Chapter-IV
CHAPTER – IV

WOMEN SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

The exuberant women activists who successfully lifted the women of India socially and economically to a certain level launched their attack on attaining political rights at the same time by claiming “Voting rights to women”. When the British Government awarded the voting rights to Indians, they considered the men folk only were eligible to vote since women were considered as property of men. Hence there was a necessity for the women activists to prove that women were not part of the men but they were independent socially and economically. While liberating them, the activists claimed independent voting right to women.

Women's suffrage movement was launched in the United Kingdom during the 19th century by eminent women liberators like Mrs.Hallett, Mrs.Henry Favett, Mrs.Caroline Mshurst Biggs, Mrs.Mary Beedy, Mrs.Agnes, Mrs.M.Learen, Mrs.Jane Taylor Isabella and Mrs.S.M.Tod. This created an inspiration in the minds of Indian women to launch such a movement in India.¹ This was the foundation of group consciousness and united action, which has been an undoubted factor in bringing about the speed of the emergence of India's

womanhood in to power and publicity. 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 Brahmosamaj and many other large provincial and community groups were rousing the women of the educated classes to think and act for their own improvement as a dedicated part of their aspiration for national freedom.  

a. DIFFERENT STAGES OF WOMEN SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

Origin of the women suffrage movement

The women suffrage movement began in India as early as 1917. It proved that a most necessary part of the work for the advancement of women was propaganda for women suffrage. The Federation of Women University in India, composing various associations of women graduates, was established. Its aim was to take efforts towards creating interest in public life and international understanding. Mrs. Margaret Cousins, who became a member of the Federation of Women University, initiated the women suffrage movement. Mrs. Margaret's early experiences in Women's Suffrage Movement in England facilitated her efforts in Madras and other parts of India. The feminist activists of India utilised her motivating factors and her invaluable experiences in this field.

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1847-1933, President of the Theosophical Society (1907-1933)
Particularly the activists belonging to the Women's Indian Association of Madras inspired the women for their franchise.\(^5\) One of the main aim of the activists was to get their suffrage in the Local administration, State and Central Legislatures and in General Elections. For this purpose they convened number of conferences and arranged meetings throughout the country\(^6\) to rouse the public support for their movement.

Mrs. Besant went to England as a representative of Indian women to give evidence before the Joint Parliamentary Committee in favour of women's franchise. There she exercised her influence on British public opinion and Parliament to see that Indian women got the franchise right along with men.

In 1917, the various leaders of women movement planned to meet Mr. Edwin Montague to discuss about the issue of women but they were informed that only deputation concerning political subjects could be accepted. So M.E. Cousins added political rights in the deputation.\(^7\) In 1917, a deputation of Indian women led by Sarojini Naidu presented their demand to the British Parliament, for enfranchisement of women on an equal basis with men.\(^8\)

\(^5\) *Stri Dharma*, Madras, vol.XVI, No.11, Sep 1933, p.ii.

\(^6\) ibid, p.iii.

\(^7\) Pratima Asthana, *op.cit.*, pp. 66, 67.

Subsequently, when the Secretary of State and the Viceroy came to Madras, the women deputation met them on 18th December 1917 and demanded for the removal of sex disqualification in franchise.9

The women deputation demanded political rights for women and their role in the coming constitution of India. The deputation consisted of 14 women leaders drawn from all over the country. Sarojini Naidu was the leader and M.E.Cousins was the Secretary of the deputation. Others included in this deputation were Dr. N. Joshi, Srimati S. Naik, Srimati Srirangamma, Srimati Kamalabai Kibe, Mrs. Annie Besant, Mrs. Nalinibai Dalvi, Mrs. Parvati Ammal (Bangalore), Mrs. D. Jinarajadasa, Mrs. Begam Hazrat Mohani, Mrs. Lazarus, Mrs. Herabai Tata and Mrs. Guruswamy Chetty.

Telegrams supporting the Deputation and regretting inability to be present were given to Mr. Montague by Lady J.C. Bose, Mrs. Sarala Devi Chaudhuri, Mrs. R. V. Nilakanta, Mrs. Uma Nehru, Mrs. Mazur-al-Haque, Miss. Arundale, Mrs. Padmabai Sanjiva Rao, Mrs. R. Rannade, and Miss. H. Petit.10 They submitted a memorandum. It includes the request for:

a) Better and increased facilities of education

b) Improved health and maternity services and

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9 Indian Constitutional Reforms, Reports of the South Borough Committee, Government of India, Delhi, 1919, pp.3-5.

c) The same franchise rights to women as could be extended to men in the next reform Bill.\textsuperscript{11}

It demanded that people should directly elect the members of the council, when such a franchise was being introduced. Women should be given franchise on the same terms as men.\textsuperscript{12} The deputation marked a distinct milestone in the history of emergence of womanhood in India.

The women activists belonging to the District and Provincial Towns also took active part in this movement. They organised a series of conferences in the Madras Presidency and other places in India. They also obtained the support of Congress committees by getting them passing resolutions recommending the removal of sex disqualification in the matter of voting.\textsuperscript{13}

**Rejection of the Demand**

Unfortunately those hopes temporarily ended in failure since the South Borough Committee, which examined the question of franchise, rejected the proposal for women suffrage.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{enumerate}
\item Pratima Asthana, *op.cit.*, p.111.
\item The Report from the Joint Select Committee, *op.cit.*, p.131.
\item Indian Constitutional Reforms, *op.cit.*, pp.3-5.
\end{enumerate}
In 1918-1919, the Franchise Committee headed by Lord South Borough as President, Sir Frank G. Sly, Deputy Chairman, P.C. Talents as Secretary, Sahibzada Afta Ahmad Khan, W.M. Hailey, Surendranath Banerje, Malcolm N. Hogg and Srinivasa Sastri as members considered that until the custom of seclusion of women in many classes and communities was removed, suffrage for women would hardly be a reality with the conservative feeling of the country and it would include grave difficulties in the actual recording of votes. Hence it entrusted the work of giving women the right to vote to the legislatures of provinces.\textsuperscript{15}

Their demand for women franchise was strongly supported by the Muslim League and they passed a resolution for enfranchising women in 1918. Besides this, several witnesses belonging to Liberal party and individuals appeared before the committee and supported their demand. Many telegrams were sent to the highly placed statesmen who were both in office and out of office in England in order to use their influence on the committee to accept the demand of the women activists.\textsuperscript{16} But they failed to convince the Franchise Committee to concede their demands.

\textsuperscript{15} Indian Constitutional Reforms, \textit{op.cit.}, pp3-5.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{ibid.}
Protest Movement

This created a hue and cry among women in India who set their machinery in motion. Meetings were held all over the country. Disappointment was naturally widespread. The protest was vocal and voluminous. The branches of the WIA held public meetings in favour of women suffrage. Women's Indian Association organised local area political conferences, at Badagara, Thirumeyachur, Enangudi, Ootacamund, Kumbakonam, Salem and Tanjore to propagate their cause and pass resolutions to protest against the South Borough Committee's proposal. Forty-five branches of WIA held meetings and passed resolutions to give women franchise.17

Various other women's organisations such as YWCA and National Council of Women also held meetings all over the country in support of women's franchise. Such meetings requisitioned the support from the Indian National Congress and other political organisations18. In reply to it, the Muslim League, the National Home Rule League and other such institutions supported in favour of women suffrage.19 Telegrams were sent to the authorities in England and a deputation of men and women met the Secretary of State for India in England in August 1919. Besides the deputation, they submitted a memorandum to the Law

17 Stri Dharma, July 1919, p.93.
18 Report from the Joint Select Committee, op.cit., p.131.
Member and Minister for passing legislation to enfranchise women.\textsuperscript{20} It is entirely significant that one member of the Government who knew Indian conditions from inside, and was therefore most fitted to voice Indian opinion, was Sri. C. Sankaran Nair.

He opposed the view of the Franchise Committee from the outset and pressed for the removal of the sex disqualification. He stated that the removal of the sex disqualification would give voting rights to at most about a million women out of the three hundred million odd population, that those women would largely be the most independent, the best educated and tax paying women in the country. Though small in number, those women would be invaluable assets to public life and their enfranchisement would remove their ignorance. The stigma of inferiority, incapacity or superiority to a desire for public service, all at present implied in her being classed in the disqualification and with the criminals, lunatics and children of her country as unfit for citizenship.\textsuperscript{21} In these circumstances, the Government of Bombay and Madras had found it practical to open the Municipal franchise to women. In these presidencies and their associated states, there was no purdah system and women voters would not be found backward in discharging their national duties.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20} G.O.120, Law (Legislative) Dept, 10\textsuperscript{th} May 1921.
\textsuperscript{21} WIA, \textit{op.cit.}, p.3.
\textsuperscript{22} M.E. Cousins, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.61-66.
Review of the disqualification

The South Borough Franchise Committee visited India for further study about franchise in 1919 due to the pressure of the feminist activists. It accepted the petitions and interviewed the representatives of few provinces. After having gone through various representations, it reported that women should be totally excluded from the franchise because of the social customs in India. This reverberated shock waves throughout India.

The members of the WIA and women in delegation who had worked rigorously for female franchise were very disappointed with the Committee. They even thought that they were humiliated by its report.

The Government of India agreed with the South Borough Franchise Committee in recommending that women in India should be disqualified from taking any share in self-Government under the Reform Bill. The only Indian member of the Government, Sir. Sankaran Nair, boldly and publicly disagreed with them on this matter and agreed with Mr. Hogg of the South Borough Committee who supported the women franchise. Women are grateful to these two champions and also to Colonel Wedgwood, a Labour Member of the Parliament. After Mr. Montague had introduced the Reform Bill, Colonel Wedgwood "urged the extension of the franchise to all literate, including women". Other political

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23 Report from the Joint Select Committee, op.cit., p.131.

24 Ibid.
leaders who have protested against the Committee's decisions were Sir. Narayan Chakravarkar, Mr. Paranjpye, Dr. Lazarus, Mr. A. Rangaswami Ayyar, Mr. V. Chakkarai, Mr. Pattabi Sita Ramayya and Mr. Venkataramma Ayyangar.  

When the Joint Select Committee met in England, Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu appeared before it. Sir Sankaran Nair asked the Bombay committee to send a delegate along with the above two women.

The Bombay committee selected Herabai Tata as a delegate and she with her daughter Mithan Tata went to England. They handed over a report to the Joint Select Committee supporting the women's franchise India.

When the Joint Select Committee was in discussion, Mrs. Annie Besant gave weighty evidences on WIA's behalf in London. Mrs. Herabai Tata and Mrs. Mithan Tata supported her move in London. They did valuable service to ensure the success of the nation. Mrs. Annie Besant exhorted the Committee for ignoring the women's demand. She also insisted that if the British continued to do so, Indian women would join in the political protest against them. In her speech, Sarojini Naidu represented All India Women and told that enfranchised women would make a powerful force for progress.

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25 *Stri Dharma*, July 1919, p.92.


Then she pointed out that "when the word franchise was heard the idea came to certain women of the women's university to start with, and I must say in this they were greatly helped by a European women who had great knowledge of the suffrage movement here, and we applied to bring a deputation to the Secretary of State and to Lord Chelmsford".

Indian women criticised the South Borough Committee's proposals as it became law women would be excluded from any share in their own Government. The woman activists mobilised the public opinion even in foreign countries like Great Britain. They held public meetings in London, Manchester, Lancashire, Birmingham and many other places. Many women associations of that country passed the resolutions in support of the demand of Indian woman activists ie. Woman Franchise. They forwarded all these resolutions to the foreign Journals like *Illustrated Weekly of London*, the *Premier*, also to the Members of Parliament, The Secretary of State for India, the Joint Select Committee and many others. They criticised the government's policy on voting right to the women of India. These magazines pointed out that the Government of British India should use the same yardstick to the Indians also, as done for English.

The Women's Association of Great Britain approved the principle of equality in the citizenship of men and women, and urged that the proposals in the present Bill for India for the enfranchisement of men should be extended to

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women possessing the same qualification so that the popular Government in India may start without any sex disqualification. On the other hand there was a lukewarm response from the Joint Select Committee as well as the authorities of the government of British India. Further they could not understand the diversity of Indian customs. Hence they decided to leave the question of women's franchise to be settled by the future Legislative Council of India for each province. The Members of the House of Commons ignored the pro-franchise memoranda given by different Indian organisations and Montague pressed the House to pass the India Bill as it existed. At last, the Government of India Bill was passed in 1919 without mentioning the women's franchise. One of its provisions allowed the Provincial Legislature Councils to settle the votes for women.

b. FREEDOM MOVEMENT AND FEMINIST STRUGGLE

The unrelented Woman activists wanted to revitalise their struggle for woman franchise with doubled vigour, so that they could achieve their aim. Hence they searched for more support from other quarters especially more vigour and influenced quarters. At that time they found that freedom movement was becoming more and more a Mass Movement. In these circumstances if they entered in it, they could politicize the women liberation movement and enlist the support of National leaders and made it as the part and parcel of the freedom

30 Herabai A.Tata, op. cit., p.9.
31 Madras Electoral Rolls (Madras: 1920, Rule No.7, Clause1, Sub clause (b)), 1920.
struggle. They succeeded in this attempt. Freedom struggle strengthened Feminist movement and it gained momentum because of women’s participation in the freedom struggle. The national leaders like Gandhiji also realised the fact that women were more or less half of the society and hence if their strength was utilised for the constructive works of Indian National Congress, they could make an impact on the freedom movement. Further he thought that, women were most suited to fight with the new weapons of non-violence and truth.\textsuperscript{33} Besides, enlightened women themselves took keen interest in national and international problems, believing that the co-operation extended to the British during the First World War would not go without result. Some of them collected friends and many others took up various jobs to help the British in their hour of need. But instead of granting political relief to the people of India, the British Government passed the Rowlatt Act, and tried to suppress Indian liberties. The Women activists participated in large numbers in the freedom struggle against the British colonial rule. While their involvement has been an object of historical concern its linkage with the women's movements and its implications for the shaping of a feminist consciousness have not received the same attention. In the special session of the Congress held in September 1920 at Calcutta, Gandhiji's resolutions of following a policy of progressive non-violence and non-co-operation until the wrongs were righted and Swaraj attained were passed. There were few women rulers, administrators and warriors exhorted men to take up the country's cause and also

\textsuperscript{33} "If non-violence is the law of being, future is with women", \textit{Gandhi on Women in young India} 4\textsuperscript{th} February 1925.
gave generous donations for the movement. Indeed, when Gandhi gave them a Clarion call, they readily jumped into the national movement.34 The advent of Gandhi gave a new light to the life of women. Gandhi encouraged women to take part in the national and political movement.35

The growth of socio-political-consciousness among Indian women gained impetus when Gandhi organised the mass struggle for freedom.36 In the following years, women of India got a new tool, in the form of passive resistance introduced by Gandhiji. As the first step, Gandhi encouraged his wife Kasturba, Thillaiyadi Valliammai and others to participate in the political activities of South Africa. With them, a lot of women participated and were arrested and sentenced to 1 to 3 months imprisonment.37 Women did not enter politics as silent spectators but active participants in the drama of non-violent struggle for freedom. They played their part fully and freely along with their male partners.38

The activity of women in the nationalist movement not only radicalised the women into articulating their own grievances, but also encouraged the nationalist movement to take their grievances seriously. The women won

34 Pratima Asthana, op. cit., p.116.
38 V.Rajalakshmi, op. cit., p.18.
support for their cause by linking freedom for women with freedom of India and formed an alliance with the national movement for the removal of colonialism. This helped to defuse male opposition to the principle of sexual equality, which was accepted by the Indian National Congress, and subsequently enshrined in the new constitutions of India.\textsuperscript{39}

The Non-Co-operation Movement played a large part in the awakening of Indian women. Few women took part in the first Non-Co-operation campaign of 1921. Large number of women collected funds for the movement and everywhere women encouraged in all ways its policy of Swadesi.\textsuperscript{40}

**Vote for Qualified Women**

In July 1919, after the introduction of the Government of India Bill in the British Parliament, the members of Joint Select Committee of both the Houses was appointed to take the evidence of the Indian representatives. All the Indian deputation, who came to London to give evidence, composed of educated Indians who without exception showed their desire to give votes to the qualified women of India. The deputation did not ask the votes for all women, as for sometime to come Universal suffrage might not be practicable in India. They claimed that the same qualifications as were laid down for men, should not be

\textsuperscript{39} Jonna Liddle and Rama Joshi, *Daughters of Independence Gender Caste and Class in India* (Delhi: 1986), p.33.

\textsuperscript{40} M.E. Cousins, *op.cit.*, p.3.
debarred from the enjoyment of right to vote on account of their sex.\textsuperscript{41} The feminist activists belonging to the forty-five branches of the WIA sent the following cablegram to the committee through the General Secretary of WIA, Mrs. Dorothy Jinarajadasa asking the voting right for women of India “Forty-five branches of WIA controverted South Borough’s evidence, they claimed votes and protested against sex disqualification”.\textsuperscript{42} On 10\textsuperscript{th} July 1920 the Madras Provincial Conference of Justice Party held in Tirunelveli passed a resolution urging the immediate extension of the vote to women on the same terms as to men, as did in the Malabar District Conference. It was noteworthy that in both the cases Indian ladies sister Balamambal and Smt. Chinnamalamma, took a growing share in public work, and proposed the resolution. \textsuperscript{43}

**Limited Franchise Right**

A group of Indian population including women was enfranchised by the Reforms Act of 1921. This Act stated that women could vote not only if they possessed qualification of wife-hood of legislatures but they have to satisfy the following also. A women can be included in the territorial constituency if she

\textsuperscript{41} *ibid*.

\textsuperscript{42} Tara Ali Beig, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{43} *ibid*, July 1920, p. 15.
is the wife of a person who either (a) was in the previous financial year assessed to income tax and had, in the year in respect of which the assessment was made a total income of not less than Rs.20000 or (b) was on the last day of the previous fasli year the holder of an estate in the province, of which the total income is not less than Rs.3,000 or (c) was on the last day of previous fasli year a registered inamdar, ryotwari pattadar or occupancy ryot, under the Madras Estate Land Act 1908, in respect of land in the province, the annual rent value of which is not less than Rs.1,500 or (d) is in receipt from any Government in British India of a Malikhanna allowance, the annual amount of which is not less than Rs.3,000 or (e) holds any title, order or decoration not lower than Dhiwan Bahadur, or (f) has been awarded by government in British India, a civil military or political pension of not less than Rs.250, a month”.44

c. POLITICAL RIGHTS:

a. Women in Local bodies

In order to get solution for their demand, the women activists approached the Justice party Government when it came to power in Madras Presidency after the election held in the year 1926. They submitted a memorandum demanding the “right to vote for women”.45


45 ibid, p.17
As a preliminary measure, the Madras government gave the right to vote to women exclusively to the resident of city of Madras under Section 48 of the Municipal Act (Act No.IV of 1919) for the first time in the annals of India, the Madras Presidency and the Corporation of Madras. Diwan Bahadur Mr.Krishnan Nayar, active member in the Justice Party brought a resolution in the Madras Legislative Council to remove the sex disqualification of women.\(^46\) He stated that this resolution if passed would give women only the right to vote and not the right to stand as candidate for the Council.

The right to stand as candidate for the council was not within the power of the Madras Legislative Council. The Government of India had to make rules and those rules had to be laid before the House of Parliament and had to be approved by them. Therefore, the MLC had no power to grant the power for standing as candidate to women.\(^47\) Muslims in the house particularly the women opposed the resolution on the ground that Muslim women could not avail the right to vote because they observed *gosha* system and they did not demand the right to vote. Mr.Nayar expressed that a number of difficulties such as registration of women voters, impersonation and others would affect the voting of women and hence insisted that the Muslim women should be left out in enfranchising. The Raja of Ramnad argued that their women in the palace followed *gosha* system, which would not affect in any manner in casting their vote. So, he supported the


\(^47\) G.O.No:120, Law (Legislative) Dept., Government of Madras, 10\(^{th}\) May 1921.
cause of women folk in enfranchising women. The resolution dated 22nd February 1921, regarding female suffrage gave its notification as follows:

"Resolution that was passed by the Legislative Council recommends that the sex disqualification prescribed by sub-clause (b) of clause (1) of rule 7 of the Madras Electoral Rule for registration on the Electoral Roll be removed in respect of women generally".

The resolution was passed on 1st April 1921, and in response to this resolution the Government of Madras was pleased to make the regulation called the "Madras Electoral Sex Disqualification Removal Regulation".

It stated that no women shall be disqualified by reason of her sex for registration on the electoral roll of any constituency of the Legislative Council of Madras.

Prominent among the women who helped to induce this result were Dr. Annie Besant, Mrs. Margaret Cousins, Mrs. Dorothy Jinarajadasa, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, Mrs. T. Sadasiva Iyar, Mrs. Dhanvanthi Rama Rao, Mrs. Ramachandra Rao, Mrs. Guruswamy Chetty, Mrs. Mahadeva Shastri,

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49 G.O No.108, Law (Legislative) Dept., Government of Madras, 10th May 1921, p.1
50 ibid.
Mrs. Lakshmi Pathi, Mrs. C. B. Rama Rao, Mrs. Lakshman Rao and Mrs. Lazarus.\textsuperscript{51} Madras City led in India in the matter of being the first city with a woman member of its Corporation, Mrs. M. C. Devadoss. The Collector of Chengalpet District has nominated two members of Saidapet branch of the WIA, Mrs. Subbulakshmiammal and Mrs. Krishnammal as Councillors of the Saidapet Municipality.\textsuperscript{52} In Erode a fair number of women voted in each of the wards in 1922 Municipal election.\textsuperscript{53} Nellore was the first town that nominated a woman Municipal Councillor and it was first to make the public arrangements for its new women voter in 1923. In Nellore separate polling station for the lady voters for the Legislative Council and the Assembly was arranged.\textsuperscript{54}

Mrs. Laxman Iyar and Mrs. Sarangabani were the nominated members of Saidapet Municipal Council.\textsuperscript{55} In 1923, the United Province Legislative Council passed the women's suffrage resolution unanimously.\textsuperscript{56} It was followed by Cochin and Travancore in 1924, Bengal in 1925, Bihar and Orissa in 1929.\textsuperscript{57} The Central Province gave women the right to vote and sit in the Council by the same resolution in March 1927. It was a strange phenomenon that supports

\textsuperscript{51} Stri Dharma, vol., No. 1, April 1921, Madras Council and Women's Suffrage, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{52} ibid, December 1922, vol. 6, No. 2, p. 17.

\textsuperscript{53} ibid, November 1922, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{54} ibid, September 1923, vol. 8, No. 11, p. 71.

\textsuperscript{55} ibid.

\textsuperscript{56} Stri Dharma, vol., No. 3, January 1924, p. 34.

\textsuperscript{57} ibid, vol., No. 1, September 1921, p. 2.
to the women's cause came from all communities in Bombay.\textsuperscript{58} In Srirangam, for the local government elections, special booths were created and in Bellary and Tanjore three quarters of the women voters went bravely to the polling station to vote.\textsuperscript{59}

**Women in Legislative Councils**

The women activists on their success of entering in to the local bodies dwell upon the Member of the Legislative Council to pass a resolution to allow the women to enter the council. As urged by them a number of Members of the Legislative Council placed resolutions before the Legislative Council meeting in July 1926. In it, they demanded the approval of the council for the admission of women to legislature. In order to pass it in the immediate session by a majority, the women activists held public meetings in many places to urge the people to stand behind them in this matter. They said that it was most urgent that these resolutions should be discussed in that immediate session otherwise women would not have the opportunity of going forward in general election and they could be debarred from sitting as representative members for three years.\textsuperscript{60} Public meetings were held in support of women in Bombay, demanding the admission of women as the Members of Legislative Councils. In 1926 eminent women in Madras organised themselves under the leadership of Lady Sadashiva Iyer, the Vice

\textsuperscript{58} Prathima Asthana, *op.cit.*, p.113.

\textsuperscript{59} *Stri Dharma*, vol.15, No.1, September 1921, p.2.

\textsuperscript{60} *ibid*, July 1926, vol.9, No.9, p.68.
President of WIA to urge Lord Willingdon, the Governor of Madras to grant right to women to sit in the council. He assured them to recommend their demand to the Secretary of State for India. 61

The Members of Legislative Council unanimously passed the resolution in favour of admitting women into the Council by nomination and election on 17th July 1926. By the terms of the Government order, that resolution automatically at once became the law of Presidency.

In response to the Indian women's demand the British Government permitted the Government of India to grant women the right to sit in the Legislative Council.

In April 1926, the Government of India by amending the electoral rules granted the right to women to become members of the legislatures. 62 It was so inspiring to Madras women to remember that they had political rights on exactly the same terms as men in that Presidency. 63

**Election and Feminist Campaign**

Women's first political work was to register their names as voters, see that their names appear on the Electoral Roll in 1922 and go for the first time


62 G.O.No.443 (Legislative) Dept., 9th October 1926, G.O.No.62 Law (Legislative) Department, 18th February 1927

காமலா சுவி சாத்தோபத்யாயா

Kamala Devi Chatopadyaya
to the polling booths to record their votes in 1923 at the time of election for local bodies.\textsuperscript{64} The election has proved that Kamala Devi was an exceptionally gifted young woman with the brilliant culture carried to which this has become The doorway. Over twenty women volunteers divided the work of canvassing and personally saw over 400 women voters of the Municipality of Madras.\textsuperscript{65} They also remained all day at the polling stations directing women in registering their votes. The men who served in the campaign party for Kamala were fine retired white-haired veterans.

Political lions in their prime like the ex M.L.A. and the new unopposed M.L.C. and some well-known Mohammadans, and crowds of efficient well set-up, graceful young men also worked day and night for the victory of the "lady candidate".\textsuperscript{66} There can be no doubt that the election polling day for the first Hindu woman candidate for the Legislative Council of Madras has been not only a day in which history has been made, but that it was a unique occasion in all aspects.

It proved itself a demonstration of a new order of chivalry for the crusades of the New Era, not only in Indian National life, but in the new world order, in which men fought for women to give the power to protect themselves. Thus ensure that later men and women may live in a harmony of


\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Ibid},

conditions equally favourable to both sexes and most freely serve their country unhampered by the foolish prejudices of out dated customs and conventionalities.

**Right to vote for literate women for reserved seats**

When the announcement was made regarding the coming of Royal Commission to India under the Chairmanship of Mr. Alexander Simon in order to assess the situation to give new India Act, the feminists wanted to utilise this for pressing their demand of women franchise. So the second campaign for female suffrage was started in 1927. But against their expectation it was decided by the Indian National Congress to boycott it since no Indian was included in it. So the feminists had to join this boycott movement.

When the Commission reached India it was boycotted by the Women's Indian Association and other National organisations. But however some feminists asked the Commission to give the right to vote to literate women or reserve seats. This was a new approach to the franchise movement towards the universal suffrage.\(^{67}\)

The feminist movement had displayed consistent interest in the constitutional progress. Dr. Annie Besant with Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru canvassed the idea of "Common Wealth of India". The WIA sent representatives to take part in the discussions and was instrumental in inserting the clause in the Bill's Declaration of Rights and Privileges. They claimed that the Rights and Duties of

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citizenship would be without distinction of sex. On 25th December 1927, a resolution was passed at "The Women's Day", celebrated at Madras.

In that women demanded the provincial Government, Municipal Councils and Local Boards to reserve a proportionate number of nominated seats for women representatives.

**Leadership Quality of Women equal to men**

A chance came to the feminists to prove their leadership quality equal to men at the time of Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930. The Congress decided to boycott the hearings of Simon Commission and insisted on immediate dominion status to India and when it was refused, Gandhi launched the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930. The British responded by declaring Congress as an illegal organisation and arrested most of its leaders. At this point the women activists came on their own, for they took over the organisation of the campaign, when the men were in jail.

There were differences of opinion amongst men in the involvement of women in the national issue; for example, men like Rajendra Prasad were against any legal reform, whereas others like Jawaharlal Nehru supported equal

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69 *Sri Dharma*, Madras, January 1928, p. 38.

70 Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1931) Confidential, p. 80.

71 Under Secretary Safe File, 68A, 30th April 1930.
rights for women. Gandhiji's approach was ambivalent. He was certainly the catalyst in bringing women into the national movement on a mass scale. His approach appealed to women, whose silent suffering and passive resistance he acknowledged, and also to the men who were willing to entrust the women into his guardianship.

Gandhiji appealed to women to make the campaign into a mass movement. He encouraged their participation in picketing cloth and liquor shops but he opposed their presence in the Salt Satyagraha.

When Gandhi planned his non-violent battle for independence it became an open invitation to women, for this technique suited them. At first Gandhi was reluctant to permit women to join the salt raid, and asked them to confine their activities in picketing liquor and foreign cloth shops.

But in light of that new freedom they found, the equality they asked for, women felt it as their duty to shoulder responsibilities connected with national struggle on an equal footing with men. In view of the non-violent nature of the proposed campaign, the physical weakness of women could not be advanced as an argument for exclusion.

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72 Jonna Liddle and Rama Joshi, pp.33, 34.
The historic march of Gandhi and his 80 men from Ahemadabad captured the imagination of the world because it was linked with two principles i.e.a) The right of every nation to self-Government and self-determination and b) The attempt to win the political freedom from a foreign power by non-violent means. Two such principles appealed immediately to awakened women like Mrs.Sarojini Naidu, Mrs.Ambalal Sarabhai, Mrs.Sarada Mehta, Mrs.Hansa Mehtha, Mrs.Kamala Devi, Miss.Naorowji, Miss.Anasuya Ben and were right at the front of Gandhiji's movement.

These women and hundreds of others were using the economic weapon for saving India's needs for money that was being drained out of India by foreign manufacturers of cloth, by spirituous drink and military expense.76 Gandhi reluctantly chose a few ladies to break salt law, but thousands of women all over the country also joined them without being called upon to do so.77 Indian women showed their best in Salt Satyagraha campaign by Gandhi on 6th April 1930 by breaking salt laws.78 When Gandhi was arrested, Sarojini Naidu took his place and in her wake Rukmani Lakshmipathi came from Madras to join the movement.79 Gandhiji passionately pleaded for participation of women in active politics and due to this event the most orthodox Hindus sent their women from their age long

76 Stri Dharma, Madras, May-June 1930, vol.13, p.4.
77 P.Thomas, Indian Women through the ages (Calcutta:1964) pp.329-332.
78 Civil Disobedience Movement 1930-31, Appendix XIII, pp.175, 176 (Confidential).
79 The Hindu, 14 April 1930, and Young India 22nd May 1930.
seclusion to wrest political power from the British. Women took out processions, picketed shops, quietly broke laws and were arrested. Others who were not engaged in active outdoor work, spun yarns on the Charka to paralyse the textile industry of Great Britain. The most important thing was that women led the battles when the male leaders were arrested on a large scale during the struggle.

Rukmani Lakshmipathy, being a member of 'Women's League' took the initiative of involving women in Civil Disobedience Movement. Responding to her call, Mrs. Ambujammal, Mrs. Gnanambal, Dr. Shakuntala Iyer and Kamalabai took part in the Movement.

The Government tried to combat this upsurge by arrests, ill treatment, and making prison life intolerable. When practically all available male leaders in the country was locked up in jail, women became "Dictators of War Council" and set up to direct day to-day activities. Outstanding among them were Avantekarai Gokhali, Smt. Kamdar, Shantabai Vingarkar, Smt. Durgabai, Smt. Vedantam, Smt. Kamalamma, Smt. Sathyavathi and Smt. Krishnabai Panikkar. In Salt Satyagraha alone about 17,600 women were arrested. Among

80 P. Thomas, op. cit., p.329
81 ibid, p.330.
83 Manmohan Kaur, op. cit., p.138.
84 Tara Ali Beig, op. cit., pp.22.
them the leading fighters were Mrs. Soundiram, Mrs. Thayammal, and Mrs. Alamelu. On 9th September 1930 women led the movement to boycott the elections to the Legislative Assembly in Madras due to which 400 of them were arrested and later released. In the same year Government made an attempt to auction liquor licenses in Madras which also did not get success because of the obstruction of women.

Again when Gandhi was arrested Mrs. Muthulakshmi Reddi resigned her membership of the Madras Provincial Legislative Council. The women of other parts of Tamil Nadu did not lag behind, and they played a prominent part in the freedom movement by organising young people into what was called as the Vaanar Sena (Monkey Army). The dynamic energy of these youngsters was diverted into systematic and disciplined activity, instead of them running riot. This organisation sowed the seeds of patriotism in the minds of young boys and girls. Women were found in almost all fields of activities. They set at dawn even before the sun was up, walking through streets, unfurling their banners, singing devotional and national songs. They held mammoth demonstrations in defiance of prohibitory orders. They hold processions and when

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85 V. Rajalakshmi, op. cit., p.20.
86 ibid.
87 G.O.No.354 Law (Reg), 18th June 1930.
88 Manmohan Kaur, op. cit., p.38.
obstructed sat on the road with cool composure.  

Perhaps the most vital item, not so dramatic as the salt or forest campaigns in the Civil Disobedience Movements, was the foreign cloth boycott. It affected thorough systematic work both of a negative and positive character. A vigorous picketing of foreign cloth was launched. Women from all over the country like Mrs.Jaishri Rajji, Mrs.Hansa Mehta, Pevin Captain, Mrs.Lilavati Munshi, Mhatre Sisters, and in Tamil Nadu Mrs.Ambujammal joined the campaign with many women of Madras City.

These women marched to the dealers in foreign cloth and asked them to abandon their trade. But the dealers ignored the women's pleading and hence the women posted themselves at the shop entrances, persuading customers as they entered, pleading them not to buy foreign cloths. Repressive orders were passed and many of them were arrested and put in prison.

A new chapter opened in the history of women when Seva Dal camps for women were opened all over the country to train them for political work.

In Madras, the Youth League was formed with Rukhmani Lakshmipathi as the head to help the Congress in its propaganda work; other

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91 Tamil Nadu Confidential Report, G.O.No. 2414, L and N 17th June 1930.

women like Krishnabai, and Kameshwari also started a separate National Association for women, and they wanted Ambujammal and her Aunt to join. Accordingly the Association worked on Gandhi's principles of Khadi propaganda i.e. Spinning on the charka and conducting Hindi classes. This was named as "Women's Swadeshi League".93

Ambujammal did a lot for the sale of Swadeshi goods at important places and also in door to door sales. She also took active part in the foreign cloth boycott movement. She also participated in singing nationalist songs early in the morning around the streets of Mylapore. On January 1930, she was leading the foreign cloths boycott at Rattanabazar in Madras.94

The police arrested her along with Mr.K.Bashyam, a trusted junior lawyer and disciple of her father, who formed the Madras Swadeshi League. The league carried on the work of the boycott of the foreign cloth in a small scale in March 1931, in which she was assisted by both unemployed youths and women from respectable families like Rukhmani Lakshmipathi, Ambuja and Jannammal.95 When Civil Disobedience brought about the Round Table Conferences in 1931 the deputation's of 15 ladies representing the AIWC urged Lord Willingdon, Governor-General and Viceroy of India, the need for an

adequate representation of women at the Round Table Conferences. In the memorandum they pointed out that in the new constitution, the fundamental rights of womanhood needed very special attention.

They stated that the women's co-operation was as valuable for the solution of its political problem as it was essential for its social, economic and educational problems. He replied that the increasing influences of women in the public affairs in India have a beneficial effect on the country. Above all, for he assured that he would do what he could support and assist women in India in their efforts to take more active part in public life.

The gathering of sixty women nominated Begum Hamid Ali, Rajkumar Amrit Kaur and Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi as the spoke women for them before the British Parliamentary Committees. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur made the principles laid in the memorandum inspite of cross-examination. From the point of view of immediate results, however, those efforts were in vain, and the publication of the Communal Award was the signal for an outburst of protest from the constituencies. As a result Mrs. Sarojini Naidu has been invited to participate

96 Dr. Annie Besant, Mrs. Sarojini Muthulakshmi Reddi, Mrs. Brijlal Nehru, Mrs. Hamid Ali (Muhamammadan), Mrs. Kamaladevi, Dr. Share, M.L.C. Punjab (Anglo Indian), Rani Rajwada (Gwalior State), Mrs. Rustimji Faridoonji (Hyderabad), Miss. Lazarus (Mysore), Mrs. Muzuruddin (Muhammadan), Madras (Stri Dharma) Madras, Notes and Comments 1931.

97 Notes and Comments, Stri Dharma, Madras, 1931,p.388.

98 ibid.

in the deliberations of the Round Table Conference. Despite Gandhi's rejoinder to their protest, wherein the Mahatma advised women to restrict their Satyagraha activities to the picketing of liquor shops and foreign cloth shops, feminine eagerness and patriotism refused to recognise any bounds. The leading women freedom fighters who actively took part in picketing of liquor shops and foreign cloths were Mrs.Chinnammal and Mrs.Virammal, Mrs.Kamatchi, Mrs.Venkatammal, Mrs.Lakshmi Venkatraman, Mrs.Radhabai Subarayan and Mrs.Ramayi.

Within the next three years over 5,000 women had served terms of severe imprisonment, they had suffered from lathi charges, cruelty, loss of property, loss of livelihood, ill health, loss of cost, loss of reputation etc. Mrs. Muthulakshmi Reddi had resigned her membership of the Madras Legislative Council while Smt. Kamaladevi Lakshman Rao of Tirunelveli along with Hansa Mehta of Bombay resigned their office as honourary magistrates.

Smt. Rukhmani Lakshmipathi fell the honour of being the first woman to be imprisoned in this campaign. Along with her, Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Smt. Durgabai, Smt. Kamala Nehru and Pandit Mothilal's two

101 Tara Ali Beig, op.cit., p.95.
daughters namely, Vijayalakshmi Pandit and Krishna and many were also imprisoned.

CONCLUSION

Indeed, women came out in thousands and hundreds of them were arrested. They also understood the necessity of their involvement in the national liberation movement since the national leaders supported their movement for women liberation socially, economically and politically. They also assured of getting equal right with men. Hence they unitedly fought against the British for national liberation and thereby elicited the wholehearted support of men of India. Further also showed their knowledge and managerial capacity during the crisis period when all the male leaders were arrested and imprisoned.

This led for the next phase of the women movement enthusiastically and valiantly. Thus Women of India showed that they could work hard equal to men in all the fields. This indirectly hinted that “sexual discrimination” should not prevent them from getting political right equal to men. This achievement hastened the feminist ultimate aim of “voting right for women equal to men”.