

**INDIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND ITS
ENGAGEMENT WITH WOMEN'S EDUCATION**

1917-1947

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

PRIYANKA MATHEW



ZAKIR HUSAIN CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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ZAKIR HUSAIN CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL STUDIES
UGC-CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDY (CAS)
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067

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Declaration

I, Priyanka Mathew hereby declare that the dissertation entitled '**Indian Women's Movement And Its Engagement With Women's Education 1917-1947**' is submitted in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of Masters Of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for any degree or diploma of any university and is my original work.

Priyanka Mathew

Priyanka Mathew

Certificate

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for the award of the degree of Masters of Philosophy in this University.

S. Chatt

Professor Saumen Chattopadhyay

(Chairperson)

Prof. Saumen Chattopadhyay
Chairperson
Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067

P. Rao

Dr. Parimala V. Rao

(Supervisor)

Assistant Professor
Zakir Husain Centre for
Educational Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

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Chapter One

Indian Women's Movement and Its Engagement with Women's Education 1917-1947

Introduction

Historical Background to Social Reform and Condition of Women

The nineteenth century can be described as an age of women, as women were the 'subjects' of 'heated discussion.' In India, atrocities against women were 'deplored' by 'social reformers' primarily in Bengal and Maharashtra.¹

Now coming to the important social reformers of the nineteenth century who worked for women, one name that stands out is the name of Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833). He was a Bengali Brahmin. Roy had been very disturbed when his female relative committed Sati.² He has been called the Father of Modern India.³ He argued that Sati did not have a scriptural backing⁴. Finally, in 1829, the government banned Sati.⁵ Sati ushered Roy to address the 'question of women's rights', specifically, 'women's education.'⁶

Another key reformer, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) was born to Thakurdas and Bhagavati Devi. His mother Bhagavati Devi, despite being a Brahmin, did not follow the 'heartless injunctions' of the 'sastras' or 'caste rules' and Vidyasagar seemed to have inherited these traits.⁷ The story of social reform with regard to widow remarriage was labelled a failure because the Pandits could not be convinced by Vidyasagar.⁸ There were also other problems attached with widow remarriage. These included 'slander, persecution and ostracism'.⁹ Moreover, widow remarriage became a

¹ Radha Kumar, *History Of Doing*, New Delhi: Kali For Women, 1993, p7.

² Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio Religious Reform Movements in British India*, *The New Cambridge History Of India III.1*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.30.

³ Gouri Srivastava *Women's Higher Education in the 19th Century*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2000, p.52.

⁴ Jones, *Socio Religious Reform*, p31.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Gopal Halder, *Vidyasagar: A Reassessment*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1972, p.1, 15, 16.

⁸ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay. 'Caste, Widow Remarriage and The Reform of Popular Culture' in *From The Seams Of History* by Bharati Ray, Delhi: OUP, 1997, p.31, 36.

⁹ Sumit Sarkar 'Vidyasagar and Brahmanical Society' in *Women And Social Reform In Modern India Vol. I* by Sumit and Tanika Sarkar. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007, p.195.

manner to control the women's sexuality.¹⁰ Even after the act, widow remarriage remained a dead letter post Vidyasagar's death.¹¹ From 1856 onwards, Vidyasagar endured high expense and at other times, life threatening situations and yet organized sixty widow remarriages by '1867.'¹² Vidyasagar in addition, set up 'forty' female schools in villages' from November 1857 to June 1858', contributing to the field of women's education.¹³

Pandita Ramabai(1858-1922) was born to a Chitpavan Brahmin.¹⁴ She established rescue homes for women called Arya Mahila Samaj in Pune in 1882 and Sharda Sadan in 1889 in Bombay.¹⁵ Furthermore, she established the Mukti Sadan in 1896 to help famine victims.¹⁶ In her book *Stri Dharma Niti* she guided women.¹⁷ According to Ramabai, the main needs in 'High Caste Hindu Woman' were 'self-reliance, education and native women teachers.'¹⁸ She attacked 'brahmanical ritualism' through her spirituality i.e. conversion to Christianity.¹⁹ In addition, she was deeply concerned with women's issues.²⁰ Moreover, Ramabai married a sudra²¹ named Medhvi.

Justice M. G. Ranade (1842-1901) was one of the builders of Modern India.²² He had a 'brilliant academic career' replete with 'prizes and scholarships'.²³ He was a member of the Prarthana Samaj'.²⁴ In addition, he raised funds to set up a 'female High School' in September 1882.²⁵ He also educated his wife Ramabai Ranade in his personal life.²⁶ He

¹⁰ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay 'Caste, Widow Remarriage and The Reform of Popular Culture, in *From The Seams Of History* by Bharati Ray, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.29.

¹¹ Ibid. p.34.

¹² Sarkar 'Vidyasagar And Brahmanical' p.195.

¹³ Ibid. p.179.

¹⁴ Meera Kosambi, 'Women, Emancipation And Equality: Pandita Ramabai's contribution to Women's Cause,' *Economic And Political Weekly*, Vol.23, No.44, Oct.29 1988, pWS41.

¹⁵ NCERT. *Training Material for Teacher Educators on Gender Equality And Empowerment Volume 3*. New Delhi: Department of Women's Studies, 2013 p.5.

¹⁶ Kosambi, 'Women, Emancipation', pWS42.

¹⁷ Ibid. p.WS41.

¹⁸ Pandita Ramabai, *The High Caste Hindu Woman*, New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2013, p.55,56,57.

¹⁹ Uma Chakravarti, *Pandita Ramabai Once More*, New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2014, p.8.

²⁰ Ibid. p.16.

²¹ Kumar, *The History Of*, p.26.

²² Y.D.Phadke. *Social Reformers of Maharashtra*, Bombay: Government Central Press, 1985, p.26.

²³ Ibid. p.27.

²⁴ Ibid. p.30.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Srivastava. *Women's Higher Education*, p.62.

also cried to raise the age of marriage²⁷.He put forth that sexual intercourse with a girl under 14 was to be considered rape.²⁸

Ranade's wife Ramabai Ranade, (1862-1924,) started the Seva Sadan in the year 1908 at Bombay.²⁹The main purpose of the Sadan was to render 'primary education' and give females a sense of self-reliance.³⁰Vocational training was an important part in the life of the Sadan. Women were trained to be nurses and "primary" school teachers .Apart from this, Ramabai Ranade also set up the Hindu Ladies Social And Literary Club. This club promoted the 'reading habits' among females, set up libraries, organized literary activity on women's issues revolving around social and educational themes. The club was in addition cosmopolitan in manner.³¹

Jyotiba Phule(1827-1890) was another social reformer. His father was a 'vegetable vendor at Poona.'³²In 1848, Phule had been insulted at a Brahmin friend's wedding, he shed tears and decided to fight for Shudras and women from then on.³³He too educated his wife, set up a girl's school in 1851, by 1852 he established three schools for ' girls' and one for 'untouchables'.³⁴He cared especially for the lower castes and women³⁵.He critiqued his co -worker who supported the old family system comprising the "free" man and "housebound" woman. He also used egalitarian language to bring about reform for women. Moreover, his Satyashodak Samaj organized weddings based on a passage centred on the man as the protector of the wife and need for the man to educate his wife. In addition, there were no 'Brahmin priestly intermediaries' at the weddings described above.³⁶

Tarabai Shinde (1850-1910,) also championed the cause of women through her writing *Stri Purusha Tulana* 1882. She questioned the nineteenth century patriarchy, and the notion of 'pativrata' because husbands were to be treated like God according to this

²⁷ Maitrayee Chaudhuri. *The Indian Women's Movement*. New Delhi: Palm Leaf Publications, 2011,p.73.

²⁸Phadke, *Social Reformers* ,p.30

²⁹Srivastava, *Women's Higher Education*, p.123.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹ Ibid. p.21,123.

³²Phadke *Social Reformers*, p.12.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴Srivastava, *Women's Higher Education*, p.60-62

³⁵ Chaudhury. *The Indian*, p.43.

³⁶ Ibid.

principle.³⁷She argued that women had been treated badly at the hands of men despite being indispensable and their 'pair'.³⁸It was found that men had gained mercy because of women.³⁹Women had so far tolerated the man's wayward ways like alcoholism and adultery.⁴⁰Furthermore she critiqued lack of education for women, their seclusion and the purdah system and enforced widowhood.⁴¹

Behramji Malabari (1853-1912) believed that early consummation led to disease, poverty and lack of education.⁴²He fought for the 'cause of women' during the age of consent campaign 1890-1891. For this because he was supported by the British politicians, British women and the British media.⁴³.He questioned how a little child could become a bride and a mother at age 'twelve or thirteen'?⁴⁴His 'favourable tactics and timing' further helped in the enactment of the bill.⁴⁵

Swarnakumari Debi (1856-1932,) was the sister of Rabindranath Tagore, who set up the Ladies Theosophical Society in 1882 in Calcutta ⁴⁶.But it had to be shut because of a lack of members. Later, the Sakhi Samiti came into existence in 1886. It worked for the education of widows and 'self-reliance 'of women suffering from poverty. She was in addition the first female editor of Bharati, the women's journal.⁴⁷

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein (1880-1932) was born into a zamindari family, in present day Bangladesh.⁴⁸She was educated at a time when women's education was frowned upon. She could read and write in English And Bengali.⁴⁹ She wrote about female 'emancipation.'⁵⁰In Sultana's Dream the main theme was education. Here the real 'heroes' were women educators who saved the country and as a result, Lady land came

³⁷ Tarabai.Shinde 'Stri purusha tulana' in *Women And Social Reform In Modern India Vol. II* by Sumit And Tanika Sarkar. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007, P.313-314.

³⁸ Shinde 'Stri purusha tulana' , p.320.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.p. 313.

⁴¹ Ibid.p. 321, 322, 323.

⁴² Srivastava, *Women's Higher Education* , 2000,.,p.29.

⁴³ Grainne Goodwin, 'A trustworthy interpreter between ruler and ruled' in *Social History Vol.38* , No. 1, London: Taylor And Francis, Feb. 2013, p.12

⁴⁴ Ibid. p.13.

⁴⁵ Ibid .p.17.

⁴⁶ NCERT. *Training Material* ,p.5.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Rokeya Hossein. *Sultana's Dream and Padmarag*, translation by Barnita Bagchi, New Delhi :Penguin Books 2005,p.vii

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.vii, viii

⁵⁰ Ibid. ,p.xxiv

into existence.⁵¹ Hossein set up two girls' schools in 1909 in Bhagalpur and in 1910 at Calcutta respectively.⁵² She critiqued the seclusion of Muslim women.⁵³ Moreover, she worked for social reform such as vocational training for women. This aspect was highlighted in Padmarag.⁵⁴

The Establishment Of Women's Organisations

The Women's Indian Association was established in 1917 in Adyar, Madras by Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins and Dorothy Jinarajadasa. They wanted to fight for women's right to vote and 'India's national freedom'.⁵⁵ The All India Women's Conference was set up in 1927 in Poona, Maharashtra by Margaret Cousins. It took up Women's education as a central issue. Legally, it was battling for passing the Sarda Act, to raise the age of marriage. It also wanted the reform of personal law, the prohibition of polygamy, the right to divorce and inheritance of property.⁵⁶ This culminated into the Hindu Code Bill of 1955-56.

Annie Besant was also the president of Congress in 1917⁵⁷. She worked for the upliftment of the Spirit of India shackled by 'social custom and habit'.⁵⁸ She played a major role in the 'Women suffrage movement' in Ireland and England. India soon became her home where she convinced people to join the women's movement⁵⁹. According to her the meetings of WIA were full of Shakhti. In other words the meetings were full of dynamic potential and encouragement. She was brought to the forefront by Besant.⁶⁰

Furthermore, Nita Kumar has analysed Annie Besant's Central Hindu College. She observed that Besant established 'separate cooking, eating and prayer quarters for the four varnas'.⁶¹ In addition, students here were 'victims of her experimentation'.⁶² This is

⁵¹Hossein . *Sultana's Dream and* p. Xii

⁵² Ibid. p .ix.

⁵³ Ibid. p. xi.

⁵⁴ Ibid. .p .x

⁵⁵ Chaudhuri , *The Indian* , p.120.

⁵⁶ NCERT, *Training Material* ,p.6.

⁵⁷Chaudhuri , *The Indian* , p.121.

⁵⁸*Women's Indian Association* (Report)Golden Jubilee Celebration, Madras, India,1917-1967p.35

⁵⁹Ibid. p.36

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Nita Kumar, *Lessons From Schools*, Sage Publications: New Delhi, 2000, p.100.

⁶²Ibid.p.105.

because cultural transmission was lacking in dialogue in this context .It was a one way process.

Muthulakshmi Reddi of Women' Indian Association stated that the main concern of WIA was to bring about Social and Educational Reform.⁶³ The AIWC was also formed with an educational intention. A resolution was passed to bring about moral and spiritual instruction in educational institutions. The motives of education were considered traditionally framed for women i.e. to bring about reform in motherhood, beautification of home and it was geared towards social service. This was contested within the AIWC that the ideals of fatherhood needed to be enlisted as well besides, the beautification of the home was the work of both the sexes.

Political Reform, involved the right to franchise which was considered a vital issue. Initially, politics were considered divisive. But later, with the eleventh session of the AIWC, women could no longer stand mute to India's freedom struggle according to Margaret Cousins the President. Even Rajkumari Amrit Kaur the President of the 12th session of the AIWC argued that social and educational reforms were closely tied to political and economic reforms. Politics was viewed as constructive work.⁶⁴

Legal Reform was another concern of the AIWC and WIA. Child marriage stood in the way of education and health. The Sarda Act of 1929-30 was a personal victory of AIWC. The issue of Purdah also created quite a stir. Purdah meant seclusion of women from public life. Hence, some women joining the AIWC and WIA gave up the Purdah altogether. Even the nationalists condemned the Purdah System.⁶⁵

Review of Literature

WIA Report 1917-1967 stated that its top priority was education. The other motive was political. Its journal was called *Stri Dharma* which sensed the voice of its sisters. From 1922-1936, the Women's Indian Association was involved in spreading awareness for compulsory education, supporting Japanese Women politically ,enabling child welfare, moral and social hygiene through removal of brothels and prison visits. S.M. Reddi of WIA also managed to abolish the Devadasi System and Child Marriage between 1926

⁶³ Chaudhuri , *The Indian* ,p.122-123.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.156.

⁶⁵ Ibid .p.168.

and 1927. The WIA also opposed separate electorates and reservation of seats for women from 1932 to 1933.⁶⁶

Report on Status of Women on Educational Development 1974,⁶⁷ in it was observed that in the nineteenth century education was given to girls to help fulfil the traditional roles in society. Few courses were open to women. Concerning literacy, it was seen that the sizeable proportion had to 'labour for a living,' and were hence uneducated.⁶⁸ However, in the post independent phase one sees the realm of equality seeping in. There were regional imbalances in education. The Southern States had displayed an impressive literacy rate particularly Kerala. The earlier committees in the Post-Independence era preferred a common curriculum. Unlike, the nineteenth century feeling, that the curricula should be differentiated because women were considered inferior to men. The Report on the Status of Women had also recommended a 'common course till the end of class' ten.⁶⁹ At the pre-primary level equality was to be inculcated, with regard to co-education it was to be provided at the primary level. The middle and secondary schools had the freedom to open separate schools. However, at the university level co-education was to be given. The separate girls' schools were to maintain their standard. Free education was to be provided upto the secondary schools for girls to bring them at par with boys. Moreover 'Science, Maths And Commerce' were to be upgraded.⁷⁰ In addition separate common rooms and toilets were to be provided to girls. Furthermore the report on the Status of Women recommended employment opportunities in higher education.⁷¹ It was found that education can make socialization an equal process. But education perpetuated in equality through 'curricula, classification of subjects according to sex and codes of behaviour'.⁷²

Gouri Srivastava had also pointed out that the main agencies that promoted Women's education were the 'Christian Missionaries, men, women and The British Government.'⁷³ The three main agencies through which Christian Missionaries promoted female education were 'Girls' Day School, Orphanages and Boarding

⁶⁶ *Women's Indian Association*, p .1-8.

⁶⁷ *Towards Equality Report*, India, Status Of Women: Delhi, 1974, P.236.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 265.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p .276.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p.278-279

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 278-279.

⁷² *Ibid.* p. 282.

⁷³ Srivastava, *Women's Higher Education* ,p.20.

Establishments and Zenana Teaching.’ The missionaries could not convert successfully but they managed to be pioneers in female education in India.⁷⁴ The men were instrumental in banning Sati in 1829, passing the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 and Age of Consent Act of 1891 etc. Then, we have the women consisting of Pandita Ramabai and Savitribai Phule among others who encouraged education among women. Another important name is of Anandibai Joshi who was the first woman to receive a degree in Medicine from Philadelphia. She was motivated by her husband.⁷⁵ The Government was yet another agency that promoted female education. Bethune the law member of the Governor General’s executive council set up Girl’s school in the Bengal Presidency in 1849. The Hunter Commission 1882-83 promoted female education. The Government Resolution on Education Policy 1913 held the same line of thinking as held by Lord Curzon and those in line with the Simla Conference of 1911. It wanted a liberal scholarship and fee structure for the study of girls. It also sought to increase the number of female staff in education. The Education Policy of 1913 furthermore, looked at how female education had become too examination centred and mechanical. There was therefore a need to make it more social and practical. It may be argued that owing to the Government efforts there was an expansion in female education since 1854.⁷⁶

There were lot of hurdles that stood in the way of female education.⁷⁷ **Srivastava** has pointed out that customs like child marriage, purdah and widowhood etc, obstructed the growth of women’s education. In addition there were problems like female infanticide and sati were other evils observed in 19th century India.⁷⁸ Charles Trevelyan in 1853 attributed the lack of female education to a life of seclusion and subjection. Education, it was argued would lead to a neglect of duties in the household.⁷⁹ Hence, women were not allowed to study.

Aparna Basu And Bharati Ray have argued that the first All India Women’s Conference was held in Poona in Jan 1927. It was based on educational reform. Margaret Cousins of AIWC wanted professional women to come together and discuss issues relating to Education namely, ’primary education, compulsory co-education, fine

⁷⁴ ⁷⁴ *Srivastava, Women's Higher Education* ., p.51.

⁷⁵ *Ibid* .p.62 ,63.

⁷⁶ *Ibid* .p.81

⁷⁷ *Ibid* . p.25 , 52.

⁷⁸ *Ibid* .p.31.

⁷⁹ *Ibid* .p.35.

arts'⁸⁰, vocational education, child marriage, increasing the age of consent, purdah system and position of teachers. Female literacy was another pressing concern. Physical training was another demand in girls' schools. There was an effort by AIWC to raise the age of consent to 16 years by Hansa Mehta and others. Women were to be taught dignity of labour and economic independence. Special education was another rising concern. By 1927, the AIWC was mindful of 'educational, social and legal reform.'⁸¹As a result of the efforts the Lady Irwin College was set up in 1932. Technical education for girls was encouraged. Women's education was more acceptable during 1927-1947. Illiteracy was overcome by compulsory primary education, public sympathy, finances to women's associations, women's literacy programme, adult education and by attacking superstition.

Karuna Chanana had analysed the state of female education in Pre-Independent India. This may be linked to their family roles. Education during the period did not seek to change the family structure. Education became a matter of debate in the end of 19th century. Gradually, women stepped in to improve their lot. In the 1930's women's organizations came up fighting for 'social reform, welfare and education.' These in time acquired political moorings with the emergence of the Independence Movement. Gandhi was the one who encouraged women to participate in his movements in huge numbers. He attacked 'prostitution' and the 'purdah' system and supported 'widow – remarriage' .He was not just an ordinary 'reformer' but he had a special 'message' for women⁸²

Women's education suffered not only due to the social customs. But, she had observed that the government was not too keen to invest in girl's education because the investment was huge. It required hostels, escorts, women teachers and scholarships. Moreover, there were no jobs for women so parents too were not willing to invest in female education. The hindrances to female education pointed out by Chanana were the purdah in the North And Child Marriage in the South in the words of Cousins⁸³ Parental apathy and general prejudice were other factors that stood in the way of female education

⁸⁰ Aparna Basu and Bharati Ray, *Women's Struggle*: New Delhi, Manohar, 2003, p.21.

⁸¹ Ibid.p.26.

⁸² Karuna Chanana 'Social Change or Social Reform: Women, Education and Family in Pre-Independence India.' In *Women , Education And Family Structure in India*, by Mukhopadhyay and Seymour, Boulder, San Francisco And Oxford: Westview Press, 1994, p. 37 - 39.

⁸³Ibid. p. 43- 46.

Contrary to popular opinion, Chanana pointed out that in the post independent era women continued to face inequality in and outside the realm of education⁸⁴. Gender in fact bridged the gap between sociology and education. We needed to examine women as a heterogeneous group. School, and family bases of socialisation lead to inequality. This process would lead to economic discrimination against women in the workplace .So, education was linked to jobs. It was pertinent that girls were attracted to education through female teachers, ‘location’ and safe school timings. The question arose that education had a modernising effect but why were women grounded in tradition still? We needed to look at the gender perspective when we study the aspect of education. Chanana said that gender, unlike feminist studies was ‘inclusive’.⁸⁵ In the present scenario globalisation and the market economy were promoting more inequality in education. Coming to disciplinary choices, Science had been the domain of men since times immemorial. Now more women were found joining engineering argued Chanana.⁸⁶ There had therefore been a ‘shift’ in the choices regarding disciplines. Even in Higher education, women have gained access in larger numbers.

Another question arose why do women get a backseat in universities, whereas men rule in these places? Women it may be argued do all the work but the credit goes to the man. As a result the top faculty positions go to men not women. Women were rarely found in leadership positions in Higher education. There were different reasons involved for this. Traditional mindsets, discrimination, absence of child care facilities and cut throat competition at work leading to rigidity were some of the factors that caused women to avoid leadership roles in Higher education. ‘Social context’ impacted academic leadership according to Chanana.⁸⁷

It had also been noted that women’s participation in academics had been low. This was because there were several breaks in a woman’s career as per the findings concerning JNU faculty members. Moreover, there were several ‘filters’ operational that actually thwarted the growth of women in academics. For instance, married women were discriminated against in the workplace at the entry level according to Chanana:⁸⁸ They were asked all kinds of uncomfortable questions like about postings. There was also a

⁸⁴ Karuna, Chanana, *Interrogating Women's Education*. Jaipur And New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2001, p. 20.

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 25.

⁸⁶ Ibid. p.37.

⁸⁷ Ibid. p .44.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.46, 47, 48.

'Tokenism' that existed i.e. women were present in committees just for name sake. Concerning Higher education for Girls, she had spelled out the reasons for poor education in Higher education.⁸⁹ Despite the work of social reformers and constitutional provisions there was a lack of schools, absence of legal support, domestic chores and traditional mindsets, lack of financial help were other such problems. Today the Purdah system continued to be a Hindrance in girl's education .So, was the case with 'sex segregation' in schools. Female education was infested with different problems. Chanana viewed the girl's education as an interdisciplinary issue.⁹⁰ Her paper praised the women's movement for opening the funds meant for 'social research and action'. **Therefore, there is a link between 'social context' and educational progress.** Policy on education should be founded on social reality according to Chanana.⁹¹

Gail Omvedt had put forth the 'women's liberation movement'⁹² was having women from different backgrounds, representing different political interests and groupings. The movement was associated with dialogues. There was no ideological consensus. There was an ongoing debate Marxism vs. Feminism. It will not be fair to separate the two. For those outside, there was a debate whether women were actually being oppressed or they held a 'different position'.⁹³ Then, those within the circle, argued between choosing two sides Marxism Or Liberalism? Marxism supported mass action and revolution whereas, Liberalism advocated for individual action by using pressure on the 'reformed state.'⁹⁴

There have been heated debates on various issues. These include 'dowry deaths, rape'⁹⁵ wife battering and fight for equal wages, anti-colonialism and anti -racism. All leftists and feminists have supported the need for a women's organisation. There had been a 'debate' whether to have 'toiling' women or 'democratic' women?⁹⁶

Gabriele Dietrich had talked of the International decade for women. This threw light upon the economic condition of women, the reduction in work options, problems faced

⁸⁹Chanana, *Interrogating Women's Education* p. 318-321.

⁹⁰Karuna Chanana. 'View From The Margins.' *Economic And Political Weekly Vol. 37, No.36*, 2002,p.3717.

⁹¹Ibid., p.3718.

⁹²Gail Omvedt.' Women's Movement 'In *Feminism In India*, By Maitrayee Chaudhuri .New Delhi :Kali For Women &Women Unlimited, 2004,p.177

⁹³Ibid., p178.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 179.

⁹⁵Ibid. p. 180.

⁹⁶ Ibid .p. 182.

by women due to technical modernization, self-employment, sexual violence against women like rape, wife battering and dowry murders. Also, women's health remained a serious concern. But, we needed to focus on Women's Movement and religion. This was because religion took a back seat owing to secularism. In addition, we have the issue of Delhi riots where women realized that they needed to have faith in themselves rather than believing in Gods. Moreover, women have been rarely theologians.⁹⁷

Rokheya Sakhawat Hossain had penned a feminist dream. It jailed all men into the mardana and put women at the helm of affairs. It perhaps offered an alternative to British rule. It was a rule based on science and nature conservation. It gave women the agency of reform. Politically speaking, the Queen was the head of lady land. Economically, the work of embroidery was entering the market. Women were becoming self-sufficient. Socially, women were not being subjected to child marriage. They were married only by the age of twenty one. Moreover, there were female educational institutions coming up. Lady land was free from sin and vices because of the rule of women. The Men in Sultana's dream were not found walking in streets. They were indoors taking care of the private space. Here, the man's strength was compared to brute force like that possessed by the lion. Women were in addition considered more efficient for they did not waste their time. Also, interestingly the queen liked Science even though Science was considered masculine. Apart from girls' schools, separate universities for women came up. Lady land was therefore superior scientifically. Water and Solar power were used. Furthermore, comparing men and women, women's brains were quicker than men's brains. It was also fascinating how the ladies did not use brute force during the war. They instead used the rays of sun and heat to crush the enemy. Lady land also had a low rate of crime. As men were usually indoors looking after babies and cooking etc. The religion of Lady land was based on truth and love. Liars were asked to leave the land. Killing was not pleasant. There was also space for repentance. Technologically speaking, the people in Lady land moved about in air cars. The queen had a daughter suggesting perhaps respect to female children. Hossein suggested a new order where women dominated successfully.⁹⁸

⁹⁷Gabriele Dietrich, 'Women's Movement And Religion,' In *Women's Studies In India, A Reader* By Mary. E. John, New Delhi:Penguin Books, 2008,p.508.

⁹⁸Rokheya Sakhawat Hossain, *Sultana's Dream*, Tara Publishing: Chennai, 2005.

Tanika Sarkar has talked about the Hindu Right in the politics of Women's Organizations. She has traced it to 1925 when the RSS was formed. The women's wing was formed in 1936. Around 1989-1990 there was an increase in the number of women's organisations run by the Sangh Parivar.⁹⁹ The ideology in the Samiti was based on Brahmanical patriarchy. In addition, it was inegalitarian. It questioned male domination in the public space that is the workplace not the home. It acquired a fundamentalist character. The membership of the Samiti had fallen.¹⁰⁰ This was because it lacked a rural base.¹⁰¹ This was contrary to the AIDWA which had a rural base and consisted of Dalit women. The Samiti had a magazine Jagriti. This worked for merging with the 'mainstream Women's Movement'. This was replaced by Sevika which worked towards 'distinguishing itself' from the women's movement.¹⁰² The above right wing did not believe in giving legal help to 'battered women' despite funds.¹⁰³ Their Shakhshas paid a lot of emphasis to physical training. Even parents were encouraged to send their daughters there because of lessons in obedience¹⁰⁴. The Pracharika pointed to one crucial women's problem that was Muslim Male's lust for the Hindu pure woman. The organizing secretary put forth that it was the British Educational policy which was the culprit, blinding women to patriotism and motherhood. Sarkar analysed that rapes were due to fact that women had moved away from the old concept of motherhood and honour. Also, the media had played a role in corrupting the minds.¹⁰⁵ The Sangh parivar had office holders as its women members. These women were indifferent to women's issues. They even saw the reservation of women as dilution of merit. In short, the real power in the Sangh Parivar was exercised by the male members.

Sylvia Vatuk discussed Islamic Feminism. It began in the 1990's in Egypt And Iran with the 're-reading of the Quran.' It was about reclaiming 'religion'. It was an attempt to undermine 'Islamic patriarchal distortions' and 'Western stereotypes of Islam as backward and terroristic.'¹⁰⁶ The All India Muslim Women's Personal Law Board (AIMWPLB) was formed as a result of the failure of the male All India Muslim

⁹⁹Tanika Sarkar, 'Pragmatics Of the Hindu Right: Politics Of Women's Organizations 'in Women's Studies In India by Mary E. John, New Delhi :Penguin Books, 2008,p.523.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.p.524.

¹⁰¹Ibid.p.525.

¹⁰²Ibid.p.526.

¹⁰³Ibid. p.526.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.p.527.

¹⁰⁵ Sarkar, 'Pragmatics Of,' p.528.

¹⁰⁶Sylvia Vatuk , 'Islamic Feminism in India: Indian Muslim Women Activists and Reform of Muslim Personal law, *Modern Asian Studies*,42,2/3 ,Illinois: Cambridge University Press,2008,p.490.

Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) But AIMPLB questioned the existence of AIMWPLB on the grounds of scholarship and political motivations.¹⁰⁷ NGOs run by Muslim Women made their appearance in the late 1980's. One such NGO was Mumbai's Aawaaz-e Niswaan, also AeN formed in 1987. It addressed the cases of suffering women by giving them divorce and maintenance wherever required.¹⁰⁸ Besides this there was the All India Muslim Women's Rights Network (MWRN). It was founded in Mumbai in 1999.¹⁰⁹ The women leaders heading such organizations were from diverse backgrounds.¹¹⁰ The activists were concerned about several issues. First, on the list was the Triple Talaq. It was the 'Male Initiated Extra Judicial Divorce.' The women wanted that the triple talaq needed to be done in a 'phased' manner over a period of few months. The AIMPLB also admitted that the 'instantaneous divorce' was a social evil rather than a legal one.¹¹¹ Then came second the Khul' divorce, 'Woman Initiated Extra Judicial Divorce'. This was discouraged by the Muslim clerics as this would lead to high divorce rate. It was reasoned by the Secretary of AIMPLB that this was because women were more emotional.¹¹² Third, regarding Mahr, which was the 'cash' or other 'valuables' given to the bride at the time of the wedding; this was to be restored to the bride at 'divorce or widowhood' according to the clerics.¹¹³ Fourth, polygamy according to the Muslim Women activists was to be carried out if the previous wife was unable to conceive.¹¹⁴ Fifth, came the nikahnama, this was prescribed by the AIMPLB but was not based on gender equity.¹¹⁵ Sixth, the shariat courts were recommended by the AIMPLB but these were found to be biased against women.¹¹⁶

Maitrayee Chaudhuri had discussed about social reform in the different regions in India. Besides, she explained the role of organisations like Women's Indian Association and the All India Women's Conference. Both organisations worked for educational, legal and political reform. She ended her discussion on Women's Movement with the

¹⁰⁷Vatuk, 'Islamic Feminism.p.494.

¹⁰⁸Ibid .p . 498.

¹⁰⁹Ibid .p .500.

¹¹⁰Ibid. p. 501

¹¹¹Ibid. p .503.

¹¹²Ibid. p .503.

¹¹³Ibid .p .504.

¹¹⁴Ibid .p .505.

¹¹⁵Ibid .p .506.

¹¹⁶Ibid. p. 508.

Shah Bano case 1985. In this case alimony was granted to a divorced Muslim Woman by the Supreme Court.¹¹⁷

Kamla Bhasin had studied empowerment and education of women in the context of South Asia. She had identified empowerment as a 'multi-dimensional' process.¹¹⁸ It included making women visible, appreciating their abilities, giving them the right environment, allowing them to exercise choices, ensuring their political involvement, providing them basic amenities, and 'access over resources' etc.¹¹⁹ Education for women's empowerment should lead to questioning patriarchy, greater level of participation and freedom.¹²⁰

Narayan K. Banerjee has explained the concept of empowerment as being very relevant to the third world countries, with its unique features namely, poverty, lack of visibility of women, their low literacy rate, and 'strong patriarchal community values.'¹²¹ etc. Grass root empowerment was started by the NGOs and Government. Empowerment was supported by the Indian Government's policy, although debated in 1988 for its 'universality'.¹²²

Supriya Kumari And Priyanka Kumari defined Empowerment as being 'self-efficient' in every relevant field such as- 'social, economical, ethical, cultural, rational, moral, intellectual, mental, emotional, physical, radical nutrition and vocational, etc.'¹²³ There was a requirement for empowerment because of the following reasons. We needed to improve the education given to girls, to bring about equality in curriculum, to provide an effective 'environment' for females, to remove gender 'stereotyping' and to make the 'exploitation'¹²⁴ of females known so that adequate steps may be taken.

¹¹⁷Chaudhuri, *The Indian*, p.203.

¹¹⁸Kamla Bhasin. 'Challenges For Women's Empowerment and Education in South Asia', In *Gender Concerns in South Asia* By Manjeet Bhatia, Deepali Bhanot and Nirmalya Samanta, Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2008, p.198.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 203-205.

¹²¹Narayan K. Banerjee. 'The Enabling Process of Empowerment. 'In *Women's Studies In India, A Reader* By Mary. E. John, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2008, p.75.

¹²² Ibid. p.78.

¹²³Supriya And Priyanka Kumari. 'Empowerment Of Women through Education in India.' In *Women Empowerment* By Shashi Kala Singh, Jharkhand: Institute for Social Development And Research, Ranchi, 2013, p.173.

¹²⁴ Ibid. p. 174-175.

Uma Chakravarti had discussed the life of Pandita Ramabai. Ramabai was critical of caste system in her writings.¹²⁵ She was heretical to the Anglican church and also anti-colonial. It was interesting how Ramabai's writings provided the money for her various 'ventures'.¹²⁶ She primarily wrote on women's issues and travel.¹²⁷ In *Stri Dharma Niti* Ramabai talked about patriarchal practices of the time.¹²⁸ Ramabai also dealt with education at length.¹²⁹ She supported marriage at the age of twenty.¹³⁰ She pointed out that widowhood increased the suppression of women.¹³¹ Unlike *Stri Dharma Niti*,¹³² *The High Caste Hindu Woman* did look at more radical issues.¹³³

Rationale of Study

Although women form half the population, history has for long ignored women. It has kept women invisible from the terrain. It has not taken into account the sacrifices and 'contributions' of women. If at all the women's role was mentioned it was coloured, full of prejudice. Also, very few women get noticed. There was a need to show that women played an equally important role in History.¹³⁴ Hence, the role of women's movement is crucial in this regard.

Education was crucial for personality development and productivity in society according to *The Report on Status Of Women*¹³⁵. Thus, it becomes vital to look at women's movement's contribution towards women's education. Hence we must examine this component in our country.

The research will concentrate on the first phase of the Indian women's movement from 1917-1947 i. e. until Indian independence.

¹²⁵ Chakravarti, '*Pandita Ramabai*', p. 9.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* p.12.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* p.16.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 20.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* p.21

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* p.22.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* p.25.

¹³² *Ibid.* p.20.

¹³³ *Ibid.* p.26.

¹³⁴ Maithreyi, Krishnaraj, 'Writing Women's History or Writing Women Into History.' In *History And Gender*, By Kirit K. Shah, 35-56. Jaipur And New Delhi :Rawat Publications, 2005, p.38-39.

¹³⁵ *Towards Equality Report*, p.234.

Objective

The main objective of the study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the activities of Indian Women's Movement as well as its educational activities.

Research Questions

1. How far the Indian Women's Movement empowered Women?
2. How did the Indian Women's Movement support Women's Education?

Research Methodology - The Historical Method will be followed in analysing the documents, contemporary newspapers, in the archives and the libraries. The study will be conducted at the National archives, NMML, CWDS archives and other libraries.

Plan Of Study

1. Introduction, Historical Background to Social Reform, Condition of women, Review of Literature And Methodology.
2. The establishment Of Women's Organisations-Women's Indian Association and All India Women's Conference
3. S. Muthulakshmi Reddi
4. Legal Reform-Sarda Act and Hindu Code Bill and Political Reform-Women's Right to Vote and Women's Political Participation
5. Conclusion

Chapter Two

The Establishment Of Women's Organisations' Women's Indian Association (WIA) and All India Women's Conference (AIWC)

The Establishment Of WIA (Women's Indian Association)

An Association was begun on 8 May 1917 at Adyar, in Madras.¹ It was started by Dorothy Jinarajadasa. She was the 'wife of the President of the Theosophical Society of Madras' and a 'social worker' of repute. She was the 'first Secretary' of the above organisation called the Women's Indian Association. Dorothy Jinarajadasa was helped by the different members namely Margaret Cousins and Annie Besant in the setting up of the organisation. Annie Besant became the President and continued in the post for seventeen years, till her death in 1933. The title of the organisation was so keeping in mind, it's all India character. It focussed on the welfare of the people of India.

The WIA was notable in its objective. It worked for the equality of women². Its aims and objects were as follows.³ It wanted 'daughters' to carry the burden of the country. Moreover, the right to education was an important concern. It included 'compulsory primary education' with teaching on 'religion'. Child marriage and other 'social evils' were cut off. The right to vote was crucial. In addition, the representation of women in 'Municipalities, Taluks, Local Boards, Legislative Councils and Assemblies'. Further, the equality for both the sexes was vital. Furthermore, the role of 'wives and mothers' was looked into. Lastly, women were to be grouped for 'self-development, education and for service.'

The Association was concerned with education and later, politics was integrated. Annie Besant's home rule was fighting for the right to vote. WIA was the very first organisation to ask for the right to vote and won in the process.⁴ A deputation was sent to Montague in 1917 at Madras. By 1930 women got the right to vote in British Indian Provinces. The WIA also made a demand for 'communal representation and reservation.'

¹ R. K. Sharma, *Nationalism, Social Reform And Indian Women*, Janaki Prakashan: New Delhi, Patna, 1981, p.107.

² *Women's Indian Association*, p.12.

³ Sharma, *Nationalism, Social Reform*, p.108.

⁴ *Ibid.* p.109.

The journal of the WIA, *Stridharma* was published in a few languages. Such as 'English, Tamil and Telugu.' Margaret Cousins was its editor from 1935 to 1936. It published news of the progress of the 'Indian Women's Movement.' By 1923 to 1924, the branches and membership of the WIA grew. It worked for politics, society, and education. 'Moral and Social Hygiene' were other concerns. Children's well-being was studied. The WIA supported the 'Child Marriage Restraint Act.' In 1931-32, a Sarda Sub Committee was devised for the implementation of the 'Sarda Act against Child Marriage.' The process encouraged women to enter 'legislatures and public offices.' Female education was promoted.⁵ This led to the abolition of the Devadasi system and immoral traffic in women. The WIA was also active culturally, during epidemics and for the needy. Adult education was thought about. An orphanage in Mylapore was also established. The orphanage cared for the protection of women. The Children Aid Society And Juvenile Court were constructed as well. Sarojini Naidu presided over the 17th Annual session. S. Muthulakshmi Reddi became president for a long time, after Annie Besant's death in 1933. The WIA also had international links. Over a period of time it was confined to Madras. The WIA remained 'the Madras constituent of the AIWC.'⁶

One of the key leaders of WIA, S. Muthulakshmi Reddi later became the president of the WIA, after Annie Besant's death. According to Reddi, the association promoted education and removed 'social evils' like 'Child Marriage,' etc. It also sought to give 'equal civic and political rights and equal opportunities' along with 'men.' The association grouped women for 'self-development' and 'service to others'.⁷ Muthulakshmi Reddi was someone who was a doctor and 'legislator' and social worker. She worked for the Devadasi reform specifically in Madras and represented 'feminist politics'. She brought the devadasi question into the Madras Legislative Council in the 1920's. The WIA condemned the dedication of girls in its 1927 resolution and called it a 'commercialized' evil. Eventually, the Madras Hindu Religious Endowment (Amendment) of 1929 came into force.. This act discontinued the inam grants given to the devadasi in lieu of temple service. Reddi forged ties with the Dravidian Movement and reiterated that reform of the Devadasis was more important than the Indian freedom movement. Unfortunately, the voices of devadasis went unheard because the

⁵ Sharma, *Nationalism, Social Reform*, p.110.

⁶ *Women's Indian Association*, p.14.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.21.

composition of WIA and AIWC was largely drawn from the upper caste. Also. Reddi and the WIA gave 'credence' to 'monogamous' heterosexual, marriages which were considered 'emancipatory', as a result the voices of the devadasis were muted.⁸

S. Muthulakshmi Reddi became a member of the legislature in 1926 order to help women and children. 'She became the 'first woman to be a member of any legislature in India. 'She resisted the 'male and white' composition of the Simon Commission but assisted the government in its education policy .She joined the Hartog Committee, but in 1930 resigned from the committee because of Gandhi's arrest.⁹ Reddi edited the Journal 'Stri Dharma' from 1931 to 1940. 1931 was the year she 'became first elected President of the AIWC'. In her presidential address she talked about the 'education of girls'. She also set up the Avvai Home .She was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1956.S. Muthulaksmi Reddi passed away in 1968¹⁰.

S. Muthulakshmi also analysed the following problems, namely, the issue of population, the 'cruelty to women' and the 'Language Problem.' ¹¹For population growth to be checked one needed to exercise self-control. This would promote health and long life and moral development. Unfortunately, women were subjected to 'cruelty' and 'violence' which was related to 'murder' and 'desertions'. The government needed to take the initiative to spread joy even in the family .As far as language was concerned, Hindi was spoken by the majority of the people in India ,hence ,Hindi would be accepted for its all India' character.

Reddi supported the raising of marriageable age for girls to 16years and for boys to 21 years. This was because girls were neglected from the beginning. The birth of a girl child was seen as a sad event .Moreover, the girl was married off early. She was hence robbed off her childhood .Early marriage led to miscarriages, In addition, midwifery made things worse. Reddi was as a result concerned for the health of females. She wanted to save girls.¹² Reddi stressed the significance of knowledge for all. Travancore was the first state to grant voting right to females and the right to sit in the council.¹³ According to her education was in a backward state. But the parents and

⁸ Mytheli Sreenivas 'Creating Conjugal Subjects: Devadasis and the Politics of Marriage in Colonial Madras Presidency,' *Feminist Studies*, Vol.37, No. 1, Spring 2011, p.71

⁹ Aparna Basu ,*The Pathfinder*, AIWC publication ,n.d. p.12

¹⁰ Ibid.p.16.

¹¹ *Women's Indian Association*, p.22.

¹² Basu, *The Pathfinder*, p.83.

¹³ Ibid.p.117.

public demanded education for females.¹⁴ Reddi noted in the *Stri Dharma* that men and women should cooperate for the welfare of everyone in March 1933.¹⁵

The twentieth century has been the 'age of organisations'. Women of India were not far behind in this regard. Women gathered together for multiple motives. Such organisations contributed to the women's Movement in India and 'worked' for the well-being of women.¹⁶

The All India Women's Conference was set up in 1927 by Margaret Cousins.¹⁷ She played a major role in the 'Women Suffrage Movement' in Ireland And England. India soon became her home where she convinced people to join the women's movement.¹⁸ The AIWC aimed at 'educational, social and legal reform'. It had a membership of 1 million and consisted of 50 branches all over India with its headquarters and a 'secretariat' at Delhi.

The AIWC was studied from 1926 to 1947. Its 'aims' have been analysed. There was a debate between two major schools of thought. One supported educational and social reform. The other school advocated for political reform. As a result the AIWC was about educational reform and issues crucial to women and children and 'humanity at large.'¹⁹

The first AIWC on the subject of Education Reform was organised at Poona from 5 to 8 January 1927. It was a result of the work that had been going on since 6 months before. In 1926 E. F. Oaten, the Director of Public Instruction Bengal asked women to put forth their 'views' on education as they wished.²⁰ The above speech prompted A.L. Huidekoper, a former teacher of Bethune to write in *Stri Dharma*, to call women to action. Margaret Cousins the 'then Secretary of WIA circulated a letter' which urged

¹⁴ Basu, *The Pathfinder*. p.119.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.139.

¹⁶ Sharma, *Nationalism, Social Reform*, p.105.

¹⁷ NCERT, *Training Material*, p.6.

¹⁸ *Women's Indian Association* .p.36

¹⁹ Sharma, *Nationalism, Social Reform*, p.113-114.

²⁰ Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p.19-20.

educated women to form 'local committees'²¹ that led to the formation of an all India level organisation.

The first session of the AIWC was under the president 'Maharani Chimnabai of Gaekwad of Baroda' who asked for 'separate schools and separate curriculum 'for girls. The separate curriculum would include 'personal hygiene, domestic economy, child welfare, music, and painting'²². She also wanted the development of women's souls rather than mere body development.²³ The first conference was highly successful .It made the annual meetings a 'permanent feature'. The issues ranged from 'primary, college to adult education.'²⁴

On day two, a resolution was passed for 'moral training based' on spirituality. This was to be made 'compulsory'²⁵ for all educational institutions. The above resolution was moved by Sister Subbalaksmi Ammal of Madras. This was opposed by Hansa Mehta on the grounds that moral training should be done in homes rather than the classroom. However, the resolution was passed. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya stressed the ideal of 'motherhood, beautiful home and training in social service.'²⁶

On day three, the 'evil' impact of early marriage was studied along with the demand to raise the age of consent of marriage to 16 years. This was proposed by Jelal Shah of Maharashtra.²⁷ It was argued that education would help women to emerge out of the purdah. Primary education was made compulsory for both the sexes. Vocational education was promoted to make girls self-sufficient. The salaries of teachers were upgraded along with improvement in teacher training. More girls were encouraged to take up teaching. Special education was promoted for the physically and mentally challenged. English was considered an international language. In addition, a resolution was passed for alternative courses for girls who did not wish for college

²¹ Chaudhuri, *The Indian*, p.150.

²² Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p.23.

²³ Chaudhuri, *The Indian*, p.151.

²⁴ Sharma, *Nationalism, Social Reform*, p.115.

²⁵ Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p.23.

²⁶ Ibid. p.24.

²⁷ Ibid.

education.²⁸ Poona was chosen as the location for the first conference because it was educationally and culturally rich. Moreover, people here were interested in female education. In addition, Poona was liberated because the women did not observe the purdah in this region.²⁹

The second session of the AIWC on 'Educational Reform' was organised from 7 to 10 February 1928 this was held in Delhi. It was presided over by the Begum of Bhopal. Here, the Begum of Bhopal traced the reasons for poor female education³⁰. One major educational achievement of the AIWC was the All India Fund for Women's Education which was initiated on 11 Feb. 1928.³¹ Furthermore between 1928 and 1931 admissions to schools were no longer based on one's background. Muslim girls were encouraged to move out of the purdah.³² This conference centred around the 'Sarda Bill' for restraining early marriage.³³

Subsequently, the third session of the AIWC on 'Educational Reform' took place from 3rd to 7 Jan. 1929. It was presided over by Rani Saheb of Mandi. She argued that one could not be merely content with the 'mid-Victorian ideal' of household work for women and all other work for men. There was a growing discontentment with the role assigned to women and the related women's movement. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya wanted the broadening of the women's activities and supported a women's movement in India. The resolution in discussion was withdrawn in favour of an amendment with two parts namely 'educational and social reform.'³⁴ The Conference was held in Patna. The conference included social reform in addition to educational reform. The Social section included the Sarda Bill and the Age of Consent Bill.³⁵

The fourth Conference was held in 1930 at Bombay under Sarojini Naidu. The Conference attended to women labour. It also looked at the 'educational curriculum for

²⁸ Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p.24-25.

²⁹ Sharma, *Nationalism, Social Reform*, p.116.

³⁰ Chaudhuri, *The Indian*, p.152.

³¹ Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p.33.

³² Ibid.

³³ Sharma, *Nationalism, Social Reform*, p.116-117.

³⁴ Chaudhuri, *The Indian*, p.153.

³⁵ Sharma, *Nationalism, Social Reform*, p.116-117.

girls'. A committee was formed for this purpose. This committee gathered at Madhya Pradesh and prepared a report. Moreover, there was 'an agitation' for the inheritance of laws for women. The AIWC was registered on July 18th 1930. This the year when the organisation became a 'separate association.'³⁶

The fifth conference was organised in Lahore in 1931 under the president Muthulakshmi Reddi. The Conference lasted for five days. Also, 1930-1 several girls' schools were opened. Hostels were built. Adult education was spread. In addition funds were given to depressed groups to motivate them to study.³⁷ Furthermore, in 1931, Muthulakshmi Reddi came in support of the missionaries in her presidential address. She pointed out that there was a high demand for education for girls. She urged women to join legislative bodies so that they could 'control' education. Moreover, around this time English education was not suggested for the elementary level of education. Some attention was given to textbooks. The spiritual basis of education was promoted. Women were asked to love and not hate.

Then, the sixth conference was held at Madras from 1931 to 1932 under the president P.K.Roy. It was for a duration of five days. In the meanwhile, a 'representative meeting' of three women's organisations was held under the president, Sarojini Naidu. A memorandum was presented with the following features. These included Equality, Adult suffrage and No reservation policy. These were presented before the first round table conference. The Bill for the women's share in the husband's property was supported. A scheme was in addition, mobilised that set up a college for Home Science.³⁸

The seventh conference was at Lucknow in 1932-33. It continued for five days under the president Lady Nilkanth. Women in the AIWC contested elections.³⁹ On 11th Nov. 1932 the Lady Irwin College was set up. It was a result of the educational fund of

³⁶ Sharma, *Nationalism, Social Reform* p.117-118.

³⁷ Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p.35.

³⁸ Sharma, *Nationalism, Social Reform*, p.118-119.

³⁹ Ibid.

1928.⁴⁰ Many members joined the Civil Disobedience Movement. But, overall, the conference distanced itself from 'party politics'.⁴¹

The Eighth Conference met at Calcutta in 1933 under the presidentship of Lady Abdul Qadir. The attempt to secure the right to vote in terms of equality failed. A second memorandum was prepared which was submitted to the Joint Parliamentary Committee in London. Women representatives of AIWC and WIA etc talked about equality with men as they went to England.⁴²

The ninth conference gathered at Karachi in 1934. It lasted for nine days under the female president Rustomji Faridoonji. The conference was graced by foreign guests. The Bihar relief fund was collected, besides the 'other central funds'. The legal rights of women were examined. Women were discouraged from working in 'mines'. Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur established contact with the 'British Women's Organisation in London'. Discontent with 'communal electorate and wifehood qualification for voting were communicated to England.⁴³

In 1935 under the presidentship of Maharani Sethu Parvati Bai of Travancore the AIWC promoted mass education particularly for females⁴⁴. The tenth conference was held in Trivandrum. Foreign guests were present at the session. The relief fund for Quetta was collected. Moreover, the state temples were opened to 'all classes' of the 'Hindus'. Separate sub committees were established for 'common language' and 'spread of literacy'. Birth control awareness was also promoted.

The eleventh conference was in 1936 in Ahmedabad. It was under Margaret Cousins. Overseas guests were welcomed. A memorandum on the status of women was submitted to the government of India and the League Of Nations at Geneva.

The twelfth conference was organised in 1937 under the presidentship of Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur in Nagpur. There were many committees formed around health, anti-child marriage, indigenous industries, harijan, legislation and franchise and legal disabilities of women. 1937 was the year in which women found position in the legislatures and in

⁴⁰ Sharma, *Nationalism, Social Reform*, 118-119.

⁴¹ Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p.27.

⁴² . Sharma, *Nationalism, Social Reform*, p.119-120.

⁴³ .Ibid. p.120.

⁴⁴ Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p.32.

addition, Vijayalakshmi Pandit became the Cabinet Minister in the united Provinces. A committee was formed to upgrade the position of women in India. Between 1927 and 1937 the conference pursued educational and social reform, apart from nationalism and 'international goodwill. It had 'national and International importance. It helped women in India and the World .In the twelfth session of the Conference, held at Nagpur in 1937, the president was Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. Sixty women were included in the legislatures of the various provinces.

The Thirteenth session of the conference was organised in Delhi under the president Rani Lakshmi Bai Rajwade. In 1938 the publication of the AIWC journal began.

The Fourteenth session of the Conference was organised in Allahabad in 1939.

The Fifteenth session was held in Bangalore in 1940 under Rameshwari Nehru. As a result of the protest done by the Conference, the Government Of India had appointed a committee to analyse the injustice done to females under the Hindu Law.

The Sixteenth session was held at Coconada in 1941 under the president Vijaylakshmi Pandit. The Conference had a two- fold agenda. One, a village reconstruction project. Two, a programme for training provincial organisers and female workers. The record of work for the year 1941, showed that the questionnaire on the Hindu Law Committee and the detailed responses of the branches were sent to the Rau Committee.

The Seventeenth session under Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya was organised in Bombay in 1944. The main aspects of the report 1942-43 were- One ,a programme of training in social service for females, Two,, 'Agitation in support of the Hindu Law Committee' and three, Relief work was to be done in connection with floods and famine in various parts of India. A programme for starting Children's Homes was begun .In addition, a fund for 'Save the Children Fund 'was initiated along with a Committee to run the Homes was started.

The Eighteenth Session was organised under Hansa Mehta in Hyderabad (Sind) in 1945. The prominent resolutions adopted included 1. A Women's Charter 2. a memorandum containing the demand of the Pan Arabic Women's Association for 'rescinding the Balfour Delegation providing a National Home for Jews in Palestine.'

In 1946, a Charter of Women's Rights was 'ratified' and a memorandum for 'central and provincial governments' was prepared. The charter was about the 'fundamental rights and duties of women'. The memorandum supported the 'national welfare and

children.’⁴⁵In 1937-1947, the AIWC continued with education with Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, member of the ‘All India Advisory Board of Education.’ Primary education was the focus around which the issues of ‘staff, nutrition, medical inspection, seasonal and night schools, buildings, playgrounds, physical instruction, hard work and oral examination’ were discussed.⁴⁶ It was observed that between 1927 and 1947 the number of females in education increased in educational institutions.⁴⁷

The Nineteenth session of the conference was held in Akola in 1946 under Lady Rama Rau. Hansa Mehta was appointed President of the UNO, Commission on the Status of Women .She later became the ‘ Indian Representative’ of ‘The Human Rights Commission of the UNO’. Vijaylakshmi Pandit became the Indian leader of the ‘ General Assembly of the UNO.’

The Twentieth session of the A.I.W.C .was held in Madras in 1947. Anasuyabai Kale was the president. During this phase the A. I. W. C. was placed by the ‘UN Economic and Social Council on its list of non- governmental organisations’ with consultative position.

It is interesting to note the Lady Irwin College was set up on 11 the November in 1932. It was the first project of the All India Women’s Conference. The association lacked a building. Thus, it rented a house on 11 Barakhamba Road, New Delhi. It started with 11 students and its ‘first founder directress’ was Hannah Sen. The 11 students mentioned above came from diverse backgrounds, from across the country. From 1932 to 1950 the College ‘offered a three year Diploma Course in Home Science And Teacher’s Training’ .The college was opened with a view to train women traditionally. The college was not funded by the government. It was run on the finances of the fund association. After, the numbers grew the college shifted to a larger building on 1 Sikandra Road in 1933. In 1938, buildings for the college were constructed. In 1948 the Central Government promised to give a grant for B. Sc Home Science affiliated to Delhi University.⁴⁸

Here’s a briefly about some of the prominent members of the AIWC. Margaret Cousins born in 1878 in Ireland and died in 1954. She made India her home. She made India her home at the call of Annie Besant. She was ready to serve half of the population in India...i.e. its women. She remained an inspiration to many women. In 1923 she was

⁴⁵ Basu and Ray, *Women’s Struggle*, p.27-28.

⁴⁶ Ibid.p.38-39.

⁴⁷ Ibid.p.39.

⁴⁸ AIWC, *Souvenir*, New Delhi 1927-1970, p.191-192

appointed the first woman Honourable Magistrate in Madras. But in 1932 she was jailed for her individual Satyagraha against 'emergency ordinances under the Indian Penal Code.' She was one of the guiding persons behind Muthulakshmi Reddi's 'Women Home Of Service.' She also introduced the Child Welfare in Madras. She was helpful in passing the Madras Children's Act.⁴⁹

A.L. Huidekoper was one of the founders of A. I. W. C. She worked closely with Margaret Cousins. She was motivated by the Director Of Public Instruction, Oates to write two letters in the *Stri Dharma* of Women's Indian Association on the subject of Women's Education. She was the former principal of the Bethune College, Calcutta. Margaret Cousins followed it up with letters to the prominent women of the country. Thus, the All India Women's Conference was born .Huidekoper was a keen educationist .She wanted lessons on citizenship, aesthetics and Domestic Science to be imparted towards educating girls. She was the chairperson of the A. I. W. C. in 1929 and its education secretary for many years .She was highly devoted, organised and loyal to the All India Women's Conference. It was remarkable how she maintained the written documents and paperwork including the minutes of the meeting. The Indore Girls' High School was established by her. She was committed to the cause of women's education.⁵⁰ Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949),she was leader in many spheres. She studied in King's College, London and Girton, Cambridge. She became the' President of the Indian National Congress 'and the president of the All India Women's Conference in 1930. She also served as the Governor of U.P. She died when in office as the Governor of U.P.⁵¹.Her career 'encompassed both the women's movement and the political movement.' She spoke against customs such as 'child marriage, seclusion and prohibition against female education.' Sarojini Naidu and other women laboured for political rights of women,social reform, 'female education' and legal rights of women ⁵².Sarojini Naidu talked about female education. She pointed out that women spoke in one voice concerning female education, although men were divided about the matter.⁵³ She also put forth that women today were oppressed because of various problems. These were 'social injustice, legal disabilities and economic dependence'. There was in

⁴⁹AIWC, *Souvenir*.p.44.

⁵⁰Ibid. p.45.

⁵¹Ibid. p.46.

⁵² Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Chronicle Books, 2005, p.18-19.

⁵³ Verinder Grover And Ranjana Arora, *Sarojini Naidu*, Delhi: Deep And Deep Publications, 1993, p.158.

addition the issues of 'ignorance and prejudice'. She observed that in a place where men were not free, 'women were doubly enslaved.'⁵⁴

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya wrote on Sarojini Naidu. According to Kamaladevi , Naidu' s personality was more impressive than her oratory skill. Naidu was a versatile person..She was the universal elder sister. She took the problem to heart to deal with the problem. She was blessed with an excellent memory. Naidu was used to a comfortable life. But she did not complain when she was imprisoned with poor health. She took pains to wish people during their birthdays, festivals and all occasions. She had the eye for personal details .She was committed to freedom and was willing to sacrifice for it. She had a good sense of humour and a sportsman's spirit.⁵⁵

Charulata Mukherjee was born on first May 1880 to Sarala Ray And the educationist P.K. Ray. She studied in the Presidency College, Calcutta. Her father was the principal of the college then. Charulata was active in setting up Mahila Samitis and girls' schools in Bengal. She was AIWC's early member and chairwoman many times. She worked for the prevention of 'immoral traffic of women and children'. She got the law enacted in 1930 in Bengal Legislature. She also represented India in Java in 1932 for the same cause. Moreover, she set up the Lady Irwin College. She also remained the President of the Calcutta unit of the AIWC until her death.⁵⁶

Muthulakshmi Reddy was born 30th July 1886. She was the 'first woman Medical Graduate 'in the country in 1912.Also, she was the 'first lady member of an Indian Legislature in 1926.In addition she was , the 'first woman to preside over a Democratic Legislature in the world' from 1926 to 1930.Morover she was the ' first alderwoman in India.' She was one of the greatest social reformers of the country. She abolished the Devadasi system in Hindu Temples. She enacted the laws for controlling the 'Immoral Traffic in Women And Children.' She also prevented 'cruelty to children' .She prohibited' child marriage 'and demanded 'equal rights for women.' She was the former president and' life member' of the AIWC since 1926. She set up the 'first Children's hospital in India 'in the year 1927 and the Avvai Home for orphan children in Madras in 1930. She resigned in 1930 from her seat in the legislative council because of Gandhi's arrest and plunged into the 'National Movement.' She was the president and

⁵⁴*Education Of Women In Modern India*, Bombay: Aundh Publishing Trust, 1946,p.i ,ii.

⁵⁵Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Sarojini Naidu, S.No.II,133, List 238,Speeches or writings by her, Private Papers,p.6.

⁵⁶ AIWC,*Souvenir*, p.57.

chairwoman of the AIWC in the year 1930. She was the president of the All Asian Conference at Lahore in 1933. She got the Padma Bhushan in 1956 and died in 1968.⁵⁷ S. Muthulakshmi Reddi addressed the sisters to get rid of lethargy in the interest of the suffering women and children and in the interests of the nation. It was blessed to give than to receive. She advised the educated sisters to look after the needy by using their 'knowledge and wealth.' She further argued that one should just not look after one's interests only but also the interests of others. One should keep the home environment clean and influence the poor to have healthy housing so that diseases like tuberculosis could be kept away. Apart from this, one should strive for better moral hygiene. She furthermore discussed the importance of reforms and said if we keep quiet about reforms like 'better sanitation', 'better health laws', 'temperance reforms' better education, factory legislation and legislation to 'suppress the immoral traffic in women and children,' the how can we protect the women in various professions and bring about equality, for instance' equal wage.'⁵⁸

S. Muthulakshmi Reddi put forth that the main duty of a woman was service. As a 'daughter, wife, mother and as a citizen,' she had duties. But most women were satisfied serving the family, few served the society and country. Take the instance of the Indian case. A large numbers of 'widows' and deserted women tried to get admission in women institutions. One reason to be happy was the Hindu Code Bill which was 'amended' by the legislature of Independent India to provide help to humanity and to free them from societal and legal problems. There was a third category of people, unmarried girls who were deprived of education and marriage because their parents could not pay for them. But there were others who believed that marriage was the sole purpose of a woman's life and therefore the woman was to get married and stay at home. This kind of advice was apt for those with a joyous home with a caring husband, stable income and wealthy parents. Most widows did not have a home or property. So much so that they were not invited into homes by close relations. Nor was shelter given to them nor basic amenities. The widows needed to depend on the world outside. Those who were young and educated could be trained in women's institutions as professionals..But the elderly widows were burdened with children. They had to be

⁵⁷AIWC, *Souvenir*, p.47.

⁵⁸S.Muthulaksmi Reddi, Papers, Untitled, VOLII Part III,S.No.155-191,Individual list 99,Private Papers,p.1129.

employed for menial jobs for a meagre amount .The menial help worked as a cook or family help .It was difficult to employ labour with children. This was where the women's institutions had given them aid. A number of widows worked as cooks or family helps in 'private families'. They put their children in Avvai Home. Once they were relieved of their children they worked in private families. Reddi asked whether the political leaders could look after the destitute women, who insisted that women marry? Furthermore, some fathers deserted their children. Also, there were Hindu laws that burdened the married women. There was no security for a woman whose husband had deserted her or whose husband had died. Their only refuge were the women's charitable homes. There were many deserted children on the roads. Who would take care of the orphans and widows? Who would nurse the suffering and restore the delinquent? Who would show kindness to the afflicted hearts? Reddi pointed out that it was the women who could help the needy. Women were considered the 'creators of race' and 'mistress of home.' They gave life to the child and educated it. They were more responsible for the 'greatness and goodness' of the child. So, the women must be knowledgeable and enlightened to be a good nurturer. The family too should be responsible for healthy housing, clean water, nutrition and hygiene.⁵⁹

The mother in the 'home' was to help in the making of good laws and governance. Women must have an actual voice in the making of the government. They were to play a prominent part in the government and be part of various departments like 'education, health, industry'. That is how women entered the public sphere and got 'civil and political rights' in the progressive nations of the globe. Women had a got an equal position in the new Constitution of the country. 'Few public workers' may have said that women should be confined to domesticity. But the women should respond by arguing that would a 'good husband happy home and economic status' be ensured to a widow, unmarried poverty stricken girls and deserted women?.Only a few educated and responsible felt for the cause of the suffering sisters. Therefore, courage was required to speak on the behalf of these suffering women. Gandhi ensured that the new Constitution gave equality and equal jobs and posts .Bhartiar said that women set up the 'new order' .Swami Vivekanada said that women's problems should be solved by women themselves. Indian women had this ability like anyone in the world .So, the right of intervention was limited to education. The words of both these gurus 'have come true'.

⁵⁹S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, Women's Role In Society, Vol. II Part III S. No. 155-191, individual list 99,Private Papers,p.1187.

Educated women felt that reforms were crucial. Reddi quoted the work of Sarojini Naidu. Sarojini Naidu asked do not the destitute cry out for help? Namely, the orphans, widows, illiterate women, villagers and children. Swadeshi began with the charkha. It meant revival of the 'small unorganized industries'. It called for the reawakening of 'music, literature and architecture.' It meant the utilization of resources in India.. It meant the 'spirit of Nationhood' where every woman was the maker of the nation.⁶⁰

Reddi said that Sarojini Naidu wanted specialization in productive work for nation development. She pleaded the producers to be filled with 'pride' and not a false sense of humility. She further asserted the need for boldness and a need to come together despite religious differences. In a spirit of love. On the banners were written the words 'we serve the world and that is why we are queens.' So, they were royalty because they served the 'least' as 'servants'. In conclusion humanity was symbolized by three Hindu Goddesses. Lakshmi who gave 'happiness and prosperity'. Saraswati who stood for 'wisdom'. Parvathi who was the 'eternal mother' who helped the 'fallen', purified the 'sinner', provided hope to the 'despairing', strength to the 'weak' and boldness to the 'coward' and gave divine vigour.⁶¹

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya wrote on Muthulakshmi Reddi. .The Women's Indian Association, 'the precursor' of the AIWC had a woman nominated to the legislative Council . Reddi was both a victorious doctor and social worker. She was admired by Kamaladevi for being 'a mother and housewife.' Though Kamaladevi was younger than Reddi, Kamaladevi learnt valuable lessons from Reddi for the women's cause. Reddi became the spokesperson for the country rather than only women. At the second conference, the British agreed for three women representatives. Muthulakshmi Reddi had been chosen along with Begum Hamid Ali and Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur. These women asked for 'adult suffrage', also 'joint electorates' and 'no reservation of seats for women'. This was supported by the British press. Muthulakshmi Reddi had come to talk of what they wanted, rather than hear from the Committee or from the British people. Reddi said that women needed equal rights to carry out their normal duties. Reddi had a brief and fruitful time as a legislator. She established the Children's hospital, 'compulsory medical examination in schools,' 'Separate Directresses of health

⁶⁰S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, Women's Role In Society, Vol. II Part III S. No. 155-191, individual list 99, Private Papers, p.1193.

⁶¹ Ibid.

for women', also child welfare units. She also introduced home science courses. In addition abolished the Devadasi system and brought about the Suppression of traffic in women and children by the 'Brothel's Act'. She was also admired for being the 'Deputy Chairman Of Legislative Council' Cum 'the First legislator'. She created a good impression of Indian women. At the first Conference she spoke about citizenship. She moreover, educated foreigners about India and removed the misconceptions. She worked on the Avvai home, the first Cancer Institute and was a humanist.⁶²

Rameshwari Nehru, born in 1886 in Lahore and died in 1966. She worked as the president of the All India Harijan Sewak Sangh from 1935. She wanted to rid society of untouchability. She was the 'founder' and president of the Delhi Women's League in 1926 (Delhi unit of AIWC). She worked for removal of child marriages, caste issues and spread of education. She travelled around the world and spoke on the Indian point of view. She took part in the 'Swadesi' and freedom movement and was imprisoned in 1942. She got the Lenin Prize in 1951 and in 1955, the Padma Bhushan for her noble services.⁶³

Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur (1889-1964) belonged to a 'royal family' in Punjab. She was the princess of the Kapurthala State. Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur was educated in England. She joined the All India Women's Conference in 1929. She became the Secretary, Chairwoman and President eventually. She was one of the pioneers behind the All India Women's Education Fund Association and worked for the Lady Irwin College. She was the Conference Campaigner for the women's vote. Her very wise role in the support of memorandum 'for equal rights and Status for Women in New constitution' of our country deeply impressed everyone within the Committee. She was successful in networking with women's organisations the world over.⁶⁴ She worked with Gandhi in the latter part of her life. She promoted Khadi in Punjab. She was the 'agent' of 'All India Village Industry Association.' She tried to improve the condition of the village in 'Jullundhar District.' She participated in the 'salt campaign' and was arrested in Bombay. She was an active participant in the Quit India Movement as well. After independence, she became 'health minister in the 'Union Cabinet.'⁶⁵ Raj Kumari Amrit

⁶² Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya, Untitled, S. No. II, 61, List 238, Speeches or Writings by her, Private papers, 15.12.1986.p.4.

⁶³ Ibid., p.53.

⁶⁴ AIWC, *Souvenir*, p.48.

⁶⁵ Sanjeev Kumar, *Women in The National Movement*, New Delhi: Regal Publications, 2016, p.71, 72.

Kaur put forth that 'education is the cornerstone of the structure of good life.'⁶⁶ She argued that that training into 'obedience' must be started early in life. She put forth that the 'best' early training of a child lay with the mother. So, motherhood was a vocation in 'itself.' She spoke against child marriage, even though she respected the institution of marriage. She pointed out that the latter was based on the 'union of souls 'unlike prostitution .She advocated for women to be perfect in home life as it was the foundation of their education. At the same time she called for 'learning by doing'⁶⁷. She emphasized the need for 'physical, mental and moral discipline'. She also supported cleanliness. She wanted co-education .particularly in the early and later stages in life. In the 'adolescent stage' co-education could be practised with moral teachers in charge⁶⁸.She wanted 'all round development' of the individual. She stressed on General education. Finally, non-violence for women was to help in the achievement of fullness.⁶⁹

Amrit Kaur further argued for 'primary, universal ,free and compulsory education.' She also advocated for adult and mass education. She in addition supported industrial and vocational training for both the sexes. She wanted co-education but accepted domestic science as a relevant subject for girls in education. She did not want too much difference in the education of boys and girls. She believed in extension of female education despite an economic crisis. According to her, the education of females was lacking and so were trained teachers. She wanted students to focus on studies and not be involved in active politics.⁷⁰She wanted the educated women to help the 'less fortunate sisters'.⁷¹

Sushama Sen was born in 1889 in the well-known family of P.N. Bose who was an Indian geologist who had founded iron ore in Mayurbhanj. He was her father, her grandfather was the Ramesh Chander Dutt, the popular historian cum writer. Sushama Sen had studied in Loretto House, Calcutta, Darjeeling, Queen's College London, and Newman College, Cambridge. In 1916 she became engaged with the Women's Movement in Bihar. She took part in Bihar for Gandhi's 'Anti Purdah, Child Reform and Khadi Movement'. She inaugurated the AIWC session in 1928 in Madras. She also

⁶⁶*Education Of Women*, p.66.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.69.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*,p.71

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 77.

⁷⁰ Amrit Kaur, *Challenge to Woman*, Allahabad: New Literature,1946,p.82.

⁷¹*Ibid.*,p.90.

organised the third session of the AIWC session in Patna in 1929. She was connected with the Lady Irwin College, She was an artist and a keen writer.⁷²

Hannah Sen was born in 1894 and died in 1957. She was born of a Jewish mother and Bengali father. She was a student of psychology and trained for the Bar. She was educated in Calcutta and London. She was one of the co-founders of the Lady Irwin College. She was an active member of the AIWC. She was also a part of the 'Indian Women's Education Fund Association,' the All India Council Of Child Welfare' and 'Central Social Welfare Board.'⁷³

Hansa Mehta was born in Surat in 1897 and died in 1995. She was educated in Baroda. She stood first among girls who appeared in the matriculation exam in 1913. She won therefore, the Chalfield prize. She also won the 'Gangubahi Bhatt Scholarship' in the inter – Arts and graduated in Philosophy from Bombay University with honours. She was elected to the Bombay Municipal Schools Committee. She participated in the first conference of the A. I. W. C. held in Poona in 1927. Here she condemned early marriages for it interfered with education. She also arranged the Bombay branch of the A. I. W. C and served as its Secretary. She was also the Vice –President of the AIWC, several times and was elected as its President in 1945-46⁷⁴. At the AIWC 1945, it was about looking at the removal of obstacles in the path of education as per Hansa Mehta.' Child Marriage, Child Labour And Purdah' were some of the concerns⁷⁵. Health And Leisure of women were considered.' Social rights like Property, marriage and family'⁷⁶ were stressed as well. According to Hansa Mehta, looking back at the A. I. W. C., the Maharani Chimnabai Gaekwad of Baroda belonged to a state that 'first enacted the laws on child marriage and compulsory primary education.' The Maharani deserved recognition because she had given up the Purdah and believed in women's upliftment. Moreover, she had penned a book about the various professions women could take up. Hansa Mehta had taken up a stand against child marriage⁷⁷ because women needed to be educated, but there was stiff 'opposition' from the South. Even Margaret Cousins was not in its favour at that phase. Harbilas Sharda passed a bill in 1928 to prevent child marriage. But after being passed the bill became unfruitful. Then, a Committee was

⁷² AIWC, *Souvenir*, p.62.

⁷³ Ibid., p.56.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.68.

⁷⁵ Hansa Mehta, *Indian Women*, Delhi: Butala, 1981, p.7.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.8.

⁷⁷ Kamala Ramji, *AIWC, Golden Jubilee And Margaret Cousins Centenary Commemoration Volume*.1977,p.96.

appointed to examine the education of females. The importance of Home Science was stressed by Hansa Mehta. Later funds were collected from the rich and the College Of Home Science was brought into being .Furthermore, a Committee to draft the Hindu Code Bill was prepared. This made the Hindu law more liberal.⁷⁸

Vijay Lakshmi Pandit was another key member of the AIWC. Born in 1900 and died in 1990.She fought for human rights .She was ‘warm hearted, an active political and social worker.’⁷⁹ She participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement in the 1930’s. She was arrested in 1932. In 1935 she was elected to the Municipal Committee in 1935 in Allahabad. Further, she was part of the Education Committee as Chairperson. She was the Vice President of ‘women’s League for peace and freedom.’⁸⁰She was concerned about health and education. She became the Cabinet Minister in Uttar Pradesh in 1937. She was part of the delegation to the UN assembly from 1946 to 1948.She later became the President of the UN Assembly in 1953.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyayya(1903 -1988), she became the founder member of AIWC in 1927and its President in 1934.⁸¹ She joined active politics in 1922.She became a part of Congress in 1922.She also contested elections for the ‘legislative assembly’ in Madras in 1926.She was a part of the Civil Disobedience of 1930.She actively participated in meetings, prepared salt and picketed ‘foreign cloth and liquor shops.’ She broke the salt law in Bombay. In addition she was planning to raid’ the salt fields’ .However, she was arrested. During her trial she asked the magistrate to leave his workplace and participate in the ‘satyagraha.’ This incident led to her subsequent imprisonment and fine.⁸²She wrote on the Women’s Movement in India. She defined it as based on gender with an economic base arranged around society. She commented on the Child Marriage Bill. It proposed to raise the age of marriage for girls to 14 years and for boys 18years. But, the bill lacked ‘public’ and ‘state support’. The lower strata of women were victims of prostitution. In Russia, this above evil of prostitution was

⁷⁸ Ramji, *AIWC, Golden Jubilee.*, p.96.

⁷⁹AIWC, *Souvenir*, p.66.

⁸⁰ Kumar, *Women In the*, p..57.

⁸¹AIWC, *Souvenir*, p.67.

⁸² Kumar, *Women in the*, p.57.

tackled by successfully employing all workers including potential prostitutes.⁸³ She was one of the founders of the A.I.W. C. She became its President in 1934. She travelled in India, braving prejudice against women.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya wrote an article on education called 'Education: new patterns and vistas.'⁸⁴ It said that there was discontentment with education. This encouraged experiments by social thinkers in formal and non-formal education. One such entity was Ivan Illich. He was a crusader against 'committed education.' He positively worked on 'adult non formal education.' Adult education should be 'analytical and dialectic'. This would ensure freedom. Ivan Illich's 'motto' was non-preaching of 'ideas and ideologies'. Kamaladevi analysed an institute in Mexico in Curnavaca. Here, the study was through arts and crafts and 'fieldtrips'. The emphasis here was on 'mastery' of speaking skills based on 'Spanish experience'. The centre was thus a 'community' of education. It consisted of 'classrooms, library craft –studios and two gardens.' Reading was less important than 'hearing and speaking'. In addition students were exposed to a wide variety of experiences. As far as India was concerned, the problem in the context of education was 'securing' employment opportunities. What was therefore needed was 'creativity and innovation.' In reality, the true goal of education has to be understood as 'personality development.' The present system of education has been pushing the young in losing interest in one's cultural heritage. We have become modernized at the cost of our cultural heritage.⁸⁵

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya also wrote on Women's status. She argued that there were two factors that stop the progress of women. Psychological factor that created a continual sense of 'subordination.' The other factor was a lack of women's movement. The professional women got divorced from the 'non-professional' housewives. They started pursuing 'sectional interests' and as a result the larger 'humanity' of women got left out. She also recognized that there was a huge rural and urban divide. Moreover, the leadership had failed As the women had 'stagnated and retreated.' She also identified

⁸³Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and others, *The Awakening Of Indian Women*, Madras: Everymans Press, 1939, p.2,5.

⁸⁴ Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Papers, List 238, ii Speeches /Writings by her, 1923-1988, S. No. 50, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, 'Education: new patterns and vistas' an article, *Indian Express*, 9 the May 1978, p.1

⁸⁵ Ibid.

problems of women like problem of wages.⁸⁶ Women according to her were becoming less and less important. She compared the present generation of women with the past generation of women and found the present generation of women complacent. These women of the present lacked a spirit of service, despite pursuing professional careers. She appreciated the work of people like Ramabai Ranade of Maharashtra among others.⁸⁷ Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya also spoke for those who were deprived of fundamental rights.⁸⁸ Further, she admired the work of Gandhi in helping women in various fields.⁸⁹ She also observed that the British period witnessed the low position given to women. But deliverance came through Gandhi.⁹⁰ She also talked about family planning. She believed people should be advised to have small families. In addition, she advocated for contraceptions rather than sterilizations.⁹¹

Renuka Ray was very closely attached to the Women's Movement in India. She studied in the Diocesan College in Calcutta and obtained her B. Sc. In Economics from the London School Of Economics. She was associated with the A.I. W. C. since 1931. She became the president from 1952 to 1954. From 1941-48, she was a member of the Central Board Of Education, Government Of India. She was part of the 'governing body of the Visva Bharati University from 1941 to 1948.' She was also the 'Chairman of the 'Family Planning and National Award Committee.' She was also 'President of the Women's Coordinating Council, West Bengal.' She took a leading part in the freedom movement. She became the member of the Central Legislative Assembly starting from 1943 onwards.⁹² According to Renuka Ray, the AIWC was a political. But soon it became absorbed in politics because of the problem of 'foreign rule'. The AIWC built the perspective of women towards 'national' concerns.

⁸⁶Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Papers, ' Women's Status: Bonds And Barriers' - an article, List 238, II Speeches / Writings by her, S. No.98,1923-88,p.1.

⁸⁷Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Papers, ' Status of women in society falling' newspaper article, List 238, II Speeches / Writings by her, S. No.98,1923-88,p.2.

⁸⁸Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Papers, ' The real issues facing women,'an article, List 238, II Speeches / Writings by her, S. No.98,1923-88,p.3.

⁸⁹Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Papers, 'President's address at the All India Women's Convention', List 238, II Speeches/Writings by her, S.No. 26,1963,p.53.

⁹⁰Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Papers, ' What Ails The Indian Women', an article, List 238, II Speeches/Writings by her, S.No.132, 1923-88,p.2.

⁹¹Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, ' Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya on Women and Family Planning', List 238, II Speeches/Writings by her, S.No. 117,,1963,p.3.

⁹²AIWC, *Souvenir*, p.72.

Renuka Ray remembered the contributions of several important women in the AIWC. Sarojini Naidu attended the 'annual sessions' except when she was jailed during the National Movement. Muthulakshmi Reddi and Charulata Mukerjee worked for the 'prevention of Immoral Traffic of women and children' in Madras And Bengal. They worked for the 'rehabilitation' of women. Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur was equated with the Conference by a foreign observer. Vijaylakshmi Pandit worked at the national and international level.' Save the Children's Homes 'was set up during her presidential tenure, with funds from the country and foreign lands .Bengal was under famine conditions during this phase. Thus, AIWC became the 'platform' to alleviate sufferings. Concerning the suffragist movement, there was a fight for the equal voting rights of women. There was an opposition against the reservation of seats under the 'limited franchise' in 1935. Quite a few women were victorious on general seats depicting the uselessness of reserved seats. Rai Harbilas Sharda passed a bill on Child marriage. The AIWC played a crucial role. The 'inheritance and marriage' laws from 1931 Onwards were the result of the agitation of AIWC. The Government set up the Rau Committee that matured into the Hindu Code. In 1943 two bills were initiated resisted by the orthodox sections. The progressive sections had to face a stiff struggle.⁹³

The Indian Woman's Charter of Rights and Duties, 'ratified by the standing committee of the AIWC at its meeting' at Calcutta in July of 1946. 'Freedom from ignorance 'helped one to progress. The AIWC demanded the following. First, Education for the country .Second the same education for both sexes as their duties were the same. Third integral education. Fourth, basic education, 'free and compulsory education seven to fourteen years. Fifth, Co-education.⁹⁴ Sixth, the 'evils' of 'child marriage, child labour, purdah and untouchability' had to be overcome. Seventh, economic incentives for female education to be rendered. Eighth, rewards for intelligent girl students. Ninth, physical education, secondary education and vocational training to be administered. Tenth, the accessibility of regional universities and secondary schools was another concern. Eleventh, the university curricula was to include 'art, music and home science'. Twelfth, hostels were to be provided for teachers and students. Thirteenth, special incentives were to be given to females in the field of education. Fourteenth, different schools were to be housed in 'own' building. Fifteenth, adult women's education was to be considered. Sixteenth, health education was yet another concern.

⁹³ AIWC, *Souvenir*, p.176.

⁹⁴ Ramji, *AIWC, Golden Jubilee* , p.99.

Seventeenth,' library and reading rooms' were important concerns for villages. Lastly. 'Cultural education' was key issue for the Government.

The AIWC was elitist. It represented the upper strata. ⁹⁵According to Nehru these organisations were superficial in their understanding of women's issues⁹⁶. Despite, its criticism, the AIWC represented' all castes and creeds' and talked about national and international concerns.⁹⁷

AIWC's Relationship with Gandhi And the Congress

It became crucial to analyse AIWC's relationship with Congress and Gandhi. Many of the AIWC members were actively part of the Gandhian politics. They sometimes networked with the Congress. The leaders of the AIWC namely Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Vijayalakshmi Pandit and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur were also leaders of the Congress. Besides, they took up several constructive programmes of the Gandhi. Therefore, the conference was described as an 'unofficial Congress auxillary.'⁹⁸

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay wrote on Gandhi. According to her political history of our country began with Gandhi. She put forth that Gandhi was a man of action. She was inspired by the Champaran struggle as one stood up against the tyranny of the planters. Gandhi according to Kamaladevi was focussed on freedom .Gandhi stood for the women's right position in society. In 1919 Gandhi called for the Rowlatt Satyagraha in reaction to the Rowlatt Act. This according to her was a time of fast and prayer and 'preparedness'. Even self-purification was important .One Day Sarojini Naidu offered to take Kamadevi to a meeting by Gandhi. The meeting was based on 'Swadeshi' and 'Communal unity' along with nonviolence and truth.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Neera Desai, *In a Decade Of Women's Movement in India, Delhi, Bombay: Himalaya*

PublishingHouse.,1988,p.5

⁹⁶ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Colonial* ,p.24.

⁹⁷ . Sharma, *Nationalism , Social Reform* , p.122.

⁹⁸ Nehru Memorial Museum And Library Manuscripts, *An Introduction to NMML* ,New Delhi, NMML,2003,p.101.

⁹⁹Kamaladevi Charttopadhyaya,, 'Untitled',S. No. II, 111, List 238, Speeches or Writings by her ,Private Papers.p.5.

Kamaladevi later discussed the sale of Gandhi's books 'Hind Swaraj And Sarvodaya'. These were considered seditious. The people bought these books for any value. There was a mini civil disobedience. The police took to violence in Delhi and Punjab. The 'Jallianwalla Bagh massacre' made things worse. There was a 'revolution' of a 'very different kind.' Kamaladevi doubted the non-violence. Gandhi asked her to not join the movement if she did not agree with non-violence. The martial law had people feel terrified. Even despite its removal in Punjab. Gandhi was willing to help Montague Chelmsford reforms. Finally he made the Congress agree to a call for non-cooperation. At this call, the lawyers gave up their practice, students too were ready to join the movement. Parents were troubled over their children leaving their studies in the middle. Kamaladevi also left her own school. Her family offered their home to start a school for females. Kamaladevi learnt spinning and weaving and organized 'cultural shows' to raise money. When the movement was launched in Gujarat the violence led to the end of the movement. Moreover Gandhi was arrested for writing a literary piece called 'Shaking The Manes'.¹⁰⁰

Moving to the Civil Disobedience Movement of the 1930's, Kamaladevi wrote in the newspaper Sunday Mail that 'Without Gandhi any march is meaningless'. Women were found picketing because of their 'patience, discipline and perseverance'. Kamaladevi broke the Salt law. Sarojini Naidu too was arrested for breaking the Salt Act.¹⁰¹

In fact Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya was arrested four times during the freedom struggle. According to her, Gandhi considered the emancipation of women. It was the woman who taught the man the lesson of peace in a warring world. Also, woman was superior to man by virtue of her moral strength. In 1921 Gandhi declared the freedom of women. Gandhi noted that the birth of a baby boy led to celebration unlike the birth of a baby girl. According to Gandhi the scripture was not the word of God. Hence, we were required to re-look them in the light of moral standards. He criticised child marriage as it was based on moral and physical immaturity. It was really contrary to swaraj. There was thus a need for complete 'awakening'. Women asked Gandhi to help with their cause. He had championed the cause of women because of non-violence and idealistic society. He believed women were the makers of their destiny. Gandhi wanted women to

¹⁰⁰Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, 'Untitled', S. No. II, 111, List 238, Speeches or Writings by her, Private Papers, p. 10.

¹⁰¹Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, 'Without Gandhi any march is meaningless' Sunday Mail, S. No. II, 63, List 238, Speeches or writings by Her, Published Papers, p. 1.

fight for Swaraj and thus women participated in great numbers. He also defended women when women ignored their domestic duties. He argued that domesticity was not a full time job. He asked educated women to carry on political education among people, to break caste system, to become aware of own potential, to take decisions independently, to cleanse the environment and to win honour, He encouraged women to take up 'civil rebellion 'against 'all restraints'.¹⁰²

Even Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur noted Gandhi's moral and spiritual contribution. She argued that 'no one has done more to restore woman to her rightful position 'than Gandhi. He condemned man for his injustices to women. He also looked upon women as companions of men, blessed with same mental capacities. He in addition pleaded for the welfare of child widows, objected to child marriage and spoke against the exploitation of women within the marriage. Moreover, the woman was the symbol of non- violence. She could teach the lesson of peace to all.¹⁰³ Furthermore, Gandhi channelled the vigour of the women's movement into the nationalist movement. He saw women as the 'oppressed group.' He as mentioned earlier questioned child marriage, dowry and purdah and supported female education.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, 'Gandhiji And Women's Emancipation'S. No. II, 108, List 238, Speeches or writings by Her, Published Papers.p.4.

¹⁰³ Kaur, *Challenge to Woman*, ,p.132.

¹⁰⁴ Ila Patel, ' The Contemporary Women's Movement And Women's Education in India' ,*The International Review of Education, Volume 44,Number 2/3 Social Movements And Education, Springer,1998,p.159.*

Chapter Three

S. Muthulakshmi Reddi

Introduction

The WIA and S. Muthulakshmi Reddi were linked very closely to each other. Speaking very briefly of S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, she was a medical doctor. She was interested in 'social reform. Reddi was associated with the 'Suppression Of Immoral Traffic, Abolition of Devadasi System And Female Education.' Reddi introduced a resolution in the legislature on November 4, 1927. She appealed for its passage on the grounds that it would save children from immorality, death and disease. It would help girls in becoming 'legal wives.' According to Reddi, the Devadasis were the 'victims of tradition, customs or a mistaken religious fervour'. They were not part of the brothels. They were not intentionally immoral.¹ Reddi wanted the Devadasi women to be accepted into society as 'teachers, nurses and doctors' under the aegis of the Indian Ladies Samaja of 1923 to 1924.

² Stri Dharma, the journal of WIA discussed how several women had escaped Madras 'with the enforcement of the Act.' It was further reported that prostitution continued under the guise of nursing. Some continued prostitution 'saying' that they were 'mistresses' of certain people. Others carried on prostitution declaring they were 'family women.'³

Reddi was thoroughly, concerned about 'concept of social purity' and 'moral hygiene'. She moved bills to 'suppress brothels' and resisted 'birth control methods.'⁴ She resisted prostitution on the grounds that it spread disease and promoted 'evil ways'.⁵ A bill to the effect was passed on 31 January, 1930. Subsequently, a deputation was sent to the then Home Minister Osman Bahadur that included Reddi and Margaret Cousins. It pleaded for the immediate enforcement of the law because prostitution endangered 'public health and good 'virtue.' The Home Minister in response 'introduced an amendment to the Bill in 1931', restricting it to the city of Madras.⁶ Reddi believed too that the Devadasis were prostitutes too. She went to the extent of establishing rescue

¹ Aparna Basu, *The Pathfinder*, AIWC publication, n.d. p.64p.65.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid .p.64

⁴ Ibid.p.11

⁵ Ibid. p.61.

⁶ Ibid. p.64.

homes for the prostitutes, Devadasis and other 'destitute women.'⁷ Then a bill was passed in 1938 in the Madras Legislature amending the Suppression Of Immoral Traffic Act of 1930.⁸

Abolition Of The Devadasi System

S. Anandhi, had observed that in the 1930's, the Madras legislative council witnessed the passing of the bill on the devadasi system. This led to a debate in which the Devadasi became either the 'protectors of culture or unchaste women'. In the Tamil speaking regions of India, the devadasis were called 'slaves of God.' In the 'later years' they came to be called 'prostitutes' in the daily vocabulary.⁹

Mytheli Sreenivas defined Devadasi as one married to a Hindu God in a ceremony similar to 'an upper caste Hindu wedding.' The devadasi gave off her 'ritual and artistic' services at the temple. In lieu of their service the devadasi received an income from the temple.' The devadasis were not supposed to marry mortal men as they were 'wives of the deity'. They however, maintained sexual relations with 'upper caste male patrons.'¹⁰ The agitation to end the devadasi system was based on the perspective that the upper castes males were exploiting the devadasis. The activists namely the 'feminists and nationalists' critiqued the devadasis on the grounds that they were the 'anti- thesis of respectable Indian wifehood' .Even the Indian Women's Movement favoured the 'monogamous marriage over alternative conjugalities.' The devadasis were classified as 'marriageable women.'¹¹ It is interesting how the colonial authorities viewed the devadasi system. Colonial civil law on one hand, saw devadasis as a special category of women. Colonial criminal law on the other hand, perceived them as 'prostitutes'. Prostitutes were those engaged in' sexual activity outside marriage. 'So, the devadasis were 'non-marrying women who were sexually active' and were prostitutes .In time, the colonial authorities viewed the 'adoption of girls' as 'trafficking in minors' for' prostitution '. This was 'in violation of the Indian Penal Code'. Thus, the devadasi adoptions began to be prosecuted since 1870's.Beyond 'legal categories', the devadasis were judged based on 'nationalist politics of conjugality that centred on heterosexual, monogamous marriage.' By, 1920's we witness the rise of WIA and

⁷ Basu, *The Pathfinder*,p.11.

⁸ Ibid.,p.67.

⁹ S. Anandhi, Representing Devadasis, *Economic And Political Weekly*, Vol.26, No. 11/12 Annual Number March 1991, p.739.

¹⁰ Mytheli Sreenivas 'Creating Conjugal Subjects'p.63.

¹¹ Ibid.p.65.

AIWC and the Indian Women's Movement and we hear women's voices on conjugality. One such voice belonged to Muthulakshmi Reddi.

S. Muthulakshmi Reddi also examined the Devadasi problem in her book. It was an 'injustice', a 'great wrong', a 'violation of human rights', a 'practice highly revolting' to moral standards. She condemned innocent females being trained in the name of religion to lead a life of 'immorality', 'promiscuity' and 'disease'. The council was 'moved' by her speech and all parties 'supported' the motion keenly. The original motion read that the council recommended the Government to legislate and put an end to the 'practice of dedicating young' females 'to Hindu Temples which resulted in an 'immoral' lifestyle.¹²

The Devadasis were unmarried and devoted to serve the Gods the Devadasi system was moral at its inception but became corrupt as time went by. The devadasis were prey to venereal diseases and leprosy etc. So, it was felt that the practice of buying girls and dedicating them to the temples must be abolished.¹³ A newspaper article carried the statement by S. Muthulakshmi Reddi. She pointed out that the dancing girls were looked down upon by the ancient texts. In 1892, the Indian Penal Code of 372 -373 penalized the dedication of girls under the age of eighteen. Thus, Muthulakshmi Reddi brought about the Hindu Religious Endowments Acts in 1927 for the enfranchisement of the inams in favour of the Devadasi. Thus doing away with their services.¹⁴ There was an urgent need to protect the minor girls of the community. These girls were subjected with the threat of slavery. There was a sincere wish to redeem the lives of these girls from the grip of those who wanted to live off their immoral lives. As a result, the members of the different associations came together to remove this vice from Tamil Nadu and Andhra. If there was any opposition to the above, it needed to be ignored.¹⁵ Regarding the opposition, it had been argued that just as the toddy tappers etc, were not consulted for the ban of liquor, similarly the brothel keepers too could not be consulted for the abolition of the vice. Even Gandhi said that the Devadasi reform had been long overdue and this reform would save innocent females from prostitution.¹⁶

¹² S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, *My Experience As A Legislator*, Triplicane, Madras, Current Thought Press, 1930, p.56.

¹³ S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'The Devadasis', Subject II, S. No.11, Part III, Individual list 99, p.492.

¹⁴ S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Dedication of Girls As Devadasis- Dr Muthulakshmi Reddi's Statement' Indian Express, Subject II, S. No.12, Individual list 99, 10th December 1947, p.34.

¹⁵ S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Dedication of Minor Girls to Temples', Subject II, S.No. 11, Part III, Vol.I, Individual list 99, p.251.

¹⁶ S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Devadasis and Prohibition' Subject II, S. No.12, Individual list 99, p.50.

Annie Besant also spoke of the 'dancing class woman' related to the temples .She traced the origin of the Devadasi women. Historically speaking, they were "pure virgin devotees' joined to the old Hindu temples. They would preach the religion and were considered respectable. They would devote their time serving Gods as the 'dasi'. They were found dressed in sanyasi clothing and would sing holy hymns. ¹⁷

There were records to show that the Dasi women were 'pure virgins' involved in 'religious study , meditation and devotional service 'similar to 'Roman Catholic nuns.' The Devadasis did not belong to the class of 'brothel prostitutes' neither were they 'destitute' women. The devadasis had to abide by Caste rules and live with their relations. A devadasi having daughters may either marry her daughters or dedicate one of her daughters to the temple idol. The married girls would live chaste lives. But the one dedicated to Gods could not marry but have a partner nonetheless. She could live as she chose. Also, with the spread of education, the devadasis were married off. In addition, we notice many social reform associations springing up, of males and females. Some sections had an educative campaign against the 'backward sections.' Many Devadasi male and female associations had been supporting the reform of Reddi and advocating for the 'protection of minor girls' .Many devadasis had found employment as 'nurses, teachers and handicraft tutors' and their behaviour had been found extraordinary. No rescue home was needed for their 'reclamation'. As they were but victims of faulty tradition and 'mistaken religious fervour'. They were having no tendency in them for evil habits. Once they would realize their vice they would forsake their old way of life for 'honourable' living.¹⁸

Need To End The Devadasi System

G.D. Tapase spoke on the 'Problem of Devadasis' at All India Radio. He put forth that the amendment by the Bombay Government on the Bombay Devadasi Protection Act of 1934 was intended to put an end to the Devadasi system. Further, the system itself went back to the ninth and tenth century. A. D. Initially, the Devadasis were pure. Gradually, the practice degraded and we notice immorality creeping in. He gave the example of the Muralis who after consecration took to prostitution wherever they wished. Therefore,

¹⁷ S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Traffic in Women and Children.,' S.No. 155-191, Vol.ii Part iii, Individual list 99, Private Papers, p.1045.

¹⁸ Ibid. p.1047.

prostitution became a way of life among certain groups. It was seen in large numbers among the Harijan community. Strangely, the practice of untouchability, did not affect the Devadasi System. Finally, an attempt was made to stop the Devadasi system through the Bombay Devadasis Protection Act of 1934. But this remained a dead letter. Tapase further argued that the system destroyed the body and the soul. There was a need to suppress this vice and restore womanhood to purity. Moreover, rescue homes were required for the rehabilitation of these women.¹⁹

Unlike the West, prostitution in India was practiced by children rather than adults. The Devadasi system was far worse than the Sati. Because the Sati meant 'physical torture' and eventual death. But the Devadasi system meant 'physical and moral' suffering. As prostitution was not joyous. Here, the choice was not made by the girl. Also, she got burdened with children. It was found that these pregnant and nursing women chose an immoral life for want of money. As a result, they became infested with venereal diseases. Moreover, everything was done in the name of religion. There was a notion that the gods would be displeased if the practice of the Devadasi system was discontinued. This was due to 'ignorance and poverty'. So, an educative propaganda was necessary to expose this evil. Furthermore, the above practice endangered public health and the nation.²⁰

The Devadasi bill was 'child saving measure'. But the problems were created by the vested interests.²¹

History Of Devadasi Reform

In the colonial period, we notice that the Devadasis were looked down upon because the devadasi had sexual relationships with more than one man. Later in the colonial and post-colonial period, the devadasis created a space for themselves owing to their art, separated from all others. Efforts at the reform of the Devadasi System started in the 1830's. The efforts were led by Veeresalingam. Also, this movement was about 'social purity'. The central figure here was Raghupati Venkataratnam. The second phase of the Devadasi abolition movement was based on the efforts of Muthulakshmi Reddi. She called the Devadasi to abandon lives of vice and to fulfil their roles as 'loyal wives,

¹⁹S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Problem of Devadasis' By G. D. Tapase, Govt. Of India, All India Radio, Bombay, II Subject Files, S. No. 11 Part III Vol. I, Individual List 99, 18.5.50, p.5.

²⁰S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Social Evil Or Prostitution Tolerated As A Religious Institution' Speeches or Writings By Her III, Part II, Vol. II, Individual list 99, p.3.

²¹S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'What is Needed Now', Speeches or Writings by Her III, Part II, Vol. II, Individual list 99, p.55

loving mothers and useful citizens' She believed in the moral superiority of the British.²²

Reddi brought to light that few of Devadasis had pleaded to withhold the approval of the Devadasi Bill i.e. the 'amendment to Section forty four of the Hindu Religious Endowment Act'.²³ But the public was generally in favour of the bill in view of the letters written to her. The government of India since 1906-1907 had tried to suppress this vice while signing the international convention on 'Suppression of Immoral traffic in Women And Children.' They had asked for reports from local governments in this regard. In 1912 three Members of the Old Imperial Legislative Council introduced three different bills to suppress the evil. Furthermore, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya also supported 'this reform' in 1912. There was a general agreement but the bill was revoked on the issue of protection of minor girls. The war stopped the bill until H.S. Gour took up the issue in 1922. Reddi appreciated the work done by Josephine Butler to suppress this 'vice'. While the Devadasi System had become a 'caste dharma' in India. As in India, every caste held on to their profession. Hari Singh Gour in 1922 made a 'similar resolution' to end the Devadasi System because children had been forced into this 'lifelong vice'. Gour's efforts had failed because the local government refused to cooperate. Also, the Indian Penal Code's provision 372 and 373 failed to curb the Devadasi practice. This was because the practice was protected by the temple community within the temple. So, there was the need to bring to effect the Hindu Religious Endowments Act. The critics of the bill like S. R. Doss were asked to visit the south for the 'cause of humanity' and to protect children, as Gandhi was already doing. Reddi hoped in the wisdom of the government, that they would fulfil the wishes of the people in bringing about reform. This would save the young from a 'life of shame, vice, disease and death.' Finally, 'an extract from the Government order of Mysore' said that it was only justified to exclude the Devadasis from temple service as they had become immoral.²⁴ Reddi had said that the dedication of girls was worse than Sati and Infanticide. The Devadasi system was 'a blot on Hinduism' as put forth by Lajpat Rai

²² Kalpana Kannabiran, 'Judiciary, Social Reform and Debate on 'Religious Prostitution in Colonial India,' *Economic And Political Weekly*, Vol. 30, No. 43, , October 28, 1995p.WS65.

²³ S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Letter from Muthulakshmi Reddi', Subject II, S. No.11, Part III, Vol. I, Individual List99, p.107.

²⁴ S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'My Bill And Resolution For The Abolition Of The Devadasi Institution in the temples' ,Subject II, S. No. 11,Part III, Vol. I, Individual list99, ,p.102.

and Gandhi. Sarojini Naidu too said it was ‘an outrage on Humanity’ that children were being trained to immoral life.²⁵

The Maharani of Travancore abolished the Devadasi system in the temples in her state. Also, the Social Reformer informed that the State of Cochin had abolished the Devadasi system on October 25 1930. Reddi appreciated the British rule for aiding the abolition of the Devadasi system in Mysore in 1909 and later in Travancore and Cochin. But she was greatly worried for the protection of minor girls in the twentieth century. She said that the civilized world had advanced legislation for children unlike India.²⁶

The Devadasi Bill

There was a legislation to abolish the devadasi system and ‘prevent the dedication of girls.’

The devadasis from the beginning were ‘enjoying the Inam lands’ in lieu of their service to the temples.’ The Indian Penal Code sections 372 and 373’ punished the ‘dedication of minor girls to the temple.’ But, the temples did not permit its operation in most cases. Thus, there was a need to abolish the devadasi system. The Mysore State had abolished the system in 1909. The devadasi bill was passed into law in February of 1929. The government had given orders to ‘enfranchise ‘the devadasi inams and to set free the devadasi from compulsory service.’²⁷

By the late 1920’s the activists started attacking the ‘property ownership and control ‘of the ‘devadasi system.’ The Madras Hindu Religious Endowments (Amendment) Act of 1929 was brought into force. According to which the devadasis connection with the ‘inam grants’ changed. Hereafter, the devadasis were allowed to enter into’ legal’ marriage alliances with the ‘mortal men.’ The result of the changes as per Pamela Rice was ‘fragmentation of South Indian models of political and moral order.’ Also,’ loss of patronage and polarization of land and wealth’.²⁸

The Hindu Religious Endowment Act did not apply to all temples. For instance, the Madras temples and temples with a tiny income of Rs. 300. There was a class a

²⁵S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, ‘ A true record of legislative efforts to abolish Devadasi System in the Hindu Temples upto 1930’, Subject II, S. No.11, Part III, Vol. I, Individual List 99, p.124.

²⁶Ibid. p. 119.

²⁷ Reddi, *My Experience*, p.109.

²⁸ Ibid. p.66.

devadasis that dedicated their girls for 'vice'. Thus, a supplementary bill was introduced.²⁹

Coming to the actual bill, to amend the 'Madras Hindu Religious Endowment Act of 1926, the preamble talked about abolishing the practice of dedicating 'young girls as Devadasis in the Hindu temples' in the above Presidency. 'The statement of objects and reasons' stated that the initial motive of dedication of young girls to temples was 'noble'. Later it became 'objectionable'. As the girls dedicated to the temples became immoral. Thus, this practice needed to be ended in the interest of the people and the country.³⁰

Further, Reddi was grateful to the people of India for supporting the reform. As the Devadasi system had given a bad name to the name of 'Hindu'. The practice was peculiar to India, as it was associated with religion. A religion that preached the 'highest ideals' but permitted children to be 'trained for an immoral life'. She quoted from the speech of Annie Besant. Besant pointed out that the Devadasis were originally virgins dedicated to the worship of Gods. Over a period of time, the temple priests fell. They ensured the fall of these young girls too. Thus, womanhood became shamed and the spiritual became sinful.³¹

The Hindu Religious Endowment Amendment Act Five of 1929 was going to be 'foiled' by Inam Commissioner, The Inam Commissioner said that those lands under females would be enfranchised .It remained 'an everlasting tradition' for the childless males to adopt children and dedicate them to prostitution under the guise of religion. Therefore, enfranchisement of land should be both for males and females.³² The Devadasis were seen as public prostitutes. Their function could be performed by pious old men , participating in music ceremonies .The art would not disappear because 'learned Societies' and Indian Universities were promoting it.³³

In 1930, Muthulakshmi Reddi of the Women's Indian Association introduced 'the prevention of the dedication of women to Hindu temples' in the Presidency of Madras .This came up in the Madras legislative council. This bill was called the abolition of the

²⁹ Reddi, *My Experience* .p.114.

³⁰S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, ' Bill to Amend the Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Act, 1926',Subject II, S. No. 11,Part III, Vol..I , Individual list99, 1926.p.93.

³¹S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, ' My Bill And Resolution For The Abolition Of The Devadasi Institution in the temples',Subject II, S. No. 11,Part III, Vol. I, Individual list99, .p.98.

³²S. Muthulakshmi Reddi 'The humble representation of the Devadasi and Kalavantulu Samskaranam Association of Tenali Taluk Guntur District', Subject II, S. No.11, Part II, Individual List 99, p.222.

³³S. Muthulakshmi Reddi' Untitled Letter' Subject II, S. No.11, Part II, Individual List 99, p.390.

Devadasi System. This bill made the 'potukattu ceremony' illegal. It also allowed the devadasi the right to 'contract marriage.' Further, it gave 'five year imprisonment 'to those helping or 'abetting' the devadasi system. The bill had to 'wait till 1947 with certain changes 'introduced in 1937' to become an act.³⁴

The Debate Concerning The Devadasi Reform

There had been a feminist debate about calling the devadasi a prostitute. The devadasi began to be called a prostitute in the colonial times.³⁵ The 'liberal rationalist discourse' saw the devadasi as a 'blot on the modernising nation'. They viewed the devadasi custom as being primitive. This custom victimized and stigmatized the lower castes. The 'abolitionist discourse' condemned the practice as 'filthy and unhygienic'. It saw the dedicated men and women as 'depraved' rather than poor. In contrast, the 'dalit discourse' linked the devadasi practice to the 'denial of critical knowledge respectable labour to dalits and lower castes.' The 'rural development discourse' pointed out that the modern nation excluded the devadasis bound by tradition and 'economic pressure' by exposing them to 'poverty' and 'abuse.'³⁶

Muthulakshmi Reddi who supported the Congress and 'Gandhian constructive programmes' wrote a letter to Gandhi. The letter explained how she considered rescuing girls from an immoral life better than even the attainment of 'Swaraj.' It was felt that the 'self-image of Hindu Womanhood 'had to be upheld by the abolition of the Devadasi system. Reddi wanted to domesticate the devadasi by marrying her off. She also wished to help the men who wanted to marry the devadasi by giving them jobs. In the discourse of the progressives, the devadasi were objects of reform. Muthulakshmi Reddi did not want to dialogue with the Devadasi associations but wanted the Suppression of their voice.³⁷

The Third voice was of the 'associations of those castes from which the devadasis' were taken. While they supported the abolition of the Devadasi System but they 'denounced' that the devadasis were dishonourable. It may be summed up, that progressives were looking at Hindu womanhood, the conservatives were speaking of defending indigenous

³⁴ S. Anandhi, Representing Devadasis, p.740.

³⁵ Anagha Tambe, 'Devadasi and or Prostitute?' in *Thinking Gender, Doing Gender* By Uma Chakravarti, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2016, p.165.

³⁶ Tambe, 'Devadasi', p.169..

³⁷ Anandhi, 'Representing Devadasis', p. 741.

culture and the caste associations were talking of caste honour. Thus, the Devadasis were not seen as subjects, having their consciousness.³⁸

Opposition To the Devadasi Reform

The bill generated a debate in Madras Presidency in the 1930's. The progressive nationalists like Muthulakshmi Reddi wanted the bill to be passed for the 'abolition of the devadasi system.' The conservative sections opposed the bill. This group included S. Satyamurthy and others. In 1931, the President of the Tamil Nadu Congress, C. Rajagopalachari wrote to Muthulakshmi Reddi saying that he was too pressed with other issues and did not have the time for the Devadasi question. Later, when C. Rajagopalachari became the Chief Minister of the Madras Presidency, he was equally hesitant to pass the bill. In the meanwhile, the conservatives also organised a devadasi conference in Tanjavur district to oppose the bill

.Let us, first analyse the arguments given by conservative sections in favour of the Devadasi system. As far back as 1927, Reddi passed a resolution to end the devadasi system in Madras legislature. In response, Satyamurthy arranged a meeting of the Devadasis in favour of the Devadasi system .Moreover, he wanted the Devadasi families to dedicate atleast one female to the Hindu temples. In addition, he wanted to protect the devadasi system because it was part of the 'indigenous Hindu/ national culture.' He furthermore warned that, if the Devadasi system was abolished then the non-Brahmins would demand the ending of the priestly class. Also, Satyamurthy himself was an 'orthodox Brahmin'.³⁹

The reformers believed that marriage should replace temple dedication. But, the reformers 'differed on the extent to which dedicated women could become marriageable subjects. 'For Reddi devadasis were 'potential wives' as long as they did not question the reform movement. There were several caste associations that came up. Here, the devadasis could be members, if they married. Else, they would be called prostitutes. But, there was the case of the devadasi B. Varalakshamma who challenged Reddi. She focussed on the devadasis specialized 'religious and artistic knowledge' and took attention away from their 'sexual relationships'. Varalakshamma wanted rescue homes for the devadasis. She also intended to categorize these women into 'Suppressed and Depressed Classes' so that they could find favourable jobs in the market, for

³⁸ Anandhi, 'Representing Devadasis,' p. 741.

³⁹ Ibid. p.740.

instance ‘appointment as nurses in hospitals and singing mistresses’ in schools. ‘Devadasis opposed marriage as the sole option for dedicated women.’ The devadasis also demanded that the devadasis who married be ‘given full legal rights’.⁴⁰

The WIA called for teaching of religion for the devadasis. This helped link the study of religious texts to their ‘work’. The WIA, ‘Nationalists And Madras Presidency Devadasis’ ‘took up these claims’ of connecting History with the enhanced ‘status of Women in it’. The Devadasis refused to marry in many cases despite the high position given to ‘monogamous’, ‘heterosexual’ marriages. These women according to Reddi chose a life of prostitution or concubinage.⁴¹

The local government told the above resolution to the Central Government. Reddi mentioned the opposition she had encountered. She reported that some people had set up ‘bogus’ organisations and wrote petitions dissuading the bill from becoming law. Reddi further, explained her efforts at supporting her bill by writing to the press, publishing literature like pamphlets and organising huge women’s meetings. She had reports in ‘favour of the bill before the council.’ Individuals attacked the opposition to the bill through ‘the press, vernacular and the English press, took her side. There was an awakening among people especially the ‘victims of this evil’ to ‘uproot his evil.’⁴²

Support Of The Devadasi Reform

The devadasi legislation was supported by the press and the people at large. Even the male and female organizations had given their consent to the bill. In addition the ‘district municipalities, local boards and mass gatherings of men and women’ had supported the cause. It was stated that the ‘unrecognised leaders of the Hindu Community’ condemned the above practice. But the practice continued due to ‘association with the temples.’

It may be remembered that the ‘late leader of the non- Brahmin party Raja of Panagal’ took a step called the ‘Hindu Religious Endowment Act’. This was to manage temples for the people’s welfare.⁴³

Stating the opinion of J. V. Naidu, it was found that the Devadasi System was a disgrace to the Hindu Society. It was found that a girl ‘living with a Devadasi ‘could not be a

⁴⁰ Mytheli Sreenivas’ *Creating Conjugal Subjects*, p.80.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.88.

⁴² Reddi, *My Experience*, p.58.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p.111.

virgin till age eighteen. Section 372 could punish a girl under age eighteen, dedicated to the temple, as it would mean her disposal. But this failed because dedication to the temple would not mean disposal. Moreover, isolated or habitual intercourse may not comprise prostitution. Also, prostitution must also mean unlawful. Hence the law was not certain. He in addition, thanked Muthulakshmi Reddi for her efforts.⁴⁴

The Sengunthar Mahajan Sangam discussed the Devadasi Reform. They supported the Devadasi reform by Reddi. They asked the government to start legislation at the earliest. The meeting protested against spurious agitation to stop the bill. The Devadasis had long been ill-treated so it was important that they support the reform. The meeting further commented that dedication of girls to temples was equal to prostitution.⁴⁵

At a conference of British Commonwealth League which aimed at gender equality. Dorothy Jinarajadasa spoke on the 'evils' of Devadasi system and prostitution in the country. It was said that majority of the people supported the bill, though the Government opposed the legislation. Moreover, Muthulakshmi Reddi was congratulated for her efforts. The Devadasi Bill 'to amend' the Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Act, 1926 was 'passed by the Madras Legislative Council.'⁴⁶ The President introduced Guntur Negabhusham who talked about the need of the Devadasis giving up prostitution marrying and not serving at the temple .Further, the government was asked to get rid of the Devadasi system because it was immoral.⁴⁷ S. Anjaneyulu was called upon to speak at the conference. He wanted the Devadasis to change their profession. The government was asked to enfranchise the inams and grant them on patta. Also, the ladies were urged to give up prostitution and the practice of dedicating minor girls. Education of boys was important. Thirteen ladies were seen pledging that they would marry their girls. Furthermore, Similar Sangams had to be set up. Muthulakshmi Reddi was asked to 'introduce Section 372 and 373 'of the Indian Penal Code to prevent 'the adoption of minor girls for prostitution.'⁴⁸

The S. I. Reformers' Conference also pointed to the need for abolition of the Devadasi system. It was asserted that the Devadasi system was promoted by those who were not

⁴⁴S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Opinion' By Naidu , Subject II, S. No.11,Part III ,Vol.I, Individual List99,p.113.

⁴⁵S. Muthulakshmi Reddi' Sengunthar Mahajan Sangam- Devadasi Reform', Subject II, S. No. 11, Part III, Individual list 99, p.481.

⁴⁶S. Muthulakshmi Reddi,' Devadasi Evil in India' Newspaper article, Subject II, S. No.12, Individual List 99,June7,1929, p.60.

⁴⁷S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, Kalavanthulus In Conference' Justice Newspaper, Subject II, S. No.12, Individual list 99,p. 65.

⁴⁸Ibid.

really men. These were people whose minds were obscene. There was need to protect the girl child at home and to honour women by bringing about the end of the Devadasi system.⁴⁹

Gandhi And Devadasi Reform

According to Reddi, Gandhiji also wrote on the matter in Young India. The Devadasi in the words of Gandhi was a 'blot upon those who countenance it.' It would have ended a long time back but for the 'supineness' of the people. Gandhi pointed out that the conscience of the people lay 'dormant'. There was a certain indifference and laziness that Gandhi reported. Furthermore, if someone like S. Muthulakshmi Reddi moved, the conscience would support it. Gandhi argued that Reddi's proposal was not 'premature'. Such a legislation could have been brought about a little early. Gandhi put forth that Reddi would receive the help from 'lovers of purity in religious and general social life.' Reddi concluded that Gandhi had 'rightly diagnosed the disease.' She knew that only Gandhi could heal the Hindu people of their 'ills'. She admitted that since Gandhi had come to visit South India in 1928, she had been attracted to him.

S. Muthulakshmi Reddi wrote to Gandhi how he was encouraging her to do away with the Devadasi System in her letters to Gandhi. She also wrote about how she brought about the legislation in this regard through lectures and pamphlets in English and the vernacular.⁵⁰ Moreover in her newspaper article in the Hindu, Reddi observed that in certain temples in Madras the Devadasi system was going on. Also, young girls were being dedicated to the Gods in the temples. She pointed that this was going on despite the literacy level. In many places of pilgrimage in South India girls were trained into prostitution. Gandhi in his southern trip pleaded for the end of this practice. It was further put forth that the trustees of the temple did not allow devadasis to save their children from the system or allow them to be married off. Gandhi also talked of Brahmacharya which was contrary to the 'Physical gratification' in the Devadasi system. Furthermore, the places that got rid off the Devadasi System were mentioned, namely Tanjore, Travancore, Cochin, Bombay and the Portuguese settlements. The

⁴⁹S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Impassionate Plea For The Abolition Of Social Evils' Justice Newspaper, Subject II, S. No. 12, Individual list 99, November 28, 1928, p. 67.

⁵⁰S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Papers and Correspondence regarding abolition of devadasi system in Hindu temples', II Subject Files, S. No. 11 Part I, Individual List 99, p. 18.

leaders in addition were called to clean the city off this vice. It was also mentioned that the Devadasis were formerly virgins later they took up a 'reverse' lifestyle.⁵¹

Problems With S. Muthulakshmi Reddi

In the seventh Andhra Provincial Women's Conference, Reddi supported the Suppression Of Immoral Traffic in Women And Children among other issues. The problem with Reddi was that she considered herself separate from the group she intended to reform. Moreover, she raised issues that were feminist that set her apart, from the class she identified with. She supposedly aped Josephine Butler who wanted to abolish prostitution in England. According to Reddi, not all women could look after their 'own interests'. She argued that those devadasis who opposed her were 'set up by their keepers.'⁵²

End Of The Devadasi System

There were three ways in which the devadasi system was abolished. One, by calling the devadasi immoral. Two, by taking help from Brahmins who cited scriptures to show that the 'servants of God were expected to be pure'. Third, the colonial law dubbed the devadasis as prostitutes. It was vital to note that Reddi held Brahmanism as responsible for spread the devadasi system. Many devadasis opposed the abolition on the grounds that the devadasi system was part of 'noble ancient religion.' Also, it was further argued by them that the devadasi system did not equate with prostitution.⁵³ But, the outlawing of the system led to the impoverishment of the Devadasi system. Some devadasis became beggars it was reported. As a result of this ban, some joined the rescue homes and the younger devadasis began dancing to popular tunes. Several devadasis gained entry into the film industry. Reddi, on her part tried to protect these women from 'priests, patrons,' elder women, 'disease' and vice. As the devadasi's art was considered vulgar by the social reformers and colonial authorities.⁵⁴

⁵¹S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Papers and Correspondence regarding abolition of devadasi system in Hindu temples', II Subject Files, S. No. 11 Part I, Individual List 99, p.39.

⁵² Kannabiran, 'Judiciary, Social Reform' p.WS65.

⁵³ Kannabiran, 'Judiciary, Social Reform' p.WS67.

⁵⁴ Davesh Soneji, 'Living History, Performing Memory: Devadasi Women in Telugu –Speaking South India,' *Dance Research Journal*, Vol.36, No.2 Cambridge University Press, Winter, 2004, p.43.

Suppression Of Immoral Traffic in Women and Children

Coming to the History Of the Act for the ‘Suppression of Brothels And Immoral Traffic.’ The Madras Vigilance Association under Reverend E.H.M. Waller, Lord Bishop of Madras had investigated the conditions of brothels in the Madras City since 1924 and made a bill by 1926. The Madras Vigilance Association with Women’s Indian Association waited on law member C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyer. He suggested that the bill be brought by a private member in the Council. K. R. Venktarama Iyer introduced it.⁵⁵

The prevailing view was that prostitution was seen as a necessary evil. Some believed that it was important for the ‘health’ and welfare of men. But, due to the work of protest by Vigilance And Women Associations through the ‘press and platform’ the people were convinced for the Suppression of this commercialized vice through legislation.⁵⁶

Reddi also congratulated the efforts of K. V. Sessa Ayyangar And Jinarajadasa of Women’s Indian Association who worked for social purity in the presidency as the Joint Secretaries of Madras Vigilance Association. A deputation of the members of the Vigilance And Women’s Indian Association waited on Frederick Stanley for the discussion of the bill and to punish the third party living off prostitution.⁵⁷

Regarding the bill, Reddi wanted an equal moral code of conduct for both men and women.⁵⁸ Further, she wanted lady officials to accompany police officers during the rescue efforts from brothels.⁵⁹ During the Devadasi campaign and the Suppression of commercialized vice, the public received it differently. The Indian press and men and women were supportive. So was the local council, which helped the bills to become acts.

S.Muthulakshmi Reddi did talk about Traffic in Women and Children. She elaborated that there was traffic in women and children in ‘two forms in India.’ One was similar to traffic in any other part of the globe and the other was peculiar to India. Prostitution was never state licensed in India, in written History unlike the European countries. The great Josephine Butler fought against the state regulation of vice. In England and got it abolished in 1886 and continental countries followed suit. The prostitutes were never denied the rights of ordinary citizens unlike the situation in Calcutta, Bombay,

⁵⁵ Reddi, *My Experience*, p.193-194.

⁵⁶ Ibid.p.195.

⁵⁷ Ibid.,p.201.

⁵⁸ Prabha Rani, *WIA and The Self Respect Movement in Madras 1925-1936: perceptions on women*, Department of History, Delhi, 1986,p.72.

⁵⁹ Reddi, *My Experience*, p.208..

Rangoon, Singapore where the prostitutes had 'segregated areas'. In Madras too, there were 'licensed streets' where the prostitutes were housed, medically examined and certified, 'which area was closed through the noble efforts of the famous woman Josephine Butler.' The towns and cities were growing with a rising population and thus there was an increase of brothels in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. Laws in Bombay and Calcutta were in place to suppress the traffic since the last six to seven years. Moreover, there were rescue homes available to minor girls and adult women rescued from prostitution. It was in 1930 that an Act was passed in Madras to shut the brothels and to 'punish' their keepers and to save the minor girls from prostitution. But it was not brought into action. There was a need of 'women welfare workers' in large numbers and finances to handle rescue work and maintenance of rescue homes.⁶⁰

Furthermore, she commented on prostitution under a 'religious custom'. This was confined to Hindu castes in Madras and Bombay, Assam and in Orissa. In the Madras Presidency certain girls were taught the arts and married to an 'idol or a dagger'. Thereafter these girls did not marry. They lived off the arts and did service in the temples for 'cultivable lands' or 'cash'. Some of these women formed permanent relationships with men of high position and lived a 'respectable life'. At one point of time, these relationships were considered normal. But, owing to Westernization these relationships were frowned upon. There was an agitation in 1859, to put down this vice in British India. The devadasis were different from the ordinary prostitutes. Miss Carmichael observed that one had to blame those creating 'the temple woman'. One could not blame the child who had been taught to live like this. For she did not have a choice. She was a 'mishandled flower.' She was not responsible for what she had become.⁶¹

Moving to the Suppression of this vice and its legislation, the women member in the Madras Legislative Council were to 'enfranchise the inam lands' of the devadasis and free them from obligatory service. Reddi abolished the dedication of girls to temples which received public support. All the women's organisations have been pushing for this reform and with the dissemination of education the evils would go. Groups to suppress traffic among women and children have been set up in Bombay, Calcutta,

⁶⁰ S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Traffic in Women and Children,' S.No. 155-191, Vol.ii Part iii, Individual list 99, Private Papers, p.1041.

⁶¹ Ibid.p.1043

Madras, Bangalore, Ceylon, Rangoon and Lahore under the name All India Vigilance Association.⁶²

Calcutta had been able to get a 'trained worker' from Josephine Butler's Home London via the Moral and Social Hygiene Association. She had visited the prime cities, held conference and 'publishing pamphlets in vernaculars.' A great many women 'social workers' were needed. Also, the legislation for 'protection of minor girls' and 'suppression of traffic in women and children' was not enough. The social workers have to combat 'poverty' and 'ignorance' and imperfect legislation from a foreign government, in matters concerning 'even innocent minor children'.⁶³ What was needed was legislation to 'suppress traffic in women and children', to 'protect minors and to punish the 'third party' living off prostitution. Also,, an educational campaign to raise support from the government. In addition, to train women officers to carry out laws and 'investigate brothels.' Moreover, to look at 'children's courts, women honorary magistrates and women juries' to handle 'offences'. Further, the cooperation of women was essential to 'suppress traffic in women and children,' to protect minors and to 'rescue' women. Further, the people have to know that 'without male chastity, female chastity is impossible' Furthermore, purity, led to good health and long life.⁶⁴

Prostitution, despite legislation, persisted according to Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur There was a need to provide an alternate livelihood and modify thinking, apart from making society more welcoming to prostitutes. However, few had changed due to personal contact and even married. But why not others? This is because of double standards in society existed for both men and women and people like Josephine Butler were needed to bring about a healthy change.⁶⁵ One such woman was S. Muthulakshmi Reddi.

Women's Education

S. Muthulakshmi Reddi spoke about women's education, admitting that women's education was backward. Even the boys' education was backward when compared with advanced countries. The disparity between boys and girls widened as one climbed the

⁶² S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Traffic in Women and Children,,' S.No. 155-191, Vol.ii Part iii, Individual list 99, Private Papers, .p.1047

⁶³ Ibid.p.1049.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Kaur, *Challenge to Woman*, p.108.

'ladder of education.' The Director of Public Instruction showed that there was 'no hostility' from 'parents' and from 'public' concerning female higher education. There was a demand for female schools. There was a genuine concern for parents and public to educate girls. When the education of Anglo-Indian and Christian girls were compared to the education of Hindoo and Muslim girls, it was found that the latter group's education was found inferior. Further, it was put forth that the Hindoo And Muslim girls were not drawn to Christian institutions because most of these were boarding. The Hindoo And Muslim girls did not want to be boarders. Moreover, these schools were located at a distance so the purdah observing Muslims could not possibly send their daughters to these institutions. Also, the parents of Hindoo girls did not want their daughters to walk long distances to reach school. 1917- 27, the institutions of girls rose by 58%. By 1922-27 this increased by 26%. This showed that in the last period there was 'no provincial subsidy' and 'primary education' had been transferred to the local bodies that were keen to open girls' schools. So, the girls lagged behind the compared to boys. Also, when there was a compulsion introduced by three of the municipalities out of the twenty seven municipalities, there was a drop observed in girls' education compared to boys' education.

Moreover, women teachers were hesitant to work under 'local bodies' because they had to appear before a 'tribunal of men'. In addition, their appointments were not confirmed under the local board.⁶⁶

Reddi suggested that there would be a 'local committee of women 'to take care of the female education in 'districts'. The committees would comprise the 'Inspectresses of secondary schools' and the 'wives of officials with the headmistresses of secondary schools'. These committee would look after girls' education .They would advise the local bodies. They would be responsible for 'opening schools,' 'appointment and transfer of women teachers,' 'drawing up of syllabus and curricula.' Furthermore, the 'provincial subsidy would be ear marked' so that girls' education would develop and the compulsion for girls would be stressed. As it was observed that wherever compulsion for boys was insisted on, it put the girls' education at a disadvantage. Also, it was noticed that parents gave the work of boys to girls and this trend was not in the interests

⁶⁶ Reddi, *My Experience*, p.124.

of 'individual or national progresses. As it created a dualism of 'educated manhood and ignorant womanhood.'⁶⁷

As regards secondary education, in the last quinquennium, only one girls' school was opened, even though there were few secondary schools in the municipalities of the presidency. There was only one girls' school in the city of Madres. There was thus, a gap between secondary education of boys and girls. Therefore, it was the responsibility of the government to take up the cause of opening schools in large numbers in 'districts within a few years.' Reddi urged the attention of the government be paid in the provincialization of Secondary education.

Co-education would not be possible without enough number of teachers in the 'staff'. In the 'mixed schools' there were male teachers who did not pay attention to the girls. The girls were made to sit away from the blackboard and light. Also, they were asked no question. So, unless there were women teachers available, who would combine 'tact, patience and love towards girls', the girls' education would not progress. Therefore, there was a need to establish 'training schools in the districts' to educate 'village women for working in village schools.'⁶⁸

The secondary school was of 'university standard.' The 'present type' of secondary education to boys offered no 'employment' to boys. Reddi did not want a similar fate for girls. The education 'imparted' to girls according to her would 'enable them' to take care of homes. She wanted a university system similar to the 'Women's University' in Poona. She did not want the commercialization of education for girls as it was done for boys. She argued that literary type of education was not of utility and it was the 'vocational training' that was demanded. She supported the opening of technical institutions which would be opened for females. She advocated 'hygiene, physiology and anatomy' as subjects of everyday 'value.'

Various women's conferences had also 'suggested' a 'parallel course. 'She in addition wanted these subjects to be transacted through the medium of the vernacular. This is because girls would learn the required knowledge earlier through the vernaculars. Reddi also wished to provide a university for girls to satiate the demands of the public and parents and to make women useful. She gave the example of Queen Mary's College wherein the 'course of study' was the same for girls and boys. She suggested that girls would get a diploma in Domestic Science. There was a European school that had this

⁶⁷ Reddi, *My Experience* p.125.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*p.126.

diploma course. But the Indian girls needed this much more than the Anglo Indians who searched for jobs. A similar diploma courses needed to be added in Queen Mary's School. There was a need to include 'hygiene, physiology and domestic science' as these would help in fighting diseases and bring value to everyday life.⁶⁹

Regarding the training of women teachers, she supported a 'better type of training.' It was noticed that there were not enough teachers to teach kindergarten. In other countries, 'Kindergarten training' proved effective .Playgrounds for girls was insufficient. So, she studied a school in Thulasingaperumal, Koil Street consisting of three hundred girls. The building did not have enough light or air. The girls had to sit in darkness and read their books as a result they became short-sighted. Children did not have enough room to move freely .She questioned how the future mothers could be 'kept and taught' in unclean and uncomfortable environment. Reddi pointed out that if the Chief Minister were to observe the school not even a session would be held in a day.⁷⁰

There was demand for the building of hostel for girls that had come up since a long time .But nothing could be done. There was Ice House for widows. But, the widows according to Reddi were not to be allowed to share their hostel with others. This was because the condition of widows was miserable. Also, these widows came from 'mofussil parts' and their parents were orthodox. Hence, the widows would be useful to the nation 'either as teachers or midwives or nurses.'

Concerning Muslim girls, higher education was backward for these girls. These girls observed the purdah and did not attend 'any missionary schools', it would be difficult to abolish the purdah. The All India Muslim Conference passed a resolution in 'favour of compulsory education' for females. The purdah was still to be abolished. But, the question of conveyances arose. Also, the question of finance came up. But, the government did not spend as much on girls' education. But this was required to fight 'ignorance, customs and habits' which stopped 'physical and mental growth.'⁷¹

'Exemption of poor girls from payment of school fees' was another resolution .Reddi suggested the 'fee remission 'for girls from poor backgrounds. The report of the Special Education officer Statham, showed that the education of girls was backward in India. So, 'better facilities' were needed for the growth of girls' education. It was observed

⁶⁹ Reddi, *My Experience* p.127.

⁷⁰ Ibid.p.128.

⁷¹ Ibid. p.130.

that the investment in education of girls was done with a begrudging attitude unlike the investment on boys' education. Large amounts of money were spent on the education of boys. Education in our country was sought not for 'culture and enlightenment' but for government jobs with huge salaries. So, parents thought that girls will not be potential wage earners. Therefore, the parents were discouraged to invest on the education of girls. They would give their daughters dowries rather than educate them enough to fight the battles of life. Reddi asked for a tiny concession in the case of girls who had finished primary education. She wanted the forms be made free because the girls were too young to act independently and parents too would refrain from sending their daughters to school at that stage that is eight to nine years.

By twelve to thirteen years, the girls had finished form three, they would be able to pressure their parents. Moreover, Reddi wanted women to participate in committees to aid child protection. She put forth that our 'individual and national progress' was thwarted by the 'ignorance and backwardness 'of 'our women.'⁷² Finally, a resolution was passed so that poor girls were exempted from school fees payment in any grade upto form three.

Regarding, Adult Women's Institute in Guntur called Sree Sarada Niketan which had been working well, but had not got the grant from the municipalities for its expenses. Henceforth, Reddi questioned the government. Reddi observed the problem of funds. For instance, the Madras Seva Sadan, its expenses were rupees seven thousand while the government granted it only Rupees Seven Hundred. Thus, Reddi moved a resolution, concerning a special grant to the Women's Home Service at Mylapore .It was providing adult education to destitute women in the presidency and was trying to become self-sufficient. It was set up by the Women's Indian Association in 1923.It had a meritorious record and the work done by it was impressive .There were fifteen 'resident scholarship students'. The scholarships were given from public funds and the funds received from Women's Indian Association. The classes were mostly of vocational nature. The teachers taught in Vernaculars and in English. Also, lessons of music and religion were held. There was 'lace- making, embroidery, weaving and spinning.' Reddi further pointed out that apart from the instruction granted on a daily

⁷² Reddi, *My Experience*, p65.

basis, about fifty mature girls and women residents came and attended the classes on an everyday basis and made earnings of four annas perday.⁷³

The women's home had a baby unit. The management was run by the Women's Indian Association. It had a strong advisory committee comprising of all women from different backgrounds. In the women's home were women working in different capacities as 'maternity nurses, vocational teachers and music teachers.' The above institution was to be given a special grant as it was not recognised and it admitted females from 15 years to 30 years. Finally, a resolution was passed to the effect. Such grants would help the education of girls. In the presidency, the literacy rate among females figured at 2%. So, if the Government wanted to promote adult education it would have to aid institutions of this type. Reddi raised the question again. She wanted scholarships for women in the industrial Homes established for them in Mylapore. She wanted fifteen hundred scholarships for Adi Dravida girls who were to be trained in the home.⁷⁴

Reddi was grateful that finally the Madras Seva Sadan was getting a building fund and was receiving other grants. She was also thankful for other efforts. For instance the budget was allocated for a Science block in Queen Mary's College, the 'introduction of Indian Music' in Queen Mary's College curriculum, vocational training at Lady Wellington Training College and the establishment of 'physical training course' under a specialist in the 'latter' college. The grants were given for the primary and secondary schools for girls. But, the hostel facility for Lady Wellington was unsatisfactory.⁷⁵

Reddi also examined the general state of girls' education and found it backward. This was based on the report of 1922-1927. It was observed that the supply of female teachers was insufficient because of the lack of availability of training facilities. Thus, Reddi suggested for better investment in girls' education. She in addition pleaded for 'more training centres' for women teachers and the 'institution' for scholarships for girls from oppressed sections. She furthermore, advocated for a 'few special residential scholarships' for Muslim girls and girls from oppressed groups at the Queen Mary's College. She also wanted hostels for Muslim girls studying in the Hobart Training School.⁷⁶ Reddi objected to denominational hostels because they tended to divide people according to caste and creed. This very aspect of separation of buildings

⁷³ Reddi, *My Experience* p.77.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p.82.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p.87.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p.89.

according to caste and creed would defeat the sole purpose of education which was unity and love for 'humanity.'⁷⁷

Reddi further pointed out that Women's Education was in a sorrowful state.⁷⁸ H.E. Irwin talked about modelling universities so that 'individual character and conduct and training of leaders of society' would guide the nation. It was also noticed that the 'academically qualified' women workers did not devote any attention to social work.⁷⁹ Also, it was argued that the illiteracy of the people stood in the way of freedom. The missionaries were appreciated for spreading education far and wide. In fact, the missionaries had served as teachers in a spirit of 'love and faith.'⁸⁰ Even with regard to Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Children, dissemination of education was essential.

There was an article in the newspaper on Women and Education. It was seen that women had all duties and no rights. The Woman was the first slave of the man. Indian women were fighting for their rightful place in society. The main problem was the lack of female education. Twenty one out of every thousand women had received rudimentary education. The values of education were ever changing. It was narrow minded to expect women to settle into domesticity. There was a need to get rid of caste system and untouchability. The right type of education would help national progress.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Reddi, *My Experience* p.93.

⁷⁸S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Lack of Women Workers', Speeches or Writings by her III, Part II, Vol. II, Individual list 99, p.537.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Education Of Women', III Speeches or Writings by her Part II, Vol. II, Individual list 99, p.561.

⁸¹S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Women And Education' Justice, S. No.12, Individual list 99, 5th January 1929, p. 101.

Chapter Four

Legal Reform and Political Reform

Legal Reform

Muthulakshmi Reddi observed our marriage system. Children were **married early** before completion of studies or before one could enter a career. Moreover, the life span of women was short. Breeding also happened speedily, and many children were birthed among the ‘better class’. The father frequently passed away before settling the children. The wife struggled to make the ends meet. The destitute women had many children and found it difficult to be employed. In addition the charitable homes had their own regulations. Unemployment was grave problem. Further, suicides of parents were reported for want of amenities.¹ Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur also commented that child marriage made children ‘victims of disease and ill-health.’²

In the mid nineteenth century, it was commonly believed that women’s rightful place was the kitchen and ‘at best’ the drawing room. The Friend Of India noted the domestication of females in its August 31, 1886 issue. It was argued that customs like child marriage etc, bound women from participating in the freedom movement of the country.³ In the nineteenth century, we have the case of 11 year old Phulmani. This child bride was raped and died during intercourse. So, the lady doctors sent a ‘memorandum’ to the government seeking legislation on ‘prevention’ of child marriage. A petition was sent to Queen Victoria with fifteen hundred women’s signatures asking for ‘similar reforms’. A committee was henceforth, formed which passed the Age Of Consent Bill 1891. It forbade the child bride from cohabiting with her husband before 12 years of age. The question was further addressed by the Sarda Act of 1929.⁴

Sarda Act

In the AIWC session, Maharani Chimnabai talked about removal of Child Marriage and Purdah as being essential ‘precondition’ to growth. In the nineteenth century there had been ‘opposition to child marriage’ and the ‘consummation of marriage’ of females in the pre- puberty stage. The social reformers put forth that child marriage had no sanction in ‘sacred texts’. The colonial government was ‘appending’ a clause to make

¹S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, *Our Marriage System*, Vol. II, Part III, S. No. 155-191, Individual List 99, Private Papers, p.1207.

²Kaur, *Challenge to Woman*, p.63.

³R. Kalaivani, ‘Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929)-A Historical Review’, *International Journal Of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, Vol.4., Issue 1, January 2015, p.14.

⁴Ibid.p.15.

'sexual relations with a woman below ten' as 'statutory rape' as per the Indian Penal Code 1861. Behramji Malabari raised the 'age of marriage' for females to 12 years by the 1891 Act. A bill in 1927 was introduced by Rai Har Bilas Sarada which was the 'Hindu Child Marriage Bill.' The final bill was focussed on 14 years for females and 18 years for males. The 'Sarada Act came into effect in 1930.' The AIWC session in Poona demanded the age of consent to be raised to 16 years.⁵

The Begum Of Bhopal in the AIWC second session, held in 1928 argued that child marriage was responsible for poor education and lack of physical, moral and mental health. The states of Baroda, Mysore, Rajkot, Kashmir, Gondal, Limbdi And Mandi had increased the 'age of marriage'. Sixteen years for girls and 21 years for boys was demanded as the 'legal age' in the sessions of the AIWC. The terrible impact of child marriage was analysed like poor female health, early widowhood, unhealthy children and lack of education .A wide campaign ensued with different tactics and measures.⁶

Eleventh of February was the 'red letter day.' For curbing Child marriage the first deputation was sent to the Viceroy led by Rani of Mandi. The team included Rameshwari Nehru, Sarla Devi Chaudrani , Begum Hamid Ali, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, Margaret Cousins and 'eleven' persons. The Second deputation was under Indira Bhagwat. It met the 'non official European' members of the 'Imperial Legislative Assembly' and political leaders like Jinnah, Motilal Nehru, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Lala Lajpat Rai among others. A third deputation was led by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and others. They met the Age Of Consent Committee. When the Sarada Bill was presented in the Legislative Assembly it was supported by the AIWC. But, the Act was 'ignored' when it was passed. The AIWC wanted all communities to follow the Act. But the Muslim Community petitioned the Viceroy to exempt Muslims from the Sarada Act. The AIWC passed a resolution in 1931 asking the government to implement the act strictly. They also reported cases of 'violation of the act. In addition, agitation was held everywhere by the AIWC and 'telegrams' were sent to the colonial authorities.⁷

It is vital study whether laws with a paucity of 'penal provisions' can still remove 'undesirable social customs'. Data from 1905 to 1980 was examined to analyse the

⁵ Aparna Basu And Bharati Ray, *Women's Struggle*: New Delhi, Manohar, 2003, p.56.

⁶ Ibid.p.57.

⁷ Ibid. p.60.

strength of the Child Marriage Restraint Act. Of 1929.⁸ It was discovered that the act lacked penal clauses but it still managed to raise the age of marriage. It in fact encouraged 'later marriages' and therefore, a 'cultural shift.'

The Sarda Bill was initiated in 1927 by Har Bilas Sarda. It was finally 'enacted' in April of 1930. The bill was surrounded with controversy. The bill was passed by the majority. It became an act on April first 1930. It was seen as an intrusion by an 'alien' government into the 'religion' of the people⁹. The Kesari reported objection to the government's interference in the social customs. As it was felt that the social customs had been sanctioned by the scriptures. A civil disobedience movement was visualized as a result of this act.¹⁰

The Bhala 'an orthodox newspaper' agitated that the government had legislated on the religion of the people. This is because marriage was one of the sixteen sacraments of the Hindu people. Furthermore, it was argued that the Hindus had already lost their political freedom. So, 1929 marked the end of religious freedom. Even, the Muslim orthodox sections opposed the bill of 1929 because it was applicable to all 'the communities' of the country.¹¹ The law pointed out that 'adults' would be fined a sum of Rs.1,000 and jailed for a month if a girl under 14 were to be married. Also, the bridegroom would be jailed even if he were above 21 years of age.¹²

It may be put forth that female 'education' tended to improve the status of the bride because she had greater value in the labour market. As a result, we find investment in 'daughters' for education. The competition for educated brides then delayed marriages. This process could lead to increase in the age of marriage. Also, the readership of the popular domestic magazine 'Manoranjan' supported late marriage. This is because the country was harmed by 'under-prepared parents' offspring. 'It was believed that early marriages led to 'an unhealthy nation'. Early marriages furthermore, retarded 'intellectual' growth, drained the 'mental and moral energies', curtailed 'foreign travel', mismatched 'alliances', overpopulated the land and brought in 'enforced widowhood.' Mahadeo Govind Ranade addressed Behramji Malabari and pointed out that early marriage led to 'early consummation and physical deterioration of the race.' This would further burden the new generation, bind their dreams and 'youth' causing poverty and

⁸ Hatekar, Mathur and Rege, 'Legislating Social Change,' p.145

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Kalavani, 'Child Marriage Restraint', p.17.

¹¹ Hatekar, Mathur and Rege, 'Legislating Social Change,' p.145.

¹² Ibid.p.147.

early widowhood. So, the Sarda Act brought in the notion of 'older' brides who had to be educated. Therefore, early marriage was ruled out.¹³The bill was a social reform. It may be said that public and governmental interference could be considered as the two main agencies of social reforms.¹⁴One school tried to bring about change through 'educated public opinion' and the other school supported legislation. The first school had proponents like Swami Vivekananda who believed in 'enlightened conscience' of the folks. Whereas, the second school had Raja Rammohan Roy, Sarda, Gour who supported the government 'for making social legislation effective'. Gour and Sarda agreed that the state was not a 'police state' but a 'welfare state'.¹⁵

Considering the Sarda Bill, the ground had been already prepared by certain organisations like Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj And Social Reform Association of 1890. But sadly, the reformers who got the majority in the legislature were not keen to start a campaign against the vices of Child marriage.¹⁶

The AIWC member Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur in the twentieth century stated that 'no girl should be married before the age of 22'. Unfortunately, laws related to social customs had their own problems. The reforms by western educated people generally were not too successful. As there was a divide seen between the western educated and the common man. This led to a lack of cooperation among the people. In addition, illiteracy, lack of communication, 'inequality of opportunity' made things worse.¹⁷It may be further argued that child marriage was sanctioned by the scriptures.¹⁸It was suggested that a girl be married in the pre-puberty age. Moreover, the act was complicated because a complaint had to be first lodged against the 'offending parties.' Also, the fine imposed was very low compared to the overall wedding cost. So, mostly, it was paid off. Furthermore, the government did not have the machinery to implement the act. Further the act remained unknown in villages because there was not enough publicity.¹⁹In

¹³ Hatekar, Mathur, and Rege, 'Legislating Social Change', p. 151.

¹⁴ Bhakat Prasad Mazumdar, Public Opinion And Social Reforms (1829-1929)*The Indian Journal Of Political Science*, Vol. 11, No. 4. Indian Political Science Association, (October- December 1950), p.102.

¹⁵ Mazumdar, Public Opinion, p.104.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.107.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.111.

¹⁸ S. N. Agarwala, The Age at Marriage in India, *Population Index*, Vol. 23, No. 2 Office Of Population Research (April 1957), p.96.

¹⁹ Kalaivani 'Child Marriage Restraint,' p.15

addition, the government feared the wrath of the orthodoxy.²⁰ So, the act remained a 'dead letter'. It was 'breached' rather than obeyed.²¹

.There is a general impression that the age of marriage has been rising. But, the quantitative data has been missing because of a lack of marriage registration in the country. The Sarda Act reduced child marriage among females according to research .Moreover, there may have been 'misreporting of age and marital status' owing to the fear of prosecution. There was a definite 'real' decline in child marriage.²² There is however, an ongoing debate with regard to the impact of child marriage.. Another view was that despite the enactment of Sarda Act, child marriages remain rampant as women's services remain unappreciated. Many women were still exploited in society.²³ There were 'efforts on the part of WIA to lend maximum support' to Rai Harbilas Sarda's Bill. This was to raise the age of marriage for girls and boys. Rai Harbilas Sarda 's main objective for the bill was to hinder child widowhood peculiar to India .Even Manu had suggested three years after puberty as the age of marriage for girls .So, he put forth that the age of marriage for girls could not be below sixteen years.²⁴His secondary aim was to delete the primary hindrance to 'physical and mental growth of both sexes' and the main reason for their early death .Lancaster in his book 'Tuberculosis in India' pointed out that early marriages put a 'strain' on the 'delicate constitution 'of the girl. He further pleaded if sixteen years be the age of marriage, this would improve the health of the mothers and their babies.

Harbilas Sarda further argued just as the veil vanished in most of Turkey. So, must other practices like child marriage vanish from the country?²⁵He put forth that Swaraj may be attained if one got rid of such evil practices. It was vital to end 'infant and child marriages'. This Hindu Child Marriage Bill was different from the Age Of Consent Bill because the former protected the girls.²⁶He talked about states that forbade marriages below twelve years of age, namely Baroda, Mysore, Bharatpur and Kotah in Rajputana.²⁷

²⁰ Kalaivani 'Child Marriage Restraint,' p.18.

²¹ Ibid.p.15.

²² Agarwala, The Age, p.101.

²³ Kalaivani, 'Child Marriage Restraint,' p.18.

²⁴ S.Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, 'Hindu Child Marriage Bill by Rai Sahib Har Bilas Sarda's Speech in the Legislative Assembly ,Simla, II Subject files,S.No.7,Individual list 99,15 September 1927,p.20.

²⁵ Ibid. p.22.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.p.23.

Harbilas Sarda put forth that Modern Review, the leading magazine, wrote an article entitled 'Indian Social Reformers, etc.' The editor wrote that the 'abolition of child marriage' and 'child mortality and the raising of the age of consent 'would make the Indians 'intelligent and fitter' .But, the British officials had been reluctant to aid the social reformers of India through legislation .The British resisted to ban Sati as well. The abolition of child marriage was a ' political and social remedy.' So, the British took a non-interfering position in 'socio- religious matters'. In addition, Sarda criticized the author of Mother India for conniving with the enemies of the country.²⁸

Harbilas Sarda stood against insults against womanhood. Harbilas was open to vote by the 'Indian members of the House' with regard to the bill. He told the story of a Mahratta girl who drowned herself in a well to escape going to her husband's house. She was saved but she died soon after. She had been married at the age of six years and was eleven when this tragedy took place. Harbilas Sarda questioned how one could oppose or postpone the bill in the wake of such events. He felt there was a need to save these needy girls. He also asked for the end of child widowhood.²⁹

S. Muthulakshmi Reddi in her Presidential address in the seventh Andhra Provincial Women's Conference pointed out Andhra had played a key role in the freedom struggle, especially in the non-cooperation movement .In fact many had been concerned with women's reforms. But, 'ignorance' and 'illiteracy' stood in the way of progress.³⁰ The customs like Child Marriage etc. were prevalent. There was therefore, the need to get rid of these customs for the good of the people. The intervening period between the passage of the act and the date of the enactment was six months. The period saw the increase in child marriages. The period was not used by the Government for its publicity or for education. But, the opposers of the bill utilized this opportunity to create confusion.³¹ The Sarda Act was a failure according to Reddi. This is because the prosecution could be done after the child marriage had taken place. Moreover, the move could be initiated by the members of the public, not by any authority as such. Also, the amount could be deposited by complainant which would be forfeited' if the prosecution failed.' Thus, one would complain without the intention of rescuing the child bride or

²⁸S.Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, 'Hindu Child Marriage Bill by Rai Sahib Har Bilas Sarda's Speech in the Legislative Assembly ,Simla, II Subject files,S.No.7,Individual list 99,15 September 1927,p.24.

²⁹Ibid.p.26.

³⁰ AIWC,List no. 38, File No. 4, 'The Presidential address of S. Muthulakshmi Reddi ,delivered at the seventh Andhra Provincial Women's Conference , held at Ellore,' 4 and 5th November,1933p.22.

³¹ Ibid.p.23.

groom.³² Furthermore, Reddi put forth, that the role of the state was crucial to bring about social change, like Governor Bentinck brought about the legislation on Sati. This was needed in the case of 'mass education'.³³ The Government should protect its people from 'disease, ignorance, starvation and disorder' it should secure 'good health, environment, education, employment and civil rights' for its people.³⁴ Sarada along with others tried to improve the condition of women. He tried to protect the 'Sacred rights' of the child. The opposition of the bill came from the 'backward South'. The bill was supported by the entire world and the 'Indian' intellectuals. Compared to the West, there were hardly any laws to protect children from abuse.³⁵ Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur said that despite the Sarada Act, child marriage continued. She argued that the education for people was required apart from a strict 'vigilance. Although penalty for parents was going to help the above Act.³⁶

Apart from the Sarada Act, we have the Hindu Code bill among the social legislations in pre-independent India which was enacted in a big way in Independent India.

Hindu Code Bill

S. Muthulakshmi Reddi wrote on the subject of Women's right. It was related to the Hindu code bill. Louis Jaccoliot, the well-known French author of the 'Bible in India' said that 'India of the Vedas entertained a respect for women amounting to worship. "The Hindu legislators realized that both men and women were equal. It turned out that laws depriving women were only recent. Reddi argued that Hindus had become the 'creatures of' custom or habit rather than reason and true religion.' The laws had placed the Hindu sisters inferior to the Muslim or Christian women. According to the existing legislation the Hindu widow was not getting any share of her husband's property. Again considering the marriage laws women were reduced to slaves. Also, Reddi suggested that the mother's claim to guardianship of children was to be recognized and was to be made' equal with that of the husband.' It was pointed out that the purdah was not a Hindu practice. But it was followed during 'turbulent times to protect women. It must be done away with. Reddi questioned how can the man be free if the woman was

³² ³² AIWC, List no. 38, File No. 4, 'The Presidential address of S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, delivered at the seventh Andhra Provincial Women's Conference, held at Ellore,' 4 and 5th November, 1933, p.24.

³³ Ibid, p.26.

³⁴ Ibid, p.30.

³⁵ S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Untitled 3' Speeches or writings by her III, Part II, Vol. II, Individual list 99, p.549.

³⁶ Kaur, *Challenge to Woman*, p.102.

enslaved? For as a mother she raised him up, as a sister she played with him, and as a wife she shared his good and bad times. The men thus, needed to realize that one could acquire Swaraj and ‘make it doubly sure’ by freeing women. When the women were given their place, India’s redemption would be carried out by women. This would be for ‘freedom ‘, education’ and’ best in the individual regardless of gender’. Finally, if half of the population was kept in servitude the country would be ‘denied’ advice, cooperation and sympathy’. They become an obstruction to the national development.³⁷

Coming to the remedies, children could not be ignored by a country. Reddi identified the unemployed, widows and exploited wives as the problems .She suggested that polygamy should be abolished and reforms were required in relation to control birth of more children. Marriages were to be ‘restricted by legislation’. The marriage should be secured for those with property and those with ‘family insurance’. There should be insurance available to the unemployed and sick. Widows too should be granted “pension’ to protect women and children from illness and acute hunger .Sadly the poor children did not have nutrition, literacy, jobs and wellness. Polygamy was not be encouraged because it led to problem of population explosion .There was a need to prevent ‘early marriages, ‘ to ‘restrict marriages’ to those with future planning, to ‘punish’ polygamy’ and allow “ **Hindu Code Bill**’ that gave equality to women. One was to prevent illness as well. There were several girls who fell prey to pimps and became immoral. Therefore, there was a need for ‘Women’s Welfare Department’ and ‘Vigilance Homes’. Reddi talked about Avvai Home for rescued women. Furthermore, she wanted reform in religion.³⁸

Let us briefly examine the background of the Hindu Code Bill Renuka Ray an active member of the AIWC, has commented on the Hindu Code Bill in the following words. The Hindu Code Bill was prepared to bring in gender equality in marriage and property relations for most of the Indians who followed the Hindu law. The opposition was trying to protect social laws and were in direct collision with the spirit of the Constitution based on equality .Under the British law, in the nineteenth century we have married women’s Property Rights Act which was passed not to allow women to hold property .Although Hindu law allowed women to hold property. For instance Stri Dhan

³⁷S. Muthulakshmi Reddi,, *Women’s rights*, Vol II Part III S. No. 155-191, Individual list 99,,Private Papers,p.1079.

³⁸S. Muthulakshmi Reddi,’Untitled1’ Vol. II Part III S. No. 155-191, Individual list 99,, Private Papers, p.1210.

though restricted. With the coming of the British, Women's property right was further restricted. This was due to the interpretations of the 'pandits and priests' there was also the concept of the 'widow's limited estates' that permitted a woman to inherit property during her life span and 'not to dispose it.'³⁹

But, in time Hindu laws lost their equal rights .Polygamy was allowed in cases where the wife was barren, later it became applicable, where the wife could not give male children. Child marriages became frequent. Widows were forbidden from re-marrying. Also, dowry system 'spread.' Custom more than laws could hamper the progress of women. The purdah system forbade women from social interaction during the medieval times, especially .Also, the 'joint family 'system' was an insurance for the 'aged, disabled and sick.' Later it bound women to 'domestic tasks'. These above mentioned customs are now disappearing.⁴⁰

In the mid nineteenth century Raja Rammohan Roy was the champion of women's cause. He worked for the banning of Sati. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar argued that widow remarriage was sanctioned by the scriptures and tried to legalize widow remarriage in the ' late nineteenth century.' The greatest change in the status of women was brought about by Mahatma Gandhi. He asked women to participate in the national movement irrespective of 'law and custom'.⁴¹

The local women's organisations also laboured for the women's cause namely the WIA and AIWC. Certain features set the Indian Women's Movement apart from its western model. Firstly, it worked for the restoration of women's rights rather than a creation of women's rights .Secondly, men participated in the movement from the beginning. Thirdly, the women's movement in India was closely related to the freedom struggle.⁴²

The Rau Committee came into existence .It wanted to modify and codify Hindu law. This committee was formed after much delay. The committee drew up two bills. These were introduced in the Central Legislature in 1943. But it was allowed to lapse because of a lack of support from the conservative sections. Yet the force of public reform led the government to re appoint the committee. This committee prepared a report which became the basis of the Hindu Code Bill.⁴³ It was translated into twelve languages. The

³⁹ Renuka Ray, 'The Background Of The Hindu Code Bill', *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.25.N0. 3. University of British Columbia, (September 1952), p.270.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 271.

⁴¹ Ibid. .p.272.

⁴² Ibid. p.273.

⁴³ Ibid. p.274.

draft code dealt with 'Succession, Maintenance, Marriage and Divorce, Minority and Guardianship and Adoption.'⁴⁴

The Hindu Code Bill met a lot of problems on its way. It was introduced in the 'old central Assembly' where it was 'shelved'. The conservative sections within the Congress such as Rajendra Prasad and Hindu fundamentalists like Aiyangar argued that monogamy was not desirable and in the paucity of children, polygamy could be permitted. All who supported the bill were termed as 'ultra-modern, westernized, not good Hindus.' Those who opposed it were called 'deeply religious, orthodox, and reactionary.'⁴⁵ The Congress Government re-introduced it in 1947, in Independent India. From 1947- 1952, the bill failed to be passed because it was bulky .Hence, it was delayed. The bill sought 'codification of Hindu Social laws' of 'marriage ,property, guardianship and adoption.' These changes based themselves on ancient laws. It sanctioned 'inter- caste' marriages which were not uncommon. Also, Divorce was allowed and polygamy was penalized under the Hindu Code .In regards to property, the bill restored the woman's absolute right to inheritance of property , Stri dhan. Whatever, she may inherit from her husband, family, parents or any other source. It gave daughters equal share in the fathers' property provided he died intestate. Even sons were equal sharers in the mother's stri dhan which was previously passed on to the daughters in case of a woman's unrestricted title to property' if she had no other testamentary disposition. In case of 'intestate succession,' the property would be shared equally between sons and daughters.⁴⁶

The bills had been passed in Bombay and Madras. The opposition was not too forceful. Had the clause on daughter's inheritance not been there the bill would have passed more easily. But the Hindu Code Bill did not guarantee equality for women It meant we needed education and the need to respect the economic role fulfilled by the housewife.. The Hindu Code Bill was a mild reform. Nonetheless, a symbol of progress.⁴⁷

The Hindu Code Bill was drafted by Ambedkar to alter the laws of Manu which treated women as objects. It brought forth a text that gave freedom to women. Women were central to the Hindu Code Bill and through the laws on 'property, marriage and divorce, Ambedkar fought for the cause of women. Ambedkar found the old law patriarchal and

⁴⁴Reba Som, 'Jawaharlal Nehru and The Hindu Code, 'in *Women and Social Reform in Modern India Vol. II* by Sumit and Tanika Sarkar, New Delhi :Permanent Black, 2007 p.248.

⁴⁵Ibid.p.256.

⁴⁶Ray, *The Background* ,p.275

⁴⁷ Ibid.p.277.

he therefore, decided to amend the law through the Hindu Code Bill. According to the Hindu Code Bill, monogamy was followed. Also, divorce was allowed. Previously, the Hindu law treated marriage as a sacrament. But, Ambedkar sought to change this. Moreover, the Hindu Code Bill granted a share in property to daughters equal to the share of sons. Ambedkar wrote to Nehru that the bill held a lot of importance and therefore needed to be passed. Ambedkar was part of the ministry to pass the Hindu Code Bill. But, when realized that the Government was found postponing the matter, he decided to resign. According to Ambedkar, any law that did not address hierarchy and gender only built 'castles in the air.'⁴⁸ Several points of view have been put on the issue of Hindu Code Bill. While some put forth that through the Hindu Code Bill the issue of women's freedom was brought about. Others argue that it was not really prepared by Ambedkar. It marked the codification of the colonial process of law making based on religious scriptures along with 'Sanskrit Pundits.' Madhu Kishwar and Rekha Thakur subscribe to the latter point of view. Gail Omvedt argued that when we connect the Hindu Code Bill with Ambedkar we tend to ignore the fact that the AIWC lobbied for this since 1925. There was a basic difference between the position of Dr. Ambedkar and AIWC. For Ambedkar it was argued that the bill marked the freedom of women. But for The AIWC the bill was a political move.⁴⁹

Moving to Nehru, the Hindu Code Bill was a reform which fitted with overall idea of 'National development'. Nehru argued on the subject of divorce. He felt that most of the industrialized nations were undergoing divorces. So, this trend would affect the developing countries as well. Therefore, he was not against westernization. He did not support unhappy marriages where people were forcibly tied together in an unhealthy way. Even in his personal life, he was willing to share his deceased father's property with his sister and mother and called himself a mere trustee.⁵⁰

The Hindu Code Bill was hotly debated in 1943-44 and in 1949 and 1951. The Hindu Code Bill is important for the issue of 'women and secularism.' But majority of the 'witnesses' opposed the draft code.' Inside there were 'black flag demonstrations' inside 'five cities'. The 'strongest opposition' came from those that opposed' the divorce

⁴⁸Pratima Pardeshi, *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar And The Question Of Women's Liberation In India*, Kratiyoti Savitribai Phule, Women's Studies Centre, University Of Pune, 1998p.38.

⁴⁹Ibid. p.41.

⁵⁰Som, 'Jawaharlal Nehru,' p.260.

provision.’ Most of the representatives from women’s organisations including AIWC did support ‘the draft of the Hindu Code.’⁵¹

The AIWC in its journal *Roshni* called for the Hindu Code Bill’s ‘equal rights in inheritance and marriage.’ AIWC responded positively to Rau Committee Report. *Roshni* of 1941 carried favourable ‘arguments of AIWC on inheritance and marriage reforms’ .H.N. Sarda’s article appeared that argued that until ‘daughters could inherit property, Hindus would remain a subject people.’ Muthulakshmi Reddi’s article also featured that gave ‘mothers equal legal status to regain the full dignity of Hindus.’ It was argued by women’s organisations that ‘gender equality in Hindu law’ was crucial to ‘national’ progress.⁵²

It was in 1944, Kitty Shiva Rao head of the legislation for AIWC, sent a circular to AIWC to have a memorandum written. Rao, wrote a memorandum approved by the ‘standing committee’ in November of 1944. The memorandum supported the Hindu Code Bill. It promoted the ‘equal inheritance of daughters and sons. Rao argued that the Hindu law needed to be changed to meet the needs of modern society which was based on equality.’⁵³

The AIWC also wanted to look after personal law within the Constitution. The British government tried to create a Constituent Assembly in September 1945 for this purpose. The AIWC was a participant in the committee session of the Constituent Assembly .Also, the Indian Women’s Charter of Rights was framed by AIWC .The Indian Women’s Charter Of Rights in addition, called for equality and the improvement of women’s position in’ education, health, work, property rights and family.’ The Charter consisted of personal law articles.⁵⁴

Two AIWC leaders Amrit Kaur and Hansa Mehta were the members of the Constituent Assembly. In the fundamental rights subcommittee there was no resistance to equality. The issue of religion and women’s rights did come up in the matter of personal law reform in the AIWC.⁵⁵

In the final analysis the Hindu Code Bill was the ‘victory of symbol over substance’. The condition of women in India remained ‘unequal’. But it was Nehru’s symbolic

⁵¹ Chaudhuri , *The Indian* , p.189.

⁵² Ibid.p.191.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p.192.

victory. From here on, the idea of women's equality as a desirable ideal was established for the Indian state.⁵⁶

Political Reform

Political participation involved 'attendance' in political gatherings, elections and political parties etc. But sadly, women's low participation in politics 'was due to the 'exclusion from social processes.' It may be argued that 'few women seek position of power. It had been argued that women's participation in politics was determined by law, by the stage of society and women's access to education, property and social life.'⁵⁷

Women's Right To Vote

Women wanted to participate in the 'government' on an equal basis. The vote for women was demanded based on 'social equality'. The effort in this direction was initiated by WIA. The WIA sent a team of Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu to England to show 'evidence' before the Joint Select Committee.' In 1917, deputation was sent to the Viceroy And Secretary of State asking for the voting rights of women.⁵⁸ The local branches of the WIA 'organized meetings and made their suggestions to London. The WIA was asking for 'justice' and not favour was the request put forth. Sadly, no attention was paid to these pleadings.⁵⁹ Women's organisations petitioned the Southborough Franchise Committee to push for Women's 'rights'. But the response was not positive. The Committee reported that 'extension' of the right to vote to women was too early in a society seeped in purdah and lacking in female education. This led to nationwide agitation in different parts of the country.⁶⁰

In 1919 a 'special delegation' of Sarojini Naidu , Annie Besant , Hirabai Tata and her daughter Mithan Tata went to London to present 'evidence before the Joint Parliamentary Committee of the British House of Commons' The bill being discussed was the 'Government Of India Bill'. The above mentioned women created public sympathy for their 'demand' At home, the WIA in Madras and certain women's organisations in Bombay asked for women's right to vote.⁶¹

The first victory when the JPC asked for the removal of 'sex qualification' but left the decision with the 'provincial legislatures'. Madras asked for voting rights for women in

⁵⁶ Som, 'Jawaharlal Nehru', p.267.

⁵⁷ Renu Sethi " Determinants of Women's Active Political Participation' in *The Indian Journal Of Political Science* Vol.49,No. 4, Indian Political Science Association, October- December 1988, p.567.

⁵⁸ AIWC, Souvenir, p.15.

⁵⁹ Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p.70.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

1920 and Bombay did so in 1921. The next step was asking for representation in the legislative councils. In 1926, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and Hannen Angelo contested for elections for the 'Imperial Legislative Council.' They lost despite being supported by the WIA. The 'government' chose Muthulakshmi Reddi to the legislative council in 1927 in Madras. This got support from 'everyone.'⁶²

Voting rights for women was the central concern when a delegation was sent to the Secretary of State for India, Montague who was asked for 'political representation.' Unfortunately Montague 'derided the idea.' He made no mention of it in his report. Furthermore, the Southborough Franchise Committee also said no to it on the grounds that India was too conservative with the Purdah system and lack of education. The British government was in no mood to give 'equal voting rights' to women in India by 1919 because the women were not granted the vote until 1928. In 1929, the Viceroy declared a Round Table Conference to talk about total independence. The AIWC was ready to send a three women delegation to discuss 'adult suffrage' but the British Government rejected the delegation.' In 1932, the women's organisations asked for representation at the Second Round Table Conference, They were finally, asked to send a three member delegation to JPC in London .But , the women 'declined' because the meetings were 'postponed' several times until the information was given that they were supposed to appear before sub-committee. The Government in the end consented to allowing them to meet the sub- committee and the full JPC. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay observed that the full committee had extra time for 'sectional interests' but wanted to avoid women's organisations as representative of women's voices. It was further argued that the freedom of women was restricted as it did not mean political right to vote for women nor did it mean women's organisations talking on behalf of women on the basis of equality.⁶³

The Memorandum on Women's Franchise was presented by AIWC to the Viceroy And Secretary Of State. It talked about how women had awakened to their role in 'public life.' It mentioned how women had their own views regarding the reforms. The representatives of women's organisations were present there. It included the WIA. So, they had signed the petition in large numbers by Gandhi 'in favour of the scheme of reform' organised by the

⁶² Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p.70.

⁶³ Joanna Liddle And Rama Joshi 'Gender and imperialism in British India.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.20, No. 43, October 26, 1985, p.WS74.

Congress And Muslim League.⁶⁴ It was argued that the right to vote be granted to the people because in the Indian National Congress there were women voters, 'delegates, speakers and even President.' India approved of this development.⁶⁵

The government was further requested to provide for 'free Primary Education' for both the genders. This should be extended to Secondary education. Girls should be given equal opportunities in Education because 'uneducated wives' of educated boys tend to thwart their growth. Moreover, it was argued that women teachers be encouraged to teach by way of scholarships especially, widows. Also, due to high death rate 'of infants and young married women' more 'medical colleges' for women be established and short maternity courses be instituted throughout India.⁶⁶

When the Simon Commission in India came. It was boycotted by Dowager Rani of Mandi led a deputation with two ladies Ahmen Shah and Chitamber. It showed the 'low number of enfranchised women.' And suggested that franchise be granted on the basis of property and literacy⁶⁷ among women. The actual participation would be guaranteed 'through reserved seats.'

Women's participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement gave a lot of appreciation to the 'nationalist leadership' and the Karachi session of the Congress was held on 'fundamental rights resolution' in 1931. With the above demand, the right to equal vote was further reinforced.⁶⁸ The AIWC came together to ask for votes for women 'actively' in 1931. This was when a new Constitution was being discussed in the 'British Parliament.' A meeting of women representatives at Bombay was held under the Chairperson Sarojini Naidu. It elected eight women namely Hansa Mehta, Taraben Premchand, Faiz Tyabji, Margaret Cousins, Hilla Fardoonji, Shareefaah Hamid Ali, Malini Sukhtankar and Rani Lakshmi Bai Rajwade. All these participants prepared a memorandum to be submitted to the 'Franchise Committee of the Second Round Table Conference.' They demanded the following, 'universal adult franchise', 'mixed general electorates', 'no reservation', 'nomination' or 'co-option for women.' Further, 'equality and no privileges', 'a fair field and no favour' were requested for. 'The draft was circulated to all constituencies.' This was their assent was sought. Finally, a united front was established. A deputation led by Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur and the AIWC members

⁶⁴ AIWC, Souvenir, p.16.

⁶⁵ Ibid.p.17.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p.71.

met the Viceroy Irwin and insisted on enough 'representation' of women at the Roundtable Conference.⁶⁹

The Gandhi Irwin Pact Of March 1931 encouraged the Congress to partake in the Second Round Table Conference. Women's organisation following the Congress sent their representative Sarojini Naidu .Begum Shah Nawaz and Subbaryan were chosen by the British. Towards the end of the Round Table Conference,'an increased franchise for women' was 'presented 'at' both houses of the Parliament.' A franchise Committee was formed with Lord Lothian as Chairperson. It accepted a memorandum from the women's organisations. But in this document women criticized the right to vote based on education and urban area. The Lothian Committee denied 'adult franchise' because of the sheer size of India, its population and illiteracy. They however increased the women voters and 'recommended 'the increase in the ratio of female to male votes from 1:20 to 1:5.'⁷⁰

The Communal Award of 1932 gave Muslims reserved seats and alongwith reserved seats from 'depressed classes'. The WIA and AIWC etc, produced a memorandum asking for adult franchise and protesting against 'separate electorates and reservation of seats. 'Women representatives consisting of Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur and Muthulakshmi Reddi And Begum Hamid Ali presented evidence before the 'Franchise Sub – Committee and the full JPC.' They asked for 'universal adult franchise' and got supported by the British women.

During the annual session of 1933, AIWC asked for voting rights and 'equal status in the Constitution and endorsed the statement by elected representatives 'of London. During the next session , Amrit Kaur acknowledged that JPC wanted the increase in enfranchisement of women to a respectable position in the new Constitution .But , the demands of AIWC and women's organisations were 'ignored.' Amrit Kaur demanded the 'removal of sex disqualification' and questioned the method of enfranchisement based on' wifehood.' The enfranchisement on the basis of urban areas was asked for. The JP C ruled out the universal adult franchise. But increased the right to vote among women. Wives could vote in some places, literate women in other places and' wives of initiatory officers in still others.'⁷¹

⁶⁹ Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p.71

⁷⁰ Ibid.p.72.

⁷¹ Ibid .

The Government of India Act of 1935 again did not grant universal adult franchise. AIWC in its annual session showed disappointment for the new franchise qualification. The AIWC resolved to get women on electoral rolls on the basis of 'literacy.' There was a 'great apathy regarding education' and the AIWC tried to overcome this. The Universal Adult Franchise was granted in 1947. But many women's names were not part of the voter's list. The AIWC tried to enrol all women voters. But their political participation has been a concern.⁷²The significance of universal franchise was spelt as equality for women.⁷³

Muthulakshmi Reddi had elaborated on what a woman's vote stood for. She argued that the women's vote would elevate the country's 'standard of life and thought'. She pointed out that the duty of the government was to protect its people from 'dangers, disease, ignorance and starvation.' It was said that the mother and her family would be the first hit by the above mentioned dangers. So, it was the woman's responsibility to take care for the upkeep of her children, protection from illness, education and employment of the youth, setting up of homes for destitute women and children and the continuance of peace. Women had the ability to change the 'course' of the elections. It was time that women understood their true potential .So that they could use their power carefully. Most of the women's organisations in the nation consisted of women from diverse backgrounds and hence, these did not associate themselves with any particular political party.' Sex disqualification, equal rights and equal opportunities' were ensured by the Constitution. But, despite this, there was inequality with regard to society, inheritance and marriage. There was an inferiority with regard to women. This could be taken care by the voting rights in the elections. A woman's vote would lose out if the individuality of the woman would not be asserted. She also discussed in relation to the candidates, that there was a lack of medical aid because of the absence of proper salaries to the medical staff .She talked about Tuberculosis and Leprosy and how it affected people because of poor nutrition and housing. The Government should make these basic amenities available to the poor.⁷⁴

Regarding Cancer, Reddi put forth that people lost their lives on account of cancer. She pointed that women were affected more by cancer than men .The Bhole Commission

⁷² Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p.73.

⁷³ Neera Desai, *Woman in Modern India* :Bombay, Vora,1977,p.225.

⁷⁴ S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, *What A Woman's Vote Stands For*, S.No. 159, Vol. II , Part III, Individual List 99, Speeches and writings by her,p.970.

had suggested a 'separate self-contained Cancer Hospital'. The Madras Citizen's meeting in August 1949 also demanded for the same facility. Thus, every woman voter should ensure this 'urgent medical relief' was provided. Women must make sure that public funds were judiciously spent on taking care of the 'poor', the 'sick' and the suffering'. This should be the priority of the 'future government.' In short, she wanted the candidates to have a good character, 'honesty of purpose', in addition to 'loyalty' and 'devotion' to noble causes that serve the country. She did not want the nation misled by the candidates. She hoped for bold, sincere and 'public spirited' women to make a comeback. Women irrespective of their community and political affiliations should promote the interests of other women.⁷⁵

According to Reddi, an English M. P. pointed out that in Paris after women got the vote, the country had shown positive signs. The infant mortality rate had fallen, the social diseases and tuberculosis had come down by 'fifty percent'. Also, the physique of the country had shown positive results, so much so that women were found to have more energy and commanded more respect. Before the franchise, women were lifeless like dolls.

Thus, the women's movement spread far and wide. It brought along cooperation and healthy relationships. Thus, brought about better health and joy and peace. Women possessed the greatest power on earth 'motherly love' in the words of Madam Corbett Ashby, the president of Paris International Congress of Women according to Reddi.⁷⁶

Women's Political Participation

Coming to the general political activity of women, 'the Constitution of India has put women on equal footing with men 'in all walks of life. Although women formed half the population, their political participation was low, in a country 'dominated' by men. Women appeared in the political scenario thanks to their participation in the freedom struggle. Gandhi and Nehru encouraged their political activity besides, their male counterparts. It may further be argued that the nineteenth century reform movement along with dissemination of education improved the status of women. But, this was only restricted to the traditional domain of the family. However, certain women became active in 'social welfare' and 'revolutionary movements. 'They worked for 'women's

⁷⁵S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'What A Woman's Vote Stands For,' S.No. 159, Vol. II, Part III, Individual List 99, Speeches and writings by her, p.970.

⁷⁶S.Muthulakshmi Reddi, Papers,' Untitled2', S.No.155-191, VOLII Part III, Individual list 99, private papers, p.1131.

education' and welfare of the underprivileged and victims of disasters.⁷⁷ A handful of women were active in revolutionary politics. They endured 'police repression', 'imprisonment' and 'even capital punishment.' Thus, women in general were supported to an extent by their families. The women in Indian women's movement were primarily from elite section of 'urban educated families.'⁷⁸The 'turn of the nineteenth century' saw the spread of education of females. This led to the rise of women's organisations as women 'entered' the public space in larger 'numbers.' The period witnessed the inception of WIA which was joined by AIWC. This ushered in a new period in the Indian Women's Movement 'for equality.' The demand for women's franchise was started in 1917, when a deputation was headed by Sarojini Naidu. When the British Parliament was asked for women's voting rights. As a consequence in 1919, the Montague Chelmsford Reforms gave a sizeable proportion of women the right to vote. Finally, in 1932 women did vote in 1932, for the first time. Muthulakshmi Reddi was 'nominated to the Madras Legislative Council' and was 'elected' as the Deputy Chairperson of the Council.' Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya first contested for the seat from the 'South Kanara Constituency'. In 1926 'Radha Bai Subbaraya, Renuka Ray, Annu Swaminathan' were the earliest women to get entry into the 'Central Legislature.'⁷⁹

Gandhi inspired women to join the freedom struggle because of their silent nature and 'dignified service.' In 1919,, Gandhi launched the Rowlatt Satyagraha. He got supported by women in this struggle, although not in significant numbers. During the Civil Disobedience Movement, women wanted to join the Dandi March but Gandhi was reluctant to include them because he did not want women to break the laws. But Durgabai Deshmukh and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya protested. Lilavati Munshi and Sarojini Naidu prepared the struggle in Bombay. Laksmi Menon, Hansa Mehta led the struggle and supported it.

Women shifted from a supportive role to a direct confrontational role. Even if it meant questioning the leadership. The 'Swadeshi movement, Non- cooperation movement and Civil Disobedience Movement 'brought women out of isolation to active politics. In 1931, President Sarojini Naidu made a memorandum on universal adult franchise and 'equal political rights without sex discrimination.' This was presented before the

⁷⁷A. Thanikodi And M.Sugirtha ' Status of Women In Politics' in *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 68 No.3 July- September 2007.p.599.

⁷⁸ Ibidp.600.

⁷⁹ Thanikodi and Sugirtha ' Status of Women,p.600.

Roundtable Conference. In 1931, the Congress Karachi session was held where the fundamental rights resolution was passed, giving political equality to both the sexes. Women fought in the elections of 1937, with 42 women in the legislature and 5 being nominated to the upper houses. In 1942, Aruna Asaf Ali and Preeti Waddadar and Usha Mehta played a key role. Women played a significant role in the Constituent Assembly for framing the Constitution. For instance the role of Sarojini Naidu, Durgabai Deshmukh and Renuka Ray in this regard was commendable.⁸⁰

During the independence struggle the environment favoured women's participation⁸¹. Hansa Mehta in 1930 recalled how the freedom struggle 'infection' got to her. Usha Mehta remembered the 'songs and slogans' that encouraged her. It was further argued that as women partook in the political activities, the restrictions on them were removed. Political movement led to social change. Personalities were equally important. Gandhi brought women into the movement championing their cause.⁸² Families inspired political participation like the case of the Nehru family. Books also proved inspirational. Take the case of the autobiography of Annie Besant that inspired Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya. Also, the values of pre- independence days encouraged women to enter politics as they would then emerge as heroines⁸³. Earlier, the attitudes of women and their families were favourable. Sucheta Kriplani wrote that Gandhi inspired women and their families⁸⁴. In addition, the role of political parties was crucial. The Congress in 1931 included women in the Constituent Assembly and also supported women's equality.⁸⁵ The Pre- Independence period saw the active role of women's organizations. After independence, politics became a male domain.⁸⁶

It may be argued that civic and political rights were a result of the work by Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu and those from women's organisations. It was through WIA's efforts that Indian women won civil and political rights. It was through WIA that the first woman legislator in India was appointed to the Madras Legislative Council. WIA also took the initiative to help the poor.⁸⁷ S. Muthulakshmi Reddi talked about

⁸⁰ Thanikodi and Sugirtha ' Status of Women, p.602

⁸¹ Sethi 'Determinants of ,' p.568.

⁸² Ibid. p.569.

⁸³ Ibid. p.570.

⁸⁴ Ibid. p.573.

⁸⁵ Ibid.p. 574.

⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 576.

⁸⁷S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'The Work Of Women Pioneers And Of Women Associations' Speech By Her III ,Part II ,Vol. II, Individual list 99, 3.9.37,p.855.

franchise. She wanted elections to be held on equal terms with men with proper 'education and training'. The question was asked do Indian women need franchise? They deserved self-government and provincial autonomy.⁸⁸ RajKumari Amrit Kaur put forth that political freedom was meaningless unless there was eradication of poverty, good and healthy living and an understanding of how to live better.

⁸⁸S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, 'Political Advancement', Speeches or writing by her III, Part II, Vo I. II Individual list 99, p.565.

Chapter five

Conclusion

Introduction

According to Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur the women's movement consisted of isolated efforts headed by individuals and organisations in the pre-war period, the progress of female education and the feminist movement which arose at the end of the war. The Women's Indian Association was the first purely feminist organisation. Also, the All India Women's Conference was composed of activities of the Women's Movement in India.¹

The women's movement can be categorized into four phases. The first phase was led by social reformers. The second phase was carried forward by the national leaders like Gandhi. The third phase of the women's movement in India was after independence. This phase witnessed the 'politicisation of the women's movement.' For instance, the AIWC despite being non- partisan had close links with the Congress. The fourth phase of the women's movement began in the mid 1970's.² Now let us summarize the chapters within the study.

The Summary of chapter one showed that the Indian social reformers improved the condition of women and pioneered educational reform. This was expressed through the opening of female schools and through their public and personal crusades for achieving equality for women. It was observed that women held a poor position in society in the nineteenth century. They needed help and help came in the form of, abolition of Sati in 1829 and the legalization of widow remarriage in 1856. Thanks, to the efforts of Raja Rammohan Roy and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and others. Pandita Ramabai also struggled to aid widows. Thus, most of the social reformers were found in Bengal and Maharashtra. In addition the two main women's organisations were established in Pune, Maharashtra and Madras, Tamil Nadu, namely The Women's Indian Association 1917 and the All India Women's Conference in 1927. These organisations battled for the end of the Devadasi System and Immoral traffic in women and children. Politically, they demanded increasing political participation of women like voting rights. Legally, they wanted the Hindu Code Bill and the Sarda Act to help the cause of women. Then, the review of related literature examined the sources that that talked about women and

¹ Kaur, *Challenge to Woman*, p.5.

² Kiran Saxena, 'Empowerment of Women: The Indian Context', *The Indian Journal of Political Science* Volume 55, Number 4, October -December 1994, p.395.

education. It was found that customs like child marriage, purdah, widowhood, sati, female infanticide stood in the way of education for females. Finally, the rationale of study, objective, research questions and research methodology figured along with the plan of study.

Chapter two outlined the establishment of the Women's Indian Association and the All India Women's Conference. These two were the main women's organisations that fought for women in the twentieth century. This chapter also explored the relationship of AIWC with the Congress and Gandhi.

Chapter three looked at S. Muthulakshmi Reddi. She was a role model. She was the first female legislator of India. She worked with the Women's Indian Association and the All India Women's Conference. She laboured to end the Devadasi System and the Immoral Traffic in women and children. She also favoured female education. The chapter elucidated that the Devadasis were immoral and they threatened public health by spreading venereal diseases. Thus, there was a need to discontinue their services at the temple by enfranchising the inam lands allotted to them. Also, the dedication of minor girls was a problem. The Immoral Traffic in Women and Children was another vice to be dealt with. It was felt that the spread of Education would help in overcoming the above problem. Concerning female education, Reddi supported the missionary efforts because they were based on love.

Chapter four explained about the Sarda Act and how it discouraged child marriage. But, the bill did not succeed as much because the government did not publicize it. Further, the Hindu Code Bill was passed. It gave women the freedom to inherit property and the right to divorce. Polygamy was abolished. It became the symbol of national progress because it was based on women's equality. Chapter four also showed how women won the right to vote. In fact, the right to vote ensured a better quality of life for all. Women also participated in active politics through the peaceful Gandhian movement and revolutionary acts of terrorism.

The main characteristic of the Indian women's movement was that it was successful in improving the lot of women. It questioned 'caste, class and gender inequalities'. It examined a wide range of issues.³ Women became socially, politically and legally free to live a life of dignity. The Indian women's movement had its own obstacles namely,

³ Ila Patel, 'The Contemporary,' p.156.

religion, social customs like caste system. But, these were overcome by the sacrifice of many women.

Furthermore, the Indian Women's Movement had its own weaknesses. These were its elitist nature and its dependence on male social reformers like Gandhi. Moreover, the Indian Women's Movement focussed on the upper/middle classes and castes of the Hindu community.⁴ For instance through the Hindu Child Marriage Bill and the Hindu Code Bill in the Pre-Independence Period. The efforts of the reformers' were confined to particular echelons of society' but did not influence 'the grassroot.' Sati, widow remarriage and age of consent focussed on the upper caste women.⁵ But, Shahida Latif disagreed and pointed out that the attitude of the Women's Movement was 'non-communal'.⁶ Also, the Indian women's movement had been called 'multi-class' by some.⁷ Another charge was that the Indian Women's Movement was accused of being Westernized and un-Indian.⁸ In addition, it lacked a mass base and did not have members from rural areas nor represented the lower cadres.⁹

However, now the trend is to include multiple voices within the Women's Movement. The Women's Movement was successful in evoking 'public consciousness' and bringing 'gender issues' before the nation. It has also pressured the governments to bring about legislation and policy change.¹⁰

Moving to the Scope of Study. This research will generate a fresh interest in Women's Studies. We have looked at the Pre-Independence Period. The Ph.D. research can focus on the contemporary period. Furthermore, the dimensions of Women's Education namely, schools, higher education, adult education and vocational education can be studied for further research.

It is important to conclude our study with the brief look at the Indian Women's Movement.

⁴ Ila Patel, 'The Contemporary,' p.159.

⁵ Sarbani Guha Ghosal, 'Major Trends of Feminism in India', *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol.66, No. 4, October- December 2005, p.794.

⁶ Shahida Lateef, 'Whither the India Women's Movement', *Economic And Political Weekly*, Volume 12, Number 47, November 19, 1977, p.1948.

⁷ Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah' *The Issues At Stake, Theory And Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement In India*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1992, p. 23.

⁸ Shilpa Phadke, 'Thirty Years On: Women's Studies Reflects on the Women's Movement', *Economic And Political Weekly*, Volume 38, Number 43, October 25-31, 2003, p.4467.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.4567.

The Indian women's movement was 'ideologically and structurally,' heterogeneous. The movement was 'multi –associational, ideologically diverse ,and regionally broad' dealing 'with a vast array of issues'.¹¹ In the pre independence era, the single 'umbrella organisation' that met to discuss women's education was called the All India Women's Conference. Soon, social problems became important in the light of education. After independence, the AIWC 'incorporated the Women's Indian Association' in 1947.¹²

The Indian Women's Movement was merged with other crucial movements. Namely, the social reform movements of the late nineteenth century and the nationalist movement of the twentieth century. The social reformers sought to raise the marriageable age, ban Sati, allow widow remarriage and permit education for women. They were mostly male. These reforms were within the realms of family and religion which deterred gender parity. The nationalist movement mobilized women for the first time. It made women activists and advanced them politically and professionally.¹³

The Indian Women's Movement had two main strategies. One, conscious raising. Two, engaging with law. The first strategy involved 'a group of women for women, by women and of women.' The second strategy held the state responsible for the Indian Women's Movement. For instance, the state legislation on Sati.¹⁴

It has also been observed that the nineteenth century dealt with the question of women. Education at this time lacked a gendered perspective. Education for the woman was about being a better wife and a mother.¹⁵

Vina Mazumdar has commented on pre independence research being full of women's problems. This was apparently done to justify social reform and to create a sense of pride in one's culture .So, sadly much of the research was centred around upper class women. ¹⁶Although, today the women's movement is 'no longer from the top percolating downward.'¹⁷

¹¹Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, 'Organizing Against Violence: Strategies of the Indian Women's Movement' *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.62, No. 1 University Of British Columbia, Spring 1989, p. 54-55.

¹²Mangala Subramaniam, 'The Indian Women's Movement' *Contemporary Sociology*, Vol. 33 No. 6, American Sociological Association, Nov.2004, p.635.

¹³ Amrita Basu, 'Globalization of the local/localization of the Global Mapping Transnational Women's Movements,' *Meridians*, Vol.1 No.1, Indiana University Press, Autumn 2000,p.77.

¹⁴ Anurekha Chari, 'Gendered Citizenship And Women's Movement', *Economic And Political Weekly*, Vol. 44, No. 17, April 25-May 1 2009,p.56.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.50.

¹⁶ Vina Mazumdar, 'Women's Studies And the Women's Movement In India: An Overview', *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 22 ,No. 3,Women's Studies :A World View, The Feminist Press, City University Of New York, Fall-Winter1994,p.42.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.p.53.

Coming to Education, the education was not enough nor on the correct lines. 'The buildings for municipal schools for girls' were found to be cramped. The efficiency of the teacher was low. Girls were taken out of school because of domestic work or due to their marriage. So, these girls fell back into illiteracy. Nursery schools were also pitiable.¹⁸ India was considered backward in education as not even two percent women could claim literacy. Education for females brought in 'false standards of life' with 'imperfect knowledge of English and Western culture.' The investment in female education had been 'insufficient' in 1931-32, for instance. The Women's Organisations talked of 'universal, free and compulsory education' from the start.¹⁹ Unfortunately, the women's movement did not look at 'female education among the lower castes and Muslims.'²⁰ However, the efforts at social reform helped female education in the nineteenth century. It encouraged a group of professionally educated women namely, doctors, teachers, academics and social workers who laid the foundation of the Women's Movement. Even post-independence, female education was confined to improving the status of females within the family.²¹

¹⁸Kaur, *Challenge to Woman*, p.97.

¹⁹ Ibid. p.62.

²⁰Ila Patel, 'The Contemporary', p.159.

²¹Neeta Tapan, *Need for Women Empowerment*, Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2000,p.125.

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