Chapter-II
CHAPTER – II

EMERGENCE OF WOMEN ELITISM AND FEMINISM

WOMEN ‘ELITE’ IN ANCIENT TAMIL NADU

Women’s important place in the ancient Indian cultural and social life can be perceived from the famous words of Manu1, "The Acharya is ten times more to be revered than the Upadhyaya, the Father, a hundred times more than a teacher, but a mother thousand times more than the teacher".

Women in India occupied a dignified place in those days. They had all the high avenues of learning. Lopamudra, Apala, Kadru, Ghosha, Pautomi and many others are some of the outstanding women of the ancient period. Gargi was the notable philosopher of that time.2

Scholars all over the world have generally agreed that the Tamil society is one of the most ancient societies in the world. Scholars who have given a shape to the Lemurian theory have always maintained that the present territorial portion of South India and a long stretch of land to the South of it, which submerged under deluges thousands of years back, have been the cradle of human civilisation.

Father Heras maintains that the civilisation of the Dravidians had dawned long back, and that the civilisation, that prevailed in the Indo-Gangetic plain seven thousand years back, is definitely that of the Dravidians. He says, “being Dravidians, the inhabitants of Mohenjo Daro and Northern India naturally spoke a Dravidian language”.\(^3\) *Purapporul Venpa Malai*, a latter composition points to the fact that Tamil community was born “when rocks appeared on the face of the earth and sand was not yet formed”.\(^4\)

In this context it is interesting to note that, of all the women belonging to the ancient civilisations, the entire world over, it was the Tamil women who had been enjoying certain higher status, privileges and freedom in life. Thiru.V. Kanakasabai Pillai remarks in his pioneer book, *Tamils one thousand eight hundred years ago*, that the Tamil women “mixed freely, although with modesty, in the business and amusements of social life”.\(^5\)

Prof K.A.Nilakanta Sastri has remarked in his book, *The History of the Tamils and their Culture* that the women of the ancient Tamilagam enjoyed considerable privileges, and there were many poetesses who distinguished them in the literary field.\(^6\)

Thiru.V.Kalyanasundaranar, who was one of the heralds in Tamil Nadu, praised the standard of independence of women early in this century. He says: “It is not an exaggeration to assert that the ancient Tamilagam was a symbol of independent womanhood. This fact can be substantiated by any

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\(^4\)‘Pura-porul venba malai’, Karanthaippaialam,p.14

\(^5\)V.Kanagasabai Pillai, *The Tamil 1800 years ago*, p.120.

\(^6\)K.A.Neelakanta Shastri, *Tamilar panpaadum Varalaarum*, p.115
amount of evidence collected from the ancient Sangam works. None, in those days, felt that woman was inferior, less equipped, and a slave to man. The lover and his loved-one should have been equally pleased in their enjoyment and domestic pleasure. There were no disparities of any sort between them. Both of them enjoyed equal privileges and equal status. The outlook and accomplishments of both the lover and his loved one were balanced and matched”.

According to Nachinarkkiniyar the lover and the loved one should function as the pair of horns adorning the head of a cow. The ancient Tamils practised love marriages. The very fact that a girl could select her husband attests to the vast large amount of freedom enjoyed by women. Prof. M.Varadharajanar writes in his book *Penmai Vazhga* as follows, “During the Sangam Age Tamil Nadu had attained a very status in political, social and commercial spheres”.

A study of Tamil literature of those days would amply prove that the women enjoyed a good deal of esteem and respect. More than thirty poetesses flourished at various times in the ancient Tamilagam. There were poetesses like Avvaiyar who had the privilege of being employed as ambassadors. Royal ladies like the wife of Bhudappandiyan were erudite scholars. Women well accomplished in the arts like music and drama were reported to have lived in every town. In many other fields too, women distinguished themselves along with men to a considerable degree”.

Dr.V.S.Manickam who has made a special study of the condition of women of Sangam period, emphasises that “the women of the ancient Tamil

7 T.V.Kalyana Sundaranar, *Penin Perumai or Vazhkai Thunai*, pp.39,40.

8 Dr .M.Varadarajan, *Penmai Vazhga*, pp.11,12.
society had the privilege to seek for educational equipments, to compose poems, to love and get married, to rebuke her lover, to pursue her domestic functions without any hindrance and to command a status in all these equal to men".9 Dr.K.K. Pillay observes in his book, *Social history of the Tamils* that "women were treated with consideration in view of their comparatively weaker physical capacity and power of resistance".10 Dr.N.Subramanian declares that "the position of women of Sangam age was not as it is today; and at the same time, it was not widely different from the one as it obtains today".11

In one of his articles he further states that "the Sangam society from the point of view of the sexes, was not an egalitarian society, and the men granted a markedly inferior status to their women, who consciously or by habit accepted that position. There was no contemporary demand for a revision of that status on philosophical or even practical grounds, and, till recently, that position has remained without appreciable change".12

Mrs. K. Gnanambal states in her book, *Home life among the Tamil in the Sangam Age* that "a woman is the fountain head of love. She was free, independent and equal to man and she was treated with uniform courtesy and respect. She was not a mere household beast of burden. She was indispensable and vital half man. She was held in reverence and adoration in the Tamil Land of the Sangam Age".13

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9 Dr.V.S.Manickam, *Tamilkaathal*, p.152.


11 Dr.N.Subramanian, *Sangam Polity*, p.285


There had been many women scholars in Tamil Nadu from the Last Sangam period (2000 years ago) as can be inferred from the chequered pages of Tamil literature. Girls and women were educated in fine arts and culture through tutors.\textsuperscript{14} The poetesses like Avvaiyar, Kakaipadiniyar, Adimandiyar and religious personalities like Manimegalai, Kundalakeshi, Kavundi Adigal and others created history in ancient Tamil Nadu. Some women secured an honoured place in the social life of Buddhism and Jainism.

They were admitted in the order of nuns by virtue of whom they gained opportunities to learn and serve. They participated in the public life and won distinctions; prominent among them were Dharmapala, Anupama, Queen Kshema, Chapa and others.

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This honourable position was maintained till the entry of the Muslims in to India in the 11th century A.D. This was adversely affected due to political instability, consequent migration of population and economic depression extending over a period of about three centuries.\textsuperscript{15} The Female education in India declined because of the following reasons:

i) The social evils such as child marriage, compulsory widowhood and seclusion of women put the women at a disadvantageous position in the society.

ii) The desires for education as a means of earning ones own livelihood was completely absent among women.


At the same time it should be remembered that their education was not altogether neglected. They were given training in the household arts and also in the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic in the indigenous schools. In addition to that they also acquired knowledge from the elderly women folk at home.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{RESURGENCE OF WOMEN EDUCATION}

The old order slowly changed with the coming of the Western thought into India. The context of social change and economic development and also the issue of women's status in India have assumed tremendous significance and have attracted a lot of attention. There is an increasing awareness of the need to enhance the status of women through education, the most potent instrument for effecting a change in their subjugated status and unenviable position occupied in Tamil society by women.\textsuperscript{17}

There are some factors, which caused the diffusion of knowledge among the women of India such as the services of the Christian missionaries, socio-religious reformers, Governmental machinery etc.

Education for women was considered as the most important factor for their elevation. The wheel was set in motion in the end of the 19th century by various forces, alien and indigenous to liberate the women of India from the age long evil customs by disapproving some of the social customs, which enslaved the women folk forever.\textsuperscript{18}


\textsuperscript{17} S.Muthiah, \textit{It's Yesterdays, Todays, and Tommorrrows} (Madras: 1965), p.44.

\textsuperscript{18} K. Venkata Subramanian, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.88, 89.
Some of the writings of the English East India Company officials as well as the Western education and the contacts with the West opened new opportunities for the people of India.\textsuperscript{19} During Lord Dalhousie's period, female education was highly encouraged and such encouragement made the Indian women to think in line with the West. Indian women became aware of the French philosophy viz., Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.

Such educational reformation not only increased the ratio of literacy among women but also did away with the blind folding fostered upon women, in the name of religion, \textit{shastra} and \textit{sambradaya}. The position of women in southern part of India especially in the Tamil speaking areas was higher than the rest of India except in certain provinces.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{i) Christian missionaries and upliftment of women}

The pioneers in the field of women education are the Christian missionaries. All the Christian missionaries which worked in India, invariably reported that they were not able to get more conversant under their fold because the Christian message did not reach the women folk of India who were not allowed to cross the doors of their houses. The gross ignorance of the women folk was due to the absence of their education. Realising this fact the missionaries set upon themselves to build up confidence among women and their family by bringing knowledge to their very doorsteps. The Christian missionaries started educational institutions, introduced a new spirit of understanding and better appreciation of life in the community and gave an impetus to a rethinking of values.\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Manmohan Kaur, \textit{op.cit.}, p.2.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Indian Franchise Committee Report, vol., Para 206, (Calcutta: Government of India, 1932), p.83.
\item \textsuperscript{21} K.N.Paniker, \textit{The Foundation of New India} (London: 1963), p.48.
\end{itemize}
They condemned the seclusion of women and also their colossal illiteracy. They mocked at the social anomalies in India and published caricatures of Indian women in highly condemnatory style.\(^{22}\)

In June 1815, Rev. Rhenius and Schnaire of Church Missionary Society (CMS) started a school for girls in the northern side of Madras. Miss. Cook of CMS came to Calcutta and succeeded in forming a native school for girls. Rev. Hacebroe (CMS) first formed native girls’ school in Tirunelveli.\(^{23}\) They opened schools for girls in 1818 at Chinsura.\(^{24}\)

The idea of imparting education to Indian women by establishing schools exclusively for them was originated from the missionaries in 1819. They opened Girls Day Schools, Orphans Domestic Establishments and domestic teachings by Governors inside the houses of upper class people.\(^{25}\)

The CMS opened a school in Tirunelveli in 1821, which was the first Madras Boarding School.\(^{26}\) The London Mission Society (LMS) also established schools for women. Mrs. Miller, Mrs. Thompson, Mrs. Norton, Mrs. Baily and Mrs. Baker of the LMS were pioneers in female education. Between 1819 and 1823 they started a good number of schools.\(^{27}\)

\(^{22}\) H.L. Gupta, *The Christian Missionaries and impact on Modern India in the pre-mutiny period, ideas in History* (Delhi: University of Delhi, 1965), p.57&60.

\(^{23}\) Annual Report of AMM, 1837-38, p.61.


\(^{26}\) K. Venkata Subramanian, *op. cit.*, p.87.

\(^{27}\) Annual Report of AMM, 1837-38, p.61.
The Ladies Society for Native Female Education was formed in 1824 under the patronage of Mrs. Ambrest, and it managed more than thirty girls' schools. In 1840 with the assistance of Rev. Issac Wilson and his wife, the Scottish Church Society ventured to start six schools for Hindus in Madras with a total of 200 pupils. There were 7,540 children in the two mission districts of Nagercoil and Neyyoor. Out of this 998 were girls. In the beginning they were able to collect only poor Christian girls, who needed pecuniary aids. In the early year besides the native schoolmasters, schoolmistresses were also employed. This was something novel to the people at that time.

The American Madura Mission (AMM) opened a school at Madura under the supervision of Mrs.Eckard in 1836. This was the first girls' school in that district. Girls of Vellala, Naidu, Pallar and Pariah castes and also dancing girls attended the school, but due to caste prejudice this school was forced to close. The vernacular language was the medium of instruction in these schools. The LMS also opened a school at Purasalvakkam in Madras in 1841 under the guidance of Mrs.Turnbell and Mrs.Porter. The CMS also opened two schools one at Kadatchapuram (Tirunelveli district) in 1840, and another called Elliot Texford School at Meignanapuram (Tirunelveli district) in 1842. These earlier efforts were directed in forming schools mainly though not exclusively for Christian girls to learn scriptual knowledge. With the advent of Free Church Scotland Mission (FCSM), female education took a new turn. They took practical steps to establish elementary schools for girls.

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28 Priculla, *op.cit.*, p.75.


They opened three types of schools such as Day Schools for caste Hindu girls, Boarding Schools for Christian girls and Normal training schools for mistresses. Mrs. Braidwood (FCSM) started a school in 1841 at Madras for caste Hindu girls.

The girls were generally from the lower strata of Tamil society. Within five years the strength of this school reached four hundred, although the school was not altogether free from the caste prejudice and also the fear of conversion. In 1847 the school was closed due to the immature attempt of the missionaries to convert five girls of this school, but however, after sometime the school was reopened.31

In 1845, the first girls' school under partial Indian management was opened in Madras.32 In 1849 J.E. Bethune established the first girls' school independent of missionaries at Calcutta.33 Bethune College was the first women's college, which employed women as teachers. Miss. Kumudini was its first Indian Woman principal. Women gradually began to realise that teaching was a 'responsible' occupation. The inadequacy of girls' schools and colleges did not provide enough scope to gain any definite form of economic independence.34

Since the chief aim of Christian efforts in imparting education to women was to implant Christian principles in their mind, majority of Indians were afraid of sending their daughters to Christian schools. Hence the mission schools failed to attract more female children. This failure made the missionaries

32 K. Venkata Subramanian, op. cit., p.87.
33 Rajpruthi and Bela Rani Sharma, op. cit., p.3.
34 Calcutta Review, 1851, pp.248,249.
think of raising public opinion in support of female education. They circulated many tracts and pamphlets to create public awareness. They also conducted essay competitions on the topic of female education and its merits.

They activated the press to take part in shaping the public opinion in favour of female education. Church Missionary Records (London), Harvest Field, Hindu Christian Observer, Indian Churchman (Calcutta), Indian Evangelical Review, Indian Messenger, Indian Social Herald, Madras Christian College Magazine, Madras Quarterly Missionary Journal, Missionary Information, Mission Field, Missionary Herald, Missionary Sketches, Missionary News, Missionary Notices, Missionary Records, Missionary Harvest, Native Herald etc., took active part in this line. Indians were encouraged to write articles on this subject. The efforts of London Missionary Society and also the Church Missionary Society in persuading the people to shake off their prejudices against female education were praise worthy. But due to the denominational character, these schools could not attract females of the upper and middle strata of society. The people of lower stratum who were comparatively free from social bondage sent their daughters to these schools. In spite of the liberal distribution of presents in cash and kind to students, the response in attendance remained poor.

A Bombay based Christian named St.Clair Jameson offered a prize of one hundred rupees (£10) to the natives of Madras Presidency for the best English essay on "Women as she is in India-exhibiting her as she passes through the various stages of her existence with special reference to those customs and institutions that chiefly affect her condition and pointing out the

means to be adopted to provide her proper sphere in society, and the advantages that would follow\textsuperscript{40}, in 1840. This proposal stirred the minds of the educated Christians and a number of people wrote essays on this topic. An essay written by a teacher of Kanjeevaram branch school of FCSM was the successful one and it was published throughout India by the mission which awakened a fresh interest in the female education.\textsuperscript{37} Such efforts of the missionaries created a new class of women who later became teachers, nurses and missionary attendants. They pursued a changed mode of life and served the society.

\textbf{ii) Efforts of Social Reformers}

The most significant outcome of the missionary activities was the changes in the social behaviour relating to the treatment of women. They tried their level best for the restoration of the women's lost glory and their rightful place in the society.

The period followed by this outbreak was the period during which social reforms and social reconstruction took place. Both men and women appeared on the stage of India to uplift the womanhood of the land. The need of educating women in India had by now started receiving some attention.\textsuperscript{38}

The activities of the Christian missions in the field of female education ultimately gave rise to an enlightened public opinion. In spite of the hostile opposition from the orthodox section, realisation of the necessity and importance of female education grew a pace in the country. Social reform should go hand in hand with educational opportunities.

\textsuperscript{37} John Braidwood, \textit{op.cit.}, p.129.

\textsuperscript{38} Manmohan Kaur, \textit{op.cit.}, p.2.
Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833)
The Father of Indian Renaissance and the founder of Brahma Samaj
Indian women owe a great deal to the indigenous religious foundations like the Brahama Samaj, Arya Samaj, Veda Samaj, Sanmarka Sangh, Hindu Reform Society, Saiva Reform Society, Deva Samaj etc. for recognising the need for encouraging the education of women as a part of social reform.\(^39\)

This kindled many officials, traders and well-to-do people to take an interest and favour female education. It was not uncommon to see Hindu gentlemen involved in the progress of female education. The interest of the intelligent Hindu in the female schools and their pleasure at the success of the girls were evinced by the resolution passed by a number of gentlemen in Madras. They gave gold medals to each of those girls who passed the examinations.\(^40\)

The western humanitarian ideas impressed the elite of India and the need for rethinking on certain age long social customs such as \textit{sati}, child marriage, prohibition of widow remarriage, polygamy, and \textit{Devadasi} systems by which the women of India were degraded into second rate citizens. The social reformers stressed more importance to female education in order to uplift the women from their degraded level. The people felt that to have quick and effective social reforms, India must be able to take decision on her own. If the country were politically free, social reforms would be easier to secure. Social freedom is inter-linked with political freedom and for the progress of the country, both are cardinal factors.

It was at this time, the first reformist movement, the Brahma Samaj took efforts for the expansion of the education of women.\(^41\) The Veda

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\(^{40}\) Annual proceedings of CMS, p.151.

\(^{41}\) Rajpruthi and Bela Rani Sharma, \textit{op.cit.}, p.3.
Samaj of Madras (1864), Hindu Literary Society (1835), Madras Native Association (1850) and Prarthna Samaj of Bombay (1867) encouraged education of girls. Brahma Samaj was the first organisation, which treated women as individuals and also paved the way for their lives outside the home. The Arya Samaj also advocated the equality of sexes by opening schools for the education of both girls and boys. Gurukulas were opened for the girls. Girls were given training in domestic science. Instruction in religious ceremonies also formed a part of their educational programme, thereby enabling the women to take part in the religious rites on equal terms with men.42

Swami Vivekananda wanted women to be emancipated from all restraints through education.43 He recommended such education as would make them self-reliant and useful members of the society.44 The Theosophical Society opened schools for women in Madras. Mrs. Annie Besant, Leader of the Theosophical society, condemned the seclusion of women and remarked "For India's uplift, the women must have an open field, unfettered hands, and unimpeded activity".45 She held the view that education for women should be adapted to their needs. Special education must be arranged for the widows in their homes and such education would transform them into the 'Lights of the home'.46

Vedanayagam Pillai's Prathaba Mudhaliar Sarithram and Suguna Sundari pictured the condition of women in the Tamil society. He

42 Manmohan Kaur, op.cit., pp.73,74.
45 Manmohan Kaur, op.cit., pp.75-79.
stressed the need for the upliftment of the women through education. Many social novelists like Madavaiah (*Padmavathi Sarithiram*), Thiru V.Kalyana Sundaranar and others also exhorted the people to give education to their daughters. Thiru.Vi.Kalyanasundaranar praised the worthiness of women in the society. In his book, *Pennin Perumai*, he expressed that “they are the backbone of any welfare society. Without their awareness the society cannot be considered”. 47

As per John Murduch’s *Classified Catalogue of Tamil Printed Books with Introductory Notices*, “The 19th century may be called as the ‘Century of Women Reform’”. A list of book printed in this century shows the necessity of women education.

iii) Governmental Efforts

The government took effort to eradicate illiteracy among women in order to remove the social disabilities of women. The government started women’s school and colleges in all parts of Tamil Nadu, thus providing employment for women teachers. This profession was first open to women in 1837, and laid the foundation stone for their economic freedom. 48

Slowly and steadily the participation of women in educational institutions increased. A real fillip to education was given only in 1855, when a Department of Public Instruction was instituted and Sir. Alexander Arbuthnot was appointed as the first Director of Public Instruction in Madras. The same year, a set of grant-in-aid rules was published with the object of assisting the private enterprise in the field of education. Public Boards like Municipalities and


Local Boards also promoted female education from 1870 onwards\textsuperscript{49}. The dawn of British regime had brought changes in the socio-economic, educational, cultural and political scenario of Indian women.

The British brought English education and helped new social groups to emerge. The English education was another boon in disguise to India. It opened the floodgates of Western ideas, which almost overwhelmed Indians in the beginning.\textsuperscript{50}

Girls Institutions and Enrolment in the year 1851:\textsuperscript{51}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Bombay</th>
<th>Bengal</th>
<th>North West Province</th>
<th>Punjab</th>
<th>Central India</th>
<th>Madras</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day schools for girls</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils in day schools for girls</td>
<td>1186</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>6768</td>
<td>8919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarding schools for girls</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils boarding schools for girls</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>797</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1110</td>
<td>2274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of girl pupils</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>11193</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that the natives of India began to pay more attention to girls' education at all India level and in particular in the Madras Presidency.

\textsuperscript{49} K.Venkata Subramanian, \textit{op.cit.}, p.87.

\textsuperscript{50} Dr.D.Janaki, \textit{Changing Status of Women in Tamil Nadu}, South Indian History Congress (Warangal: 23\textsuperscript{rd} - 25\textsuperscript{th} January 2000, XX.Session), p.4.

\textsuperscript{51} Educational despatches, St. George Fort, dt January-June, 1852, vol.XI, p.115.
The Report of missionaries induced the educated Hindus to open female schools. The HLS opened a school for girls at Madras (Block Town) and a good number of Hindu girls attended this school.

With the increased efforts of the missionaries and also native educational agencies, the female education touched a new phase. In 1880-81 there were 557 girls schools with 35,042 pupils. The number of female pupils in Boy's schools rose from 11,503 in 1871-72 to 37,361.\textsuperscript{52} The initial efforts taken by various people paved the way for the growth of female teacher training education; thereby knowledge diffused among the women folk also. Miss Mary Carpenter, a great English social reformer, suggested the establishment of Teacher Training Colleges for women. This proved a great stimulus because it opened a useful career for women.\textsuperscript{53}

Mr.H.B.Grigg, Director of Public Instruction, expressed his favour for starting normal schools and Government agency for female education. The Indian Education Commission of 1882 recommended that female education should receive all encouragement.\textsuperscript{54}

This Commission went into the question of women education and suggested the introduction of a system of scholarship, the establishment of hostels, extension of opportunities for secondary education, encouragement of training of women teachers and also the appointment of women inspectors.\textsuperscript{55}

The Madras Government amended grants-in-aid code in favour

\textsuperscript{52} The Educational Report of Hunter's Commission 1884, p.756.

\textsuperscript{53} Pratima Asthana, \textit{op.cit.}, p.134.

\textsuperscript{54} Report of Indian Education Commission 1882, p.548.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{ibid}, p.560.
of the qualified female teachers working in private institutions. The progress of female education was confined to the primary stage. The demand for upper secondary education hardly existed since the caste girl's school life was closed at the age of 12. After that the girls were withdrawn from schools. In order to attract them, the missionary introduced knitting and other household arts. Up to 1888, no Hindu or Mohammedan girl was matriculated at the Madras University.

RISE OF PUBLIC OPINION ON WOMEN EDUCATION.

The South Indian Conference held at Madras in December 1884 passed some resolutions favouring female education. Resolution I of Tenth conference of Indian National Social Conference held at Calcutta on December 27, 1897 passed the following resolution suggesting the best way to spread female education:

i) To employ female teachers in female schools;

ii) To establish training schools for women to secure sufficient number of qualified female teachers

iii) To open home classes for grown up ladies

iv) To employ Pandits to read passages from Puranas

v) To publish text books for female schools and

vi) To impart instruction in needlework, hygiene, culinary art, domestic economy and training of children in secondary schools.

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57 ibid, 1899-1900, Vol.VI, p.34.

58 Athneum, 2nd March 1894.

The interest of the intelligent Hindus in the schools for girls and their pleasure at the success of the girls are evinced by the resolution passed by a number of educated Indians to give a small gold medal to each of those who passed the examinations.\textsuperscript{60} Because of all these measures, the caste people accepted the liberal education for women but at the same time, they preferred rather private tutors to coach their daughters than sending them to the mission schools because of the fear of conversion.

The presence of the mission girl's school induced the Hindus to resolve to open a school for Hindu girls. They followed the same schooling system that was practised in the mission schools. They appointed the teachers who were trained in the mission normal school. In course of time, the aversion towards the mission schools began to decline.\textsuperscript{61} The Madras Elementary Education Act of 1920 inaugurated a new era in the history of elementary education in the province. This helped to improve education in general and girls education in particular. As a result of the constitutional reforms in January 1920, education underwent some radical changes. The famous Tamil poet Bharathiar's poem, "Women's freedom" deals with the glory of modern women who are equal to men.\textsuperscript{62} The domination of the Brahmins in education, jobs and politics was very much opposed by the leading non-Brahmins in Tamil Nadu in 1920. The representatives of backward community and the Justice Party later the Self-Respect Movement which was launched by E.V. Ramasamy Naickar in the year 1926 were aimed at restoring the lost pride of the non-Brahmin women by

\textsuperscript{60} Annual Report of FCSM, 1871, p.72.


\textsuperscript{62} Dr. D. Janaki, \textit{op.cit.}, p.7.
advocating equal right to women in education, marriage, wealth and politics.\textsuperscript{63} During 1900-1947, women's education showed an upward trend due to various reasons. The significant event of the period was the emphasis laid on women's education.\textsuperscript{64} The Census Report of 1901 recorded a literacy rate among women of one in 144 and by 1921 the rate was 1.8\% and educational institutions for girls grew rapidly in number and size.\textsuperscript{65} The government took effort to eradicate illiteracy among women to remove their social disabilities. A review of the educational position in 1928 by the Hartog committee of the Simon Commission is significant. Its findings and recommendations are:

\begin{enumerate}
\item There is a great disparity between the education of boys and that of girls.
\item The public expenditure on girls' education was small compared to that on boys' education.
\item The main obstacles to the progress of the education of women are the conservatism and the prejudices of the people.
\item The progress of education of women differs from 'province' to 'province'. Even in the same province it differs from the urban to the rural areas or from one community to another.
\item A whole-time woman officer of outstanding calibre and experience must be appointed at the headquarters.
\end{enumerate}

\textsuperscript{63} Kudiarasu, 1928, p.8.
\textsuperscript{64} Dr.D.Janaki, \textit{op.cit.}, p.9.
\textsuperscript{65} Rajpruthi and Bela Rani Sharma, \textit{op.cit.}, p.4.
vi. The professional education of women at the collegiate level is extremely backward.

vii. The Secondary education for girls has been successfully developed in the urban areas only.

viii. The Primary education for girls is extensive in the urban areas but is generally limited and in efficient in the rural areas.

ix. Wastage and stagnation exist very largely in boys’ schools but their extent in girls’ schools is even greater.

x. The shortage of women teachers, particularly at the primary stage is due to a lack of adequate training facilities and also due to an unwillingness of women who are brought up and trained in town to work as teachers in rural areas and the inadequacy of the pay offered.66

Under the Government of India Act of 1935, Provincial ministries had a free hand in matters of educational policy. The total enrollment of girls in all institutions increased during this period though the number of institutions for girls did not correspondingly increase, mostly because of the slump in the economy of the country caused by the Second World War.

The enrollment of girls in primary schools rose from 12 lakhs in 1922 to nearly 35 lakhs in 1947 and enrollment in secondary schools in the same period increased from 27,000 to 6 lakhs. In higher education, the increase was even more significant. This period witnessed significant changes in women’s education in Tamil Nadu.67

66 K. Venkatasubramanian, op.cit., pp.88,89

67 Dr. D. Janaki, op.cit., p.10.
Education of Girls and Women in India

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>% of literacy of women</th>
<th>Primary schools</th>
<th>Secondary schools</th>
<th>Universities and Colleges</th>
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<td>1921-22</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<td>1946-47</td>
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</table>

The impact of mass awakening during the freedom movement and the role that women played in the struggle for independence can be seen from improved enrollments in 1946-47.\(^68\) Madras had the largest number of girls under instruction i.e., 1.33 millions in 1946-47. This was due to a comprehensive scheme of compulsory primary education adopted by the state. The Madras Government adopted some special measures to expand primary education such as:

1. The opening of schools in those places which needed them.
2. Increased grants to local bodies.
3. Additional girl's schools wherever necessary and
4. An additional teacher in existing schools.

Paditha Ramaa Bai
There was a great awakening among people in political and social activities after Independence. Among the many changes in social life that over took the country the most striking one was in respect of the status of women. The constitution itself gave women all fundamental rights. Naturally this gave a momentum to the expansion of facilities for education of women.69

**WOMEN'S INVALUABLE NATURAL RESOURCE**

India now recognises in her women an invaluable natural resource, the development of which, is an investment for her future. The contemporary Indian Woman is both a citizen and a homemaker and in order that she may perform both of these functions efficiently and responsibly, she must be provided with at least a general education and where intelligence and particular aptitudes are revealed, a professional and vocational education too. Even where exceptional ability is not revealed, a good general education should be provided. A.Mathew remarks, "A scheme of education which ignores or assigns an inferior position to women may be effective politically and professionally, but has no enduring effect on personality as a whole or on racial characteristics".70

**Emergence of Women Activists**

Because of the efforts taken by various people a nuclei of women elite formed and laid foundation for the growth of educated “middle class”, women having English knowledge and modern views. They came forward to work for the welfare of the women folk in India. Pioneers in education who sponsored the cause of women's independence were numerous.

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69 ibid, p.91.

70 Rajpruthi & Bela Rani Sharma, *op. cit.*, p.5.
Dr. Muthulakshmi Ammal M.L.C
Among them were Pandita Ramabai (the first Indian intellectual to become a Christian), Ramabai Ranade, Lady Bose and her sister Smt. P.K. Ray, Saraladevi Chaudhuri, Miss. Contractor and Miss. Carpenter, Lady Harnam Singh, Smt. Parvati Chandrasekar, Smt. Rukmaniamma, Smt. Kamala Satthianandhan, (the first women editors of a journal) and Miss. Regina Guha, whose celebrated legal action in 1922 paved the way for women to practice law.

Miss. Cornelia Sorabji was the first woman to benefit by this change while Mittsan Tata Lam was the first woman barrister. Other names were Dr. Multhulakshmi Reddi, the first woman member of the Madras Legislature, sister Subhalakshmi and Smt. Sundari Hensman. The first woman M.A. in India was Chandra Mukhi Bose of Bengal, who later became the first Inspector of schools. One who toured extensively thus paving the way for women to travel freely in connection with their works, was Smt. Sreenivas, a Christian widow.

There were 2 women Vice-Chancellors namely Mrs. Hansa Mehta of the Baroda University, Baroda while Mrs. S. Parthasarthy was the principal of a men's college in Madras. All the universities were open to women. In 1948-49 there were 18,804 educational institutions for girls, and about 1,07,270 women were employed in the educational services and research in 1954-55. 71

Challenges and Impediments for Educated Women

In spite of the tremendous progress made in opening up educational avenues for women, the problem of education and the teaching profession were manifest and difficult to overcome. The main difficulty was the inadequacy of the existing educational facilities, which had led to serious neglect of women's education.

71 Dr. D. Janaki, op. cit., p. 28.
Social obscurantism and lack of opportunities for women had left most Indian women cloistered and without access to the higher reaches of education. The educational system, even where women were able to have access, was totally biased, being geared to satisfy the needs, aspirations and advancements of men alone. These systems showed no concern whatsoever was the socio-economic position of women, who neither constituted the core of the community, nor laid any attention to their personality development.

This attitude stood in the way of women being transformed from a state of subservience and defence to one of self-reliance and interdependence and prevented them from equipping themselves to face the challenges of life and play a dynamic role in India's reconstruction.  

One of the misfortunes of the educational system was that higher education was not available easily for those who needed it, because it was expensive, especially for girls. The favoured ones used higher education as an adornment, and those who needed it and whose services could add to the wealth of the country, had little chance of acquiring it. Unless higher education was made free this would have not been possible. Hence, higher education was meant only for the large majority of well-to-do people. While women have long been regarded as efficient teachers their opportunities in other fields had been restricted. Their place in the medical profession and university education came long after. The legal profession also did not open its doors easily to women, although there was no restrictions. The last citadel of reaction in this respect was the diplomatic service. It was in this section that had the fewest number of women. Through women's organisations, women stressed the

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72 S. Muthiah, *op.cit.*, p.44.

importance of education and knocked the doors of the government by passing resolutions. The sixth Madras Annual Constituent Meeting of the All India Women's Conference on Educational and Social Reform was held on 24th October, 1931 at the Women's Christian College, Madras, under the presidency of Dr. Miss. E. Mc Dougall.

The following resolutions were unanimously passed:-

i. To make Home Science a compulsory subject in women's education.

ii. That an inquiry be made into the defects and limiting conditions in elementary schools and recommended that emphasis should be laid on the right type of training which teachers should receive.

iii. To make an inquiry into the possibility of adapting Educational Film Technique to the Indian Curriculum and associate it with classroom teaching.

iv. The desirability of extending the scheme of compulsory and free elementary education to Muslim girls also in the city of Madras.

v. The need for all certified girls schools as well as junior certified schools for boys being included under the same supervision and direction.

vi. The caste distinction in the application forms for admission into educational institutions should be discontinued.74

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74 Stri Dharma, November-December, 1931, p.25.
Empowerment of Women by Promoting Women's Studies

Education is a powerful instrument for bringing about the desired attitudinal changes in teachers, parents and children. It is necessary to develop a literature for children with a view to presenting the image of a "new woman" emerging out of a new value system. The saying, "If a woman is educated the whole family is educated" succinctly brings out importance of women's education. The economic, social, cultural and religious development of the family largely depends on the nation's development.\textsuperscript{75}

In the post independence era, a new dimension appeared with the constitutional acceptance of the equality of women and of their need to play multiple roles in the society as citizens, as homemakers and as builders of the new society.\textsuperscript{76} But, in spite of the growing recognition of the importance of women's education, which considered education as mainly to play their traditional roles in a more enlightened manner, without conceding them a position of equality with men in other spheres of life can still be found.\textsuperscript{77}

Lastly, education as a whole starved for funds. Women's education needed especially large funds, which on some pretext or other were never made available. Therefore it is possible to conclude that despite of the gains made during the period, progress achieved in the direction of female education was inadequate and imbalanced.

\textsuperscript{75} Venkata Subramanian, \textit{op.cit.}, p.85.
\textsuperscript{76} S. Muthiah, \textit{op.cit.}, p.44.
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{ibid}, p.48.
Education, thus, is an instrument for freeing women from a state of subordination and exploitation, and enables them to play the role of agents for social transformation. It helps them to face and overcome the negative impacts that culture, religion, caste, class and other such determining factors have generated. It helps them to look at life and also themselves scientifically and rationally, and negate the nation's biological impurity, inferiority and powerlessness.

**Women's Social Awareness**

Some of the upper class women were liberated from the social evils and hundreds of educated women were mentally prepared to enter into public life. They acquired western education and entered into the society as free individuals. Such women had courage, fortitude and individuality in their ideas and held definite views.

With the help of education, they made bold attempts to throw away the mantle of shyness and became professionals and public servants. This involvement of the professionals arose an era of socio-economic freedom for the women folk. These educated women realised the causes for the subjugation of the women in the contemporary society and strived for the upliftment of women. Education, as a liberating influence of the greatest importance, provided "self-confidence, discrimination, a proper comparative sense of values and independence, necessary as an accompaniment to greater freedom of action, responsibility and movement".  

This enlightenment helped in the starting of some women's associations mainly to educate women, champion their rights and effect social

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Swarna Kumari Devi
reforms, and ultimately to bring about an all-sided upliftment of women.

In the aim of an all-sided upliftment of women, educated women worked in two ways:

a) Running service institutions to bring about social reforms in the women of India.

b) Collectively formed associations to fight for equal rights to women.

There were a number of organisations, which worked for the general progress, and well being of women. Most women ran these organisations themselves.

**Individual Feminist Social Service**

Some of the educated ladies came forward to work for the elevation of the Indian women folk. They established service societies for this purpose. Among them, one who entered first in the field of reforms to women was Pandit Ramabai of Poona. She established many associations such as (1) Ramabai Association, Boston (1857), (2) Seva Sadan Nursing, and (3) the Medical Association in which high caste widows and girls volunteered to work. Swarnakumari Debi founded the Ladies Association in 1886, under the auspices of Brahma Samaj. A social reformer started Manipatram Rupram Anashtashrm at Ahmedabad in 1892. A Parsi woman of Bombay established Stree Zoroastrian Mandal in 1903. B.M.Motiwala founded the Gujarati Hindu Stri Mandal in 1908; Saroj Nalini organised Mahila Samities in Bengal. Mrs.

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Saraladevi Chaudhrani founded the Bharat Stri Maha Mandal in 1909 in Lahore. The Chimnabai Maternity And Child Welfare League was established by Maharani Chimnabai of Udyogalaya in 1914. The Bhagini Samaj was started in Poona in 1916. All these worked for the upliftment of the women in India. They worked independently without any co-ordination. The educated individual women organised associations at the regional as well as the national level to work for the elevation of the Indian Women folk. They are a) Women's Indian Association, b) The National Council of Women in India, and c) All India Women's Conference.

**a) Women's Indian Association**

A new chapter was opened in the year 1917 in the field of service to women’s upliftment. When the Theosophical Society at Madras realised the need for the organisational efforts of the educated women to elevate the women mass due to the volume of the reforms of women, it decided to utilise the services of feminists like Dr. Annie Besant, Mrs. Margaret Cousins and others. This ultimately gave birth to the Women's Indian Association, in Tamil it is known as India Mahila Samajam, on 8th May 1917 at Madras. The objects of the association were:

1. To acquaint to women their responsibility as daughters of India.

2. To help them to realise that the future of India lies largely in their hands for, as wives and mothers they have the task of training, guiding and forming the character of the future rulers of India.

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80 Modern review (vol. 52, 1932), p. 42.

3. To bind women into groups for the purpose of self-development and education and for the service of others.

4. To secure for every girl and boy, the right of education through schemes of compulsory primary education including the teaching of religion.

5. To secure the abolition of child marriage and to raise the age of consent for girls to sixteen.

6. To secure for women the vote for Municipal and Legislative Councils as it is or as may be granted to men.

7. To secure for women the right to be elected as members on all Municipal and Legislative Councils. As the education of women was India's most pressing need, the establishment of classes in subjects, in which women showed an interest was the primary aim of the women's Indian Association.82

It was the first organisation, which aimed at creating an overall awakening among women and trained them to shoulder their responsibilities in public life. It had a non-sectarian character and included in its fold women belonging to all classes without any distinction of caste, colour or religion. Its branches were first opened in Srinagar, Madras, Calicut, Tanjore, Bezweda and Bombay. Later, its branches were opened in other parts of India. Its first president was Mrs. Annie Besant and for eight years Dorothy Jinarajadasa remained its honorary secretary.83 Mrs. Margaret Cousins, Mrs. Malathi

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Patwardhan, Mrs. Ammu Swaminadhan, Mrs. Dadhabahoy, Mrs. Ambujammal and others administered Women's Indian Association.

Since Mrs. Besant's death, Dr. Muthulalksmi Reddi had been its president. Stri Dharma was its official monthly magazine. The organisation took a valuable part in the awakening of women's responsibility for public service. In 1935, the Women's Indian Association became the Madras constituent branch of the All India Women Conference.

b. National Council of Women in India

The National Council of Women in India was set up in 1926, as a branch of the International Council of Women. It concentrated in gaining political rights for women. It was organised chiefly by British women. But these were confined mostly to cities and big towns.

The birth of the All India Women's Conference took place in the year 1926 in order to press for improved educational facilities for women. In a prize distribution function at Bethune College, Calcutta in 1926, Mrs. Margaret Cousins demanded that the women in India should have full franchise. Mrs. Cousins took initiative for creating awareness among women. She invited all the women's associations in the country to meet in a conference.

In 1927 the Women's Associations of Madras, Bombay, Poona and other cities assembled in Poona under the presidency of Maharani Chimnabai Gaekwad of Baroda. This meeting brought all on a common platform to launch women's movement on a firm footing to acquire adult franchise and

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84 M.E. Cousins, op.cit., p.27.
85 Renuka Ray, op.cit., p.84.
equal rights for women in health, education, inheritance, marriage laws, social reforms etc. The All India Women's Conference turned into a countrywide movement.

The aim and object of the conference were:

1. To work for a society based on the principles of social justice, personal integrity and equal rights and opportunities for all.
2. To secure recognition of the inherent right of every human being to work and also to the essentials of life such as food, clothing, housing, education, social amenities and security.
3. To support the claim of every citizen the right to enjoy basic civil liberties.
4. To stand against all separatist tendencies and promote greater national integration and unity.
5. To work actively for the general progress and welfare of women and children and to help women to utilise to the fullest the Fundamental Rights conferred on them by the Constitution of Indian Union.
6. To co-operate with people and with the organisations of the world for the implementation of these principles.  

To attain these aims and objectives the society should pledge

1. To work on non-violent and non-party political lines for the abolition of privileges occurring to individuals or to any section of the society on the basis of caste, creed, descent, wealth, sex, colour or race.

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86 All India Women's Conference, Historical perspective (compiled and edited) Bombay Branch, p.144.
2. To strive for the promotion of universal education, national health, family planning and social security with improved living and working conditions for women and children.

3. To promote mass education and dissemination of knowledge among women to develop national, scientific, secular attitudes in faith, morals and religious practices.

4. To seek out work opportunities and gainful employment for women.\(^{87}\)

From 1927 to 1952 Bombay was the national headquarters of the All India Women's Conference. Though the Conference did not ally with any political party, it supported the National Liberation Movement. It declared that it, "shall be free to discuss and contribute to all questions and matters affecting the welfare of the people of India with particular reference to women and children".\(^ {88}\) In 1953, the Conference started the official journal called *Roshani* in Hindi and English.

The Bharat Stree Mandal, the Poona Seva Sadan, the Women's Indian Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Sarojini Dutt Mahila Samaj, the Women's Brahmo Samaj and many other large provincial and community groups roused the women of the educated classes to think and act for their own improvement as a dedicated part of their aspiration for National Freedom.\(^ {89}\) The role of educated women of Tamilnadu is second to none in India. They also came forward to work for the elevation of Indian folk. Sister R.S. Subbulakshmi Ammal founded 'Sharada Home' in 1912 at Mylapore in

\(^{87}\) *ibid*,

\(^{88}\) Report of the 13th Session of AIWC, p.64.

\(^{89}\) M.E Cousins, *op.cit.*, p.57.
Madras. The education and the profession of teaching of Subbulakshmi paved the way for the establishment of the Ashramam. In 1912 all her dreams became actualised when Miss. Linch, the then District Educational Officer, came forward to help in establishing the Rehabilitation Centre to the Destitute Widows. It was chiefly meant for the protection and training of young widows to lead an honest livelihood. This home was started with inmates of four at the beginning. In 1913, this ashram with strength of 20 widows was shifted to Triplicane, Madras. During the to First World War, it was shifted to Ice House, Madras in 1914. She received assistance from Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi.90

In 1920, the government conferred the title ‘Kaise-i-Hind’ upon Subbulakshmi for her meritorious and selfless service to the cause of education. This educational and Destitute Home for the widows received aid from the Government and in 1922. This educational institution, with sufficient facilities became ‘Lady Wellington School’.91 In 1923, Subbulakshmi was entrusted with the management of the school.

It was a turning point in the area of female education. Shri Sharada Union Ashram had received awards for 15 years service and for the young widows it started a new school in 1927 called Shri Sharada Vidhyalayam. Seva Sadan Society, which was established by her and it, was maintained for the poor children92. She continued her social service for the cause of women’s education by starting an evening school in Coodalur in 1934. She became the president of Women’s Indian Association93. In 1952, she was elected as a

91 ibid,
92 Prathima Ashtana, op.cit., p.91.
93 ibid, p.92.
member of Upper House in Legislative Council.\textsuperscript{94} Lady Andal Venkatasubba Rao, a pioneer in women's welfare founded the institution of Madras Seva Sadan.\textsuperscript{95} With the encouragement of her husband, Sir Venkatasubba Rao, she started a multipurpose 'Social Welfare Institution' with her own funds. To quote Mrs. Sarojini Naidu "This admirable institution created and fostered by the devoted and zealous labour of Sir. M. Venkatasubba Rao and his accomplished wife has already proved itself a national asset of far-reaching and beneficial value in the south and educational life of the great Southern Capital".\textsuperscript{96}

The report of the Madras Seva Sadan states "The Institution is a direct living response to a most a poignantly urgent demand peculiar to modern India, the demand of young women seeking an individual independent life, for education and culture, advancement, impelled by the urge of self expression. It is a response which is steady, efficient and certain, because it is organised and systematised."\textsuperscript{97}

The Madras Seva Sadan was not meant for well-to-do girls, but mainly for "despairing young women" as well as poor widows, orphans and deserted wives. It gave educational facilitates to adult women belonging to the poor classes to enable them to earn an independent living. Besides general and literary education, it taught them lace work, needle work, sewing, cutting, weaving, embroidery, jigna and rattan work.\textsuperscript{98} The Seva Sadan did a great

\textsuperscript{94} Chandrika Somasundaram, \textit{op.cit.}, p.97.

\textsuperscript{95} Some Illustrious Women of India, Special Reference to Tamil Nadu (Madras: Asian Book Comp, 1975), p.6.

\textsuperscript{96} \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Indian Ladies Magazine} (Cannanore: May-June, 1932, vol.v, No.9 & 10), p.418.

\textsuperscript{98} \textit{ibid.},
Group Photo Taken on the occasion of the Fifth Anniversary Celebration of the Avvai Homer and Orphanage for Girls- Aug. 17th 1935

* Courtesy of "The Hindu"
work in providing scope for Indian women to learn some useful occupation. The course of instruction imparted in the institution was divided into two sections namely literary and industrial. A few of the pioneering projects started in the Madras Seva Sadan as early as the 1920's and 1930's by Lady Venkatasubba Rao, were:

1. A cottage system for unfortunate children
2. Provision of hostel accommodation for working women.
3. Rehabilitation of formerly mental patients.
4. Rehabilitation of women convicted of infanticide.
5. Giving women professional training as nurse, music teachers etc.

Another important person who worked individually for the upliftment of Indian women was Dr. (Mrs) Muthulakshmi Reddi, whose love for children and splendid public spirit started "Avvai Home and Orphanage" in Madras in 1930. The aims of the orphanage were:

1. To give shelter and protection to the destitute orphan and to girl minors irrespective of caste.
2. To prevent abuses of parental or guardian authority which endanger the morals of the young.
3. To aid these children with free boarding and lodging facilities and a suitable education so as to make them useful and respectable citizens.

99 Prathima Asthana, *op.cit.*, p.94.
100 Some Illustrious Women of India, *op.cit.*, p.7.
The objects of the hostel were:

1. To provide a safe and comfortable lodging and boarding at a moderate cost to all girls irrespective of caste, community or creed who come to Madras for their higher education or who do not have a healthy atmosphere in their own homes.

2. To create an atmosphere conducive to their moral and spiritual welfare and

3. To instil into them a spirit of love and selfless service for the poor, helpless and for the lowly.\(^\text{102}\)

The orphanage was under a committee of management composed of Dr. Muthulakshmi (Secretary and Treasurer), Mrs. Rajivi Shiva Rao, Dr. Mrs. Parukutti Raman, Mrs. K.C. Acharya, Smt. G. Visalakshi, Mrs. T.G. Pillai, Mrs. Amusaminathan, Miss. C.N. Nallamuthu Ammal and Mrs. Venkatappa. Smt. Parvati Devi, the Headmistress of Hindu Girls School, Kanjeevaram, also did commendable services to women folk.

She established the ‘Kanchi Mahila Paraishad’ in Kanchi with the aim to equip the ladies of the town with general information and to create public opinion among them regarding matters of the nation.\(^\text{103}\)

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\(^\text{102}\) ibid,

\(^\text{103}\) Modern Review (Vol. 13, 19310, p. 160.)
Apart from the above mentioned lady public workers, there were many other ladies also who worked for the emancipation of women folk like:

1. Kalyani Kumaramangalam, 2. V.P. Thamaraikanniar
9. Hemaladevi, 10. Selvi Subbu Bharathi,
11. Saraswathi Ammal, 12. Kumudavalli,
15. Malar Mukkathammiar, 16. K.T. Urukumani Ammiar,
17. Pari Poorana Ammaiar 18. E.R. Lakshmi Ammaiar,
19. Sethu Lakshmi Bai. 20. Amboyam Ammaiar

who should also be remembered forever for their work in the liberation of women folk from suppression.

**Women Printing Media’s Social Service**

The emergence of women's journals was indeed a glorious tribute to the reform movement. The journal *Suguna Bothini* created awareness among women by stating "Though education spreads very promptly and quickly, the educated women who write articles to the journals are very few. We expect that they will try their level best to send matters to journals".⁷⁴

*Penmathi Bothini, Maather Mitri* and *Maather Manoranjani* were the other journals, which appealed for the women education. Further Kamala Swaminathan a feminist activist of Madras started an English Journal

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⁷⁴ *Sugunabothini.*
called, *Indian Ladies* in the year 1901 for the welfare of ladies. *Maather Marumanam*, by issuing proverbs and stories encouraged men to marry widows\(^{105}\).

The author of *Chakkarvathini* stated "During the Vedic period, the women were treated with honour. In the later period due to the low civilisations of the foreigners like Muslim, the women were not allowed to get education, which kept women as slaves to their husband. It is necessary that they should get education and develop in all fields".\(^{106}\) *Mangai* stated "some people naturally would be very brilliant and some would follow the advice of the other". In this way the journal, *Mangai* published every month some advice to women. *Guhapriyai*, the author of *Mangai*, stated that men have the right to give suggestions in the matter. She further stated that education should be imparted even in the languages of Hindi and English to women.\(^{107}\) The Tamil journal *Sindhamani* took the problem of women to the notice of the Government.\(^{108}\)

**NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND LIBERATION OF WOMEN**

Due to the momentum provided by the nationalist movement in its various phases and more particularly during 'the Gandhian Phase' (1915-1947), the organisations for fighting for the liberation of Indian women gathered rapid strength. In course of time, in order to eliminate their cause of social and economic slavery, the advanced and enlightened sections of the women's organisations led by women themselves, built up their own organisations with a

\(^{105}\) M. Maragathavalli, *Maathar Marumanam*, Ethalkal 1-12.

\(^{106}\) Subramania Bharathiar, *Chakkravardhini*, Ethal 1-7.


\(^{108}\) Sinthamani, Ethal of Fourth year.
comprehensive programme of social, economic, cultural and political advancement of the Indian Women.\textsuperscript{109}

They found in National Congress a political platform for the women movement. From the very first, its membership was open to women on the same terms as to men and year after year saw women attending its annual sessions.\textsuperscript{110} It was in the year 1900, Mrs. Swarnakumari and Smt. J. Ganguly attended the Congress session held in Calcutta as delegates from Bengal.

Smt. Ganguly was the first woman to speak from the Congress platform. This was perhaps a beginning of a new era and then onwards women took an increasingly active part in the political activities of the country.\textsuperscript{111} A Bengali women member, Smt. Saraladevi Chaudharani of the Tagore family, made history in the Congress session held in Calcutta in 1904, as she was first to sing ‘Bande Matram’ a national mantram rousing patriotic action.

She had been an outstanding figure in India's struggle for freedom. She had suffered much such as the loss of her property, imprisonment of her husband, travelship long and wearisome, separation from her loved sons in the course of her patriotic services etc.\textsuperscript{112}

The first decade of the 20th century witnessed the revolutionary activities in the political field. Sarala Devi, Bhikaje Rustom and K.R. Cama

\textsuperscript{109} Rajpruthi and Bela Rani Sharma, \textit{op.cit.}, p.56.
\textsuperscript{110} M.E. Cousins, \textit{op.cit.}, p.55.
\textsuperscript{111} Manmohan Kaur, \textit{op.cit.}, p.3.
\textsuperscript{112} Stri Dharma (Sep. 1923, Vol.6, No.11), p.162.
Indian Women Association - Salem
openly supported the cause of the revolutionaries. Those women who received education had done credit to their sex and had led the movements for social reforms such as:

a. Legislation to prevent child marriages
b. To terminate the Devadasi system
c. To get more just inheritance rights for women and
d. Equal pay for equal work.

From 1912, there began the movement for creating Associations of Women. This was the foundation of group consciousness and united action that had been as undoubtable factor in bringing about an acceleration of the emergence of India and womanhood into power and publicity. Perhaps in those early days women went to those Congress sessions more as the helpmates of their husbands, to attend to their needs, their food and create comforts. But the entry of Mrs. Annie Besant into politics in 1914 galvanised new and increased natural consciousness in both men and women and roused patriotism in many a sensitive woman's heart and they joined for the first time with men in public processions of protest against the Government. At this time, women also joined the Indian Home Rule League.

A branch of Theosophical Society was established at Salem and Coimbatore in the year 1908 and 1909 respectively. Mrs.Kamakshi Ammal, Mrs. Lalitha Bai Shamanna, Mrs. Madhavi Ammal and Mrs.Sita Tatachari also joined as its members. They established a branch of Women Indian Association

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113 Manmohan Kaur, op.cit., p.3.
115 M.E.Cousins, op.cit., p.67.
in Salem and worked for the upliftment for women.\textsuperscript{116} Annie Besant gave a new turn to the women's movement in India when she favoured the idea of "vote for women", and served in the deputation to the Secretary of State for India. In 1917, she was elected as President of the Indian National Congress.\textsuperscript{117} The three women who occupied the places of power and honour on the platform at the Calcutta Congress were Mrs.Besant, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and Begum Amma Bibi, mother of the Ali brothers, Muhammed and Shaukat Ali. Womanhood had thus come out of its seclusion to share with manhood the struggle for gaining freedom.\textsuperscript{118}

Under Annie Besant's presidentship, the Congress expressed the opinion that the, "same tests be applied to women as to men in regard to franchise and the eligibility to all elective bodies concerned with local government and education". It was on Besant's call that many women joined the Home Rule Movement as they could no longer remain indifferent to the problems of India's freedom.\textsuperscript{119} Indian women experienced an air of freedom when a call of resurgence came to them from the West. The impact of democratic ideals rejuvenated women and they began to feel the stir of a new life. In the words of L.S.S.O. Malley, "Profound as has been the penetration of the west into men's idea of religion, caste and national status, it has nowhere penetrated more deeply than its re-evaluation of women".\textsuperscript{120}

The women in ancient Tamil society were highly respected but

\textsuperscript{116} Extracts of Native News paper reports, vol.V, dated 28\textsuperscript{th} January 1930, p.114.

\textsuperscript{117} Pratima Asthana, \textit{op.cit.}, p.65.

\textsuperscript{118} M.E.Cousins, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.57, 58.

\textsuperscript{119} Pratima Asthana, \textit{op.cit.}, p.65.

\textsuperscript{120} L.S.S.O Malley, (ed.,) \textit{Modern India and the West}, p.65.
Group photo taken at the English Session of the Madras Constituent Conference of the All India Women's Conference, on 'Educational and Social Reform' held at Museum Theatre on 21st October, 1933 under the presidency of Dr. Miss H. McDougall.
they were degraded in course of time due to many social evils, which were
perpetrated on them. Their involvement in public life was curtailed and punitive
measures were imposed on those who disobeyed. Mainly they were put under
ignorance due to the emergence of a new educational concept viz. education was
for men only.

In course of time, due to the coming of western ideas through
Christian missionaries, Government officials and English education, some of the
age long social customs were put to severe criticism and the educational concept
was modified. Consequently, women were allowed to get education. Some of the
upper castes and upper middle class women obtained education. Imparting
education to women itself was considered to be a social reform.

Enacting laws liberated women. Due to the spread of education,
high society women awakened and entered into public life. Such educated
women came forward to liberate rest of the women who were still under the
teeth of social evils. The very first concession that was demanded was
educational opportunity because they considered that it was mainly education
that could render better service and guard against social evils against women
and other disabilities.

The Indian National Congress passed resolutions in its Annual
conferences, about the abolition of social evils against women by promoting
women education as well as passing acts. The Indian National Social
Conference and the Servants of Indian Society also worked for the upliftment
of women.

The dawn of 20th century witnessed a new dimension in

women's status. The establishment of Women's India Association is an epoch making event. The aim of the Association was the welfare of the women and children through promotion of women's education, social reforms and legislations and establishment obtaining equal rights and opportunities for women. The backward community women also advocated equal rights to get education. At this juncture Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, the first Women Legislator also advocated reforms for getting voting rights for women.

Because of their efforts the Madras Government gave women the right to vote exclusively to the city of Madras under Section 48 of the Madras Municipal Act (Act of IV of 1919) for the first time in the Annals of India, the Tamil Nadu and the Corporation of Madras.

The franchise given to women by the Justice Party Government in 1921 paved the way for establishing the political identity to women. Though the women were granted the right to vote they were not permitted to contest election. In 1926, eminent women organised themselves under the leadership of Lady Sadasiva Iyer to claim franchise for contesting Legislative elections. The British Government permitted the Government of India to grant women the right to sit in the Legislative Council in April 1926. Franchise Movement started by women in 1917 came to an end when Indian Constitution adopted Universal Adult Suffrage in 1950. After Independence in 1947, many problems had to be tackled and hardly any thought was given to women's role in politics.

In order to increase the level of representation of women in

\[122\] ibid.


\[124\] G.O. 443, Legislation Department, 9th October, 1926.
Legislatures and other administrative bodies and positions of power, certain steps appear necessary as a transitory measure. Reservation of jobs is one such step under which more women are able to avail of educational and job opportunities on an equal footing with men. The present generation of women enjoys to a great extent 1. Economic freedom options to gain employment 2. Educational freedom seeking education of their choice and interest 3. Social freedom participation in socio-economic political group activities, 4. Political freedom and 5. Recreation facilities.

In the political field a number of women became politicians and turnout of women voters has been steadily increasing at every election. As Manu has said "When women are respected, there is God's delight and culture grown and children are brought up in love, strength and idealism"\textsuperscript{125} the transformation of Indian women has been brought about the change to a great extent. New laws passed by the Government and the efforts of the women's organisations helped the emergence of new women in India. The laws passed in favour of women after 1947 are 1. Special Marriage Act (1954), 2. Hindu Marriage Act (1955), 3. Succession Act (1956) which enabled women to get their share from the ancestral properties, 4. Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act (1956), 5. Adoptions and Maintenance Act (1956), 6. Anti Dowry Act (1961), 7. The Family Court Act (1987), 8. Law Against Eve Teasing (1998) etc. All these Acts have been enacted to improve the condition of women in all spheres.\textsuperscript{126}


\textsuperscript{126} D. Janaki, Socio-Economic History Section, \textit{South Indian History Congress}, XX Session, 23-25, Warrangal January, 2000, p.22.
CONCLUSION

So initially extension of education took place but educated women did not claim any economic freedom as they belonged to the affluent section of the society. But due to the development of the professional class viz. teachers, nurses' etc., a change was seen in the field of social reform of women i.e. economic liberty of women. So the movement for upliftment of women added another sphere of liberation i.e. economic liberation, which can be seen in the coming pages.

Because of the efforts of the Christian missionaries, social reformers and also the Government women obtained education. Further they wanted to serve the society. Initially they served for the upliftment of women individually, but in course of time they associated themselves and worked unitedly for the upliftment of the women folk of India.