CHAPTER 1

HISTORY OF MADRAS LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE

TO WOMEN MEMBERS

( UPTO 1946 )
The history of the Madras Legislative Assembly begins with the Indian Council Act of 1861 passed by the British Parliament. The Revolt of 1857, which threatened the existence of the British rule in India made the British Parliament to think about the assistance of native Indians in the administration. Then, the British Parliament passed the Indian Council Act of 1861. The Indian Council Act of 1861 constituted a great landmark in the growth and development of the Legislatures. This Act for the first time associated with the Governor-General's Executive Council a small number of additional members with half of them being non-officials. It provided for the addition of not less than six and not more than twelve nominated members to the Governor-General's Council and the functions of the new Legislative Council were limited wholly to legislation. Legislative Councils were established for Madras, Bombay and Bengal. The Act also restored the legislative powers of the Council of the Governor of Madras which was for legislature purposes by the Advocate-General and of four to eight members nominated by the Governor. The consent of the Governor and the Governor-General was made necessary for all legislations passed or amended by the Governments of Madras and Bombay. The Act thus

1. Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly "Review", Legislative Assembly Department, Fort St. George, Madras-9, May, 1980, P.2.
sowed the seed for the future legislature as an independent entity separate from the Executive Council.

The Indians who were nominated as additional members of the Madras Governor's Council under the 1861 Act, were mostly zamindars and large ryotwari landowners. Only towards the closing years of operation of this Act of 1861 some professional men like lawyers were allowed to get into the council. The most important men were Mr. V. Basheyam Aiyangar an eminent lawyer who later became the Advocate General of Madras High Court. Mr. S. Subramaniya Aiyar, another Madras advocate who later played an active role in the nationalist movement and Mr. C. Sankaran Nair, who later rose to the rank of a member of the Governor General's Executive Council. The legislative councils so established were mere advisory committees by means of which Government obtained advice and assistance in their work of legislation and the public derived the advantage of full publicity being ensured at every stage of the legislative process. The councils were not deliberative bodies with respect to any subject except that of the immediate legislation before them. They were also debarred from examining the budget.

The non-official members nominated by the Governor were mostly zamindars and ryotwari landlords who were very submissive to the Government. The Governor held the council meetings

frequently at Otacamund. Most of the Indian members were reluctant to go to Otacamund. The Governor also retained most of the old members in the council who were very submissive to the Government. Thus, the council was not effective in its function.

The Indian National Congress founded in 1885 analysed the function of the councils and sought reforms for the councils. Firstly, they wanted that the number of non-official Indian members in the council must be increased. Secondly, they wanted that a considerable number of non-official Indians in the council must be elected and Thirdly, they demanded more powers for the legislative councils. Because of such attempts of the Indian National Congress and the Madras Mahajana Sabha of Madras, the British Parliament passed the Indian Council Act of 1892.

The Indian Council Act of 1892 was the next milestone in the evolution of the legislatures by which the number of additional members of the central legislature was increased but it was not to be less than ten and not more than sixteen in the case of Supreme Council and not less than eight and not more than twenty in the case of Madras Legislative Council. Two-fifths of the additional members were to be officials. Non-official members were recommended by the District Boards, Universities, Municipalities and other associations. The Act enlarged the functions of the council in two ways namely, the council discuss the annual financial statement and ask questions subject to

3. Ibid.,
certain limitations. Members were to hold office for two years.

In Madras, eight among the eleven non-official seats were made elective and the remaining three were filled up by means of nomination by the Governor. Altogether thirty-eight non-official Indians were elected in eight elections which were held in the Presidency during the period of the operation of this Act from 1892 to 1909. The most active among them were Mr. C. Jumbulinga Mudaliar, Mr. N. Subha Rao Pantulu, Mr. R. Kesava Pillai, Mr. C. Vijayaragavachariar, Mr. Kalyana Sundram Aiyar, Mr. Guruswami Aiyar, Mr. P. Ranghaia Naidu, Mr. P. S. Sivaswami Aiyar, Mr. V. Krishnaswami Aiyar, Mr. C. Sankaran Nair and Mr. M. Krishnan Nair. Several of them were re-elected from their constituencies consecutively for three terms. Most of these members were practising lawyers and had considerable agricultural properties.

The non-official members realised the hurdles in their way to play an active part in the council. They thought that the powers given to them by the Indian Council Act of 1892 was very limited and with that power they could not do anything to the public. So, they urged the British Government for further reform of the Legislative Council. The Indian National Congress also had the same opinion and said that the Council under the Act of 1892 existed only for the officials to have their own way. The Hindu Nesan of Madras wrote that the Legislative Council as it existed under 1892 Act was useless. It urged the British
Government to create a truly representative body with power to certify the budget.

After the partition of Bengal in 1905, the approach of the Indian National Congress towards the British Government in India was totally indifferent. The extremists group in the Congress announced their swadeshi programme and this spread like wild fire throughout the country. Many violent incidents took place in the country and the British Government had to face many problems in her administration. In order to safeguard their interest and to win over the Moderates of the Indian National Congress and to defeat the attempts of the Extremists, the British Government announced the Third Indian Council Act of 1909 commonly called the Minto-Morley Reforms.

The Indian Council Act 1909 further enlarged the status of the Legislative Councils both of the Governor-General and of the Provinces. It introduced for the first time the method of elections though not yet direct election and thus, helped to quicken into life the seed of representative institutions. It dispensed with official majorities in the Provincial Legislative Councils and gave them power to move resolutions upon the matters of public interest and also upon the budget and to ask supplementary questions. The additional members of the Governor-Generals-Council were increased from 16 to a maximum of 60 and

those of the Madras Legislative Council from 20 to a maximum of
50. The Madras Legislative Council consisted of 16 officials
and 26 non-officials. The ex-officio members were Governor,
Advocate General and 3 members of the Executive Council. Sixteen
officials were nominated by the Governor. Out of 26 non-
officials, 5 were nominated and only 21 were elected.

There were altogether 28 such representatives in the council
during this period. The most active among them were Mr.P.Kesava
Pillai, Mr.A.S.Krishna Rao, Mr.N.Krishnaswami Aiyangar,
Mr.B.Narasimheswara Sarma, Mr.B.V. Narasinha Aiyar, Mr.K.Perraju
Pantulu, Mr.T. Seshagiri Aiyar, Mr.P. Siva Rao, Mr.V.S.Srinivasa
Sastri, Mr. P.Thiagaraya Chetty and Mr.Yakub Hasan. Most of
these members were actively engaged in the nationalist movement
and belonged to the moderate wing of the Congress.

There were so many changes took place in the political
atmosphere of India between 1909 to 1919. The Bolshevik
Revolution in Russia in the year 1917 and the First World War
changed the British look towards their colonies. The Home Rule
Movement organised by Annie Besant, the Union of Moderates and
Extremists in the Indian National Congress, the Lukno-Pact
concluded between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim
League, completely changed the political climate in India. They
demanded a self-government at an early date for India.

5. Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly "Review", Legislative Assembly
Department, Fort St. George, Madras-9, May, 1980, PP.2-5.
Compelled by these circumstances the British Parliament passed the new Act called the Government of India Act of 1919. At that time, no women candidate occupied any one of the above mentioned positions because practically women had no political right to contest or to participate in the election.

The Government of India Act of 1919, which embodied the Montague Chelmsford Reforms, put the natural inevitable sequel to the long chapter of previous parliamentary legislation by the introduction of Representative Government in India with Legislatures composed of elected representatives of the people. In the Centre, the principle of responsible Government was not introduced. Central Legislature, thereafter was called the Indian Legislature which was reconstituted by enlarged and more representative characters. This Act set a Bicameral Legislature at the Centre known as the Central Legislative Assembly and the Council of States. The Council of States had 60 members and out of them 33 members were elected and 27 were nominated by the Governor-General. The Legislative Assembly composed of about 145 members of whom about 103 were elected and the rest were nominated. The powers of both the chambers of Indian Legislatures were identical except that the powers to vote was granted only to the Legislative Assembly.

The new Act divided the Provincial Subjects into two categories as the Reserved Subjects and the Transferred Subjects and entrusted only the Transferred Subjects to the council of the

6. Ibid., P.36.
Indian Ministers. For the Madras Presidency, the number of elected members was 98, the number of nominated non-official members was 10 and the number of members of Executive Council and nominated official was 19. The proportion of elected members of the Provincial Legislative Council was raised to over 70%. The legislative power of the council was extended to Provincial matters only. Every law of Provincial Legislature required the assent of the Governor-General as well as Governor.

For the first time in the history of Madras Province, the independent legislative body known as Madras Legislative Council was set up in 1921. The council was inaugurated by the Duke of Connaught. The duration of the council was for 3 years. The Second and Third Councils under the Act of 1919 was constituted after General Elections which were held in 1923 and 1926 respectively. This historical evolution of the Madras Legislative Council was connected with another important matter that granted power to women to contest the elections.

Though, there were many women rulers like Raziya, Rani Mangammal, Janshi Rani in India, the political awareness among the Indian women took place only after the Home Rule Movement organised by Annie Besant. The activities of the Congress Extremists created the political awareness among the women in some parts of India. In the Madras Presidency, the political activities of V. O. Chidambaram Pillai, Subramaniya Siva and

Bharathiyar induced the political feelings among the women folk. They began to think the position of their nation under the British Rule. Because of the various educational reforms, many women, who completed their elementary and high school education, studied the native newspapers which gave elaborate account of the political activities in India and developed some kind of national feelings in their minds. Bharathiyar's poems on Nation and liberation of women created a special awareness for women folk in the society.

In 1917, the Women of South India in order to claim their rights in the political field, established the Indian Women's Association in Madras. The branches of this association were formed throughout India. In the Madras Presidency, many women like Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, the first woman member of the Madras Legislative Council, became the members of the Indian Women's Association and worked to check the various social evils like child marriage, Devadasi system and to help in the various propaganda for the emancipation of women. The Indian Women's Association induced the common women folk to think of their backwardness and to come forward to take part in all political activities in par with men. In 1917 under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu, the Nightingale of India, the Indian Women's Association presented a memorandum to the British Secretary of State for India in which it insisted proper education and franchise for Indian women. The British Parliament appointed the South Borough Committee in 1918 to study the issues in the
memorandum. The South Borough Committee toured in India to consider the franchise for women. Even though, the women of Congress and Muslim League pleaded for right to vote, the committee felt that franchise for women was premature and ignored it. Again, British Parliament suggested on the basis of the Joint Select Committee’s Report to leave the decision to the members of the State Legislative Council. The Madras Legislative Council was the first council to discuss the enfranchisement of women. In April 1921, Mr. M. Krishnan Nair, a member of the Madras Legislative Council introduced a resolution that women should be enfranchised on the basis of men. In the council, he pointed out how retrograde the 1919 Act was in denying the women the right to seek election to the Legislative Council. However, as this issue had to be fought at the National level with the Parliament, the non-officials in the Madras Council confined themselves to the question on enfranchising women for local council elections. Mr. Nair’s resolution seeking franchise for women to the Provincial Legislative Election was supported by several non-official members and it was finally passed by a majority of 34 votes. Following this, Bombay, Bengal and other State Legislative Councils passed resolutions.

8. Ibid., P.7.
10. Ibid., P.1507.
In 1922, the Government of Madras Province gave power to the Municipalities and the Local Boards to nominate women members. In 1926, the Government of India gave right to women to contest elections and sit as members in the Provincial Legislature. The same issue was taken by Madras Legislative Council in July 1926 and a Law was passed. Following this law, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi was nominated as a member of the Madras Legislative Council. She was the first Women Legislator of the Madras Presidency. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi was born in 1886 in Pudukottai district. She acquired her education mostly by private study tutored by her own father. She received her M.B.C.M. Degree in 1912. After her successful medical career, she became a member of the Women's Indian Association and added her power and prestige to its efforts to deal with various social evils like Child Marriage, Devadasi System and at the same time helped in the vigorous propaganda for the emancipation of women. She was the follower of Gandhian Principles. In 1928, she was unanimously elected Deputy President of Madras Legislative Council. But, she resigned this post in 1930 protesting against the imprisonment of Gandhi. In her tenure Mrs. Muthulakshmi Reddi had done a lot of social service and national activity. She was responsible to bringing out some social reforms by the Madras Legislative Council. On 4th November 1927, Dr. M. Reddi put forward a motion in the Madras Legislative Council on the system


of dedicating the girls and young women to Hindu Temples for immoral purposes. Then, the Madras Legislative Council had passed the Madras Act of 1927. This Act stopped the system of dedicating girls and young women to Hindu Temples for immoral purposes. Mrs. Reddi's resolution in the Madras Legislative Council was opposed tooth and nail by a faction of the Devadasi Community even though majority of them supported it.

Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi moved a resolution in Madras Legislative Council for raising the marriageable age of boys and girls to at least 21 and 16 years respectively which was unanimously accepted by the council. As a result of her sincere efforts, the Sarada Act was passed in 1928 by the Madras Legislature. Another important work of Muthulakshmi Reddi was the Act passed for the Suppression of Brothels and Immoral Trafficking through a resolution and interpellations. She got seats reserved for women in local bodies. Mrs. Alamelu Mangathayarammal was the second woman nominated to the Madras Legislative Council after the resignation of Dr. Mrs. Reddi. The Madras Legislative Council which heard the fine English speeches

13. G.O.No. 4079, Law General Department, dated 20th December, 1927.
of Mrs. Reddi had the fortune of listening to the oratory of a Tamil Pandithai. Mrs. Alamelu Mangathayarammal was against the tide of protect from the orthodox section of the Hindu Society and passed the Matriculation Examination from the U.F.C.M. Girls High School, Madras. She married Mr. S.G. Narasimhalu Naidu in 1900. She served the public in many ways. As a legislator, her interest was the progress of women and children. She was one of the two women who were examined as witnesses from Madras by the Age of Consent Committee.

The Indian Act of 1935 abolished Dyarchy in the Provinces and for the first time introduced elected representatives to form the Government in the Provinces. On the basis of 1935 Act, election for Madras Provincial Legislative Assembly was held in December 1936. In the Madras Presidency, the Indian National Congress (INC) which contested the elections emerged victorious and formed its ministry under the leadership of Mr. C. Rajagopalachari in 1937. The nine women elected in 1937 to the Madras Legislative Assembly were 1. Mrs. C. Ammanaraya Raja, 2. Mrs. Anjali Ammal, 3. Mrs. Jebamoney Masilamoney, 4. Mrs. Khadija Yakub Hasan, 5. Mrs. A.V. Kuttimalu Ammal, 6. K. Lakshmi Ammal.

   b. Alamelu Mangathayarammal was given the title of Pandithai by Saiva Sabha, Palayamcottah, June, 1911.


Mrs. C. Ammanna Raja was a graduate and was much interested in women movement. She faced two women rivals but, she was elected with absolute majority with 71% of votes. Mrs. Anjalai Ammal was a freedom fighter and a good public speaker. She was a District Board Member at Cuddalore. Though, she had two women rivals, she got 82% of votes. Mrs. Jebamoney Masilamoney was well educated and she was the first catholic lady in the Madras Presidency, who came out successfully in the election. She had one woman rival but got victory with 75% of votes. Mrs. Khadhija Yakub Hasan was a Turkish Lady. She married Mr. Yakub Hasan who was a strong congress worker. She was a member in Health and Red Cross Centre. She occupied the post of Honorary Presidency Magistrate. She worked for Muslim Girls' Education. She got only 2% additional vote more than her rival Dr. (Mrs.) Husnara Tajuddi who was a well known social worker of that area.

Mrs. A. V. Kuttimalu Ammal was married Mr. Madhava Menon, a Congress Member of Madras Legislative Council. She was a freedom fighter, and a member of the All India Congress Committee. She was opposed by Mrs. C. K. Leela Krishnan who belonged to the People Party. Mrs. A. V. Kuttimalu Ammal got 75% of votes.

Mrs. K. Lakshmi Ammal was the daughter of Soma Sundara Bharati. She did service to the harijans. She was a member of Madurai Town Congress Committee. She took special action for
Harijan Temple Entry Issue. Her rival got only 1% of votes. Mrs.V.Lakshmi Ammal married a doctor who was a prominent congress leader. She worked for the advancement of women without caste and colour for 20 years. She worked for the awakening of rural women. She was a freedom fighter and Vice-President of the Congress Committee. She was arrested twice during the freedom struggle. She became the whip of the Congress Party in the Madras Legislative Assembly. Her rivals were two men. Because of her contest in the general rural constituency, she got victory with 70% of votes.

Mrs.N.Lakshmi Devi was a congress worker and a member of the Senate of Madras University. She faced one woman rival and got 63% of votes. Mrs.Rukmani Lakshmipathi was born in 1861. She was the grand daughter of Mr.T.Rama Rao, Diwan of Travancore and daughter of Mr.H.Srinivasa Rao. She had both traditional and western education. She had graduated from the Madras Presidency College. A staunch supporter of intercaste marriage, she married a Saivite Neogi Brahmin Dr.Lakshmipathi. Mrs.Rukmani Ammal was actively associated with a number of social-service organisations. She was the Secretary of the Bharata Stri.Mahamandal Madras and a prominent member of the Women's Indian Association. She was a delegate to the 10th International Women's Suffrage Alliance Congress at Paris in June 1926.

Mrs.Lakshmipathi was an active congress worker. She was the first woman satyagrahi from South India, who broke the Salt Law

at Vedaranyam in 1931. She was the first woman political prisoner and she inaugurated the political prisoner's section in the Vellore women's jail. She was courted arrest again during the Civil Dis-Obedience Movement in 1932. In 1940, Individual Satyagraha Movement had brought her one year imprisonment.

She held many responsible positions in the Indian National Congress. She was the Secretary of Tamil Nadu Congress Committee in 1935 and Vice-President of the same in 1935. In 1936, she presided over the Tamil Nadu Provincial Conference was held at Karaikudi. In 1937, she was elected to the Madras Legislative Assembly on Congress ticket. She followed the foot-steps of Mrs.Reddi and became the Deputy Speaker.

She was very much interested in the education of women and children. During her tour to western and eastern countries especially to Japan in 1938, she made a study of the educational systems there and wanted India to adopt those good aspects. She was a dedicated social worker. She strived hard for raising the "Age of Marriage and Age of Consent." She died in 1951. She had always been a soldier for women's cause. It needs courage, self sacrifice and loyalty to take the utmost penalty for one's conviction and this Mrs.Lakshmipathi had always done.

Since, the Indian leaders were not consulted by the British Government in reaching the decision to make India a participant

in the World War II, the Congress Working Committee directed all the Provincial Congress Governments to resign their position immediately in order to express their protest against the forced involvement of the country in the War. In accordance with this instruction, Rajagopalachari's Ministry resigned on 26th August, 1939, after passing a resolution.

Soon, after the resignation of Rajaji Ministry the Governor took over the entire administration of the Madras Presidency directly into his hands. The Governor's rule in the Madras Presidency lasted for 7 years without a break. The next election for the Madras Legislative Assembly was held only in the month of March 1946.