Chapter-III
CHAPTER – III

WOMEN STRUGGLE FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIBERATION

As seen earlier, the socio-religious reformers and women organisations viewed some of the age long social customs related to women as evil practices and pushed the women folk into the sphere of ignorance and superstitious beliefs. Hence they worked for the removal of such customs and elevate the women folk.

FEMINIST MOVEMENT FOR SOCIAL REFORMS

The first attack of the women activists was the child marriage. They thought that this was responsible for all the evils such as prevalence of young widows, propping of prostitution and growth of ignorance perpetrated on the women folk due to absence of education. So they tried to remove the evil by forcing the government to raise the age of marriage of girls. At this juncture in 1924, a Bill was introduced in the Central Legislature by Mrs.Gour to raise the 'age of consent' from 12 to 14. It aimed at protecting young girls from the victims of child marriage.

It also insisted that sexual relation at the age of 12 and 13 were a crime against nature and the future.¹ Women’s Indian Association, Women’s Graduate Union, Seva Sadans, etc. supported Gour’s Bill. But due to the unfavourable attitude of the Government, the original Bill and its amended Bill were

¹ *Stri Dharma*, Madras, June 1924, vol.7, No.8, p.113.
defeated. This defeat intensified the struggle. The progressive press and social reformers criticised the anti reform attitude of the government.

The newspapers such as *Justice, Dravidian, Kudiyarasu* and *Viduthalai* condemned the protagonists of the Act. On the other hand, some reactionaries like Rangachari and Rangaswami (Ayyanger) supported the stand of the Government. The All India Social Conference and Mr. Gandhiji also supported the legislation for removing a social evil.

The Women’s Indian Association held a meeting in 1925 in Madras in order to popularise the evil of child marriage. It brought the matter to the notice of International Organisations such as the World Young Women’s Christian Association, England, the International Suffrage Alliance, etc. The All India Women’s Conference urged the Government to pass a legislation to make marriage below the age of 16 a penal offence. It demanded that the age of consent to be raised to sixteen.

With the support of the Women Organisations, Mrs.Gour had reintroduced her Bill in January 1927 to raise the age of consent to 14. Considering the aims of the Bill, the Government had stated that the local Governments were asked to submit a report on the working of the Law of 1925 and on receipt of those reports.

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2 *ibid*, pp.113, 114.

3 *Justice* (Madras) dated 15.10.1920, and 15.01.1921; *Dravidian* (Madras) dated 1.10.1920, 1.01.1921; *Kudiyarasu* (Erode) dated 15.2.1921 and 15.3.1921.

4 *Dravidian* (Madras), 26 March 1925.

5 *Young India*, 26 August 1926.

6 *Stri Dharma*, June 1925, p.116.

7 Indian Quarterly Register, 1927, p.427.
reports the Government intended to appoint a committee, if necessary. The Bill was circulated. The response of the local Governments to the circular of the Government of India regarding Gour's Bill was varied widely. In this context a public meeting was held in Madras on 23 March 1927 and passed the resolution that, "This meeting is in favour of marriages taking place only after 16 years for girls and 18 for boys. It considered the age of consent being raised to 14 years as an immediate step towards the prevention of child motherhood and wholeheartedly supports Mrs.Hari Singh Gour's Bill to raise the age of consent for married girls from 13 to 14".

In the meanwhile, a different approach to the problem of early marriages was made on 1st February 1927, by the introduction of the Child Marriage Restraint Bill or the Sarda Bill named after its author, Rao Sahib Har Bilas Sardas. The Bill was published after radical alterations made by the Select Committee. The amended Bill aimed at penalising husbands over 18 marrying a girl below 14 years of age.

It also provided that the parents, guardians and priests who were responsible to solemnise marriage of such girls or boys below 14 and 18 years of age respectively should be punished. The Bill was sent again to the Select Committee and it made some minor changes. The re-amended Bill stated that a mere betrothal ceremony would not constitute a marriage and the Bill also exempted a female parent or guardian from punishment.

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8 Radhakrishna Sharma, Nationalism, Social Reform and Indian Women (Delhi: 1981), pp.188, 189.
10 Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1928, Sec.2.
11 ibid.
Dr. (Mrs) Muthulakshmi Reddi, President
The orthodox leaders and the governmental authorities opposed the Bill both on legal and religious grounds, as the Bill aimed to check the solemnisation of marriages among Hindus by invalidating the marriage, if either of the party did not attain the prescribed minimum age.\textsuperscript{12} Mr.M.K.Acharya, the Home Member, wanted to delay the passing of the Bill until the report of the Age of Consent Committee was published. This amendment of Mr.Acharya was carried with the support of the official members.\textsuperscript{13}

On the other hand, the AIWC supported the passing of its resolution in its conference held at New Delhi in 1928. It condemned the custom of allowing immature boys and girls to become parents and demanded that the legal age of marriage for girls and boys to be made 16 and 21 respectively. Rani of Mandi had started an "All India Child Marriage Abolition League". The object of the League was to arouse and educate public opinion throughout India against the Institution of child marriage and to attain the goal of 16 years as the minimum age of marriage for girls and 18 years as the for boys. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, Deputy President of the Madras Legislative Council, had secured the passing of Resolution to abolish child marriage.\textsuperscript{14}

They sent a deputation to mobilise the support of various political parties to eradicate this social evil. After obtaining the support of reformers of Madras, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi moved a Bill on 27\textsuperscript{th} March 1928 in the Madras Legislative Council. The Bill said, "This council recommends to the Government that they may be pleased to communicate to the Government of India that in the


\textsuperscript{13} Modern Review, February 1929, p.284.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Stri Dharma}, Madras, March 1928, p.68.
opinion of the council legislation raising the marriageable age of boys and girls to at least 21 and 16 years, respectively\textsuperscript{15}. Dr. Muthulakshmi, Dr. Keegler, Dr. Ida Scudder of Vellore, Dr. Macphail and others, cited a number of instances of the miseries of child wives.

Dr. Muthulakshmi added further that "the saddest consequence of all this was the presence of a large number of child widows... the number of married out of a total of 217 lakh women was 95 lakhs. Number of widowed was 40.9 lakhs and thus it formed nearly half of the total number of married women\textsuperscript{16}. Madras showed its support for the social justice by unanimously passing the resolution in the Council. Due to the efforts of Muthulakshmi Reddi and Rukmani Lakshmipathy, the Act that increased the marriageable age for boys and girls was passed by Legislature in 1928.

The Government of India appointed a 10-member committee on 25\textsuperscript{th} June 1928 under the Chairmanship of Sir Moropant Viswanath Joshi to examine the state of law relating to the age of consent. It submitted its report to the Government on 20\textsuperscript{th} June 1929\textsuperscript{17}. It pointed out that the Government had not shown interest in enforcing the Age of Consent Act of 1891. Hence the Act was practically unknown throughout the country\textsuperscript{18}.

Due to unabated enthusiasm in passing the Bill, Government of British India itself changed its mind and it was in favour of the Sarda Bill. It was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council, March 1928, vol.XLII, p.30.
\item \textsuperscript{16} \textit{ibid}.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Edward Jewitt Robinson, \textit{The daughters of India. Their social condition, Religion Literature, Obligations and Prospects} (Glasgow: 1960), p.21.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Report of Joshi Committee dated 20.6.1929, p.18.
\end{itemize}
The Crux of the Indian Problem

“இந்திய பிரச்னை சுருக்காகள்”

“இந்திய பிரச்னை சுருக்காகள்”
passed on 20th September 1929 and became an act on 1st October 1929. However, it came into force only on 1st April 1930.

The awareness of the rural women on the necessity of the raise of marriageable age of girls can be seen in the resolution of the second Self Respect Conference held at Erode in May 1930. Nagammai, S.R.Kannammal, Moovalur Ramamirthammal, Neelavathy, Karaikudi Visalakshmi, Neelambigai Ammal and Dharumambal played active role.19 More than 150 ladies took vow not to give their daughters in marriage before 16 years. They insisted about the enhancement of the minimum age of consent for males and females and also encouraged inter-caste marriages. The resolution passed in this conference stated that, "the minimum age for marriage of girls must be 16 and boys must be 19 and legislation should be made to encourage inter-caste marriages".20 On 16th November 1930, Self-Respect Movement organised a separate conference for "Women's Emancipation" at Madras especially to implement Sarda Act of 1929 which aimed to prevent child marriages. Alamelumangai, Thayarammal, Indrani, Lakshmi Ammal, Dharumambal were the prominent women members who participated in this conference.21

Further the activists of the women organisations like AIWC, WIA, YWCA and the Indian Ladies Samaj appealed to His Excellency the Viceroy, the Central Legislatures and the Local Governments to keep the Sarda Act intact and strictly to enforce the provisions of the Act. They also took efforts to establish Sarda committees in every district, municipality and taluk by utilising the local youngsters so as to educate public and persuade individuals to obey the Act and to report cases

19 Kudi Arasu, 30th May 1930.
21 Kudi Arasu, 24th November 1929.
of violation of the Act. The Tamil Nadu Women's Conference held at Erode and the Provincial Self Respect conference held at Virudunagar in 1931 urged the Government to pass further acts to secure the consent of the bride and bridegroom in every case of marriage.

In order to monitor whether the Government properly implemented the Act, the WIA formed the "Sarda Act committee" in April 1932 in Madras. The Committee then realised that the Sarda Act would encourage rather than discourage child marriages, unless

1. The punishments were not really deterrent.
2. Government themselves were not to enforce it severely.
3. The law was amended so as to facilitate the issue of injunctions to stop marriage, by the magistrates themselves.

The report of the Assistant Secretary pointed out the immediate need of amending the Sarda Act, was not only to prevent but also penalise child marriage.

Further the conference of Sarda Act Committee, held at Delhi in 1932 asked the Government to take steps to amend the law so as to prevent child marriages. Further it also requested that the Child Marriage Restraint Act should be so amended so as to give power to District Magistrates to issue injunction stopping the performance of marriages that contravened the provisions of the Act. The feminist's struggle was further strengthened when Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam,

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23 *ibid*, p.532.
which was formed in 1949, claimed that one of its aims was to create awareness on the evil of child marriage. Further it passed resolutions in its state level and district level conferences to raise the marriage age of boys and girls to 21 and 18 respectively. Its leaders wrote many articles and books to raise the public opinion related to the marriage age. Because of the efforts of various organisations the public opinion was roused and as per survey of 1950 the marriage of girls below 14 was very rare and only 10% of such marriages were done in Tamil Nadu.\(^\text{25}\)

Another important evil under which women suffered was “Prohibition of widow remarriage”. This evil was due to the child marriage. Even before the attainment of puberty thousands of girls became widows. There was a chance of turning these young widows to engage themselves in prostitution, which destroy the health of the society.

The feminists attacked the ban on widow remarriages. The Widow Remarriage Movement was started to remove the disabilities that tradition had enforced upon the Hindu widows and to create an impression that widow re-marriage was permissible within the Hindu fold and that a widow could re-marry, if she so chose.

The Widow Re-Marriage Movement, started by Ishwar Chandra Vidhyasagar in Calcutta in the 1850’s\(^\text{26}\), made its impact upon Tamil Nadu also. Because of the efforts of the Social reformers and feminists, the Widow Re-Marriage Act, popularly known as Widow Re-Marriage Reform Act XV of 1856 was passed. It stated that “no marriage between Hindus will be invalid or issue

\(^{25}\) ibid, 1933, vol. XVI, p.243.

illegitimate, by reason of previous marriage or betrothal to another who is since deceased." Though this Act was acclaimed as a great measure by the social reformers, it remained a dead letter for a long time. There were some defects in this Act. In spite of these defects, the Act evoked good public opinion and so the Widow Re-Marriage Movement gained momentum. Widow Re-Marriage Associations were organised throughout the country in 1871, because of the efforts taken by Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidhyasagar. Above all, with the passage of this Act, widow re-marriage was accorded a legal status.

In 1879, the Widow Re-Marriage Movement entered a new phase when K. Veeresalingam Pantulu (1848-1919) took up the cause. On June 7th 1883 a widow remarriage was celebrated in Mylapore. It was celebrated under Veeresalingam Pantulu and Raghunatha Rao. Mr. Pantulu shifted his residence to Madras in 1892, and performed twenty-nine such marriages. In 1895, he founded a Widows Home in Madras.

It served as a hostel-cum-school. This institution offered much succour to widows in the state. Following the example set by Mr. Pantulu, the Government of Madras in 1903 sanctioned a few scholarships with a view to encourage the education of widows. Further the Widow Re-marriage Movement got the support of the Indian National Social Conference, which passed a resolution stating that “the practice of men more than fifty years of age marrying


29 Dr. C. Paramarthalingam, Religion and Social Reform in Tamil nadu (Madurai: Rajakumari pub, 1997), p.21.

30 Report of the Eleventh Social Conference held in Amaravathi, 30 December 1897 (Poona: 1898), Resolution VI, p.369
G. Subramania Iyer (1855-1916) - Co-Founder of "The Hindu" Worked strenuously for the social reform through The Hindu.
young girls below twelve was opposed to the spirit of the *Shatras*. It was extremely prejudicial to the interest of the community and that the power of adoption given by the law permitted no excuse for such ill-assorted marriages.

The conference therefore, affirms the necessity of actively discouraging all marriages where the age difference between the bride and bridegroom exceeds thirty years".30 The freedom fighter G.Subramania Iyer in his capacity as the editor of *The Hindu* used the newspaper as a vehicle for promoting social reform, which comprised of 1. Widow remarriage, 2. Suppression of infant marriage, 3. Abolition of caste distinctions, 4. Abolition of nautch parties, 5. Raising the age of marriage for girls and 6. Uplift of the untouchables.

Through the columns of *The Hindu*, he advocated Government measures for widow re-marriage and abolition of infant-marriage. In September 1887, *The Hindu* reported that in India there were 80,000 widows less than 9 years of age and that more than two lakhs were fewer than fourteen. *The Hindu* stated that "they were the victims of a cruel custom brought into existence partly by the superstitious beliefs of the Hindus and partly by Muhamedan tyranny"31

With a view to promoting widow re-marriages, the Hindu Women’s Re-Marriage Association was founded in 1887. Appreciating it, *The Hindu* noted that "we are glad that something like a provincial conference was established in

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31 *The Hindu*, 19th Sep 1887.
32 *The Hindu*, 7th May 1889.
Southern India". Its first meeting was held on 21st April, 1887. Social reformers like R. Raghunatha Rao, K. Subba Rao, Veeresalingam Pantulu, and A. G. Narasimhan attended it. With a view of promoting social reform, G. Subramania Iyer and his friend K. Subba Rao established the Madras Hindu Social Reform Association on 9th November, 1892.

It's objects were 1. Female education, 2. Marriage reform, 3. Domestic reforms and 4. General amalgamation of castes. As per the Census Report of 1931, in India there were 2.50 crores of widows: among them 3,96,556 were below 15 years of age and those of young widows were 3,21,701 as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Age Category</th>
<th>No of Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Below the age of 1 year</td>
<td>1,515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Between 1 to 2 Years</td>
<td>1735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Between 2 to 3 Years</td>
<td>3,438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Between 3 to 4 Years</td>
<td>9,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Between 4 to 5 Years</td>
<td>15,019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Between 5 to 10 Years</td>
<td>1,05,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Between 10 to 15 Years</td>
<td>1,85,336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>3,21,701</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were many women organisations, which worked for the remarriages of widows. They are 1. Maathar Marumana Sangam, South Travancore, 2. Maathar Marumana Sangam, Karaikudi (Maragathavalli), Maathar Murpokku

33 Indian Social Reformer, 25th November 1893.
34 *Chakravarthini*, vol. I, p.5.
Sangam, Eranganoor, Madhavan Koil Yadhava Caste Sangam, Burma Resident

In support of remarriages, women activists pointed out that the Sashtras were not against the remarriages of widows. Maragathavalli, the Editor of Maathar Marumanam, said that Atharvana Vedam, Manu Smiriti, Javali Smiriti, Besar Maharishi's Smiriti, Agasthiya Smiriti and Thiruvilaiyadarpuranam were recognising the widow remarriages. Further she quoted the marriages of Thara and Mandothari with Sukreevan and Vibudanan as done in the Ramayana. Thus they tried to enlighten the people that widow remarriage was not a sin since Hindu Dharma and Puranas are supporting it.35

The journal Maathar Marumanam circulated the pamphlets with captions as: 1. It is virtue to remarry a helpless widow, 2. If you lost wife remarry a widow, 3. Widow’s remarriage will liberate the society, 4. The liberation of womenhood is the real freedom, 5. The tears of widow will destroy the home, 6. The remarriage is common right for both sexes, 7. Where there is bliss there is no widowhood, 8. The hands helps to grow a child are the hands, which rule the world.36

In spite of the legislation that was enacted to curb the child-marriage,

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36 ibid.
Under the auspices of the All India Women's Conference, the Women's Section Association, Young Women's Christian Association and the Indian Ladies' Samaj, a public meeting was held at Bartan Courser, Egmore, on Saturday, 19th bly, evening to protest against the proposed amendments to the Sarda Act and the Madras Act for the suppression of brutal and immoral truths in women and children, under the presidency of Mrs. N. V. Raghavan.

(By the writer, India)
it continued to take place. Re-marriage was deemed to be an unthinkable act, as the society was so rigid to adopt it. The virtue and fidelity of its own women members determined the status of a family and so orthodox families were not bold enough to cross the barriers set-forth by tradition.

Measures were still needed to improve lot of widows as their condition continued to be pathetic. However, in due course, the growth of education and public awakening lessened the strains of widowhood and paved the way for “a corresponding increase in the process of the re-marriage and rehabilitation of widows”. The position that obtained in the 19th century has changed. The society slowly accepted widow re-marriages without any social stigma. Another important evil, which was responsible for the ignorance of the Indian women, was the ‘immoral traffic of women'. This was due to the misuse of the Devadasi system of Chola period. The feminist activists took effort to prevent the growth of prostitution. In order to get popular support they organised propaganda meetings in different places. Stri Dharma published articles highlighting the necessity of the suppression of brothels and immoral traffic. Smt. Muthulakshmi Reddi took up the question of Devadasi when she became a member of the Legislative Council in 1926.

A resolution was passed at "The Women's Day" held at Madras on 25th December, 1927 claiming the abolition of the Devadasi system and immediate effective legislation for the prevention of the same. At the instigation of WIA, K.R.Venkatarama Iyer introduced the “Suppression of Brothels and Immoral Traffic Bill” in the Madras Legislative Council in December 1927. This association took steps to popularise the Bill and elucidate the support of leaders. The tendency of opposition to the Devadasi system was even more acute when the national leaders

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37 Stridharma. May 1926, vol.7, No.9, p.35.
38 ibid, January 1928, p.38.
like C. Rajagopalachari and S. Sathiamurthy expressed their opinion in support of the system. When Muthulakshmi Reddi initiated the debate on "Abolition of Devadasi System", Rajagopalachari, as the President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, refused to take up the issue for discussion.\textsuperscript{39} Satyamurthy, on the other hand went to the extent of claiming that the Devadasis represented national art and culture and hence the system should be retained and every Devadasi should dedicate at least one girl to be a future Devadasi.\textsuperscript{40}

The Select Committee appointed by the Madras Legislative Council to examine Mr. K.R. Venkatarama Iyer's Bill for the Suppression of Brothels and Immoral Traffic, published its report on the amendments effected by the Committee which were important and commendable. Finally the Devadasi Bill was passed in 1929 in the Legislative Council and it became the Act on 30th January 1930 when it received the assent of the Governor of Madras.\textsuperscript{41} It was the best achievement of Dr. Muthulakshmi as a Legislator. The feminists received a support from Self-Respectors when they passed resolutions in their conference held at Virudhunagar on 8\textsuperscript{th} August 1931, such as the marriage of widows, the right to divorce and the abolition of the Devadasi system. The resolution to abolish Devadasi system stated that, "The practice of dedicating girls to the Hindu temples in the name of God and religion and thus making them prostitutes is an utter dishonour and disrespect for the Hindu Society. Hence the Conference decides that such a practice should be stopped".\textsuperscript{42} Muthulakshmi Reddi's Anti-Nautch Bill got the support of Self-

\textsuperscript{39} Muthulakshmi Reddi papers, subject file No.11, Part II.

\textsuperscript{40} Muthulakshmi Reddy's letter to the editor of Tamil Nadu (a Tamil Newspaper) in Reddy Papers, subject file No.12, Part II, p.79.

\textsuperscript{41} G.O. 283, Law Legislative Department, 15\textsuperscript{th} April 1930.

\textsuperscript{42} Kudi Arasu, 13\textsuperscript{th} August 1931.
Respecters. She sought to abolish the *Devadasi* system. Moovalur Ramamirthammal organised a separate conference for *Devadasis* under the leadership of Periyar E.V.Ramasamy Naicker and resolutions were passed for the abolition of this system.\(^{43}\) She carried out Devadasi abolition campaigns through the Association of *Devadasis* in local areas. She not only demanded support for the Devadasi Abolition Bill but also worked for their rehabilitation. She formed the "*Malaranthulu Vidhya Sangam*" for the sole purpose of fighting for the education and the betterment of the members of the *Devadasi* Community. It tirated against the continuation of the system. In 1936 she published a novel with the title "*daasikalin Mosavalai Allathu Matipattra mainer*" (Tamil). She authored essays regularly in 'Kudi Arasu' on the condition of women. She wrote another fictional serial in *Dravida Nadu* in 1945, called "*Damayanthi*". It also dealt with the question of *Devadasis*. She organised "*Devadasigal Munnetra Sangam*". From being a *Devadasi*, she became the foremost champion of women's cause in Tamil Nadu.\(^{44}\)

Sister Subbulakshmi Ammal said in the fourth Madras Constituent Conference of Women Indian Association on "Educational and Social Reform" that the "Conference condemns the constitution of the *Devadasi* system in the Hindu temples. It appeals to the Government, Hindu Religious Endowment Board, Temple Committee and the Trustees to prohibit the ceremony of dedication of minor or major girls within the premises of any temple or any other place of worship". She also elicited its whole-hearted support to the "Prevention of Dedication Bill" of Dr. Muthulakshmi".\(^{45}\)

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\(^{44}\) *Dravida Nadu*, 22 and 29 April 1945, 13 May 1945.

After the enactment of the "Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act", the Government did not improve the provisions of the Act due to the lack of rescue house and the facilities to provide adequate training to the committed persons to correct themselves as useful citizens of the country. It conducted a meeting at “Kanagarathna Hall” at Madras. Hundreds of Devadasi ladies participated in it and raised the voice in support of abolition of the institution of Devadasis. Dr. Muthulakshimi supported their demand. Referring to the Devadasi System, she said that when she introduced the bill in the Legislative Council she had thought that the Devadasi system was prevalent only in some parts of southern India. But it did not take a long time for her to realise its countrywide prevalence by the number of letters, which she received from the affected members of various parts of India. She exhorted them to lead pure lives and save their children from a life of infamy, disease and early death.

Another evil was Dowry. This was responsible for the other evils such as Child Marriage and increasing of child widows. This was developed in 'Stridhana' of ancient period. In 1930 and 1940 this evil forced the bridegroom's party to extract money from the bride’s parent according to their status. Homicide, self-immolations were taken when the dowry was not paid as assured at the time of marriage. The reformers of 19th century exercised over the problem of dowry. Yet it became a real issue with them in the 20th century. The 'Dowry System' was fairly prevalent among all the castes and communities in Tamil country in the 19th century. The amount of dowry depended mainly on the social status, education, occupation and wealth of the proposed bridegroom. The amount was paid either in

47 ibid, pp.691, 692.
cash or in the form of gold jewellery or property.\textsuperscript{48} The Christian missionaries condemned the dowry system. They forced the Christians to refrain from this practice. However they failed in their attempts. And ultimately they regularised it by way of putting certain conditions. For example the American Madura Missionaries were permitted to grant Rs.25/- to the girls who left the school to be married. In Dindigul, the Rev. Lawrence was allowed to give two girls each Rs.25/- in the year 1845. In the year 1847, the dowry was fixed at Rs.45/- on the request of the Christians.

The following articles were being substituted for payments: 1) one large brass pot for water valued about Rs.5/-, 2) one brass \textit{sembu} for Rs.1-8-0, 3) one brass lemp for Rs.3/-, 4) two plates, 5) two couches for Rs.10/-, 6) two clothes for Rs.8/-, 7) one hardwood chair, Rs.2-8-0, 8) two chairs for Rs.6/-, and 9) cash Rs.5/-, total Rs.45/-, a Bible and two hymn books were given in addition. But they did not give dowries to girls who were not fit to study. In the year 1851, the mission empowered the Girls Boarding School Committee to dismiss such girls who proved unfit to complete a course of study.\textsuperscript{49}

Maharaja Ananda Gajapati of Vizhiangaram made some notable efforts in this direction. The Maharaja moved the issue with the assistance of Valluri Jagannatharao, treasury officer of Nellore district, in the Madras Legislature in 1888. No law could be made on this as the Government held that the matter was connected with the native religion and its interference might hurt the feelings of the natives. The “Anti Dowry League” was started in the first session of the Madras Students Convention. All unmarried members had to pledge that they would not accept


\textsuperscript{49} Annual Report of AMM, 1847, p.114.
dowry. Similar Leagues were started in Northern India in 1914. Sri. Veeresalingam condemned the evil in his *Vivekavardhani* and also in his satires and public lectures. His lecture on Kanyasulkam (Dowry) was based on the *shastras*, which according to him never sanctioned their practice.

Resolution IX of Fourteenth conference of I.N.S.C. held at Lahore in 1900 stated that, the sale of girls in the name of marriage was opposed to the spirit of the *shastras* and in the abuse of the institution of marriage tending to degrade the marriage tie. So the conference recommends Reform Sabhas and Associations to discourage this abuse should make strenuous efforts.\(^{50}\)

Though the reformers and associations took effort to remove this custom, it spread with the spread of education. In the magazine *Chakravarthini*, Bharathiar condemned dowry system as one of the main cause for the origin other social evils. Due to this evil, nearly 355 married girls turned as prostitutes in Pudhukottai area because their parents were not able to pay dowry.\(^{51}\) Many journals published the names of persons who were not willing to marry the girls without dowry.

In this way the women activists fought for the abolition of *Sati*, and Child marriage. They also fought for the remarriage of widows, stop of demanding dowry and abolition of prostitution for the enlightenment of the people. In order to improve the condition of the women all considered that education of women is most important.

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P. VAIDYANATHA ITER. M. S. NATHA IZER, Etc.

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c. WOMEN FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

The feminists explained that the women ignorance was the basic reason for all the evils through their journals Sukunabodhini, Matharmithri, Penmathibothini, Maathar Manoranjini, Chakravartini etc., which explained the importance of women education also.

First they told that a woman was the root of a good and happy family life. If a husband spent half an hour daily he could educate his wife. If she was educated, her affection towards jewels may disappear and may maintain good relationship with her husband.

In the beginning they aimed the education of the women only within the house that too by their own husbands after marriage, that means even the feminist could not come out suddenly from the social bond. But in course of time after 1858, that is under British Government a change took place with the establishment of a magazine named “Penmathibodhini” with the sole aim of creating awareness in the women folk through articles. It further stated that Astronomy, Geography, History, Philosophy and Logic should be taught to them so that they could get out of the age long social evils through learning.52

51 Chakravartini, Thokuthi 1, Idhal 5, p.105.
52 A.Ponnusarny Mudaliar, ibid,5,p. 128
The table shows that girl’s schools increased nearly 8 times during a thirty-year period i.e, between 1870 and 1903.53

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>GIRLS SCHOOL</th>
<th>NO OF STUDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>9421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>1056</td>
<td>133000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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As per the Census Report of 1901, 94 ladies were educated out of 10,000. Among them the majority were the Christians. In Calcutta there was an association called “Sathi Samithi” and it worked for giving the education. In 1893 Mathaji Maharani established a school in Calcutta in which 525 girls studied. Udhayatharakai established “Baaliga Padasalai”54 for girls. In Madras “Indhiya Maathar Sahaya Beero” was established. It helped the women by giving jobs, taught tailoring, craft etc.55 In Baroda there was an Act, which stressed that the girls of the age between 6-10 should go to school. Srimathi Rajalakshmi praised this and requested the Government to pass such type of Act in Madras also.56

The activists took further step in the direction of women education. The WIA in its Annual meeting held at Adyar (Madras) in 1926 demanded free education to women. They insisted that the scheme of free education should be started all over India and the inclusion of religion in all schools according to religious beliefs of each child. They also demanded that the compulsory medical inspection should be made for girl children.57

53 ibid.
54 M.S.Natesayyar, ibid, 5, pp.195-199.
56 Chakaravarthini, vol.2, p.99
57 Annual report of WIA, 1926 and 1927.
Through the first Conference, held at Delhi on 7th February 1928, a memorandum of Resolutions on Educational Reform was submitted to the Government. In it they enunciated women's principle of reform such as the restoration of right to education, compulsory medical inspection and physical training. They also demanded for alternative courses of study for girls not intending to enter the learned professions. The encouragement of the fine arts and all subjects would enrich, ennoble and enlighten the future mothers of the Indian Nation.58

In continuation of this memorandum they formed five sub-committees with definite constructive work. In 1928 they created the, All India Women's Education Fund.59 In 1930 the Committee of the Educational Fund had been registered as the ‘All India Women's Education Fund Association’. They decided to make a full inquiry about a suitable education for girls for which an All India Committee was appointed to investigate this matter.60 They started a campaign for Primary Education for the masses. A meeting of AIWC had been held at Panagal Building, Saidapet. It formed a good starting point to obtain improved educational facilities. Accordingly Mrs.Lalitamma Krishnaswamy, Saidapet Honorary Secretary, Mrs. Subbulakshmi Iyer, Municipal Councillor, Mrs. V.T. Lakshmi, Mrs. Malati Patwardhan, Mrs. Cousins, and B. Musmet, met Rao Bahadur M.Krishnasamy Reddi, President of the Chengelpat District Board and placed before him a strong representation that girls should be included in the four year experiment in Primary Compulsory education.61

58 ibid, March 1928, p.67.

59 ibid,

60 Report of the Fourth Conference of AIWC, 1930.

The feminist activists took active part in training women to send their daughters to school after their puberty. Committees were formed to create the public awareness to adopt compulsory primary education for their girl children. In pursuance of this scheme, Mrs. Margaret E. Cousins sent a circular letter in 1926 to women all over the country to form local committees and hold constituent conferences in each of the provinces, defined districts and Indian States, for the purpose of declaring their views on problems of education.\(^{62}\) In 1932 the work of the Education Section went forward with unabated vigour; progress being made with the scheme for opening a Women's College for Home Science, Educational Research and Training of Teachers.\(^{63}\)

The AIWC continued its effort by reiterating its demand for immediate, free and compulsory primary education for girls and boys up to the age of 12, in its Annual Conference held at Lucknow in Dec 1932. It also urged all local governments and local bodies to take steps to introduce it in urban, sub-urban and rural districts. It also earnestly appealed to all parents, especially to Muslim parents, to afford their daughters every facility for higher education.\(^{64}\) It was of opinion that the Matriculation Examination of the Indian Women's University of Poona should be recognised by Government and public bodies.

They also urged that Home Science should be introduced as a compulsory subject in high schools and as an optional course in colleges for women. The activists believed in the ideal of unity desired to take active and practical measures to achieve the same. They therefore proposed:

\(^{62}\) ibid, January, 1928, p.38.

\(^{63}\) Report of the Sixth Conference of AIWC, 1932.

\(^{64}\) Stri Dharma, Madras, February 1933, vol. XVI, No.IV, pp.183, 184.
(a) That no educational institutions should be based on communal lines.

(b) That, as a common language is necessary for intercourse between different communities, every effort should be made to adopt one, which is spoken over the greater part of India.

In furtherance of this, a meeting of the WIA was held on January 23rd, 1933 at the Pantheon Garden, Egmore unanimously adopted the following resolutions that:

1. This meeting strongly protested against retrenchment in the women's branch of education in view of the fact that the total expenditure on the same is very inadequate to meet the requirements of that department.

2. Women Inspectorate, the women staff, both in the Madras Educational Service and in the subordinate educational service, should not be reduced on any account.

3. It protests against any proposal to amalgamate girls' schools with the boy's schools, especially in the districts and in the mofussil because

   i) The people in the rural districts being conservative will not send their girls to boy's schools and even when they do send out of mere necessity they will not allow them to continue in a boys' school long enough to become permanent literate.

   ii) The special needs of girls such as music, kolattam, stitching and needlework, domestic science will not receive the same attention in boy's school as in girl's school.
iii) The literacy of women in the districts was much less than the town.

4. This meeting requests the authorities to reopen the music class for the B.A. students in the Queen Mary's College, so as to enable women of culture and character to learn and practice the art.

5. This meeting strongly protests against any retrenchment in the expenditure incurred for the teaching of domestic science, for medical inspection and for physical training in all the girls' schools, particularly in the model training colleges and schools in the Presidency.65

The President of the meeting submitted the resolution to the Director of Public Instruction, the Hon'ble Minister of Education and His Excellency the Governor.

The demand for compulsory primary education for boys and girls has been almost universal; the state constituencies joined whole heartedly in it. Realising the need of removing illiteracy among adults, the activists started night schools and day classes in many places. The activists suggested that moral instruction based on spiritual ideals, upholding the best traditions of the country, should be given in all educational institutions.

65 ibid, February 1933, vol. XVI, No.IV, p.194.
The principles of sex and social hygiene should be taught in all high schools and colleges, they claimed. The activists in 1938 extended their social service of removal of illiteracy among Harijans and other depressed people living in the rural areas of Tamil Nadu. They established schools for Harijans. In these schools they taught them the importance of public health also.

Further they studied the Wardha Education Scheme and a practical scheme of working Nursery school was drawn up. In recognition of their helpful outlook, the Government of India selected two members of the AIWC to one of the committees of the Central Advisory Board of Education.

As a result, this Board's Memorandum on Educational Development was published in 1943 and covered several of their important demands, which were included in the working scheme of the Educational Board, in the year 1943.

As a result of their agitation carried on by the feminist, the Government of India appointed a committee to examine the injustice done to women under the Hindu Law.

The Government had not realised the futility of such piecemeal legislation when the whole problem of the position of women under Hindu Law required a full and comprehensive examination in order to adopt the law to meet modern conditions.

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66 Annual report of WIA, 1933, p.12.


69 *ibid.*
d. WOMEN MOVEMENT FOR HEALTH

The activists stressed the problem of health of women, both physical and social. Because of their concern at the inferior quality of medicines, the authorities were pressed to formulate an All India Drug Act.

They were the first activists to alert and educate the public on the dreaded disease of cancer, its early detection and cure, through pamphlets, exhibitions, posters, films, seminars, etc. Under the veteran leadership of Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, the first Cancer Research Institute with a laboratory and clinic was set up in Madras.\textsuperscript{70}

Later they also introduced mobile health vans in rural areas all over the country, known as the Asoka-Akbar vans, which rendered sorely needed service as there were no rural health centres. X-ray units were added in some of the states, and even healthy centres were constructed. In view of its rapid growth and heavy responsibility, the village Mobile Health Van Committee was registered as a subsidiary of the Conference.\textsuperscript{71}

The work of the Women Association created awareness in the public about health particularly women health. Because of their work special wards for female and children were formed in Government Hospitals.

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{ibid}, pp.78, 79.

\textsuperscript{71} \textit{ibid}.
WOMEN MOVEMENT FOR ECONOMIC LIBERTIES

The Women Associations never failed to realise that the basic cause for social degradation of women was due to the absence of economic subjugation. They worked hard to remove the hurdles in the way of economic liberties. They worked earnestly for their civil (liberty) equality.

i) Right to inherit properties:

In 1929, Dewan Bahadur Har Bilas Sarda had introduced a Bill in the Legislative Assembly giving the Hindu widows a right to inherit their husband's property jointly with his sons. It was unfortunately thrown out owing to Government's opposition to it.\textsuperscript{72} The Act III of 1874 known as the 'Married Women's Property Act' was the earliest law, which widened the scope of \textit{stridhan} and gave an incentive to women to engage in remunerative work. In pursuance of their policy the activists urged the Government that changes in the Hindu Law should be made to ensure equitable treatment of Hindu women in the case of inheritance and succession of husband's property.\textsuperscript{73} Further the activists took one more step in the direction of attaining civil liberties by passing a resolution in the fourth Madras Constituent Conference of women on Educational and Social Reform held at State House (Madras) under the Presidentship of Lady Beatrix Stanley in the year 1929. In this conference Mrs. Saraswathi Ammal moved a resolution saying, adherence to the principle of civil equality for men and women and the abolition of all inequalities in the matter of inheritance of property".\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{72} ibid, July - August 1936, p.182.
\textsuperscript{73} ibid, 1931, p.565.
\textsuperscript{74} Indian Ladies Magazine, Cannanore, Sep-Octr, 1929, vol. III, No.2 & 3, pp.141,142.
Because of their efforts, Dr. G.V. Deshmukh introduced the Bill to amend the Hindu Law governing Hindu Women’s right to property in the Madras Legislative Assembly. The activists insisted for the immediate revision and reform in the inheritance and succession rights of Hindu Women, their property rights in joint or divided families and their ‘Stri Dhanam’ right.  

Their demand was further strengthened by the inspiring speeches of Nagammal, the wife of E.V.R, Moovalur Ramamirthammal and S.R.Kannammal (sister of E.V.R) in the First Self-Respect Conference held at Chenglepet on 17th and 18th February 1929. One of the important resolutions passed in this conference was that, there must be parity among the sons and daughters in the matter of inheritance of the family properties. K.E.Veera Kalyani, T.S.Kunjitham, R.Annapoorani and Indirani Balakrishnan were some of the most prominent women who took part in this conference. The Social Reform Section of the AIWC took a very active part in the agitation for reform of the Laws of Inheritance as affecting women. It continued its work, in the direction of getting the laws of inheritance amended. Again it kept busy in 1932 in agitating against the attempts to amend Sarda’s Bill to secure a share for Hindu widows in their husband's family property. It was widely supported in the constituencies. It also strongly urged the early abolition of all disabilities affecting the rights of inheritance of women in its meeting held at Lucknow in December 1932. Their agitation for getting civil liberties was strengthened by the veteran champion of the Women’s cause, Harbilasji in the year 1933 when he introduced

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75 Stri Dharma, Madras, January 1928, p.38.
76 Kudiyarasu, 1929.
78 Stri Dharma, Madras, February 1933, p.185.
Durgabai Deshmuk
another of his beneficient Bill in the Legislative Assembly viz. the "Hindu Widows Inheritance Bill". He hoped that it would meet with a better fate and attitude of the Government would be more reasonable. The matter of the Bill was of vital importance to the welfare of Hindu Society. The Bill sought to do some justice to the Hindu women who were groaning under the burden of double injustice.79

This measure evoked widespread sympathy and support of the feminist activists. They held meetings all over India and sent telegrams of sympathy and support to His Excellency the Viceroy, the Home Member, the Secretary, Legislative Assembly and Harbilasji. The AIWC in its annual session of 1933 passed a resolution that "This Conference strongly protests against the legal disabilities of Hindu women in matters of personal and property rights and is of opinion that they must forthwith be removed. To achieve this end, it urged on the Government of India for the immediate appointment of an All India Enquiry Committee and earnestly appealed to all states to co-operate with this committee.80

The activists were not satisfied with this struggle. They intensified it by holding meetings and enlisting public support for the Social Bills introduced in the Legislative Assembly e.g., Dr. Deshmukh's Bill to amend the Hindu Law governing Hindu Women's Rights to property. Due to the extensive propaganda by the AIWC and the co-operation of men like Haribilashji, C.D. Deshmukh and others, the "Hindu Women's Right to Property Act of 1937" was enacted to give better rights to women in respect of property.

According to the Law the widow was entitled to the same share, which

79 ibid, July - August, 1933, p.182.
80 ibid, March 1933, p.240.
The Office Bearers of the All India Women Conference and the members of the Standing Committee who met in July at Waltair for their half-yearly meeting.
a son receives in the case of property in respect of which he died. As for the self-acquired property of an individual, the wife, the daughter and the mother were as usual recognised as heirs.\textsuperscript{81} The property they inherited was in the nature of a restricted estate, for at the death, it passed on to the next heir of the male from whom she inherited. The activists unrelented activities were responsible for liberating the women from economic burden.

**Equal Pay for Equal Work.**

The WIA, AIWC and some other associations took an active effort to elevate the economic position of women labourers. The women labourers of the Madras Labour Union (MLU) held special meetings for the welfare of women. This union in 1890s itself took up special schemes like baby welfare, crèches, etc. for the women workers.\textsuperscript{82} Because of their struggle even in 1891, a law was passed limiting the hours of work for women workers in factories to eleven per day. The Union demanded an increase in the wages of women. In this connection the Coimbatore Labour Union had a charter demands in which it demanded:

1. That every pregnant woman is entitled to one month's holiday with wages and without;
2. Arrangement for keeping little children for feeding if request comes from women workers;
3. That every worker be given two sets of clothes every year at the cost price.\textsuperscript{83}


\textsuperscript{82} Public Works and Labour, G.O., 2334L, 16 October 1927, T.N.A.

\textsuperscript{83} Department of Industry and Labour, L.878 (14), 1928.
In continuation of the earlier struggle of MLU, the feminist activists fought for the economic welfare of the women labourers. At first their demand was for better wages for women, special facilities of work time and maternity benefit. A number of Union leaders stressed the need to unionise women in order to change their miserable condition. A resolution was passed at the women's day at Madras on 25th December 1927, demanding that there should be equal pay for equal work irrespective of sex in all forms of manual labour. It also demanded that children should not be employed in factories and workshops except under strict inspection and further stated that legislation might be brought in compelling employers of child labour to register their industrial concerns".84

At this stage the demand for equal pay for equal work was not seriously taken since there were questions to be settled before it. Hence they concentrated on some other problems as one can see in the following pages.

The women organisations recognised the duty of women to support the indigenous industries of their country and demanded a higher standard in industrial production. Swadesi Exhibitions had been an important feature of some of the constituent conferences. Almost all the constituent bodies had adopted resolutions exhorting the use of Swadesi articles.85

They tried to prevent the child labour by urging the Government of India to recommend the same age for Indian children as for European children for employment in non-industrial occupations or at least fix the age at 12 as the minimum age for Indian children.

84 Stri Dharma, Madras, January 1928, p.38.

85 ibid, March 1933, p.242.
They appealed to appoint at least one representative of women at each of the Geneva International Conference where questions relating to child welfare, child labour, child protection and traffic in women and children came up for discussion.

They conducted meetings and passed resolutions and sent to the Secretary of Geneva International Labour Convention Secretary, the Viceroy, the Home members of the Local and Central Government, and the Secretary of the Assembly. The activists also looked on the legal disabilities of Indian Women. For this purpose a committee appointed by AIWC in 1934 to investigate the conditions in mines. This committee suggested that women should be eliminated from underground work. This aroused a great interest among the activists to help the unfortunate women miners. Because of their hard work the working hours were reduced to ten in 1934.

The Factories Bill was passed on 19th July 1934 and it contained many improvements on previous legislation. Some of the valuable recommendations of the Whithloy Commission (Royal Commission on Labour) had been enacted. Some of its clauses referred specially to women and children were:

1. No woman and child should be allowed to clean or oil any part of the machinery of a factory
2. Women, adolescents and children were protected from being employed in hazardous occupations, and
3. Women might not be employed except between 6a.m and 7 p.m.

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86 ibid, December 1933, p.73.
88 Stri Dharma, Madras, October 1934, p.536.
On 30th May 1939, S.R. Varadarajulu, on behalf of the Madura Labour Union, addressed a women workers' meeting. The discussion was on the amendment introduced to the maternity benefits bill and the need to fight for pension for women workers and also a number of other concessions.\textsuperscript{89}

Although the Unions were predominantly male in composition, they did take up some of the demands of women workers because of the urge of the women organisations. The Madras Labour Union, the Coimbatore Labour Union, the Madura Labour Union and the Coimbatore Socialist Textile Workers Union took up women's issues, like maternity benefit, rest hours, increased wages in general and provision of crèches.\textsuperscript{90}

In 1943, the Government of India passed the Maternity Benefit Act for women in factories, which prescribed that the cost of benefit should be borne by the employer. Eight weeks were fixed as the maximum period for the purpose and eight annas as the amount fixed for the day. That act was applicable to those women who had been in employment for at least 9 months.

It provided safeguards against discharge from service on account of absence due to maternity. In 1948, a law fixed nine hours as the maximum length of the working day to women. No act could be enacted for equal wages to women workers with men workers even after independence. The constitution of free India, however, recognised the principle of equal pay for equal work for both men and women.

\textsuperscript{89} \textit{The Hindu}, Madura Labour Union, 31\textsuperscript{st} May, 1939.

\textsuperscript{90} Public Works and Labour, G.O. 321 L, 1\textsuperscript{st} February 1930, T.N.A.
CONCLUSION

The incessant effort of the Feminist activists was mainly responsible for passing of acts to liberate the women folk from social and economic inhibitions. The women folk of India were thus liberated from the clutches of some of the social inhibitions and they were free from economic subjugation. They marched towards the economic equality with the men step by step. The activist’s next aim was the political liberties of women. They so far emphasised on civil liberties since they believed that attaining civil liberties is the stepping stone for attaining the political liberties.