Chapter V
CHAPTER – V

EQUALITARIAN STRUGGLE

The Women of India were disappointed on the rejection of their demand for “voting right for women equal to men”. Hence they participated vigorously in the freedom movement and even took lead of men in some areas. Hence they claimed equality with men in political liberties particularly voting rights and started “equalitarian movement” whose aim was to get “Universal Adult Suffrage” to all Indians.

DEMAND FOR ADULT FRANCHISE

Statutory Commission under Simon en-toured India and it submitted its proposals to the British Government in 1929. Regarding the women franchise it recommended to the constitution of the franchise sub-committee of the Round Table Conference after pointing out the question of why the enfranchisement of Indian women on the same terms as men “produces the very few women voters indeed”.¹

It was decided that it would be better if the Government proceed gradually, steadily while further step in developing women's suffrage in India would be taken up for consideration. Some qualification other than already existing ones was needed. It may perhaps be found possible to add two others to the then existing qualification viz.

¹ Notes and Comments, Stri Dharma (Madras: 1929), p.3.
1. Being the wife over 25 years of age of a man who has a property qualification to vote and
2. Being a widow over that age whose husband at that time of his death was so qualified.
3. It was stated that in addition to the above “the education qualification should apply to women over 21 as well as to men”.2

As soon as Lord Irwin, Viceroy of India, announced the decision of holding a first Round Table Conference to discuss about the dominion status, the feminist particularly WIA submitted the names of Sarojini Naidu, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi and Rameswari Nehru to be included in it. But since the Indian National Congress decided not to send any delegate from the Congress because Lord Irwin announced that dominion status for India would be taken for discussion but not for implementation. Hence the WIA also withdrew its representatives.

The conferences began in 1930 and in this meeting Indian women were represented but they were not those who were selected by the WIA. They were Begum Shai Nawaz and Mrs. Radha Bai Subbarayan, who were the British Government nominees. In this meeting they were willing to accept social reservation as an interim measure.3

This was not acceptable to the rest of the feminist as Smt. Sarada Devi in her Presidential address at Tamil Nadu Women's Conference held at Erode, stated that the immediate demand of the Conference was “complete Adult Franchise of women and a new role in the new constitution of India”.

Our symbol represents the ideal influence of woman, which it is the object of our association to make an actuality in every detail of daily life in every part of India. It has its origin in Madras, where women's work was begun in the Madras Presidency (the place of the woman's feet), but its life is taught in the region of Banners, and its intellect must be up ever more to the Himalayan regions into which rises her head.

Serene and self-reliant, she stands each member, with hands towards the world and brothers, both in the East and West, to give them from her heart to right hand, I bring to you prosperity, represented by the lotus, the flower that bears within itself seeds and blooms everlastingly, and from the lamp in her left hand, to extend the steady flame of inspiration which will light the fire of the united life of man and woman, the fire of devotion to our Sacred Religion, of love for humanity, the fire of patriotism, the fire of zeal for reform.

Thus she represents Religion, Knowledge, Organization, Service, Beauty, Conquest, aspiration and Co-operation, all offered freely to Mother India by each of her daughters.

Dedication

To the women of India today, and to the memory of the Indian women of all past ages who have set an example of Courage, Wisdom and Devotion to Truth.

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* The Editor will be glad to receive articles suitable for publication in English, Tamil, or the Indian language. All communications to be addressed to the Editor, Women's Indian Association, Adyar, Madras.

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FOREIGN,
A Resolution was passed. It stated that "This Conference was strongly of opinion that women should have equal rights of citizenship and right to vote for the Legislative Councils and Assemblies and Local bodies".4

The WIA discussed the question of Women's franchise and their place in the future constitution in Madras. They prepared a draft memorandum and sent round to prominent men and women in India and outside "for opinion, suggestion or support".5

The "elite" Indian women opposed the proposal for enfranchising the wives and widows on the property qualification of the living or dead husbands. In 1931 they unanimously supported the statement. In the printed draft memorandum of the WIA, dated March 1931, it is stated, "that the elementary rights of women as human beings should not be based on an extraneous factor like "marriage".6

As for the representation of women on Councils, Assemblies and other public bodies the draft memorandum of the WIA suggested the reservation of a certain percentage of seats for women for a transitory period. This suggestion was not acceptable to the majority of the women assembled in Bombay.7 Mrs. Hamid Ali, Mrs. Faridoonji and Rani of Mandi, the former President of AIWC, and many more declared in unequivocal terms that "if practical equality is secured for women in the matter of franchise, they will be able to find their way into the legislature and administrative institutions of the

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4 Report of Tamil Nadu Women's Conference, Erode, January 1931, pp. 3-5.
6 Memorandum of WIA, dt. 14th March 1931.
7 Stri Dharma, October 1931, pp.14-17.
country through the open door of ordinary elections. The WIA, Madras branch which had signed the Joint All India Memorandum for Adult franchise and no reservation had been criticised because it had passed for the allotment of reserved seats for women in Local Boards and Municipalities in Madras Presidency.

The WIA, Madras branch to whom the district Women's Associations appealed for help in this matter took up the cause, made representation to the Local Government and finally succeeded in their efforts in having the seats restored to the women to those Municipalities. So long the franchise was based upon the property qualification as the result of which only very few women had the right to vote in every District and Municipality. Women cannot successfully compete with men on equal terms in an open constituency when facing election.

The Joint Memorandum of the AIWC demanded that every woman over the age of 21 should be given the right of voting and if that demand was granted, women would be enabled to face elections along with men in General Constituency.

**CONFEDERATION OF WOMEN ACTIVISTS**

The Women activists came under one umbrella due to the appointment of Lothian Franchise Committee by the British Government in 1931. In 1932 this committee was appointed to enquire and collect information for the next India Act.

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8 *Memorandum of WIA, op.cit.,* dt 16th March 1931, p.341.

In spite of the political situation, the AIWC was able to produce very good evidence in support of the joint memorandum for "Adults suffrage and no Reservation" before the Lothian Committee. The confederation of four women's organisations in Bombay, the AIWC, the WIA, the National Council of Women in India, and the Women Graduates Union accepted and supported the demands of AIWC.

The Madras Presidency Muslim Ladies Association also supported its view through its representatives Mrs. Rahmuthunisa Begum, and Begum Nazir Hussain. Miss. C.N.Nallamuthu Ammal, member of the Standing Committee for the Madras Constituency, gave detailed evidence in support of AIWC memorandum.

Mrs. M.E. Cousins, Mrs. Annie Besant and Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy, the three women witnesses who rendered evidence on their own behalf before the Lothian Committee in Madras in favour of literacy and property qualification for women's franchise. It is seen that there were some feminists who were not in support of the views of the confederation.10

In April 1931, a representative meeting of the Confederation was held in Bombay under the presidentship of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu. In this meeting AIWC, WIA and the National Council of Women in India, conjointly drew up a memorandum to be placed before the franchise sub-committee of the Round Table Conference. It was circulated to the constituencies, from which no different opinion was received. The demands noted in the memorandum were:11

1. Equal rights and obligations of all citizens without any bar on account of sex.

2. No disability to attach any citizen by reason of his or her religion, caste, creed or sex, in regard to public employment, office of power or honour, and in the exercise of any trade or calling.

3. Adult suffrage.

4. Women to fight elections on equal terms with men, in mixed general electorates.

5. Neither reservation of seats for women as such, nor special nomination or Co-optation.\footnote{Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, The Awakening of Indian Women (Madras: Everyman Press, 1939), p.104.}

A Joint Declaration on Women's Franchise

The joint statement signed by Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, Mrs. Swaminathan, Mrs. Jinarajadasa of WIA and Amrit Kaur, Rajkumari of Kapurthala, Begum Shah Nawaz, Mrs. Rustumjee Faridoonji, Mrs. Hamid Ali, Mrs. Sultan Singh, Mrs. Lakshmi Kutti Menon, Mrs. Mills Irving, Mrs. Ferozuddin and Miss. Vincent and Rani Rajwade of NCWI, has been issued to the press. The joint memorandum on the status of Indian women had already received publicity through circulation to all the members of the Round Table Conference. Some of the expedients which had been suggested, were:
a) Property qualification for franchise on the basis of wifehood or widowhood if the woman did not hold property in her own right.

b) Literacy qualification for franchise.

c) Nominations for Legislatures.

d) Reservation of seats or co-option in legislatures.

All such expedients were, wholly undesirable for the following reasons: -

1. Any qualifications for the vote based on property as undemocratic and, as such, wholly against the spirit of the age. At the same time an expedient of this nature is quite contrary to the interest of the humble poor, who constitute India's main population.

2. Owing to the almost incredible illiteracy prevalent amongst the women of India any such qualification stands clearly self-condemned.

3. Nominations and reservations of seats or co-option in any sphere of activity as a pernicious and humiliating system which must run counter to all real progress. However impartially carried out, it must by its very nature, engender an inferiority complex amongst those for whom it caters a contingency to be avoided at all costs. It may even tend to create a spirit of communalism amongst women.13

On the existing basis of the franchise, the educated women would get the vote of the graduates and taxpayers. A woman was capable of voting for their representative to be in the Legislative Assembly to see how money was spent. ‘Taxation without representation is tyranny’ is the basis of constitutional democratic Government.14 The representatives of women's organisations and


individual women witnesses demanded that the principle of equality between men and women should be the basis of the new Indian Constitution. The feminists showed the proportions of men and women enfranchised at the time in the several provinces were shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Ratio of Enfranchise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>1 – 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>1 – 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>1 – 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>United Province</td>
<td>1 – 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>1 – 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bihar and Orissa</td>
<td>1 – 62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Central Provinces</td>
<td>1 – 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>1 – 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They said that this result was mainly due to the fact that the existing qualification for the vote was a property qualification and that the number of Indian women who own property in their own right was infinitesimal. The feminists received a shocking news when the Communal Award was announced in August 1932, since the British Government openly applied communal principles to women franchise and representation. About 2.5% of the seats were reserved for women in the provincial legislatures.

16 ibid, p.79.
The women activists opposed vehemently the reservation of seats but the government did not relent to their demand. Hence the struggle continued. The women's organisation opposed communal electorates and they thought that the only way to solve all these problems was adult suffrage.\textsuperscript{17} When all the efforts proved in vain by the publication of Communal Award, almost all the constituents of confederation protested it. Some members of the AIWC contested election with men on terms of equality for seats in Municipal Corporation and academic bodies of universities to show their protest.\textsuperscript{18}

The feminists of WIA discussed the White Paper proposals relating to the question of women's franchise and their place in the future constitution of India. They emphasised that women had realised the value of the vote and that:

1. An adequate members equal to that of men should be enfranchised so that they might have an effective voice in the affairs of the country.

2. Women should have equal right of citizenship.

3. Women were in favour of joint electorates.

4. According to them, for the time being adult franchise was impracticable administratively for women but to an appreciable extent, adult franchise should be given for women in urban areas. This was because of the following reasons:

\textsuperscript{17} M.E. Cousins, \textit{Indian Womenhood Today} (Allahabad: Kitabistan Series Pub, 1941), p.40.

\textsuperscript{18} Proceedings of 7\textsuperscript{th} AIWC (1932), p.12.
a) There were more educated and more knowledgeable women among the urban than the rural because a number of adult women's institution, women's clubs and associations were mostly situated in the Municipal towns and Cities.

b) The urban women had better facilities for education for the acquirement of knowledge for exchange of ideas etc.,

c) Polling and canvassing was easier in the cities than in the villages and presiding women officers would be available in the cities and hence less administrative difficulties.

d) Compulsory primary education existed in many of the Municipalities and the percentage of women literate was higher in the cities and town than in the rural areas.

e) Newspapers and Magazines, both vernacular and English were confined chiefly in cities and broadcasting and radio existed in some of the Municipal towns. Therefore this system had less objections and more advantages for women.

5. As women had not equalled chances of success with men in an open election, the reservation of seats for women would be necessary for sometime. At the same time it was not desirable to have it on a communal basis.
6. As very few women had properties of their own, it was suggested that any women paying the least amount of tax to Government should be eligible for voting.  

The White Paper increased the voting strength of women to men as 1:10 in the year 1933. It was the final blow to the Universal Franchise. The publication of a white paper revealed that all attempts made in 1931 and 1932 to gain equal status for women were frustrated. But they did not loose heart. On the other hand the Confederation of activists submitted a memorandum to the Joint Parliamentary Committee of the British Parliament. They demanded adult suffrage and objected the separate electorates and reservation of seats.

Though for the whole of India, the proportion of female to male voters was 1 to 26, in Madras it was 1 to 10 already. It was expected that if the proposals of widening the franchise were accepted the probable number of women to be enfranchised would be at least 9,00,000. The franchise committee suggested that women managing the property of minor's should be given the vote.

Finally the Government of India Act was passed in 1935. Adult Franchise was not accepted but franchise was extended as recommended in White Paper.

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19 Proposals for Indian Constitutional Reform, Delhi (White Paper Report), Appendix IV, p.82.
21 G.O. 415 dt. 12.03.1932, Public Department (MS).
22 G.O. 449, dt. 20.03.1932, Public (Franchise) Department.
23 Proposals for Indian Constitutional Reform (Delhi), op. cit., p.82.
The following qualifications for franchise in the case of women embodied in the Government of India Act of 1935. Women of 21 years of age and over would be eligible to vote as follows: ²⁴

a) Payment of tax under the Madras Motor Vehicles Taxation Act for the whole official year immediately before the electoral roll was prepared or revised; or

b) Being registered land holders, inamdar, ryotwari, pattadar, or occupying ryot under the Madras Estate Land Act; or

c) Assessment of ground rent payable to Government; or

d) Payment of property tax for the two half years immediately prior to the preparations or revision of the roll under the Madras City Municipality Act or the District Municipalities Act; or

e) Being during the whole of the previous fasli a kanamdar or kuzhi kanamdar or the holder of a kudiairuppu or a verampatamdar having fixed tenure, each of these terms bearing the meaning defined the Malabar Tenancy Act 1929; or

f) Being for the whole of the fasli immediately preceding the preparation or revision of the electoral roll average with possession lease or tenant of immovable property other than house property of an annual value of Rs.100/- in Madras city or a Municipality and Rs.50/- elsewhere in the Presidency; or

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g) Being a guardian of a minor possessing one of the above property qualifications; or

h) Occupying during the whole of the previous year as sole tenant house property tax or house tax had been duly paid for the year; or

i) Being a registered joint landholder inamdar, pattadar, or occupancy ryot entitled to an additional vote on an application signed by a majority of the registered joint holders.

j) Assessment to income tax.

k) Literacy (i.e. ability to read and write in any language) certified by village officer in certificates to be countersigned by the Tahsildar or alternatively the holding of the elementary school certificate issued by the headmaster of a school recognised by the Government.

l) Being the wife of a person possessing the property qualification at present entitling to vote for the provincial legislative council. One dector only to be enfranchised under a husband's property qualification. But a woman once placed as the toll in respect of a husband's property to continue as the role during widowhood or until remarriage when she would lease to be qualified of her late husband.
m) Being a retired pensioner or discharged officer, commissioned officer or soldier of His Majesty regular forces.  

WOMEN'S ELECTORATE UNDER THE ACT OF 1935

The number of enfranchised women between 1921 and 1933 was 3,15,651 as against 6.8 million men. Franchise for men and women (though limited) was distributed in the following manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bihar &amp; Orissa</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>C.P.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Under the Act of 1935 the women were given the right to vote as follows and because of this million of women had the right to vote:

i. Due to property qualification

ii. Due to education

ii. Due to wifehood qualification.

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25 Proposals of Indian Constitutional Reform, op. cit., p.32.
Number of women who actually voted were as follows:

### Women voters for Provincial Legislative Council

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provinces</th>
<th>No. Enrolled</th>
<th>No. in contested constituency</th>
<th>No. voted</th>
<th>Percentage of Col. 3 &amp; 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>2,796</td>
<td>2,578</td>
<td>1,420</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>1,755</td>
<td>1,636</td>
<td>923</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>3,763</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.P</td>
<td>2,262</td>
<td>1,684</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>1,060</td>
<td>882</td>
<td>594</td>
<td>67.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>1,127</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>91.57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Women voters in Legislative Assembly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>No. Enrolled</th>
<th>No. in contested constituency</th>
<th>No. voted</th>
<th>Percentage of col.3 &amp; 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>15,84,784</td>
<td>15,23,248</td>
<td>4,79,278</td>
<td>31.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>3,35,390</td>
<td>3,05,750</td>
<td>1,29,535</td>
<td>42.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>9,70,033</td>
<td>8,96,588</td>
<td>46,758</td>
<td>5.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.P</td>
<td>5,20,380</td>
<td>4,94,752</td>
<td>95,553</td>
<td>19.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>1,80,105</td>
<td>1,73,459</td>
<td>58,216</td>
<td>33.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>2,99,044</td>
<td>2,15,490</td>
<td>1,70,37</td>
<td>7.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Provincial</td>
<td>2,63,331</td>
<td>2,59,750</td>
<td>63,744</td>
<td>24.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>45,366</td>
<td>29,680</td>
<td>8678</td>
<td>29.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.W.F. Province</td>
<td>4,895</td>
<td>4,895</td>
<td>3498</td>
<td>71.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>79,208</td>
<td>70,526</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>6.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sind</td>
<td>32,668</td>
<td>27,740</td>
<td>9705</td>
<td>34.70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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26 Rajpruthi Bela Rani Sharma, *op. cit.*, vol.10, p.128.
Finally this act raised the number of women voters to about 5 million.\footnote{M.E. Cousins, \textit{op. cit.}, p.67.} Women in villages and towns realised their responsibilities of voting. Act of 1935 provided the reservation of 41 seats for women in provincial legislatures. It fixed the proportion of a woman to every 5 men voters in an electorate of 35 million votes in India. It gave votes to women with property and educational qualifications and wives of men and of military services etc. The Act stated that "seats will be reserved for women in both Federal and Provincial Legislatures on communal basis".\footnote{Mallabai Subbamma, \textit{Women and Movement and Association: Regional Perspective (1860-1993)} (Hyderabad: Book Link Corp., 1994), p.45.}

Though women welcomed the Act as a step forward in the equalitarian struggle, they were dissatisfied with the scheme of account of the qualifications imposed on the right to vote and thereby limiting it. The Women Confederation issued a joint statement criticising its major defects and remarked that the property qualifications attached to franchise in a poor country like India automatically excluded the majority of women from franchise.

They expressed the view that all special privileges should be done away with the "wifehood" qualification. It was objectionable since \textit{"It places a premium on men and does not recognise their independent right to suffrage"}\.\footnote{Anandhi S: women in the loksabha election: predicaments and possibilities, political participation of women.p.120} The most serious defect was that, those who were qualified to vote had to make an application for being enrolled as voters. This naturally constituted a great handicap to large section of women who due to ignorance, might omit to fulfil that condition and hence would not become voters though eligible under the Act.
The Government advanced the following three reasons for not conceding Universal Franchise to women:

1) It would imply insuperable difficulty for the administrative machinery.
2) The backward social conditions prevailing in the country did not warrant such a vital and far-reaching reform.
3) The Government argued that various organisations existing in the country were themselves not of one view regarding the desirability of the grant of adult suffrage to women.

Prior to the 1935 constitution the ratio of men to women voters in India was 1:20. Under the new constitution women had been granted special qualifications for being enlisted as electors, which had raised the ratio of women and men voters to 1:7. It was held that if they wished to be registered as voters on the literacy qualification, they should apply personally and sign their name in the presence of an authorised official. The response was good and a large number of applications were received from women to be registered under the literacy qualification.\(^{30}\)

**Women Suffrage and National Independence - Linkage**

Subsequently the Feminists realised that they could not achieve their demand of “voting right for women equal to men” without their strong bond with the freedom movement, which also fought for adult franchise. So they vigorously involved in the national struggle.

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As seen in the earlier chapter they proved their power and leadership quality equal to men. Their participation in the freedom struggle strengthened their demand for voting right equal to men. On behalf of Confederation of women organisations Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, Mrs. Yakub Hassan, Mrs. Chopra and Mrs. Ponnuswami Iyer met Mr. C.F. Brakebdury, Chief Secretary to the Government and represented him the difficulties in registration of Muslim women literate as voters as per the Act of 1935. On 19th May 1936 in reply to the women deputation, Government has issued a communique relaxing the rules for women in pardahs that their husbands or male relations could present their application on their women's behalf to the Receiving or the Registration Officer.

The following table shows the allocation of seats to women.

### Allocation of seats for provinces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Sikh</th>
<th>Muhamaden</th>
<th>Anglo Indian</th>
<th>Indian Christian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
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32 ibid, May 1936, p.5.
In Assam and Orissa, the seats reserved for women would not be communal seats. Under the provisions of the sixth schedule to the Government of India Act, women were entitled to vote for the seats to be filled by representatives of Muhammadan women in Bengal and Bihar and for the general seat to be filled by women in Assam, the electorate in the case of all other seats would consist of men and women, together.

The city of Madras was too large a constituency for a women candidate. But the general feeling of women in Madras was very definite in favour of making the whole city, the constituency, and in the circumstances they did not press their objection.  

Doubts had been expressed regarding the arrangement for the women's constituencies of the Madras Legislative Assembly, the Government had decided to publish the following communique for general information:

"The electoral roll for a woman's constituency was the since as that for the general Muslim, or Indian Christian Constituency of the area prescribed as the women constituency. At present men or women whose names were included in the electoral role for that area were entitled to vote in the Muslim or Indian Christian constituency for which they were electors".

In the general Elections of February 1937 in India, 9 women were elected to the Madras Legislative Assembly. They were Mrs.C.Ammanna Raja,

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34 ibid, p.127.
35 ibid, p.125.
36 G.O.No.325, dated. 15.2.1937, Public (Elections) Department.
37 M.E.Cousins, op.cit., pp.78,79.
ISLATORS FETED. Yesterday the Madras Constituency of the All-India Women's Conference gave a receptive Assembly and Council at Gokhul Park, Cheltenham. Our picture shows some of the Legislators at the scene of the occasion, including Mrs. Aman-Swamitha, Mrs. Amman-Nath, Mrs. Kalal-Bhandari, Mrs. Madhava Menon, Mrs. Margaret E. Chan, Mrs. Lakshmi Sankar-Ayyar, and Mrs. Aman-Swamitha.
Mrs. Anjalai Ammal, Mrs. Jeba Money Masilamany, Mrs. Khadija Yahub Hasan, Mrs. A.V. Kuttimaluammal, Mrs. V. Lakshmi Ammal, Mrs. Dr. N. Lakshmi Devi, Mrs. Rukmini Lakshmipathy, parliamentary secretaries and several women whips of their parties.

Mrs. Subbarayan was elected much later and she was the only woman in Legislative Assembly. Begum Rasul and Mrs. Hansa Mehta were notable in winning their seats in the Upper Houses in general constituencies. General (non-reserved) seats (of men and women voters) for the lower house were contested and won by one woman in the United Provinces and one in Madras Presidency, 3 of these being non-Congress candidates of the total number of elected women in the legislatures. Among them, 36 were belonged to the Congress party, 12 were Muhammadans, others Christians and Independents.

In the General Election of February 1937, among the total number of women voters of about 5 million, 80% of them polled their votes enthusiastically. In electioneering, it was evident that the women of the masses, the women workers in villages and towns were awakened to their responsibilities and their powers as enfranchised citizens using the vote as a direct means of securing Self-Government.

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38 Stri Dharma, July – Aug 1936, p. 186.

39 M.E. Cousins, op. cit., pp. 79, 80.

40 ibid, p. 83

41 Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., p. 57.
Rukmani Lakshmipathi

15-7-1937 - 1-10-1945
Mrs. Rukmani Lakshmipathy was the first elected woman in the Madras Legislature. She was the Deputy Speaker of the Assembly from 15.07.1937 to 01.10.1939. She also served as the Minister for Public Health in the Ministry of Mr. T. Prakasam.\textsuperscript{42} In the mean time the feminists had to postpone their struggle for the adult franchise due to subsequent events took place in the Indian politics that arouse due to the outbreak of Second World War in September 1939.

Since India was included in the War without obtaining its approval, the Congress ministries resigned on 29\textsuperscript{th} October 1939 in protest. So they believed that they could get it only when India obtained independence. Hence they decided to participate in the National movement more vigorously.\textsuperscript{43}

Though the Congress had resigned from office in 1939 on principle, Rukmani Lakshmipathy decided to contest and set up a Congress candidate for a bye-election to the Central Assembly and won the seat for the Congress.\textsuperscript{44}

Under the guidance of the Congress party, all the women organisations set aside their demand temporarily and joined their hands with Congress. Until the end of the War, the election was not conducted. They wholeheartedly took part in the Individual Satyagrahas in 1940 and latter the Quit India

\textsuperscript{42}Tamil Nadu Legislative Pavazhavezha Malar, 14.7.1997 (Chennai: Tamil Nadu Legislative Secretariat), p.42.

\textsuperscript{43}ibid, p.417

Movement in 1942.\textsuperscript{45} In the Individual Satyagraha, only selected people were permitted to participate.

Rukmani Lakshmipathy was very proud of having been selected to lead it in Madras. She actively involved herself in it and was imprisoned for six months. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, the then the Minister for Local-Self Government in the U.P. Cabinet, resigned and joined hands with Gandhiji and took active part in the Satyagraha.\textsuperscript{46} Hundreds of women activists spontaneously participated in the "Quit India" Movement, started on 9th August 1942.

The leaders were arrested in the first round up, so the women of India stepped forward to carry on the movement for Independence. Women like Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kriplani and Usha Mehta worked underground during this period.\textsuperscript{47} Kanak Lata Basura played a memorable role in the Quit India movement and marched to occupy the building in Assam. She was shot in the chest. Bhogeshwar Phov Kanam was also shot dead for holding the tricolor flag. Anupriya Basura and Sudhalata Dutta organised the Red Cross First Aid parties in Assam.\textsuperscript{48} Chandra Prabha Saitani and Sita Bhuwaneshwar Devi celebrated freedom day. Therefore, these two ladies were also assaulted.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{ibid},


\textsuperscript{47} "Social problems in India", \textit{Ladies Herald} (Vol.X, No.5, September and October 1937), p.194.

\textsuperscript{48} B. Mitra and P. Chakraborty (edn.), \textit{Rebel India} (Calcutta: 1946), pp.4, 5.

\textsuperscript{49} Pratima Asthana, \textit{op. cit.}, p.124.
Rajkumari Amrit Kaur who took active part in the Salt Campaign also participated in the 1942 Quit India Movement.\(^{50}\) When all the Congress leaders were arrested and the Congress was declared unlawful, Rukmani Lakshmipathy as the Acting President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee took the initiative to keep the organisations active.\(^{51}\)

In response to the vigorous struggle, the British Government sent Lord Wavell to decide the future of India. In August 1945, he summoned all the Governors of the provinces for consultation. It was decided to hold elections.

In this election also restricted franchise was followed. After the Cabinet Mission Plan, elections to the Constituent Assembly were held in July 1946 to form the Interim Government. Thus both the elections were not based on the adult franchise. In 1945, Ammu Swaminathan was elected to the Central Legislative Assembly and next year to the Constitution Making Committee.\(^{52}\)

The period immediately was preceding the division of India into the present states of India and Pakistan. In October 1946 Constitutional Assembly was set up and this body was elected by the existing legislatures to frame the Constitution for Independent India. Many prominent women like

\(^{50}\) Annual Register, Vol.II, July to December 1933, p.357.


\(^{52}\) S.P. Sen, *op.cit.*, pp.290, 291.
Sarojini Naidu, Hansa Mehta, Durgabai, Renuka Ray and Malati Chowdhury served on this important body.\textsuperscript{53}

In the same year elections were held in England. The Labour Party came to power with Mr. Attli as the Prime Minister. He announced that his Government desired to transfer power to Indians. For this purpose, negotiations between the British authorities and Indian leaders were set in motion as a consequence of which Indian Independence Act of 1947 was passed. This marked the ending of the British Rule in India.

**ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS**

After independence in 1947 many problems had to be tackled and hardly any thought was given to women's role in politics. In order to increase the level of representation of women in legislatures and other administrative bodies and positions of power, certain steps appear necessary as a transition measure. Reservation of seats for jobs is one such step under which more women were able to avail of educational and job opportunities on an equal footing with men.\textsuperscript{54}

Political status of women can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in the shaping and sharing of power and in the value given by society to this role of women.


\textsuperscript{54} Dr. D. Janaki, *South Indian History Congress, XY Session* (Warrangal: 23\textsuperscript{rd} - 25\textsuperscript{th}, Jan 2000), p.14.
The Indian Constitution guarantees political equality through the institution of Adult Franchise and the right to equality, which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex. The national movement and the leadership of Gandhi acted as major forces in the achievement of equal status.

The equal political status would not be realised by mere declaration in the constitution. Voting in the elections did not bestow equal status. If adequate opportunities to take part in the deliberations of the nation were not provided, participation has no meaning. The socio-economic conditions were not conducive at that time for the effective participation of the women in political affairs.

The problem of equal status and equal participation must be understood in the context of a society. In a traditional society like India, the participation of women in public life was not encouraging. Women were kept low profile as far as political life was concerned.\(^{55}\)

**UNIVERSAL FRANCHISE IN FREE INDIA**

The new Constitution of Independent India is proud, that the elections “to the House of the people and to the Legislative Assembly of every state shall be on the basis of adult suffrage, that is to say every person who is a citizen of India and who is not less than twenty one years of age”.

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As for the qualifications for membership in the Parliament it is laid down that a person shall not be qualified to be chosen to fill a seat in Parliament unless he:

a) is a citizen of India

b) is in the case of a seat in the Council of State not less than 35 years of age, and in the case of a seat in the House of the People not less than 25 years of age, and

c) possess such other qualifications as may be prescribed in that behalf or under any law made by Parliament.

As observed by Laxmi Menon, "Indian women secured equality of rights within more or less thirty years after the agitation, which took a much longer time in western countries".56

The introduction of adult franchise together with the removal of all discrimination on ground of sex provided under the new constitution have been great steps towards the complete emancipation of the Indian women. Franchise granted to women not only serves them a weapon to press them own specific interests in legislatures but also enables them to influence state politics affecting the entire India in the political, economic and cultural fields. The granting of adult franchise implies the recognition of the right of women participation in the decisive sphere of the national life, the sphere of politics where all-important decision affecting the economic, social and cultural life of

56 Rajpruthi and Bela Rani Sharma, op. cit., vol.10, p.126.
the people are taken. The granting of franchise to women also implies admission of the fact that she is not inherently inferior to man in capacity and that if given free and adequate opportunity she can also function in responsible post as Minister, Ambassador or Governor.

Hence, the mere acquisition of franchise is not enough. Along with this right women must also realise their responsibilities as citizens.

An extensive educational campaign among women is needed to make them conscious of their responsibilities as the citizens of a free India. The task of enlightened women of India is to make use of the political right in a progressive manner for social, economic and cultural advancement of the nation on fruitful and rational lines.\textsuperscript{57}

**POSITION OF WOMEN UNDER THE NEW CONSTITUTION**

Due to adult suffrage, all adult women were enfranchised. Accurate figures of the percentage of men and women who voted are not available but it is estimated that 50\% as the total electorate of 170 million participated in the first General Election.

As the reports reveal one can safely say that everywhere women showed great enthusiasm in the elections. As observed by Laxmi Menon, "To the ignorant, it was a great occasion having a religious significance. In many places

\textsuperscript{57} ibid, pp.129,130.
women took off their shoes as if they entered a place of worship and caste their ballot papers in great reverence". Women participated in all stages of election as party workers, election agents and volunteers.

**FIRST GENERAL ELECTION 1952**

In 1952, all this was ahead. Men and women got down to the serious task of exercising their vote and millions of women went to the polls. It was without doubts the biggest electorate in human history one had to be 21 years of age. After India attained Independence Smt. Ammu Swaminathan stood as a candidate in the first General Election for the Dindigul constituency and was elected to Rajya Sabha, from the Madras Legislature. As the leader of the delegation of women Members of Parliament, Smt. Ammu Swaminathan went to Japan in 1953 and in 1954 to China as the leader of women's Goodwill mission.

In 1952, Manjubhashini was nominated to the Madras Legislative Council and continued as a Member till 1972. The President of India nominated Rukmini Devi Arundale to the Rajya Sabha in 1952 and 1956.\(^{59}\)

In the 1952 election Mrs. Soundaram Ramachandran got into the political arena and was elected as a Member of the State Legislature and remained till 1962 when she was elected to Parliament. While she was a Member of the State Legislature, Shri C.Rajagopalachari, Chief Minister of Madras State,


\(^{59}\) Some illustrious women of Tamil Nadu (with special reference to Tamil Nadu) published under the auspices of the International women's year celebration committee, Tamil Nadu, (Madras: Asian Book Company, 1975), p.5.
entrusted the Community Development Project Programme in Madurai District to the care of Mrs. Soundaram. After her election to Parliament, the former Prime Minister, Mr. Nehru made her a Member of his Council of Ministers and put her in-charge of Education and Social Welfare. Sister Subbulakshmi served as a Member of the Madras Legislative Council when Rajagopalachari was the Chief Minister of the State of Madras.\textsuperscript{60}

In the State Assemblies, 13 States elected 196 women. Bihar took the lead by electing 33 Members.\textsuperscript{61} In the first General Election three women came into prominence as Parliamentarians. Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur was the first Cabinet Minister with the Health portfolio, the Deputy Minister was Maragatham Chandrashekar from Tamil Nadu. Lakshmi Menon was made a Parliamentary Secretary for the first 5 years of Parliament's life and remained as Deputy Minister for External Affairs.\textsuperscript{62}

CONCLUSION

Women folk of India a Century back could not come out of their house due to social customs. But due to their resurgence they achieved Socio-economic upliftment and political rights. They thought that voting right equal to men might give them individual right. They did not want to live in the shadow of men. Due to this they slowly restraint themselves from calling themselves in

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{ibid}, pp.41-83.

\textsuperscript{61} Manmohan Kaur, \textit{op. cit.}, p.3.

\textsuperscript{62} Rajpruthi and Bela Rani Sharma, \textit{op. cit.}, vol.15, p.117.
using their husbands name by using prefix Mrs so and so. Instead they used their early name but of course they added her husband’s name as suffix. They also gained confidence in their life to treat themselves with equal to man. No Shastras or Dharmas is standing in their way as in the earlier periods. They also felt that they could contribute to the nation welfare. They established that they could serve the society and nation enthusiastically like men for the promotion of India’s pride among the nations of the world.