Chapter II

The Press on the Struggle for Women’s Franchise
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Women’s political liberation won’t end with mere participation. Apart from participation in the political movements, it also depends upon their right to vote for their favourite candidates and contest in the elections. At the dawn of the twentieth century, the Indian women were not provided with such rights. According to customs and conventions, participation in decision making for the community and the exercise of political power were pertaining exclusively as man’s sphere.¹

During the first half of the twentieth century, the arguments for women suffrage all depended ultimately on the idea that women would be the equals of men. It was because women believed so and they thought the true state of the case was wrongly judged by men and also they felt that there were women who were hurt for not being admitted to the franchise.² The vote was considered as a symbol of freedom and equality³ and was the most important and basic means by which citizens were assimilated into the political process and learn how to exercise power.⁴ The press served the women community by inducing them with political knowledge for the purpose of securing their voting and contesting rights.

The Indian Constitutional development began with the Charter Acts and the Council Acts, but the Government of India Act of 1919 was the first step to achieve the democratic government in India. It gave voting rights to Indian men. It considered only the male members as citizens because the discrimination existed even in England up to 1916. The Indian Patriot expressed its dissatisfaction about the attitude of the women in this country. It harangued that the women didn’t mind not having voting rights. The Indian Patriot registered its unhappiness by expressing that even having a

¹ Munriddin Qureshi, Social status of women, Vol I, New Delhi, p. 9.
³ Christabel Pankhurst, Plain facts about a great evil, Biblio Life, Charleston, p. 122.
thought about women’s voting rights was considered as a social felony during this unpleasant situation.5

The Indian women were treated unfit to vote until 1921, when the Government of Madras provided that right to them. The press observed its sadness that attending a political meeting; entering into a political work seemed to be an unpleasant adventure to the women. *The Indian Ladies Magazine* opined that the initiative undertaken by the men for the women to be interested in politics was too unwomanly.6

When the first election was held in 1920 under the guidelines of Montague-Chelmsford Reforms Act of 1919, women raised their voice against gender inequality in ballot and demanded the right of equal franchise. They agitated to remove the gender disqualification and demanded the exact right which entitled men to vote. Their demand for equal franchise was accepted by the national leaders. Hence, this became one of the demands of the nation. The press generated public opinion in favour of the women’s franchise right.7

**Campaign of Cousins**

An understanding of the political system served the women an essential need for the committed political activities.8 The *Stri-Dharma*, the official organ of the Women’s Indian Association expressed its view to impart political training to women to understand the existing political system and they should not be left out of democratic system in India.9 Annie Besant, one of the prominent leaders of Women’s Indian Association kicked off the fruitful efforts to attain voting right for the women in India. She had a healthy link with Margrat E. Cousins, one of the pioneers of the Women’s Suffrage Movement both in Ireland and England. In 1915, Mrs. Cousins and her husband James Cousins were invited by Annie Besant for the noble cause of women’s franchise in India. They gladly accepted her invitation and came to India. Mr. Cousins was appointed as sub-editor of the *New India* and Mrs. Cousins as a Teacher at Madanapalli in Chittoor District. Cousin’s involvement in Indian feminist politics

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9 *Stri-Dharma*, Madras, April, 1928, p. 1.
began in 1917, when she and Dorothy Jinarajadasa, called together the Women’s Indian Association from the Theosophical headquarters in Madras.

Convinced that India was a hundred years away from a suffrage campaign, Cousins decided that basic social reforms were the primary requirements. With this in mind, the initial thrust of her campaign was towards educational reforms, improved adult literacy and the reform of Indian motherhood.\textsuperscript{10} When Cousins first heard of the government’s proposal to investigate franchise reforms in 1917, she petitioned its investigating committee on the issue of educational reforms for girls. Only when her petition was rejected it fell outside of the committee’s specific charge of franchise reform which made Cousins to modify the focal point of her campaign to votes for women.\textsuperscript{11} She continued to operate the Women’s Indian Association and its official magazine, the \textit{Stri-dharma} rhetorically for her dignified cause.\textsuperscript{12} Cousin’s role was extremely praiseworthy in formation of the National Council of Women in 1925. It was formed to promote mutual awareness and co-ordination of work among women’s organisations in various parts of the country. These efforts culminated in the establishment of All India Women’s Conference in 1926.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{First Women Deputation}

Cousins collected twenty women from all over India and organized them as women’s deputation to meet E.S.Montague, the Secretary of State for India on his visit to India. On 18\textsuperscript{th} December 1917, when he was in Madras, the memorable All India Women’s Deputation headed by Sarojini Naidu had an immemorable meeting with him.\textsuperscript{14} They submitted a memorandum which demanded of him women’s franchise in India on the basis of gender equality.\textsuperscript{15} The following were the momentous part of the memorandum: “the women of India understood and supported the broad

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{10} J.H. Cousins and M.E. Cousins, \textit{We Two Together}, Madras, 1950, p. 208.
\bibitem{11} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 309.
\bibitem{12} Ian Christopher Fletcher, \textit{Women’s Suffrage in the British Empire, Citizenship, Nation and Race}, London, 2000, p. 193.
\bibitem{13} Aruna Asaf Ali, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 78.
\bibitem{14} Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 94; Aparna Basu & Bharathi Ray, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 54-55.
\end{thebibliography}
claims of their people for Self-Government within the empire, and they pressed for its bestowal as urgently as do their brothers.\textsuperscript{16}

This was the first voting meet for the Indian women on the same terms as might be granted to men. This event marked a distinct milestone in the history of emergence of womanhood in India. It raised the tide of social, educational and political honour of women in India. The press in Tamilnadu voiced in support of their demand. It added strength to them. The participation of women in the Indian National Congress opened the flood gates of their self-assertiveness and social freedom.\textsuperscript{17}

In support of the deputation, \textit{Stri-Dharma} wrote humorously, “It must have been a relief to the Secretary of State Mr. E.S. Montague and H.E., The Viceroy after listening for days and hours to addresses read by black-coated gentlemen, to have the opportunity of contemplating and listening to a Deputation that looked cheerful, clad in beautiful saris.”\textsuperscript{18} It ended the article with alluring words “the women had an opportunity of voicing the sorrow of many hundreds of Indian women whose husbands, sons, brothers and fathers have been turned away from their families, because they loved their mother India beyond all else, and the deputation seized their chance; all honour to them.”\textsuperscript{19}

Most of the papers in Tamilnadu praised and welcomed the effort taken by the women team. The \textit{Prajanukulan},\textsuperscript{20} a journal published from Tiruchirappalli, in order to kindle the women for a good cause praised the efforts taken by the women to meet the Secretary of State and to present the memorandum and it was the good sign of future society.

The Indian National Congress right away endorsed women’s request for the franchise on the same terms as men, the property qualifications. At a special session of Indian National Congress in 1918, Sarojini Naidu told her colleagues that extending the vote to women was rational, scientifically and politically sound, well-suited with tradition and consistent with human rights.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{16} Kamaladevi Chatopadyaya, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{17} Cousins, M.E., \textit{Indian Women Today}, Allahabad, 1944, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Stri-Dharma, Madras}, February 1938, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 16
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Prajanukulan}, Thiruchirappalli, February 1918, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{21} Geraldine Forbs, \textit{Women in Colonial India}, New Delhi, 2005, p. 65.
Montague’s Report

After the consultation with the Viceroy and the Members of his committee, Montague submitted the Montague Scheme in 1918. As per the report only 2.5 percent of the people acquired the right to vote out of the total population of 24 crores and 17 lakhs. The voting qualifications varied from province to province. The most unfortunate thing was that the franchise right of women was not found in the scheme. Thus it discriminated women for franchise on the basis of sex. Indian National Congress in its Calcutta Session in December 1917 stated that women should not be discriminated on the basis of sex. The Indian Muslim League also passed a resolution in 1918 saying women should be given the power to vote.

In course of time, the Stri-Dharma worked hard to create public opinion in favour of women’s franchise. It published an article entitled “why the Indian women should have votes?” following that, it gave the answer too. It observed that the possession of a vote was the shortest route to gain power and efficiency. It induced the women community by quoting ‘strike the iron while it is hot’. It also stated that in olden days women used to take part in state affairs in India not only as rulers but also village councilors. The women of India were demanding for what they once possessed. In support of the women’s franchise in India, the Stri-Dharma gave punching answers to the male chauvinistic letters addressed to the magazine. In its answers, it demanded voting right for all women irrespective of possession, profession, religion and education. It suggested that by appointing a female officer, the purdah women could vote without any hesitation. In an article in Tamil language, it asked the women not to renounce their goal. Thus, the papers maintained tempo and cadence of the movement even when it suffered under initial failure.

Southborough Committee

By the constant demand of the women and the major political parties in India, the British Government appointed a committee to investigate the issue of

26 Stri-Dharma, Madras, May 1918, pp. 37-38.
women’s franchise. Since the committee was appointed to deal with the election question, it was called the ‘Franchise Committee’. When the committee was headed by Lord Southborough; it came to be known as Southborough Committee.\textsuperscript{29} When the committee came to India, the women leaders carried a propaganda and constant agitation to mend the committee in their favour. Forty five branches of the Women’s Indian Association expressed their demand for voting right by passing resolutions and sent them to the committee.\textsuperscript{30} All these branches were united by one factor, their official magazine, the \textit{Stri-Dharma}. The \textit{Justice}, the non-Brahmin paper wrote that the reasonable fraction of Hindu and Muslim women shook off their traditions, conservativeness, superstitions and became enlightened enough to take an active part in the political life of the country. It added that the demand for the right of women to be elected to the legislative and municipal councils was being largely recognized.\textsuperscript{31} But their efforts ended in vain. The committee submitted its report in 1919 that the social conditions of India made it premature to extend the franchise to the Indian women at this situation.\textsuperscript{32}

The most of the papers in Tamilnadu voiced their displeasure on the Report of the Southborough Committee. The \textit{Desabakthan} of Madras observed its dissatisfaction that voting right for women was not mentioned in the report and once again the women of India were swindled.\textsuperscript{33} The \textit{Hindu Nesan} wrote that even though the report had many good things, the absence of women’s franchise blemished all the others.\textsuperscript{34} The \textit{Swadesamitran} published a letter written by Margaret Cousins which protested against the committee’s denial of the franchise to women and urged the women associations to convene number of meetings to protest against the report. It appealed that the copies of resolutions passed there should be sent to the Government of India, the Secretary of State, and British Women Suffrage Societies.\textsuperscript{35} The same paper expressed its dissatisfaction and asked the Indian women not to fret about the

\textsuperscript{29} Herabai Tata, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Swadesamitran}, Madras, 22 May 1919.
failure but to craft subsequent step.\textsuperscript{36} The \textit{Indian Emigrant} was also dissatisfied with the conclusions of the Southborough Committee and observed that the committee had not granted franchise to the women of India and it was unwise that the government did not pay much attention to their rights.\textsuperscript{37}

The reactions of the Muslim journals were different. Some journals supported the women’s franchise whereas few journals supported the opinion of the Southborough Committee. For example, \textit{Mukbhar-i-Dhakan}, a Muslim journal from Madras referring to the Indian women who were protesting in different parts of the country against the report of the Southborough Committee, invited the attention of the Muslim leaders to the subject and called upon them to support the opinion of the committee.\textsuperscript{38} The \textit{Quami Report} argued that \textit{purdah} was no way interfered with the right to vote. Its editor supported the cause of women franchise and grumbled the silence of the Muslim community and its leaders on this subject.\textsuperscript{39}

\textbf{Joint Select Committee}

In July 1919, the Government of India Bill was introduced in the British Parliament. The Joint Select Committee of the members of the both the houses examined the evidences. The members of various deputations recommended giving voting right to the qualified women of India. On behalf of the Women’s Indian Association, a committee consisting of Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant and Herabai Tata gave evidence in London before the Joint Select Committee for the extension of the franchise to the women.\textsuperscript{40} Their demand was for voting right to about a million women who were educated and tax payers. They said that they were voting in the municipal councils and this should be taken as a precedent.

To add fire to the issue, the \textit{Stri-Dharma} published an article of Sarojini Naidu with the headline ‘A Plea for the Franchise of Indian Women’; it was a requisition to the members of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on this issue. When the women of India stood better in many fields, it was a prime crime that the voting

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Ibid, 22 May 1919.
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right was denied to them.  

The journal expressed its heartfelt thanks to the Home Rule League, of which Balagangadar Thilak presided, was the first political organization announcing publicly its support of women suffrage. This gained mammoth support from the important leaders for the women’s cause.

The electoral role stated that criminals, lunatics and children were not eligible to vote and so the women were not eligible to vote. They were also unfit to be considered for citizenship. The women’s associations of Great Britain urged the Joint Select Committee to extend the enfranchisement to Indian women also, so as to start the popular government in India, without any sex disabilities.

The *Hidnu Nesan* wrote that no Indian spiritual teacher had ever opposed the grant of franchise to women. It added that the rebuff of the franchise would wound the feelings of the Hindus following a religion which venerated their women. It was not therefore, proper for the Joint Select Committee to deny the franchise to women, fearing that a grant of it might wound the susceptibilities of the Hindus. It strongly registered its view that fearing to interfere in the socio-religious activities of the Indians, the Government should not commit any wrong against the Indian women.

The activities of the women’s associations in England and the Indian press showed sympathy and took interest in the cause of Indian women. The Joint Select Committee favoured in giving voting right to the Indian women. On the basis of its recommendations, the Indian Council Act of 1919 recognized franchise for women in India. The Parliament granted the right to decide the voting rights of women to each Provincial Council by a council resolution.

Even before the formation of the first ministry in Madras, Mangalambigai Sadasiva Iyer organized a women’s conference in Madras on 28th December 1920 to secure women’s suffrage. *The Hindu* gave wide exposure to the

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41 *Stri-Dharma*, Madras, January 1920, p. 125.
42 Ibid., October 1920, p. 164.
conference in order to support the women’s cause. The Women’s Indian Association and the press in the Madras Presidency put pressure on the members of the Madras Legislative Council to sponsor resolution for the same purpose. As a result the Madras took the lead and Diwan Bahadur M. Krishnan Nair gave a notice on 27th February 1921 to move his resolution on women’s franchise in the Madras Legislative Council. The Council accepted this, but as per Madras Electoral Rules, a resolution could be discussed and passed in the council only after the expiry of not less than a month since the notice resolution was given. Therefore the resolution was expected during the Easter holidays.

Success in the Struggle

In course of time, a deputation consisting most important female personalities of the Madras Presidency such as Mangalambigai, Mrs. Ramachandira Rao, Mrs.Rama Rao, Mrs. Gurusamy Chetty, Annie Besant, Rukmani Lakshmipathi, Margaret Cousins, Dorathy Jinarajadasa, Mrs.Lakshmana Rao, and Mrs.Lazarus met K.Srinivasa Iyengar, the Law Member of the Government of Madras, and submitted their memorandum to eliminate sex disqualification for the franchise for the Legislative Council of Madras. He assured them that their memorandum could be submitted when the resolution of Krishnan Nair would be moved in the Council. He further guaranteed that the name of ‘women’ would be removed as in the case of criminals, lunatic and the immature.

The Stri-Dharma praised the assiduous efforts made by Mangalambigai and expressed its faith on the Law Member. Though the Law Member promised them to support the resolution, he did not promise regarding the voting of purdah women. The Quami Report, an Urdu paper gave assurance that the purdah wouldn’t be a barrier on the way of women’s voting right. The same deputation met another Minister K. Venkata Reddy, but he expressed his powerlessness to carry out their wishes, though he was a minister representing the public. The Swadesamitran expressed its disappointment on his avowal and criticized his male chauvinist inability regarding the

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46 The Hidnu, Madras, 29 December 1920.
47 G.O. Ms. No. 139, Law Department (Legislative), 4 July 1921, TNA.
48 Stri-Dharma, Madras, April 1921, p. 14.
righteous cause. As per the previous notice dated 27th February, 1921, Krishnan Nair had moved the resolution in the Madras Legislative Council on 1st April, 1921 for the removal of sex disqualification for voting right. Accordingly the resolution was moved. The Council recommended the Government of Madras that the gender inequality prescribed in sub-clause (b) in rule 7 of the Madras Electoral Rules for Registration of the electoral roll was removed in respect of women and that the qualification which entitled men to vote was applicable to women.

At this juncture, the Women’s Indian Association convened meetings all over the presidency and sent deputations to meet the Law Member to get the resolution passed. The press already created the public opinion in favour of the resolution. As a result, the Bill was passed with the majority of 47 votes for, 13 votes against and 10 remained neutral and so the motion was declared and carried. On 10th May, 1921, the Government of Madras was pleased to make the following regulations:

1. The resolution may be called the Madras Electoral Sex Disqualification Removal Regulation
2. No women shall be disqualified by reason only of her sex for registration on the electoral roll of any constituency of the Legislative Council of Madras.

Madras was the first presidency in British India granting the right to vote to women as to men. The resolution received mixed support from the press. The Desabakthan considered the resolution as the triumph of the Indian womanhood. The Swadesamitran appreciated the resolution even though it was passed by a legislative council which was not a genuine representative body. The Stri-Dharma welcomed the resolution and on behalf of the Indian womanhood, it expressed its pleasure on the

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51 Resolution 19 of the Madras Legislative Council, April, 1921.
52 Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council, April 1921, p. 1015.
53 Ibid., p. 1016.
54 Ibid., p. 1017.
55 G.O. Ms., No.108, Law Department (Legislative), 10 May 1921, TNA.
58 Swadesamitran, Madras, 2 April 1921.
new right and gratitude to the women strugglers. But Navasakthi, edited by T.V. Kalyanasundaram, the former editor of the said Desabakthan, opposed the resolution on the ground that it was a right granted by the bureaucratic council which often restricted such rights. According to it, the liberty of women was only in the teaching of Gandhi and in the *charka*, the spinning wheel, and to go after him without getting deceived. The non-Brahmin paper Dravidan expressed it’s rejoice over the grant of the right. At the same time it gave more emphasis on women’s education than women’s voting rights. It added that a country which denied education to women was not fit for self government. It was a positive criticism on the issue.

The press voiced forcefully whenever the given rights were taken back. An instance regarding this, that the Stri-Dharma expressed its furious response in January, 1922 against the United Province Municipalities’ adoption of a resolution excluding *undesirable women* from the municipal franchise. It added that, if immorality was to be the disqualification for any kind of vote then it had to be the disqualification of men and women impartially.

**Right to Contest in the Elections**

Achieving the right to vote was only like half crossing of the well. The resolution passed in the Madras Legislative Council gave women the right to vote. It did not enfranchise the women to stand as candidates for the Legislatures. This right was vested with the British Parliament. The womenfolk did not get satisfied with their limited voting right alone but they demanded for the right to contest in the elections for Legislative Council. So after 1921, women diverted their attention towards getting right of entry to the Legislatures either by election or by nomination. The liberal press also started focusing its view on the new issue.

The Stri-Dharma published a matter in Tamil to justify the women’s demand for representation that there was no use of voting right alone. If the women were allowed to sit in the Council and to talk about their issues, they could make use of the right. If their advice would be heeded in the Council as in the family, there would

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59 Stri-Dharma, Madras, June 1921, p. 35.
60 Navasakthi, Madras, 2 April 1921, MNPR., Vol. I, 1921, p. 466.
61 Dravidan, Madras, 3 August 1922.
62 *Undesirable women* mean prostitutes.
63 Mythili Sivaraman, *Fragment of a Life, a Family, Archive*, New Delhi, 2006, p. 73.
be proper and adequate facilities such as transportation, proper drainage system and prevention of infanticide. The same paper published the resolution passed in the Ladies meeting conducted by the leading and representative women of Madras city, under the leadership of Mangalambigai in July 1925. Through the resolution, the journal recommended that the electoral rolls of the Council would be amended as to confer on women prescribed qualifications for the right to vote and to stand for elections to the Council of state.

In the editorial of the first issue of *Chinthamani*, a specialized magazine for women from Madras insisted the female representation in governing bodies. It published the questions raised by the fundamentalists as following:

- Was it unfeasible for a nation to develop without female representation?
- Were the women qualified to sit equally among the male members?
- How much did women know about public services?
- Who would be doing the family duties if the women became Council Members?

It gave a single answer for all the above questions that women were fit and qualified for everything. The press tried to consolidate the worldwide support in favour of the righteous cause. By publishing the resolution passed in the British Commonwealth League’s Conference held in London in September 1925, the *Stri-Dharma* called upon the British Government to amend the Government of India Act of 1919 in such a way that the women might be eligible for contesting in the election or nomination as member of the Indian Legislative or Provincial Councils.

The government often used its own escaping mechanism, the non-intervention in the religious matters in India. The press was not willing the same thing to be followed in the cases of immediately needed reforms. The *Dravidan* observed

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64 “என்னை வைத்து அருகுகள் நேர்த்துக்கொள்ள மாபூர் செய்யலாம்? தொடர் செய்ய முகமா வாலிகை மின்ச்செய்யமல்லாம்? ரமையாளர் அணுகாணமாயாலே போதினையே தொழில்வார்கள் நிறுவனங்கள் பொருள்களை மாற்றுவதற்காக வாழ்க்கை மாலையாளர் வெளிய அறிவியல் அளவு வேளாண்மை...ஏனெனென்று நிறுவனங்கள் நிற்கின்றன வேளாண்மை என்பதாலே பொருள்களை மாற்றுவதற்காக வாழ்க்கை மாலையாளர் வெளிய அறிவியல் அளவு வேளாண்மை...ஏனெனென்று நிறுவனங்கள் நிற்கின்றன வேளாண்மை என்பதாலே பொருள்களை மாற்றுவதற்காக வாழ்க்கை மாலையாளர் வெளிய அறிவியல் அளவு வேளாண்மை...ஏனெனென்று நிறுவனங்கள் நிற்கின்றன வேளாண்மை என்பதாலே 

65 Ibid., August 1925, p. 148.
66 *Chinthamani*, Madras, August 1924, pp. 3-6.
67 Ibid., p. 7.
that the women were gallantly urging that they should be granted all the rights enjoyed by men, and it criticized the government’s attitude that it was not proper in its part to be still harping on the age old argument of religious neutrality. It also remarked that the women paid the taxes like men and it is unfair to deny them the rights enjoyed by the latter. It requested the Government of India to pay attention to the demand for representation of the Indian women.  

Understanding the democratic values, the open-minded Indian men and the press extended their support and sympathy for the women’s cause. The press gave extensive coverage to the various meetings of the women’s organisations and matters related to women with the motive of sowing the seeds of democracy in the minds of the public. The Swarajya circulated a question to the public stating “Was it not a sin that one section of the society should keep another under subjection, with denying universal suffrage for fake reasons?”

The women’s organisations in Madras made a series of serious efforts to ripe the fruit. Margaret Cousins worked hard to win the entry of women into legislatures. With her advice, Mangalambigai Sadasiva Iyer led a deputation of the members of the Women’s Indian Association to meet Lord Willington, the Governor of the Presidency in 1925 to achieve the right for women to sit in the Council.

As the result, the Reforms Enquiry Committee, also known as the Muddiman Committee on Franchise Reforms submitted its report in which it recommended to empower the Legislative Assembly and the Provincial Councils to legislate in this matter. The Stri-Dharma admired Alexander Muddiman for his move and commended the matter as extremely good news for the Indian women kind. The Madras Presidency was the first in India in reaping the fruits of the recommendation. M.Krishnan Nair, a male feminist moved a resolution in 1926 in the Madras

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69 Dravidan, Madras, 24 September 1924.
70 Seetha Neelakandan, Margaret E. Cousins in Butchi Arumugam (ed.), Some Illustrious Women in India: with special reference to Tamilnadu, Madras, 1975, p. 45.
73 Stri-Dharma, Madras, October 1925, p. 179.
74 Ibid., p. 180.
Legislative Council in favour of admitting women into the Legislative Council through elections. The Council passed it and the Government of India accepted the resolution in April 1926.\textsuperscript{75}

The \textit{Swadesamitran} wrote that it was a welcome sign of the times and while it took fifty years of constant agitation to secure franchise for women in England, Madras was able to achieve the same results in about five or six years. It added that Madras was the first among the provinces of India to grant the women the right to vote as well as to stand as candidates for elections to the Council. It solicited that the other provinces had to follow the example of Madras in that respect.\textsuperscript{76}

\textbf{Women Candidates in the Election}

Immediately after the grant of right to contest, the election for the Legislative Council was announced in the Madras Presidency. Because of the short span of time before the election, large number of women couldn’t contest. It was so difficult to secure the women candidates. The Women’s Indian Association requested the political parties to select women candidates in the election. The \textit{Stri-Dharma} also appealed to the political parties for the selection of more women candidates as much as possible.\textsuperscript{77} But no political party in Madras was ready to bring the women candidates in the election. Affronted by the candidate selection of the political parties, the Women’s Indian Association fielded two women candidates. Hanan Angelo and Kamaladevi Chatopadyaya jumped into the elections under its banner.\textsuperscript{78} Hanan Angelo contested the seat which was reserved for Anglo-Indian community, and Kamaladevi Chatopadyaya contested from South Canara. The Indian National Congress which already promised to support Women’s issues neither contested in the election nor supported these women candidates. The \textit{Stri-Dharma} praised the candidature of Kamaladevi Chatopadyaya as the first Hindu woman to stand as a candidate in an election to the Legislative Council throughout the world.\textsuperscript{79} Both the female candidates lost their elections. Kamaladevi Chattopadyaya secured 4,461 votes only 51 votes less

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{75} \textit{Report on the Administration of Madras Presidency}, 1925-1926, Madras, 1926, p. XVIII;
  \textit{Fortnightly Report}, First Half of July 1926.
  \item \textsuperscript{76} \textit{Swadesamitran}, Madras, 22 July.
  \item \textsuperscript{77} \textit{Stri-Dharma}, Madras, August 1926, p. 145.
  \item \textsuperscript{78} Kamaladevi Chattopadyaya, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 97.
  \item \textsuperscript{79} \textit{Stri-Dharma}, Madras, October 1926, p. 179 and December 1926, p. 17.
\end{itemize}
than the successful rival candidate by a few days work. Though no women won in the election, the Stri-Dharma cherished the women for casting their valuable votes with enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{80}

**Representation through Nomination**

Due to non-representation of women in the Council, the Women’s Indian Association and the Stri-Dharma hard-pressed the government forcefully for the nomination of Muthulakshmi Reddy, its Vice-President, a devoted social worker and a medical practitioner to the Madras Legislative Council.\textsuperscript{81} The Government of Madras nominated her to the Council. She was the first woman to sit in the Council.\textsuperscript{82} She was elected unanimously by the members as the Deputy Chairman of the Council.\textsuperscript{83} The Indian Ladies Magazine praised her as the first woman to be elected as the Deputy Chairman among the Democratic Countries in the world.\textsuperscript{84} The press gave much importance to her selection for the superior post. The Swadesamitran wrote that this was an event of great significance and rich promise for the future.\textsuperscript{85}

Even before the nomination of Muthulakshmi Reddy, Poonam Lukose was nominated as the Health Minister in Princely State of Travancore. The Chinthamani admired her selection as the first female member of the Legislative Councils in India.\textsuperscript{86} The government nominated Mathaviammal as a member of Cochin Legislative Council. Both were the active members of the Women’s Indian Association. By 1927, seven Indian provinces accepted the entry of women into Legislature. The Stri-Dharma covered this news and considered it as a step ahead in the history of the Indian womanhood.\textsuperscript{87} The Indian Ladies Magazine upheld the women leaders for attaining their triumph in securing representation.\textsuperscript{88}

After being elected as the Deputy Chairman of the Legislative Council, Muthulakshmi Reddy worked hard for the betterment of women in the province. The

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., December 1926, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{81} Kamaladevi Chatopadyaya, \textit{op.cit.} p. 98.
\textsuperscript{83} The Indian Ladies Magazine, Madras, August-September 1927, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., p. 15.
\textsuperscript{85} Swadesamitran, Madras, 25 November 1926.
\textsuperscript{86} Chinthamani, Madras, October 1924, p. 115.
\textsuperscript{87} Stri-Dharma, Madras, May 1928, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{88} The Indian Ladies Magazine, Madras, March 1928, p. 40.
major fraction of the press in Tamilnadu supported her in all her council activities. The Indian Social Reformer wrote in extol of her that in the short period of three years, she was able to do much for the cause of women and children which she had at heart. She concentrated on the education of poor girls, question of social hygiene and the dedication of women. On praising her, the paper observed that India would very soon get rid of all its disabilities such as the custom of early marriage, purdah, unequal marriage laws, unjust inheritance laws etc. In the motive of inducing the women community for their enhanced future and in honor of Muthulakshmi Reddy, The Indian Ladies Magazine proudly reproduced her article.  

Even though the Kudiyarasu had anti-Congress opinion, it praised the activities of Muthulakshmi Reddy, who followed the footsteps of Gandhi. It asked the government to enact the bill relating to the abolition of Devadasi system moved by her in the Council. Still Muthulakshmi Reddy had no greed either for the membership of the Council or for the chair of its Deputy Chairman. When Gandhi was arrested in March 1930, she felt no hesitation in resigning the membership and quit her office.

The Common wealth of India Bill

In 1927 with an initiative of Annie Besant, the Common wealth of India Bill was being discussed in the British Parliament. The idea of Commonwealth was conceived by her in the year 1925. The demand for the extension of voting rights for women evolved from it. But the press did not express its satisfaction regarding this Bill. The Quami Report had an opinion that the Commonwealth of India Bill was based on her personal creed and political views and did not represent the demands of Indian public as was proved by the fact that the Bill had not been rectified by the Indian National Congress and not accepted by its leaders. The Swarajya remarked that Annie Besant’s Commonwealth of India Bill was a bitter and grossly unfair campaign against the Indian National Congress. In spite of these negative opinions, the Women’s Indian Association sent its representative to London to take part in the

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89 Ibid., February 1931, p. 438.
90 Kudiyarasu, Erode, 30 March 1930, p. 7.
discussion. The very intension of the participation was to add a clause by which the rights and duties of citizenship should be viewed without any distinction of sex.

**Special qualifications for women voters**

In March 1927, the Simon Commission was appointed to examine the working of the Mont-Ford Reforms. It viewed that India couldn’t reach the position until its women played their due part as educated citizens.\(^9^4\) The Statutory Commission came to India in 1928 and recommended two additional special qualifications for women voters. They were, 1) being the wife over twenty-five years of age whose husband had the property qualification of vote; 2) being a widow over the age whose husband at the time of his death was so qualified. It added women over twenty-one years who possessed education would also be enfranchised.\(^9^5\)

**Election Questionnaire**

Wifedom and widowhood qualifications were criticized by all women’s organisations. Most of the papers expressed that the recommendations would make the women of India as enduring dependents to men, hence, it was suggested that the issue should be intensely investigated.\(^9^6\) Before the problem was solved, the election for Madras Legislative Council was announced in 1929. The Indian National Congress stayed away from the election. Finding it easier said than done to contest with male candidates in the election, women did not contest in it.

Even though women were not contesting in the election, they campaigned for the election. It showed the political awakening of women.\(^9^7\) The *Stri-Dharma* taught the new women voters to think about the tasks before voting.\(^9^8\) It published a questionnaire on behalf of the women’s organizations at Madras for the use of women voters. The following was the questionnaire constructed for reforms to be carried out by men candidates.

“You will have women’s vote, if you answer in the affirmative the following questions:

\(^9^5\) *Government of India’s Dispatch on Proposals of Constitutional Reform*, Calcutta, 1930, p. 29;
\(^9^7\) *Stri-Dharma*, Madras, May 1929, p. 301.
1. Would you introduce and support all the measures for developing the higher education for women?
2. Would you introduce and support all schemes for extending modern scientific medical relief to Indian mothers and children? Ex. Children’s hospital, maternity and child welfare centres, Training of nurses, Midwives and health visitors, and medical inspection for school children.
3. Will you support Sarda’s Bill and the Select Committee report on that Bill that the Marriageable age of girls be raised to 14 and that of boys to 18?
4. Are you for penalizing marriage between minor girls and old men over forty years?
5. Would you try your best to put down the sordid custom of buying bride-grooms?
6. Are you for raising the Age of Consent over 18 or at least to 18 outside marital bond?
7. Would you encourage widow marriages and take steps to remove the stigma that is attached to widow-hood in this country?
8. Are you for closing up of the Brothels and penalising commercialized vice?
9. Would you introduce legislation or support any legislation for the recurring the protection of mirror girls from immoral surroundings and introduce the necessary amendments in the Madras Children’s Act?
10. Are you for doing away with the present degenerate Devadasi institution in the Hindu temples and for enacting more stringent measures for disallowing the “Potti” ceremony” within temples, for major girls also?
11. Are you for making the Hindu Marriage Laws just and equal between wife and husband?
12. Are you for giving inheritance rights to wives and daughters and owners and disposers of husband’s and father’s property?
13. Are you for prohibition and total abstinence from drink?
14. Will you introduce legislation to improve the condition of factory women and child-labour in this country?
15. Are you for encouraging indigenous industries and Khaddar?
16. Do you realize that untouchability, caste and communalism, are a great hindrance to the attainment of India’s freedom, and would you work for the speedy eradication of the same?” 99

The Women’s Indian Association and its authorized journal, the Stri-Dharma was not affiliated with any political party.100 It encouraged women to vote for the candidates who positively answer the questionnaire irrespective of the political party.101 Special provisions such as separate ways for women to the polling stations, female officers were arranged for the women to exercise their votes. In the urban constituencies the female voting percentage was over 75%, where as in the rural constituencies, it was very meagre. The total number of women of this presidency who exercised their votes was 17,836 out of 98,680.102 Alamelu Mangathayarammal was the only lady who became the member of Legislative Council. She was elected unopposed103. The efforts of Stri-Dharma did not end in vain. Other than Madras presidency, sizeable numbers of women were elected for Legislative Councils and Municipal Boards.104

Struggle for Universal Adult Franchise

After the end of the election the women’s organizations in India started their work for universal adult franchise energetically. They utilized the use of their own papers for the purpose of universal adult franchise. Representatives of various women’s organizations in India met in Bombay in April 1931 under the leadership of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and drafted a memorandum demanding no reservation of seats for women or special nomination and it emphasized women to contest in the elections on equal terms with men in mixed general election as in European countries. This memorandum was presented to the Viceroy of India and the Members of the Second Round Table Conference. The Stri-Dharma published the zeal of memorandum and insisted the demand for the equality of citizenship among men and women of India.105

99 Ibid., May 1929, p. 301.
100 Ibid., May 1928, p. 51.
101 Ibid., July –August 1930, p. 385.
102 General Elections 1930 statistics in G.O. Ms. Nos. 570-571, Law (Legal.), December 1930, TNA.
104 Stri-Dharma, Madras, March 1931, p.181 and July 1931, p. 389.
105 Ibid., May 1931, p. 286.
When the idea of Round Table Conference was conceived, the women organizations urged for the representation of women. They submitted the list of eleven female members for the consideration. The names were, Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Brijal Nehru, Hamid Ali, Kamaladeve, Shave, Rani Rajwade, Rastunji Faridoonji, Lazarus, and Muzuruddin.\textsuperscript{106} The \textit{Stri-Dharma} insisted that the women’s co-operation was as essential and as precious for the solution of political problem as it was for social, economic, and educational problems.\textsuperscript{107} The paper emphasized that two or three women out of hundred members at the Round Table Conference could not sufficiently represent half of India’s population.\textsuperscript{108} The paper called on every political party in the country for securing adequate representation for women. But All India Women Conference was asked for three of its representatives and the Women’s Indian Association the much older organization would share one seat from the former.\textsuperscript{109} Radhabai Subbarayan, Begum Shah Nawas and Sarojini Naidu were the selected women representatives for the Second Round Table Conference.

The \textit{Anandha Bodhini} published the message from Sarojini Naidu about the Round Table Conference. In it, the paper emphasized that the people of India should not feel themselves as Muslims and Hindus but Indians. It asked the women of India to render their support to attain success in the Round Table Conference.\textsuperscript{110} The \textit{Thamilagam} felt in discontent that the government was against the development of women, particularly in the field of women franchise. It added that the women of India should support the mission of Sarojini Naidu in the Round Table Conference.\textsuperscript{111}

It was said that Sarojini Naidu was selected only to represent on general issues. Women’s organizations in India and papers like the \textit{Stri-Dharma} demanded the authorities concerned that Sarojini Naidu would be their representative in all matters pertaining to their status in the forthcoming new Constitution.\textsuperscript{112} In spite of these efforts, the demand was rejected by the authorities. In the conference Radhabai Subbarayan from Madras demanded special franchise for women and age of voting

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  \item \textsuperscript{106} \textit{Stri-Dharma}, Madras, July 1931, p. 386.
  \item \textsuperscript{107} Ibid. p. 387.
  \item \textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{109} Ibid., p. 388.
  \item \textsuperscript{110} \textit{Anandha Bodhini}, Madras, September 1931, p. 226.
  \item \textsuperscript{111} \textit{Thamilagam}, Madras, August-September 1931, pp. 25-26.
  \item \textsuperscript{112} \textit{Stri-Dharma}, Madras, July 1931, p. 442.
\end{itemize}
should be lowered to the age of twenty one to be consistent with the age of men. But the women’s organizations did not go with her line; they stood on the line of the joint memorandum. They considered wifehood qualification as objectionable on the ground that it placed a premium on marriage and perpetuates the idea of women’s dependence on men and did not recognize their independent right of suffrage. So there were two opinions among the women on adult franchise one was the idea of gradually increasing the franchise and special representation and the other was demand for universal adult suffrage and equal rights. But both demanded the reduction of disparity between the voting strength of men and women.

The paper *Vote* registered its view in its editorial that it didn’t agonize about the methods recommended by the franchise committee. But it urged strongly that the terms of the franchise should be the same for women as for men, and that those terms should be such as to enfranchise as nearly as possible the same number of women as men. It also said that it was unthinkable that in a great country like India, there should be any inequalities in the franchise of men and women more especially as Ceylon was enjoying equal franchise for men and women at that time.

Because of the repeated demand of the women’s organizations with the backing of the press, the Franchise Sub-Committee of the Round Table Conference met at London to enquire about the reduction of disparity between men and women voters. Women demanded to remove the provision of making the application for the special qualification in the election to the authorities. Even though the demand was showed through continuous protests, the committee was not for removing the application condition.

Then another Franchise committee called Lothian Committee was appointed to solve the problem of women’s franchise in India. It visited India twice in 1931 and 1932. It circulated a questionnaire to various women’s organisations. The *Stri-Dharma* published the questionnaire for the discussion among women. The leaders of the Women’s Indian Association and the All India Women’s Conference

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114 *Vote*, Madras, 22 January 1932.
circulated the questionnaire and answers to their members for approval. Some members were chosen to meet the committee to articulate their opinion. The Lothian Committee received documents from women supporting universal franchise, but they also heard from women who favoured reservations. After analyzing the questionnaire and documents, the franchise committee realized that it was necessary to increase women’s franchise. They aimed at the proportion of 1:4. Apart from the wife or widowhood qualification the committee proposed mere literacy as a qualification for vote. But they rejected the plea for universal adult franchise. By covering the news of Indian Ladies conference at Triplicane held in July 1932, the Swadesmitran expressed its opposition to Lothian Committee for not giving adult franchise.

The Stri-dharma uttered its dissatisfaction strongly on the report that Indian women wanted no reservation of seats but would fight their way into the councils and local boards. As laid down in the memorandum, Indian women wanted equal opportunities to serve the country with men, and therefore every woman of twenty one years and above should have franchise and the committee’s report would perpetuate caste system. It also condemned the report particularly the reservation for women clause through the resolutions made in the Madras Ladies Conference in October 1932.

In 1933, the Joint Parliament Committee’s Report known as the White Paper incorporating the recommendations of Lothian Commission was published. In it, no attempt was made to remove the gender disqualification in franchise. All efforts made by the women organisations ended in futile.

The Indian Ladies Magazine accepted the property qualification as recommended in the white paper for eligibility to vote in the elections to the Provincial and Federal Legislatures. But it strongly disapproved of the proposed special condition under which women may be enfranchised, namely being the wife or widow of a person possessing the property qualification at present entitling him to vote for the Provincial legislatures. It considered that the women’s rights as citizens should not depend on

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117 Geraldine Forbs, *op.cit.*, p. 70.
120 *Stri-Dharma*, Madras, September 1932, pp. 688-691.
marriage. Therefore it recommended that the women of twenty one years of age in all urban areas should be enfranchised. The magazine insisted that more women’s voice should be raised in question of urgency and importance of this matter. Thus, it tried its best to build public opinion in favour of adult franchise.

In March 1933, the women representatives prepared an alternate proposal for an intervening stage. Three women representatives, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Muthulakshmi Reddy, and Hamid Ali were sent to London to give evidence before the Joint Select Committee. The Stri-Dharma expressed its happiness that its readers would be glad to know that Muthulakshmi Reddy who prevailed upon to go to England and give evidence, on behalf of all the organized women’s associations in India, before the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the question of women’s franchise and their status in the new Constitution. Initially Muthulakshmi Reddy was not ready to accept the invitation on the grounds of personal sentiments and principles. The women organisations and the papers like the Stri-Dharma convinced her to go and give evidence for the wellbeing of the women in India. Even though the women’s organisations continuously insisted on adult suffrage, they had an alternative option. They opted for atleast adult suffrage in the urban constituencies. The Stri-Dharma criticized that the women representatives from India had not been given a proper opportunity to put their case before the full committee and the press in England was not as sympathetic and helpful as it might had been. It also marked that it was proud of the firm and courageous stand taken by Indian women representatives in the course of their evidence given before the Joint Select Committee. It added that the courage, fine sense of proportion, honesty of purpose, and a true all India spirit were the characteristics of the Women’s movement, and the three veteran representatives were fully worthy of the trust that was put in them. They had added dignity and honour to

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122 The Indian Ladies Magazine, Madras, May-June, 1933, p. 132.
123 Ibid., September-October, 1933, pp. 233-234.
124 Stri-Dharma, Madras, June 1933, pp. 403-405.
125 Ibid., July 1933, p. 424.
126 Ibid., p. 426.
128 Stri-Dharma, Madras, September 1933, p. 525.
the women’s cause. It offered them its warmest and most sincere appreciation and gratitude for what they had accomplished.129

The representatives of All-India Women’s Organization also met the Joint Select Committee. They were sided with the committee. The Stri-Dharma criticized the organization as conservative and communal.130 It exposed its sadness that it could not understand why the Joint Select Committee had failed to show the women’s organisations the same courtesy and concession as they did to the communal, the die-hard and to the ultra orthodox groups from India and the later evidence was more to their taste than that of the women’s.131 But finally, the Joint Select Committee did not alter its report. All leading women’s organisations vehemently opposed the committee’s stand. The Stri-Dharma exposed vehement opposition of the Indian women and showed its unhappiness on the report132 whereas The Indian Ladies Magazine wrote that even in the most advanced countries, absolute equality had not been attained yet, but the government’s work had benefited in India by the growing influence of women. The magazine felt slight happiness about the increasing of women’s franchise.133

In the round table conferences, it was decided to grant increasing women franchise and special representation to them. It was decided that from ten percent to twenty five percent of the total population of women should be given the right to vote. Even though women were disappointed with the report, they didn’t renounce their struggle. During the time a by-election in the Madras city was announced in October 1934. Muthulaksmi Reddy organized a meeting in Madras and requested the women voters to support any candidate who would promise to work for the betterment of the women community. This message was carried to the women voters of Madras through the columns of the Stri-Dharma.134

The Women’s Indian Association requested its members to support the candidature of Rukmani Lakshmipathi of Congress party, because she was ready to

129 Ibid., p. 530.
130 Ibid., October 1933, p. 594
131 Ibid., p. 595.
132 Ibid., December 1934, p.78.
134 Stri-Dharma, Madras, November–December 1934, p. 72
follow the manifesto of the association and she was also a former member of the Women’s Indian Association.135 The women candidate was supported by the major daily of the province, the Hindu. It wrote that Rukmani Lakshmipathi had a record of service and sacrifice to her credit which entitled her to the unstinted support of all who placed national interests before communal and sectional ends.136

With the support of the women’s organisations and major newspapers, she won the election in a thumping majority.137 She made a record that she was the first elected woman member of the Legislative Council of Madras. The Stri-Dharma praised her triumph not for any thing but she was a women.138 It added that she was known for her diligence in public work and for the courage with which she had undertaken difficult causes in which she did not shrink from likely defeat. It was so nearly impossible to get any of the political groupings to put forward the women candidates for the government of local or party election that women would know that Rukmani Lakshmipathi was receiving encomiums for her work.139

The Election of 1937 and Registration of Women Voters

The British Parliament passed the Government of India Act in August 1935. It was an outcome of long process of several committees. The Act amplified the women's franchise. The women of and over twenty one years of age were eligible to vote if they had the property and literary qualifications. The wives and widows of the common voters were also allowed to cast their vote. But the adult franchise was not permitted in India.140 Even the alternative proposals given by the women representatives were rejected.

Reservation of seats for women on the communal basis was granted by the Central and Provincial Legislatures. The Madras Provincial Legislature reserved eight seats for women out of 215. No seats were reserved for women in the Upper House of Madras Legislature. The creation of special constituencies for women would create the tendency to segregate and isolate them into a separate compartment. It was a

135 Ibid., March 1935, p. 221.
136 The Hindu, Madras, 8 April 1935.
137 G.O.Ms. No. 103, Public (Confidential), January 1935, TNA.
138 Stri-Dharma, Madras, April 1935, p. 252.
139 Ibid., January-February 1936, p. 38.
good thing that the women were not debarred from contesting elections from the general constituencies.

The women had to fulfill the application condition. The Government of Madras asked the women voters to present their application in person to the officer of registration. The Kudiyarasu insisted the women voters to register themselves on or before 20th June 1936. It published the qualification for the women voters in order to educate the new women voters. But the registration of women voters was not an easy task for the women of Tamilnadu. The Stri-Dharma revealed their grievances of women during the registration. The due date for the registration was the month of June. Most of the women voters were out of station because of summer vacation. Another main problem was of the purdah women, their social custom did not allow them to face the male officers while registering. The Stri-Dharma requested the government to make alternative arrangements. The government was in a mood to hear the voice of the paper and extended the due date to the month of July and in the case of purdah women, they were allowed to register their names through their husbands or other male relations.

After the passing of the Act of 1935, the Congress changed its attitude in contesting in the elections to go to the legislatures. It started the ground work for the forthcoming elections. By late 1936 the government announced that the general elections to the new legislatures would fall in February 1937 and the Congress Party had straight away started its work. The women organisations approached various political parties to nominate at least some women for the general constituencies. Suitable candidates’ names were specified to the political parties by Muthulakshmi Reddy. But the political parties including the Indian National Congress were not interested in giving candidature to the women in general constituencies. The Kudiyarasu published the names of the well-known women candidates as follows: In Madras Ladies Constituency, Rukmani Lakshmipathi of the Congress party and Alamelu Mangathayarammal of Justice Party contested. In Cuddalore Division Ladies

141 Premalatha, P.N., op.cit., p. 69.
143 Kudiyarasu, Erode, 10 May 1936, p. 5.
145 G.O.Ms. No. 3499, Home, 3 September 1937, TNA.
Constituency, the Congress candidate Anchalai Ammal the Justice Party candidate Andalammal and an independent candidate Backiyalakshmi contested. In the Landlords’ constituency, Radhabai Subbarayan contested as an independent candidate. Roche Victoria contested from Tirunelveli Christian Ladies Constituency as an independent candidate, Lakshmi Ammal of Congress Party, C.S. Nayagam of Justice Party, Rajamani Ammal and Seethalakshmi Ammal, the independent candidates contested from Madurai Ladies Constituency.¹⁴⁶

The Congress party lost only four seats in the 116 general constituencies and won 156 of the total of 215. The Congress women Candidates won 7 seats out of 8. One seat was bagged by an independent candidate.¹⁴⁷ Roche Victoria, an independent women candidate contested from Tirunelveli Christian Ladies Constituency joined the Congress Party before the election. She won the election.¹⁴⁸ Though the women victors were less in numbers, the Madras Presidency stood first in the number of women who voted in the 1937 elections. The number of women voted in Madras was almost three times higher than the second best Bombay Presidency.¹⁴⁹ All these things occurred only because of the tireless work done by the women’s organisations and the press of Madras. After the announcement of the results of the election, The Indian Ladies Magazine observed that it was gratifying to note that number of women had been put into the new legislatures. It observed that there should be no doubt much disappointment of large numbers had not been elected. It shared its happiness on the election of best women candidates.¹⁵⁰

Women Representatives

After the grand success in the elections, the Congress party formed ministry under the leadership of C. Rajagopalachari. Among the women victors Rukmani Lakshmipathi and Jothy Vekatachalam had joined the Madras Cabinet. Radhabai Subbarayan, the defeated independent candidate in the 1937 election was

¹⁴⁸ Kudiyarasu, Erode, 14 February 1937, p. 16.
¹⁴⁹ Premalatha, P.N., op.cit., p. 70.
named as Indian National Congress Party candidate in the Madurai, Ramnad and Tirunelveli non-Muhammadan rural constituency in the by-election for the Upper House of the Central Legislature in 1938.\textsuperscript{151} The \textit{Kalki} observed that many people wondered that she was not selected as the candidate by the Congress in the 1937 elections, and the Congress party rectified its mistake by fielding her in the by-election. Because of her political experience she got thumping victory over her rival candidate. The above paper pointed out that it occurred to highlight the individual woman’s victory, if she won in the general elections along with others, her individuality could not be identified. It added that her triumph resulted in the emergence of number of women in the political arena.\textsuperscript{152} The \textit{Madhar Marumanam} admired her victory that the Madras Presidency should feel proud of sending the first women representative of South India to the Central Legislature and it published the message of Radhabai Subbarayan that she was not afraid of being a solitary woman member sandwiched between 140 male members.\textsuperscript{153} Through the message, the paper emphasized nothing be impossible for women.

Due to the Second World War, all the works were paralyzed from 1939 to 1945. In 1945 the by-election from the Madras city constituency for the Central Assembly was announced. The Congress party nominated Guntur Narasimmha Rao as its candidate. The local party people disliked it. The local newspapers urged the Congress Party to change its candidate. The \textit{Hindustan} published the public opinion to change the candidate and to nominate Ammu Swaminathan.\textsuperscript{154} The \textit{Indian Express} requested the Congress authority to nominate Ammu Swaminathan, the renowned women candidate of Madras city and viewed that she was the only suitable candidate for the election.\textsuperscript{155} The \textit{Kalki} made a warning to the Tamil people that the selection of Narasimha Rao would cease Madras City from Tamil Country.\textsuperscript{156} The Congress Party respected the opinion of the press and changed its candidate. It nominated Ammu Swaminathan as its candidate. Only because of the campaign of the press, a woman

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\textsuperscript{151} G.O. Ms. No. 984, Public (Elections) Department, 13 June 1938, TNA.
\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Kalki}, Madras, 5 May 1946.
\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Madhar Marumanam}, Karaikudi, April-May 1938, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Hindustan}, Madras, 20 October 1945
\textsuperscript{155} \textit{Indian Express}, Madras, 20 October 1945.
\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Kalki}, Madras, 21 October 1945, p. 10.
\end{flushright}
could secure her birth in the election. The Kalki praised her candidature that she was well known to Madras, her commitment in the women’s organisations was commendable. She was the famous mother of her well known daughters Mirunalini, the expert in dance and Major Lakshmi of Jhansi Rani Regiment of Indian National Army. It added if she would win the election unopposed, there would be no chance for her popularity and the Justice Party helped her by fielding its candidate to spread her popularity. The paper believed in the women voters of Madras that they wouldn’t elect any candidate other than Ammu Swaminathan. With the support of the major fraction of the press, she won the election in November 1945.

In the Second General Election held in 1946, more than 20 percent of the enrolled women voters cast their votes. Due to the tireless efforts made by the women organisations and the press, twelve women were elected for the Madras Legislature. Apart from the eight reserved seats three women were selected from the rural general constituencies and one from the urban general constituency. Rukmani Lakshmipathi assumed the post of Minister for Public Health and Medical Department. Mrs. C.Ammanna Raja became the Deputy Speaker. Fourteen women became the members of Constitution Assembly of India, among them; Ammu Swaminathan and Durgabai Ammal were selected from Madras Presidency.

Women Representatives in Municipal Boards

For the first time in India, the Madras Municipal Corporation provided the voting right to the women of the Madras city in 1919. The Swadesamitran urged the government regarding women’s franchise in the municipal boards, that the existing restriction in respect of women standing as candidates for municipal councillorships should be removed. It also requested to extend the voting right of women to other Local Boards. The Manorama, the paper from Calicut insisted that the franchise

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160 Ibid., p. 85.
161 Vijay Agnew, op.cit., p. 40.
162 Madras Act IV, Section 48, Madras, 1919.
164 Ibid., p.1220.
right given by the Madras Corporation should be extended to other local boards. In the year 1923 the Act was amended enabling the women to contest in the local boards’ election. The members of Women’s Indian Association in large number could become the municipal councilors. Hannen Angelo, an Anglo-Indian nurse became the first elected councilor of the Madras Corporation. The Stri-Dharma praised her election that even though Anglo-Indian special constituency was provided, she contested in the general constituency and won it. It added that in the Madras city, the women were rising to a sense of their responsibilities both in their national and civic duties. This was an appreciable acknowledgement to the women of Madras.

Nomination of the Alderwomen

Because of the increased number of women councilors in Madras Corporation, the Alderwomen were nominated to assist the Mayor. In 1937, Muthulakshmi Reddy was nominated as the first Alderwoman of Madras. Her nomination was a booster to women of the city. In 1938 Andal Venkata Subba Rao became the Alderwoman and in the year 1939 Kamala Bandalae was nominated as the Alderwoman. The Grihalakshmi expressed its thanks for selecting these women unanimously as Alderwomen of the city.

Memorandum for Women’s Employment

In other municipal councils too, the women councilors worked effectively. The Kudiyarasu exposed the work done by Kannammal, the women councilor of Erode Municipality. She presented a memorandum to the Municipal council to resolve it. In the memorandum, she insisted the employment for women in the municipal jurisdiction. She requested the jobs such as cashier, vaccination and typing should be reserved for women. If private training was needed for the women for the jobs, the municipal authority should make arrangements for the free training. The women teachers should be appointed in the elementary schools even for the boys. The paper insisted the female councilors of the other local boards to make such

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166 Stri-Dharma, Madras, July 1925. p. 131.
167 Ibid., September 1925, p. 164.
168 Grihalakshmi, Madras, 1 November 1939, p. 774.
169 Ibid., p. 775.
memorandum and to be presented for making resolutions in favour of the women community.\footnote{Ibid., p. 9.} After few days, the above paper published the news that the requisition of Kannammal regarding women’s employment was passed in the council into a resolution.\footnote{Ibid., 18 December 1932, p. 11.} This attempt was made to expose the supremacy of women in municipal boards among the upcoming women in political field.

After independence, the Government of India instituted Universal Adult Suffrage and Constitutional guarantee of sex, caste and religious equality. According to the Indian Constitution, no person be ineligible for inclusion or to claim to be included in a special electoral roll on ground of religion, race, caste and sex.\footnote{Constitution of India, Article 325.} It guaranteed that the election to the House of the People and the Legislative Assembly is to be on the basis of adult suffrage.\footnote{Ibid., Article 326.}

The women enfranchisement had very peculiar pages in the history of Tamilnadu. It was given not on the pity of men folk, but by the protracted struggle of womenfolk. The role played by the press in Tamilnadu was one of the main reasons for the women’s rising and they broke the custom, usage and also the legal ban. When the Constitution of India came into force on 26th January 1950, the sex disqualification of franchise was legally removed, women were provided with adult suffrage. Thus, the adult suffrage was incorporated in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution.