THE GOAL OF WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION
The Self-Respect Marriages could be successfully undertaken in an atmosphere where the status of women like that of men was raised - thus emancipating them from the age-old traditions and irrational chains of bondage and exploitation. Right from the launching of the Self-Respect Movement, it decried the godly colour and religious sanction given to women as slaves of men and challenged other historical and mythological fallacies narrating the necessity of women's subjection to men in the society. In fact, the SRM insisted on equality for women as for men in all matters including education, right to ancestral properties and in securing government jobs. It encouraged widow-remarriages, discouraged prostitution, *devadasi* system, child marriages advocated age-fixation of age suitable for marriage and women's right for divorce.¹

The SRM even before it underwent a shift in its ideology from free thinking to atheism had women's education in the columns of *Kudi Arasu*. While delivering a lecture on women's duty, at a Women's school in Erode in 1925, Thirupathiripuliyur Srilashri Sivasammyaga

Mayyam Santharaniyama Swamigal, a sympathiser of the SRM, right from the days of its formation said that education alone would raise the status of women in the society. It would make them conscious, duty-minded and happy citizens, he added.² Thiruppur K.V.Venkatasahalam Pillai also wrote on the same lines in his article on "Women's Education" in the Kudi Arasu.³ S.V.R. under whose presidentship the South Indian Social Reformers' Conference held in Madras in 1928, spoke in his presidential address that the education of women was essential to establish an enlightened society.⁴ One of the resolutions of the First Provincial Self-Respect Conference was that that women teachers would be more capable to impart education to the Primary School children and so the Government of Madras should consider it thereafter, the Conference pleaded.⁵ Similar resolutions were passed at the second and third Provincial Self-Respect Conferences held in

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2. Kudi Arasu, 17-5-1925, PRLRC.
3. Kudi Arasu, 16-8-1925, ML.
4. Ibid., 2-12-1928, PRLRC.
5. Ibid., 24-2-1929, PRLRC.
1930 and 1931 respectively, followed by other district
and taluk level associations and meetings.

To propagate and to put its ideals into
practice, the S.M. began to give women activists a
fair chance and their contributions secured a sufficient
place in the columns of Kudi Arayu. Until her death in
1933, Nagamma, wife of E.V.R., seemed to be a symbol
and representative of the women's cause. In a message,
after her death, E.V.R. had confessed that she helped
him to a greater extent in his social reform work.5

Tiruchi Naalavathi, Kunjitham, R. Ranganayaki, Valliammal
and a host of others tried to fill the void created by
Nagamma's death. At a free school at Kilpakkam, in
Madras, in 1934, Kunjitham, a trained graduate teacher,
spoke about the essential education for women. In the
course of her speech she said, "A free, liberal and
rational and scientific education alone would break the
chains of bondage from which the women suffered."6

5. Kudi Arayu, 14-5-1933, PRLRC.
6. Prasnathriyu, 2-8-1934, PRLRC.
The Indian National Congress that insisted on women's participation in the national movement, advocated women's education. The Madras Seva Sadan and Women's Indian Association whose headquarters were in Madras, devoted themselves, for the cause of women's education, though comparatively, on a limited scale. The Justice Party which was in power from 1921 to 1936, seemed to have taken a sympathetic attitude towards women's progress as part of its welfare programmes. Such a favourable atmosphere made easier the work of the SSM which was for all practical purposes an ally of the Justice Party in Tamil Nadu. Despite the efforts of these organisations, in the 1930's, that too in cities where the literacy rate would be slightly higher, due to its urban character, had showed a desperate record in comparison with men.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Cities</th>
<th>Female literacy per 1000</th>
<th>Male literacy per 1000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salem</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madurai</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjeeveram</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the avenues like the educational institutions also, both the Justice Party and the SRM, could not carry out their declared policy of liquidating Brahmins in them. In the Lady Willingdon Training Centre, Madras, for the period 1924–25, only 11% of the students admitted belonged to the Brahmin community. But even by 1933–34, the percentage of admission of Brahmin students in the centre could not be arrested and it increased to 36%. 

But the SRM on its own tried to set the matters right to an extent by establishing and sponsoring several non-formal and private institutions and centres to impart education to the needy girls and women. In memory of late Nagasam, a Reading Centre at Tuticorin and in several parts of Tamil Nadu were established in 1933.

10. Kudi Arasu, 17-9-1933, PRLRC.
In 1935, the self-respectors under the leadership of Kanadukathan V.S. Sharmugam had decided to establish by June 1935, a "Development League for Women" to which Neelavathi, was made the Secretary. It was declared that, among other aims and ideals the proposed body might work for the literacy of girls and women.\textsuperscript{11} With much more interest and enthusiasm, the self-respectors at Kulasekarapatnam in Tirunelveli district in 1943, formed a Women’s Literacy League. It aimed to unearth, increase and utilise the literacy and the social reform potential among women in the district. K.A. Hanijamai who later became the wife of R.V.R., and was no less than a person who also led the "Provida" after the death of her husband, was responsible for the emergence of this League.\textsuperscript{12}

Not satisfied with the introduction of a new formula, in the mode and conduct of marriages, the...
the performance of marriages in the society. Child marriages which were a bane of the society was strongly opposed by it when the issue of the Child Marriage abolition was discussed about by several social reform organisations all over the country in general, writing in 1927, Keivelyam Swamiar, a spokesman of the SRM, proposed the marriageable age of girls to be at least 16 years, because by that time they would be able to attain both mental and physical maturity.\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Kurakkan}, its another media from Karaikudi, referring to the motion moved by M.K. Acharya in the Legislative Assembly to postpone by consideration of the Child Marriage Bill, till the Age of Consent Committee had submitted its report, wrote:

\begin{quote}
The injustice of the members of Government is having voted in favour of the motion is intolerable. We ask whether the Government wish to encourage the mean practices obtaining in this country. India has been under the orgies of the British rule for the last 150 years. The very fact that the people are in such a condition as
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Kudal Arasu}, 6-3-1927, \textit{PRLRC}.
to justify Miss Mayo's action in writing 'Mother India' is a great disgrace to the Government.  

At last wise counsel prevailed on the government which gave approval to Sarada's Bill in the Legislative Assembly in 1929. Subsequently the Justice Party passed the Child Marriage and Age of Consent Bills prescribing marriageable age for girls as 14 years.  

Along with Dr. (Mrs.) S. Muthulakshmi Reddy and other progressive minded Brahmin leaders, the SRM opposed and condemned, tooth and nail, the Senapatisa and other Brahmin orthodox people who raised the banner of revolt against the child Marriage Bill, especially in Tanjore and Tiruchirapalli districts.  

The orthodox section of the Muslim community, like the orthodox Hindus criticised the Sarada Bill as opposed to the basic tenets of Islam.  

But supporting

14. Native Newspaper Report: January to February 1929, pp. 264-265, Kumaran (Karaikudi), 7th February 1929, TNA.


the Bill, a progressive section of the Muslim girls seemed to have made a representation to His Excellency, the Viceroy. Dravida praised such an attempt wrote:

We have pointed out more than once that the cry raised by the orthodox Hindus against this Act is an empty one. It is the Muslim girls who know the hardships to which their sisters are subjected. The Viceroy should therefore attach due weight to the representation made by them on this subject. All religious precepts which are inconsistent, with common sense should disappear. Even religious laws should be altered, to suit the times. We, therefore, appeal to the Viceroy not to interfere with the Sarda Act, being afraid of the threats of the orthodox section.16

The ARM took strong exception to the Government of Madras which did not pay sufficient attention to enforce the Sarda Act effectively in the Presidency and to its timidity in dealing with the law breakers.19 As a result of this, it was obliged to carry the propaganda

16. Native Newspaper Report: January to March 1931, p.171, Dravida (Madras), 21-3-1931, TNA.

19. Native Newspaper Report: May to August 1931, p.957, Dravida (Madras), 4-7-1931, TNA.
against the evils of Child Marriage continuously, in spite of the Government’s legislation to that effect. In 1931, a Tamil novel entitled, "Mohana Ranjini or Social Emergence", written by M. Seethalakshmi, a self-respector, vividly portrayed the cause and effect of the Child Marriages and as how such marriages were detrimental to human growth and culture. But the incidence of Child marriages, comparatively speaking with the other provinces was very few among non-Brahmins in the Tamil districts, only among the depressed classes it was more, see Table II.

Table II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Name of the District</th>
<th>Percentage of people indulged in child marriages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chingleput</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>South Arcot</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tanjore</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>North Arcot</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nilgiris</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tiruchi</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20. **Kudi Arasu**, 1-11-1931, PRLRC.

The Government's legislation could not affect or prevent even this limited occurrence and it had traced out only four cases in the ten Tamil districts of the Presidency in the year 1932 and prosecuted them for the offence.22

According to the 1931 census report, the proportion of females was greater in the Madras Presidency because the early marriages to bridegrooms much older and the prevalence of general discouragement to remarriages were cumulative in effect and produced inevitably a large proportion of widows.23 Having fully aware of the evils that are accrued to the girls or women widowhood, the S&N attributed the mental, physical and moral degradation among them to their pre-puberty marriages (some of them resulting in the death of boy-husbands) and to their marriages entered at a tender-age to the father-like greedy and wealthy widowers. It was highly critical of such marriages ending with bad results.24

24. Kudi Arasu, 20-3-1927, PRLRC.
It deplored the plight of the young widows who were denied, in their communities, of their opportunity to remarry and lead a contended life like other women. In a chickathamboor village in 1928, a young Adi-Dravida widow, who was having a son, had developed an illicit contact with a man of her own community when she was threatened by her son and by her deceased husband’s brothers, she fled away with her mate. She was brought back, tortured and kept in a confinement without food and water for several days. This was one of the cases in question pointed out by the SRM. Further, in connection with this incident, it had appealed to all Adi-Dravida people, not to resort to such inhuman behaviour and treat the frustrated young widows with sympathy and due concern.  

It (the SRM) encouraged books which highlighted the plight of the young widows with an intention to educate the ignorant and orthodox people. While making a detailed review about a book entitled, ‘Sageerathi

25. Kudi Aranu, 30-12-1928, PRLRC.
or the plight of a Young Widow', written by a staunch self-respecter, A. Rattinasabapathy of Tirunelveli the Kudi Arasal averred:

The book vividly describes, in a most witty and at the same time in a touching manner, as how the young girls who marry the old womanisers, suffer at the hands of their husbands and as how the young widows who were denied an opportunity to remarry were forced to indulge in acts of self-destruction. 26

E. Sivan, the Kumaran's Assistant Editor also published a book Vishalakshi or the Unbridled Lady on the same lines. 27

In 1932, the Tamil Nadu's Anti-Purushit League, an auxiliary body of the SRM, under the Secretarship of C. M. S. Paramasivam took efforts to establish at Urzypoer a Widow's Home to protect the unfortunate widows from social ostracism and neglect. 28 When the SRM found the young widows who were put to untold sufferings at the hands of the orthodox reactionaries, took pity on them and attacked consistently, of course, verbally, those who were responsible for it. But when it found that there occurred

27. Ibid., 22-11-1931, PRLRC.
28. Ibid., 25-9-1932, PRLRC.
a considerable change in the attitude of such people who were hitherto blocking the remarriage of the young widows, it encouraged and praised them. In 1939, a self-respector from Tirunelveli district, by name, S.P.V.P. Balasubramaniam, under the title, "Liberty to the Widows of the Sengunther Community - A Plea" in the Kudi Arasu appealed:

Sisters, at seven of our South India Sengunther Conferences held, previously, to get rid of the pathetic condition from which our young widows suffered, we passed resolutions to the effect that such victims would remarry and in that case the community would not trouble them by ostracising them. Now, my dear sisters, you have every right to remarry anyone of your choice without fear of being banished from the community. As a result of such progressive resolutions, many widows have been rehabilitated in Tirunelveli district.29

Through stage also, the SRM made efforts to attack this evil. In 1940's M.R.Radha, a popular stage and cinema actor and a disciple of E.V.R., staged dramas

29. Kudi Arasu, 20-6-1939, PRLRC.
like, "Vimala or the Tears of a Widow" in several parts of the Tanjore district. This had not only supplemented its propaganda but also helped to increase the image of it even among illiterates to an extent.  

Another evil practice that had crept into the society from the Itihāsa days, was the "Devedasi System". Though in proportion to the total women population of the Madras Presidency, this was practised by a very small number of people, and proved a source of hindrance to hapless women who aspired to live with dignity, respect and freedom. Began with a noble intention of enlisting the service of the devoted women well-versed in dancing and singing from a particular community, for the cause, to serve God at His altar, as His wife*, till death. This system, over the years had degenerated into a system that

30. Information collected from an interview arranged with M.B.Kaliappan, op.cit.

* At such celebrated ceremonies such girls or women were married to Gods. On these occasions, to the incumbents, 'thali', a sacred thread around their necks was tied to show that they were married. This is popularly known as "Pottukattuthal"
gave room for the practice of prostitution inside and outside the premises of the temples.\footnote{31} Dr. (Mrs.) Muthulakshmi Reddy, strongly advocated against this system both in and out of the Madras Legislative Council. The agitation conducted by the Women's Indian Association and the speeches of Mahatma Gandhi during his South Indian tour in 1927 had also caused a favourable public feeling on this matter in the province.\footnote{32} In spite of all this, but for the work of the SRM, with the co-operation of the Justice Party in power, a legislation to abolish the Devadasi system in the Madras Presidency would not have been passed as early as 1929.

The Government of India on its part from 1912 onwards, when Nanakji Dadabai and Mudhokar, brought out three bills to suppress this evil, was reluctant to take up this issue.\footnote{33} The government of Madras, reflecting


\footnote{32} Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council, \textit{Vol.XXXVIII,} October & November 1927, p. 519, TNA.

\footnote{33} Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council, \textit{Vol.XXXVIII,} October & November 1927, p. 419, TNA.
similar attitude in 1926, wrote to the Secretary, Government of India, expressing its unwillingness to consider the issue thus:

...interference by police in a system recognised by courts and Hindu law seems neither advisable nor desirable. Further adoption by Devadasis is not by itself an offence and prosecution is therefore difficult...  

Reacting to a resolution moved by V. Ramdas Pantulu in the Madras Legislative Council in 1927, to abolish the system and the general public feeling in support of its abolition, the Secretary to the Government of Madras, in a letter to the Secretary to the Government of India, once again expressed his displeasure against such moves that involved practical difficulties. Dr. (Mrs.) Muthulakshmi Reddy, while defending the Government's policy, suggested that, the practical difficulties that would result after the abolition of the Devadasi system, could be easily got rid of, if the lands granted to them were enfranchised

34. Law (1926) Dept. General, Ordinary Series, C.O. No. 2479, A, Dated, 6-8-1926, TNA.

35. Law (General) (1927) Dept. Misc. Series, Letter No. 3853, Dated, 3-12-1927, TNA.
and instead a levy of quit-rent be imposed without transferring the property rights. Accordingly, a bill was passed at last with the Ministerial party extending its support. Orthodox people like S. Satyamurthy, Swami Venkatesham Chetti and C. N. Muthuranga Mudaliar opposed the Bill. The SRM, on the other hand, criticised the Justice Party which was seemingly sympathetic to its ideals, for its timidity in passing the bill even before 1929. While wholeheartedly supporting the genuine efforts of Dr. (Mrs) Muthulakshmi Reddy, the SRM declared that it would work for the successful implementation of the legislation in Tamil Nadu. At a self-Respector's Women's Reform Conference held at Ponnoor in North Arcot district, under the Presidentship of Rajalingam, in the year 1942, among other resolutions, a resolution to remove the Dayadasi system from practice in Tamil Nadu was passed.


37. Kudi Arasu, 23-3-1930, PRLRC.

38. Viduthalai, 27-11-1942, PRLRC.
Expensive marriages running into several
days and the dowry claims had kept women a liability to
men in particular and to the society in general, hence
subordinate to their men-folk. The SRM being fully
aware of these evils that traditional practices produce,
opposed them. It advocated, simple and inexpensive
marriages and declared that there was no sex discrimina-
tion against women as both men and women were equal in
every respect of the word. To earn public sympathy for
the distressed plight of such women and their families,
it brought out several instances of women who were
suffering and were tortured due to dowry claims by the
men folk in the columns of Kudi Arasu. A book entitled,
Women Remarriage, written by M.Chinniah Chetty, a self-
respector, had extensively exposed how the gifts given by
the parents of the brides at the time of their daughter’s
marriage at huge cost and the dowry claims of the bride-
grooms and debt incurred as a result of it had put the
brides’ families to untold miseries. This book was widely
published by Kumeran. In fact, since majority of the

39. Kudi Arasu, 29-10-1933, PRLRC.
self-respect marriages were conducted among fairly well-to-do families, the dowry claims and the evil consequences accrued to them did not seem attract much attention of the \textit{SRM}, hence its propaganda against such widespread evil at that time was limited.\textsuperscript{40}

The prostitution, yet another evil practice, seemed not only a social problem and menace but also a socio-economic problem that pushed the women who practiced it to a state of complete slavery and moral degradation. The census figures quoted by the\textit{Archdeacon} showed that there were 911 persons recorded as prostitutes and procurers in the city of Madras.\textsuperscript{41} K.R. Venkatarama Ayyar had introduced a Bill in the Madras Legislative Council in 1928, for the suppression of Brothels and Immoral Traffic in the Presidency as a whole. This was seconded by Dr. (Mrs.) S. Muthulakshmi Reddy in the Council.\textsuperscript{42} In

\textsuperscript{40.} \textit{Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of March 1930 Public (General) Dept- 3-6-1930, No. P-4-6, TNA.}

\textsuperscript{41.} "\textit{Indian Social Reformer} (Weekly), Bombay, dated 26-10-1926, NMLM.

\textsuperscript{42.} \textit{Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council, 3rd to 8th September, 1928, Vol. XLIII, p.271, TNA.}
addition to this initiative, the Justice Party in power was sympathetic towards such a measure. By 1929, the League of Nations, an international body took a decision to the effect that traffic in women and children should be abolished in the world. This was communicated to the Government of Madras through the Government of India.  

At last the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act was passed in 1929. It came into force gradually from 1930 onwards from one town to another in Tamil Nadu. Within the period under study, this Act was extended to villages which were situated within a three-mile-limit of Madurai and Dindigul Municipalities. Social Reformers like Thiru.Vi.Ka. advocated an objective approach to eradicate the evil in the society. He said that it was poverty that forced the women to sell their honour and any measure to root out this evil should be directed towards securing an economic independence for them. Both the moderate orthodox section as well as the SRM, were in full praise of the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act, but pleaded

43. Law (General) 1929, Dept, M.S.Series, G.O.No.4647, dated 29-11-1929, TNA.

44. Home (1944) Dept, M.S.Series, G.O.No.3477, dated 28-11-1944, TNA.

45. Navasakthi (Madras), 7-5-1926, ML.
the Government to establish Rescue Homes to rehabilitate women, rescued from brothel houses. The SRM questioned: "Why the prostitution is attributed to Women alone?" "This showed the practice of permanent subjugation of women by men in the society", it declared. "The word prostitution has been used to mean that women are pleasure objects to men, hence slaves. This is an impediment to women's liberty. This should go. Does the society brand men as prostitutes?" Besides propagating thus against this practice in its media, the SRM also encouraged and published books, which depicted the hypocrisy of men and the helpless condition of women who indulged themselves in prostitution. Moovar Ramanirdammal's book, The Play of Prostitutes or the Enlightened Womanizer, published in 1936 was testimony to the efforts taken by the SRM. But, it treated the issue merely as a social problem than as a socio-economic problem of the people.

46. "The Hindu", 1-2-1930, Kudi Aran, 18-5-1930, PRLRC.

47. Ibid., 26-10-1930, PRLRC.

48. Kudi Aran, 22-3-1936, PRLRC.
The custom, usage and continuous practice as embodied in the Hindu Law did not permit women to enjoy property rights on par with men. This inhuman treatment had enslaved women. At a Tirunelveli District Self-Respect Conference held on 28-11-1927, E.V.R., as President, pleaded to the Government to give equal rights to women like men to inherit or possess property as that would make them economically independent. On that occasion, among other resolutions, the following two resolutions were passed to that effect:

(1) In Hindu families where the widowed women refuse to remarry, they should be given right over the property of their deceased husbands.

(2) Properties in Hindu families should be equally distributed between men and women without any sex discrimination. 49

If the Government of India wanted to continue their rule undisturbed, the SRM suggested, that they could do so, by passing social legislations aiming to establish social equality in the society. It added, among other reforms, the Government could introduce a legislation giving equal property rights to women like men. 50

49. Kudi Arasu, 11-12-1927, PRLRC.
50. Ibid., 5-10-1930, PRLRC.
the ... social equality should precede political and economic equality.

Referring to the Bill sought to be introduced by Harbilas Sarda in the Legislative Assembly for securing a right to Hindu widows over the property belonging to their husbands having been opposed even by the Government on the ground that the three Hindu members who took part in the debate on the motion were against it, Dravidan observed:

The objection of the Government to this Bill has no doubt caused much dissatisfaction to all persons. It is indeed regrettable that while the Government should help the progress of the country by accepting at least Bills introduced in the Legislative Assembly for effecting social reform, though they do not grant all facilities for such reform, they should have opposed the Bill while sympathising with its object in words.\textsuperscript{51} Similar stand was consistently upheld by the ... in its media and by its activists at meetings till the Hindu

\textsuperscript{51} Native Newspaper Report: January to March, 1932, p.172, Dravidan (Madras), 27-1-1932, TNA.
Women's Rights to Property Act was passed in 1937 by the Government of India in the Legislative Assembly. The Kudi Arasu, in its editorial soon after this Act was passed commented:

"Though the Bill that was brought forward by Dr. Bhagawan Das was at last put into an act against stiff orthodox opposition, though the Act will not be of much help to the women in securing their due share of property like that of men, it established the necessity of Hindu Women's right to property on a firm ground."  

Thus the Kudi Arasu had maintained that in all walks of life, the women were in no way inferior to men and fought for their securing equal right on par with their men, It asserted:

"It is due to the prevalence of faith in matters like God and religion, the women remain subordinate to men. Valour and freedom are not the sole property of men. By birth both are equal. Several natural impediments do not disqualify them. The women are utilized as machines to beget children. This had turned them dependents"

52. Kudi Arasu, 7-2-1937, PRLAC.
on men. Until this is abolished there is no real freedom for women. Women can live even without begetting children. They can live like men. 53

As a sequence to the above, as far back as 1934, the SRM, 54 had advocated Family Planning as a way out for women's freedom. While upholding the cause of woman, it had to face opposition from different quarters, especially from a section of the nationalists who were supposed to be sympathetic to women's problems for want of their active participation in the national freedom struggle. When the other women associations in Madras worked for women's equality juxtaposed, the opposition to them was not similar to that that was faced by the SRM. This was precisely because, the SRM's ideology took to atheism. 55

Undeterred by this, the SRM, 56 however, believed that an increased number of women participation

53. Ibid., 12-8-1929, PRLRC.
54. Purnachi, 22-4-1934, PRLRC.
55. Dasabandhu, 17-8-1929, PRLRC.
was abolished, purposely, to encourage more women participants to such self-respect conferences. A resolution to this effect was passed at the Tamil Nadu Social Reformers' Conference held in Madras on 22nd December 1940 under the Presidentship of C.N. Annadurai. The popularity of the BNM reached its peak during its anti-Hindi agitation launched in 1938-’39. The women participation in this agitation had even surpassed the participation of women during national movement in Tamil Nadu. At the Tamil Nadu Women’s Conference held in Madras on 13th November 1938 under the Presidentship of Neelambigai alias Neelakkanniammier, the conference endorsing the resolution passed by the Madras Thyagarayanagar Women’s Development Association, conferred the title "Periyar" (the Great-man) to E.V. Ramaswamy in recognition of his selfless service to the Tamils. Not only Sanskrit

56. *Kudi Arum,* 15-8-1937, PRLRC.
57. *Ibid.,* 22-12-1940, PRLRC.
58. *Ibid.,* 21-11-1938, PRLRC.
in it would alone set an example to its upholding of the women's cause. As a result, more number of women writers had started contributing articles to the media, espousing the ideals of the SRM. Though the formation of a separate wing for women did not materialise, a few women's gatherings, meetings and conferences at the district and local levels were held in various parts of the Tamil region. At the Second Provincial Self-Respect Conference held in Erode in 1930, the privilege to preside over the women's conference went to Dr. (Mrs.) S. Muthulakshmi Reddy. For the same conference, Guruswamy Kunjitham was made one of the Executive Members. Indirani Balasubramaniam and S. Neelavathi were the two women appointed for the SRM's thirteen member Executive Committee of the third Provincial Self-Respect Conference held in 1931 in Virudunagar. The joining of C. N. Annadurai in the SRM in 1935 had brought a marked change in the techniques adopted to popularise it. It was due to his efforts, at Tiruchi district third Self-Respect Conference held in 1937 in Thuraiyur, under his Presidentship, the entry fee for women in the conference
literature, even Tamil literature which depicted women as subordinate to men were not spared. At two of his public meetings held at Kancheepuram and Thirupathur in 1943, K.V.R. decried the condition of women as tribal where Kannagi was honoured as the symbol of chastity and modesty. On the other hand, in the same year, C.V. Ananda- durai, made a virulent propaganda against Sita, the heroine of Ramayana, in the columns of DravidaNadu under the title Kumbaram. Impressed by C.V. Anandadurai's presentation and interpretation, the youth section of the self-respectors, more out of style and fashion than out of conviction started quoting the article in their propaganda against sanskritic-Hinduism.

Further the SRM from 1930's by pursuing a method of "deplore and educate", had encouraged articles and books on women. In the process, the authors or writers portrayed women as pitiable beings. But, C.V. Anandadurai's Parvathi, B.A. novel serialised in his 59, Viduthalai, 16-6-1943, PRLRC.
Dravidanadu in 1943 made a breakthrough from this traditional approach and treatment to the story. The heroine-centred novel of his had depicted the heroine, well-educated, service-minded, heroic and a rational character who boldly fought against social evils and exploitation.

As for the voting rights for women and their recruitment in all government, private and Municipal bodies on par with men, the SRM, though did not work much for their success from the inception of it, however, upheld these ideals. Whenever self-respectors and sympathisers of the SRM happened to be in profession and in position and were given power in recruitment, they to an extent tried to make use of that opportunity and passed resolutions at least to that effect. 60

In all, though in a limited manner, the SRM had showed a definite sense of commitment towards women's cause and surpassed the efforts of other organisations and social reformers who worked for their welfare. The SRM felt the need to prescribe rationalist and atheist solutions in the struggle to change the status of women in society.

60, **Kudi Arrai**, 30-4-1933, FRLRC.