Chapter V

The Press on the Social Issues of Women
Chapter V
The Press on the Social Issues of Women

The gender identity created in the family household at the level of relations is to be analysed from the household. According to John Steward Mill, the economist, home is the birth place of feminism. It is hard to envisage a social system without the family. Its activities of production, reproduction and providing residence in an ambience of emotional and affectionate care can not be fulfilled by any other institution.

At the beginning of the Twentieth century, there had been different interpretations of the origins and dynamics of subordination of women, family had been viewed as the major site of women’s oppression by the feminist writers. The feminist perspective emphasised the ideological dimension of family and its crucial role in women’s subordination. The ideology of family viewed women mainly as wives and child careers, responsible for all caring and domestic responsibilities and economically dependent on men. Culturally and religiously, men had granted greater freedom to express their sexuality, while code of sexual behaviour expected of women insisted on women’s chastity, virginity, modesty, submissiveness and all other feminine virtues. Thus, the moral roles associated with ideology were expressed in two different standards for men and women.

There was large number of extended families in Tamilnadu in the dawn of the twentieth century. Though there were some merits in the system of extended family, the social scientists considered the system as anti-feminist. *The Indian Ladies Magazine* pointed out that a joint family life was a very fine thing when taken in the right spirit but it was always hard from the point of women liberation. The

---

5 Ibid., pp. 21-22.
6 *The Indian Ladies Magazine*, July - August 1932, p. 462.
Government of India also supported the point through an order that the very principle of the joint family is against giving equal rights to females. A woman is the important member of the family, she acts in various roles as wife, mother and daughter. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the family was the place where women suffered a number of tensions. Women had suffered due to the heterogeneous nature of the society with its structure based on social and economic inequalities. These inequalities were inherent in the traditional social structure. These disabilities of women had led to halting progress in the role of status of women in the society. Defeating the inequalities and attaining equal status with men is the fundamental concept of women’s liberation.

The western education spread in Tamilnadu and the activities of the social reformers served a lot for the emancipation of women. Along with these factors, the press in Tamilnadu extended its support for the purpose. The Kudiyarasu observed that the women themselves were the major obstacle than men for their liberation, and they were thinking of themselves not fit for liberation. The age old mannish ideology was the main cause for the conservative ideas of women. To achieve an absolute liberation for women, the society should wither the conservative ideology of masculine (Aanmai in Tamil). Without leaving such ideology, men's speaking about women liberation was like the attempts of cats for the liberation of rats. The press committed itself in raising such consciousness among the public on women liberation.

The customs and conventions which were followed in the society for a long time tided the women community with shackles in and out of the family. When a woman became a widow, the widowhood affected and humiliated her very much. The pains, the women experienced from her marriage to her death were uncountable. They were forcibly given inferior status in the fields of health and hygiene also. They

---

7 G.O. No. Ms. 174 Law (General), 19 January 1935, Statement of P. C. Tyagaraja Iyer. a judge in the Southern Indian town of Chittoor,
9 Neera Deasi, & Usha Thakur, op.cit., p. 70.
10 Kitchlu.T.N., Widows in India, New Delhi, 1993, p. 7
11 Kudiyarasu, Erode, 12 August 1928,
had to struggle a lot to put their steps in art and literature. The press in Tamilnadu supported the women community as much as possible to surmount such problems.

**Problems of Widowhood**

The extreme painful suffering for women community was widowhood. Generally speaking widowhood is a state of being a widow or a widower.\(^{13}\) But the problem in India was the state of widowhood which was forced only on the women. The *Stri-Dharma* considered that the culmination of a women’s heartbreak was at her widowhood.\(^{14}\) In India, widowhood was not just transition from one marital status to another after the death of the husband. Entering into widowhood is more hazardous, painful and humiliating to women than to a widower because of the discrimination and ritual sanctions of the society against widows. With the result, widows not only suffer with social and economic sanctions but also face many psychological consequences, loneliness and in many cases deprivation causing emotional disturbances and imbalance.\(^{15}\) Widowhood was the last phase of life for most of women. Widowhood was also a dreaded time of life. Depending on her caste and age at widowhood, a woman could expect to face any number of hardships.\(^{16}\) There were different categories of widows; the aged, the destitute, the young and even widows of tender age etc., and each category of widows had its own problems.\(^{17}\)

The position of widowhood further complicated when mismatched marriages came into existence to maintain lineage. The fifty year old males started marrying teenaged girls of fifteen to sixteen years of age with the expectations of descendents and mainly the male descendants. Such mismatched matrimonial relations were increasingly accepted by poor parents willingly due to their inability to arrange good dowry. Such old men died after a few years of marriage leaving behind the young widows, who were later on forced to live a cursed life after being deprived of natural requirements.\(^{18}\)

---

\(^{14}\) *Stri-Dharma*, July 1928, p. 110.
\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 2.
\(^{16}\) Sarah Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, University of California, 2000, p. 213.
\(^{17}\) Adinaryana Reddy, *op.cit.*, p. 3
Widows were forced to wear the white clothes for easy identification. They were forcibly tonsured. They were secluded and placed in the murky corners of homes. They might experience the wrenching emotional pain of losing a loved spouse. They might be considered by others to be dangerously inauspicious. Women struggled with their bodily affairs frequently and when they were unable to contend with their feelings, they got ready even to commit suicide. It was a life long chastisement forced on the widow for a mistake not done by her. She would be pressed by her kin to avoid all ‘hot’ non-vegetarian food, eating rice only once a day (a quantity that left her almost fasting); keep away from bodily adornments; and live in enduring celibacy.

The extended families did a little bit of good to the young widows. At least the food was not scarce and the kids of the family usually mingled with them and filled their lives to some extent. With springing up of nuclear families, the problem of widows had become several times magnified. Some such families might provide shelter to the widow mother but the situation became very sensitive in the case of widow sisters and sister in-laws. Mere provision of shelter and food were not enough to solve the problems of widows. Young widows were sometimes subjected to harsh criticisms because of their renewed interest in life and their expressions of such interests. The society expected the widows to keep up the ideal of strict discipline for the rest of their lives.

The only way to combat the evil was to perform widow re-marriage and to propagate it. The Giruhalakshmi observed that among the women liberties, widow re-marriage was the paramount one, which should be compulsorily given to the women community. But it was not trouble-free to perform widow re-marriage at that time due to the social obstacles. In spite of these obstacles, the press made efforts to preach about the sufferings of the widows and create favoured public opinion for widow re-marriage.

---

19 Sarah Lamb, _op.cit._, p. 213.
20 _Ibid._, p. 214.
The Sufferings of the Widows

The myths, surroundings and the complex social structures namely caste, religion and social class made the widowhood of women a multifaceted problem. The life of a widow was at its best one of incessant self-sacrifice and at its worst a record of unredeemed sorrows and sufferings, a long tale of troubles and tribulations, hopelessness and helplessness. Widowed women often faced a strong drop in status and limited life choices. Economically, the position of a widow was deplorable. Widowed women’s life could be highly disrupted if she did not have economic means of support. She could not earn by virtue of her own right. She could not claim any share in the joint family possessions or even in the property of her husband. A widow was to tolerate the hardships of widowhood as well as youth with all patience and perseverance. Her main interest in life was to go on pilgrimage. The state of widowhood especially in young age was regarded as a curse of her misdeeds of the previous birth. She was alleged in many families, responsible for the death of her husband. So she was subjected to severe insults and bitter taunts. Comparatively the condition of non-Brahmin widows was better than that of Brahmin widows.

The Stri-Dharma observed that there was perhaps no Brahmin house in Tamilnadu without a widow, and there was no widow but cherishes a sorrow in her heart.\textsuperscript{24} In Brahmin community, the widows were tonsured and dressed with white saris.\textsuperscript{25} They were kept in the gloomy corners of the house. They were distanced from the worldly affairs and even from the sunlight. They were considered the symbol of misfortunes and sorrows. They were called as amangalis (inauspicious beings). The orthodox people didn’t allow them to attend sacred ceremonies of the family and society. The rules of sastras forced on them, while the Eurasian women or a Muslim woman were exempted.\textsuperscript{26} The widows among the lower castes suffered with different type of disabilities. Among the lower castes widow remarriage though was not prohibited yet there was some aversion towards it. One important aspect among the lower castes which caused hardship to the widows was the type of family in which the

\textsuperscript{24} Stri-Dharma, April 1929, p. 260.
\textsuperscript{25} Kudiyarasu, 30 August 1931, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{26} Thamilan, Madras, 24 July 1912.
widows lived. The Kudiyarasu remarked the suffering of widows, as everlasting suffering and imperishable pain. In those days, the widowhood was considered as a state of social death.

When a child widow attained puberty, her heart bled like anything to see the girls of equal age. Couldn’t struggle with the feelings many of them slipped from the stateliness of life. It is said that 90% of the prostitutes were widows from both high and low castes. Their illegal sex relations caused large number of infanticides. The Vaisya Mitran revealed an incident that a widow came from Madurai, gave birth to a female child in the Municipal toilet in Madras and later on she left the child. She was arrested and sent to court. It was not a normal occurrence. A widow giving birth to a child was considered as a social sin. So she came to Madras secretly to escape from the social attacks. More than this incident, the Kumaran revealed the fact that 92% of widows who gave birth to the child committed suicide. Apart from caste differences, the sufferings of the widows varied due to the age factor. An old widow was much better off than a child widow or a childless widow. Although widow re-marriage had been legalised since 1856, it remained an uncommon practice in Tamilnadu even by 1929.

The Kudiyarasu revealed a shocking report that according to the senses of 1921, there were 11,892 child widows in Tamilnadu who were under the age of five years, among them 597 were under the age of one. The journal raised the question to the public what was the crime, the female babies had done, and for what crime they were suffering with this social chastisement. The questions of the paper turned the views of the public towards the problem of widows. The orthodox people criticised such journals as anti-public. The Kumaran bravely wrote that they were ready to carry

---

27 Adinaryana Reddy, *op.cit.*, p. 3.
28 Kudiyarasu, Erode, 6 September 1931, p. 15.
32 Vaisya Mitran, Devakottai, 21 July 1916.
33 Kumaran, Karaikudi, Annual Souvenir, 1928
36 Kudiyarasu, Erode, 2 August 1925.
the title given by the orthodox people, if the widows could see the dawn in their life. Comparing with the widows of the other religions, the Hindu widows felt more hardships due to the religious rules and customs. On this, Neelavathi, the Self Respect cadre wrote in an article in *Kudiyarasu*, that the tears and sufferings of the widows would be the major cause for the downfall of Hinduism in this land. She supplemented that the sufferings of widows were severe than untouchability.

Letters of Kokilambal

The liberal press strived to persuade the people in favour of widow remarriage through their own techniques. *Gnana*akaram followed a technique of long story in the form of letters written by a widow named Kokilambal, under the title of ‘Kokilambal kadithangal’ (Letters of Kokilambal) in the year 1911. The tale dealt with many social evils like problems of widowhood, child marriage and advocated widow remarriage as the solution. In this story Kokilambal, a small girl got married with an elderly man. When she attained puberty she became a widow. The family members of the husband censured her as ill-fated for the demise of her husband. The story ended with the female falling in love with a young man and getting re-married with him. The paper was bold enough to make public such revolutionary climax in those days. The story exposed evidently about the agonies of the widows. The following sentences uttered by the female lead, “It’s your stupidity to organize my marriage with the man of forty five, when I was seven” and the questions such as “The man was similar to my father. Is he an apt pair for me?” thrashed strongly the evil of child marriage prevailed in the society. The story exposed the sufferings like forcible tonsure and murky room isolation. The story witnessed that the widow herself turned towards the idea of re-marriage. The story was in black and white in the style which could turn the minds of the readers towards the dignified cause. This ground-breaking endeavour done by the paper created fuss among the orthodox people where as warm reception among the broad-minded people.

---

37 *Kumaran*, Karaikudi, November-December 1930, pp.185-188.
39 *Gnana*akaram, Madras, Journal 1, 1911
40 Ibid., Journal 4, 1911.
41 Ibid.
Widowhood Worst than Sati

Before 1829, sati was followed in major parts of India. The British Government enacted an Act to end the evil practice. But there was no way to end the sufferings of the living widows. There were difference of opinion between orthodox and liberal press on the issue of sati and widowhood. The orthodox press welcomed the continuation of widowhood and always praised the system of sati. The Aryadharmam, a conservative journal observed that the strong-minded women certainly would go for sati and only the less determined women only would opt for widowhood. More than that the Vivekabodhini observed conservatively that the uthamapathinis would die themselves immediately after the death of their husbands, those who could not die themselves would go for sati and those who could not opt for both would go for widowhood. It indirectly suggested that death was the only way to flee from the painful widowhood. The journal Anandabodhini frankly wrote against the widow re-marriage in 1918. But during the course of time it changed its view on widow re-marriage. It pointed out that in olden days the women were given freedom to opt for sati or widowhood, like that they would be given freedom to go for re-marriage. Nattukkottai Vaisyan condemned the system of forced widowhood as inhuman and brutal and it was worst than the cruel practice of Sati.

The Kudiyarasu expressed its different view to proclaim the sufferings of the widows to the world that sati was painful for one day whereas widowhood was most painful for the lifetime. E.V.Ramasamy wrote in the Kudiyarasu, that Rajaram Mohan Roy should be blamed and responsible for the tears and moans of widows, unless he worked hard for the enactment of the Abolition of Sati Act, the widows could be immolated with the dead bodies of their husbands. Because of the Act, they had to live with everlasting sufferings. Instead of dying with only one death they were forced by the Act to live with sequence of deaths frequently. Thus, the paper indirectly

---

42 Aryadharmam, Kumbakonam, June 1928.
43 Uthamapathinis means wives of high morale, they strictly followed the traditional rules of wifehood.
44 Vivekabodhini, Madras, December 1916, pp. 213-216.
47 Nattukkottai Vaisyan, Palayamkottai, May-June 1917, p. 664.
48 Kudiyarasu, Erode, 21 September 1930, p. 3.
49 Ibid., 27 October 1929, p. 11.
asked the government and the public to take some prolific efforts to end the tears of widows.

**Obstacles for Widow Re-marriage**

To educate the public on the widow re-marriage, the press categorized about the impediments before it. The major obstacle was the mind-set of the orthodox people. They did not prepare for the change and they didn’t allow others to do the same. Eventhough there was a law for remarriage enacted in 1856, the orthodox people were always blissful to defy the law. The government was not paying attention in enforcing the law effectively. The mass illiteracy among the Indian women was another obstacle. Although, the foresighted men came forward to marry the widows, most of the widows due to their illiteracy, were not ready to re-marry. Bearing in mind the simple social matters as religious was the major obstacle. The orthodox people spiritualised the entire marriage system. The people could not exit from the religious clutches in marriage matters. The deep-rooted caste system was a further barrier in the track of positive social change.

**Widow Re-marriage and Sastras**

While comparing the age old *sastras* and the widow re-marriage, the liberal press openly criticised the *sastras*, whereas the conservative papers though they were willing to support the widow re-marriage, wrote against it due to the influence of *sastras*. Some conservative papers registered their supporting view on re-marriage most moderately. In the initial times, the *Anandhabodhini* wrote against the widow re-marriage that the wife should treat her husband as God during his life, even after his death also she should give the same treatment, so, the widow re-marriage was against the 'pathiviradha dharma' (the ideal wifehood based on conservative ideas). Later it altered its view and it observed in an article that the re-marriage of a child widow could not affect her chastity. In the same article, it recommended that the system of child marriage should be eliminated, if not, the society should recognize the re-marriage of

---

54 *Anandabodhini,* Madras, February 1921, pp.282-284.
the child widows. The editor of the papers also endorsed this view. Finding difficult to put down the sastras, this paper satisfied itself with some bendable ideas. But Nattukottai Vaisyan, a liberal journal observed that the widow re-marriage was not against the sastras. It raised the question if the widow re-marriage was against sastras, weren’t the widow prostitution and their pre mature abortion against sastras. It asked the conservative thinkers to perform the widow re-marriage out side their family if they considered it as against sastras and not to hamper others when they performed re-marriages. E.V.Ramasamy wrote in the Kudiyarasu, that there was no connection between widow re-marriage and sastras and the time was being wasted in tracing the connection. He supplemented that instead of wasting time, we could have done breathtaking things.

The age old conventions and sastras measured chastity as women oriented. It was believed that the men’s error did not affect the chastity, whereas even a single sight of women would blemish their chastity. So the Giruhalakshmi chronicled its strong observation that it was imprudent to believe the re-marriage would affect the chastity of the women. E.V.Ramasamy wrote strongly in the Kudiyarasu that the society which accepted widowhood indirectly encouraged and approved prostitution.

**Sexual Inequality**

Most of the papers damned the inequality between men and women concerning widow re-marriage. If the wife passed away, the husband prepared himself for his next marriage right away. In some cases even if the wife was alive, the husband was legally recognized by the society to get re-married. But at the same time, the society put a number of blockades for a widow to get re-married. The lopsided condition was strongly condemned by the Nattukottai Vaisyan. Even the Anandhabodhini, the conservative paper in the initial stages, strongly witnessed the similar view. The Giruhalakshmi observed that the widowhood was forced only on the women community and there was a traditional thinking in the society that

56 Ibid.
57 Nattukottai Vaisyan, Palayamkottai, May-June 1917, pp. 668-669.
58 Kudiyarasu, Erode, 27 October 1929, p. 11.
60 Kudiyarasu, Erode, 28 April 1935.
61 Nattukottai Vaisyan, Palayamkottai, May-June 1917, p. 678.
widowhood was familiarized only with the women community. It supplemented that there was no equivalent term in Tamil for widower. It called upon the broad-minded thinkers to axe the term Vidhavai (widow).

The Kumaran raised a question to censure the difference why the widows should follow the life of celibacy while many men were involved in several marriages. The Anandha Vikatan published a statistical data that the number of widows in Madras Presidency was 40,91,962 and the number of widowers was 9,28,756 and it told its longing that it would be immense contentment if the widow re-marriage would be in practice. Accordingly, the press toiled hard to promulgate the gender inequality regarding widow re-marriage.

**Home Imprisonment**

Isolation and imprisonment of widows inside the dwelling was considered as the manifest destiny. It was the compulsion of the time for widows not to see the outer world and settle in the murky corners of the house. The Anandha Vikatan articulated its melancholy that it was very hard to exercise their desires for the widows due to the house imprisonment for the long time. It suggested that the sastras should be amended in favour of widows, and as per the amendment, the widows should without much ado be allowed to move liberally in the outer world. This witnessed that the paper without relinquishing the sastras strived hard for the well being of the widows. The Stri-Dharma remarked that if not letting the widows and giving them the improved future, it was unfeasible to taste the power of political independence.

**Service Organisations for Widows**

The papers often eulogized the activities of the service organisations for the widows. They gave extensive exposure to their activities with the intention of creating awareness among the public. Vidhava Vivaha Sahaya Sabha (Widow Re-marriage Association), a well known organisation established a home for widows at Tiyagaraya Nagar in Madras in the year 1921. In a short period, 247 widows became its members. The organisation campaigned for widow re-marriage. It published Tamil,

---

63 Giruhalakshmi, Madras, 1 January 1940, pp. 30-31.  
64 Kumaran, Karaikudi, Annual Souvenir, 1928  
65 Ananda Vikatan, Madras, February 1927, p. 36.  
66 Ibid., July 1926, p. 225.  
67 Stri-Dharma, Madras, July 1920, pp. 158-159.
Telugu and English books for the intention. Due to the service and campaign of the organisation 15 widow re-marriages were performed in Madras city in one year. The *Ananda bodhini* eulogized the gracious activities and solicited others to work for the splendid cause. The organisation established Sri Gangaram Widow Bhavan as the provisional residence for widows who were ready to re-marry. The paper appealed to the organisation to set up such homes in each and every town. With the intention of encouraging the other social service organisations to work for widows’ welfare, the paper published such news. The *Kudiyarasu* much-admired the works done by the organisation such as the performance of 30 widow re-marriages in the year 1928, 50 in 1932 and 40 in 1933 and the publication of awareness pamphlets in 7 different languages in the province for the righteous crusade. The *Giruhalakshmi* asked for the public to hold up the works of the organisation in campaigning widow re-marriages. The *Kudiyarasu* instigated the formation of another organisation, *Pengal Nilayam* (women’s centre) for the performance of widow re-marriage and to generate consciousness among the masses on widow re-marriage.

Veeresalingam Panthulu was a social activist who worked for the cause of re-marriage of widows' in the Telugu speaking areas of Madras presidency. In extol of his work, the *Indian Patriot* wrote that the public opinion was in favour of widow re-marriage, and Veeresalingam Panthulu was the moving spirit for this. The paper asked the privileged of other regions to follow his means. A widows’ home called Sarada Home was run by Subbulakshmi from 1919. Formerly she was a child widow, and then became a graduate. For the enhanced life of widows, education and training were given to them at home. Because of her altruistic work, she was called as ‘Akka’ (elder sister). *The United India and Native States* applauded her work, and pleaded the well-off to donate generously to the Sarada Home for the gracious cause. The activists considered the words of the press as recognition for their work. These became the moral booster for the forthcoming liberalists.

---

69 Ibid., p. 796.
71 *Giruhalakshmi*, Madras, 1 February 1940, p. 126.
There was another institution called ‘Seva Sadan’ served in Madras. It was established by Women's Indian Association in the year 1923. It gave asylum to the poor women including widows, educating them and giving training for their livelihood. The Stri-Dharma encouraged the organisation through divulging its activities. The Indian Ladies Magazine remarked that the Seva Sadan teaches the women including widows, lace work, needle work, sowing, cutting, weaving, embroidery and rattan work, so that a widow, on leaving the premises after her course was fitted to care for her livelihood. The journal also published the photocopies of these activities. The gratitude given by the press stirred the organisations to do the services more effectively.

Advertisement for Widow Re-marriage

Kudiyarasu, edited by E.V.Ramasamy, reserved its columns for the well being of women. It strongly justified the widow re-marriage. For the purpose it adopted a novel *modus operandi* in the form of advertisement. The paper frequently published advertisements such as “Wanted a widow for marriage, wanted an educated widow for an educated and honest bride-groom, caste no bar.” Such advertisements created jolts and change in the minds of the public. This paper served as a connecting bridge between the widows and the men who were ready to marry the widows. Even though the paper was rationalistic in nature and acted against religious beliefs, it open-handedly allotted its advertisement columns even for the staunch believers of various religions. It illustrated the noble intention of the paper. It also blissfully published the news about the widow re-marriages occurring in various areas of Tamilnadu. For example, it published the news about the marriage of Nallasivanu and Kamalambal, which took place in Nagercoil on 10th September 1930. The bride was a widow whereas the groom was a widower. They got married in front of their kids. After overcoming many obstacles they achieved it. The paper pointed out that such

---

75 Stri-Dharma, Madras, September 1929, p. 490.
76 The Indian Ladies Magazine, Madras, May-June 1932, pp. 418-419.
77 “இந்திய இளையத் தளம், 
ஜீவான வெள்ளையுடன் மாடுத்து இன்னும் இளையத் தளம், 
அந்த இந்திய இளையத் தளம்” - Kudiyarasu, Erode, 20 January 1929.
78 Ibid., 19 September 1926.
marriages would turn the course of the nation.\textsuperscript{79} The \textit{Kudiyarasu} eulogized the advance among the Catholic people regarding widow re-marriage by quoting a Catholic widow’s re-marriage held in Musiri Taluk on 2\textsuperscript{nd} July 1932.\textsuperscript{80} The news on the widow remarriages published in the paper served as a stimulus for reformers to make greater efforts.

The \textit{Kudiyarasu} was much concerned about the Second World War, not for all of its cruel results, but for the possibility of increase in the numbers of widows in India. This showed the dedication of the paper on its gracious cause. It urged the government to make new legislations for the betterment of the widows. It came with different but praiseworthy idea that the widowers aged above thirty should not marry the unmarried girls.\textsuperscript{81} The \textit{Stri-Dharma} observed the same thing much earlier in 1925 that a widower should not marry a virgin girl, he should choose only a widow.\textsuperscript{82}

\textbf{Madhar Marumanam and Widow Re-marriage}

\textit{Madhar Marumanam} was a journal published by Maragathavalli from Karaikudi from 1936. The Tamil heading itself means widow re-marriage. This was the only magazine which worked only for the cause of widow re-marriage. Each and every part of the journal voiced for widow re-marriage. It replicated the views of Gandhi for the proliferation of widow re-marriage that enforcing widowhood on thousands of women was equivalent to sit on the mines of bombs, and we could not forecast the accurate time of the danger.\textsuperscript{83} With the intention of re-marriage propagation, the journal published an advertisement for a pencil brand, in which the wordings “widow re-marriage will offer liberty” was printed. It witnessed that the journal followed the technique of modern days even in 1940s.\textsuperscript{84}

For the purpose of widow re-marriage propagation, the paper asked it’s readers to gather and forward the following particulars such as the details about the associations, which decided not to go for widow re-marriage, their population, in which

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{79} \textit{Ibid.}, 28 September 1930, pp. 7-8.
\item \textsuperscript{80} \textit{Ibid.}, 16 July 1932, p. 12.
\item \textsuperscript{81} \textit{Ibid.}, 16 October 1943, p. 12.
\item \textsuperscript{82} \textit{Stri-Dharma}, Madras, November 1925, p. 1.
\item \textsuperscript{83} \textit{Madhar Marumanam}, Karaikudi, March 1937, pp. 30-34.
\item \textsuperscript{84} “\textit{\textit{பாடல்களை விகாரமாக வலுப்பெண்கள் நிற்பார்வைத்து}”
- \textit{Madhar Marumanam}, Karaikudi, 16 October 1943, p. 12.
\end{itemize}
region they were residing, the liberal thinkers in the midst of them, various rituals of
the demography related to forcible widowhood and widow re-marriages which
occurred in the particular region. Again the paper wanted the readers to forward the
photographs of re-married pairs to be printed in the journal for creating awareness in
the society.85 Thus, it tried to generate public opinion and use the popular opinion for
the right thing.

When the fraction of the society began supporting the widow re-
marrriages, there were certain limitations followed in showing their support. A woman,
who became widow before attaining her puberty could be re-married, a widow without
children could be re-married, a widow, who didn’t experience the pregnancy could be
re-married, a widow below the age of twenty five could be re-married, a widow could
be re-married within their community and linguistic cluster, a widow could be married
only with the widower were some of the limitations evolved in the minds according to
the circumstances. Some open minded persons had a radical thought that until the
number of widows should be exhausted; there should be no marriage for the virgin
girls. Some broad minded had far-reaching thought that the re-marriages could be
performed without any limitation as per the possibilities. The paper enlisted such
limitations and asked for the readers’ opinion. It stood firmly with the intention of
performing widow re-marriages, even though there were various precincts.86 It
circulated the news from aboard that the social organisations frequently offered prizes
and praises to the re-married women. While mentioning the news, the journal requested
the local organisations to hold up the widow re-marriages in the western replica.87

The journal followed the *modus operandi* of using day to day life
illustrations frequently to make public the sufferings of the widows. The following is
the popular illustration. “If the climber, snake-guard lost its supporting stick, try to
offer them the supporting stick, unless the snake-guards will become putrid and the
price will come down.” Indicating the census report of 1931, the journal wrote that

85 Ibid., October- November 1936, p.46
86 Ibid., p.40.
87 Ibid., February 1937, p.35.
there were twenty five million women suffering in India like the support less climbers. It requested the society to provide them the supporting stick of re-marriage.

The journal brought about various orders posted on widows by which they couldn’t touch the spiritual deities and perform coconut breaking ceremonies in temples. But the paper insisted a much needed order should be posted on the society by which the socio-industry could be prohibited from manufacturing huge number of widows. It appealed to the society to perform re-marriages for existing widows and transform the colours of their dress. It published one more example taken from the daily life that there was an oil lamp without flame, the lamp-filament was well prepared, the match-box was also ready, a young man also was ready to light up and there should be no hesitation in illuminating the lamp of joy. It raised a rousing question if the lamp once lost its flame, was it impossible to have the flame again and it was idiotic to blame the darkness while preventing from lighting up the lamp. Thus it blamed the fundamentalists who prevented the widow re-marriages.

Then the journal took the example of veena which was thrown on the dusty soil. It raised a sensible question if the performer of the veena passed away, was it impossible for another performer to play the veena. It added that thousands of excellent veenas were thrown on the soil of Tamilnadu. Once again the paper raised a poignant thought that it was impossible to look at the sufferings of the widow daughter while other family members were involved happily in the family affairs. Most of the

88 "நாங்கள் அனுமந்த வர்த்தமான சர்வதேச நரசிம்மன் தெரியும் நாய் குப்பையின்றியால்.
முன்னெடுக்காமல் வர்த்தமான சர்வதேச நரசிம்மன் குப்பையின்றியால்.
89 "எனக்கு பேரார்வது, வெள்ளம் பதிக கலந்த குருவை வெளியிலிருந்து வெளியில் வெளியில் வெளியில் வெளியில்
குருவை விளக்கக்கூடிய வெளியிலிருந்து வெளியில் வெளியில் வெளியில் வெளியில்
- Madhar Marumanam, Karaikudi, December 1936, p.8.
90 “எனக்கு பேரார்வது, வெள்ளம் பதிக கலந்த குருவை வெளியிலிருந்து வெளியிலிருந்து
எனக்கு பேரார்வது செய்யல்லே அவர்களோ? என் இருவரும் முக்கியத்துவம் கொண்டவை எனினும் எனினும்
எனினும் எனினும் எனினும் என்று போன்றவை குருவை விளக்கக்கூடிய வெளியிலிருந்து
என்று போன்றவை விளக்கக்கூடிய வெளியிலிருந்து வெளியிலிருந்து
91 “என்று போர்ப்பையின்றியால் வென்று முயல்வையின்றியால் வென்று முயல்வையின்றியால் வென்று முயல்வையின்றியால்
என்று போர்ப்பையின்றியால் வென்று முயல்வையின்றியால்
- Madhar Marumanam, Karaikudi, June 1937, pp.38-40
92 “என்று போர்ப்பையின்றியால் வென்று முயல்வையின்றியால் வென்று முயல்வையின்றியால்
என்று போர்ப்பையின்றியால்
- Madhar Marumanam, Karaikudi, January 1937, p.45.
illustrations used by the journal were directly taken from day to day life which gave moral support to the widows.

In support of the widow re-marriage it published thought provoking quotations regularly. They were, “The tears of widow will destroy the home”\textsuperscript{93}, “The snivel of women will shatter the rock”\textsuperscript{94} “Marrying widow is a bliss”\textsuperscript{95}, “Where there is mercy there is no widow”\textsuperscript{96}, “The lovers of tradition must use their rationality”\textsuperscript{97} “The requirement of widows is re-marriage alone”\textsuperscript{98} and “If the wife passed away, marry a widow”\textsuperscript{99}. The journal utilized even a small space in the pages for the proliferation of widow re-marriage.

Knowing very well that unless and otherwise men were ready to marry a widow, it was hard to end the sufferings, it called the liberal young men to arise and abolish the title ‘widow’.\textsuperscript{100} It frequently used the census report of 1931 for its noble cause. It told that there were 18 crores unmarried men in India whereas there were only 14.5 crores unmarried women and to keep away from the scarcity of the brides, the grooms should prefer widows as their brides.\textsuperscript{101} Generally, there was a belief that the \textit{puranas} and the \textit{sastras} were against widow re-marriage. But the periodical selected some favoured \textit{sulohas} and through that it attempted to establish the stipulation of re-marriages.\textsuperscript{102}

The periodical observed that the laws of the society didn’t deny the re-marriage of the males, irrespective of their age because they were the law makers. The widow re-marriage was the livelihood right for women. If widow re-marriage was

\textsuperscript{93} “முடித்தமல்ல குடும்பத்தில் நிறைந்த அனுப்பிக்கும்”
- \textit{Madhar Marumanam}, Karaikudi, February 1937, p. 34.

\textsuperscript{94} “முடித்தமல்ல குடும்பத்தில் பேசுவதற்கும் காரணமா”
- \textit{Madhar Marumanam}, Karaikudi, April 1937, p. 41.

\textsuperscript{95} “தேவபெருவுக்கலை மேலும் புலவர்களின்”
- \textit{Madhar Marumanam}, Karaikudi, May 1937, p. 36.

\textsuperscript{96} “நற்பல நூற்றாண்டு அவாக்கின் முதல்வர விளக்கம்”
- \textit{Madhar Marumanam}, Karaikudi, March 1937, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{97} “பயன்படுகை பலவர்களுக்கு புலவர்களின் விளக்கம்”
- \textit{Madhar Marumanam}, Karaikudi, March 1937, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{98} “நற்பல நூற்றாண்டு அவாக்கின் விளக்கம்”
- \textit{Madhar Marumanam}, Karaikudi, March 1937, p. 28

\textsuperscript{99} “பயன்படுகை பலவர்களுக்கு புலவர்களின் விளக்கம்”
- \textit{Madhar Marumanam}, Karaikudi, July- August 1938, p. 42.

\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Madhar Marumanam}, Karaikudi, March 1937, pp.28-29.

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Ibid.}, April 1937, pp. 29-30.

\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Ibid., May 1937, pp. 17-24.
denied, their survival was deemed to be denied. The lovers of prostitution alone opposed widow re-marriage. Apart from that, there was no reason for their opposition. It expressed its discontent over the male prejudiced attitude that the terminology ‘widow re-marriage’ was believed even by the babies only female oriented. Above all it asked the young widows to revolt against the old customs and to leave the dithers in demanding re-marriage for them.

It published statistical figures in the year 1937 regarding the widows in Madras Presidency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Widows in Madras Presidency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Widows under the age of 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widow re-marriages in 1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widow re-marriages in 1935</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It pointed out through this table that the Madras State stood far behind in the widow re-marriages. Even the uneducated northern states over took the comparatively highly educated Madras Presidency. It was an embarrassment for the people. It appealed to the people of the state to bend their minds towards the righteous cause. At the same time it appreciated the efforts taken by various communities for the noble purpose. It witnessed the efforts taken by the Nattukottai Chetty community for the purpose and the magazine made known the truth that the incessant propaganda was the only reason behind the optimistic transformation.

Later it published a appalling statistical information under the heading ‘Widows in India’ in the year 1938 to generate consciousness among the public.

---

103 Ibid., pp.37-41.
104 Ibid., August 1936, pp.11-15.
105 Ibid., October - November 1936, pp27-29.
106 Ibid., September- October 1937, p.28.
108 Ibid., p.41.
The magazine believed that the society would transform itself after undergoing the shock generated by the widows under the age of one. The *Kudiyarasu* also exposed the same data for the same purpose.  

There were number of journals in Tamilnadu which worked for the improved well-being of the widows. Among them *Madhar Marumanam* and *Kudiyarasu* contributed praiseworthy service to the cause. The press could achieve its goal in creating bravery in the minds of widows, unclutteredness in the minds of the parents and responsiveness in the minds of the public.

**Wifehood problems**

For a girl, her birth place was not considered as her enduring living place. It taught them how to be enslaved in their husbands’ place. In short, it served as a seminary for the young girls who were liable to be shifted to another place. The parents and relatives imparted the conservative thoughts in the minds of the girls. After marriage, their beliefs on those ideas strengthened due to the new circumstances. The

---

111 *Kudiyarasu*, Erode, 24 November 1935, p. 15.
women’s slavery was tightened one more time in the name of chastity. It is known ‘Karpu’ (Chastity) in Tamil. The fundamentalists made it female oriented.\textsuperscript{113} The issue of maltreatment of women in marriages and the power of imbalance that was structured in the husband-wife relation in the family system were never questioned. This was openly demonstrated during the Age of Consent Bill controversy.\textsuperscript{114} The conservative press upheld the women’s slavery and their submissiveness inside the family in the name of ‘pathiviratha dharma’, where as the liberal press criticised the conservative ideas forced on them.

The conservative ideas taught that a woman had no other God on earth than her husband and the most outstanding of all the good works she could perform was to gratify him with the strictest obedience. This should be her only devotion.\textsuperscript{115} She should serve him with all her might, even though he might be a crooked, aged, infirm, offensive in his manners, choleric, dissipated, irregular; drunkard, gambler, debauchee, deaf, blind, reckless of his domestic affairs, agitated like a demon and criminal. She shouldn’t spy defects in his character and give him any cause for disquiet.\textsuperscript{116} Holding in low estimation her children, her grand children, and her jewels, in comparison with her husband; she had to burn herself with her husband when he died and she would be applauded by the whole world for her attachment.\textsuperscript{117} If she followed the ideas strictly, she would be honoured by all men, and be praised as a prudent and virtuous wife.\textsuperscript{118}

The Aryadharmam, a conservative journal insisted the above matters and it forced some social restrictions on the wives; they were, not to stay in another place in the absence of her husband irrespective of the situation, not to sleep soundly, not to sit in the portico of the house, not to look at through the windows, and not to hoot.\textsuperscript{119} Thus the conservatives made restrictions on women even in the essential things of laughing and sleeping. The Viveka Bothini observed that the parents and the teacher

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., p. 145.  
\textsuperscript{115} Caleb Right and J.A.Draineed, \textit{Life in India}, Chicago, Year not mentioned, p. 111.  
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p. 112.  
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p. 111.  
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p. 112.  
\textsuperscript{119} Aryadharmam, Kumbakonam, 1927-1928, Book 1, Pamphlet 11.
were the gods for a man where as husband alone was the god for a woman.\textsuperscript{120} Hence it indirectly denied the women’s education and supported the dependent state of women. It published the things to be followed by a \textit{pathiviratha} woman. They were, for a woman, her husband’s house alone was the place of worship, husband alone was the God, serving her husband alone was \textit{dharma} and sacrificing her life for the cause of husband alone was \textit{yoga} and she should beg him to have the above highness until her death.\textsuperscript{121} It added that the wife should act as a device in the hands of husband.\textsuperscript{122}

But after three years, in 1911, the same paper observed through a verse written by Sundaram Pillai, that men and women were equal in God’s creations.\textsuperscript{123} It was an interim relief given by the paper. After the particular issue, it didn’t derail from its old ideology for a long time. In the same line, the conservative paper \textit{Kalpatharu} answered to a question asked by a reader as follows, a wife should worship her husband as a god, even though he had a sexual life with a prostitute within his house even in front of his wife.\textsuperscript{124} Thus, this paper showed it staunch belief in conservatism and male chauvinism.

The \textit{Anandha Bodhini} advised the wives to follow the following things;

- Not enjoying freedom in husband’s house
- Not going to near by houses, if it was essential bring a child for her safety.
- Worshipping her husband as God
- Seeing the ground while walking
- If the husband got annoyed on her, she should not show her anger.
- Eating after her husband had eaten
- Sleeping only after her husband had slept
- Not using even her own belongings without the concern of her husband.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{120} \textit{Viveka Bothini}, Madras, July 1908, p. 27
\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Ibid.}, August 1908, p. 60
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Ibid.}, July 1911, p. 263.
\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Kalpatharu}, Madras, September 1917, pp. 208-210.
\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Anandha Bodhini}, Madras, 1918, Vol. III, p. 32.
Above that it noticed that wife should be proud to be a slave of her husband, and she
should pray to attain the status.\textsuperscript{126} It advised a woman to follow her husband with the
distance of feet in order to show his dominance.\textsuperscript{127} It pointed out its invention that the
women could not survive independently in the world at any time.\textsuperscript{128}

The \textit{Kudiyarasu} vehemently opposed these conservative ideas. Through
an article written by Penong Janaki, the paper strongly expressed its view that a
husband was not a God for his wife and he should act as a good pal of her.\textsuperscript{129} The \textit{Stri-
Dharma} expressed its views in favour of women community that the Indian society
prescribed the relationship of husband and wife as that of spiritual lord and devotee,
technically called \textit{pativiratha}. But to those who could not concede to the husband the
superiority that he had assumed, the relationship appeared more as one of master and
servant. As a servant ate food after his master, so had a wife to her husband; that
produced subordination instead of companionship between the parties was not a
sacrament.\textsuperscript{130}

Contradictorily, the same journal published an article with the title ‘the
duties of a wife’ in which the author remarked how a wife should be blindly obedient
to her husband, when the husband got angry she should keep her mind cool as gold
which could lose heat immediately after came out of fire; she should not act as iron
which kept the heat for an extended time. But the article did not insist on the duties of a
husband. It asked women to serve her fullest extent to pleasure of their husbands.\textsuperscript{131}
Such conservative types of ideas conceived and delivered by some orthodox authors
also crept into the publication of such liberal journals.

The \textit{Chinthamani} articulated strongly that women were not the
instruments of pleasure, play things and child delivering machines; they were human
beings with flesh, blood and feelings.\textsuperscript{132} It added that the women were utilized as the
sexual instruments only because of the illiteracy and it requested men also to come

\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Ibid.}, 1916, Vol. II., p. 511.
\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 355.
\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Kudiyarasu}, Erode, 28 September 1930, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Stri-Dharma}, Madras, July 1928, p. 147.
\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Ibid.}, October 1920, p. 173.
\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Chinthamani}, Madras, September 1926, pp. 67-70.
forward to end the women’s slavery within the family.\(^{133}\) At the same time it criticised the female’s westernised overlapping in the name of liberation.\(^{134}\) In order to strengthen the liberal ideas, the *Giruhalakahmi* published the request of Gandhi that a wife should not be forced to be dressed in *khadhar*, if she felt uncomfortable to wear it.\(^{135}\) Thus, it insisted on women’s liberation even in matter of dressing through Gandhi’s statement. It requested the women community not to consider themselves as the sexual instruments of men’s lust.\(^{136}\) The *Anandha Vikatan* exposed the condition of family-women who were lacking freedom even in food and dress. It expressed its unhappiness that they were not treated equally inside the family and the women were considered as the forbidden creatures.\(^{137}\) The *Stri-Dharma* requested the husbands and wives to live with mutual understanding and there should not be any form of prejudice between them.\(^{138}\)

The *Kumaran* took several steps to eliminate the family problems of women. It published a cartoon in order to expose the prevailing inequality among husband and wife. In the cartoon, a husband and his wife hurried towards a railway station. The husband was tidily dressed with high quality dress, wearing chapels, and carrying an umbrella. The wife, without chapels and umbrella, was carrying things on her head and having children with her. The man ordered the women to walk fast.\(^{139}\) Through this cartoon, the journal exposed the actual picture of the society. The women without any facility were forced to carry the burdens of the family, where as men enjoyed all the facilities without having any burdens. The paper published an article written by Neelavathi, a woman cadre in the Self-Respect Movement. In the article she emphasised the backwardness of women even in taking food, sleeping and in the form of sitting. The article exposed how women were not given preference in taking sweets, sleeping on the beds and sitting on the chairs. She concluded with a fact that giving

\(^{133}\) Ibid., September 1927, pp. 67-68.

\(^{134}\) Ibid., pp. 96-98.

\(^{135}\) *Giruhalakahmi*, Madras, April 1940, p. 249.

\(^{136}\) Ibid., March 1940, p. 131.

\(^{137}\) *Anandha Vikatan*, Madras, June 1927, p. 209.

\(^{138}\) *Stri-Dharma*, Madras, May 1928, p. 77.

\(^{139}\) *Kumaran*, Karaikudi, Annual Magazine 1928,
equal status for women inside the family would not ruin the life of men.\textsuperscript{140} The paper posed a question whether ignorance was bliss for women.\textsuperscript{141}

The \textit{Kumaran} brought out an instance that the congress members showed their unsociability to the anti-congress members by giving bangles to them. Through this occurrence, they considered the anti-nationalists not as men but women. The \textit{Kumaran} raised its voice against the anti-feminist attitude of the Congress members. It articulated its opinion that the women were equally doing their role in the nationalist movement, and the women should not be under estimated.\textsuperscript{142} The \textit{Nattukottai Vaisyan} demanded equal status of men and women in married life. It stressed the need of a symbol for men like the \textit{thali}\textsuperscript{143} for women.\textsuperscript{144} Through the symbol one could identify the man was married or not and the probability of cheating could be minimized.

The major problem of the wives in the family was that their household services were not duly recognised by the family members especially by the elder women. Work without due recognition made them indirect slaves. With reference to the International House Wives Charter discussed in International Co-operative Women’s Guild in 1934, \textit{The Indian Ladies Magazine} made an appeal that the work of women at home itself should be recognized as a precious social and economic service. It also asked for the recognition of the rights of mothers and housewives to enjoy freedom and spend holidays happily in the interest of maintaining their physical and mental health.\textsuperscript{145}

\textbf{The Parental Attitude}

The parental attitude towards their daughters extensively differed from that towards their sons. Particularly in the matter of marriage the parents exposed uneven attitude towards their daughters. They always showed their great interest in arranging marriage for their sons, whereas they felt their daughter’s marriage as an unbearable burden. They used to utter the phrase ‘blaze in their stomach’ regarding

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{140} \textit{Ibid.}, November-December, 1931, pp. 169-173.
\item\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Ibid.}, April-May, 1932, pp. 361-369.
\item\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Ibid.}
\item\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Thali} is the symbol of Hindu marriage, in the form of a thread tied around the neck of the bride by the groom.
\item\textsuperscript{144} \textit{Nattukottai Vaisyan}, Palayamkottai, May 1915, p. 289.
\item\textsuperscript{145} \textit{The Indian Ladies Magazine}, Madras, November-December 1934, p. 245.
\end{itemize}
their daughter’s life. The *Kudiyarasu* denounced the parents for showing disparity between the sons and daughters thinking of receiving huge income.\(^{146}\) It insisted that the parents should get the bride’s concern over the selection of groom in order to shun many problems in future.\(^{147}\) Even after marriage, she would face the differential treatment in her husband’s house too. She couldn’t find anybody to share her pains and not a soul was there ready to mind for her. These resulted in the deterioration of her physical and mental health. The above paper observed that it was the major reason for weakness of the Indian women.\(^{148}\) It observed the marriage system of that time as the method of enslaving the women. It expressed its grief over the treatment of wives as not as life companions but only as bed companions by their bad companions in many families.\(^{149}\)

Along with the *Kudiyarasu*, most of the papers had the broad-minded ideas on the household life of women. They didn’t side with the conservative line. Some among them echoed their voice for the liberation of the enslaved wives. The *Kalaimagal* wrote that the women should be given the right of choosing their spouse.\(^{150}\) In spite of conservative oppositions the paper insisted the said right. The idea of the right of choosing their spouse was considered as a revolution at that time. It was considered as a basic necessity to shatter the conservative family laws. The *Stri-Dharma* supported the initiative of the Government of Bombay in enacting the law to prevent the unequal marriages, like marriages between a man of 48 and a girl below 18. It requested the Government of Madras to bring in such law to protect women’s rights. It demanded to penalise the parents with imprisonment and fine, if the parents were the lawbreakers.\(^{151}\)

**The Press on Dowry**

Almost all the papers of that time insisted on the evils of the *dowry*\(^{152}\) system often. The deprived unmarried girls were mostly affected by this social evil.

---

147 Ibid., 23 March 1931, p. 4.
148 Ibid., p. 5.
149 Ibid., 13 April 1930, p. 7.
151 *Stri-Dharma*, Madras, May 1928, p. 50.
152 *Dowry* is given to the bridegroom by the bride’s family on the occasion of marriage in kinds or money or both. Among certain communities, the *dowry* was given to the bride by the bridegroom.
Even after knowing that it was a social evil, most of the grooms accepted or demanded dowry without any hesitation. To escape from the questions of the society, the grooms laid blame on the women of the family. The paper *Chinthamani*, edited by Balambal, a woman editor, vehemently criticised the evil and the escaping mechanism of men.\(^ {153} \) The *Giruhalakshmi* damned the attitude of the bridegroom’s family in plucking *dowry* from bride’s family and their consideration of bride as a money yielding tree even for extended time after her marriage. It added that because of these sufferings the wives were forced into some unwanted evil practices.\(^ {154} \) In order to criticise the evil system, it called the supporters of the system as marriage merchants.\(^ {155} \)

The *Jaganmohini*, the magazine for Tamil novels was published by a woman, Vai.Mu. Kothainayaki Ammal. She was a renowned writer of the times. She published five important Tamil novels titled, *Pillai Veettar Kollai*, *Pidarikalin Peyottam Thalaivanin Thindattam*, *Seer Vagaikalin Adukku Sammandhikalin Mudukku*, *Peykalin Sasanam Perunthuyar Saharam*, *Madura Ganam Idhayak Kulappam* and *Kasi Yathirai Vaibavam Mosam Pona Paribavam* in order to generate awareness on the evils of *dowry* system.\(^ {156} \)

The *Kumaran* published a cartoon in order to criticise the different types of *dowry* system which prevailed among the Nattukkottia Chetti Community. In that community, the *dowry* was given by the groom to the bride. The grooms offered huge amount of money to purchase the brides. Even the aged men, who had the purchasing power could offer huge money and got married for several times. But the poor young men were unable to get married. This type of *dowry* system created unmatched pairs among the community.\(^ {157} \)

Unquestionably both the forms of *dowry* system stained the life of women community. The *Madhar Marumanam* listed the demerits of the *dowry* system as follows:

- It deteriorated the female value in the society
- It made marriage a commercial deal

\(^{153}\) *Chinthamani*, Madras, November 1925, pp. 243-245.

\(^{154}\) *Giruhalakshmi*, Madras, May 1940, p. 307.

\(^{155}\) Ibid., March 1940, p. 189.

\(^{156}\) *Jaganmohini*, Madras, 21\(^{st}\) Year Annual Magazine, 1 January 1944.

\(^{157}\) *Kumaran*, Karaikudi, April- May, 1927, p. 125.
It created unhappiness, while a female child was born
- It resulted in female illiteracy
- It resulted in late marriage of deprived girls
- Even good-looking and brilliant girls could not get married
- It created bewilderments inside the family
- It resulted in extravagancy and
- Moral degeneration of the young men who got married with rich girls

The magazine requested the society in order to avoid such demerits; the dowry system should be left out.158

**The Press and the Chastity of women**

In those days the word ‘Karpu’ (chastity) was very popular among the Tamil masses. Most of them believed that the word was only for the moral life of women. The conservative papers were very particular about the chastity of women. They had an idea that the voluntary slavery of wife to her husband was called chastity. When in the presence of her husband, a woman should not look at others, she should stay her eyes on her master, to be ready to receive his commands. When he spoke she should be silent, and pay attention to nothing besides.159 The Saivam wrote a male bigoted definition on chastity that unconditional submission of a wife towards her husband was called chastity and the wife should be proud to be the submissive to her husband.160 The Kumaran wrote that such submission would result in the thrashing of women’s respect and life.161

There was a belief that women staying outside her house would blemish her chastity. The Kumaran triggered a question regarding the faith, if a man stayed outside his house, would his chastity be polluted.162 The Kudiyarasu in its editorial pointed out that the term chastity was invented to enslave the fifty percent of the population of the human society.163 It courageously criticised even Thiruvalluvar, the renowned Tamil poet and the great female poet Avvaiyar for giving prejudiced...
meanings to the expression chastity.\textsuperscript{164} It observed “Chastity, not connected to one’s marriage, has been forced only on women. It can be supported in view of women’s health, body care and general behaviour. But, chastity is not understood in that sense. The fact may be understood that chastity is not being insisted upon men. For example that chastity is not found even among manly Gods. It means justice offers on the basis of one’s birth and the concept of chastity is based on such discrimination. This should be entirely abolished and the conservative idea in which the chastity is a must for women and it need not be emphasised for men, is the outcome of the institution of private property. In the existing condition, the woman is considered as the property of a man.” \textsuperscript{165} The \textit{Chinthamani} gave a satisfactory definition that the chastity was common to both men and women.\textsuperscript{166} The \textit{Kudiyarasu} penned that the word chastity in English gave the meaning to virginity and it was common to both the sexes.\textsuperscript{167} The magazine \textit{Pen Kalvi} also insisted on the same thing.\textsuperscript{168} Likewise, the \textit{Chakkaravardhini} insisted chastity upon men too.\textsuperscript{169} The \textit{Nattukottai Vaisyan} also voiced for the equality on chastity.\textsuperscript{170} The \textit{Stri-Dharma} printed the important Tamil poem titled ‘\textit{Penkal Viduthalai Kummi}’\textsuperscript{171} (women liberation song) on women liberation written by the famous Tamil poet Subramania Bharathi. In that poem, the poet insisted on the talk about chastity which was common between men and women.\textsuperscript{173} Thus the press argued that men too should be chaste.\textsuperscript{174}

\textbf{The Press and the Right to Divorce}

According to the \textit{Kudiarasu}, the marriage was nothing but an agreement between husband and wife. In course of time if they felt to break the bond, they could

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{164} \textit{Kudiyarasu}, 12 February 1928; E.V.Ramasamy, \textit{Pen Yen Adimaiyanal?}, Chennai, 1992, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{166} \textit{Chinthamani}, Madras, September 1926, pp. 67-70.
\textsuperscript{167} \textit{Kudiyarasu}, Erode, 8 January 1928.
\textsuperscript{168} \textit{Pen Kalvi}, Madras, April 1913, pp. 16-18.
\textsuperscript{169} \textit{Chakkaravardhini} ,Madras, November 1912, pp. 92-93.
\textsuperscript{170} \textit{Nattukottai Vaisyan}, Palayamkottai, May 1915, p.289.; April 1917, p. 660.
\textsuperscript{171} \textit{Kummi} is a type of dance performed by the women during the festival seasons.
\textsuperscript{173} “நேற்குடக்கு போக்கு மேல் தோன்றிவிடுக் கும்மி
 முன்னிக்குத்துடன் மேல் போக்குவிடுக் கும்மி”
\textit{Stri-Dharma} ,Madras, March 1923, p. 124.
\textsuperscript{174} Chandrababu, B.S. and Thilagavathi, L., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 300.
\end{flushright}
go for divorce without any hesitation.\textsuperscript{175} It considered the right to divorce to women as a symbol of liberation. A Women’s Conference held in Madras on November 16 and 17, 1929 resolved in favour of the right to divorce women. The \textit{Kudiyarasu} unequivocally welcomed it. The paper said that it was nothing but a legal safeguard for women and it would not increase the numbers of divorcees. It counselled the protesters not to be frightened of the act. It opined that it would certainly not ruin chastity. When the \textit{Justice}, the paper of the Justice Party, \textit{The Hindu} and \textit{The Mail} wrote against the resolution, the \textit{Kudiyarasu} expressed its shock and criticised their opinion.\textsuperscript{176} It regularly insisted the necessity of the right to divorce women. It said that though divorce was not new to our nation, it was considered new by the conservatives. The right would bring equality between husband and wife and the husband’s suppression would be abridged.\textsuperscript{177} The right to divorce would act as the ‘safety valve’ for women’s freedom.\textsuperscript{178}

The \textit{Madhar Marumanam} expressed the necessity of divorce right to women in order to free them from slavery. It created fuzz in the society. It explained that the changing of the right means folly and blocking of the essential changes blindly would spoil the nation’s hopes. It persevered the divorce right to women was the need of the time and the women themselves should admit the change.\textsuperscript{179} The \textit{Stri-Dharma} held up the right to divorce whereas it cared for the wellbeing of the kids too. It insisted the urgent necessity of qualified divorce in Hindu Law. It opined that the inclusion of qualified divorces in the Hindu Law immediately alone would help to solve the thorny and burning problems of women.\textsuperscript{180} It demanded that the divorce right be lawfully effected without recourse to a court of law when both husband and wife consented to and it had to be effected in the presence of witnesses and in writing. Thereafter, guardianship of children remained with the husband unless there was an agreement. If there was not mutual agreement either spouse might apply to the court for divorce under specified conditions, including bigamy, adultery, ill-treatment,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Kudiyarasu}, Erode, 17 August 1930, p. 10. \\
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 8 December 1929, pp. 6 and 29 December 1929, pp. 8-9. \\
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 2 August 1931, p. 6. \\
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 6 September 1931, p. 4. \\
\textsuperscript{179} \textit{Madhar Marumanam}, Kariakudi, April 1937, pp. 22-27. \\
\textsuperscript{180} \textit{Stri-Dharma}, Madras, January 1930, pp. 86-88.
\end{flushleft}
desertion. If a wife had treated the older relatives of her husband so badly that life in common became intolerable, or if she had been so treated by them, this was a ground for divorce. The paper viewed that the serious mental illness which was incurable should be the main reason for the divorces.\textsuperscript{181} It also believed that a qualified divorce would put off an innocent person from being tied for life to an incurable leper or lunatic, to one who had wilfully deserted or maliciously ill-treated his partner, or to one undergoing a commuted life-sentence, or to a man whose love was indistinguishable from hate, and who knew that he could commit adultery without any preclusion from society.\textsuperscript{182}

**The Press on Modernising the Kitchens**

The women of Tamilnadu were living in awful unhygienic housing condition on those days. Bad housing resulted in many evils. It had impaired public health and in particular the health of women.\textsuperscript{183} In India, there was no need for the male members in many houses to go into the kitchen, and only the female members had to go there. So, very little attention was paid to the construction of the kitchens in India. The kitchens were messy and uncomfortable. The women felt discontented to work in such untidy kitchens.

*The Indian Ladies Magazine* placed a plea for modernising kitchens in India. It asked to get rid of the smoke problem and the kitchen should be well ventilated with at least two or three casements, fitted with wire-gauze in order to keep the fires out. The paper told that the walls and floors should be easily washable and every kitchen in India should be provided with a sink and taps fixed over it.\textsuperscript{184} The paper thus demanded comfortable kitchens with safety measures for women. Positively thinking, the plea for modernising the kitchens was made for the well being of the women. Thinking in another angle, *The Indian Ladies Magazine* made this plea with a traditional thought of blocking the women within the four walls of the kitchen and there was no need for them for coming outer world.

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., August 1931, pp. 474-475.
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., January 1933, pp. 133-134
\textsuperscript{183} Hansa Metha, *op.cit.*, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{184} *The Indian Ladies Magazine*, Madras, November-December 1934, p. 255.
Press on the Women’s Health Awareness

Next to education, the most vital need for women is health. The health of a nation’s women is the greatest asset, because only healthy women can produce healthy children. The outreach of health services was very poor in respect to women of Tamilnadu those days. Examinations of in-and-out patients’ records of medical institutions made known that for every three men who benefited of these facilities only one woman did so. This was by no means because women were healthy but because, in the family, the importance given to women’s sickness was considerably less than that given to men’s sickness. Our institution based health system also discouraged women to look for health services that made them travel long distance and to spend great expenses. More over, the majority of women didn’t have time, mobility or child-care amenities to do so.

More women died due to child-bearing which was a normal physiological function than the number of men and women who died of plague, smallpox and cholera. One reason for this was be short of proper and adequate health services. The other reasons were lack of education and health awareness, existence of social evils, like child marriage and purdah and unhygienic housing conditions. The Stri-Dharma observed the above mentioned health condition of women as “they were living, breathing and breeding in an unhealthy and unsanitary environment” and it perceived the immediate need was vigorous propaganda for women health.

The press in Tamilnadu did the commanding propaganda work to generate health awareness among the women particularly during the time of pregnancy and child’s birth. Most of the papers often published the health instructions for women. The Vinoda Vichithira Patrikai tried to end the panic of pregnancy. It published the symptoms of pregnancy and the tips to be followed in the initial stages. It advised the pregnant women to make use of soft clothes, eat easily digestible foods, breath

185 Hansa Metha, op.cit., p. 9.
187 Ibid.
188 All India Women’s Conference, Nursing Service, Tract No.5, Calcutta, 1946.
189 Stri-Dharma, Madras, February 1928, p. 51.
190 Vinoda Vichithira Patrikai, Madras, May 1901, pp. 299-302.
fresh air and give attention to the health of the baby.\textsuperscript{191} In the same article it wrote about the prior symptoms of the pre-mature delivery and the tips to avoid it.

The \textit{Chinthamani} ornamented its editorial column with the topic ‘women and health’ in July 1926. In it, the paper criticised the conservative thoughts which made blocks in the way of women’s health and it instigated the modern medical techniques to be followed in the matter of child birth.\textsuperscript{192} In September 1927, the same paper revealed its disappointment over the non-committal attitude of women of Tamilnadu regarding their personal health.\textsuperscript{193} Even the conservative papers like \textit{Ananda Bodhini} didn’t renounce the matters of women’s health. It gave customary instructions to the pregnant women for the trouble-free delivery of the babies.\textsuperscript{194}

In the interest of women’s health, the \textit{Madhar Marumanam} published a list of maternal mortality in 1939. It showed it’s grief towards the growth rate of mothers’ death during maternity. It urged the government to take immediate essential steps to curtail the rate of death.\textsuperscript{195} To add divinely importance to the above work, it quoted that saving the pregnant women was a heavenly service.\textsuperscript{196} In the same year, the \textit{Giruhalakshmi} published health guidelines for the pregnant women and revealed the Public Health Commissioner’s Annual Report for 1939 which contained comparative list of maternity deaths of various countries in which India stood high. It condemned angrily that the Government of India was the only government in the world which simply deprived of the health of mothers and babies in the name of scarcity of money.\textsuperscript{197}

In the areas of Thiruchirappalli, one of the major towns of the Madras Presidency, there was a superstitious practice of forcing the pregnant women to stay in the temple of Thayumanavar throughout the time of delivery. Without any proper hygienic facility, the women and new born children suffered a lot. The \textit{Kumaran} vehemently criticised the superstitious practice and raised the question if it was a

\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., June 1901, pp. 326-329.
\textsuperscript{192} \textit{Chinthamani}, Madras, July 1926, pp. 694-695.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., September 1927, pp. 67-68.
\textsuperscript{194} \textit{Ananda Bodhini}, Madras, August 1932, pp. 137-139.
\textsuperscript{195} \textit{Madhar Marumanam}, Karaikudi, March-April, 1939, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{196} \textit{T. R. குர்பா புத்தானேஸ்வராய் காப்பற்றவத்து தேவா தொண்டு} (‘Karpa Strikalaik Kaappattruvathu Dheiva Thondi’)
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Giruhalakshmi}, Madras, 1 October 1939, p. 709.
sanctum or a labour ward. It appealed the Government of Madras and the society to end the brutal evil practice. It begged the women community to give much attention and importance to the maternal health care.

High productivity in a sex segregated society like India affected the status of women in several ways. The birth of the first child at a very early age and frequent pregnancies combined with malnutrition led to the high maternal mortality and fatal wastage. The Indian women were completely exhausted down by child care and house work. Since high value was attached to the reproductive function, formal education tended to be seen as irrelevant for girls who were destined for marriage and motherhood at an early age. The liberal press suggested birth control as a means of avoiding the above problems. Birth control is nothing but the adoption of artificial methods during or after sexual intercourse to avoid pregnancy. It is otherwise known in modern days as family planning. The birth control was the solution for not only the population problems of a nation, but also a much needed solution for the problems of women’s own status and rights.

The All India Women’s Conference noticed that the wife should have the right to limit her family. It should be the responsibility of the state to provide facilities for acquiring the necessity knowledge to the married women who desired to have it for health and economic reasons through recognised hospitals and maternity homes. The press in Tamilnadu echoed the notice of this right. Among the papers in Tamilnadu, the Kudiyarasu endlessly played a leading role in the propagation of birth control among the public. Even from 1928, it started its campaign in favour of birth control. While other journals insisted birth control only for women’s health, the Kudiyarasu insisted it not only for women’s health but for the women’s liberation as principal motive. It recommended birth control as a means of attaining independence and sovereignty of women. It published an article written by Sherwood Eddy in

---

200 Alfred de Souza (ed.), *Women in Contemporary India*, New Delhi, 1975, p. xi.
203 Report of the All India Women’s Conference Standing Committee, 1946, Calcutta, Article IX (f)
204 *Kudiyarasu*, Erode, 6 April 1930, p. 10.
propagating the need of birth control. The author stated that India was the country for which the birth control system was much needed because of its backwardness and conservative ideas. Further, it published the views of seventy girl students from various universities on birth control. Most of them viewed in favour of birth control. It also published twelve letters written by twelve women who were affected by sequence of deliveries. Through the letters, women demanded birth control as their right. Thus, this journal thrived in creating public opinion in favour of this issue. This journal pointed out that the birth control indirectly helped to boost up the widow remarriage also. When the public were unaware of the birth control methods, it tried to consol them by recommending the usage of condoms for women.

Religious minded persons talked of sin when they protested against birth control. They argued that the family planning was synonymous to child murder. Some orthodox sections criticised that the birth control techniques encouraged immorality in the society. The liberal press discarded their ideas by mentioning that this was absurd for when fertilization of ovum did not take place no living being was born. There was no child to be murdered and hence all feeling of guilt was misconceived. The immorality reigned supreme even before these measures were conceived. The press observed positively that the birth control reduced the rate of prostitution and it eliminated double standard of morality and helped the development of responsible moral behaviour in human beings.

Most of the papers gave next main concern to the menstrual problems of women. The Gunabodhini insisted the compulsory rest should be given to women during the menstrual cycle. The papers devotedly were interested in advertising health care products for women especially for the menstrual days. Most of the papers carried the advertisements for health syrups for the menstrual days. It was noteworthy

205 Sherwood Eddy, 'Asia Kandatthil Karpa thadai Muyarchigal' (Birth Control efforts in Asia) in the Kudiyarasu, Erode, 11 January 1931, pp. 8 and 13.
206 Kudiyarasu, Erode, 18 January 1931, pp. 7 and 11.
207 Ibid., 15 March 1931, pp. 4 and 17.
208 Ibid., 10 May 1931, p. 7.
209 Ibid., 20 September 1931, p. 4.
212 Gunabodhini, Bangalore, October 1920, pp. 106-108.
that the *Ananda Vikatan* was the first magazine in Tamil to make public an advertisement for sanitary napkins. It advertised ‘Tampax’, the sanitary napkin imported from England. In this way it tried to craft a new sanitary culture among the women of Tamilnadu. The press tried to impart the knowledge of first-aid to women. St. John’s Ambulance advised through an advertisement in *Kalki* that women should be aware of accidents and they should possess the knowledge of first-aid. The organisation was involved in giving first-aid training to women at no cost. The press made positive efforts to spread this useful news among women in Tamilnadu. The *Ananda Vikatan* published a list of some diseases of most probability and the drugs for curing them. It advised women to know and remind them for the total health care of the family.

Another important social oriented health problem for women of India was the system of *purdah*. The mask was the mark of low status of women. *Purdah*, the veiling or seclusion of women, was an expression used to describe a whole continuum of custom observed by about one fifth of the women in Tamilnadu, Hindu and Muslim; from veiling and seclusion as sex-segregated behaviour. The system was observed by the major portion of Muslims and by the minor portion of Hindus. The male mistrust over the female chastity forced this system on women. This system made it tricky to educate girls. Even the Franchise Committee denied voting rights to women in 1920 due to the *purdah* system.

Most of the reformers thought that *purdah* was only the social problem but in reality this system resulted in solemn health problems. The women could not show her face to male members of the family except the closest relatives and husband; some times she had to cover her face even before her husband. When she fell ill, she could not be treated by a male doctor. Rather she preferred death to her treatment by a male doctor which she regarded as nothing less than disgrace. So serious evil

---

213 *Ananda Vikatan*, Madras, 3 November 1940.
215 *Ananda Vikatan*, Madras, 20 June 1933.
216 The word *purdah* is derived from the Persian word, that means curtain.
consequences of this system were fully seen and realised during the illness of the
purdah women. When, by chance, a male doctor was called to examine the ailing or the
dying women, he could sit behind the screen and then test her pulse and prescribe
medicines.\footnote{One surgeon was allowed to remove cataract through a hole cut in a sheet", -Balfour, M.S.& Young.R, \textit{The Work of the Medical Women in India}, London, 1929, p.3; Radha Krishna Sharma, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 12.} Although women patients from the beginning were admitted to
government and municipal hospitals, the scarcity of female staff made their attendance
almost nil.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 13.} Devoid of the benefit of daylight and fresh air, purdah, led to the
malnourishment of the body, and death of thousands of mothers and children during
child birth.\footnote{Vaughan.K., \textit{The Purdah System and its effect on Motherhood}, Cambridge, 1928, p. 38.} This evil system affected not only women but future generation of both
sexes.\footnote{Hilla Rastomji, \textit{‘Purdah ’ in Shyam Kumari Nehru (ed.), \textit{Our Cause}, Allahabad, 1938, p. 201.}

Knowing the facts, the press in Tamilnadu observed this problem as
socio-health problem. The \textit{Kudiyarasu} published an article on the evils of \textit{purdah}
system. It pointed out how the system resulted in the collapse of family life and the
women were treated as the assets of their male counterparts. The article requested the
orthodox section of the society to release the women community from the secure unit
of cloth.\footnote{\textit{Kudiyarasu}, 30 October 1927.} But a Muslim named Abdul Sayabu put pen to paper a letter to the
\textit{Kudiyarasu}, in which he criticised the article against the \textit{purdah} system. He argued that
the religious rules of Islam would never allow removing \textit{purdah}.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 4 December 1927.} The orthodox
section of the society voiced that the system was intimately oriented with the religions
and if it would be removed, the religious sentiments would be wounded. The \textit{Stri-
Dharma} argued that \textit{purdah} did not have spiritual and religious authority either in
Islam and Hinduism.\footnote{Roshini, \textit{op.cit.} p. 95.} The \textit{Madhar Marumanam} criticised the conservatives who
safeguarded this system by parcelling the women within the cloth in the name of
\textit{purdah} system and put them in house imprisonment.\footnote{\textit{Madhar Marumanam}, Karaikudi, October - November, 1936, pp. 13-16.} It condemned the thought of
conservative Muslims who believed that the curtain was protecting the chastity of
women.\textsuperscript{228} It published the Turkish example that the exclusion of \textit{purdah} in Turkey resulted in many good things. It requested the Muslim representatives not to hesitate to prohibit this evil, when a Muslim country like Turkey heroically overthrew it.\textsuperscript{229} While the liberal press articulated against this evil, the Muslim press upheld the practice strongly. There was a long debate at the meeting of the Madras Municipal Corporation on \textit{purdah} system in the first week of September 1916. The liberal members registered their views that a large number of deaths had taken place among the Muslims during child birth on account of their \textit{purdah} system. The \textit{Quami Report} registered its encounter against the liberal members that most of the members were under the wrong impression, they neither took the trouble to understand the principles of Islam; nor they cared to make themselves acquainted to exhibit their base in false reasoning and the attempt to end the practice was the illegal intrusion into the religious sentiments of the Muslims.\textsuperscript{230}

Even though the liberal press in Tamilnadu voiced for removing the \textit{purdah}, the tone was not sound enough to succeed. Few journals pointed out the evils of this system where as few journals made efforts in the form of soothing the Muslim community. But the majority of the Muslim press vehemently opposed the elimination of the socio-health evil. In short, the press in Tamilnadu could create socio-health awareness among the public but it was unable to put an end to the evil absolutely.

\textit{The Hindu} tried to generate awareness among the women regarding the perilous disease of small pox. It munificently allotted its columns for making women to conquer the long-established beliefs and to approach the disease scientifically.\textsuperscript{231} Regarding the same disease, the \textit{Nyaya Dipika} wrote that the chief cause of the disease was poverty and ignorance of the people and it requested the women to keep their homes and surroundings dirt-free. It also asked the public to leave the panic of vaccination.\textsuperscript{232}

\textsuperscript{228} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{229} \textit{Ibid.}, July 1937, pp. 41-42.
\textsuperscript{231} \textit{The Hindu}, Madras, 13 October 1908.
\textsuperscript{232} \textit{Nyaya Dipika}, Madras, 7 October 1922, \textit{MNNPR.}, p. 1256.
The Sasilekha instigated the government to train more numbers of Indian women in medicine to conquer the women health problems.\(^{233}\) The Swadesamitran uttered its unhappiness towards the high rate of infant mortality in the province and it suggested the government authorities to make serious steps to offer pure milk to the infants without any delay to diminish the problem.\(^{234}\) The Desabakthan observed the similar thing and asked the authorities to make proper arrangements to improve the supply of milk as in Calcutta Municipal Corporation.\(^{235}\) The Andhra patrika demanded the Government of Madras to construct more number of maternity houses and make arrangements to teach mothers about the values of health.\(^{236}\) The Vikata Dutan criticised the Corporation of Madras for not paying ample attention to women health and it requested the government authorities to take immediate steps to develop health care measures for women.\(^{237}\)

The press penned its view for the improved health of the women community. Although it couldn’t achieve absolute success regarding the purdah system, it succeeded in creating health consciousness among the women community. Thus, the press cared for the health of women where no body cared for.

**Press on the women’s role in Arts and Literature**

Lacking in literacy and liberal thinking, the major portion of the people did not allow their women to come out of their homes. Under such circumstances, thinking of women participating in performing arts like dance, music and drama was considered as a social evil. In spite of these restrictions some women came presumptuous to participate in such events. The society had the estimation that they were belonging to indecorous families. In some orthodox families the interested women were allowed to get training but they were not allowed to exhibit their talents in front of the public and they could exhibit their talent within their houses and only for the pleasure of the family members.\(^{238}\) The Ananda Vikatan in the initial years

\(^{234}\) Swadesamitran, Madras, 21 May 1915.
\(^{235}\) Desabakthan, Madras, 8 April 1920, *MNNPR.*, p. 444.
\(^{237}\) Vikata Dutan, Madras, 24 October 1906, *MNNPR.*, p. 58.
expressed its view that women going to drama theatres even to watch the dramas would lead to the corrosion of the family.  

Under such critical situation, some papers in Tamilnadu tried to correct the conservative views on women’s involvement in arts and literature. For example, the *Giruhalakshmi* published an article popularising the Sri Saraswathi Ghana Nilayam in Triplicane, Madras. In the article, it remarked that the institution was started to train the girls in performing arts like veena, flute, piddle, harmonium, bharathanatiyam, kummi, kolattam and drama with 8 female students by K.Latha. It pointed out that the institution was started with the motive of pleasing the family women of Tamilnadu. The paper also expressed its contentment towards the very purpose of the institution. It requested the family women not to hesitate in taking part in such arts without considering it as a prestige issue not only for the pleasure of their family members but also for the society they belonged.

After few years the *Ananda Vikatan* changed its conservative view on women’s participation in arts and literature. It tried to bring out the hidden talents from the talented women. For that it announced essay competition especially for women. It asked the participants to write hilariously. After 1930’s the above journal committed itself to the cause of women’s participation in the arts and literature. It published an article about Veenai Dhanammal, a female expert in playing *Veena*. She mesmerised the listeners for three hours with her performance. The article requested the women to listen to such music as much as possible, that’s why they also could perform. The paper published musical news about K.B. Sundarambal, a Carnatic songster of Tamilnadu that her voice consisted lot of creativity and spirited feelings. It added that her voice didn’t end with the ears but touched the minds. It finished the article with a request that more Sundarambals should evolve from the women of Tamilnadu.

While praising the excellence, the press didn’t fail to criticise the unworthy programmes, although they were performed by notable personalities. For example the

---

240 *Giruhalakshmi*, Madras, 1 March 1940, pp. 143-144.
241 Ibid.
243 Ibid., 15 December 1935, p. 23.
244 Ibid., 29 December 1946, p. 25.
Ananda Vikatan criticised the dance performance of Sunalini Devi, the sister of the well known nationalist leader Sarojini Devi. It penned about her performance “In London it was erotic, in Paris it was ugly, in Berlin it was ugly and at last in Chennai it was ugly too.” Thus, it followed the journalistic morals for the betterment of the art rather than the artist.

M.S. Subbulakshmi was the leading Carnatic vocalist of those times. She was well-known for her benevolent attitude. She conducted many music programmes for collecting funds for the cause of gracious things. The journals like Kalki published such news to popularise music and philanthropic attitude among the women. It published a news about her music programme held in Bombay on 13th May 1945 and an amount of Rs.42,000/- was collected to meet out the expenses for the construction of a high school in Matunga. The programme was attended by fifteen thousand audiences. She performed another fund collecting music programme at Chinthamani Talkies, Madurai on 28th July 1945 for the development of Madurai College. In the programme a fund of Rs.80,501/- was collected and 550 Musical records were sold during the programme. The Kalki praised her efforts and pointed out that the amount collected in Madurai had broken the record of Bombay. Like that, she was involved in such fund collecting music programmes in Mylapore on 17th November 1945, in Pondichery for the Bharathi Memorial Fund on 6th October 1945, in Kallidaikurichi on 16th June 1946, and in Nagpur on 17th February 1946. The press praised her social commitment than that of her musical involvement. Through the news about her programmes, the press tried to impart talents with social commitment into the minds of women of Tamilnadu.

In those days, the Tamil cinema was dominated by the male technicians. The women were unable to do cinema oriented jobs other than acting. The press welcomed the women’s role in various jobs. The Sandamarutham revealed a Bombay based cinema news in order to boost up women technicians. In it, the journal told that a
women lyricist, namely Kamala was paid Rs.10,000/- for writing ten lyrics in the film ‘Kathambari’. The above journal exclaimed that until the time nobody was paid one thousand rupees per lyric in Bombay and a women achieved the heights.\textsuperscript{251} Thus, the magazine acted as a boosting inspiration to the talented women of Tamilnadu. The booster given by the press was one of the factors which led to the participation of women technicians in Tamil cinema in large numbers in future.

Every December witnessed carnatic music fair in Tamilnadu particularly in the city of Madras. The leading sabhas of Madras denied the Thamilisai (Tamil Music). The Kudiyarasu propagated sturdily popularising the Thamilisai. In the part of its propagation it released the directory of experts in Thamilisai. In the directory itself the women occupied considerable position. Out of thirty six vocalists, twenty four were female experts. This journal listed out the famous tale tellers of Tamilnadu also. In the list of fifteen tale tellers, eleven were women.\textsuperscript{252} The famous critic of the music of those days C.R. Srinivasa Iyengar commented that the art of tale telling by the women was like a dog walking only with its back legs. The Kudiyarasu condemned his narrow-minded comment and pointed out the women had each and every right like men to perform any type of art.\textsuperscript{253} Thus, the press gave its shoulder to the talented women to exhibit their talents for pleasure of the entire community.

\textbf{Women Writers and Editors}

The prestige of the nation, the wellbeing, grievances and the mental strength of the public could be measured only through the press. From time immemorial, the women were the only affected section in the country. Through an inspiring article, the Giruhalakshmi called the potential women to write articles in the papers. It gave chance to the affected women to register their grievances through their articles. The article criticised the orthodox thought that women were lacking in creativity, and it viewed that they were the leaders in creativity. The paper suggested profundity reading of literature and history would make them as good creators. Even though they had to face failures at the early stages, they were potential enough to

\textsuperscript{251} Sandamarutham, Madras, 25 January 1944, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{252} Kudiyarasu, Erode, 20 April 1930, pp.9 & 12.
\textsuperscript{253} Ibid., 6 September 1925, p. 4.
overcome them. The article ended with a captivating sentence that they should not be terrified of failures and the success would succeed.254

Among the leading women writers in Tamilnadu, Vai.Mu. Kothainayagi played an important role in writing novels. Apart from writing novels, she performed as a successful editor of a monthly called Jaganmohini for thirty five years from 1925. The monthly journal was purchased by her mostly for publishing her novels. She wrote most of her novels for women’s cause.255 She wrote 115 Tamil novels in her days. In her writings she targeted conservative superstitions, the real obstacles of women’s liberation. She insisted on women's education, widow re-marriage and the abolition of devadasi system in her novels. She pointed out how chastity was not only women oriented but human oriented. She insisted property right to women as that of men. She utilised her magazine with the fullest extent to clash against the women slavery.256 Although she was not highly educated, her writings witnessed matured style. The Hindu praised her writings that the approach was elegant and easy flowing and especially womenfolk would find the novels as proper companion in their spare hours.257

Another famous women editor was Sister V. Balammal. She edited the magazine called Chinthamani. The front page of the magazine carried the message that the journal was a high class Tamil monthly and dedicated mainly to the cause of Indian women.258 The press backed her up for the splendid service for the women community. The Hindu wrote “Sister V. Balammal has done a service to the cause of the women of this presidency by her starting ‘Chinthamani’, a Tamil monthly intended to raise the present status of women both politically and socially. Chinthamani promises to fulfil the function under the able editorship of the scholarly lady. The current number of the journal which is before us opens with an editorial which emphasises the need of convincing the opponents of women-emancipation by explaining to there what the new movements really means, and by clearing certain very common misconceptions regarding it. A special feature of the journal is that moral, national and domestic ideas

254 Giruhalakshmi, Madras, April 1940, pp. 226-230.
255 Jaganmohini, 21st year Souvenir, Madras, 1 January 1944, Dinamani, 18 July 2010, p. 8.
257 The Hindu, Madras, 11 October 1926.
258 Chinthamani, Madras, November 1925.
are brought before the readers in a quiet unobstructive way, through the medium of stories and dialogues. This number contains contributions on a variety of subjects including one on the baby-welfare movement in the western countries."\(^{259}\) Thus, the most important paper of the time witnessed its involvement in the evolution of women in the field of press.

Another magazine *Penkalvi* worked for the promotion of women’s education. The very meaning of the title is women’s education. It was edited by a woman namely Revu Thayarammal. This monthly journal started in 1911. She reserved first fourteen pages for advertising purposes. Then she utilised the subsequent pages for the betterment of the women community.\(^{260}\) Other papers like *Gunabodhini* supported her mission. It gave extensive exposure about the journal *Penkalvi* and recommended its own readers to support the women editor for her genial cause.\(^ {261}\)

Another important journal published for and by the women was *Madhar Marumanam*. The title itself revealed the meaning of women’s re-marriage. The editor of the journal was M. Maragathavalli. Influenced by the ideas of E.V.Ramasamy, she joined the self-respect movement. After sometime, she left the movement, but not the revolutionary ideas taught by the movement. With the effect of these ideas, she started the magazine exclusively for the cause of widow’s re-marriage from Karaikudi in the year 1936. The title itself challenged the ideas of orthodox people. Initially the editor was a widow. Then she got re-married with Murugappa, the editor of the journal *Kumaran* in the presence of E.V. Ramasamy.\(^ {262}\) The *Kudiyarasu* welcomed their marriage with the observation “Maragathavalli’s marriage – mixture of re-marriage and inter-caste marriage.”\(^ {263}\)

In 1918, feminists living in Madras like Annie Besant, Margrate Cousins and Dorathy Jinarajadhasa established *Stri-dharma* in connection with the Women’s Indian Association. This anti-colonial, pro-nationalist journal asked women to take up the cause of female reform and national freedom embraced by late

\(^{259}\) The Hindu, Madras, 11 April 1925.

\(^{260}\) Penkalvi, Madras, March 1914.

\(^{261}\) Gunabodhini, Madras, September 1919, p. 75.

\(^{262}\) Dravida Iyakka Idhazhkal, Madras, 1975, p. 197.

\(^{263}\) “மாராத்தாவளின் மாணாம் மாராத்தாவளி மாணாம் தனிப் பாடல் பாடல்”

- Kudiyarasu, Erode, 7 July 1929.

226
nineteenth century Indian male reformers. For almost twenty years, a privileged group of Indian and British women worked together in cultivating both a domestic and international audience for the Stri-Dharma’s radical agenda. Readers came from a diverse example, targeted the Hindu and Muslim women from northern and southern India and worked to make the information found in articles available to both literate and non-literate audiences through special programmes. Initially started to give women a voice in Indian political life, the story of this multilingual international publication exemplified the complex relationship that developed between feminism and nationalism in India during the decolonization movement of the 1920s and 1930s. It was circulated throughout India and the world and published in English, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi. The paper appealed to those interested in women’s role in Indian social reform movements that included marriage reform, education for women, and women’s suffrage for both Hindu and Muslim women. The women editors of this journal asked women to do their duty for ‘Mother India’ by supporting women’s political causes within the context of the anti-colonial struggle against Britain.264

It served as the official organ of the Women’s Indian Association. Keeping in line with the strong western bias of international feminism, the editors modeled the journal on British women’s political journals. They utilized the columns of this journal to highlight news of women’s activities and published opinion pieces that lobbied for popular liberal feminist agendas such as women’s suffrage and equal rights. The editors attempted to reconcile its hybrid status as a journal neither completely Indian nor British in character with a growing feminist internationalist discourse that posited a universal female subject. These women continually negotiated the boundaries of this position in the effort to link the nationalist and feminist projects during the interwar years. Muthulakshmi Reddy and Malati Patwardhan, Stri-Dharma’s two Indian women general editors, played an important role in guiding the journal’s direction by recruiting Indian readers and writers. The Indian writers supplied the vernacular language sections as well as a large percentage of the English articles

that made up over half of the journals content. 265 Because of the work rendered by its editors and writers, this journal turned into a champion of women suffrage in India.

The growing infrastructure of the Women’s Indian Association, with seventy-two branches and over 4000 members by 1935 throughout India, provided the most significant space where women went to hear the news. The editors made a special effort to reach Stri-Dharma’s indigenous language audience. For example, they translated the sacred marriage texts in three languages in order to demonstrate traditional opposition to child marriage and published ‘education leaflets in the vernacular’ for free, such as ‘Our Appeal to our Sisters,’ ‘The Value of the Women’s Vote,’ and ‘Evils of Child Marriage and of Untouchability.’

Stri-Dharma’s Tamil editor, G. Visalakshi, also sponsored talks on subjects such as the Sarda Act. In cultivating this multilingual community in support of women’s rights, Stri-Dharma made information easy to understand. Rather than use Sanskritized translations of words in the Hindi section, a common practice in many nationalist publications of the period, the journal substituted more common English usages for words that did not easily translate in Hindi. Stri-Dharma needed to reach as large an audience as possible to fulfill its role as an advocate for women. Its editors thus placed a premium on readability in all sections of the periodical. As a result of such programs, Stri-Dharma expanded its audience beyond the boundaries of the South Indian elite. Although mostly a publication for and by educated women, the methods through which readers personalized the medium enabled the periodical to reach a much larger audience than might have been otherwise possible. 266

The Indian Ladies Magazine was founded in 1901 in Madras by Kamala Sattiiyanandhan, wife of a Christian social reformer. 267 She frequently took up the theme of women and education. She utilized the journal to organize the activities of the educated women, facilitated them to understand the public affairs and supplemented those of men. She observed through her journal that if among women with men worked hard in getting educational benefits and participated in the national movement, the

265 Ibid., pp. 647-649.
266 Ibid. P. 649.
demands of the people could be more vigorous and their aspirations would be quickly realized. She often insisted physical exercises for the healthy life of Indian women through the journal.

Some other journals worked for the cause of women’s liberation but run by the male editors. The important journals of this kind were the Chakkaravarthini edited by Subramania Bharathi and Giruhalakshmi edited by S. Krishnan.

Press on Chellammal Bharathi’s Efforts

Chellammal was the wife of a famed Tamil poet Subramania Bharathi. After the early demise of Bharathi in September 1921, she suffered a lot for the survival of her family. She tried to bring together and publish her husband’s nationalist poems, which was the dream of Bharathi. She made this effort for her livelihood also. Thus, the press came forward to support her. The Navasakthi published her requisition letter regarding the publication of the poems on 30th September 1921. In her letter she stated that the poems of Subramania Bharathi were the only property left for her and so she was trying to print and publish them. She requested the readers to help monetarily to do the work. In support of her requisition, the above journal published the views and requisitions of the renowned Tamil scholars. V. Kalyanasundaram, the editor of the paper, published his statement in supporting the efforts of Chellammal on the same day. Because of the support rendered by the paper, she could receive some sort of monetary assistance from the public and she published two volumes of Bharathi’s poems in the name of Swadesa Geethangal. But she could not carry on her work in publishing all his poems due to financial constraints. In 1940s the press, particularly the Kalki tried to collect Bharathi Memorial Fund for the livelihood of Chellammal, the wife of the creator of the everlasting national songs, Subramania Bharathi.

---

268 Naidu, Ch.M., Nationalism in India, Its Economical and Social Background, 1885-1918, New Delhi, 1988, p. 120.
270 Venkatraman.V., Burmavil Bharathiyan Desabakthikkus Thadai, 1928-1929, Rajapalayam, 2005, p. 31-34.
271 Navasakthi, Madras, 30 September 1921.
272 Ibid.
273 Kalki, Madras, 29 April 1945, p. 17.
The Problems of Female Railway Passengers

The press constantly played a vital role in observing the problems faced by women in daily life. The papers condemned the makers of those problems fearlessly though they were high officials and Europeans. In those days the women suffered a lot while travelling in the train. The paper Liberal elaborately listed out the problems faced by the female railway passengers. It wrote about a Chetty woman who was travelling in second class to Salem on court business. A European jumped into her compartment at the last moment. He attempted to assault her. The case went to the court. But the judgement was given in favour of the European. The female passenger was not given due respect in the court.\(^\text{274}\) The same paper wrote about another occurrence in which a poor lonely domestic woman servant was travelling from Kolar to Madras in a third-class compartment. The guard got into her compartment and forced her to his wishes. She, being afraid of the white men and his brute instincts, kept quiet till she came to Madras and then reported the matter to the police. But the guard was safeguarded by the judgement.\(^\text{275}\) The same paper published the news about a deprived native Christian girl, aged eighteen. When she was going home from school one day by a train, one Eurasian got into the same compartment and began to tap her chin and tried to abuse her. She bawled to the gate-keeper. The train was stopped and the Eurasian jumped off. In this case also the court failed to pay justice to the girl.\(^\text{276}\)

After pointing out these three different incidents which occurred in the train, the paper criticised the Court’s attitude against women community. It asked the railway department to provide proper protection to female passengers.\(^\text{277}\) The journal Veerakesari observed that it was highly awful that the railway authorities were altogether headless of the frequent outrages on Indian female passengers. It said that these outrages were becoming very common that almost every day there was news from one corner or another that a European entered the compartment and assaulted a female passenger. The journal requested the railway authorities to employ lady ticket collectors for each of the carriages reserved for females to constantly travel in their

\(^{274}\) Liberal, 22 March 1908, MNNPR., Vol. I, 1908, pp. 133-134.

\(^{275}\) Ibid., p. 135.

\(^{276}\) Ibid., p. 136.

\(^{277}\) Ibid.
Due to the incessant request of the press and the public, V. Mangalam was appointed as the member of the South Indian Railway Committee in December 1939. She was the first woman member of the committee. The press praised this appointment, by which the female passengers’ welfare would be definitely protected.

There was no doubt that the women suffered a lot of issues inside and outside of the family such as wifehood problem, widowhood hardships, conservative social ideas, lack of health consciousness, and the problem of dowry. The male chauvinistic society didn’t consider their sufferings. Even the affected women willingly accepted the sufferings as God’s gifts. The press came forward to sweep up their ignorance. It often expressed its opinion that if the men of the nation would attain the liberty whereas the women would remain in slavery, the nation could not be considered as developed, it could not be called even as a partially developed country. The press instructed the women to wrestle against the forced sufferings on them in order to create a fully developed country. It widely made known the sufferings of women in order to generate public opinion in favour of the women community. Thus, public opinion was created by the press, which broke the social impass against women in the subsequent days.

---

279 Giruhalakshmi, Madras, 1 January 1940, p. 62.