Summation
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The liberation of women is considered as the empowerment of women with respect to social, cultural, economic, political and professional independence. It is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. It is a process in which women gain greater share of control over resources - material, human and intellectual like knowledge, information, ideas and financial resources like money - and access to money and control over decision-making at home, community, society and nation, and to gain power. It directed women from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power. But the history witnessed the lack of women’s liberation in all spheres of the society.

Although men and women were born with equal rights, it was very unfortunate that most societies operated under extreme patriarchal conditions, often suffocating for women folk. In this issue, India was not an exemption. Being the second greatest collection of human lives on earth, there were lot of discriminative and prejudiced instances against women community. The male dominated society gave only nominal importance to women such as naming the rivers, months and sacred things with female names. But in reality, the society was not for giving even microscopic importance to women. The Indian women didn’t have the chance to hear the word ‘equality’. Even in the family portraits the wives had always to stand whereas the husbands sat comfortably. Tamilnadu, a part of India also witnessed the same unfairness against women. From time immemorial, women in Tamilnadu were treated as a sort of thing. Their placing in the society was not at par with other human beings. They had no rights. They could neither move nor do anything at their will. Women basically were seen as expendable assets, they were allowed to contribute very little to the society though they were able to contribute a lot. This was not a matter of choice, but was a tradition.

The struggle for women’s rights proved to be an extensive and exhausting process, but the social reformers in Tamilnadu proved to play an optimistic role in this process. The fight was especially difficult because those conservative socio-religious traditions, that were part of the culture, were very adamant in their beliefs on
the role of women in society, but the rational thinkers and social reformers seemed to be determined to turn India into what they deemed as a civilized nation. They were responsible for starting women’s right movements in this soil.

Eventhough the pre-independence government took the policy of religious neutrality to escape from the law and order problems; it supported the passing of important pieces of legislation at several times. In order to be successful in their fight to give women more rights in India, the liberal reformers utilized the usage of several techniques. One of them was the press which played tactful and tasteful role for the upliftment of women in all perspectives. There is a belief in the society that women's liberation begins with broad-mindedness. The press in Tamilnadu was utilised as a tool to make the minds broader.

It is palpable from the foregoing study that the emancipation of women was closely related with the liberal press in Tamilnadu during the period from 1905 to 1947. The press in Tamilnadu contributed much to the cause of women. The advent of Europeans, their educational system, westernised thoughts and the printing technology helped for the formation of press in Tamilnadu. The press served as the mediators of public opinions.

In the initial stage, the missionaries utilised the use of the press for the propagation of their religious faith. Then the movement-oriented people started utilizing the press for their purposes. The Congress men started a number of papers to stimulate the gospels of Indian nationalism in Tamilnadu. The Dravidian movements relied only on the press for the propagations of Dravidian ideology. Apart from their routine work, the liberal Indian press started concentrating on the social problems also. They were involved in the matters of untouchability, promotion of education and the emancipation of women.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, women’s participation in politics was absolutely zero. ‘Politics’ was a word at the moment which scared a large number of women. The importance of women’s political participation for a practicable democratic polity was not accepted. The women were not allowed even to think of political participation. To attend a political meeting seemed to them to be an adventure only to be undertaken by the other gender. For a woman, to be interested in such matter
was to be unwomanly. No woman could be a true patriot, really desired the well being and freedom of her country unless she attended atleast some political meetings.

It is very hard to say that the women as a group or individuals had many problems which could not be aptly expressed by men. The problematic issues of the people such as education, employment, health and nutrition as well as the foreign policy, relationship with other countries, issues of war and peace needed a women’s point of view because they affected women too in a peculiar manner. Women comprised nearly fifty percent of the total population of the country. The government could not run effective administration with just half of the population.

The women themselves did not think positively about the political participation. The liberal minded people in various political parties had thought of women’s participation very much. The educated women also started to think of political participation. In that situation, the liberal Indian press served as a stimulating factor. Realising the inevitable need of women’s participation in the movements, the movement oriented papers gave a clarion call to the women folk.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of British India applied the British policy of 'Divide and Rule' by partitioning the Bengal into two provinces. The partition of Bengal turned the national movement into vigorous one. The emergence of the Swadeshi movement attracted the women towards the national movement. The nationalist press in Tamilnadu encouraged women’s role in the struggle even it was very meagre.

Annie Besant, an Irish lady acted as the role model for women in the Indian movement. It is notable that no other personality occupied more number of pages in the *Madras Native Newspaper Report* than Annie Besant during the period between 1916 and 1918. Only because of the background force, she was involved in the freedom struggle fearlessly. The press served as a safety wall to women according to the needs of the time. The voice given by the press in Annie Besant’s favour acted as a boost to women to join in the active politics on a large scale. The advent of Gandhi speeded up women towards the national movement. The liberal Indian press played its due role in propagating the ideals of Gandhi. The women anxiously participated in all
the movements announced by him. Because of the efforts of the press, the women of Tamilnadu started feeling proud of participating in the national movement.

Not less than the Indian National Congress, the Self-Respect Movement too attracted a number of women through its papers. The Self-Respect papers adopted a new technique giving more than equal importance to women than men to induce their activities. It generously allotted more columns for women. The Leftist papers were also concerned with women’s participation in all spheres.

The liberal press strived hard and succeeded in creating political aptitude and awareness among women. It gave popular political information about their government, the policies of the government, their achievements and failures. It made an important change in women’s thought and behaviour pattern. More than that the press imported training in political activities into the minds of women.

The liberal press had an opinion that it was the duty of the women to shoulder the full responsibilities of social and public life and contribute their share towards the educational, social economic and political advancement of the country. It further opined that they had no right to remain idle or indifferent, when the mothers and the children of India died in such large numbers due to unhealthy condition and epidemics. The press cried repeatedly that it need not be pointed out that India needs thousands and millions of devoted women missionary workers to attend to her woes. The special feminist journals such as Stri-Dharma bravely accepted in January 1930 that the women themselves were responsible for the evils that they did not prevent and against all those which, they struggled too weakly. It added that the women were born to serve those who need their service most.

Motivated by the press, more number of women started participating in the political and social movements actively. They overthrew their hesitation and fear even to be imprisoned. Because of the initiative which was made before the independence, women are able to travel well at present. Women are able to become the commanding leaders of political parties. Through the Panchayat Raj institutions, over a million women have actively entered political life in India. The women are now reaping the fruits from the trees, which were planted before independence.
The women’s right to vote turned a vital factor in Indian society, for two reasons. In the first place, when a woman voted the candidate, he should take care that his conduct and record must meet with a good woman’s approval, and this made better men of the candidates. In the second place, the women’s voting right made the political influence of the good men in the community increasing greatly. In the initial stages, the voting right of women compelled the mere politicians to move towards the state of statesmanship. Because the voting women were influenced by the men whom they know, but more than that, they were very much influenced by the good men whom they know. The voting right of women certainly improved humanity, because it compelled men to seek and earn the approval of women.

Regarding the franchise right of women, the press voiced firmly in three stages. When the demand for voting right to women arose, the press stood with womenfolk. When the Indian women were given voting right on the basis of widowhood and wifehood qualifications, the press in Tamilnadu vehemently opposed the given handicapped right. The press continuously voiced for the universal adult suffrage.

In the second stage of suffrage movement in India, women demanded for the right for representation in the legislatures. The press served as their mouth piece. Finally women won this battle and got the right. Regarding the above rights, the role of the press in Tamilnadu was much higher than the press of the rest of India. Madras was the first presidency in India, in which the women got the right to vote and representation. One section of the liberal press prior to independence urged not for special reservation for but for equal representation for women, whereas the other section demanded for increased representation and special representation for women. But both the sections worked for the enhancement of women’s franchise.

In the third stage, women demanded for the universal adult suffrage. The press in Tamilnadu generated valuable public opinion in favour of the said right. In spite of the support of the press, the British Government was not ready to give the right. Only after independence, the Constitution of India assured the full pledged voting right to women. The hardly achieved voting right brought several achievements in the society.
The idea of making a legal provision for reserving seats for women in the Parliament and State Assemblies came into being during Rajeev Gandhi’s tenure as the Prime Minister of India when the Panchayat Raj Act, 1992 (73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment) came into effect granting not less then 33% reservation to women in the Panchayat Raj Institutions or local bodies. The Bill in its Current form envisages reserving 181 seats (out of 543 seats) in the Indian Parliament for women. Securing 33% reservation for women in opening the doors of opportunity for political empowerment to almost 50% of our population has been a dream for many visionaries in India. If the bill gets cleared it will go a long way in ensuring political equality through active participation of woman from both urban and rural areas. At present women are able to become the Councilors, Chairpersons and Mayors of the local bodies, Ministers, Chief Ministers, Governors and the President of India.

Regarding social protection of women, in the foregoing study, much importance is given to three legal proceedings, Child Marriage Restraint Bill, Prevention of Immoral Traffic Bill and Abolition of Devadasi Bill. Among the Bills, the first and third Bills received blend of extreme reactions from the press. In spite of equal opposition from the conservative press, the two Bills were enacted into Law. Because of the continuity of the conservative opposition, the liberal press worked as the watch dogs for the violations, whereas the second one received unanimous support from the entire press. Even though the Government of India was not interested, the Bill became Law, only because of the longtime pressure made by the liberal press and public opinion. The press worked hard to create public awareness on the Acts than persuading the government for their enactment.

At present, the child marriage almost vanished from the soil of Tamilnadu. No Hindu temple in Tamilnadu is having the troop of devadasis now. But the day to day instances witness the existence of immoral traffic in women. The Law failed to curtail the practice of prostitution.

The liberal press gave much concern over the Bills which had equal opposition. Fearing of the challenging opposition from the conservative press, the liberal press worked hard for long time for the proper enforcement of the Laws and for the positive change in the individuals. At the same time the liberal press didn’t care
much about the enforcement of Laws, which were unanimously supported by the press. It is a fact that the challenged Laws are being enforced successfully even now whereas the unanimously supported Law is facing series of serious violations today.

The continuous efforts of the press made the makers of the Constitution of India in favour of the women community. The press and public opinion placed equality as the root of the Constitution of India. They tried to ensure liberty, equality and dignity of all the citizens of India. To ensure this equality, the Constitution of India eliminated almost all discrimination based on caste, creed, sex or religion. It accepted in principle the equality of men and women. The Article 14 of the Constitution confers equal rights and opportunities on men and women in the political, economic and social spheres. Article 14 empowered the State to make affirmative discrimination in favour of women. Similarly, Article 15 prohibited discrimination against any person on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, and place of birth or any of these. Article 15 (3) stated that nothing in this Article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for women and children. Article 16 provides for equality of opportunities in matter of public appointments for all citizens; Article 16 (2) guaranteed that no citizen shall on grounds of sex, among other grounds, be ineligible for, or discriminated in respect of employment or office under the state.

Article 39 stipulates that the State shall direct its policy towards providing men and women equally the right to means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work; Article 42 directs the State to make provisions for ensuring just and humane condition of work and maternity relief; and Article 51 (A) (e) imposes a Fundamental Duty on every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. To make this de-jure equality into a de-facto one, many policies and programmes were put into action from time to time, besides enacting and enforcing special legislation, in favour of Indian women.

Eventhough the Constitution of India guaranteed equality as a Fundamental Right, the various Religious Personal Laws followed by different communities deny equality to women. The press opined that women are entitled to legal equality and it is the duty of the state to ensure that women are not discriminated. The press motivated women’s movement in constructive work for legal protection for
women. Its motivation served as one of the factors for the enactment of series of Legislations concerning women to reinforce the provisions enshrined in the constitution.

The Government of India enacted both women-specific and women-related legislations regularly to safeguard the rights and interests of women, besides protecting against social discrimination, violence and atrocities and also prevent social evils like child marriages, dowry, rape, practice of sati etc. The government enacted more than forty legislations having direct or indirect bearing on women. The Government of India has reviewed and amended these Acts from time to time to take care of the interests of women in the changing situations and societal demands and public opinion created by the liberal Indian press.

The women were not treated economically independent at the dawn of twentieth century. They were considered as unfit for possession and profession. They were denied property rights. The liberal press acted as one of the message bearers for the property right of women particularly the widows. Because of the voice, the women community managed to get some relief from the Acts of 1937 and 1947. Even the Constitution of India didn’t provide the absolute property right to women. But at present the women can reap the benefit of full fledged property right after the passing of the Women's Property Act of 1989 and the amendment of Hindu laws in 2005. These efforts removed gender inequalities in the inheritance of agricultural land, and made Hindu women’s land rights legally equal to men’s. It provides women security by giving them birth rights in joint family property that cannot be willed away by fathers. It signals the daughters and sons are equally important members of the parental family. It creates a permanent link with her parental family. This can enhance women’s self-confidence and social worth. The press motivated the public representatives to make such fruitful Legislations and cultured the minds of the people in accepting them through awareness campaign.

Before twentieth century, women were household workers and agricultural labourers from time immemorial. But they were not treated as employees. Even the government records didn’t treat them as bread earners. Women were usually restricted by the geographical limitations too in the field of employment. They were
also forced to compromise on emoluments, the earning differentials. Their earnings were considered merely supplementary to their husbands’ income. The liberal Indian press worked hard to educate the conservative people about the necessity of women employment and induced the love for employment in the minds of educated women. It also suggested various kinds of jobs such as teaching, nursing etc. for women. The efforts of the press resulted in a great awareness on women’s employment. Apart from agricultural sector, women put their steps towards employment in industrial and service sectors. After entering into the field of employment, women had to carry a double burden that of the home and the work place. In order to tackle this double burden, the press in Tamilnadu felt that women should be recognized as independent economic entities with the option of work on par with men. It urged that women should be given every convenience to enable them to work. These would comprise of marriage and maternity benefits, crèches, nursery and kindergarten schools, as also labour-saving gadgets at affordable prices. The efforts of the press along with the feminists resulted in positive changes.

The national data collection agencies accept the fact that there was a serious under-estimation of women's contribution as workers. Various factors including the press strived hard in changing this condition. At present, a large percentage of women involves in various works. The women teachers occupy about seventy five percentage of employment in elementary school education in Tamilnadu. They are showing their talents in almost all the fields.

In addition to this, the press of those days recommended co-operative movements for the economic betterment of women. It suggested such movements as poverty elimination methods. To lead a dignified life, the poor women started moving towards co-operative movement. Such advancement evolutionarily gets transformed into women self help groups now.

At the end of nineteenth century, women’s education was uncommon one by its absence. The only class who seemed to have been taught to read was the devadasi girls attached to the temples in Tamilnadu. The Christian missionaries were the first to take interest in female education. The press had the opinion that the education of women occupied top priority amongst various measures taken to improve
the status of women in the country. The papers bravely visualized their opinions by gathering the momentum in favour of educating girls, though the orthodox sections of the community opposed it. The papers tried hard to make the society trust education as a powerful agent of progress.

The press voiced for compulsory female education and free female education because it had a strong idea that the education would be a pre-requisite for women’s liberation and development. The press felt happy to expose the educational achievement of women, whether they were small or big. It persuaded the government to establish more number of schools and colleges for women. It consoled the parents not to hesitate to send their girls to missionary and co-educational institutions. Almost it succeeded in its efforts. The government announced free elementary education even before independence. At present the government has decided that every girl child is eligible for free education from standard VI to XII. The girls of Tamilnadu effectively capitalize the privileges given to them. In the quality of education they have already overtaken men. Regarding quantity, they are almost closer to men now.

Because of the awareness generated by the press and by the public opinion, the status of widows changed dramatically. They were freed from the dark corners of the houses and the darkest customs of the society. Their white saris were coloured by the press ink. They can stand on their own foot because of the property right and employment opportunities provided to them. The re-marriages of young widows are legally recognized and more than that commonly accepted by the public. We can not think about these positive changes without the efforts made by the press.

Because of the economic development through the possession and profession rights, the wives gained enhanced status in the family. The liberal ideas imparted by the press made this change. Regarding working women, their work pains are doubled because the husbands are not ready to share their wives’ household duties. At the same time, homes are not at all prisons to women. They can watch the outer world with the help of mass media and move freely into the society.

The press cared for women’s health when no body cared for. The medical records of those days made known that for every three men who benefited of these facilities only one woman did so. The importance given to women’s sickness was
significantly less than of men. The press created health awareness among women regarding most vulnerable problems like maternal mortality and menstrual problem. It pressured the government to arrange health amenities to women. Because of the awareness, the scenario has changed. At present, the maternity hospitals outnumber other hospitals in Tamilnadu. The public are in a frame of mind to give much importance to health of pregnant ladies and child bearing.

The women performers of stage and silver screen of those days were considered under-disciplined human beings. But the press succeeded in breaking this unacceptable truth. It was continuously involved in publishing the news of women performers. It also brought name and fame for them. Inspired by the fame and popularity given by the media of those days particularly the press, the parents came forward sending their girls to the performing arts and silver screen. Due to the publicity of the press, the sabhas experienced the houseful boards for the programmes performed by the female artists.

More over, the press didn’t fail to applaud the budding women leaders of that time. It not only served as a stimulus for the women leaders but also motivation for the women aspirants. The papers allotted their columns generously whenever there was a chance to greet the women. The liberal press always stood by the side of Muthulakshmi Reddy, the first women medical practitioner of the state. She achieved many heights in politics and public life with the motivation of the press. The liberal papers strongly supported her positive initiatives at the Madras Legislative Council. When Durgabai took initiatives for the Salt Satyagraha in Madras, only few leaders and the nationalist press supported her efforts. With the support of the press she bravely conducted the satyagraha and became the Dictator of Madras City Congress. When Rukmani Lakshmipathi was involved as a lone women cadre in Vedaranyam Salt March, the nationalist press in Tamilnadu decided to encourage her patriotic efforts. When she was arrested as the first woman in South India during the Civil Disobedience Movement, the press popularised her efforts and made her as a role model for the rest of the Indian women. The press succeeded in making Ammu Swaminathan as a Congress candidate instead of already announced male candidate in the general elections of 1945. The press hailed the appointment of Kamakodi Natarajan as a first
Indian women teacher in the Department of History at the Madras University College. When the learned women stepped forward to field of press, the other papers didn’t consider them as professional rivals. They welcomed and motivated them through their writings.

The women are able to reach the considerable position after crossing a number of inhuman hardships. Constitutional provisions and the legislations enacted by the government to safeguard the interests of women have been bringing slow but effective change in social, economic and political status of women. At present, the women in Tamilnadu can perform their duties in various positions. The women can achieve major and respectable commanding positions only because of the awareness and bravery generated by the press.

The press acted as a guardian of women in public places. It made known the atrocities against women which took place in public places such as trains. The papers acted as the advocates for women’s legal protection against such crimes. They tried to train women to know about legal protective measures enacted for them. The press in Tamilnadu today, followed the same method for the legal protection of today’s women.

Prior to independence in Tamilnadu, the press had done its journalistic duties pleasingly. It had clearly made known the feminist problems to the society. It successfully created awareness among the public regarding women issues. It generated favourable public opinion in support of women. If any obstacle arose from the society, it tried to console the public. If not possible, it condemned the conservative section furiously. The major portion of the press shouldered the liberal thoughts regarding the emancipation of women. The press served as the presser and persuader of the government whenever the legal implications were needed for women. It didn’t show any hesitation in attacking the authorities, when they stood not for the women’s cause. It carried the matters of women as the symbol of social recognition. On the whole, the press in Tamilnadu particularly from 1905 A.D. to 1947 A.D., succeeded immediately or after some times in most of its attempts regarding women’s liberation except few issues such as purdah and prostitution.
No body can deny the positive development of women in various fields after Indian independence. Various internal and external factors caused this positive change. Among them, the press in Tamilnadu served as one of the prominent factors. The core services of the major fraction of the press in Tamilnadu during the first half of the twentieth century for the liberation of women were planning and building the standards of life for women, using the available resources for their betterment, helping to achieve their goals in life, motivating them to participate in the decision making process, making them stand on their own legs and educating them about awareness of their rights and duties to build positive attitude in life.

The press always came forward to the rescue of feminine character and dignity, whenever they suffered setbacks. It performed as the internal as well as the external factor. Then and there the press succeeded in creating awareness, consciousness and unclutteredness internally and induced the authorities to make legal protections, economic prosperity, educational opportunities, legislative measures and other favourable platforms externally for the emancipation of women. It made the public admit that there would be no chance of welfare of the country unless the condition of women would be improved similar to a bird's impossibility of flying on one wing. Thus, the press laboured through variegated means and brought about liberation for women in all spheres of life on par with men.