CHAPTER III

WOMEN LEGISLATORS IN THE MADRAS LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

(1952 - 57)
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The first general election for the Madras Provincial Legislative Assembly after independence was held in May 1952. In this election 1653 men had contested for 375 seats. But 373 were elected. Among the 24 women, only 2 were declared elected. Both of them were sponsored by the Indian National Congress. One of the candidates was Dr. T.S. Soundaram Ramachandran and the other was Mrs. Thimma Kodamma Reddi. The Congress Party which won the majority of the seats in this election formed the Ministry under the leadership of Mr. C. Rajagopalachari.

Dr. Mrs. T.S. Soundaram Ramachandran was elected for the first time from Attur constituency in Madurai district to the Madras Legislative Assembly. She was born in August 1905. She was educated at Madurai. She received her M.B.B.S. degree at Lady Hardinge Medical College, New Delhi. She was a member of the Indian National Congress for many years. She was specially interested in the Gandhian Constructive Programmes and actively participated in the Quit India Movement in 1942. She was exiled from Travancore, while working in that State. Due to her untiring work, Gandhiji appointed her as the representative of the Charity Endowment Committee in the Madras Presidency.

1. Who's Who of Tamil Nadu, Published by the Government of Tamil Nadu, P.355.

Mr. C. Rajagopalachari, the then Chief Minister of Madras State entrusted the Community Development Project programme in Madurai district to the care of Mrs. T. S. Soundarm Ramachandran. After her election in 1962 to Parliament, the late Prime Minister Shri. Nehru made her a member of his Council of Ministers at the Centre and put her incharge of Education and Social Welfare. It was during this period that, she was awarded the 'Padma Shri' title for her social and constructive activities.

Dr. T. S. Soundaram Ramachandran was a member of the Indo-China Friendship Council which visited China in 1955. In addition, she had travelled widely covering a number of continental countries and the State. She was the Honorary Project Executive Officer in the Periyar Community Project. She was the member of the State Social Welfare Board and the All India Family Planning Board from 1966 to 1967. She served as the Secretary to the Central Government and directed several departments such as Education, Social Welfare, Elementary and Higher Secondary Schools. In 1967, she suffered a heart attack and since then, she had to limit her movements. However, her activities had not on that account decreased. She was the Director of Institution at Gandhigram. Gandhigram itself contain a complete and varied institutions which deal with most of the problems that confront the women and children living in the country side. It had an abode for deserted and destitute women and children. Educational courses starting from preparatory school to basic, post-basic, rural higher education and ending with post graduate classes. The thousands of women and girls who had the good fortune to pickup
the threads of a hopeful life would always remember her as "Amma" the mother who took care of all sorts of her children.

Mrs.Thimma Kodamma Reddi was elected for the first time to the Madras Legislative Assembly in 1952 from Pattipadu constituency. She was born in 1925. She served as an advocate.

Since there were only two women legislators in the Assembly, their role was a limited one. They took part in the discussions of the House on varied subjects.

During the debate on Harijan Uplift on 18th December 1953, Mrs.T.S.Soundaram Ramachandran regretted that untouchability had remained static in the State particularly, in rural areas despite the fact that the Government had been taking sincere steps to eradicate untouchability. Kudiarasu stated that, she requested the Government to take severe steps to punish those offenders of untouchability and demanded the Government to construct houses for harijans through co-operative societies.

While taking part in the discussion on Education on 24th December 1953, Mrs.T.S.Soundaram Ramachandran regretted that the Government was not able to give elementary education atleast for 20 percent of school going children in the State. So, she demanded the Government to take sincere steps to provide all the

school going children with adequate education. Viduthalai stated that, she demanded the Government to introduce shift system in the elementary schools in order to increase the strength of the students and to improve the standard of education and requested the Government to encourage basic education in the State and to take steps to avoid drop outs in schools.

Mrs.T.S.Soundaram Ramachandran, while taking part in the discussion on the general budget for the year 1955-56, on 5th March 1955 suggested the Government to start many more cottage industries to solve the unemployment problem in the State particularly, in rural areas. She expressed her compliment to the Government for introducing free education upto VIII standard. She demanded the Government to start training schools for deaf and dumb wherever possible in the State.

The Chief Minister Mr.C.Rajagopalachari during his reply in the House stated that the Government would consider the points raised by Mrs.T.S.Soundaram Ramachandran regarding shift system in schools and to start more cottage industries to solve the unemployment problems.

Mrs.T.S.Soundaram Ramachandran participated in the discussion on Harijan Uplift on 16th June 1955, stressed the need for improving the economic conditions of the harijans, so, as to

enable them to get social status in the society. She stressed the Government the need to reserve special funds for the construction of houses to the harijans. She also urged the Government to give tenancy guarantee to the harijans at least for 15 years in Government lands and temple lands. She strongly demanded the Government to make all the cremation and burial grounds common to all the Communities including the harijans irrespective of their status. While publishing the speeches of Mrs. T.S.Soundaram Ramachandran, The Hindu stated that education alone would improve the economic and social condition of the harijans. It urged the Government to give adequate education to all the harijans in the State and demanded special treatment in the field of education to other backward classes like Dobi, Kallas, Weavers, Barbers etc.

During the debate on Education on 18th July 1952, Mrs.T.Kodamma Reddi supported the demand and pleaded on behalf of women for some more facilities for women both in the matter of education and in appointments. She quoted the statement of the Prime Minister of India Pandit Nehru regarding Women's Uplift. She quoted that the great Prime Minister had said that until such time as women could come forward and take complete part in Governmental activities and would participate in the governance of the country there would be no real freedom for all. So, she pointed out that it was imperative that in the interest of

honesty, impartiality and above all in a sympathetic understanding of the human problems in the administration of the Government, women should be drawn more and more into the Government. She pointed out that the only way to ensure progress was to provide women with all facilities, to educate themselves in the educational institutions. She requested the Government to provide ample opportunities for women to enter into educational institutions and come out successful in life. She also demanded that women should be given free education up to a certain level so that they might rise up to the occasion and compete with men in education. She also demanded to allot more seats in both arts and professional colleges for women students in the State. The Hindu was sure that the beloved Rajaji who had performed so many miracles in a short time would add one more to his laurels by throwing open the door to women both in the educational sphere and in the matter of public services.

During the discussion on Public Health on 13th August 1955, Mrs. T. Kodamma Reddi requested the Government to instruct the managements of industrial concern to grant special leave for certain period before and after confinement. She also submitted that the nursing mothers should be granted some breaks during working hours and they should be granted nursing allowance. She also requested the Government to enact special laws to prohibit pregnant women from working over time. She demanded the

Government to take steps to prevent women from taking to abortion and abandonment of children. She pointed out that it was only out of bitter necessity that women were compelled to renounce motherhood. So, she urged the Government to establish more maternity homes and nurseries to make women to be hailed as mother herione. She said politely that the nurseries would enable the children to find second mothers when their mothers were at work. She also urged the Government to appoint a body to study the problem of the protection and care of mothers and children. She demanded the Government to provide infant homes for destitute children. She further demanded that those children should be given free food and clothing and they should also be protected from being attacked by diseases.

The Minister for Public Health Mr. A. B. Shetty replied that the Government granted the nursing allowance to nursing mothers and the Government enacted special laws to pregnant women. He also stated that the Government would establish more maternity centres in the State and the Government appointed the Committee to study the problems of mothers and children. He also said that those affected the diseases would be given free dress and food by the Government.

While taking part in the debate on Head of State Ministers and Headquarters Staff on 18th August 1955, Mrs. T. S. Soundaram Ramachandran regretted that despite her repeated request in the


House the women's welfare department was not made a permanent one. She further regretted that the prevailing problems of women's welfare were not solved so far. So, she demanded the Government to take steps to permanent the Women's Welfare Department. She urged upon the Government to construct hostels for the lady students studying in teacher training, medical college and nursing courses. She also demanded the Government to start special homes for widows and destitute women in every district headquarters.

The Minister for Public Health Mr. A. B. Shetty said that the Government would construct hostels for ladies studying in teacher training, engineering, medical, law and nursing courses and also Government to construct special homes for widows and destitute women in every districts.

During the discussion on the Governor's Address on 4th August 1955, Mrs. T. S. Soundaram Ramachandran expressed her compliments on behalf of the House to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru for his notable services for the maintenance of world peace. She also expressed her compliments to the Government for having appointed the Speaker as Chairman, Madras Public Service Commission. She suggested to start more cottage industries in rural areas to solve the unemployment problem of the rural masses and to provide them atleast two full meals a day. She regretted to note that the Government was trying to place Block Development Officers as the central revenue officials to implementing the

15. Ibid., PP.465-470.
social welfare schemes. She felt that such a step would affect greatly the improvement and welfare of the people. So, she demanded the Government that revenue and panchayat development should be allowed to function independently under two independent heads.

The Minister for Industries Mr. M. A. Manickavelu told that the Government was to start more cottage industries in the rural areas to solve unemployment problems of the rural areas.

Mrs. T. S. Soundaram Ramachandran congratulated the Government of India on the successful implementation of the project of Neyveli Lignite Corporation. She requested the Government to start more industries in the State both small scale and large scale industries during the Second Five Year Plan, so, that they might give more employment opportunities to the people in Tamil Nadu. The Minister for Industries Mr. M. A. Manickavelu stated that the Government would quickly start many small scale and large scale industries.

17. Ibid., PP. 474-479.
19. Ibid., PP. 484-490.