all the reformers in other parts of Madras also.³¹

Another writer in Swadesa Mitran attributed the problem of conversion to the lack of freedom for women at home to learn what they liked. He pointed out that the women should be allowed to read Ramayana and Mahabhratha, as they wished to strengthen their mind with Hindu ideologies.³²

Some of them strongly recommended vernacular education in preference to English education since the latter was seen as an instinct of western culture. Speaking at the Triplicane Girls' school Mr V.S. Srinivasa Shastri recommended instruction to be imparted in vernacular language and so that English language ceased to be compulsory for girls.³³

30. Swadesa Mitran, Editorial, 12 July, 1895.

31. Native Newspaper reports (Andrapatrika) 30 November, 1918. The writer claims that missionary schools teach Christianity and thus to avoid such evils native schools to be started.

32. Swadesa Mitran, 12 July 1895. A letter to the editor.

33. NNR, (Andra Patrika), Madras, 3 Feb. 1916.

In 1918 the Dravida patrika opposed English Education for women as they would imitate English women and their culture.³⁴

However their opposition to the intrusion of Western culture did not prevent their admiration for the western Bourgeois life. The Editor of Swadesa Mitran stated that it is wrong to suggest that Indian women would lose their four essential virtues such as fear (acham), ignorance (madam), shyness(Nanam) impurity (payirppu) through education. He pointed out how European women even after higher education could preserve the feminine virtues. He further stated that Indian women should be raised up like European women.³⁵

Many middle-class men identified the problem of women's education with the poor economic and living condition of the 'natives', government policies and the lack of liberation for women in other spheres of their life. The underdeveloped nature of the economy, according to them, led to the employment of young girls as wageless helpers at home. They blamed the government for not encouraging women's education through scholarship scheme and for tuition fees etc.³⁶ Some of them pointed out the illtreatment of women at home and their seclusion which led to backwardness in education.³⁷

34. NNR, (Dravida Patrika) 2 Jan. 1918.

35. Swadesa Mitran, 25 June 1901. Editorial.

36. Ibid., 7 June 1890. A letter to the editor.

37. Ibid., 29 August 1906. A letter to the editor.

What kind of an education was sought for women?

The general emphasise was on primary education but not on the higher education. As the purpose of education was to not/prepare women for employment outside their home. The following subjects were recommended to be taught at schools. Tamil, Mathematics (only very little), Geography (the weather, landscape of Tamil Nadu etc.) History (of great women who struggled to preserve their chastity) some hygiene methods, midwifery lessons, tailoring, col cooking, music, gardening and some indoor games.³⁸

By the early 20th century with the activities of Subramania Bharati, the perceptions on women's education became much more radical. The education was now demanded not just to train them as efficient mothers and daughters but to enable them to join the freedom struggle against the British rule.³⁹ The education was also intended to bring about equality between men and women, both at home and outside. The social activists during this period based their attitude on human reason and explained how women were subordinated by cultural and social environment,⁴⁰ yet they too were not free from the influence of patriarchal values and ideology.

38(a) Indian Social Reformer, 25 March 1900.

(b) Swadesa Mitran, 12 July 1905. A letter to the editor.

39. Subramania Bharathi. Essays for women, 1935.

40. Neera Desai, Women in Modern India, 1957. p.59.

Subramania Bharathi⁴¹ in his essays for the betterment of Tamil women stated :

My entire desire and aim is to improve the welfare of our nation through sharpening women's intellect and talents. Our women should be taught about the deeds of our great leaders, their activities which in turn would help them to inspire their husbands and sons to sacrifice latter's life for the independence of our nation.⁴²

He sharply condemned the attitude of men who were complacent and showed indifference to women's education. He pointed out that "There is nothing more harmful and heinous a crime than darkening the mind and heart of our women, by preventing them from receiving enlightenment through education.

41. Among the several middle-class male writers and poets in Tamil Nadu, who were striving for women's liberation, Subramania Bharathi was the leading radical poet in the early 20th century. Though Bharathi came from a very orthodox Brahmin family (It was this rigid and orthodox family life affected Bharathi very seriously to write forcefully about women's emancipation) and thus conditioned by feudal and patriarchal values. He proposed to restructure the entire social system, by changing the every base of the society from women to caste system. He strongly advocated modernity in every field while asserting a cultural identity against the colonial hegemonic ideologies and cultural values. In his early years he was influenced by foreign revolutionary movements especially by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and he demanded such revolution in India to bring about liberation to every human being in India. He championed illtreatment of Fiji workers (Tamil workers), unequal social system through inequitable distribution of wealth, and inequality of women. Bharathi was impressed by Chinese feminism and praised Chiu-Chin the leading feminist of China in his poems and demanded women's participation in all kinds of liberation struggle.

42. Subramania Bharathi quoted by Viswanathan & Mani: Mahakavi Bharathiyarin Chakravartini Katuraigal, 1979, p.13

There can be no escape from sharpening the intellect of our women".⁴³ He ridiculed those men who prevented women's education as they were unaware of the benefit of such education.

His poems, written with the intention of propagating female education, clearly explain Bharathi's stand on this issue. In one of his poems written on the welfare of the society, he states that The God had provided equal intelligence for both men and women, and that only men as fools had tried to darken women's intellectual capacities. He further says, that through education, women's intellect can be sharpened, which would bring prosperity to the nation.⁴⁴

Bharathi wanted women to be treated as human beings with intellect and not as mere objects of reform. He demanded that women themselves should realise their degrading condition and fight for their rights.

In one of his writings addressed to Tamil women he gave suggestions to them to adopt various methods for improving their own education. "Sisters! all of you must get educated as a first step for improving your consciousness. It is wrong to expect these men to improve your condition. Some of you who are already educated must tirelessly propagate

43. Subramania Bharathi - Chakravartini (Journal) Aug 1906. Part 1. Vol. II. p. 1.

44. Subramania Bharathi, Selected Poems, (reprint) ... 1981, p. 205.

to
 the gospel of women's education/all women. Women's associations should be started everywhere to discuss the problem of illiteracy. Many women who donate their wealth and valuable materials to the temples should do so for women's education, and donate enormously to build up girl's schools etc."⁴⁵

He clearly identified women's education as a first step along with their liberation as essential for the welfare of the nation. He said that it would be a folly to argue that men should be educated first and women only afterwards. He demanded that unequal treatment of women should be abolished along with the improvement of women's education which would bring about great cultural change towards modernity.⁴⁶

Bharathi argued that changes have to be brought along with the political struggle and not just one after another. He mocked at men who talked of political freedom and at

45. Subramania Bharathi, Essays for Women, Madras, 1935.

These essays were written by Bharathi between 1910-20 and published in Tamil newspapers especially in Swadesa Mitran.

46. Bharathi's ideals women called 'Pudumaipen' (modern women) by him represents his dream of an liberated women in the Free India. Bharathi wrote in his poem as she asks for education : "Gone are they who said to woman, 'Thou shall not open the book of knowledge' and the strange ones who boasted saying, ' We will immune these women in our homes.' Today they hang down their heads."

the same time denied education to women. He wrote :

that our women should be well read and high in intellectual capacities. It is only in their womb that a great patriot with all high qualities can take birth. Men folk on their own cannot change the status of our country to a free-nation. Today our women have been pushed into deep darkness, while our men talk about nation's welfare through freedom struggle . What a great ignorance.⁴⁷

He felt the necessity to provide Indian women not just a conventional education on cooking, painting etc. but lessons on patriotism, and knowledge about the great leaders of the world in order to equip them to participate in the freedom struggle. In the modern girl, Bharathi saw the dynamism to learn everything possible and working hard to prevent India falling into ignorance. His 'pudaimaipen' has been portrayed in his poem as eager to learn all the arts. He portrayed her as singing this :

To learn every techniques of life,
 To learn rich literary arts,
 To travel in all four directions,
 To bring modernity to our land,
 To abandon living in the dark pitches
 We intellectuals will learn all the shastras and arts
 and bring comforts to everyone,
 we will destroy obscurantism and
 we will live to be priased by men for our talents.⁴⁸

47. Viswanathan & Mani ed., Subramania Bharathyarin Chakravartini Essays, 1979, p.43.

48. Subramania Bharathi, Selected Poems, op.cit., p.33.

By and large, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries women's education became an important symbol necessary to strengthen the indigenous culture against the British onslaught.

Prospectives on Women's Economic Role:

The middle-class men's perceptions on economic role are linked with their perceptions on women's education. Since they saw the inevitability of the linkage between the household chores and women they never felt the necessity of demanding women's employment outside their house. It was not for women to earn money or to be economically independent. Thus women's education was intended to redefine women's position at home.⁴⁹ Women's household duties were seen as inferior to outside work performed by men. Even radicals like Bharathi defined women's role as housewives as an important aspect of women's life and even their participation in the freedom struggle was urged as a part of their role as mothers, and sisters.⁵⁰

Bharathi in his poem, while defining the role of men and women in the society stated clearly that,-- In a family, economic needs are fulfilled by the father. The household chores are done by the mother who keeps the family lively.⁵¹

49. Swadesa Mitran, 17 February 1908. A letter to the Editor.

50. Selected Poems, op.cit., p. 204.

51. S. Bharathi, Selected Poems, op.cit., p. 204.

While he condemned the leisure of middle-class women and encouraged them to involve in the swadeshi activities, he did not emphasise their economic role as wage earners and he never felt the necessity for women to be employed outside their respective homes.

In the beginning of the 20th century, many reformers urged women to employ themselves with small-scale industries in order to encourage swadeshi products. Many reformers were also concerned about the growing leisure of women being wasted in unnecessary gossips.⁵²

G. Subramania Iyer condemned the growing tendency among the middle-class women to avoid the traditional work which he thought brought economic independence to women and the family in the earlier days.⁵³

Perspectives on Child Marriage

The concern to improve the general condition of women in the families resulted in the condemnation of the practice of child marriage. They identified the evils of child-marriage as hampering everybody's moral, social and physical interests, leading to many other social evils like polygamy, child-widows and ill-treatment of women

52. Swadesa Mitran, Editorial, 16 April, 1908.

53. Swadesa Mitran, Editorial, 17 September 1906.

in general. In this matter the reformers followed Keshab Chandra Sen's idea on child-marriage. He urged that the practice of child-marriage was not sanctioned by the scriptures and wrote : "The custom of premature marriage, as it prevails in this country is injurious to the moral, social and physical interest of the people as it is one of the main obstacles in the way of their advancement."⁵⁴ Moreover at this time the reformer's ideal was the monogamous family and hence urged the abolition of polygamy. They identified the problem of child marriage with polygamy, the young girls being married away to old men, incompatibility among the married couples etc.⁵⁵

It was pointed out how the child-wives were deprived of a normal childhood, forced to do household duties and to early pregnancy and early death.⁵⁶ Some reformers gave medical and scientific explanation to abolish child-marriage. They identified the decline of women's population with the high mortality rate among the female.⁵⁷ They also argued that child-marriages were equally harmful for male-children since they would be deprived of proper

54. Keshub Chandra Sen, quoted by Kumari Jayawardene, Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World in the 19th and early 20th Centuries. p.84.

55. Swadesa Mitran, Editorial, June 25, 1890.

56. Swadesa Mitran, 1890, A letter to the Editor.

57. Ibid., Editorial, 25 November, 1890.

education and burdened with the responsibilities of fathers and husbands.⁵⁸

Subramania Bharathi's contempt for child-marriage is expressed in very fiery language in his autobiography written in poetry. He condemned his parents and the orthodox society which forced him into early marriage. He says, "If I think more about it my heart will melt. To say it to others my tongue will prevent. This is all about my childhood marriage."⁵⁹ He sharply condemned those men who encourage child-marriage and equated it to committing a murder :

The children who drink breast-milk were decorated as brides ! Is it not equal to committing a murder. Those shameless, Villaneuous, rotten and degrading human beings ought to be strangled to death and thrown out of this world.⁶⁰

In early Tamil fiction also child-marriage figures as a major social problems. The novels of Vedanayagam Pillai and Madhavaiah are good examples. In one of the novels written by Vedanayagam Pillai in 1887, the heroine

58. Ibid., Editorial, 22 August 1890.

59. Subramania Bharathi, Selected Poems (Suyasarithai Autobiography), op.cit., p. 252.

60. Ibid., p. 253.

who has been portrayed as well educated campaigned against child-marriage and pointed out that it did not have the sanction of the shastras. She speaks to many women about marriages in other countries where, marriages take place only after women attained maturity. She also gives the example of Sita, Droupati and other women of ancient India who married according to their wishes after attainment of puberty.⁶¹

In the early 20th century, a social novel written by A. Madhavi⁶² in an autobiographical form clearly portrayed problem of child-marriage. He strongly believed that women's own consciousness on these various problems can bring about social changes.

The heroine of the novel, Murthu Meenakshi, was aware of all the problem faced by women through her own experience. The heroine condemned child-marriage by saying that she was not even able to recognise her mother's face when she was forced into early marriage.⁶³

What were the main demands against the child-marriages?

The reformers' main demand was the total abolition of child-marriage among all the castes and to raise the

61. Vedanayagam Pillai, Suguna Sundari (Novel), 1887, Vanavil Press, 1979, pp. 75-76.

62. A. Madhavi⁶², Muthu Meenakshi (Novel) 1903, 1981. Indian social reformer comments about him in the following way: "Madhavi has devoted his literary talents entirely to the cause of social reform. His novels, short stories and poem in English as well as in Tamil have been the means of making idea of social reform." ISR, 6 August 1915.

63. Ibid., Muthu Meenakshi, p. 1.

the marriageable age to 12 years. They supported the Age of Consent Bill. Writing on the government ordinance to raise the Age of Consent, the Editor of Swadesa Mitran called upon all the like-minded people to support the Ordinance and the subsequent Bill, since it gave "fair amount of justice to women and her sexual life".⁶⁴

They thought that the increase in child-marriage was due to the general disrespect shown to women and the treatment meted out to them.⁶⁵ They demanded the support of the Tamil people for the resolutions passed in the Bombay social conference against the forcible consummation and for the Age of Consent Bill.⁶⁶ In the early 20th century the introduction of post puberty marriage Bill, which demanded the marriage of Hindu girls after the attainment of puberty derived lot of support from the reformers.⁶⁷

Perspectives on the Problems of Widows:

In this section an attempt is made to show how the advocacy of widow-remarriage implicitly emphasized the

64. Swadesa Mitran, Editorial, 1 August 1890.

65. Swadesa Mitran, Editorial, 31 March 1891.

66. Indian Social Reformer, 8 January 1899.

67. NNR (New India), 26 January,

patriarchal family system and how such reform strengthened the traditional views on women, instead of liberating them. In Madras from late 19th century onwards majority of the middle-class men expressed their great concern and awareness about the problem of child widows and widows in general. They suggested widow-remarriage as an alternative to the ill-treatment meted out to the widows. The common fear among the reformers was said to be that some high-caste widows who had been ill-treated and prevented from remarriage, had rushed to prostitution ... This concern to prevent the disintegration of family life... was a theme in the literature of North and South India".⁶⁸

Very often the awareness about the ill-treatment of widows stemmed from their personal experiences at home. For example Bharathi was seriously concerned about the conditions of his aunt and other women at home who were widowed at a very young age. His novel 'Chandri gaiyin Kadai' emerged out of his experience and awareness about the harrassments of widows in his own family.⁶⁹

The custom of tonsure of widows was severely condemned by the reformers. They thought that such customs showed sheer disrespect for human being's feelings. The

68. Kumari Jayawardena, op.cit., p.81.

69. Rajam Krishnan, Panchali Sapadam Padiya Bharathi (History), 1983, p.5.

Editor of Swadesa Mitran stated that "It is absolutely absurd to state that if a widow keeps her hair she would be attracted towards prostitution and it is a folly to treat a widow as corpse or as one who has lost all her senses."⁷⁰

Vedanayagam Pillai sharply reacted to the custom of tonsure and the ill-treatment of widows. In 'Pen Manam' (Respect for Women) he stated that the status of widows was very pathetic and deplorable, since she was ordered to abandon all her luxurious and enjoyable life and ordained to drudge in domestic duties.⁷¹

What were the solutions sought for the ill-treatment of widows? All the reformers recommended remarriage for the widows. While some of them claimed that only the child-widows, who according to them never enjoyed married life should be allowed to remarry and not other widows who had children etc.⁷²

Some of them felt that the improvement of child-widows can be brought about by teaching women to be self-dependent and providing means to keep them employed in interesting

70. Swadesa Mitran, 5 August 1890. Editorial.

71. Vedanayagam Pillai, Pen Madhi Malai, Penkalvi, Pen Manam op.cit., p. 120.

72. Swadesa Mitran, June 1890. A letter to the Editor.

and engrossing philanthropic and charitable works.⁷³

A Resolution passed in the social conference recommended for the establishment of widow homes to earn independent livelihood.⁷⁴ Another Social Conference held in 1900 suggested that the improvements of the condition of child-widows should be the main attention of all Associations and they should involve it the promotion of education and philanthropic work among the widows.⁷⁵

In the early 20th century, Bharathi tirelessly campaigned for widow-remarriage and he insisted such reforms should be carried out by women themselves. His earnest desire was that women should attempt on their own to liberate themselves and thus widows should initiate on their own to remarry anyone as they wished.

Writing to Tamil women he stated that the only way to reduce the number of widows and their sufferings was to allow them to remarry irrespective of their caste to anyone of their wish at any age.⁷⁶

A. Madhaviah's novel Muthu Meenakshi is a moving portrayal of a child-widow's sufferings, and the ill-treatment meted out to her. A heart melting account is given about

73. ISR, 24 December, 1899.

74. Ibid., 8 January 1899.

75. Ibid., 14 January 1900.

76. Subramania Bharathi, Essays for Tamil Women, op.cit., p. 119.

the feelings of the young-widow Muthu Meenakshi who becomes desparate enough to contemplate running away with any man possible to escape from her miseries.⁷⁷

In Sundaresan, the hero of the novel, Madhaviah creates a social reformer who not only educated Muthu but was willing to marry her after she became a widow. The hero addresses the widow in the following way:

The way you have been made to look inauspicious and ugly, no affection and love shown to you by anyone, day and night drudging in the household works all alone, living with one meal, all these have brought blood in my eyes ! How torturous is this life for a widow?⁷⁸ The hero explains to her how the Shastras permitted such marriages. He further states that "this society is cruel enough to banish a widow who remarries but could do nothing about the widows who secretly indulged in prostitution."⁷⁹

From the above statements of the hero of the novel it is clear that the reformers like Madhaviah urged widow-remarriage to avoid widows going for prostitution and tried

77. A. Madhavia^ah, op.cit., p.55

78. Ibid., p. 74.

79. Ibid., p. 77.



to reinforce the patriarchal values of society and its moralities.

In the early 20th century Bharathi's novel, 'Chandrigaiyin Kadai', not only advocated widow-remarriage but urged women to change their consciousness with regard to this. The heroine of this story, Visalakshi, a widow, is encouraged by her sister-in-law, Gomathi to get remarried. Gomathi throughout the novel has been portrayed as uneducated, one who knows how to serve men in the orthodox family and who always suppressed her feelings. Here she finally bursts out with anger and demands that her sister-in-law get married. She says that "Widow marriage is very much acceptable according to the old shastras. We must realise that both men and women are equally slaves of God. So why should women be the slave of these men and lead^a/subordinate and fearful life till death : Visalakshi ! You must tear away and burn those contemptible shastras written by men for their selfish motives and should courageously seek the help of some reformers to get married to a man of your choice."⁸⁰ In the end of the story Bharathi shows how Visalakshi, the widow, despite many difficulties gets married to a 28 years old Sanyasi and grows her hair. Through the character of

80. S. Bharathi, Chandrigaiyin Kadai, (reprint) 1948, p.8.

Visalakshi, Bharathi tried to portray women as strong wilful characters who need no sympathy for being widows, but need only men of progressive outlook to marry them. Bharathi constantly attempted to show that widows are human beings with feelings and capable of being lively and thus should not be treated as an object to be reformed.

Perspectives on the Familial Relationship:

In this section, the middle-class conception of women's role at home, ^{and} the man-woman relationship would be studied.

According to Vedanayagam Pillai, for a woman her husband is everything, and her happiness should be of living with him for ever. He is her lord and saviour.⁸² Vedanayagam Pillai thought that women had no right to complain their sufferings in married life to their parents or others which according to him was against the pati-vrath Dharma. Thus however cruel their husbands were, there should be no grudge shown or no attempt made to run away from them. He further said that for women who were unlucky to get cruel husbands only God can be the protector and saviour.⁸³

81. The conceptions about familial relationship has been made through the study of literary works. The difficulties in getting access to the reformer's own biographies and autobiographies made it impossible to assess their conception of man-woman relationship. The problems of many middle-class women at home is yet to be explored through other sources.

82. Vedanayagam Pillai, Pen Madhi Malai, Penkalvi and Pen Manam op.cit., p. 42.

83. Ibid., p. 77

For a just society, Vedanayagam wrote that men should co-operate with women at home and not ill-treat them. He condemned men ^{one} /who treated women as beasts and slaves :

These men have treated their dogs and cattle with much more warmth and affection, while their women were treated as slaves and forced to partake his meal. What a great injustice done to human beings.⁸⁴

He also condemned men who left their wives and enjoyed their life with prostitutes. He said that those who left their wives and approached the prostitutes would realise how shocking it would be to learn that their own daughters and sisters were forced into prostitution.⁸⁵

The late 19th century was the period when the domestic reform was much talked about by the reformers. In their writings the conflict between women and women at home had received considerable attention. T.K. Narayanaswami Pillai for instance wrote about the Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship and gave details about how both of them should adjust and bring about peace in the family.⁸⁶

84. Ibid., p. 102.

85. Ibid., p. 109.

86. T.K. Narayanaswami Pillai, Mami Maruqiar Vazkai, 1892.

According to him the mother-in-law should try to educate her daughter-in-law should teach her not to indulge in gossip, and should not harrass her with household duties. He advised the daughter-in-law to preserve her chastity, modesty and respect for elders, especially the mother-in-law.⁸⁷

Vivekabodini, a Tamil journal brought out in 1908, in its Ladies' pages defined the harmonious life between the husband and wife. It looked upon the wife as an instrument for her husband to be used at any time, implying that it is the duty of the wife to furnish any help needed by him and make him the happiest person in the world.⁸⁸

While the gender difference in a society was created with the cultural specificity of that particular society, reformers identified the difference between men and women in their status as natural to their physical construction. In 1887, a letter to the Editor of Swadesa Mitran stated that the unavoidable differences between men and women by their nature has created two different world for them. According to him men always had higher mental

87. Ibid., p.109.

88. Vivekabodini, No. 1, July, 1908. p.27.

qualities than women for women were generally weak in intellect and unable to grasp things fast. The writer argued that women's household duties cannot be associated with slavery since women have been created as subservient to men.⁸⁹

The familial relationship especially the role of women at home, the problems faced by them etc. become the focus of many novels written in this period. Idealisation of married love and home as sanctuary where women reigned as angels was to be seen in the writings of Vedanayagam Pillai. He has created heroines in his novel as talented women who undertook the task of creating a home of peace, beauty, guardianship for children and emotional security for their husbands.

In his novel Pratapha Mudaliar Charitram his heroine who has been portrayed as talented, well-educated and one who knew how to protect her chastity and pativrath qualities confesses in the following way :

Women, however educated they may be, they are not meant to compete with men and they cannot succeed than men. They are like tiny plant, which grow in short period, produces flower and vanishes away. Whereas men are like trees which grow slowly but give benefit for longer years.⁹⁰

89. Swadesa Mitran, 14 May 1887. A letter to the Editor.

90. Vedanayagam Pillai, Pradhapha Mudaliar Charitram, op.cit., p. 58.

He shows his heroine as ignorant about sexuality, modest to everyone, seeks no wealth except her husband's love and ready to serve him in any form. Another kind of women he shows as lost all their moral characters and thus being ill-treated.⁹¹

Madhavi^aiah's novel Muthu Meenakshi written in 1903, does not directly focus on the man-woman relationship. But on the social problems faced by women shows how women very often were controlled by the community or by the extra-familial institutions such as caste and how women themselves reinforced the patriarchal structure and values.⁹²

While not critically viewing the place of women at home, the domestic drudgery and the unnecessary binding on women through the four-fold qualities, he does propose an alternative for widow's harassment, seclusion and loneliness through remarriage of widow. The novel focuses more on the mother-in-law, daughter-in-law relationship. It also portrays the problem of a young wife, sufferings of family due to polygamy, harassments by step-mother, dutiful son but a harassing husband etc. In the early 20th century, this novel was one of the most radical one.

91. C.S. Lakshmi, Face behind the Mask, op.cit., p.36

92. A. Madhavi^aiah, Muthu Meenakshi, Op.cit.

In the most part of the novel he emphasised how women's relationship with women themselves was conditioned by the hierarchical position given to women at home and how male dominated relationship restricted women from understanding other women's problems.

Just like any other reformer, idealisation of paternal love and authority prevented him from seeing the essence of equal authority for men and women. His portrayal sometime involved showing women as home destroyers and breakers of harmonious life.

Another novelist and campaigner against many women's problems was Pandit S.M. Nadesa Shastri who has written a few novels based on the family problems.⁹³ Polygamy was the target of his attack. He portrayed the sufferings of a man who married twice, in his novel Dinadayalu (1902).

His another novel called Thalaiyanai Mandirobhadesam in 1901 claimed to show how important was the wife's guidance for man.⁹⁴ He proclaimed that in a family life just as wife needs advice and helps from her husband, the husband should also listen to his wife for her advice. While the novel began with the intention to show how good an adviser a woman could be, it ironically pin pointed the wife's unnecessary influences over her husband. But implicit in his writing was that a woman even as a wife only exercised informal influence to achieve certain

93. Pandit S.M. Nadesa Shastriyar - Dinadayalu (1905) Reprint. 1980.

94. Ibid., Thalaiyanai Mandirobhadesam (1901). Reprint. 1980.

benefits for her children or other family members and not for her own sake. He also pointed out how she exercised the informal influences within the pati-vrath Dharma. In the end of the novel of heroine points out to her husband that he is her Guru, God and everything.

The separate sphere ideology was accepted by everyone even after the demand for women's participation in the freedom struggle was advocated. The sexual differences became the basis to measure the women's participation level in the struggle.⁹⁵ Women were recognised only as the supporter of the struggle and to implement the decisions made by the male leaders. Women's role in the public was only reluctantly accepted with no change in the belief on the basic division between the male and female. Men's sexuality was considered to be spontaneous and natural and women's as more moral than men.

In the early 20th century the enlightenment liberal philosophy had a great influence over the reformers. They emphasised the similarities between both the sexes rather than their so-called natural differences. They also viewed the sexual differences being shaped by the specific cultural environment.⁹⁶ Their primary aim was to put an end to the male privileges. Bharathi represents this thinking. His aim was to put an end to all kinds of

95. For argument of this kind, refer Kumari Jayawardena, op.cit., p. 97.

96. The best example would be Subramania Bharathi's Essays for women in Swadesa Mitran, 10 May 1918.

human oppression to liberate each and every one. For him the cultural and the political struggles were two different aspects of human struggle. He emphasised women's liberation to bring them to the national struggle and did not claim the total destruction of the patriarchal values.

He severely condemned the growing tendency among the reformers to concentrate completely on the political struggle. He demanded the simultaneous struggle at home and outside to liberate women and all human beings. He says that

The nations are made of home and so long as you do not have justice and equality fully practiced at home, you cannot expect to see them practiced in your public life. Because it is the home life that is the basis of public life, and a man who is a villain at home cannot find himself suddenly transformed into a saint the moment he gets to the councils or to courts of justice.⁹⁷

Bharathi realised how importance it is for women to liberate herself from the clutches of men who kept her as a slave. He condemned those men who thought in terms of disorder in the society through women's liberation. He says that those men who thought so were "the men who are jealous and do not want to see others living with freedom."⁹⁸

97. K. Swaminathan, ed., Subramania Bharathi, Chosen Poems and Prose, 1984.

98. Ibid., 1984.

In one of his poems he demanded women's liberation in the following way,

If all life on earth is God
fools ! Why not the wife?
High-flying stories you spin
preach freedom, rain floods of compassion.
If you deny women freedom,
life has no worth in this world .

He claimed that the weight of the struggle of human beings against the colonisation is much less than the struggle of women against the slavery at home. He also demanded that for the complete women's liberation the following rules have to be followed strictly by the Tamil society.⁹⁹ According to him

- (1) women should not be married off before they attained puberty.
- (2) They should not be compelled forced to marry someone against their wishes.
- (3) Divorce should be permitted, if they wished to do so, without any kind of social punishment for that.
- (4) Property rights for women.
- (5) Single-woman should be allowed to live peacefully without any ban or her independence.
- (6) A woman should be free enough to have friendship with men other than her husband.

- (7) Higher education with employment opportunities should be made available to women.
- (8) Women should be employed just like men in all kinds of administrative works.
- (9) In the Swaraj India women should have equal rights like men in politics.
- (10) Men should realise that they cannot prosper without women's liberation and progress.

According to Bharathi, "Independence for women or freedom for them is not something to be given by men. Womenfolk on their own should try to assert their rights at home and only seek the help if necessary from men, who are progressive".¹⁰⁰

Bharathi in his poem created a modern woman called Pudumaipen who tries to liberate every woman. The Pudumaipen says:

Dance the Kummi, , beat the measure
 Let this land of the Tamils ring with our dance
 For now we are rid of all evil shades,
 We've bseen the good
 The life of the beast that is beaten,
 tamed and tied down.
 Fain would they lay it on us in the house

100. Viswanathan & Mani ed., Subramania Bharathi in Chakravartini Katturaigal, op.cit., p. 77

but we scornfully baffled them
 The dog they sell for a price, nor ever
 consult his will
 nigh to his state had they brought us
 would rather they had killed us at a blow.¹⁰¹

As far as the rights of the wife in the family is concerned, Bharathi says that it is very often the wife's duty to bring harmony and peace. According to him, it is she who has to abandon the inferiority complex that she is a slave or a servant of her husband and should strive for the 'equality' consciousness.¹⁰² In contrast to all the other middle-class men who demanded that women should protect her chastity even if she has to forego her life for that. Bharathi took a different view :

Men as fools and idiots slips out of their
 behaviour and demand pati-vrath for women alone !
 If she violates that she is not only beaten and
 harrassed but socially boycotted and left in the
 street ! Why should women alone protect her chas-
 tity? What a horror for a woman ! Hell with
 these shameful men. There is nothing foolish than
 beating up women like the beasts.¹⁰³

101. K. Swaminathan, ed., op.cit.,

102. Viswanathan, & Mani, ed., ChakravartiniKatturaigal
op.cit., p. 79.

103. Subramania Bharathi, Essays for Women, op.cit.,
 p. 22. Swadesa Mitran, 27 March 1920. Madhar. Pagudi

Bharathi draws a direct analogy between the power of the husband and that of the colonisers or the Imperialists. He sees the female struggle for freedom as a continuation of the people's struggle for Independence to free themselves. He says, "Just like we have been colonised and forced to show respect to the Imperialist and otherwise beaten up and imprisoned, men at home show their women."¹⁰⁴

For him, woman is power (shakti) and to be esteemed as greater than life, since she protect and unites human beings and gives happiness.¹⁰⁵ He further says that the great women of India should not be considered as fool hardy and ignorant but as a great intellectuals. In the end of the story 'Chandrigayin Kadai' he makes the following statement. "It is a gross mistake to consider our Mothers, wives and sisters who show abundant love and affection on us as fools and ignorant because they talk at times useless and senseless things at home. It rather shows the ignorance of our men who refuse to accept the intellectual capacity of our women".¹⁰⁶

He further describes how women have contributed so much to the development of human civilisation. He says that while world civilisation has been created by men, it has

104. Ibid., p.22

105. Subramania Bharathi, Selected Poems op.cit., p.210

106. S. Bharathi, Chandrigayin Kadai (Novel) op.cit., p.128.

always been preserved and protected by women.

Men indeed have till now been trying with scant success, to civilise one another by means of the sword and the bullet, the prison cell, the gibbet and the rack. But it has been lot of women to have no other weapon than fables, parables and symbols in her work of civilising men.¹⁰⁷

For Bharathi, the change in the traditional culture and ideologies are greatly linked up with the question of modernisation. He thought that women should be modernized and not westernised. But he demanded that women should have the knowledge about western culture and civilization. Addressing the Tamil women he says that women should destroy those obscurantist ideas in their food habits, dressing and marriage customs.

Modernisation for him was linked up with education of every woman. He demanded that all women, should use their intellect to reason out everything which has been adopted blindly. For him women need to have an analytical outlook over the traditional practices such as rituals etc., He asserted that women needs liberation to modernise themselves, for which women themselves should fight.

107.K.Swaminathan, op.cit., p.402.

On the one hand Bharathi resisted the influence of western culture by criticising the feminists for being so violent, unmarried and careless about households duties. On the other hand he explained to the 'native' women how important it is for them to create a women's liberation movement in India just like the European women. He says that such liberation movement should be based on the intellectual activities and to help men in their national struggle.¹⁰⁸

He gave much importance to Motherhood and idealised every women as a powerful Mother. For him, every mother should be a great patriot to preach patriotism to the children and make them the leaders of national struggle. He asserted that every woman as Mother should feel ashamed of anti-national men they have produced and nurtured. According to him, it is only women as Mothers can bring about great strength and Anmai to men.¹⁰⁹

In the early 20th century Subramania Bharathi's poems or even the novels contained different ideas about women. His characterisation of women was mixed up with radicalism and humanism.

While all the other reformers and the later national leaders idealised Sita as one who preserved her chastity and pati-vrath. Bharathi had no word to say about this

108. S. Bharathi, op.cit., Essays for women, p. 52.

109. Viswanathan & Mani, ed., Chakravartini Katturaiqal, op.cit. p. 78.

mute and self-sacrificing spouse of Rama. Rather he idealised Droupati of Mahabhāṛata^a . Who was a polyandrous wife of the five Pandavas.¹¹⁰ In Droupati Bharathi created/modern^a woman with the power as Goddess Shakti and Bharath Matha. He named her Panchali which itself indicates that she was not merely a polyandrous wife but asserted herself as the daughter of the Panchala King.

In Bharathi's Panchali Sapadam, when her husbands lost her in the game, she did not silently accept the fate as a wife, rather she reacted strongly and condemned everyone in the court who had done the great injustice to women. She argued that since her husbands lost themselves in the game as slaves they had no right over her. She further asserted that she is the daughter of the Panchala King and no more the wife of the slave husbands. She turned back to her husbands and asked,

Is this the fate my lords?
 With all the rituals, you married me,
 Only to give me away as a gift
 to these vilaneous, degraded men.¹¹¹

Perspectives on Marriage and Rituals

Majority of the middle-class men insisted that the marriage should be based on the mutual consent between

110. Uma Chakravarty remarks that none of the Mahabharath women has been idealised as an Indian woman-hood. Contrast to her remarks Bharathi in his poem 'Panchali Sapadam' idealised Droubhati. Uma Chakravarty, "The Development of the Sita Myth : A Case Study of Women in Myth and Literature", in Kumkum Sangari et.al., ed. Women and Culture. 1986, p.52

111. S. Bharathi, Selected Poems, Panchali Sapadam, ...

man and woman and they referred back to the Shastras which stated that the marriage should be one of mutual consent based on love.¹¹²

In the late 19th century many middle-class men championed the cause of mutual love and affection. They claimed that the marriage should be based on the love of two minds and not of two heads. The harmonious family life with women and men living in peace was the main aim of their reforms in the marriage. The compatibility among the married couples was demanded as a basis for peaceful family.¹¹³

Bharathi vehemently opposed the traditional obscurantist ideas being followed with regard to marriage. According to him all women should be allowed to marry men of their wishes. For him love should be the central to marriages. On the essence of love alone Bharathi wrote numerous articles and poems to inculcate humanism through love. According to Bharathi, mutual love and affection makes men forget all his troubles and sorrows.¹¹⁴ He further states that love in life cannot include a life of the beasts and only education for women and men can bring about realisation of true love and compatibility in life.

112. Swadesa Mitran, Editorial, 4 July, 1890.

113. Swadesa Mitran, 16 July, 1887.

114. Bharathi, Selected Poems (Pen Viduthalai Kummi) op.cit., p. 211.

He however refused the advocacy of European way of marriage and sees many 'animal qualities' in their married life.¹¹⁵

The extravagance in marriage ceremonies was severely condemned since they claimed that the country's poor economy was due to the spend thrift attitude of many families.¹¹⁶ Some of them severely condemned the dowry system. The Editor of Indian social reformer states that the dowry question affects the economy of every family that is money and that any kind of material given at marriage should be a free and voluntary gift.¹¹⁷

Bharathi strongly recommended women's freedom in their decision about marriage and men's fidelity in the married life. His ideal 'Pudumaipen' (A Modern Woman) sings the following way :

....They talk of wedded faith, good;
 Let it be binding on both
 But the custom that forced us to wed;
 we've cast it, down and
 trampled it under the foot
 ... With men of our wishes, with hand
 do
 in hand with them, we will/happiest things
 to cripple those obscurantism.¹¹⁸

115. S.Bharathi, Essays for Women, op.cit., p.58.

116. Swadesa Mitran 16 July 1895. 'extravagancies' in the Hindu marriages.

117. ISR, Editorial, 8 July 1900.

118. Subramania Bharathi, Selected Poems (pen viduthalai kummi) op.cit., p.211

The reformers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries presented to complexity in their perceptions about the women's question. Almost all of them had sympathy for patriotic and liberal ideas of the west, with the admiration for European economic and political liberalism. Occasionally they did claim a very mild liberalism with regard to women's political rights.

As far as the familial relationship is concerned they did not claim any radical change or the total restructuring the system. They did not demand women's employment outside their house.

Their reform activities in turn emphasised the importance of patriarchal values and the male domination in the family and outside. They attempted to impose the patriarchal ideology at home and outside.

While the utilitarians especially the British missionaries pointed out the obscurantist and backward looking ideology of the Hindu families, the Reformers tried to show that the women's life in ancient India was much better. They claimed the women of ancient India enjoyed all sorts of freedom.¹¹⁹

There were many limitations in the reformer's attempt to liberate women. Very often the reform movements were attempted on the nearest relatives. It involved reforming the wives or sisters.¹²⁰

119. Kumari Jayawardena, op.cit., p. 81.

120. Sumit Sarkar, "The Women's question in the 19th Century Bengal", in Dr. Senapati et al., ed., Women and culture op.cit.

Their claim for women's liberation and modernisation had nothing to do with other class women except the middle-class. The issues they took up such as child-marriage, widow-remarriage etc. were concerned with the women of middle-class and had nothing to do with the working class women.

Even in their reform activities, they could hardly challenge the government's indifference towards women's education. For they depended on the British government's employment.

In the early 20th century the social reform activities were pushed backward for the sack of political activities. The reformers only urged women's participation in the National movement without making any attempt to change the male attitudes at home.¹²¹ Some of them even thought that challenging the familial relationship and male authority would hamper the political struggle.

Despite all these limitations what one observes is the occasional inspiration given by middle-class men for the development of women's associations and philanthropic works. They also made efforts "to prohibit the extreme form of abuses affecting women".

121. NNR, (Desabhaktan) 12 Jan 1918. This paper states that the women's turning to patriots itself is an indication of progress. It makes its full appeal to women of Madras to do their duty.

CHAPTER IVDEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S CONSCIOUSNESS

This chapter focuses on the development of women's consciousness in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This is attempted through a study of the writings and speeches of the women activists.

The first part of the chapter is a discussion of the nature of women's self-view and the later part is an analysis of the nature of women's consciousness.

Contrasted to the accepted notion that women were only objects of reform, the early 20th century witnessed the reform activities being undertaken by middle-class women. The writings and activities of some of the an indication of this change.

As stated in the previous chapter, the growing rate of women's employment outside the home, the steady increase in the literary rate of women¹, the growth of various women's associations, welfare activities, and increase in the female writers and readers only indicate the above fact.

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1. Indian Social Reformer, 22 November 1908. The remark on the development of women's education was made in the Indian Ladies Conference. It is stated that remarkable number of ladies belonging to different communities have received fairly good education in Madras.

The development of consciousness among women as women was related to their participation in activities outside their homes.² The changes in their area of activity brought about an awareness about various problems facing them. For example they slowly became alive to the problem of male domination and partiality shown to the male sex both at home and outside.

In the mid and early 19th century Europe middle-class women like Hannamore who were evengelists, demanded for reform which would modernise women with the ingrained qualities of Mothers and wives. They thought that education for women would make women understand the needs of men at home and collaborate with them.³

Some of the educated middle class women of Europe, especially the activities like Mary Wollstonecraft⁴ followed the enlightenment philosophers.

2. K.N. Panikkar, Introduction, Studies in History, Vol. III, No. 1, Jan-June, 1987, p.8.

3. For argument of this sort refer. Olive Banks, Faces of Feminism op.cit., pp. 13-27.

4. Mary Wollstone Craft's 'Vindication of the rights of women' written in 1792 had a tremendous influence on the educated middle class women of India in the early 20th century. This book reveals powerfully, the bondage and constraints faced by Victorian women. But she does not question the dominant patriarchal values. Just like any other Enlightenment Philosopher, she appealed to human reason and moral virtues. She believed in the influence of environment and culture in one's life and not in the natural difference between men and women.

They consciously fought against male domination and campaigned for equal rights. But however they too emphasized the domestic qualities of women, purity, chastity, one man and one love etc.

Similar trends were to be seen among the middle-class women of Tamil Nadu also. In the late 19th century Mrs. Kirupai Satyanathan, the first graduate from Madras, made it clear in her writings that she believed women to be the efficient Mothers, wives and guardians of children. She demanded that women ought to cherish this maternal role given to them by men which is the speciality of the weaker sex. She constantly advocated the domestic virtues and separate spheres for women.⁵

However, Kirupai Satyanathan's novel Kamala written in 1896 was different from her other novels. The heroine of this novel, Kamala, takes up social service and shows how happiness comes from within and not from outside.⁶

In short the middle-class women's feminist consciousness meant accepting the 'feminine qualities' imposed by the middle-class men. They only stressed the 'femininity' of traditional society, and never challenged the patriarchal

5. Indian Social Reformer, 24 June, 1900.

6. C.S. Lakshmi. Face behind the Mask, p. 134.

ideology. In effect they never tried to assert their interest against the wishes of male counterparts. They did accept the role model prescribed to them as their fate or Karma. In turn they tried to adjust and change themselves within the patriarchal society. Thus even when they advocated the 'extended sphere' for women from the domestic drudgery, it was meant to come out and help men in their public activity. This development among the middle-class women did not result in their consciousness about patriarchal ideologies.

On the one hand they accepted⁷ the demand for modernisation and adhered to the victorian values (however backward looking). On the other hand, stressed the traditional values of the family, women's role as wives and Mothers etc. They did refer back to Hindu scriptures and shastras to find an explanation for their activities.

In effect, the collaboration with male reformers and acceptance of traditional role of women resulted in the failure of feminist consciousness. They failed to see the universal womenhood, except viewing women through their marital relationship. This consciousness had barred them

7. The educated women who were activists in the women's associations were Alarmelmangai, Achalambigai, Rukumani Ammal, Yadugiri Ammal, Thangamma Bharathi, Mrs. Sadasiva Iyer, Mrs. Sathiyathan and Visalakshi Ammal. Their opinions about various social problems related to women, have been discussed here.

from reaching out to the working-class women. They constantly searched for the alliance with middle-class women and men in all their activities.

Women's Education:

In this section, an attempt is made to study the consciousness of women about the need of education for women. All the educated middle-class women stressed the importance of primary education if not higher education. They had not only grasped the problem of illiteracy but condemned the government for the partiality shown to boy's education.⁸ They disapproved women's desire for wealth except education. Many of them insisted that by nature men and women are equal in mental powers and it is only the environment that curtailed women's education.⁹ Some of them even thought that the importance given to male education alone had created hierarchy in the society among men and women.¹⁰ While on the one hand they denied the inferiority of female mind, on the other hand they argued for education of girls to fulfil their customary duties

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8. (a) Swadesa Mitran, 23 Jan 1908. A Report on the Meeting of Madras Hindu Association held on 18 Jan 1908. C. Andalammal gave a lecture on 'freedom efforts and women'. In which she pointed out the partiality shown by the government.
- (b) Swadesa Mitran, 3 Aug 1911. A letter to the editor by Kanagambuja ammal.
9. Ibid., 7 July 1908. 'Freedom for women' - a reply by Alermelmangai.
10. Ibid., 11 Aug 1909. Pen Kalviyum, Madhar Ozukamum by Swarnam.

as wives and mothers.¹¹ They did not recommend women's employment outside the house.¹² Their ideas were the replica of what Annie Besant or other English women wanted out of women's education.

According to Annie Besant, women's education, in India should take into account the nature and culture of this country and should not contradict Hindu ideas on women's position etc. This education she asserted should make women as more religious and thus not to make them proficient in business or professions.

She further emphasised that only the following subjects to be taught to Indian women:

- (a) Hindu religion, moral education, Mahabharata, Ramayana & Manu smriti.
- (b) Vernacular literature, Bhaghavatgita, History of Chaste women, regional geography.
- (c) Hygine Methods, little bit of Mathematics, mid-wifery methods, Beautician course and some indoor games.
- (d) Music, Painting and Tailoring etc.¹³

It was these ideas of Annie Besant was reinforced by the 'native' women.

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11. Ibid., 7 Jan 1909. A lecture give by C. Saraswathi Bai.
Ibid., 8 May 1911. A letter to the Editor by Kanagambuja
Ibid., 11 Aug 1909. Pen Kalviyum, Madhar Ozukamum (Ammal.
by Swarnam.
Ibid., 21 March 1912. A letter to the Editor by
Kamakshi Ammal.
Ibid., 17 Sept 1912. Alarmelmangal Ammal's Lecture given
the women's meeting held at Madras.
Ibid., 30 April 1914. Report on the Sarada united
Association Meeting. Lecture given by V. Meenakshi Ammal.
 12. Ibid., 8 Feb 1905. Pen Kalviyin Pavan' A letter to
the Editor by Alarmelmangal.
Ibid., 8 May 1911. Pen Kalvi - Kanagambuja Ammal.
 13. Ibid., 10 June 1904. Indhiayap Penkalin Vidvabisathai
Patri Annie Besant Ammal.

The Tamil Women felt the necessity of women's education, which has been stressed in their writings, Alarmelmangai's letter to the editor of Swadesi Mitran titled "The benefit of women's education emphasised the women's earnest desire to learn in schools. She urged men to avoid unnecessary doubts about educated women. She further emphasised that women's education would only help men to be successful in their profession."¹⁴

Another Tamil woman, who gave a lecture at the social gathering of Hindu ladies under the auspicious of the Madras Hindu Social Reform Association, expressed somewhat similar views but strongly opposed men's view, that women would be polluted if they are sent to schools. She says that, "These people do not find anything wrong in women bathing in the sea during the eclipse in front of crowds of men or they have no objection to women elbowing their way through crowds in Temples. But they think that the girls will loose virtues if they attend schools. How unreasonable they are!"¹⁵ She emphasized that education do not produce evil effects but would bring about feminine virtues in every woman.

According to these women, education would teach women pati-bhakti and chastity, and bring about good

14. Swadesa Mitran, 8 Feb. 1905. See a letter to the Editor.

15. Indian Social Reformer, 26 Feb. 1899.

qualities in their manners such as patriotism, unity with other women, efficiency in household chores etc. Kanagam-bujammal felt that however educated a women may be cannot impart those qualities to her children without her own education.¹⁶

In contrast an illiterate woman was portrayed as "sinking in ignorance and enriching her children with obscurantist ideas, involving in day-long gossips, desiring for the petty wealth etc.,"¹⁷

What kind of education was sought by these women?

Many of them argued that education for women, meant primary education and not higher education the knowledge about employment etc. Alarmelmangai who wrote numerous articles on education stated clearly that they were not demanding higher education like men nor did they desire for womens to work outside. According to her education should be one (1) which allows women to learn vernacular liberature such as the stories of Damayanthi, Adirai etc.

(2) which would teach Dharma Shastras, Needhi Shastras

(3) which would teach some of accountancy to enable women to run the family efficiently.

(4) which would teach women the benefits of pati-Bhakti and chastity.

(5) which would enable her to protect the chastity even with high risks.

16. Swadesa Mitran, 8 May 1911. See a letter to the Editor.

17. Ibid., 9 April 1906. Kalladha Penkalal Varum Kashtangal by Alarmelmangai.

(6) which would make women conscious about patriotism and national problems.¹⁸

On the other hand, a liberal like K.D. Rukumaniammal urged equal education for boys and girls. She disagreed with common-view that women should be trained as efficient Mothers and wives. "It seems to me that to give our girls in the short school life only such a training as is calculated to make them good wives and wise mothers is a very narrow and one sided view of education. The questions of women's education is not only of domestic but of national importance."¹⁹ According to her a woman should be made to grasp the ideas of nationality, national interest responsibility of individual to the race etc. She asserts that English education is to be given to women just as for men. She claims that "The domestic ideal of women's education... may satisfy men but not women educated on modern lines. As this ideal urges upon the necessity to train our girls to become good wives and wise Mothers, it may reasonably be asked what attempts if any are proposed to be made in our School and colleges to train our boys to become good husband and wise parents."²⁰

18. Ibid., 8 Feb. 1905. See a letter to the Editor. Pen Kalviyin Pavan, -Alarmelmangai.

19. ISR, 16 Dec. 1917.

20. ISR, 23 June 1918.

Even Mrs. Subalakshmi Ammal urged that there should be absolutely no difference in the system of education given to men and women and thus it should be of liberal education.²¹

A desire to become an educated husband's worthy wife was the chief, if not the sole motivation of a women's desire for education.

There were women's meetings held every where in the Tamil speaking areas to stress the essence of women's education and how the ancient Tamil Nadu cherished the fame of having educated women like Avaiyar.²²

The general interest shown by women on education is clear from the account given by Yadugiriammal.²³ There was generally an urge to break away from home education and join the schools.

The Method to achieve women's education, according to them, was to urge wealthy mento donate generously to open up many educational institutions for women. They demanded that no fees should be collected from girls and rather they should be encouraged with scholarships.²⁴

21. New India, 27 Dec. 1914.

22. About the various association meetings held in Madras and in other districts, have been discussed in the later part of the chapter.

23. Yadugiriyammal - Bharathi Ninaivugal.

24. Swadesa Mitran, 9 Feb. 1904. Rukumaniammal's letter to the Editor.

While all these educated women campaigned for modernisation through education, they opposed missionary education. They thought that the Imperial culture will find its roots in the Hindu families. A woman writing in 1903 states, that the Hindu girls taught in the missionary schools by the nuns would be : "Hindu by appearance but worshipping Jesus at heart". According to her these girls will also destroy the ritual life of the Hindus by nurturing their children with Christianity.²⁵

They also opposed English education and stressed the importance of vernacular education. Sister Thayarammal argues that the "Education in English is forced on Indians with the idea of teaching liberalism and democracy. But this English education has only created few Indian clerks to obey the orders of the British. It is also Shameful that this education has reduced the indigenaity of our education".²⁶

The Tamil fiction of this period, written by women reflect the importance given to women's education. A few novels portray the impact of education on women.

Pandit Visalakshi Ammal's novel Vanasudha is a good example.²⁷ In the novel Visalakshi Ammal suggests

25. Ibid., 21 March 1916. See a letter to the Editor.

26. Swadesa Mitran, 21 March 1916.

27. Pandit Visalakshi Ammal has written seven other novels related to the similar theme and on other social problems such as Gowri (1906), Jalajakshi (1902) Nirmala (1903), Gnaranjini (1907), Sujatha (1908) Virajini (1909) & Aryakumari(1910).

that education even if given by men at home would bring about considerable changes. In this novel, the heroine Vanasuda receives education through a reformer who later marries her. After her informal education the heroine learns how to respect the elders, how to be obedient, how to be subservient to her husband, and how to follow the pati-vrat^h qualities sincerely etc. she reads Ramayan, Mahabharath and history of great women. After her education the heroine realises what is true love and real wealth. The heroine in the end of her novel states that her husband is her lord, form of happiness, spirit and the source of her own living and thus she does not need any other form of wealth.²⁸

The demand for women's education by these women ended up in stressing the moral qualities needed for a woman even after being educated. In fact their belief was that education would sharpen the traditional qualities. They never challenged the patriarchal society which prohibited women's development and independence. They made it clear that Indian men are not to be blamed since the power lies with the Alien Government.

Women's economic role:

In the late 19th century, the tendency among the educated women was to campaign for women's primary education and not for her employment. In the early 20th century the

28. Ibid., Vanasudha, 1909, p. 113.

the tendency was to recommend at least self-employment for woman to save herself from being harrassed as widows.

The Indian Ladies conference held in 1916 at Bombay urged the new form of education which would "furnish a means of livelihood" than mere accomplishments. The Resolution demands that atleast the lower section of the people should be given education of a more breadwinning type.²⁹ Many middle-class women strongly condemned the ill-treatment of widows. The alternative they suggested was that these widows should be made independent through employment.³⁰ Alarmelmangai demanded that, women just like men should be taught chemicals of the soils, Astrology, how to breed the cattles, how to export the goods to money markets, how to make soap and choose plants for gardening etc. to fetch income to women and her family. According to her these kind of employment can liberate women from being the slaves of men.³¹

Child Marriage and Widowhood:

The social evils such as child-marriage and widowhood were of considerable concern for the educated

29. NNR, 7 Jan. 1916.

30. Swadesa Mitran, 30 April 1904. A letter by V. Meenakshi Ammal.

31. Ibid., 17 Sept. 1906. See the letter written by Alarmelmangai.

middle-class women. They severely condemned child-marriage and suggested various ways for the betterment of the widows. While some of them advocated widow remarriage, some other favoured self-employment for widow's. However all of them sought reforms within the patriarchal system and thought that marriage is the end and means of women's livelihood.

They linked the problem of child-marriage with many other social evils which affected women. Such as illiteracy of women, illtreatment of child-wives and child-widows, polygamy and bride-price.³² They argued that as long as women were not educated and not given enough independence, their condition and status would be very low and will certainly be oppressed by men.³³ Gnana Sundari Ammal condemned the polygamy and bride-price. She wrote that men who married twice or thrice were equal to animals with no sense and brain. She also condemned the parents who demanded at bride-price and thus sold their daughters at an early age. According to her these men did not have respect and love for women.³⁴

32. Ibid., 4 April 1906. Balyavivagathai patri - A Woman.

Ibid., 7 Jan. 1909. Vivaga Vayadai patri - Srimathi Achalambigai Ammal's letter. and many other women have expressed their opinions about the evils of child-marriage.

33. Ibid., 4 April 1906.

34. Ibid., 19 Jan 1909. See a letter to the Editor.

Many of them argued that due to early marriages women would be deprived of education which affected her family life. They pointed out that the young wife would be inefficient without the early education, would not know how to run a family or to bring up the children.

Parvathi Ammal who spoke at length about raising the marriageable age pointed out how the other kind of social evils have stemmed from such early marriages like that of bride-price, suicides, increase in child widows, polygamy etc. According to her, if the marriageable age is raised there would be no question of harrassment of child-widows and their remarriage etc.³⁵

All of them supported the Age of Consent Bill and they argued that the ancient shastras allowed only the post-puberty marriage.³⁶ Achalambigai Ammal argued that in the Ancient period, marriage of a woman depended on the maturity of her mind and heart and thus not merely the maturity of her body.

35. Parvathi Ammal, Penkalin Kalyana Vayadai Uyarthuthal Patri, 1917.

36. (a) Achalambigai Ammal spoke in support of the Age of consent Bill in the Indian Social Conference held in 3 Jan. 1909.

(b) Swadesa Mitran, 21 Aug 1909. See a letter to the Editor by Kamalini.

(c) Swadesa Mitran, 13 Sept. 1911. See a letter to the Editor.

(d) Ibid., 26 Feb 1912. - Murai kedana vivaganqal Rukumani Ammal.

According to her, in Ancient India the custom of Swayamvaram had raised the status of women. She claimed that women had the right to behave according to their own wishes.³⁷

These middle-class women demanded mutual love and understanding between men and women. According to them marriage between a man and woman should depend on the two hearts alone. A ladies monthly meeting held in South India Brahmasamaj discussed the civil marriage bill. Alarmelmangai Ammal moderately exposed the various customs prevalent in the current Hindu marriage system. According to her if the civil marriage bill was passed into law, it would wipe off all the previous customs with which the Hindu society is entangled.³⁸ She further asserted that the intercaste marriage is not contrary to the Hindu shastras.

The deplorable condition of widows had attracted much of women's attentions. They wanted a just and human treatment for the widows. Reformers like Rukmaniyanmal argued that the tonsure of widows, one meal per day, heavy workloads, widows being considered inauspicious were the severe form of imprisonment for women. She condemned those educated men who wanted improvement in the condition of women and at the same time had not done anything about the amelioration of the widows.³⁹

37. Swadesa Mitran, 7 Jan. 1909. See a letter to the Editor by Achalambigai.

38. ISR, 10 Sept 1911. A report on the meeting. Apart from Alarmelmangai Ammal, Chidambaramammal, Mrs. O. Kandaswamy Chetty and others discussed in Tamil about the Biu.

39. Swadesa Mitran, 23 March 1905.

Another woman writer seriously opposed the orthodox view that widows would take to prostitution if given freedom. She demanded that men should be punished for attracting women, to fall into prostitution.⁴⁰

Another woman argued that the widows should be taught many professions to utilise their life in a proper way. She argued that the widows who have been left with many children and no property, should be taught some professional courses, which would enable them to earn money and thus not to depend on anyone.⁴¹

These educated middle-class women also attacked various rituals performed against the status of women, particularly they condemned the puberty celebrations, extravagences in the marriage, dowry system etc. Alarmelmangai felt that through the puberty celebrations unnecessary importance has been given to women's maturity and thus women being treated as an object.⁴² Cuddalore Rukamani argued that the spending of wealth unnecessarily on the grand celebration of marriages often had led to impoverisation of families and lowering of women's position

40. Ibid., 13 March 1916.

41. Ibid., 4 April 1906.

42. Ibid., 17 Sept. 1906. Alarmelmangai's letter.

at home.⁴³ Dowry system they thought leads to harras-
ments of women and makes married life meaningless.⁴⁴
They did condemn the marriage between close relatives.
The Reformer like Rukumaniammal condemned the marriage
alliance between the blood related groups. i.e. marrying
maternal uncle, or second cousin. She argued that such
marriages are harmful to women's life and their children.
She recommended inter-caste marriage.⁴⁵

Women's Liberation

The early 20th century literature pertaining to
women's consciousness about man-woman relationship, women's
relationship with the Society etc. are numerous. The
consciousness about women's oppression at home, and male
domination, is clear from many educated women's writings.
All of them defined (contrast to some of the male reformers)
that the nature had nothing to do with man-woman differ-
ences, but only the specific cultural environment had made
women subservient to men.⁴⁶

Alarmelmangai strongly reacted to men who opposed
women's freedom, by pointing to the women's liberation
movement in Europe. She argued that contrasted to the

43. Ibid., 7 Jan. 1909. Rukumani's letter.

44. Ibid., 2 Feb. 1905.

45. Ibid., 26 Feb. 1912.

46. qbid., 16, May, 1918.

European society, Indian women faced more sufficient problems such as deprivation of women's own independence everywhere.⁴⁷ She further pointed out how the curtailment of women's freedom extended to beating up of women at home and increasing number of suicidal cases.

Among the high caste women (especially the Brahmin women) the feeling of being imprisoned at home and secluded from men had created a strong reaction and resentment. Kamalini a Brahmin women writer, observed how the Brahmin women's freedom was curtailed through many customs. She noted that the Brahmin women could see or talk to men other than her husband and was not allowed to dine with men. She also deplored that "our men enjoy our shyness and ignorance as feminine beauty, what a wretched life has been ordained to us?".⁴⁸

Some of them referred to the ancient period when according to them, women had power and authority. They further emphasised women's role which created changes not only at home but in the public and thus contributing to the historical events.

Veera Lakshmi argued that in ancient India women were present during the rituals and ceremonies and learnt

47. Swadesa Mitran, 7 July 1908. See a letter to the Editor by Alarmelmangai.

48. Ibid., 13 Aug. 1909. Kamalini's letter.

all vedas. Their courage according to her, helped to stop even great wars for example that it was Kalindi who prevented the Kalinga war.⁴⁹

In the early 20th century many women activists argued for equality ^{and} natural rights for women and claimed equal rights at home against male domination. In an association meeting held Srimathi Rangapapa proclaimed, that men might be stronger than women in physical strength and not otherwise. She further said that "If they think, they are higher than us, that is idiotic. Today we have decided to show them the truth that men and women are equal and thus they need not give us independence, we will struggle to attain it on our own."⁵⁰

Many of them did not agree with the theory that the sexual-differences had created sphere for men and women. An aversion for male defined society and an urge for women's independence were clear from many educated women's speeches and writings.

Yadugiriammal had argued that women intellectual ability was equal to that of men and they have the right to fight for their freedom. According to her only men made

49. Ibid., 16 June 1909. Veeralakshmi's letter.

50. Swadesa Mitran, 16 May 1918. Report on the women's Meeting held at Mrs. Pakiyalakshmi Ammal's house.

women as slaves and prevented any efforts for women's liberation. She further blamed men for demanding women's chastity. She said that the slave mentality of men not only accepted British rule and on top of it oppressed women folk at home. She asked "How can our men who are slaves of the British can show domination over us?"⁵¹ In the end she demanded that women's liberation efforts should be along with the efforts to liberate all the human beings for national liberation.

Somewhat similar views were expressed by Thangamma Bharathi. She claimed that men not only tried to imprison women but ridiculed and disrespected womanhood through their speeches and writings. Further she suggested that women have to protest against their own brothers, husbands and other male relatives who harassed them. According to her, non-violent methods were the best way for women to express their resentment. She suggested that women should refuse to do household chores if harassed by men. She also recalls the revolution of Russia, where justice won place against the autocratic rule.⁵²

51. Ibid., Yadugiri's speech in the above meeting.

52. Bharathi, Essays for Women. Report on Women's efforts. pp. 17, 18-19.

The claim for women's political rights and property rights became very prominent in the early 20th century. Many women thought that women's voting right can solve many of their problems. Mrs. Satyawathi urged women to fight unitedly for the voting rights of women and for the property rights of women. She said that Indian women should take inspiration from the women of England to achieve such rights.⁵³

Some of them urged women to participate in the freedom struggle, if not as leaders but as Mothers and sisters. "As Mothers, we must inspire our children with great patriotism, sacrificing tendency, consciousness about freedom struggle etc. As housewives we must replace foreign goods and use only Swadeshi products at home." This was the argument given by many women in this period. These ideas also found expression in contemporary literature written by women.

Pandit V. Salakshi who wrote many novels based on the condition of women in the families stressed the importance of pati-bhakti and pati-Vrat qualities of women. She created women character who resented the harrassments by their husbands but realised the greatness of their husband.

In one of her novel vanasuda a woman called Dharmavathi, who had all the 'traditional feminine qualities' criticises her husbands' behaviour of going

53. Swadesa Mitran, 23 May, 1919. Satyawathi's letter.

to the prostitutes. She claimed that she was ashamed of her husbands who seduces many woman and thus violated of the 'family Dharma'.⁵⁴ On the other hand she held that her husband was her god and wealth and that her only wish in life was to serve him as a slave forever.⁵⁵

In another novel, Saraswathi written by Visalakshi the heroine is advised by her sister that a woman, for she has born as a woman in the world, has to marry a man and thus not to live as a single woman. According to her single womanhood was against the Arya Dharma and Stri Dharma.⁵⁶

Thus Visalakshi in almost all of her novels stressed the importance of marriage for women and the necessity to observe chastity, patience and self-content in a family life. In her novels the chaste women are always rewarded with a good husband.⁵⁷

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54. Pandit Visalkshi Ammal, op.cit., 1909. p.4. In the end of the novel V alakshi shows, how the chastity of Dharmavathi and her continuous pati-bhakti shown to the cruel husband has changed him totally as a good-charactered man. Visalakshi further shows in detail how the husband regrets about the past and rectifys it through showering love on his wife.
55. Ibid., 1909. p. 11
56. Ibid., Saraswathi, 1905, p. 71.
57. In the above two novels, the heroines Vanasuda and Saraswathi who preserve their feminine virtues get married to a good charactered men who treat them with love and affection.

Social Welfare Activities and Women's Associations:

Another form of consciousness raising efforts made by the educated middle-class women involved the foundation of women's Associations at the districts level and at the state level.⁵⁸ Along with this, many women involved themselves in philanthropic works which extended the support to women workers in a Madurai factory, to indenture labourers.

The Matters discussed and debated in many of the local associations were women's education caste-system and its defects, early marriages, condition of widows, handicraft for women and some reform activities.

In some of the women's gatherings the condition of women in the Ancient Tamil Society was traced out. Vedas and Puranas were read out at length. Along with that the emphasis on women's chastity and devoting to God were emphasised.⁵⁹

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58. The various local associations which were started in this period were as follows:
- 1) Madras Hindu Women's Association (1908).
 - 2) Durban women's Association, in which Tamil women held important posts such as General Secretary etc., (In 1908 Mrs. V.R.R. Mudari was the General Secretary)
 - 3) Jermiston Indian Women's Association.
 - 4) Bharathi Mahila Parishad.
 - 5) Madhar Bharathi Samaj.
 - 6) Hindu Women Lakshmi Vilasa Sabha (1911).
 - 7) Madurai Women's Association.
 - 8) Triplicane Saradha Stri Sangam and
 - 9) Saradha Ladies Union etc.
59. Madhar Bharathi Samaj Meeting held in 13 June 1909. Swadesa Mitran (a report) 16 June 1909.

There were many ladies union took up women's education as a primary aim. For example the Sharada ladies union started in 1911 aimed at the development of women's education alone. The Secretary of the Union Subba Lakshmi Ammal says, that the object of the union is to improve female education in general by opening up a library and by delivering occasional lectures related to the essence of education.⁶⁰

Much before the women's India Association was started, these local unions, and women's associations were active in taking up various issues pertained to women. Very often the meetings of these association were held at the house of prominent personalities.⁶¹

Apart from initiating and conducting the local associations many women participated in the Indian National Social Conferences, and in the other women's organisations. Many of them even spoke on social problems and supported the resolutions. For example Srimathi Alarmelmangai Ammal moved the resolution aimed at the abolition of the

60. (a) New India 30 Dec. 1914. (A Report on the Sarada Ladies Union).

(b) The National Indian Women's Association Meeting at Kumbakonam discussed about "knowledge and education".

61. Meetings were held at

(a) The Tanjore collector's house in 1915.

(b) V.V. Subramania Aiyer's House.

(c) G. Subramania Aiyer's house etc.,

(d) Madurai Women's Association meeting was held at Mrs. K. Ramaswami Iyer's house.

caste system. She demanded that the government of India should pass law, declaring the validity of intermarriages among various caste and sub-castes.⁶²

At the 'Mahila parishad' or the ladies Congress held at Madras on 30 December 1909, Women from all over India participated. The Tamil Women for the first time in large number gave lectures relating to various themes, such as extravagance in marriages, women's education and women's duties to society etc.⁶³ The aim of starting a separate Association for women was clearly explained by Kamakshi Ammal in one of their meetings. According to her even the educated women feel shy and uncomfortable in front of men for they have been kept behind the doors for many years. And thus it is necessary for them to express freely their opinions about various issues related to women in the Associations. Further she says that a woman can be trained as efficient Mothers and talented wives through such women's associations.⁶⁴

62. New India 27 Dec. 1914. (28th Indian National Social Conference).

63. ISR 3 Jan. 1909 (The Indian National Social Conference)
The following womenmade speeches:

- (a) Mrs. C. Rukumani Ammal on "Marriage Expenses" (Tamil).
- (b) Sow Lakshmi Ammal on "Women and Education" (English).
- (c) Achalambigai Ammal "The Raising of the Marriageable Age of the Girls" (Tamil).
- (d) Muthulakshmi Ammal - "Our Indian Sisters and Hindu Ethics" (English)
- (e) Mrs. Sambamurthi Rao - "Education of Children" (Tamil)
- (f) Mrs. K. Balaram Iyer - "The Place of Tamil in Education of Girls" (Tamil).
- (g) Mrs. S. SivagamaValli Ammal - "Charity" (Tamil).

64. Swadesa Mitran, 14 March, 1912.

Apart from these local Associations the caste associations also had women's conferences where the caste women could discuss about social evils affecting women and the problem related to their castes etc. For example in 1918 the Arya Vaishya women's conference held at Coimbatore, widely discussed about child-marriage and women's education, and passed resolutions against child-marriage. Almost 500 caste women were present. Anna Poorni Ammal spoke about women's duties for the caste development.⁶⁵

An Association started at Jermiston (South Africa) and at Durban had many Tamil women's participations. Srimathi Sowbhakiyathammal speaking in Durban women's association, urged Indian women to encourage Swadeshi Movement and indigenous industries and praised the Indian Freedom Movement.⁶⁶ Following these local associations and ladies union the women's Indian Association started in 1917 had very similar objectives and works. According to the founder member of the association the aim of the association is to remind the women their responsibility as daughters of India and to make them realise their duties to future India as mothers and wives. They also pointed out that leaflets pamphlets and monthly paper will be issued in various vernacular

65. Swadesa Mitran, 22 May 1918 (Report on the Arya Vaishya Conference).

66. Swadesa Mitran 9 March 1908.

languages dealing with hygiene cleanliness, caretaking of children, the place of women in public life etc.⁶⁷

The Social Welfare Activities of these educated women ranged from collecting donation for the Indian soldiers involved in the war to the problem of indenture labourers.

To condemn the indenture system, a public meeting was called at Madras, where Mrs. Sadasiva Iyer pointed out to the loosing of moralities through such system. According to her the village coolie women have lost their chastity and purity through forced indenture system. She demanded that the plantation labourers be relieved immediately.⁶⁸

The members of the Ladies deputation which met the Viceroy in 1917, pointed out that they had come to plead "the cause of the poor helpless and ignorant women who are taken from villages and made victims of the indenture system in the colonies". They further said that they were highly disturbed by the sufferings of their unfortunate sisters. They emphasised that the indenture system had affected the self-respect, purity and the honour of Indian womanhood.⁶⁹

67. Indian Social Reformer, 10 June, 1917.

68. Swadesa Mitran 5 Sept. 1914. A meeting to condemn the indenture system - Swadesa Mitran, 16 Feb. 1917.

69. ISR, 1 April, 1917.

By the early 20th century, there was a significant shift in women's own consciousness, by identifying male oppression at home and outside. But this consciousness did not involve transformation of patriarchal society or a total change by deconstructing the traditional sex roles and the traditional family. Instead they mutely accepted the bourgeois ideology and patriarchal values. In the process they identified their own self being just as the male reformers or the middle class men identified them.

Some of them did claim equal rights due to some inspiration given by the male reformers and established their close links with some British women like Annie Besant. However these important changes did not amount to an organised women's movement or to any kind of radical feminist consciousness.

In this period the condition in which women lived had curtailed many of their feelings and activities. First of all the cultural stereotypes of women's behaviour like that of being emotional, sensitive, softspoken, passionate and home loving etc. had strong influence on the educated women. Thus they tried to find women's liberation within these assigned qualities. Secondly the hierarchical set up of women's relationship and the identification of women's place in relation to the male had curtailed the unity of women and affected the identification of women's problems.

Thirdly, just like the male reformers middle-class women activists were also caught in the dilemma of choosing between modernisation and tradition. They urged modernisation of women through education and following some of the European customs. At the same time stressed the importance of women's traditional role as Mothers and wives. Fourthly they never demanded economic independent of women as a part of the liberation of women. All these had serious effect on the women's activities.

No doubt the participation of women in the social reform activities had changed their position of being the object of reform to one of being the subject of agitation.

Women did participate in the national movement and demanded liberation of all human beings. Their associations were also concerned about self-government and Swadeshi movement.

But their capacity to reach to the women of other classes was so limited that their struggles and agitations served only the interest of their own-class.

For those women who played only a complimentary role to their husbands' the idea of sexual differences appeared natural and they even accepted the separate sphere ideology.

Despite all the above limitations, the early 20th century, witnessed a steady development of women's

consciousness about social problems. It was this new development which led to the participation of women in the political struggles against imperialism, claim for property rights and voting rights etc. In the later years their participation in the mass movements was significant. There was also growing number of women writers and public speakers over the years. In the process, they not only gained the voting rights but prepared Dr S. Muthulakshmi Reddy as the first woman legislative councillor in Madras.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have made an analysis of the economic and social condition of middle-class women for the period 1890-1920 and how the middle-class, men and women perceived the question of women's liberation. An attempt is also made to examine the linkage between the condition of women and the perception of the male reformers as well as the consciousness of the middle-class women.

The questions that emerged out of this study are :

- (a) What was the influence of the existing socio-economic condition of the period, on the lives of women?
- (b) How did these situations affect the perceptions of the male reformers and the educated middle-class women?
- (c) Whether there were any differences between the ideas of the male reformers about women's question and that of the educated women?
- (d) Was there any 'feminism' involved in the consciousness of middle-class women?
- (e) What were the limitations in the perceptions of male and female of middle class? and
- (f) whether their perceptions and consciousness had any impact on the later years' national movement and on the post-independent women's movement?

With the impact of the colonial intervention, there emerged a new middle-class which found itself in a relatively privileged position through English education. They mainly occupied themselves with the learned professions and attained the position of leadership in India. Despite being the professional group, this class had inherited and maintained certain feudal values. In Tamil Nadu, the higher castes, especially the Brahmins, due to their early education and the newly acquired government services, constituted the bulk of the middle-class. It retained some of its traditional values and norms of the newly acquired middle-class position.

The middle-class attempted modernisation of the society, on the lines of the progress attained by the West. This urge for modernization was reflected in attempt to bring about regeneration and reform in the traditional culture by abolishing obsurantist ideas. The condition of women became an important target of this attempt. The effort of middle-class in this direction resulted in the campaign for women's education.

The kind of education, recommended for women, resulted in emphasising their domestic oriented role. Thus, as we have seen in the first chapter, the employment of women in the learned profession was extremely low.

They went in for only social welfare activities and philanthropic works, and not for the other professions like Railway officers, telephone operators, lawyers, etc. Thus we find that there existed a vast difference between the number of educated women, and the number of women employed in the learned professions.

Neither the British Rule nor the middle-class encouraged women's employment outside their domestic sphere.

The economic condition of women except for the minute development of education and employment, had worsened in the colonial period. 'Leisure' instead of work for women became a status symbol. The education of women did not result in the abolition of the traditional role of women but reinforced it. Thus the prevailing concept and practices of sex-segregation in employment, the idea of separate sphere for women, continued as before. With the result the total restructuring of the society did not take place. Instead the changes urged by men helped to reinforce the patriarchal society.

In this period, certain changes took place in women's social condition, with the advent of the reform activities. However the new middle class reinforced the traditional values attached to women, such as

chastity, pati-bhakti, purity and impurity etc.,

In the second chapter, I have shown the various oppressive institutions affecting women's freedom of mind and body and how the familial structure emphasised the role of women as mothers, wives, and daughters.

One argument would be, that the social positions of women can be determined by the economic position of women. Infact, the level of the relationship of women with the labour market i.e. the economic role of women, which has money value in the labour market, will be one of the important factor to determine the total emancipation of women. In short, the structure of production relation along with reproduction in a society can determine the decision-making power of women.

Just as the middle-class view of the social position of women determined their limited economic role, the condition of the limited employment for women in the public sphere, determined not only their social position, but also the consciousness of women and the perception of the middle-class men.

Thus we find the linkage between the occupational patterns of women, and the prevailing social condition as well as the prevailing conception of the male and female members of that particular class.

In the Third chapter, I have shown how women's question became the inevitable part of the social reform activities of the middle-class and what were the limitations in the perspectives of the male reformers.

Within the tradition of reformers of the late 19th century some of them followed the evangelical ideas, to an extent. The urge for moral reform, giving emphasis to pure social reform, rather than reform in all spheres etc. Thus the reformers of this period and their views were basically conservative and emphasised the traditional moralities. They not only demanded chastity for women, but condemned men who went for prostitution. They believed in the changes through social services and philanthropic works.

Their emphasis was to make women aware of the West through education but not to bring them to the public sphere through employment. Even within the western culture, only the victorian way of life i.e. giving emphasis to the moral qualities of women, such as chastity, patience, purity and innocence about sexuality, were given importance. While on the one hand they tried to abolish the obscurantist practices in the society, on the other hand they gave much of importance to the traditional feminine virtues and the traditional role of women.

Thus even when they were campaigning against the child-marriage and for the widow-remarriage, they determined the permanence of marriage in women's life.

Their aim was not to restructure the family and its ideology. In fact they thought that the limited modernisation of women would serve the interest of the Bourgeois ideology.

They never criticised or tried to abolish the heterosexual relationship or monogamy. Rather they glorified motherhood and women's household duties.

In fact these reformers thought that the sexual differences are natural and thus advocated the separate sphere ideology. They never thought in terms of women's economic independence and political rights.

In the early 20th century the ideas of the reformers had changed. However, they adopted certain early 19th century reformers ideas of women's role and place. The enlightened liberals of the 20th century also emphasised and sometime glorified women's maternal role, seeing the inevitability of marriage and motherhood for women. They too viewed women through her 'feminine virtues'. It is not surprising that they looked backward in time to Golden age of Motherhood. What was distinct about the early 20th century reformers' thought was the mixture of radicalism and modernism. Reformers like Bharathi demanded

the abolition of male domination at times, and even restructuring of the society through abolition of caste system etc. At the same time he glorified motherhood and emphasised feminine virtues as important aspects, of women's life. He did not want the abolition of monogamous family for the restructuring of the society.

One positive point about the radical reformers was that they not only demanded social reform but also political reform through drawing women into politics. However here, Bharati made it clear that social reform should be the first priority, since he thought that the behaviour of male members in the family determined the nation's welfare and freedom.

These changes envisaged by them were intended for a total restructuring of the society. Implicit in their ideas was the patriarchy and its rule over the family. These ideas continued even during the national movement. The Nationalist leaders emphasised the importance of women's participation in the freedom struggle, not as women equal to men, but as mothers, sisters and daughters.

This narrow outlook failed to bring many woman to the public front except few wives and sisters of the reformer's and the freedom fighter's. The Bourgeois idea of a monogamous family, men and women socialising as sisters and brothers in the political front were to be seen in the congress activities.

Moreover, the middle-class reformers both the late 19th and early 20th centuries thought in terms of changes within their class and not total changes. Though now and then their social service and philanthropic work was concerned about the working-class or lower class, the self-interest was not totally ruled out.

Here one has to see the role of colonial government. The main interest of the colonial government was to appease the middle class through some political, economic and social measures. In order to meet out the interest of the middle-class, the British government in India adopted social welfare measures which in turn resulted in the encouragement of bringing about modernisation in women lives. Another aim was to bring about victorian culture and Bourgeois life which in the long run would benefit the British rule.

It is not however true that the middle-class always accepted the benevolent attitudes of the colonizers. It was in fact the reaction against the intervention of colonial culture that led to the emphasis on the traditional role of women. I have shown in the third chapter in many places how the reformers opposed the missionary and English education, European way of marriages, and European culture on the many aspects of the reform activities. The reaction resulted in the cultural struggle and later merged into a strong political struggle. But many reformers

remained were not able to find a way for total reordering the system.

Yet, they had brought about a better situation for women within the patriarchal system, by abolishing the child-marriage, encouraging widow-marriage, voting rights for women, etc. But they did not question the centrality of marriage in women's life. Therefore they could not encourage the concept of women's independent.

In the ^{fourth} chapter I have shown the development of women's consciousness or the self-view in this period. There are much more complexities and contradiction involved in their thinking and activities than in the case of the male reformers. It is partly because of the kind of education they received and the way they were made to react to the situation in that period. The result of this was that women consciously or unconsciously reinforced the patriarchal structure and the values.

They demanded independence for women as well as protection of women essentially identical in their thinking with men as well as different from men.

The late 19th century educated middle-class women, just like the late 19th century male reformers, were essentially conservative and emphasised women's traditional roles. Just like the male reformers the moral reform became the essential activity of women in this period. They emphasised the feminine virtues as essential

qualities and discouraged single women or calibacy. For them monogamous family, marriage and children were essential part of women's life. These women mainly belonged to the reformers family. Occassionally from outside this circle woman came to participate in the reform activities. We have no evidence to show whether they raised their voices against the male harrassments at home or outside. They only talked in terms of women's relationship in the hierarchy of the family relationship i.e. male relationship in the family. They in fact viewed themselves just as men of their family and other reformers or society viewed them.

In the early 20th century this attitude continued, yet some middle-class women identified the problems of male domination at home. I have shown how in some of their association meetings they discussed about male harrassment. But the solution sought by them was not a radical one. Neither they demanded the abolition of monogamous family nor the abolition of existing social system. What one notices in their speeches and writings is the general humanitarian zeal for changes and some amelioration to women within the existing system. They rarely thought in terms of equal education for men and women or equal employment opportunity formen and women. Their intention of educating women was to train women in a modernised way so that they would be accepted by their husbands and by the other members of the society. There was a great

appreciation in them about the victorian women and their culture. This is clear from the fact that no association meeting was conducted without the decoration of the queen's photograph. Educated women often read about the victorian way of life and chastity.

What one notices in their demand for the abolition of indenture system, was the purely moral reform activity combined with some philanthropic ideas. Through destroying the indenture system, they thought, that women's purity, chastity, and Indian womenhood as such can be protected. They thought that the lower-class women were loosing their morality since their husbands had gone as indenture labourers.

It was not their intention to show concern about other problems involved in the indenture system. The lower-wage system, racial problems etc. mainly the immediate problems of the lower-classes did not attract them much. In the process they alienated other class women, and tried their best to protect the middle-class values and ways of life. This even led to the misinterpretation of the problems of the working-class.

Since their aim was to emphasis the traditional role of women, their associations only conducted in the traditional ways. Just like women gather for some rituals at home or marriage ceremonies, in the associations the convention of conducting pujas rendering pati-Bhakti

slogans were to be continued.

The issues they took up, were mainly concerned with women and sometimes issues like swadeshi movement, National struggle etc. But can one detect a feminist slant in the debates and discussions carried out by these women?

Feminism is not only a consciousness about women's oppression and exploitation in society, in family and at works, it is also a movement to restructure the society. This movement is different from the movements for emancipation and equality which was sought within the existing social and political system. The social legal and political reform can only bring about amelioration for women and redress some of the discriminating policies against women. This reform activities do not tackle the problem of women's role in the family or bring about revolutionary changes in the social and economic and political system.

In the period under study there was no feminism involved as far as the male-female reformers activities are concerned. No doubt by the early 20th century women became the subject of the reform activities rather than being an object of agitations. Women were also participating in broader political struggles, demanding voting rights etc. But as we have seen, they have viewed themselves as middle-class men did, such as mothers and

and wives and accepted the standard sexual moralities. They denied the equal pleasures of sex for both men and women. They also failed to be part of the mass movement. While some of them took up the leadership of the Labour movement, Others did not make an effort and join it in large numbers. Middle-class women were hardly concerned about the problems of the working-class women. There was a philosophic resignation in them, that made them to accept the role of Karma.

They were not perceiving the existing reality in total which would have resulted in building up broad based mass movement and a cultural movement along with the national movement. It would be very appropriate to quote Karl Mannheim, who says that, the group which is exploited and wants to change that situation hardly predict the real existing condition of the society and in turn they are not at all concerned with the reality. According to him, "their thought is never a diagnosis of the situation, it can be used only as direction for action".¹

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