CHAPTER - VII

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS
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The All India Women's Conference was founded in 1927 brought together Indian Women of enlightened ideas who wished to change the social status and to traditional code applicable to women. A National and a popular organisation with branches throughout the country. The AIWC has served as a powerful pressure groups both at the Central and State levels as per the discussions in the earlier chapters. In the post-Independence period U.N.O. gave the AIWC a consultative status to ascertain the Indian opinion on world wide women's issues.

The All India Women's Conference has completed 70 years of fruitful service to the nation. How far it has been able to meet the needs of women and children to whose cause it is deciated? To what extent is the organisation at present standing up to the expectations of the common women of our country? What are the constraints and limitations, if any. And finally, what is the significance of the organisation in the context of history? All these are the major issues of the present study. On the basis of the study the following observations, achievements of AIWC, limitations and suggestions for future are given in this concluding chapter.
VII.1. ACHIEVEMENTS OF AIWC

The principal objective of the AIWC has been to elevate the status and increase the legal and constitutional rights of women as well as to make systematic efforts to create social awareness among them. Initially, the issues tackled mainly concerned the middle class. It began with the aim of educating women but soon realised that education and social reform were closely interwined and that women's education could not be promoted without eradicating social practices such as purdah and child marriage. As our study has shown, the AIWC played an active role in initiating and campaigning for social legislation that would improve the position of women. It helped in getting the following acts passed successfully.

* The Sarda Act, 1929.
* The Special Marriage Act, 1954.
* The Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act, 1955.
* The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956.
* The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956.

It also played an important part in getting various other social reform bills enacted and implemented.
The AIWC founded a number of pioneering institutions, many of which now function as autonomous apex bodies in their respective fields. These include,

* The Lady Irwin College for Home Science, New Delhi (est. 1932) which is now an institution offering Graduate and Post-Graduate Courses in a variety of subjects.

* The Family Planning Centre (est. 1937) now the Family Planning Association of India.

* Save the Children Committee (est. 1943) now the Indian Council of Child Welfare.

* The Cancer Research Institute (est. 1952), Madras.

* The Amrit Kaur Bal Vihar for mentally retarded children (est. 1964), New Delhi, now run by the Mentally Retarded Children's Society.

VII.2. WELFARE PROGRAMMES OF AIWC

With the passage of time AIWC has diversified its activities, and programmes which include projects for the eradication of illiteracy, family planning, child welfare, fighting drug addiction, use of non-conventional sources of energy, vocational training for women, free legal aid to
women in distress, medical relief in villages, and other socio-economic measures aimed at the under privileged sections of society. Although the leadership is still elite many of the workers come from rural areas. For instance, the creche mother's training programme organised by the South Calcutta branch and the Calcutta Metropolitan Branch attracted women from deep interior villages such as Khirpai and Midnapore district and Chamtjagarh in Bankura district. The programme to train project leaders attracted women of the scheduled castes from the Sundarbans in Bengal and tribal areas of the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu. All these programmes are important in promoting women's welfare.

VII.3. LIMITATIONS

Despite diversification, the AIWC still remains, like almost all women's organisations in India, largely middle class able to challenge the basic social economic and cultural constraints that affect the majority of Indian women. Gender subordination in our society is not only a heritage of the past, neither is it merely culture specific, although tradition and culture have reinforced it. It is in the ultimate analysis the product of an interplay of complex economic, political, social, cultural and other related factors. For instance, class, caste and
religion have allied with patriarchy in perpetuating gender inequality; the age-old prescriptive norms have conditioned women's minds; so-called 'modernisation' has rendered thousands of women either unemployed or swollen the ranks of agricultural day labourers; the unorganised informal sector has undergone a tremendous explosion and women, its principal victims, have been denied the opportunity of united or unionised struggle; the novel international division of labour between the first world and the third world countries has created a new type of exploitation for women. It is true that these problems cannot be solved without a thorough transformation of the present socio-economic frame work. It is also true that one single organisation cannot bring about this metamorphosis. The activities of the AIWC must show a greater awareness of the deep-rooted nature of women's oppression. The organisation must advance beyond its early twentieth century 'welfare' approach towards lower caste/class women. Unless a sense of participation develops among the subordinate social groups, the AIWC will be unable to improve women's life situations in any real sense of the term among all sections of the population. According to the present President of the AIWC, Asoka Gupta, a happy trend is noticeable in some tribal and backward areas that are showing eagerness to
come into the main stream of the AIWC movement and the Conference is trying to reach out to the poor and underprivileged.

2) Today, the AIWC has over a 1,00,000 members in more than 500 branches throughout the country. However, it is not able to attract enough young women. As our statistical analysis reveals not all the branches are active and the majority of office bearers are in the age group of 50 to 70 years. In the Interviews conducted by us, younger members expressed the view that the organisation is overly dominated by senior members and office-bearers who do not give them opportunities to express themselves. They feel that the older women are keen on holding on to their positions and are reluctant to make room for the next generation.

3) Another point to take note of is that the concept of 'Social Work' has taken on new dimensions. In the earlier years, creating awareness among women, consciousness raising and bringing them out of the four walls of their homes was important. With inspiration from reformers and leaders such as Ranade, Gokhale and later Gandhi, EVR Periyar women from respectable middle class families took up social service. All the work was honorary.
This attitude has now changed. We now have a large number of professionally trained social workers who do not wish to do voluntary work. With inflation and rising costs of living, young women want paid work. Besides, in the joint family system, the elders looked after children and domestic help was easily available. Now families are mostly nucleous and it is difficult and expensive to get domestic help. Hence young women cannot find the time to do social work. It is perhaps necessary for the AIWC to have more professionally trained workers to make the organisation more effective.

4) One feels that the activities of the AIWC have become stereotyped. New programmes should be introduced to attract the young generation. Greater emphasis on work in rural and urban slum areas is necessary and also making women aware of their legal rights rather than running masala and papad units or organising mehandi competitions.

5) The women's movement is making rapid strides in India. A number of autonomous women's organisations have come into existence in the last decade and have been very active on issues such as rape, price rise, exploitation of rural, Harijan and tribal women and so on. These organisations are now working among the rural and poor
women, though their membership, like that of the AIWC, is mainly drawn from the urban educated middle classes.

6) The AIWC has no historical or organisational value, or that its contributions over the years have been minimal. This is merely to state that a reappraisal of the organisation's activities is necessary in view of the changed socio-economic scenario. The AIWC is a premier women's organisation that has attracted the most talented and capable Indian women of this century, among them: Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Rameshwari Nehru, Dhanvanthi Rama Rau, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Charulata Mukherjee, Vidyagauri Neelkanth, Hansa Mehta and many others. It is equipped to play a crucial role to help women attain economic self-sufficiency and fight gender inequalities.

7) In the historical context, the AIWC has a three-dimensional significance. First, it symbolises the transfer of leadership of the women's early awareness that the responsibility for women's regeneration belongs to women. In the nineteenth century, the movement for women's education and uplift was initiated and led by men. In the twentieth century, as women became more educated, they came to form their own associations and occupy leadership
positions. The AIWC has been at once the premier and pioneer organisation in this arena. It has been a path breaker.

8) The AIWC was formed at the instance of western and western-educated women. In its early phase, naturally, it looked towards western role-models. The deliberations of the organisation indicate that by now the western stereotype has been totally rejected. The leadership is fully Indian, the members are drawn from the Indian middle class, the approach to problems has an indigenous bias, and the models for ideal womanhood are drawn from great women of ancient India.

9) The organisation has provided women with opportunities to come out into the world outside the parameters of the home, in order to contribute something to society at large. Most of the members are housewives and have exhibited initiative and will in carrying out their organisational activities. Here is the genesis of women-bending and the building of women's network. For providing the lead in such a crucial area of life, the AIWC must be given a place of pride in Indian history.

10) AIWC has been actively involved in many practical projects to help the poor rural and urban women. Workshop
and training programmes are held all over the country to acquaint women with the use of Science and Technology in Farming energy service devices in the kitchen (like Solar Oven) recycling waste, improving sanitation and providing clean water. New horizons have opened for women.

11) For thousands of women AIWC not only mean a forum for expressing their ideas and aspiration, but also the training ground through which they gained experience of practical social work which was instrumental in bringing about social change.

12) The old generation is keen on holding high positions and hogging the limelight and is reluctant to give room to the younger generation.

13) There is an absence of rapport between head office and rural areas.

14) There is a need to organise more legal cells in rural areas.

15) Majority of members belong to upper middle class and the so called elite of society.
SUGGESTIONS

1. Voluntary organisations should undertake surveys to pin point problems of women in a particular area, as basis for framing the plan of action.

2. Equip all members both in the techniques and methodology of social service and in special fields like Nutrition, Child Care and Education.

3. Pressurise Government to ban all advertisement which degrade women.

4. Break through the generation gaps.

5. Publicise outcomes of desired changes as further incentives and motivation.

6. Since many new organisations have come up the AIWC should work along with them to eradicate social evils. Younger people have to be drawn to the organisation by giving them emoluments. A women's development planning and monitoring cell have to be set up for monitoring of plan programmes. As we are in the threshold of the 21st century it is essential to empower women.
7. AIWC programmes should be evaluated by a committee of experts consisting of Government Nominee, Voluntary Organisation and Beneficiaries.

8. The young women must now come forward to join the organisation in order to contribute fruitfully and meaningfully to women's development and fight for establishing women's rights in all communities of India.

9. AIWC is not popular in the southern district of Tamil Nadu they are concentrating only northern states. In Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu social evils like infanticide, Child Labour, Bonded Labour, Women Labour, Exploitation occurrences of communal clashes, still exist more on this remote rural areas of the districts. So AIWC should concentrate its activities in Southern districts of Tamil Nadu.

CONCLUSION

AIWC should concentrate its activities in Tamil Nadu. Eventhough AIWC has certain limitations, it played a vital role for the cause of women and children. There Educational Programmes, present day problem solving
measures, rural development programmes are praiseworthy. In order to improve the functioning of the AIWC the above mentioned suggestions are to be taken into considerations for future course of action. There are many voluntary organisations working for the welfare of women. AIWC is a reputed and pioneer organisation, a closer co-ordination of AIWC with other organisation will certainly enhance the status of women, fund saving, holistic approach to the upliftment of women.