Chapter I

The Press and the Participation of Women in Politics
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The politics in India found a radical change in the nineteenth century; the political movements against foreign rule came to life; though the political scenario changed, the status of women remained unchanged. The participation of men in political movements against British rule was more. The women found it tricky to participate in the national movement due to social restrictions. Generally, those opposed to women's participation in politics spoke of their fear of family disintegration\(^1\) and of the effect of rough and tumble politics in the tender nature of women.\(^2\) Inspite of these conservative views and restrictions, some women came presumptuous to participate in politics boldly. They faced many problems initially. But later, they held some positions in the movements. The women, who participated in the political activities equal to men, started fighting for their rights gradually. They started movements for women’s suffrage and female representation in the legislatures. The similar situation prevailed in Tamilnadu also. The press exposed the women who conquered the social restrictions and came to politics, their activities and the problems they faced. Because of the influence of the press, more female faces came forward to take part in politics. The women, who were considered once as slaves in politics slowly but surely became free and participated in the political movements. An understanding of the political system serves as a prerequisite for political involvement. The press in Tamilnadu tried to pass on such knowledge to the women community.\(^3\) Political rights conferred by democratic system serve as opportunities for the citizen to participate. If there are significant differences in


resources and motivation, new participatory opportunities can mean more inequality in participation. People with the resource and motivation skilfully use the opportunities available to them.\(^4\) Prior to independence in Tamilnadu, the period made opportunities for women’s political participation. The press motivated them to participate vigorously. But their participation was meagre. The most important reason for the less involvement of the women in politics was the social environment which restricted the women to come out of their private sphere and participate in public life.\(^5\)

By giving importance to the women community, the press served as one of the psychological booster which was needed for their political participation. Subramania Bharathi, the national versifier wrote in the Swadesamitran that, until the women came forward to take part in politics and administration, there would not be liberation for the nation.\(^6\) Such exposures in the columns became the stimulus for the women’s participation in the political movements. Their participation in the National movement, Dravidian movement and the Leftist movement are to be elaborately discussed through the eyes of the press.

1. Women and the National Movement

Women’s participation in the Nationalist movement in Tamilnadu was not a major force in the history of that period. This however, does not suggest that their participation was not significant or did not negate the individual women’s merit or achievement. The nature and extent of female participation in the nationalist movement can be categorised at three levels. First, women took part of the general mass of people who joined satyagraha. Such as women were enthused over particular issue or were caught up in the excitement generated by any one satyagraha. They were not involved with the Congress or with any local or provincial organisation. A large proportion of the women who participated in the nationalist movement were simply part of general public.\(^7\)

\(^4\) Ibid., pp. ix-x.
\(^5\) Ibid., p. 5.
\(^7\) Vijay Agnew, Elite Women in Indian Politics, New Delhi, 1979, p. 10.
Secondly, small groups of women were committed to one particular feature associated with the nationalist struggle. This would include the women who took part in the social reform actively allied with Gandhian politics such as living in ashrams or being involved in a campaign for *khadi* and village industries or with Harijans. Their involvement was limited in terms of issue and its geographical locale.  

The third category consisted of a very small number of women who participated in all aspects of nationalist activity. This was an elite group of women whose commitment was not limited to the politics of a particular area but was attracted to the movement in its entirety. The number of women who were totally committed to the nationalist activity was not in equal proportion to male politicians or even to the total female population. Women in leadership were few and were given honoured status in the movement.

The anti-colonial struggle attracted the women from various castes and communities. The issues caught up in the discussion of women’s presence and role in politics – such as the desire to counteract criticisms of Hindu social organisations or the question of role definition were the problems associated with Hindu conventions and traditions. A number of European women such as Annie Besant and Margrat Cousins were involved in various issues of the period. The first eighteen years of the twentieth century were period of greatest influence and kudos for Annie Besant in India; she was the President of the Theosophical society from 1907 till her death in 1933 and served as the Congress President during 1917-1918. Her participation in the nationalist movement did indicate to Indian society that political roles were obtainable to women.

It is without doubt that the national movement was the most important cause of the women’s emergence in the socio-political life of the country. It served as an important forum for social reform and modification in women’s status and roles. They emerged with a common purpose that was the freedom of the country. It became

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12 Vijay Agnew, *op.cit.*, p. 11.
the matter of survival. All reformers including Gandhi invited women’s participation both as an opportunity for their own growth as an individual and as a force for the national movement\textsuperscript{14}. It is difficult to write on any aspect of the lives of Indian women during the second half of the freedom struggle without referring to Gandhi and the impact of his call to women to join the freedom struggle\textsuperscript{15}. His overpowering voice in the movement and his views on women influenced women’s positioning in it. He was able to mobilise a large number of women, irrespective of castes and class lines, to play an energetic role in the freedom struggle\textsuperscript{16}. The battle for independence found women participating in good measure against the British, against social suppression, against legal inhibition and economic deprivation\textsuperscript{17}.

\textbf{Contribution of Dancing Girls}

Because of the partition of Bengal of 1905, the Indian masses were overflowing with anger. As a part of this, the Swadeshi Movement got strengthened. Using of swadeshi goods and boycotting of foreign goods were insisted. The self-boosted women also joined their hands with men in the movement. The press gave extensive exposure and more importance to women’s participation. For example, the \textit{Swadesamitran} reported the contribution of women in Mymensing of East Bengal, that the dancing girls\textsuperscript{18} had totally abandoned the use of foreign articles and even foreign liquors. They went in processions, singing swadeshi songs from house to house to collect contributions for the National University in Northern part of India. The police were closely watching women’s movements and prohibited such processions on the pretext that they would lead to a riot. The Swadeshi enthusiasm in these women and the malice of the government were both beyond description\textsuperscript{19}. Because of the enthusiasm generated by these ladies, the district started playing leading role in the freedom struggle. The government considered it as the centre of political agitation in

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\textsuperscript{15} Karuna Chamana, \textit{Gandhi, women Roles and the Freedom Struggle in Gender and Nation}, New Delhi, 2001, p. 294.


\textsuperscript{17} Krishna Iyer, \textit{Human right to be Women} in Kusum (ed.), \textit{Women March Towards Dignity}, New Delhi, 1923, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{18} The prostitutes in Mymensing were otherwise known as dancing girls.

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East Bengal. To curtail the inflaming national spirit, the government decided with bifurcation of the district into two. The motive for the publication of this news was that if the Swadeshi movement could have an awakening among the dancing women of Mymensing, the women who were looked down by the society, it had to find out full awakening among the rest of the women society.

**Ash Wednesday of the Indians**

The partition of Bengal was observed as black day by the people of Bengal every year. On that day, people woke up early, took bath and had zilch to eat and drink. The shops remained closed. The women were seen without wearing jewels. The women boycotted their basic work, cooking. The men and women assembled in large numbers in grounds and they preached about the evil activities of the government. The paper *Dravida Deepam* registered these Bengal facts and gave more importance to the meaningful activities of the Bengali women. It gave the title fittingly as 'the Ash Wednesday of the Indians'. The purpose of this paper in publishing these matters such as national feeling of the women, who lived faraway in Calcutta, their sacrifices, and their boycott of jewels which was considered as the symbol of culture, was to initiate the women of Tamilnadu to join the national movement. It gave a new idea of participating in the national movement to the women even staying at home.

**Congress Women’s Conference**

At this juncture, the Madras Session of the Indian National Congress was planned to be held in December 1908. It consisted of the Women’s Conference also. This was the first of its kind in India. To look after the works of the women’s conference, a group of well known women of the city was constituted. The *Madras Standard* invited women of all standards of Madras State in large numbers to attend the conference. It added that the women’s participation in the conference would

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20 Letter from the Government of Bengal and Assam to the Secretary to State for Indian Affairs, 22 October 1907.
21 Home Dept. (Public A), Proceeding Nos. 138-139, November 1907, National Archives of India (hereafter NAI).
illuminate the darkness that prevailed in the country.\textsuperscript{25} Thus, it directly encouraged the women to take part in national politics. In the same way, the Swadesamitran wrote that the success of the conference lied in the participation of the women with the motive of obtaining national spirit.\textsuperscript{26} Even though the press voiced loudly for women’s political participation, they couldn’t come out from the social clutches. The women comparatively meagre in numbers participated in the conference.

**Home Rule Movement**

There were one or two scattered incidents to prove the nationalism of women before the advent of Annie Besant, an Irish woman. The women in Tamilnadu played a vital role in the national movement only from the launching of Home Rule Movement by her. The press in Tamilnadu filled the columns with the activities of the women not only to induce the spirit of nationalism but also induce the need of the women’s participation in all the spheres of society.

Until the commencement of the First World War, Annie Besant, was not interested in participating in Indian politics. She was busy with the activities of the Theosophical Society at Adyar ever since 1905 when Colonel Olcott handed over the responsibility of the publication of the Theosophist to her.\textsuperscript{27} With the outbreak of the world war, however, she entered into politics from religion, to Home Rule from theosophy.\textsuperscript{28} In the initial stages, some papers opposed her move. Even Subramania Bharathi who always welcomed the women liberation criticised her activities in the India that she made efforts to establish a society which should be competitive for Gopala Krishna Gokale’s Servants of India Society with the plan of preventing the patriotic spirit of the youth.\textsuperscript{29} He called her as ‘Anniya Besant’ (Besant, the alien).\textsuperscript{30} In the Vijaya, Bharathi inscribed that she had been directing her power and influence against the new movement of swaraj in India.\textsuperscript{31} He did not show any sympathy for she

\begin{footnotes}
\item[25] Ibid., P. 840.
\item[26] Swadesamitran, Madras, 2 December 1908.
\item[27] Home(Political) proceedings, No. 247(Secret), Part A, March 1913, NAI.
\item[29] India, Madras, 31 October 1908.
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was a woman. Although he criticised her activities, he didn’t show his opposition against her political participation.

Annie Besant drew up a programme for her work. She organised a meeting of his followers, the Theosophists at Adayar in September 1913 and put forward a four fold plan of reforms for religious practice, education, social custom and politics. On 21st September 1913, another meeting was held of those who were working for education or social or political reform. Several matters on the theme were discussed, and the members agreed to do everything for the betterment of the society.32 It was hoped many dedicated Hindus would join the forum. At a joint conference of the Madras Congress and the Mahajana Sabha on 21st September 1913, Annie Besant made it clear that England would give to India what it had given to South Africa. Thus, a woman took the leading role in the political field of India.

By starting two newspapers, the *New India*, a daily and the *Commonweal*, a weekly, she popularised the demand for the self-government, i.e. Home Rule. The press played a pivotal role in popularising the emerging female leader, Annie Besant. The press created the public opinion in favour of the political ideas of this lady.33 She attended the Madras session of Indian National Congress in December 1914. She pleaded for self-government not as a reward but as a right. The press generously allocated their columns in welcoming her participation and plea.34 This created a political awareness in the minds of the women community. The *South Indian Mail* from Madurai gave vivid publicity to her plea. It wrote “there is no doubt that the success of the last session of the Indian National Congress is mainly due to the question of the Home rule League adumbrated by Mrs. Besnat. Her organ ‘New India’, her matchless eloquence, her facile pen, her versatility, her vast erudition, her firm conviction and her love of India are at the disposal of her adopted motherland. She is a great asset in the political arena. No Indian needs to be ashamed of her what ever may be his personal difference.”35 Prior to that, the press didn’t give such importance to any

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33 *Swadesamitran*, Madras, 25 March 1915.
34 *New India*, Madras, 2 January 1915.
35 *South Indian Mail*, Madurai, 10 January 1916.
other women. The paper published this matter not only to praise Annie Besant but also to create political awakening among the Indian women.

She realised that unless a powerful movement was launched, her efforts would not be crowned with success. To begin with, she thought of associating with Indian National Congress with her work. She approached Dadabhai Naoroji, and Feroz Shah Metha for the said purpose. But Feroz Shah Metha wrote back to her that her opinions were so much religious and they differed in educational and social questions.36 She was let down by the approach of the Indian National Congress.

**Besant and Tilak**

On 24th September 1915, she made a formal announcement of forming the Home Rule League to work both in India and in England.37 On 25th December 1915, she called a meeting to discuss the establishment of Home Rule League. Surendra Nath Banarjee, the prominent Congress leader presided over the meeting. As per the suggestion made in the meeting, the foundation of the Home Rule League was postponed.38 But Balagangadar Tilak established the Home Rule League on 28th April 1916 in Pune and defined its objects in attaining self-government within the British Empire by all constitutional means.39 Prior to that, Annie Besant made efforts to compromise with Tilak to work together for the Home-rule. She failed in her attempts. When a women leader’s efforts ended in vain, the *Indian Patriot* published news in favour of the womanhood. The press acted as the stimulus for the old women, Annie Besant had to go ahead, when the sole responsibility of failure was forced on her.40

**Home Rule League in Madras**

Annie Besant, however founded the Home rule League for India in England on 7th June 1916, to educate the British statesmen and to place before the demand of the Congress for Home Rule.41 Before starting the same in Indian soil, she toured all over India and spread the ideas of Home Rule every where. On 3rd September 1916, the Home Rule League was inaugurated at Adyar in Madras with Annie Besant

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36 RajKumar, *op.cit.* p. 74.
37 Premalatha P.N., *op.cit.*, p. 82.
38 *New India*, Madras, 4 January 1916.
39 Premalatha P.N., *op.cit.*, p. 82.
as its President. The press of the Madras Presidency hailed the women’s presidency, which is unusual to this soil.\textsuperscript{42}

As Annie Besant was becoming popular through the press and her intensive travel, her reputation among the youth in the Indian Nation Congress was rapidly increased. When the senior members of the party said that Annie Besant did not possess ample knowledge of India, beyond Theosophical society, the \textit{Indian Patriot} stated that we couldn’t deny that she had the power to influence the youth, many of whom were drawn to her by her various virtues.\textsuperscript{43} This served as the back-up for the budding women leaders and sheltered their aspirations from early demise. The press continued publishing the ideas of Annie Besant regularly. She revealed her ideas about indentured female labourers and against the British rule in South Africa, “the women are not safe, nor are the children, and neither is the property”. The \textit{Madras Standard} reproduced her audacious ideas without spoiling the inner spirit of women’s upliftment.\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{Increase of Security Amount}

Annie Besant utilised her papers to the fullest extent to amplify the tempo and sharpness of her propaganda. She published a series of articles entitled ‘Winning the self government’ in her weekly, the \textit{Commonweal}. Her write-ups, speeches and activities irritated the government sternly. The Government of Madras found sufficient reasons to move against her and she was warned to desist from her centre of action. She paid no heed. She continued her propaganda even more vigorously.\textsuperscript{45} In order to dampen her activities a sum of Rs. 2,000/- was demanded towards security on 5th June 1916 under Section 4 (1) of the Press Act of 1910 by the government.\textsuperscript{46} It provoked her to launch a vigorous campaign against the Press Act itself.

The government on the other hand forfeited her security and a new security of Rs. 5,000/- was demanded from the Vasantha Press, Adyar, where the \textit{New India} was

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Fortnightly Report}, First half of September 1916.
\textsuperscript{45} RajKumar, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{46} Home Dept. (Political) Proceedings No. 247 (Secret) Part A, March 1918, NAI.
printed.\textsuperscript{47} She paid the money under protest as the order was found to be illegal.\textsuperscript{48} This news exposed the bravery of the old lady among Indians.

Further an enhanced security of Rupees 10,000/- was demanded from the \textit{New India}.\textsuperscript{49} She approached the High Court of Madras to seek permission for appealing in the Privy Council against the raising of the Security Deposit. But, her demand was discarded. In this critical situation the press voiced for Annie Besant. The \textit{Vijaya Vikata Dutan} of Madras pointed out her failure and felt sorry for the same.\textsuperscript{50} The \textit{Maha Vikata Dutan} of Madras mentioned the Bengal precedent regarding the paper \textit{Comrade} and expressed its doubt and fear that the Madras High court should follow the Bengal precedent regarding Annie Besant’s matter. It further remarked that the Press Act had given very large power to the executive officers; even the Privy Council couldn’t do any thing unless the Act was replaced.\textsuperscript{51}

The \textit{Quami Report}, an Urdu paper published from Madras condemned the action of the government that it was adverse to Annie Besant and when the government was displeased on one’s matter, the punishment had to naturally follow. It criticised the unnatural and forced punishment on her.\textsuperscript{52} The \textit{Swadesamitran} condemned the action of the government against the old women was undesirable.\textsuperscript{53} The \textit{Andhra Patrika} prayed Lord Pentaland, the Governor of Madras to follow liberal policy against her.\textsuperscript{54} The \textit{Lokopakari} of Madras objected the action of the government in having declared the security paid by Annie Besant to have been forfeited, without previously giving her an opportunity to know the nature of the so called offence.\textsuperscript{55} The \textit{Dravidabhimani} observed that she was attacking the government pertinaciously and fearlessly.\textsuperscript{56} Though lot of difficulties encircled her, Annie Besant didn’t renounce her self-confidence.

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\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Ibid.} \\
\textsuperscript{49} Home Department (Political) Proceedings No. 247 (Secret) Part A, March 1918, NAI. \\
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Swadesamitran}, Madras, 31 August 1916. \\
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Prohibition Activities of Bombay and Central Provinces

In 1916, the Government of Bombay forbade Annie Besant from incoming into the province. The Government of the Central Province also followed Bombay Province. This unwise action of the two governments added fuel to the fire and stirred the public opinion in her favour. The public of Bombay conducted a protest meeting against the order on 7th December 1916. The Swadesamitran in order to give importance to the woman leader, received the news through telegram, and published the same on the next day. The Hindu observed that the actions of the Governments of Bombay and the Central Province against Annie Besant as illegal. It also published the resolution passed in the Adyar Theosophical Society against the prohibitory order of the Government of the Central Province. It added that the government’s order was the infringement of the Proclamation of Queen Victoria of 1858. Such a support from the reputed daily like The Hindu made the women aspirants bolder.

The South Indian Mail observed when the people had not yet recovered from the jolt caused by the Bombay Government’s Order; the Central Provinces Government’s Prohibitory Order had aggravated the situation. The government violated the religious neutrality by prohibiting an old woman to take part in the Theosophical meeting. It was felt painfully that even a microscopic liberty was taken away from an old lady in the name of Press Act of 1910 and the Defence of India Act of 1915. It would affect the nation directly. The paper requested the public associations of India should organise immediate agitations throughout the nation against the order of Central Provinces. The Desabakthan, a Tamil paper published from Madras observed that the credit of letting the world know that the press in India was in insecure

57 Home (Political) Proceedings No. 247, Part A, March 1918, NAI.
58 Swadesamitran, Madras, 8 December 1916
59 “We must deprecate in the stranger manner, this ill judged action taken by sir. Benjamin Robertson, who is reputed to be an able and just administrator, we regret that he should have given way to panic and sought to put the Act into force against Mrs. Besant. The Bombay Government’s unjustifiable step in prohibiting Mrs. Besant from entering that province has aroused the keenest resentment throughout India and has incidentally drawn attention to the grave danger to the liberty of the subject involved in the Defence of India Act and its application. The Central Provinces Government’s prohibitory order is all the more inexplicable”.

-The Hindu, Madras, 1 November 1916.
60 The Hindu, Madras, 4 November 1916.
position went to Annie Besant, and for that she deserved the gratitude of Indians.\textsuperscript{62} Thus, the old woman’s pride was portrayed through the sufferings.

The \textit{Swadesamitran} observed that the Defence of India Act of 1915 was enacted to be used only for the military purposes and the Government viewed her as an armed force. Thus, the paper characterised women into a military force.\textsuperscript{63} It added that the Act was misapplied on Annie Besant and the action of the government would create wrong impression that they were unnecessarily alarmed.\textsuperscript{64} In order to show its support to her, the \textit{Vidya Banu} of Madras republished the same matter.\textsuperscript{65} The \textit{Prapancha Mitran} of Thiruchirappalli also reproduced the above matter in order to show its strong protest against the government.\textsuperscript{66} The \textit{Lokopakari} condemned the action of the Government of the Central Provinces in having prevented Annie Besant from going there and observed that the haphazard application of the Acts to her.\textsuperscript{67} The \textit{Andhra Patrika}, a Telugu paper from Madras censured the action taken by the Government of the Central Provinces that it would not create peace in the country, but it was merely a measure against an old woman.\textsuperscript{68} The paper opined that the Defence of India act was basically unlawful.\textsuperscript{69} The penalty would only serve to perpetuate her name, for she had been punished for no crime.\textsuperscript{70}

A public meeting was held at Victoria Edward Hall in Madurai on 12\textsuperscript{th} November 1916 as a sign of protest against the prohibition laid on Annie Besant. A resolution was passed in favour of her, that a prohibition order, which had to be forced on the war criminals, was forced on an individual even on an old woman. \textit{The South Indian Mail} reserved its columns for publishing the above resolution.\textsuperscript{71}

The Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces had issued an explanation of the prohibitory order. \textit{The Hindu} criticised his explanation that it was a confused and a contradictory statement. It wrote that Annie Besant was capable of

\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 1978.
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 1980.
speaking inflammatory and as tending to turn violent, but nobody need to be afraid of her skill while she was in the theosophical travel. The New India thanked the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces for his success in creating a tremendous stir, a violent political and religious agitation and had immensely increased her power and popularity. The Swadesamitran remarked its frustration among the explanation. The Vijaya Vikatan observed its sadness on the Government of India’s frequent orders against Annie Besant. It added that the Government of Britain should save the old lady from the hands of the unlawful Acts like it saved Belgium from the hands of Germany. Besant’s New India openly criticised the Government of Bombay for not giving any explanation regarding prohibition of her from entering into Bombay. It found out and revealed the reason for not giving any explanation was very simple; there was no light to be thrown, nor any explanation to offer.

But some papers wrote in favour of the government’s action. The pro-British papers like Wednesday Review wrote that the action was not against Annie Besant as a leader of Theosophical Society, it was not a crusade and the matter was construed as religious one. Besides Tamil papers, other regional papers also supported Annie Besant in this matter. This showed that the women, who came to public life, would not be left alone. 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 stimulus to women to join in the national movement in large.

**Lucknow Session of Indian National Congress, 1916**

Bala Gangadar Tilak and Annie Besant who acted separately in the name of their own Home Rule Leagues, decided to act together. The Lucknow session of Indian National Congress in 1916, passed a resolution recognising the Home Rule

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75 “Alas, Mrs. Besant is trying to plead for the helpless has become a victim to a calumny. Nevertheless, all these will have no effect at all. In ancient days Jesus Christ shed blood for the sake of sinners. Can we on that account treat him with contempt? We are ashamed at the Governments in India frequently passing orders against Mrs.Besant” —Vijaya Vikatan, Madras, November 1915, MNNPR., Vol. II, 1915, p. 2076.
League of Tilak and Annie Besant as a body affiliated to the Indian National Congress and authorizing them to carry on a vigorous propaganda in favour of the Congress-League scheme.\textsuperscript{79} Annie Besent succeeded in bringing harmony and unity between extremists and moderates through Lucknow Congress Session.

**Annie Besant and the Student Community**

Though Annie Besant faced many problems like *New India* Security case, prohibition orders issued by the Governments of Bombay and Central Province, she continued her attacks on government’s policies. To draw the students to the agitation, she convened a protest meeting of students at Madras in 1917, against the failure of 2,800 students at the secondary school leaving certificate and the intermediate examinations. Denouncing the government and the University authorities for their reactionary measures, she wrote that the authorities in order to keep India down, wanted a strangle higher education. As a result many students joined the Home Rule Movement. The students raised the slogan “we are not asking for Home Rule, we demand it.”\textsuperscript{80}

**The Internment of Annie Besant and the Reactions of the Press**

The entry of a large number of students into the agitation alarmed Lord Pentland, the Governor of Madras who decided to curb the activities of Annie Besant. He warned the students not to ally with her and not to take part in political meetings.\textsuperscript{81} She strongly condemned this action of the government through the *New India*.\textsuperscript{82} Lord Pentland prohibited her on 7\textsuperscript{th} June 1917 from writing or speaking or publishing anything political in the *New India*.\textsuperscript{83} He passed another order on the same day, which forced her and her co-workers B.P.Wadia and G.S.Arunale to take up their residents in any one of the following six places: Nilgiris District, Coimbatore District, Bellary, Palani Hills, Shevary Hills and the Municipal town of Vizagapatnam within fourteen days.

\textsuperscript{81} G.O. Ms. No. 559, Home (Education), 1 May 1917, TNA; Home Rule Movement 1914-1920, p. 277, NAI.
\textsuperscript{82} *New India*, Madras, 1 June 1917.
\textsuperscript{83} G.O. Ms. No. 774, Public (Confidential), 7 June 1917, TNA.
days. Another Government Order was issued on 14th June 1917 reducing the period fixed from fourteen to seven days to leave Madras and Chingleput District for their place of confinement. Obeying the order, they selected Ootacamund in Nilgiris District, and left Madras. There, they hoisted flag of Home Rule League. The District Magistrate issued an order under section 144 Cr.P.C. prohibiting them from hoisting the flag. Despite such restrictions, Ootacamund at once became the centre of political activities and a place of pilgrimage for the Home Rulers.

Their internments earned more popularity and support for Home Rule Movement. Almost all the papers censured their internments. The Hindu, in its editorial described it as a brutal and unconstitutional act of aggression upon Indian constitutional agitation. Thus, it encouraged a campaign against the government’s action. The Hindu Nesan, a Tamil paper of Madras echoed the feelings of the masses as there were several public meetings conducted against these internments, resolutions were passed and the telegrams were sent. According to the Swadesamitran, protest meetings were conducted against these internments at Thanjavur, Madurai, Kaniyur and Sangagiri. There was a ladies meeting held at Sangari Durg in which in addition to a resolution of protest against the internments, a Swadesi vow was also taken by all those present. The same paper reproduced the following comments in Tamil published in the Times of Ceylon on the following subject that in the name of suppressing Annie Besant, the government had brought her fame and glory.

The Dravida Patrika from Madras reported about the ladies’ meeting held at Sangari Durg to protest against these internment orders, the President Rukmani Ammal, wife of P. Varadharajulu Naidu, editor of the Prapancha Mitran, said that every man and woman should work for the acquisition of Home Rule for India. Thus,

85 G.O. Ms. No. 785, Public (Confidential), 14 June 1917, TNA.
86 Circular instruction from the acting Chief Secretary, Govt. of Madras to the District Magistrate, Public (Confidential), Ootacamund 19 August 1917, D.O. No. 3191 w/1 in Home Rule Movement, 1914-1920, p. 453; Report on the Administration of the Madras Presidency, 1917-1918, p. ix.
88 The Hindu, Madras, 11 June 1917.
90 Swadesamitran, Madras, 27 June 1917.
91 Ibid.
the journal exposed the emergence of the women as leaders for the cause of the women in the right time.\footnote{Dravida Patrika, Madras, 4 July 1917, MNNPR., Vol. II, 1917, p. 1944.} It added that the efforts of the government made the people furious. Supporting Annie Besant, it noted that if the Government would come forward to know the public opinion through the press, it would help the development of the new fortitude in the country.\footnote{Ibid., 27 June 1917, MNNPR., Vol. II, 1917, p.1893.} The \textit{Andhra Patrika} stated that because of the internment, her fame spread not only in India but also world wide and the spread of her name and fame in belligerent countries against Britain would cause series problems for British Empire. It indicated that the reasonable political agitations could not be put down by any restraint.\footnote{Andhra Patrika, Madras, 28 June 1917, MNNPR., Vol. II, 1917, p. 1903.}

Pattabi Sitharamaya, a notable Congress leader discussed the question whether the members of the Legislative Councils should protest against these internments and resign their seats. \textit{The Hindu} and the \textit{Andhra Patrika} gave vivid coverage to this matter in order to show their agitation against the internments.\footnote{The Hindu, Madras, 26 June 1917; \textit{Andhra Patrika}, Madras, 27 June 1917, MNNPR., Vol. II, 1917, p. 1903.} The \textit{Kaliyuga Varthamani} of Madras strictly blamed the government’s action against her.\footnote{Kaliyuga Varthamani, Madras, 23 June and 7 July, 1917, MNNPR., Vol. II, 1917, p.1995.} Subramania Iyer, one of the leaders of Home Rule League made efforts to collect ‘Besant Fund’ to face the legal expenses against Anne Besant’s internment. The \textit{Andhra Patrika} gave extensive coverage to the matter and remarked that the Besant fund was not for her benefit, it would help the advancement of our country.\footnote{Andhra Patrika, Madras, 29 June, 1917 MNNPR., Vol. II, 1917, pp. 1964-1965.} The \textit{Desabhimani} observed the action of the Government of Madras was deeply regretted, it had outraged the feeling of the most of the people of India and manifestation of such feelings was felt every day at public meetings all over the land.\footnote{Desabhimani, Madras, 30 June 1917, MNNPR., Vol. II, 1917, pp. 1942-1943.}

When most of the papers wrote in favour of Annie Besant some Non-Brahmin Movement oriented papers exposed their views in favour of the government. The \textit{Andhra Prakasika}, a Telugu Non-Brahmin paper justified the internments. At the same time it published two letters of its readers. The readers revealed that they became
the subscribers with the view to encourage the paper, but its writings in support of the Madras internments had filled them with grief and surprise. They felt sorry for the tone of the writings. They pointed out that Annie Besant established Home Rule League and had been trying to bring about reforms in traditional values with the wishes of the people, the spirit with which the paper referred to Annie Besant was improper. They were of opinion that the paper had been thereby doing disservice to the country and to the Non-Brahmins too. They further added that this article created great agitation among the reading public. Although the letters were written against the paper, it published them without bowdlerizing any thing as per press ethics. Thus, even the anti-Besantian paper popularised Annie Besant’s fame with a different style. The papers also gave coverage to the protest meetings against her internment. Another non-Brahmin paper Dravidan criticised the protest meetings as unwise, unjust and seditious. The paper, Non-Brahmin also criticised the agitations and remarked that nobody would follow the Besant’s way to attain Home Rule. But some nationalist papers condemned the writings of the Non-Brahmin papers. The Andhra Patrika asked if the papers would not publish the defects of the administration, how the rulers would know the views of the people. It added that Annie Besant was an advocate to the people. Her articles could not be said to be faulty. It requested the readers of the Non-Brahmin papers, which stood by the side of the government and against her, should not come back from the agitations in favour of her.

When Annie Besant was in internment, some papers published matters worrying about her health. The Hindu observed that she was suffering from serious nervous break-down and it asked the government to release her on health grounds. The Swadesamitran observed that their readers would be pained to hear the news of her ill health. It expected that, on hearing the news atleast the government would cancel the internment order issued against her.

101 Dravidan, Madras, 9 July 1917.
102 Non-Brahmin, Madras, 29 July 1917.
104 The Hindu, Madras, 3 August 1917.
105 Swadesamitran, Madras, 4 August 1917.
Although almost all the journals expressed their voice against the government, it didn’t come forward to head it. Pattabhi Sitharamayya, the Congress Legislator initiated some efforts in the Central Legislature to free her. But they ended vain.\textsuperscript{106} The All India Congress Committee and the Muslim League together held a meeting on 31\textsuperscript{st} July 1917, to work out a plan to secure her release. A resolution was passed to launch passive resistance.\textsuperscript{107} But it couldn’t succeed.

**First Woman President of Congress**

The question of the election of the President for the subsequent Congress session came up before various Provincial Congress Committees. In recognition of Besant’s sacrifices and in appreciation of her contribution to the cause of the Indian National Movement, all the provinces suggested that Annie Besant should be elected as its President.\textsuperscript{108} The Madras Provincial Congress Committee convened a special meeting on 12\textsuperscript{th} August 1917. It nominated her as the president of the Indian National Congress with thumping majority.\textsuperscript{109} On finding her release very urgent, the Madras Provincial Congress committee on 14\textsuperscript{th} August 1917 approved of passive resistance.\textsuperscript{110} The government feared that such agitation during the time world war would create more administrative problems. Irked by this, the Government of Madras requested the Government of India to remove the restrictions imposed on Annie Besant and her colleagues.\textsuperscript{111}

In order to get Annie Besant released, a special meeting was convened at Triplicane in Madras on 14\textsuperscript{th} September 1917 by some women including Dorathi Jinarajadasa and Sivakamu Ammal. On the day, the women offered prayers in the temple and then a procession was undertaken in order to test whether the police would interfere with regard to the orders provisionally issued prohibiting general processions.\textsuperscript{112} The Government of India announced its decision to release them on 15\textsuperscript{th}

\textsuperscript{106} Letter from the Chief Secretary, Government of Madras to the Secretary, Government of India, Public, 31 July 1917 in Home Rule Movement, 1914-1920, p. 435.
\textsuperscript{107} New India, Madras, 2 August 1917.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 10 August 1917.
\textsuperscript{109} Fortnightly Report, Second Half of August 1917.
\textsuperscript{110} New India, Madras, 16 August 1917.
\textsuperscript{111} Fortnightly Report, First Half of September 1917.
\textsuperscript{112} Fortnightly Report, Second Half of September 1917.
September 1917.\textsuperscript{113} On their release, the move for passive resistance was also given up.\textsuperscript{114} When Annie Besant came to Madras, a large assemblage of women tendered warm welcome and congratulations to her.\textsuperscript{115}

The voice registered by many papers during Annie Besant was in internment was very useful to the whole women community. It was an evident fact that the press would extend its support to a woman, when she was involved in public life and faced problems. The educated women, who were mere spectators from a distance, started stepping towards political and national movement. The women community living within four walls for a long time was surprised to find how the press focused on an old woman. Later the surprise turned into the booster for them. Their active participation in the national movement earned specific reference. The women theoskeptists like Ms. Arundale, Dorathy Jinarajadasa and Sivakamu Ammal took the leading roles in the national movement in the subsequent days.\textsuperscript{116}

After the release, Annie Besant travelled all over the nation. She utilised the press to propagate the ideas of the Home Rule. The members of the Women’s Indian Association were attracted towards the national movement because of her propagation through the press.\textsuperscript{117} Her ideas of Home Rule spread like wild fire and the large number of women joined in the movement.\textsuperscript{118} In December 1917, the Calcutta Session of Indian National Congress held under the leadership of Annie Besant.\textsuperscript{119} Almost all the papers carried the news of women presidency of the national party. Although some papers had differences of opinion with her, they welcomed the women presidency. This was the red carpet welcome given for the Indian womanhood towards the national politics.\textsuperscript{120} The \textit{New India} carried her heart-touching Presidential address in the session as follows: “while I was humiliated, you crown me with a honour, while I was crushed under the heel of bureaucratic power, you acclaimed me as

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{113}] G.O.No.917, Public (Confidential), 5 October 118, TNA.
\item[\textsuperscript{114}] \textit{New India}, Madras, 16 September 1917; \textit{Report on the Administration of Madras Presidency}, 1917-1918, p. ix.
\item[\textsuperscript{115}] \textit{Fortnightly Report}, Second Half of September 1917.
\item[\textsuperscript{116}] Ibid., Second Half of June 1917.
\item[\textsuperscript{117}] \textit{Stri-Dharma}, Madras, July- August 1930, p. 285.
\item[\textsuperscript{118}] Ibid., p. 286.
\item[\textsuperscript{120}] Premalatha, P.N., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 95.
\end{itemize}
your leader, while I was silenced and unable to defend myself, you defended me, and won for me release. I was proud to serve in lowliest fashion, but you lifted me up and placed me before the world as your chosen representative.” \(^{121}\)

After the announcement of Montague Declaration in 1918, there were differences of opinions between Annie Besant and the Congress leaders. In the meantime, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was emerging as a great leader in the party. Gandhi propagated the gospels of Non Co-operation Movement. But she was for passive resistance under the Constitutional frame work. Most of the nationalists openly started opposing her. \(^{122}\) The papers, which were so far in favour of Annie Besant, started criticising her not even considering as a woman. They started blaming the moderate policy of Annie Besant and her followers. \(^{123}\) As a result of this, she resigned from Provincial Congress Committee on 18\(^{th}\) March 1919. \(^{124}\) Afterwards, the press did not render its support to her efforts. The *Nyaya Dipika* from Madras registered its view that the attempts of Besant turned out useless. \(^{125}\) The *Quami Report* openly blamed that her activities hindered the growth of the National movement as well as the Khilafat movement. \(^{126}\) After that, she started concentrating in the Theosophical works. Regarding the National movement in Tamilnadu, Annie Besant was the only lady who occupied most of the columns of the press, which resulted in tremendous political awakening among the women. \(^{127}\) With the support rendered by the press at initial stages, she was able to serve as a pioneer in the National movement.

**Mahatma Gandhi and Participation of Women**

The Nationalist movement of Gandhi was not merely a political struggle but a means of regenerating and rejuvenating society. He encouraged women to participate in all aspects and phases of nationalist movement particularly in the constructive programmes. He believed that their mental courage and spiritual determination surpassed that of men which were the essential rudiments of the

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127 Premalatha P.N., *op.cit.*, p. 82.
The press not only in Tamilnadu but all over India served as mediator between Gandhi and masses. His charisma and call brought large number of enthusiastic women into the national movement.

The Press and the Women in Non Co-operation Movement

After the end of First World War, the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms Act was enacted in December 1919. It did nothing for the Indians. Then the Government enforced Rowlat Act on Indians. According to the Act, anybody could be imprisoned at any time without any trial. The opinion of the public and the press was deadly against the Act. There were number of protests that occurred in Tamilnadu also. Sarojini Naidu, one of the prominent Women leaders of the Congress party moved the following resolution against the Rowlat Act in Madras on 7th March 1919, “that this public meeting of the citizens of Madras once again earnestly urges on His Excellency, the Viceroy and the Government of India, that they should drop the Rowlat Bills at least at this stage in as much as they are unjust, subversive of the principle of liberty and justice with which the safety of the community as a whole and the state itself is based.” She described the Act as the insult of insults and tyranny of tyrannies.

Gandhi re-fixed an All India Satyagraha on 6th April 1919 by fasting, prayer and penance. He used the women force as a means for achieving political independence. His particular brand of his politics, ahimsa facilitated women’s entry into politics. He had a faith in them that they could not be totally ignored in the development politics. Sarojini Naidu had an idea that the blind discipleship of the followers would certainly bring success in the politics and the war. She herself followed her idea and made others follow that. On the fixed date, there were satyagraha struggles all over Tamilnadu. These struggles were attended by large

129 G.O. Ms. No. 318 Public, 2 July 1919; The Hindu, 8 March 1919.
130 G.O. Ms. No. 222 Public(confidential), 24 April 1919, TNA.
131 Under Secretary’s Safe File (Hereafter USSF), No. 407(secret), 6 May 1923, TNA.
132 The Hindu, Madras, 24 March 1919.
133 Ahimsa means non-violence.
135 Fortnightly Report of the Commissioner of Police, Madras 25 March 1919, TNA; G.O. Ms. No. 222,Public (Confidential), 24 April 1919, TNA.
number of women. The *New India* observed that the women’s participation would cause development and change in the political arena.\textsuperscript{136} The *Swadesamitran* praised the women’s overwhelming participation as the outstanding effort towards victory.\textsuperscript{137} *The Hindu* wrote that the women of Tamilnadu had committed themselves in remarkable efforts.\textsuperscript{138}

In the mean time, the occurrence of the Jallian Wala Bagh massacre on 13\textsuperscript{th} April 1919 shocked the entire nation. Gandhi started involving in the National movement vigorously. The Khilafats joined their hands with the congressmen. Respecting Gandhi’s plea, men and women of Tamilnadu were actively involved in the on going movement. The press praised the participation of the women. Even the anti-Congress paper, *Kudiyarasu*, praised the role of women in Non Co-operation Movement that they were involved, worked hard, faced so many hazards and went to prisons.\textsuperscript{139} The praise of press resulted in the rise of spirited participation of the women in national movement.

In March 1922, the *Young India* published two letters written by two ladies to their imprisoned husbands respectively. Abdur Rehman Ghazi of Lyallpur was imprisoned under section 108 of IPC. His wife wrote a different letter to him. In it she said, “Congratulations on your arrest. Thank God. The much longed day has come, and God has accepted your sacrifice. We are all very happy. May you cheerfully suffer for your country and your religion, and may the almighty arm us with sufficient strength to bear hardships for our cause.”\textsuperscript{140}

Another letter was written by the wife of Stokes who was imprisoned due to Non Co operation Satyagraha. She said in it, “I know it well that when my husband is in Jail with many other sons of India suffering for the sake of righteousness, he is sure to be happy. I am quite confident that the almighty God will hear the cry of the oppressed and deliver his judgement.”\textsuperscript{141} These types of letters exposed the committed sacrifice of Indian women towards the national cause. The papers in

\textsuperscript{136} *New India*, Madras, 7 April 1919.

\textsuperscript{137} *Swadesamitran*, Madras, 7 April 1919.

\textsuperscript{138} *The Hindu*, Madras, 7 April 1919.

\textsuperscript{139} *Kudiyarasu*, Erode, 21 February 1932, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{140} *Young India*, Ahmadabad, 9 March 1922.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
Tamilnadu like the *Stri-Dharma*, the *Swadesamitran*, the *South Indian Mail* and the *Navasakthi* reproduced this matter to stimulate the women’s commitment in Tamilnadu.

**The Press and the Women in Constructive Programmes**

Immediately after the Chauri-Chaura violent incident on 4\(^{th}\) February 1922, Gandhi suspended the Non Co-operation Movement. He instigated constructive programmes like the promotion of *khadhi*\(^{142}\) and the prohibition of liquor and foreign goods to the Congressmen. Being moved by the miseries of the rural people, Gandhi planned to penetrate the villages where he made noble experiments in social and educational works.\(^{143}\) He believed that the women’s nature was particularly suited to this non-violent Satyagraha and constructive programmes.\(^{144}\)

He called upon the women of India for the special service of fighting the evil of drinking liquor and of boycotting foreign cloth. The high caste homes were exceedingly rare in which alcohol was kept in any form even for medicinal purposes. But unfortunately, with increasing impoverishment, low castes had turned to the comfort of toddy. It was easy to win over women crusaders to a determined fight against this evil, still more easy when the blame for it could conveniently be laid at the door of the British Government. As for the boycott of foreign cloth, it was more difficult. Many intellectuals in India had no real faith in *khadhar*\(^{145}\) or home spinning movement. But on the other hand there had been a marked tendency among educated Indian women to a renewed appreciation of Indian textiles, and a preference for saris with the old genuine Indian woven border, instead of strip or lace or machine embroidery sewn on imported silk which for a short time had been fashionable. This and the fact that they considered themselves to be in the service of the mother, ‘soldiers of the cause’, induced even half hearted *khadhar* supporters to come out and picket foreign cloth shops.\(^{146}\) The press capitalised the situation in turning the women towards the constructive programmes. It played a foremost role in mobilising female mass. The women of Tamilnadu also gave their ears to the voice and were involved seriously in

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\(^{142}\) *Khadhi* means a type of handmade cotton cloth.


\(^{144}\) Vijay Agnew, *op.cit.*, p. 35.

\(^{145}\) *Khadhar* means a type of handmade white cotton cloth.

the programmes like promotion of khadhi and picketing of liquor shops. The Desabhimani exhorted to the women to play their part effectively in making the constructive programme a grand success.\textsuperscript{147} It also requested them to help men in making the Swadeshi and boycott movement a success one.\textsuperscript{148}

The Navasakthi from Madras observed that the original resolution regarding the Non Co-operation Movement did not contain any provision for prohibition campaign and it was purely a spontaneous move by the public particularly the women. It added that it was included to it only because of the vehement participation of the women.\textsuperscript{149} The prohibition movement had spread in almost all parts of the Madras Presidency before the end of February 1921. The sale of arrack and toddy was boycotted by the public particularly by the women in many places.\textsuperscript{150}

Because of the agitations, the Government of Madras lost nearly a quarter of its revenue by October 1921.\textsuperscript{151} The prohibition movement was more successful in Erode area than other areas. The credit of the success in that area went to two important women, E.V.Nagammai, the wife of E.V.Ramasamy and Kannammal, his sister.\textsuperscript{152} Knowing this news through the press, large number of the women vigorously involved in the movement. Fearing that the law and order would be spoiled due to the women’s involvement, the government withdrew its previous Order under section 144 of IPC.\textsuperscript{153}

In between the movement, the Congress leaders of Tamilnadu requested Gandhi to end the programme. He simply replied that it was not in his hands, but in the hands of the two women in Erode. Many journals carried the statement of Gandhi in praise of the women community of Tamilnadu. It activated as stimulus for the rest of the women community in other parts of the nation.\textsuperscript{154}

There was an overwhelming reception to the promotion of khadhi in Tamilnadu.\textsuperscript{155} The Sutandiram analysed its success and said that the commitment of

\textsuperscript{147} Desabhimani, Madras, 18 March 1921, MNNPR., Vol. I, 1921, p. 471.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 3 April 1921, MNNPR., Vol. I, 1921, p. 499.
\textsuperscript{149} Navasakthi, Madras, 28 March 1921.
\textsuperscript{150} Fortnightly Report, Second Half of February 1921 and Second Half of October 1921.
\textsuperscript{151} Report of the Administration of the Abkari Revenue of the Madras Presidency, 1920-1921, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{152} Tamilnadu, Salem, 25 December 1921, p. 21; Swadesamitran, 13 February 1922.
\textsuperscript{153} Veeramani K. (compil.), Periyar on Women’s Rights, Chennai, 1992, p. XIII.
\textsuperscript{154} Tamilnadu, Salem, 24 June 1922.
\textsuperscript{155} Eraliya, Suyamariyathai Sudarolikal, Chennai, p. 3.
the women towards that programme was the main reason for the success.\textsuperscript{156} Gandhi appealed to the woman to spin for some time every day with the use of \textit{charka}.\textsuperscript{157} His plea made many women mad towards the promotion of \textit{khadhi}. The excited women contributed even their gold bangles and other jewellery for this movement.\textsuperscript{158}

In Madurai region, Padmasini Ammal played a vital role in the promotion of \textit{khadhi}. She worked for the cause along with other notable women like, Thayarammal, Mrs. Joseph, Subbulakshmi Ammal, Mrs.Sundaram, Seethammal and Muniyammal. They established an association called Association of Sisters for that purpose. On behalf of the association, thirty women members wove \textit{khadhi} for two hours every Wednesday. The \textit{South Indian Mail} carried this noteworthy news to the masses. This effort resulted in imparting national spirit not only for the women but for the whole society.\textsuperscript{159} The efforts taken by Padmasini Ammal, patriotically encouraged 500 women to join the Indian National Congress in Madurai.\textsuperscript{160}

Not only the Indian women but also the European women in the Theosophical society, like Madamme de Manziarly, Miss. Baria, and Mrs. Peramma were actively involved in the movement for the promotion of \textit{khadhi} in Tamilnadu. Initially they learned and then they taught the rural women what they learned regarding \textit{khadhi}.\textsuperscript{161} Many women were given training for spinning in the Theosophical Society. Among the trained, Kamalamma was able to spin 380 counts. No mill could spin so fine a count as that gifted woman.\textsuperscript{162} Rajagopalachai donated free cotton to 750 women from his Thiruchengode Ashram for spinning and made them join in the Indian National Congress.\textsuperscript{163} Alarmed by the promotion of \textit{khadhi}, the government initiated several steps to curtail it. It ordered its employees not to wear \textit{khadhi} during the official duty.\textsuperscript{164} It prohibited them from subscribing to the \textit{khadhi} fund.\textsuperscript{165} \textit{The Hindu}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[157] \textit{Young India}, Ahmedabad, 24 May 1924: \textit{Charka} means hand spinning machine.
\item[158] Aruna Asaf Ali. \textit{op.cit.}, p. 73.
\item[159] \textit{South Indian Mail}, Madurai, 6 October 1925.
\item[160] Premalatha P.N., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 109
\item[161] \textit{New India}, Madras, 25 November 1924.
\item[162] \textit{Young India}, Ahmedabad, 18 December 1924.
\item[163] \textit{Ibid.}, 25 June 1925.
\item[164] \textit{Government Servants Conduct Rules} in G.O. Ms.No.284, Public, 4 March 1925, TNA.
\item[165] G.O. Ms. No. 506, Public, 1 June 1927; G.O. Ms. No. 1111, Public, 9 November 1927, TNA.
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gave coverage to the above news and viewed the reactions of the Government as coward.  

Sarojini Naidu worked hard during the Non Co-operation Movement. She engaged the columns of the important papers. It encouraged the other women to think of joining in the national movement. Due to her industrious efforts and the name and fame given by the press, she became the President of Indian National Congress in 1925. She was the first Indian women to attain the great position.

The Stri-Dharma gave vivid coverage to the Madras Session of the Indian National Congress held in December 1927. In order to promote khadhi, the Stri-Dharma proudly carried the news sixty women volunteers who attended and served in the conference in khadhi saris. The Hindu praised Rukmani Lakshmipathi and Kamaladevi Chatopadyaya, the two notable women leaders of Madras Presidency for organising the sixty women for the purpose. Because of the popularity generated by the press and her committed service, the former was appointed as the Secretary of the Women’s Section of the Congress.

Women and Agitational Politics, 1927-1929

In the year 1927, a large number of women satyagrahis participated in the Neil statue Satyagraha. The Neil’s statue was considered as the symbol of disgrace by the nationalists. So they staged agitations to remove the statue. Padmasini Ammal of Madurai pledged her anklets to meet out the expenses to go to Chennai for the Satyagraha. Anchalai Ammal of Cuddalore travelled all over Tamilnadu to propagate patriotism on that issue. She participated in the Neil Statue Satyagraha and therefore she was arrested on 6th September 1927. The Navasakthi hailed her patriotic spirit. Her daughter Ammakannu Ammal also was arrested along with four other

166 The Hindu, Madras, 25 June 1925.
168 Stri-Dharma, Madras, 2 February 1928.
169 The Hindu, Madras, 29 December 1927.
170 Col. Neil was the Commander of British force during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. Appreciating the service of Neil during the Sepoy Mutiny, the Government of Madras installed his statue in the Mount Road, Madras.
172 Navasakthi, Madras, 7 September 1927.
women in the same month. The Navasakthi published the news of the imprisonment of the mother and the daughter. The news induced the patriotic fire among women of the presidency. The Hindu wrote about another lady, Lakshmi Ammal who participated in the satyagraha and was imprisoned for seventeen days. The Tamilnadu Congress Committee demanded the government to remove the statue. Due to the continuous participation of women cadres, the satyagraha got strength day by day. The papers like, the Navasakthi, the Swadesamitran, the Hindu, the Tamilnadu, the Swarajya, etc., covered their pages with the sprit of nationalism in support of the satyagraha. When the announcement of Simon Commission came, the satyagraha was stopped. Immediately after establishing the government in Tamilnadu in 1937, the Congress Ministry removed the Neil Statue from the Mount Road on 22nd November 1937 and the statue was placed in Madras Museum.

In November 1927, the Simon Commission was set up to examine the results of Montague-Chelmsford Reforms Act. The Commission was chaired by Sir John Simon. The Commission without Indian representation was seriously criticised by the press. In order to discuss the matter in detail, Annie Besant convened a meeting in New India buildings, Madras on 9th November 1927. The women of Madras constituted an organisation among themselves to agitate against the Simon Commission. The traders of Madras also joined their hands with them. Rukmani Lakshmipathi, a notable woman of Madras presided over the joint meeting of the women and the traders on 25th January 1928. The nationalist press felt proudly about the presidnetship of a woman.

Regarding the boycott of Simon Commission, the students of Madras were addressed by Yamini Poornammal and Masilamaniyammal, the well known women leaders of the city. The news had its column in The Hindu. The above said

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173 Fortnightly Report, First Half of September 1927.
174 Navasakthi, Madras, 21 September 1927.
175 The Hindu, Madras, 20 October 1927.
176 Navasakthi, Madras, 26 October 1927.
178 The Hindu, Madras, 23 November 1927.
179 New India, Madras, 17 November 1927.
180 The Hindu, Madras, 26 January 1928; Swadesamitran, Madras, 26 January 1928.
181 Swadesamitran, Madras, 28 January 1928.
women along with Rukmani Lakshmipathi and Padmasini Ammal were served as speakers in the women gathering at Madras on 1st February 1928. In the meeting, they resolved to boycott the Simon Commission totally. The press carried the news of these women and cared for their views. It created a deep impact in the minds of the women. There were severe riots and firings during the agitation against the Simon Commission. In spite of these agitations, the Commission visited Madras. The Tamilnadu Congress refused to meet it. It organised a public meeting at the Madras beach. Rukmani Lakshmipathi spoke vigorously against the commission. The Women’s Indian Association continuously criticised the Commission through the Stri-Dharma for not having Indian representation. Due to the voices of the women community, the Simon commission reserved five pages in its report especially for Indian women.

The Press and the Women in the Civil Disobedience Movement

Gandhi launched the Civil Disobedience Movement on 26th January 1930. It was treated as a golden opportunity for the women of India to exhibit their spirit of nationalism. It saw the best in the women of Tamilnadu but the British showed themselves at their worst. The movement was started when the women got slightly awakened in the field of national politics. So, the women in Tamilnadu rendered their immense support to the movement.

Gandhi advised women not to take part in direct struggle but to actively participate in the programmes like boycott of foreign goods and picketing the liquor shops. On hearing this the Stri-Dharma remarked in its editorial “whatever be the opinions of individual readers on the details whereby self-government shall become the possession of India, every women not only in India but throughout the world must watch anxiously the result and the reaction following Mahatma Gandhi’s appeal to a new method of war, soul force, self sacrifice without blood shed or violence”. Thus, it

182 USSF No. 651, 27 September 1929.
184 The Hindu, Madras, 19 February 1928.
185 Stri-Dharma, Madras, September 1930, p. 489.
186 Modern Review, Calcutta, June 1930, p. 754.
showed the enthusiasm among the women towards the liberation of the soil. More than that, *The Indian Ladies Magazine* stated “it was the only alternative to ordinary war; women welcomed this withstanding that Mahatma Gandhi had refused to allow women to participate in that historic march, because he explained that it would complicate things. Women in different parts of India were not satisfied with this explanation and had protested against their arbitrary exclusion when they were just as full of health and patriotic spirit as their marching brothers. Women wanted them to be included not only in the conferences, congresses or commissions, but also in the marches, imprisonments and demonstrations organised for the welfare of India.” It exposed the commitment of the women in the struggle to the extent of criticising their leader Gandhi too. Observing the commitment of women, Gandhi stated that the impatience of some sisters to join the good fight was a healthy sign and it had led to the discovery of the attractive campaign against the salt tax. Seeing the self awakening of the women, he showed green flag for their direct participation in the struggle. The *Sudanthira Sangu* asked the women cadres to get ready to face all the hardships, campaign village by village and to do medical service in the villages.

As a part of the movement, Gandhi started his march towards Dandi on 12th March 1930 for breaking the Salt Law. He had nominated Sarojini Naidu to lead the raid on Dharshana salt field. The news of a woman who was nominated as the leader of the struggle by the Gandhi was widely popularised by the press. She was involved in the raid along with number of women in Dharsana. For about 27 hours continuously, they denied to take even a single drop of water in the struggle. The news of the women’s struggle was highlighted by almost all the papers in Tamilnadu. The news spread like wild fire and brought fury into the minds of the Indian women.

In the Salt satyagraha, Gandhi was arrested on 5th May 1930. As a protest against his arrest, Muthulakshmi Reddy, the Deputy President of the Madras

187 *Stri-Dharma*, Madras, April 1930, p. 28.
188 *The Indian Ladies Magazine*, Madras, July 1930, p. 28.
189 *Young India*, Ahmedabad, 10 April 1930.
192 *The Hindu*, Madras, 22 May 1930
Legislative Council resigned her post. In her letter to the Governor of Madras, she stated "I am obliged to take the step as a mark of respect for that great soul, Mahatma Gandhi who has been arrested and imprisoned by the government. I feel it my bounden duty to express to your Excellency on this occasion that his life has been a source of inspiration to me in all my activities." Due to the nationalist spirit inside, she was ready to throw the prestigious post of the Deputy Chairman of Madras Legislative Council. Kamalabai of Tirunelveli District also resigned her post of Honorary Magistrate. It was thus early demonstrated that women in the political field put principles before political–self interest. Inspired by the activities of such women, Mahatma Gandhi said that he was becoming increasingly certain that in the struggle for swaraj, the women of this country could contribute a greater share than the men. The press in Tamilnadu popularised the women’s activities and published that statement of Gandhi on the women community. This made the women gave much ardour towards the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Because of women’s participation in Salt satyagraha in Tamilnadu in large numbers the nationalist movement picked up its impetus. Salt March in Tamilnadu was planned to be conducted from Tiruchirappalli to Vedaranyam under the leadership of Rajagopalachari. He selected hundred volunteers including a woman, Rukmani Lakshmipathi. On 13th April 1930, they started their march and they reached Vedaranyam on 28th April 1930. All among the route, the women supplied food and water for the volunteers. While violating the salt laws many volunteers including Rajagopalachari were arrested. While the front line leaders were arrested one after one, Rukmani Lakshmipathi, the only woman volunteer became the leader. Many papers published this proudly. She bravely went to Agasthiyampalli camp and issued the patriotic pamphlets to the policemen too. The Indian Ladies Magazine
praised her bravery for meeting the lion inside its cave. She was arrested on 14th May 1930 while returning from her bath and was imprisoned for one year. She was the first women in India to be arrested during the Civil Disobedience Movement.

There was no symptom of struggle at Madras city initially during the Salt satyagraha. A woman named Durgabai committed herself in the struggle and changed the situation in Madras. She along with Anjalai Ammal, Venkataramanammal, Kamatchiyammal and Saraswathi Ammal initiated the struggle in Madras Marina beach with Congress flags. On 15th April 1930, they prepared salt by violating the laws with nearly ten thousand people witnessing. They were fined with Rs.500/- each. On 20th April, Durgabai along with few women bring sea water in the pots and started preparing salt in front of Madras High Court. In this struggle, Prakasam was arrested. According to The Hindu, the women’s fearless struggle could not be controlled by the arrest activities. After the arrest of Prakasam, Durgabai took the role of leader in that struggle. For her planned programme, the party called her as ‘Madras City Dictator’ and the press praised her efforts and heights. She disobeyed the police warnings and arranged a procession. On 25th April, many women volunteers including Durgabai participated in the procession and were beaten up with lathis. Although she too was wounded, she gave first aid to the other wounded volunteers.

For disobeying the laws again and again, she was arrested on 25th May, under section 117 of IPC and Section 74 of Salt Act. She was imprisoned for nine months including three months rigorous imprisonment in Vellore jail. Even in prison, she gave training in Hindi language, spinning in charka and politics to the

201 The Indian Ladies Magazine, Madras, July 1930, p. 610.
202 Young India, Ahmadabad, 22 May 1930.
203 G.O. Ms. No. 952, Public(Confidential), 16 September 1931, TNA; Civil Disobedience Movement 1930-1931, Appendix-III, p. 165.
204 Giruhalakshmi, Madras, 1 January 1938, p. 43.
205 Marina beach in Chennai (Madras) is world’s second longest beach.
206 The Hindu, Madras, 16 April 1930.
207 Ibid., 21 & 22 June 1930.
208 Giruhalakshmi, Madras, 1 January 1938, p.50; G.O. Ms.No.952, Public (Confidential), 16 September 1931, TNA; Fortnightly Report, Second Half of May 1930.
209 Fortnightly Report, First Half of May 1930; Giruhalakshmi, Madras, 1 January 1938, p. 51; Padmini Senguptha, The Story of Women in India, New Delhi, 1974, p. 195.
210 Young India, Ahmadabad, 29 May 1930.
211 Giruhalakshmi, Madras, 1 January 1938, p. 51.
other women prisoners. Due to Gandhi-Irwin Pact which was concluded in 1931, she was released from the prison. After the failure of the Round table Conference, the movement was resumed again on 4th January 1932. She was also involved actively in it and imprisoned again at Madras prison. The news about Durgabai’s imprisonment was caught by the press of Tamilnadu regularly. In praise of her activities, the Gruhalakshmi published a special article on her in January 1938.

Tamil press played a remarkable role in spreading the Civil Disobedience Movement among the women community. Gandhi insisted picketing in front of the liquor and foreign goods shops. The volunteers including the number of women under the leadership of Satyamurthi agitated in front of the Collector’s office against the liquor shop auction. The Swadesamitran published the news with a photograph. The same paper again published the news with a photograph about the ladies meeting regarding the Civil Disobedience Movement in Triplicane under the leadership of Muthulakshmi Reddy. It gave coverage to the celebrations of Bharathi day on September 11, 1931 organised by the Madras Ladies Swadesi Movement. It published the news of giving training in spinning to the women in Congress party office. It gave powerful advertisement through the news about the Triplicane Ladies Swadesi Sales Depot during the Deepavali festival season. It elaborately gave details about the women picketing in front of the foreign textiles shop at Madras and the imprisonment of the women volunteers. The Stri-Dharma gave details about the role played by the women of Madras in organising the young people into ‘vanara sena’ (monkey army) for the constructive programmes. The Bharathi, the Tamil periodical from Uthamapalayam asked the women not to waste their time in idle talk and to play draughts spin yarn on the charka. It advised the women of Tamilnadu to give up the routine practice of wearing foreign bangles, which entail a drain of nearly

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212 Ibid., p. 52.
213 Ibid., 9 August 1931.
214 Ibid., 6 September 1931.
215 Ibid., 20 September 1931.
216 Ibid., 18 October 1931.
217 Ibid., 8 November 1931; Fortnightly Report, First Half of May 1930.
218 Ibid., 25 September 1932.
219 Stri-Dharma, Madras, July 1930, p. 380.
80 lakhs of rupees every year from our country and didn’t confer any benefit to India. The women were asked to dress in khaddar clothes, dispense with foreign articles such as soap and toilet powders. It insisted on humming national songs to infuse the national spirit in the minds of their children and husbands; the women should be ready to stand in the forefront of the freedom struggle. The women of the Women’s Indian Association also supported the Swadesi movement in Tamilnadu. It was very particular in waging struggle against the economic exploitation of the Indian market by the aliens which could be otherwise to contented. Every branch of the Women’s Indian Association organised making and sale of home made articles especially Indian made cloths. Margrate Cousins, the important leader of the Women’s Indian Association was prohibited under section 144 of IPC and then she was imprisoned for one year due to her activities relating to the Civil Disobedience Movement.

In the southern part of Tamilnadu, K.R. Manjammal and P.S. Manjammal of Rajapalayam actively participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement. They were arrested and imprisoned in 1932 for nine months. After their release K.R. Manjammal was honoured by the Congress Party with the certificate of felicitation, which was made of khadhar cloth. The Swadesamitran published elaborate news about her sacrifice in order to boost up other women in the national movement. In Coimbatore, two women involved in picketing were arrested and sentenced with six months of imprisonment and the fine of Rs.200/- These incidents were covered and propagated among the masses by the press. Thus, it is known clearly that the press was always interested in highlighting the sacrifices of the women community.

The Government of Madras closed the toddy shops in certain areas in testing manner. The Daily Mail published contradictory news that the women of that

221 Ibid., p. 88.
222 Stri-Dharma, Madras, June 1930, p. 340.
223 The Indian Ladies Magazine, Madras, July 1930, p.612; Civil Disobedience Movement Diary of the Chingleput District in Civil Disobedience Movement 1930-1931.
224 Stri-Dharma, Madras, June 1930, p. 340.
225 Swadesamitran, Madras, 18 December 1932.
227 Swadesamitran, Madras, 25 May 1932.
228 Ibid., 24 January 1933.
particular area of Madras persuaded the government not to close the toddy shops and to help their husbands to drink toddy. By publishing a cartoon, the *Ananda Vikatan* criticised the views of the *Daily Mail*. In this cartoon the women of Tamilnadu tried to oust the British by beating them with broomsticks and chapels. It wrote a note under the cartoon that the women of Tamilnadu were expressing their thanks in a special manner to the British for revealing a new truth. It added humorously if the editor of the journal would visit the rural areas, the village women certainly would render warm welcome to him. Thus, the *Ananda Vikatan* expressed its higher views on the women of Tamilnadu.229

The Women’s Indian Association was a committed nationalist, illustrated by its boycott of Simon Commission and the First Round Table Conference, its promotion of swadesi and its publicity about Civil Disobedience Movement campaign through their official organ, the *Stri-Dharma*.230

Almost all the nationalist papers had registered the role of the women of Tamilnadu in the Civil Disobedience Movement in vivid manner. Although the *Kudiyarasu*, the anti-congress paper criticised the Civil Disobedience Movement totally, it praised the participation of women in the movement in Tamilnadu. It remarked how the women of Tamilnadu participated and went to prisons fearlessly. Thus it showed its respect on the press ethics and the women community.231

The motivation given by the press resulted in the women’s enthusiastic participation in Civil Disobedience Movement. It was said that women’s participation in this movement was much larger than their role in Non Co-operation Movement.232 Their participation won them the admiration of the nationalist leadership and the Congress passed the Fundamental Rights resolution at the Karachi Session in December 1931.233 The resolution runs as follows: “All citizens are equal before the law irrespective of religion, caste, creed or sex. No disability attaches to any citizen by reason of his or her religion, caste, creed or sex in regard to public employment, office

229 *Ananda Vikatan*, Madras, 10 May 1933.
231 *Kudiyarasu*, Erode, 21 February 1932, p. 4.
of power or honour and in the exercise of trade or calling."  

Through this resolution, the congress leadership committed itself to admit equal political and civic rights for women in independent India.

Women and the Congress Working Committee

In April 1936, Jawaharlal Nehru had neglected to appoint a woman to the Congress Working Committee in order to accommodate important people and to give representation to crucial interests. Gandhi expressed his disappointment by stating that Nehru could have asked the older Congressmen to relinquish their position in favour of Sarojini Naidu, or he could have chosen to elect a woman instead of a socialist member. The Stri-Dharma protested strongly against the exclusion of Sarojini Naidu and for not considering the appointment of Kamaladevi Chatopadyaya as a Socialist member and that was an injustice of a very grave order to the women community.

The Press and the Women in Quit India Movement

In 1935, the Government of India Act was passed. The Congress Party changed its attitude in contesting the elections. It contested in the elections of 1937 and succeeded in many Provinces. The important women in the Congress Party were given opportunities to contest in the elections. Women’s part in the elections is dealt elaborately in the next chapter. The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 paralysed the entire political system. Considering it as the suitable time, Gandhi launched Quit India Movement in August 1942 with a motto of ‘Do or die’. He and other prominent Congress leaders were put behind bars by the Government of Bombay before the beginning of the movement. The Quit India Movement was practically leaderless as all senior members were put in jail. However, when the news spread, spontaneous agitations took place all over the country. In Tamilnadu, the women joined in processions, meetings, agitations and organising strikes. Rukmani

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236 File No. 12/Adm/71, DIG-CID Officer, Bombay, Letter written by Jawaharlal Nehru to Mahatma Gandhi on 25 May 1936.
238 Stri-Dharma, Madras, May 1936, p. 52.
Lakshmipathi, the active women leader of the Tamilnadu Congress Committee took initial steps for the movement.

The participation of the women students in the movement was the most significant event of that period. According to *The Hindu*, the female students played feisty role in accelerating the national struggle. Most of the women students of the Queen Mary’s College and the Women’s Christian College boycotted the classes without worrying about their precious education. They organised hartals, processions and picketing.\(^{239}\)

*The Hindu* further stated that Kamaladevi Arya, a girl student actively participated in the Quit India Movement by distributing leaflets among the public. She was arrested on 14th August 1942.\(^{240}\) *The Kalki*, a Tamil journal exposed a different type of action followed by the prominent women leader Soundaram Ramachandiran. She helped the families of the people who were in prison in connection with this movement.\(^{241}\) This news boosted many youngsters to agitate vigorously without worrying about their family’s livelihood.\(^{242}\)

Anthoniammal and Petchiammal of Coimbatore were arrested for participating in the Pankajam mill strike, which was the part of this movement. They were imprisoned in Vellore for six months. Kuttiammal and Cholaiyammal of Coimbatore were involved in breaking the railway line near Singanallur and were arrested and imprisoned. The spread of the news of arrest and imprisonment of the women in large numbers became the turning point of the movement in Tamilnadu.\(^{243}\)

Even before attaining the independence, the nationalists planned to celebrate the Independence Day in 1943 in Madras. Tri colour flag was hoisted by the women leader Radhabai Subbarayan. Immediately after that, she started singing ‘Vande Matharam’, she was arrested and imprisoned for three months. For organising students’ strikes, Ammu Swaminathan and Manjubasini were arrested and imprisoned for twelve months. The nationalist press carried this news. Motivated by this, the

\[^{239}\textit{The Hindu}, \text{Madras, 13 August 1942.}\]
\[^{240}\textit{Ibid.}, 17 August 1942\]
\[^{241}\textit{Kalki}, \text{Madras, 10 November 1942.}\]
\[^{242}\textit{Somaiyajulu, Madurai Mavatta Suthanthira Poratta Varalaru}, \text{pp. 384-387.}\]
\[^{243}\textit{Kalki}, \text{Madras, 24 November 1942.}\]
students boycotted their classes continuously. As a result, the strength in the colleges reduced.244

The women satyagrahis left their fear and participated in the processions during the first anniversary of the Quit India Movement. While walking in the processions, they shouted the nationalist slogans, distributed brochures and requested the shop keepers to observe hartal. The press also gave full support to their spontaneous participation.245 Although the prominent leaders were in prisons, the movement moved successfully only because of the spontaneous participation of the public. The women force served as the stimulus for it. The press gave much importance to their role.

Gandhi toured Madurai area by train between 1st and 3rd February 1946. Every railway station witnessed the gathering of thousands of people to see him. The Kalki gave extensive coverage with photographs of his tour. It published a photograph taken in Manapparai railway station in Tiruchirappalli District and made a note that it was the scene most liked by Mahatma Gandhi. In that scene, the women gatherings occupied the maximum portion. Thus, the journal hailed the women’s participation in a high manner.246

The Press and the Women in Indian National Army

Subash Chandra Bose was an Indian revolutionary who fought with military force against Britain during Second World War. He was popularly known as Netaji.247 His military force was called Indian National Army. In the army, the women of Tamilnadu served as soldiers and army commanders. The women section of the Indian National Army was started in 1943. It was popularly known as Jhansi Rani Regiment. Lakshmi Swaminathan, the daughter of Ammu Swaminathan was appointed as its captain.248 In a meeting in July 1943, Subash Chandra Bose addressed and his call to the women to share the burden of the battle for the freedom brought new spirit in the movement.249 Lakshmi Swaminathan held the post of the Minister of

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244 Fortnightly Report, Second Half of February 1943.
245 The Hindu, Madras, 10 August 1943.
246 Kalki, Madras, 17 February 1946.
247 Nethaji literally means ‘Respected Leader’.
248 Manmohan Kaur, Women in India’s Freedom, New Delhi, 1985, p. 40.
249 Ibid., p. 41.
Social Welfare and Medicine in the Azad Hind Cabinet established in Singapore.\textsuperscript{250} The cabinet declared final struggle against the British as following: “In the name of God, in the name of bygone generations who have welded the Indian people into one nation and in the name of the dead heroes who have bequeathed to us a tradition of heroism and self-sacrifice, we call upon the Indian people to rally round our banner and to strive for India’s freedom. We call upon them to launch the final struggle against the British and all their allies in India and to prosecute that struggle with valour and perseverance and with full faith in final victory—until the enemy is expelled from Indian soil and the Indian people are once again a free nation”. This declaration was signed by the Ministers. Lakshmi Swaminathan was given priority in the order next to Subash Chandra Bose.\textsuperscript{251} Another important personality in Indian National Army was Govindhammal of North Arcot District. While joining the army, she donated six sovereign bangles and one acre rubber plantation field to it.\textsuperscript{252} Whenever the press carried the adventure news of these women, the patriotic spirit rose in the nation. It helped the women who were unable to go to the battlefield, determined to fight with the British government from their homes and the streets.\textsuperscript{253}

2. The Press and the Women in the Self-Respect Movement

The Self-Respect Movement acted in Tamilnadu against the Indian National Congress and the domination of Brahmins in all the spheres of the society. The movement was established by E.V.Ramasamy. Initially he was an energetic member of the Indian National Congress. Due to the differences of opinion with the congress leaders, he left the Congress party and started the Self-Respect Movement. Women liberation was one of the fundamental objectives of this movement.\textsuperscript{254} Although it aimed at social reforms, it served as a training station for the women in political field. The movement propped up the Justice Party in the elections. In 1944, it came to be known as ‘Dravidar Kazhagam’. In the cause of social change, the

\textsuperscript{250} Kalki, Madras, 11 November 1945.
\textsuperscript{251} Arun, Testament of Bose, New Delhi, 1946, p.261; Somaiyajulu, Nellai Mavatta Suthanthira Poratta Varalaru, Thirunelveli, 1976, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{252} Manmohan Kaur, op.cit., p. 41.
\textsuperscript{253} Kalki, Madras, 2 December 1945.
chairmanship of the political and social meetings were forcibly placed on the heads of the women cadres for quite a lot of times. The movement oriented papers such as Kudiyarasu, Viduthalai, Pakutharivu and Revolt cared for the women liberation from their launch. They cultured the women in social, political and economical fields.

**Political Participation**

The main reason for the microscopic participation or non-participation of women in politics was the male dominance.\(^{255}\) So, the Self-Respect Movement gave equal opportunities to the women in political arena. Their papers gave importance to the women’s participation than of the men in order to induce the rest of the women society. The Diravidan covered the news about the conference of Unmai Naaduvor Sangam (Truth Lovers Association) in 1929 in Erode. The meeting was conducted by and for the women. Lakshmi Ammal, Chinnathayammal, Bangaru Ammal, and S.R.Kannammal took the leading role in conducting the meeting. The journal hailed the active participation of women and made a note that the meeting had evidenced the ability and determination of the women community.\(^{256}\) Giving emphasis to the women’s activities in the papers was the thriving technique followed by the Self-Respect movement to mobilize the women towards their goal. The Kudiyarasu gave much importance to the efforts taken by Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammal to bring hefty number of Devadasi women to the Chingleput Self-Respect Conference in February 1929.\(^{257}\)

The following instances evidenced that the women were given main concern in the Self-Respect Conferences and their papers. In May 1932, the Salem District Self-Respect conference was presided over by S. Neelavathi and the inaugural address was delivered by R. Annapooraniyammal. The Kudiyarasu covered their speeches extensively in order to motivate the women community.\(^{258}\) The later served as the Chair in the Adi Dravida youth Conference in Sirkazhi in July 1935.\(^{259}\)

\(^{256}\) Diravidan, Madras, 20 May 1929.  
\(^{257}\) Kudiyarasu, Erode, 24 February 1929.  
\(^{258}\) Ibid., 22 May 1932.  
\(^{259}\) Ibid., 21 July 1935.
The Tanjavur District Self-Respect conference was presided over by the women leader S. Kunjitham in June 1932. She delivered a rousing speech there. 260 In July 1933, she acted as the chairperson of the Thiruchirappalli District first Self-Respect Conference held in Srirangam. 261 While attending the Self-Respect Conference at Kolar gold mines in June 1932, she was prohibited by the Order under section 144 of IPC for her fiery speech. The news regarding her prohibition was utilized by the Self-Respect press as a spur to the other women cadres. 262 Pudukottai Princely State Sengunthar Community First Conference was held on 27th March 1933. Movaloor Ramamirtham acted as its chair. 263 S. Neelavathi presided over the Thanjavur District Self-Respect Conference in the year March 1933. 264 In May 1933, she delivered the inaugural address in the North Arcot District First Self-Respect Conference. 265 In 1935, she presided over the Self-Respect Conference in Aruppukottai. 266

State Level Self-Respect Conference was held at Madras on 26th and 27th December 1931. During the conference, E.V.Ramasamy went abroad. In his absence, S. Kunjitham took the leading role in conducting the conference successfully. She acted as the convenor of the reception committee. Her works and speech were given priority in the columns of the *Kudiyarasu*. 267 The journal covered the news of women’s participation in large number under the heading ‘Women’s Liberal Enthusiasm’.

The Tamilnadu Women’s Conference was held on 11th November 1938 in Madras. This conference was chaired by Neelambikai Ammaiayar. In this conference, she gave E.V.Ramasamy, the evergreen title ‘Periyar’ (the great man). This incident got priority in the columns of the *Kudiyarasu*. 268 Miranda Gajendiran was honoured provided with the chance of introducing the party flag in the Justice

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260 Ibid., 25 June 1932.
261 Ibid., 16 July 1933.
262 Ibid., 12 June 1932.
263 Ibid., 5 September 1933.
264 Ibid., 9 April 1933.
265 Ibid., 14 May 1933.
266 Ibid., 14 July 1935.
267 Ibid., 3 January 1932.
268 Ibid., 20 November 1938.
Party conference held at Thiruchirappalli on 29th September 1945.\textsuperscript{269} Through these incidents, the self respect leaders and their press kicked off the efforts to break the general view that womanly nature, which barred women from political activities from time immemorial.\textsuperscript{270}

The Self-Respect press respected the self determination power of the women. The leading women cadres like Neelavathi and Maragathavalli left the movement for some reasons. Among the two, the former joined in the Indian National Congress, the opposite camp. The self-respect press didn’t blame her decision and thought it was an example for women’s self determination, for which the movement worked for.\textsuperscript{271} Even after this incident, the \textit{Kudiyarasu} republished her earlier articles several times. It conveyed its condolence to her while her father Kaliyaperumal passed away in 1938.\textsuperscript{272}

In almost all the self-respect events, the women cadres were given priority and responsibilities. Their press didn’t fail to highlight the women’s participation. Giving responsibility in the events and due recognition in the columns became the crucial cause for the women’s participation in large numbers in the Dravidian movements at later period.

\textbf{Anti-Hindi Agitation and the women}

Immediately after assuming the government in 1937, the Congress ministry announced the introduction of compulsory Hindi in the schools of Tamilnadu. The Tamil lovers vehemently opposed it for it would cause the downfall of Tamil. Being afraid of this, E.V.Ramasamy started his campaign against the introduction of compulsory Hindi. He and his movement utilised the usage of the print media for their effective campaign. He received support from almost all the parts of the non-Brahmin society irrespective of the sex. The agitation got momentum due to the participation of the women.\textsuperscript{273} The press covered the women’s agitations to be a magnet for the masses.

\textsuperscript{269} \textit{Ibid.}, 20 October 1945.
\textsuperscript{270} Thara Bai, \textit{op.cit.} p. 101.
\textsuperscript{271} \textit{Kudiyarasu}, Erode, 16 May 1937.
\textsuperscript{272} \textit{Ibid.}, 30 January 1938.
The anti-Hindi agitators planned to conduct a conference at Sholavandan in Madurai district on 8th May 1938. To meet the expenses, they planned to charge delegation fee from the participants. The cadres were ready to contribute the fee even to participate in the conference. Knowing that the success of the conference depended upon the female participation, they announced the exemption of fees for the women through the *Kudiyarasu*.274 This effort encouraged the women to participate in the conference.

Opposing the intrusion of compulsory Hindi into Tamilnadu, a women’s conference was held in July 1938 at Madras. About three thousand women participated in it. The conference was chaired by Narayani Ammal. Dharmambal, a leading medical practitioner of Madras came with the resolution against compulsory Hindi in Madras Presidency. Pushpavathi Ammal, Meenambal, Pandithai Jalajatchi Ammal, and Meenambal Selvaraj delivered fiery speeches on Anti-Hindi agitation. The *Kudiyarasu* covered the events in the conference and published the speeches of the renowned women orators with the motive of inducing the women community against compulsory Hindi.275

The agitators organised All Parties’ Anti-Hindi Agitation meeting at Triplicane in Madras on 31st July 1938. Because of the press’ propaganda, 800 women from various areas participated in the conference. Among the orators, four were women. The Paper *Viduthalai* highlighted the event to capture the attention of the women community towards the goal irrespective of party politics.276

In this situation C. Rajagopalachari, the Chief Minister visited Erode on 28th July 1938. The women of Erode showed their opposition with black flags. The news was published in *Viduthalai* to encourage the anti-Hindi feelings in the society.277 The *Kudiyarasu* published the same with effective photographs for the same purpose.278 The same paper published the news of the agitation arranged by Dharmambal at Madras Mint Road. It was attended by the women in large numbers. They performed

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274 *Kudiyarasu*, Erode, 1 May 1938.
275 Ibid., 31 July 1938.
276 *Viduthalai*, Erode, 1 August 1938.
277 Ibid., 29 July 1938.
278 *Kudiyarasu*, Erode, 14 August 1938.
aarath\textsuperscript{279} in front of the agitators to wish them. By publishing the news, the press added cultural flavour to the agitation.\textsuperscript{280}

**The Imprisonment of the Women with Babies**

Enthused by the propaganda, the women were ready to go to jails. Even the mothers with kids went to jails with their kids. Comparatively they were less in numbers but enthusiastically they were as equal to men. The *Kudiyarasu* exposed the arrest and imprisonment of Movalur Ramamirtham Ammal, Dharmambal, Malarmugathammal, Pattu Ammal and Seethammal. Among them, Seethammal was arrested and imprisoned with her two children aged one and three. The paper published the photographs of the arrested women with the kids. This made a stir in the inner sentiments of the women.\textsuperscript{281} The journal published the particulars of the imprisoned women with photographs regularly. The news of the arrest of the women with children added fuel to the agitation. It also noted regularly the numerical particulars of arrested men, women and children. According to the *Kudiyarasu*, the total number of women arrested at the end of March 1939 was 54 and the number of children was 20.\textsuperscript{282} Among them some women were imprisoned for second time also.\textsuperscript{283}

Because of the vigorous agitation, E.V.Ramasamy was arrested and imprisoned. In this situation, the *Kudiyarasu* carried the news of Narayani Ammal’s challenge to the government. She challenged the government, unless the government would release E.V.Ramasamy within one week, she would involve herself in demonstration in front of the Premier's house and would get imprisonment. As she challenged, she demonstrated in front of the Chief Minister’s house on 17\textsuperscript{th} February 1939 and was imprisoned for six months.\textsuperscript{284} The exposure of this ‘challenge and response’ through the press stunned the public very much. It created the spontaneous sprit in the minds of the Tamil women.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{279} *Aarathi* is used to welcome the great persons with the use of sacred things.
\item \textsuperscript{280} *Kudiyarasu*, Erode, 18 September 1938.
\item \textsuperscript{281} *Ibid.*, 20 November 1938.
\item \textsuperscript{282} *Ibid.*, 26 March 1939.
\item \textsuperscript{283} *Ibid.*, 12 March 1939.
\item \textsuperscript{284} *Ibid.*
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T.S.S. Rajan, the then Minister criticised the protests of the women and remarked that the women came forward to be imprisoned with their children, in order to get milk at no cost for them. This statement created heat in the political and social fields. His statement commercialised the sacrifices of the women. The Kudiyarasu condemned it as misinterpreted and rotten. It asked him to withdraw his statement otherwise he should resign from the ministry.\textsuperscript{285} In praising the women who were imprisoned, the journal released a printed yearly calendar with the photographs of them. It also noted that the calendars sold out in no time.\textsuperscript{286}

Because of the high spirit of the agitation, the government changed its policy and issued an order on 21\textsuperscript{st} February 1940 that the Hindi would be taught as optional instead of compulsory.\textsuperscript{287} The participation of the women in the agitation was one the significant causes for its success. The propaganda of press served as the fundamental cause for their participation.

3. The Press and the Women in Leftist Movement

According to the Marxian ideology, the emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible so long as women are excluded from socially productive work and restricted to house work, which is private,\textsuperscript{288} and the women have to participate in outdoor activities, binding them to house hold work alone is the greatest injustice.\textsuperscript{289} As per these lines of Marx, the Communist Party of India made efforts to impart political thoughts on women and bring them to the political field.

After the year 1935, the Communists in Tamilnadu organised the womenfolk and formed the ‘Madhar Sangas’(women associations). The women of this time began to sense the need for total social transformation. They understood the importance and significance of the Marxian ideology and they joined their hands with men folk to implement the Communist programme quite successfully. There was natural reluctance on the part of the women to allow their sons to undergo hardships like jail

\textsuperscript{285} Ibid., 8 January 1939.
\textsuperscript{286} Ibid., 29 January 1939.
\textsuperscript{287} Palanidurai.G., Poly Ethnicity in India and Canada, New Delhi,1997, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{288} Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Free Capitalist Socio-Economic Formations, Moscow, 1979, p. 440. and R. A. Sydie, Natural women, Cultured Men, Vancouver, 1987, p. 100.
\textsuperscript{289} Mythli Sivaraman, Karl Marx Noorandu Malar, Madurai, 1983, p. 94.
sentence. But this initial reluctance later turned into a feeling of pride when they saw their sons playing a great role for the upliftment of the society.\textsuperscript{290}

Women came out daringly to speak at public places and this was seen in the second anniversary meeting of the Tramway Electric Supply Union held on 1\textsuperscript{st} May 1938. That day, Subadra Ammal, a committee member of the Madras Socialist Party hoisted the flag and spoke on the history of labour movement. The \textit{Janasakthi}, the official Tamil magazine of the Communist Party of India published the news and exclaimed her bravery and her impulsive speech.\textsuperscript{291}

K.P. Janaki, the female stage performer attained the heights in the Tamilnadu Communist Party. She was drawn into the movement in 1936. Her husband Gurusamy was in the Congress Socialistic Party and she was influenced by his ideas. Gradually she came into the movement. In a meeting at Villapuram in Madurai, under the leadership of Jeevanantham, a prominent Communist leader of Tamilnadu, she spoke on the slavery of women. She stressed the need to rise up and identify oneself with the movement. The party magazine covered the news and gave more highlight to her speech.\textsuperscript{292} She contributed a lot for the party. She collected party fund. Party classes were conducted at Madurai by her for the women comrades on Marxism and Socialism.\textsuperscript{293} The party magazine praised her, in order to recognize her activities regularly. The recognition made her work more for the party. She staged a drama ‘\textit{Kanthan Kaattum Vazhi}’ in many places to collect fund for the party.\textsuperscript{294}

In November 1942, the Solidarity Weak was celebrated by the Communist Party. During the weak, 72 betel leaf selling woman from Pappanayakkanpalayam of Coimbatore District came forward to collect party fund in the streets of Coimbatore with \textit{hundis} by breaking the social restrictions on the women. The party journal hailed the activities of these village women for the cause of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[291] \textit{Janasakthi}, Madras, 21 May 1938.
\item[292] \textit{Ibid.}, 13 August 1938.
\item[293] \textit{Ibid.}, 9 August 1941.
\end{footnotes}
This incident proved how large number of women got engaged in the leftist movement as they began to understand the ideas of socialism.

Kadayannallur Rathinasabapathi, a party cadre passed away in 1945. Party leader R.V. Ananthakrishnan went to console his mother. She said that her son worked for the communist ideology and that she was ready to give her other son for the party. Even amidst that grief, she gave hundred rupees for the party fund and said, “I am very much worried about you, the party members”. *Janasakthi* exposed the incident as the evidence of the emergence of the women as political force worth reckoning. In 1940s the women showed immense interest in the formation of women associations. The journal exposed the role played by the Tuticorin women in strengthening ‘Madhar Sangams’, as a time needed service.

In addition to that, the women party members were involved in several industrial strikes also. In a Textiles mill in Coimbatore, the women labourers demanded that their daily work should end at 5 pm instead of 6 pm. The management promised to consider the matter after some time. The women started strike on 22nd February 1946 for the immediate enforcement of their demand. The Communist workers offered them their support. The management declared lock out and the matter however got settled and the women were allowed to leave the factory by 5pm. The *Janasakthi* recorded the women’s strike as a role model to the rest.

In 1946, one of the biggest strikes began in the South Indian Railway from 24th August to protest against the dismissal of several workers. The police terror was intensified at the railway work shops at Golden Rock in Thiruchirappalli. The women had gone out to collect funds for the strike when the police arrested them. The women refused to get into the police van and walked all the way to the police station, shouting the slogans all the way and exhorting the public to witness, how women who supported the strike, were arrested and insulted. For twenty nine days this strike,

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296 Ibid., 19 September 1945.
297 Ibid., 23 June 1945.
299 *Janasakthi*, Madras, 27 February 1946.
thousands of women fought daringly. Savage terror was let loose. The Janasakthi observed the bravery of women, including the mothers as old as sixty years of age.

Coimbatore Textile workers struck work again on 11th November 1946. Two hundred workers including many women were picketing at the mill gates. The police brought in the backlogs in trucks. The police let loose the lathi charge. Riffle butts and bayonets were freely used. A reserve policeman threw down a women worker and fixed the riffle butt on her chest. She snatched the riffle from his hand. Another policeman standing close by shot her. The police killed another woman when she was helping men workers. As soon as the firing stopped, the workers carried the dead bodies of the two women on their head and marched towards the union office. A woman comrade ran to the head of the procession crying “shoot, shoot if you dare, drink more of the workers’ blood”, limped upto face the police. The party magazine exposed the women’s powerful role in the strike and their courageous spirit towards the goal.

Female Students and the Leftist Movement

Knowing about the equal status enjoyed by women in the Soviet Union from the articles published in the Janasakthi, the female students felt that they had a role to play. A Students’ Conference was convened by Parvathi Kumaramangalam at Salem on 4th and 5th July, 1942. It was attended by over 500 female students. She wrote an article in the Janasakthi stating that their hands that rocked the cradle would hold the guns. She hailed the remarkable works of the Soviet women engineers in the industrial establishments. Thus, the girl students of Tamilnadu understood their role in the society and many of them actively participated in the students’ conferences and the conferences conducted by and for the women.

The participation of the girl students in political and social activities was acknowledged by the party journal. A team of doctors was sent to Bengal, at the time of Bengal famine in 1943. A lady doctor by name Devaki joined the team. The girl

300 Renu Chakaravarthy, Communist in Indian Women Movements, New Delhi, 1980, pp. 171-172.
301 Janasakthi, Madras, 25 September 1946.
302 Renu Chakaravarthy, op.cit., pp. 171-172.
303 Janasakthi, Madras, 20 November 1946.
304 Ibid., 10 May 1944.
305 Fortnightly Report, First Half of July 1942.
306 Janasakthi, Madras, 7 November 1942.
students of Madras Medical College actively participated in various public welfare activities. Their activities were highlighted in the party journal. At the Students’ Conference held in Calcutta in 1945, Devaki was elected as a member of the Student Committee. Slowly many other women students came forward to join the movement. Mention must be made of Rukmani of Annamalai University, Kamala Ramakrishnan and Vijayalakshmi of Madras Medical College. They were interested in reading party journal and leftist literature.

The major movements of Tamilnadu such as the Indian National Congress, the Self-Respect Movement and the Communist Party of India considered the women’s political participation as the source of their success and the triumph for their policies. To captivate the attention of the women, they started utilizing the media as much as possible. The women, who were boycotted for a long time in the political arena, considered that their names were printed in the columns as the symbol of recognition. In the initial stages, the press too gave less importance to the womenfolk. But it changed its attitude and started giving importance to the womenfolk. They started thinking that giving importance to the women was the need of the time. The press, which changed their attitude according to the needs of the time, could develop themselves. The women community started gaining importance in politics and in columns. The womenfolk highly utilized the contributions of the press in developing their calibre and also their participation in the political movements in Tamilnadu.

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307 Ibid., 21 February 1945.
308 Indumathi.V., op.cit., p. 310.