Social Legislations for Women and the Press
Chapter III

Social Legislations for Women and the Press

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Tamilnadu had to face plentiful social hazards. In each and every sphere of the society, the male community dominated its counter part. The women were not independent. The western education created a change among women in Tamilnadu. They started fighting with the male made hazards. The press rendered them its full fledged support to fight effectively. The Indian liberal press exposed the matters of social legislations related to women issues such as Child Marriage Restraint Act, Abolition of Devadasi Act and Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act in favour of the Indian women. The important thing done by the press was the creation of public awareness on women’s problems such as widows’ problem, prostitution, devadasi system, unhygienic condition, child marriage, infant female mortality, and male chauvinistic attitude in the society. It is inevitable making the public accept the reforms than supporting legislate the reforms. The press in Tamilnadu did both the aspects in favour of social legislations for women.

1. Prevention of Child Marriage

Early marriage was the root cause for many problems such as early maternity, frequent maternity, maternal mortality, infant mortality, premature motherhood, child widowhood and virgin widowhood. It was not the problem only to the health and happiness of the girls but also affected our age old culture and civilization. With child marriage, a woman lost out in three vital ways: first, she lost the opportunity for self-development and acquiring the skills that would enable her to manage house-hold, secondly, because of her ignorance of the nature of the conjugal relationship, she would be unable to fulfill all her family duties, and these two factors inevitably led to the marital bond breaking down irretrievably.¹ Gandhi pointed out that the child marriage put an axe at the root of all developments. It burgled the

¹ Padma Anagol, The Emergence of Feminism in India, 1250-1920, Surrey, 2005, p. 206.
sufficient opportunities for education for girls. It resulted in harmful effects not only for the girl brides but also their families and society on a whole.

**Post Puberty Marriage Bill**

In Madras Presidency, among certain castes the early marriage was prevalent on those days. The child marriages were arranged between two families for financial or some other personal gains, like two corporations negotiating collaboration for mutual benefit. The rational thinkers and the government took several steps to wipe out the social evil. The abolition of child marriage was advocated both at the press and the public platforms since nineteenth century. In the year 1913, the *Indian Patriot* published an article entitled ‘the Evils of Child Marriage’. In this article, the paper observed the evils caused by the child marriage and it raised its voice once again for the decent cause of discontinuing child marriages. It pointed out that unless and until child marriages were made penal and the offenders adequately punished, the custom through exuberantly reproduced by the whole Hindu community, would exist as long as the Hindus exist. The paper requested the government to introduce a law of prohibition of the dreadful custom fearlessly.

Some reform-loving Brahmins started Hindu Marriage Reform League at Madras to promote post-puberty marriage in May 1915. This period witnessed mixture of reactions from the Brahmin community. In order to promote post-puberty marriages among the Brahmins, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri introduced a Bill known as Hindu Post Puberty Marriage Bill on 17th June 1914 in the Madras Legislature. The Bill was circulated among the leading personalities and important officials. On hearing this news from Madras, two Calcutta based journals named, the *Hitavadi* and the *Bangavasi* expressed their negative opinion that the Madras Hindus would certainly never support the new Bill, and the government should not encourage legislations like this at the instance of faddists and the social iconoclasts, however well meaningful they

---

2 *Young India*, Ahmedabad, 23 May 1929.
6 G.O. Ms. No. 860, Public, 3 June 1915, TNA.
might be, without consulting the leaders of the Hindu Society.\footnote{Hitavadi, Calcutta, 18 December 1914; Bangavasi, Calcutta, 19 December 1914, MNNPR, Vol. I, 1915, p. 93.} This showed that they feared if the reform Act would be passed in Madras, it would affect the Bengal Presidency also in subsequent times. Their observations were nothing but the registration of their fear. \textit{The Hindu} suggested that the agitating fraction of the people were not properly educated about the Bill, and they should be acceptably informed in that line of reaping the fruits of the Bill.\footnote{The Hindu, Madras, 23 November 1914.}

The \textit{Andhra Patrika}, a Telugu newspaper from Madras articulated its support to the Bill that there was not much opposition to the Post Puberty Marriage Bill. It also invited the attention of the government to increase the age of consent of girls who were living without guardians from twelve to fourteen.\footnote{Andhra Patrika, Madras, 28 December 1914, MNNPR, Vol. I, 1915, p. 119.} By condemning the meeting of the conservatives held at Triplicane in Madras in January 1915, the \textit{New India} revealed that an attempt was being made by a few bigoted people to fasten an intolerable yoke on the necks of others, because they themselves were indifferent to the harm done to the nation by the custom of premature motherhood. It further added that it hoped that Srinivasa Sastri would disregard the clamor of the few, who desired to tyrannize over their enlightened brethren.\footnote{New India, Madras, 12 January 1915, MNNPR, Vol. I, 1915, pp. 147-148.} In the same context, the \textit{Indian Patriot} belittled the meeting of the conservatives and asked Mrs. Srinivasa Sastri not to give up his liberal efforts.\footnote{Indian Patriot, Madras, 12 January 1915, MNNPR, Vol. I, 1915, p. 148.}

The \textit{Swadesamitran} communicated its lament at every small innovation tending to improve the condition of the Indian society being opposed by some people. It stated that if the people would snooze over the matter the government would put the Bill under impression that the majority of the people were against it.\footnote{Swadesamitran, Madras, 12 January 1915, MNNPR, Vol. I, 1915, p.178.} The \textit{Islamia Prasanga Nesan} replicated the comments of the \textit{Swadesamitran} to generate supportive public opinion among the Muslims towards the Bill.\footnote{Islamia Prasanga Nesan, Madras, 20 January 1915, MNNPR, Vol. I, 1915, p. 276.}

In support of the Bill and the women of the Nation, the \textit{Dradidabhimani} from Salem suggested that in the interests of the social advancement of the Hindus, the
government should be attentive in passing the Bill into law, ignoring the opposition of some old-fashioned men.\textsuperscript{15} By reprofing a Hindu leader who criticized the Bill in the meeting of the \textit{Hindu Magasangam},\textsuperscript{16} the \textit{Andhra Patrika} observed that he who bestowed a tough on the many deaths yearly resulting from difficult labour, the high mortality among the infants, and the dwarfing of out womanhood was prematurely called upon to undertake the responsibilities of family life, could not help cursing in his mind the institution of early marriages and it was certainly within the sphere of the duty of the rulers to take steps for counteracting this evil.\textsuperscript{17} Hence, the press served as a protecting armrest for the Bill from the conservative criticisms.

The \textit{New India} covered the news of a public meeting held on 25\textsuperscript{th} January 1915 in support of the Post Puberty Marriage Bill in the Anderson Hall, Madras. The paper expressed that the meeting was overcrowded and enthusiastic, and its constituents showed that the highly educated public opinion of Madras was strongly in favour of the proposed Bill\textsuperscript{18}. Thus, the paper circulated the news among the public about the overwhelming support to the Bill.

In Kumbakonam, a protest meeting was organized against the Post Puberty Marriage Bill in January 1915 by Krishnasamy Iyengar, the leader of the Brahmin community. By condemning this protest meeting, the editor of the \textit{United India and the Native States} put pen to paper that it had to be pardoned to say that Krishnasamy Iyengar’s comprehensive condemnation of the Bill and of the horrors which his heated imagination traced to it constitutes an unmerited and cruel slur on the Hindus, for there must be several thousands of families in South India in which post puberty marriages were celebrated without producing any of those disastrous consequences which Krishnasamy Ayyangar’s excited imagination had conjured up.\textsuperscript{19}

In support of this reform Bill, Mangalambiakai Sadasiva Iyer, a leading woman personality of the Madras city convened a ladies meeting in Madras on 28\textsuperscript{th} January 1915. The \textit{Wednesday Review} praised the efforts taken by the ladies that the Madras ladies were doing better than the gentlemen who were uttering maledictions

\textsuperscript{16} Hindu Magasangam was an association of orthodox Hindus, particularly the Brahmns.
\textsuperscript{19} United India and the Native States, Madras, February 1915.
over the Bill at sundry gatherings. It further wrote about the Bill that for honest differences of opinion they had the profoundest respect, but when the educated Indians who threw the *sastras*, overboard in most affairs of life, set up the cry of religion in danger, because of the Bill, it could not help exclaiming, these were the pillars of orthodoxy. Even though the press strongly supported the Bill, a major portion of the educated Brahmin community strongly opposed the Bill. In this situation *The Hindu* expressed its support to the Bill and asked a question “is it necessary at the beginning of the twentieth century to cite arguments and quote authorities in support of the position that infant marriage was an evil and a curse in Hindu society?” This paper expressed its disappointment in knowing the volume of opposition to the Bill.

To educate the masses, the *Hindu Nesan* enumerated the number of advantages resulting from post puberty marriages and said that the people themselves should realize the advantages and bring these marriages into practice. This paper believed that the popular acceptance of a reform would produce better and permanent results rather than the legal recognition. The *Andhra patrika* covered the news of a meeting held in Madras in January 1915 in support of the Bill. The meeting was attended mostly by the Hindu pandits. The paper revealed how most of the pandits in the meeting expressed their views in favour of the Bill. This paper also condemned another meeting which was organized by the conservatives who were with the intention of preventing the Bill. It observed that one fourth of the audience of the conservative meeting itself including a pandit openly supported the reform Bill. It concluded with the belief that the attempt of the orthodox to decry the Bill, which was only a permissive measure, was bound to prove a failure. In this situation, the Bill had to face an amplified opposition. The *Desabhimani* prayed that the government should not heed the meaningless objections of the orthodox people to the harmless Bill and try to pass the bill as early as possible. It also citied a few instances from Sanskrit dramas,
other literatures and *puranas* to show how post puberty marriages were common among the Brahmans even in ancient India.\(^{25}\)

To show their protest to this reform Bill some orthodox people presented memorials to the government. The *Arya Vysia* exposed that the signatories had affixed their names and signatures in the memorials only under compulsion.\(^{26}\) It also said that the resolution against the passing of the Post Puberty Marriage Bill, which some Brahmins had managed to adopt with the help of the illiterate were only forced ones, and not voluntary. It strongly insisted the government not to heed the cry of “religion in danger”, but should pass the Bill at an early date.\(^{27}\) The liberal press worked hard constantly in a serious and hurried manner to enact the Bill prior to obstacles to be made by the orthodox section.

The opponents also became aggressive in their attitude. They submitted a petition to the Government of India not to renounce its religious neutrality. The *Trilinga* viewed that it was difficult to see any meaning in the petition of the supporters of child marriages and requested the government not to pass the Post Puberty Marriage Bill into law.\(^{28}\) The *South Indian Mail* from Madurai wrote that the paper entirely approved of Sastri’s intention to propose and it hoped that Madurai would undoubtedly show its support to the Bill through the representative in the council.\(^{29}\) The papers strived to generate public opinion in favour of the passing of the Bill by citing the supportive utterances from the foreign countries too. The *Swadesamitran* recorded the news about the conference held in Dublin, Ireland where the Indians resolved that the Government of India should accept this Bill and pass it into an Act immediately and that it should not listen to the objections raised by the illiterate people who have not rightly understood its purpose.\(^{30}\) Though such papers wrote continuously in support of the reform Bill, the nervousness in their voice can be sensed due to the mounting opposition from the orthodox people. They expressed their fear that the Bill might have been defeated due to the non committal attitude of the alien government.

---


\(^{27}\) Ibid, p. 418.


As expected, the conservative papers raised their vigorous voice against the enactment of the Bill. The *Lokopakari* from Madras wrote that every one had begun to act according to one's own wishes, as our national and religious customs could not thrive under a foreign Government. The Government had no power either to prevent men from taking to bad habits, or to compel them to do so, while the British Indian Government had promised not to interfere in matters of a religious nature. The paper *Vidyabhanu* revealed that the public would not permit the interference of the government into this matter, which was purely a religious one. It further opined that if the Bill would be passed into law, the payment of large sum of money to the bridegroom and other marriage expenses would increase.

The *Gnana Bhanu*, the paper from Mayavaram in Madras Presidency commented that the Bill was deadly against the *Sastras* and the customs of the Aryans, so that the government would be considered to have disregarded the feeling of several thousands of virtuous Brahmans. It further observed that a few so called modernists, having an incomplete knowledge of English and forgetting their mother tongue, supported the enactment of the Bill, masqueraded in the presence of all the supporters of the Indian nation, and it requested the Government not to heed their voice. The *Vedantha Dipika* uttered strongly that the Legislative Council had no authority to rectify the established and traditional customs of the Brahmans, as it consisted of only a few of the purported Brahmans, and hoped that the Government, which had declared its neutrality in religious matters, would not interfere in this matter. Like that, the orthodox papers from the modern Andhra, Karnataka, and Kerala provinces of the Madras Presidency expressed their remonstration against the Bill by quoting the phrase ‘religious neutrality’.

The government was worried about the mixed reactions from both the sections and their papers. The supporting papers echoed the tone that the government should not pay attention to the cries of the orthodox, whereas the conservative papers repeatedly stated the policy of religious neutrality announced in the Queen’s

---

Proclamation, to create fear among the authorities on the intrusion into the religious matters. The conservative press justified their opposition for the reason that the pre-puberty marriage would only increase the number of virgin widows whereas the post-puberty marriages would increase the number of unmarried girls who would never get married at all.

In spite of the support rendered by the liberal press and the broad minded people in Tamilnadu, the feared government felt no hesitation in withdrawing the Post Puberty Bill. All the supportive measures taken by the liberal press ended in vain. But they paved way for the future reform Acts. They served as the strong basement for the forthcoming Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929.

**Raising the Age of Consent and Marriage**

In the early 1920s, the rational representatives of the Central Legislative Council continued their efforts to raise the age of consent and marriage. The initiative attempt made by Sir Hari Singh Gaur was defeated in the Central Legislature after a lengthy and spirited debate in 1922. The *Stri-Dharma* commended the work of Hari Singh Gaur and his supporters for their courageous attempts in the midst of the orthodox section. The paper concluded the article with a note “they have the gratitude of progressive men and women who encourage them to ‘try, try, try again’” Thus the papers gave moral booster to the reform liking legislators. As a step of improvement, Bakshi Sobhan Lal, a member moved a Bill in the Central Assembly on 18th February 1922 to increase the age of consent in both marital and extra-marital cases. In accordance with the Bill, the age of consent was planned to be raised from 12 to 14 years instead of 10 to 12 years as in the previous Act. Bakshi warned that if proper consent was not fixed, it would create painful effects to both the mother and the child.

---

35 G.O. Ms. No. 860, Public, 3 June 1915, TNA.
36 *Stri-Dharma*, Madras, February 1922, p. 49.
37 Ibid., p. 50.
38 Report of the Age of Consent Committee 1928-1929, Calcutta, 1929, p. 120.
39 G.O. Ms. No. 2270, Law General Department, 6 July 1928 TNA.
40 Sundaram, K. S. (tr.), *India Matha*, Madras, 1928, p. 22.
The Bill was circulated to assess the opinion from various provincial Governments on 19th April 1922. The Non-Brahmins of Tamilnadu were in favour of increasing the Age of consent; the orthodox Hindus were strongly against it. The social spirited men were not given opportunities to express their prolific opinion through representation. The rigidity and intolerance of caste system, the fear of social ostracism and the play of orthodox spokesmen in the Legislature worked as stumbling blocks. The Justice Ministry of Madras Presidency wholeheartedly supported the Bill. But due to the opposition of the Brahmins, the Madras Legislature did not show any sign, either favouring or against the Bill. The Bill stirred the conscience of orthodox members of the Central Legislature to a considerable extent. On 25th September 1922, the author of the Bill moved it and then it was referred to a Select Committee. Finally the motion was defeated by 41 votes to 29, the government remained neutral. The efforts of the reformers again ended in futile.

In 1924, Hari Singh Gaur introduced another Bill to rise the age on consent from 12 to 14 in marital and extra-marital cases. The orthodox members criticized the Bill that it would be better for the reformers at first to turn their attention to the economic and sanitary facilities than to rush for increasing the age of consent in the legislature, because the poor economic and sanitary conditions were the basic reason for the poor health of girls which ended in infant mortality and maternal mortality. When the Bill was left to the Select Committee, it reduced the age from 14 to 13 in case of married girls, and increased to 14 in case of unmarried girls. Due to the strong opposition from the orthodox members, the bill was also dropped. The conservative press in Tamil Province celebrated the failures whereas the liberal press determined to defeat the failures.

Again, Alexander Muddiman, the Home Member introduced a Bill on 1st September 1925 by increasing the age of consent from 12 to 13 in case of married

---

41 G.O.No.Ms. 237, Judicial (Magistrate)Department, 2 June 1924, TNA.
42 The Indian Penal Code of 1860 fixed the marriageable age for women as 10 years. It was raised to 12 in 1891. The orthodox Hindus of Madras endorsed the age limit half-heartedly; -Tamilnudu, Salem, 26 August 1929, MNNPR., Vol. II, 1929, p. 1237.
44 G.O. Ms. No. 237, Judicial Department (J.D.M.), 2 June 1924, TNA.
girl and 14 in extra marital or unmarried cases.\textsuperscript{46} The Bill was passed by 84 votes for and 11 votes against.\textsuperscript{47} The Bill then became law as Act XXIX of 1925.\textsuperscript{48} The Stri-Dharma observed that the success of the members was considered as the success of the Indian women.\textsuperscript{49}

Boosted by the encouraging circumstances, H.S. Gaur introduced again a Bill in March 1927 with the object of increasing the age of consent from 14 to 16 outside the marital relationship and of protecting married girls between 13 and 14 years of age.\textsuperscript{50} The Government of India circulated the Bill to the Provincial Governments requesting them to furnish information regarding the working of the previously amended Law and its remedial effect.\textsuperscript{51} The Madras Provincial Government and the liberal press gave a positive report on the amended Law.\textsuperscript{52}

After receiving the data from the Provincial Governments, the Government of India appointed the Age of Consent Committee on 25\textsuperscript{th} June 1928, with Monopant Viswanath as its Chairman and five members to formulate lines of further possible advance in the age of consent issue.\textsuperscript{53} The committee had two of its members from Madras; they were A.Ramasamy Mudaliar and M.O.Brien Beadon, a women medical practitioner.\textsuperscript{54} The committee received written statements from individuals and organisations and visited various places in India.\textsuperscript{55}

The committee visited different places in Tamilnadu such as Ootacamand and Madurai.\textsuperscript{56} The Stri-Dharma did the proper ground work to gather the positive opinion from the public. The committee received a positive answer from the people of Tamilnadu; even some Brahmin ladies of Madras opined that the age of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{46} G.O. Ms. No. 2270, Law General Department, 6 July 1928, TNA.
\bibitem{48} G.O. Ms.No.2270, Law General Department, 6 July 1928, TNA.
\bibitem{49} Stri-Dharma, Madras, August 1928, pp. 460-463.
\bibitem{52} G.O. Ms. No. 879A, Law General Department, 8 March 1928, pp.1-23, TNA.
\bibitem{54} G.O. Ms. No. 2270, Law General Department, 6 July 1928.; G.O. Ms. No. 3383, Law General Department, 6 October 1928; G.O. Ms.No.3126, Law General Department, 20 September1928, TNA.
\bibitem{56} \textit{Report of the Age of Consent Committee, 1928-1929}, Calcutta, 1929, pp.1-3; G.O. Ms. No.123, Law (General) Department, 9 January 1929, TNA.
\end{thebibliography}
marriage for girls should be raised to 16 and some even advocated 18.\textsuperscript{57} After analyzing all these opinions, the committee recommended that the age of consent within and outside marriage be raised to fifteen and eighteen respectively, sexual relation below that age be made a cognizable offence; in order to deal most effectively with the evil of early marriage consummation, law should be enacted fixing the minimum age of marriage of girls at fourteen years.\textsuperscript{58}

In the mean time Harbilas Sarda, a liberal member of the Central Legislative Council from Jabalpur moved a new Bill called Child Marriage Restraint Bill in the Central Legislature. The government asked H.S. Gaur and the reformers to wait for the finalization of the new Bill.

From the introduction of Bills regarding the age of consent to the introduction of the Child Marriage Restraint Bill, the press in Tamilnadu reacted for and against the Bills. They sowed the seeds of social awareness about the issue. The papers run by the orthodox people preached strongly in favour of not raising the age of consent and the existence of child marriage. The \textit{Vedantha Dipikai} propagated strongly that the there was no mistake in the child marriage while many aged women in England were living without marriage. It concluded the article that the real sufferers were the women who were not willing to entertain child marriage.\textsuperscript{59}

The orthodox paper \textit{Arya Dharmam} preached deadly against the Age of Consent Bill. It advocated that the age for girl for marriage should be fixed at eight. It observed that if the post puberty marriage would be performed, it would be considered against the religious rules and it would be believed that the marriage was performed only for sexual intercourse. It gave a punch that the bridegroom of a post puberty marriage would become the husband of Sutra lady, and the family deemed to be transformed into Sutra family.\textsuperscript{60} Thus, this paper tried to terrify the Brahmins with social exclusion indirectly. It further advocated that there was no use in the Age of Consent Bill for the Indian ladies and it condemned the supporters of the Bill as the

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Stri-Dharma}, Madras, September-October 1929, pp. 512-513.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Vedandha Dipikai}, Madras, 1913-1914, pp. 64-69.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Arya Dharmam}, Kumbakonam, 1927-1928, pp. 52-55.
enemies of Hinduism.61 The paper added that there was no representation to express the sorrows of affected people in Age of Consent Committee. It planned to organize a signature movement against the Bill and condemned The Hindu, the leading news paper for not supporting their ideas against the Bill.62

The Darul Islam, an Islamic paper from Madras advocated as for as Muslim community was concerned they did not want to apply the law to them, since this evil was not much prevalent among them and there were definite rules in their religious scriptures governing marriage, divorce and succession.63

Most of the papers welcomed the Age of Consent Bill. The journal Kapu referred in detail to the physical and moral deterioration of the Hindu population in India, attributed it to social evils and urged on the attention of the government that the need there was in the country to pass a law like the Age of Consent Bill, which was moved in the Legislative Assembly by H.S. Gaur.64 The paper Chinthamani blamed the old practice of child marriage for the evils of premature pregnancy and premature delivery. It advocated that the women should support the Age of Consent Bill for removing the above evils.65

The Andhra Patrika criticized the attitude of some people who had begun to complain against the introduction of the Age of Consent Bill as a danger had entered the Hindu religion. This paper condemned the orthodox Hindus who did not give their consent to make any changes in the social structure for a long time. It also observed when there was a general desire prevalent among the people that the old customs and traditions should undergo a change in accordance with the new conditions prevailing at the time, the elders of the society who had the power to do so should make the necessary arrangements in that direction. This paper fated the orthodox men for merely condemning the members of the Legislative Council without having any useful purpose for the benefit of the society.66

---

61 Ibid., p. 55.
62 Ibid., pp. 581-584
65 Chinthamani, Madras, September 1927, p.67.
The *Kudiyarasu* suggested that the age of consent for the girls should be increased, because the weather condition in our tropical land was not suitable for early consent. The Brahmins had an orthodox view that if the pre-puberty marriage would not be performed, the girls might go for other gender for their sexual requirements. The *Kudiyarasu* criticized such outdated uncivilized views of the orthodox Brahmins.

Thus, many papers registered their voice in support of the passing of this reform bill, whereas some papers strongly opposed it. The liberal press backed the reformers, whenever they were targeted by the opposition vehemently. The liberal writings hold up the women community by striving to eliminate the long standing social evils.

**Child Marriage Restraint Bill**

On 1\(^{st}\) February 1927 Harbilas Sarda introduced a Bill in the Central Legislative Council to restrain the solemnization of child marriage. It was known as Child Marriage Restraint Bill. It was otherwise known as Sarda Bill. Its aim was to restrain the solemnization of child marriages among the Hindus by declaring such marriages invalid when either of the parties was below the prescribed age. It advocated eighteen years for boys and fourteen years for girls to be married.

The orthodox members, especially the Brahmins of Tamilnadu attempted to prevent every effort in this concern in Central Legislature. Opposing the Bill, M.S. Shesha Iyengar of Tamilnadu cautioned that it would create a revolution in the existing social order. M.K. Acharya of South Arcot, another orthodox member from Tamilnadu moved a resolution to the effect that consideration of Child Marriage Bill should be postponed till the report of Age of Consent Committee was available to the members of the Assembly. Amidst this opposition from the orthodox members, the Bill was referred to the Select Committee by a motion of 15\(^{th}\) September 1927, which

---

67 *Kudiyarasu*, Erode, 4 August 1929.

When the Bill was circulated to gather public opinion owing to the demand of M.K.Acharya, it became a subject of criticism from the press in Tamilnadu which promoted women’s interest. The \textit{Kumaran} observed that it was to show to the government a good deal of opposition to the bill in the country and it was also a fraud commonly practiced by the orthodox members in such circumstances.\footnote{Kumaran, Karaikudi, January 1929.} The \textit{Tamilnadu} advised the Central Government not to be afraid of the outcry raised by the few orthodox persons against this reform Bill.\footnote{Tamilnadu, Salem, January 1929, MNNPR, Vol. I, 1929, p. 199.} The \textit{Stri-Dharma} criticized the orthodox members from Tamilnadu that the reformists at national level had branded the people of Tamilnadu as nastiest culprits working against the abolition of child marriage after watching their backward attitude in the Central Legislature.\footnote{Stri-Dharma, Madras, April-June, 1929, p.3 and September-December 1929, p. 487.}

Muthulakshmi Reddy also sought permission from the Government of India to introduce her Bill in the Madras Legislative Council for the prevention of child marriage of girls below sixteen years and boys below twenty one years on 27th March 1928. She was informed by the government that there was a Bill before the Central Assembly to achieve a similar objective and that she might as well wait for the result of that legislation which was applicable to all India.\footnote{G.O. Ms. No. 544, Law General Department, 15 February 1928, TNA.} Then she constantly organized meetings of women both in the city and outside and also wrote articles in the press in favour of the Sarda Bill. The efforts taken by a woman for the women community occupied the columns of both orthodox and rational newspapers.

\textbf{The Reactions of the Orthodox Press}

The \textit{Arya Dharmam} observed that there was no use with the bill of Muthulakshmi Reddy. It asked some questions to Muthulakshmi Reddy with the intension of criticizing the bill. The following questions were raised by the journal:
If it was impossible to understand for the girls under ten or eleven years of age about the married life, was it possible for the girls of fourteen or fifteen years of age.

- If the girls would get married after sixteen years of age, would they have been exempted from the widowhood even after the age of fifty?
- Was it shrewd to avoid automobiles for transportation fearing of accidents? Likewise, it is not wise to avoid child marriage, fearing early widowhood.

It concluded with a note that anybody willing could republish the questions and use them to prevent the passing of the Act. It also published the resolutions passed in the Tanjore District Brahmins’ conference in order to criticize the Bills regarding child marriage abolition. The Bharathamitrani, a monthly from Kumbakonam in Tanjore District disparaged the Bills of Harbilas Sarda and Hari Singh Gour that the bills were induced to commit irreligious deeds and were also capable of depriving every one of our orthodox women of her rights in religious matters. It further asked the government to prevent the passing of the two bills which purposed to harm the orthodox people.

The Al-Ameen, a Muslim paper opposed the passing of the Bill and said that it would be an interference in religious matters, which was quite uncalled for, unjustifiable and dangerous. It pointed out that the Bill if passed; the Muslims should be excluded from its scope. The Darul-Islam expressed its view on behalf of the Muslims that the Bill encroached upon the Mohammedan Law; the Muslims in India should be ruled in accordance of the Mohammedan Law. It further recommended the exclusion of Muslims from the Bill.

---

77 “10. 11 சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி 14,15 சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோழி சோzion சோzion சோzion சோzion சோzion சோzion சோzion சோzion சோzion சோzion சோzion சோzion சோzion சோzion சோzion சோzion சோzion சோzion विश्वकुल 10. 11 चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी 14,15 चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधरी चौधर - Arya Dharmam, Madras, 21 June 1928.

78 Arya Dharmam, Madras, 21 June 1928.


It is a surprise to point out here that the *Grihalakshmi*, a paper for women’s progress too opposed the passing of the Bill. It viewed the Bill from orthodox view that marriage in our country was not like that of the west, a contract but an inviolable sacrament; it was good that the government should not be permitted to interfere into it. It supplemented that there would be an endless agitation in the country due to the passing of the Bill.

The *Arya Dharmam* organized a meeting of orthodox women in Madras in the midst of July 1929. In that meeting they preached about the evils of Child Marriage Restraint Bill among those women. A resolution condemning the Bill was passed and was sent to the Viceroy. The paper also planned for strong propagation against the Bill even before it came for discussion in the Legislative Assembly on 4th September 1929. It warned the conservative people that if the Bill would be passed into a Law, the country had to face series of bills for widow remarriage, divorce and for women’s separation.

**The Reactions of the Liberal Press**

Though some papers wildly cried against the Bill, majority of the papers supported the gracious cause without any hesitation. With the view to supporting the efforts of Muthulakshmi Reddy at Madras Legislative Council, the *Kudiyarasu* exposed the widowhood ceremony of a small girl child under the heading ‘Child Marriage’.

The *Stri-Dharma* expressed its happiness in publishing the news of the passing of the Child Marriage Resolution of Muthulakshmi Reddy in the Madras Legislative Council. To support her effort, it said that it was interesting to watch from the gallery the debate on the resolution in all its aspects. It added that Muthulakshmi in spite of her ill health rose nobly to the occasion. It further viewed that the passing of the resolution brought about strength of her aim. As it was considered a national issue, the women in Tamilnadu convened a meeting at Madras in support of the Sarda

---

84 Ibid., pp. 523-524.
85 *Kudiyarasu*, Erode, 1 April 1928.
86 *Stri-Dharma*, Madras, April 1928, pp. 1-2.
Bill. To communicate the unanimous support of the Madras women among the Indian women, the Stri-Dharma carried the news effectively.  

The orthodox people expressed their view on the Bill as irreligious. They asked the government not to give sanction to the Sarda Bill and challenged it saying that they would celebrate child marriages in nearby Princely states and the states under other European powers. The Tamilnadu from Salem made public the above matter in order to create awareness among the reformers. In spite of the unfavorable stand taken by the important Muslim journals, the Daily News was trying to appease the Muslims of Tamilnadu in support of the Sarda Bill. It published the positive news that Mohammed Ali Jinnah supported the Bill on behalf of the Muslim community and warmly eulogized the Government of India for having for once come out of their stereotyped and steel frame grooves of thought and action and assumed the role of Indian nationalists. The Swarajya observed that if this Bill would be passed into law, not only would the evils of child marriage be removed but several other evils incidental thereto would also vanish to a great extent, thousands of girls and lakhs of families would be thereby saved.

Promulgation of the Sarda Act

At last James Creror, the Home Member announced the Government’s stand on 4th September 1929, in favour of the Bill. He pointed out that the country was more alive against the evil of the problem. The Daily News observed that his announcement created happiest feelings among the reformers. It further added that the Home Member’s speech was filled with emotion at the horrors caused by early marriage and had foreshadowed the government’s attitude towards the elevation of Indian society and the Legislation relative to the same.

During the final stage of the Bill, the orthodox section of the society submitted a request petition with signatures of the people who fought against the Bill. The Dravidan reacted immediately and exposed the signatures in the petition were not

---

87 Ibid., September–December 1929, p. 495.
The Kumaran state that it was a fraud strategy commonly practiced by orthodox persons under such circumstances to print memorials in English, obtained therein the signatures of the illiterate people by representing them that they were going to get the taxes reduced and submit the same to the government. It further pointed out the signatures were even forged at times.94

The Home Member also said that he was convinced by the Bill of Sarda as a first step in the direction of seeking a practical remedy. He further added that really the Bill had gained tremendous and enthusiastic support even from Madras where it was said that there was great opposition to the Bill due to the frequent propaganda made by the press and the women’s organisations of Tamilnadu.

At the Central Legislative Assembly, sixty seven members voted for the Bill and fourteen members against it on 23rd September 192995. The Hindu remarked about the voting on the Bill as a decisive step in social reform had been taken by the adoption of the Sarda Marriage Bill by the Legislative Assembly96. Finally the Bill was passed into Law at the Central Legislative Assembly on 1st October 1929.97 In support of the Law, the New India remarked that it was extremely gratifying that this Bill had been making steady progress. It was hoped that all the amendments seeking to lower the age of marriages below that in the Law should be certainly defeated.98 It further observed that the passing the Act of 1929 exposed the triumph of nobleness.99

**Contents of the Child Marriage Restraint Act**

In spite of the orthodox Hindus and a section of Muslims and their newspapers were trying their best to get rid of the Sarda Act, it came into force from 1st April 1930 after an interval of six months.100 It prohibited the marriages of girls under fourteen and of boys under eighteen. As per the Act whoever, being a male above eighteen years of age and below twenty one, would contract a child marriage should be

---

95 *The Hindu*, Madras, 24 September 1929.
96 Ibid.
98 *New India*, Madras, 24 September 1929.
99 Ibid., September 1929, p. 497.
100 *Stri-Dharma*, Madras, July-August 1936, p. 178.
punishable with simple imprisonment which might extend to fifteen days, or with fine which might extend to one thousand rupees, or with both. Whoever, being a male above twenty one years of age, would contract a child marriage should be punishable with simple imprisonment which might extend to three months and shall also be liable to fine. Whoever would perform, conduct or direct any child marriage shall be punishable with simple imprisonment which might extend to three months and should also be liable to fine unless he would prove that he had reason to believe that the marriage was not a child-marriage. Where a minor would contract a child marriage, any person having charge of the minor, whether as parent or guardian or in any other capacity, lawful or unlawful, who would do any act to promote the marriage or would permit it to be solemnized, or negligently would fail to prevent it from being solemnized, should be punishable with simple imprisonment which might extend to three months and should also be liable to fine, provided no woman should be punishable with imprisonment. For the purpose of this section, it should be presumed unless and until the contrary would be proved, that where a minor had contracted a child marriage, the person having charge of such minor had negligently failed to prevent marriage from being solemnized.

The Stri-Dharma thanked those who helped in the passing of the Child Marriage Restraint Bill and expressed feelings of relief and happiness and said that the legislation would bring great relief to the anxious parents in India.\(^{101}\) In support of the Law, the Tamilnadu observed that there was no doubt that the evils of child marriage would disappear in a way as the result of this Legislation. It further pointed out that no wise person should come forward to oppose it but the orthodox people alone had not yet censed raising a vain outcry.\(^{102}\)

The Revolt, the paper from the Self Respect Movement exposed its happiness that it was certainly glad at their inestimable help in the passing of the Sarda Act. The paper requested the government on behalf of humanity not to be timid and halting in their duty towards the women.\(^{103}\) The Kudiyarasu exposed its happiness about the passing of the Law and published the full detail about the Law to create

\(^{101}\) Ibid., December 1929, p. 558.
awareness among the Tamil women. The Viswabandu remarked about the Law that since the majority of the selected representatives of the public themselves demanded that such a measure should be enacted for the betterment of the women in India, so that the government had in no way acted against the spirit of the Queen’s Proclamation.

After passing of the Law, many conservative papers expressed their condemnation about the Law. By reproving the Law, the Muslim paper Al-Kalam suggested the Muslims to convene protest meetings at no time in their localities against the Child Marriage Restraint Law. The Quami Report damned the Law alleging that it tended to eradicate the principles of religion, and that it is opposed to the opinion of most of the Muslim members and it recommended the Government of India to exempt Muslims from the operation of the Law. It called the Law as a dreadful menace to Islam. The Alma-e wrote that the Law was the matter of life and death to the Mohammedans and exhorted the Muslim community to convene protest meetings throughout India on 1st November of 1929. It further warned the government that the Child Marriage Restraint Law would cause the bloodshed of Muslims in the cause of Islam and it articulated its view that the Law as an anti-Islamic legislation.

The Azad Hind condemned the Law and grumbled the Muslims who supported the Law in a reproachable language. Thus, this paper spilled out its abhorrence without considering the welfare of the girl children. Most of the Islamic papers censured the Law and demanded for the exemption of Muslims. Almost all the Islamic papers cared for Muslims only. Some Islamic papers joined hands with the interests of orthodox Hindus in this issue. The Saiphul Islam wrote that not only the Muslims but also the sanadana Hindus were ready to show their passive resistance against the law.

The Kudiyarasu published the above matter positively. It noted that the Muslims and the sanadana Hindus jointly tried to mess up the law and asked that the

---

104 Kudiyarasu, Erode, 27 October 1929, p. 16.
government should not give-up its fruitful attempt on fearing of this religious matter. It
In a discontented mood, the *Arya Dharmam* observed the following in an article “The
Sarda Bill became the Law. From now, there should be no sleep for us. The principle
of equality of mankind is deadly against our religion and community.” It concluded
the article with the challenge “We must accept the punishment by breaking the Sarda
Act instead of giving up our religion and tradition”.

The Muslims and the orthodox Hindus asked the government to exclude
them from its operation. In favour of the Act, the *Ooliyan*, the paper from Karaikudi
asked that the Government should not grant exemption from the law to any one. If
exemption would be given to anyone, other problems would arise. The All India
Sanadana Dharma Conference started an initiative against the Sarda Act. It insisted the
orthodox people to disobey the provisions of the Act on 1st April as a mass
movement. Krishnama Acharya, a well known Brahmin member of the Central
Legislative Council announced to move a Bill to amend the Sarda Act to exclude the
Brahmins, the Visyas and the Saurastras. It evoked strong opposition from the Tamil
press. The *Tamilnadu* severely criticized such a move. The *Stri-Dharma*
communicated this news to the literate women and requested the government not to go
back on its own verdict. Thus the press of Tamilnadu tried its best to prevent the
move for the conservative amendment in the Sarda Act.

**Child Marriage Restraint Act in Practice**

Though the Sarda Act was the result of the tireless efforts made by the
social reformers and the press, the Government didn’t show much interest in
implementing it properly and vigorously. The orthodox section of the society
performed the child marriages as usual by violating the law without any trepidation.

---

113 “அங்கிய மனிதர் ஆளுமியளவு, விளை மண்டல் அலைமியளவு, மூட்டுக்கள்
பாரையில் வளர்ந்துக் கொள்ளியால் கூட முடிக்கியென வையுட்டியுள்ள தலைமகனால்
நிலையாகள்பற்று.”
114 “அங்கிய சிறியக்கவ வழியுடனும் காட்சிகளைக் கூட்டியுள்ள சிறியக்கவ
சாலையில் வையுட்டியுள்ள தலைமகனால்
115 *Ooliyan*, Karaikudi, 12 November 1929.
117 *Tamilnadu*, Salem, 16 April 1931.
They prepared themselves to pay the penalty of Rs.1,000/-. Within the six months between the enactment and the enforcement of the Act, approximately thirty lakhs of child marriages were performed and most of them were celebrated like a grand fiesta. The Sarda Act was virtually called as ‘practically a dead letter’. The Government of Madras took milder measures for the breach of the Act in the case of Muslims and orthodox Hindus. In these circumstances too, the press echoed its voice for the womankind.

There were hectic celebrations of pre-puberty marriages all over the presidency and the dowries demanded by prospective grooms rose to unprecedented heights as the month to its close. The Tamil press considered that it would be foolish on the government’s docile and inactive position in order to secure the support of the orthodox merely because of the present political situation. When C. Vijayaragavachari of Salem, the one of the well-known leaders of Indian National Congress conducted child marriage for his grand daughter, the Tamilnadu recommended the government to enforce the Act properly. It also requested its readers that they should be vigilant of the sentences which were passed on a few persons for having contravened the provisions of the Sarda Act.

The Dravidan criticized the District Magistrates for levying minimum amount of penalty for the breach of the Act and it requested the government to invite the attention of the Magistrates to this point. The Desabakthan suggested that it was indeed regrettable that District Magistrates, who awarded sentences of imprisonment for one or two years and fines of hundreds of rupees to the man who contravened the ordinances, should not attach to a case of infringement of the Sarda Act even the importance attached to a nuisance case.

The Vetri Murasu remarked that as the practice among the rich in performing child marriage deliberately was becoming common, it was the primary duty

---

120 G.O. Ms. No.2617, Law, 13 September 1934, TNA.
121 Ibid.
123 Tamilnadu, Salem, 23 May 1931.
of the government to punish them suitably.\textsuperscript{126} The \textit{India} remarked that the police should be given essential powers to prevent the marriages that were being celebrated in contravention of the Act and to take action against those who violated it.\textsuperscript{127}

In spite of these violations, there was no doubt that the Sarda Act had good results in fortifying those parents who in their hearts disapproved of child marriage. A remarkable increase in the number of unmarried Hindu girls attending secondary schools in later years had been in part, the result of the passing of this Act.\textsuperscript{128} Due to the continuous efforts taken by the reformers and the press, after the amendment of the IPC and the Child Marriage Act in 1940, the age of consent for married and unmarried girls was raised to fifteen though the minimum age of marriage became sixteen.\textsuperscript{129}

\textbf{2. Prevention of Immoral Traffic in Women}

Prostitution is not a modern vice. It is as old as humanity but the nomenclature, ‘prostitution’ was applied to it in very early times. In the primitive societies, where marriage was unknown, pre-marital promiscuity was the rule. In a society where “nationalization of women” existed, there was no need for harlotry.\textsuperscript{130} With the dawn of civilization, marriage became an established institution. Pre-marital freedom disappeared and prostitution appeared.\textsuperscript{131}

The entry of Europeans into India during the 17\textsuperscript{th} century profoundly affected the socio-economic and political situation in Tamilnadu as elsewhere in India. With the growth of industry and commerce, Madras gradually developed into a big city where European merchants started to invest large sums of money in banks and business organisations. A large number of merchants, weavers used to come to Madras from the adjoining areas. Madras became a focal point of migration for the poor and landless, mostly men from neighboring villages. The women who came to Madras took employment as maids and domestic workers. They were poorly paid and many of them

\textsuperscript{128} Premalatha, P.N., \textit{op.cit.} p.211.
supplemented their income by practicing part-time prostitution. Many families used to migrate to Madras and other towns when epidemics devastated their villages. Lack of legitimate source of income often led women of these families to earn money by selling their bodies. The growth of industry and commerce in Madras led to the growth of prostitution there.¹³²

In the nineteenth century many social organisations, social reformers and the government officials of Tamilnadu became very concerned with the widespread growth of prostitution and trafficking in young girls for the purpose of prostitution. After collecting relevant information from the public and various government sources, Dadabhoy, a staunch social reformer of Tamilnadu, introduced a Bill in the Council of the Governor-General of India in 1912 for protecting women and girls from being trafficked for the purpose of prostitution, he presented statistics on prostitution in important towns of Tamilnadu.¹³³

Madras had about 1,500 sex workers at that time. The Bill also had provisions for prohibiting dedication of minor girls in Temples as Devadasis. The Andhra Prakasika observed that if the Bill would be passed into a law, the evil of prostitution would come to an end and asked the people to convene meetings in support of the Bill and to request the government to pass the Bill to raise the honor of the women of the country.¹³⁴ The Swadesamitran expressed its entire approval of the Bill and asked the government to enact the Bill as early as possible.¹³⁵

The Government of India was not interested in passing the Bill immediately, because it was not a government sponsored Bill. Just then the First World War intervened and the Bill remained as a dead letter.¹³⁶ The government’s hesitation to shoulder the responsibility for the care of the girls and women rescued from brothels was the important cause for its inaction regarding the bill.¹³⁷ The government used its

¹³² Moni Nag, Sex Workers of India: Diversity in Practice of Prostitution and ways of Life, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 31-32.
¹³³ Ibid., p. 37.
¹³⁵ Swadesamitran, 19 May 1913.
¹³⁶ Moni Nag, op.cit. p. 38.
¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 39.
general policy of non-interference in socio-religious matters of the Indians to escape from its responsibility regarding the Child Protection Bill.\textsuperscript{138}

In the mean time, the \textit{West Coast Spectator}, observed that the problem of prostitution was rather socio-political than civic. In civilized countries, Municipal Corporations considered their duty to fight this social evil, were armed with the necessary powers in conjunction with the police carried on a regular crusade on it, the Municipal Boards in India should follow the same.\textsuperscript{139} In the midst of 1923, the \textit{Nyaya Dipika} observed its sadness that prostitutes had multiplied enormously in the city of Madras. It requested liberal minded councilors to move a resolution in the Municipal Corporation asking the Commissioner to convene a public meeting under the Governor of Madras with a view to devise ways and means to raise the standard of morality in the city of Madras. It requested the government to co-operate in this matter and see that adequate police-watch should be kept before the houses of prostitutes.\textsuperscript{140}

\textbf{Madras Vigilance Association}

At the failure of the Government of India to enact an all-India legal law to suppress prostitution, the Provincial Governments came forward to do so. During the Justice Ministry, an effort was made to prevent immoral traffic in women through Legislative means. The Government of Madras set up the Madras Vigilance Association in 1925 consisting of Archdeacon Loasby as its President, Rev. A. Foreman Cox and R. Suryanarayana Rao as its Joint Secretaries for framing the Madras Suppression of Immoral Traffic Bill\textsuperscript{141}. Different committees were formed within the Vigilance Association to furnish information and discuss the various clauses of the Bill.\textsuperscript{142} In addition to this, legal and administrative opinions were collected from the concerned departments. Traver Philips, the Commissioner of Police furnished the required data for drafting the Bill.\textsuperscript{143}

On 5\textsuperscript{th} September 1928, K.R. Venkatrama Iyer, a member introduced the Bill in the Madras Legislative Council for the suppression of brothel and immoral

\begin{flushleft}
\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[]\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 39-40.
\item[]\textsuperscript{141} \textit{History of the Madras Vigilance Association}, 1925-1926, Madras, (no details), p. 1.
\item[]\textsuperscript{142} G.O. Ms. No. 394, Law (Legal) Department, 18 September 1928, TNA.
\item[]\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Proceeding of the Madras Legislative Council} 1928, Vol. XLIV, Madras, 1928, p. 334.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
\end{flushleft}
traffic, and Muthulakshmi Reddy supported the motion by seconding it.\textsuperscript{144} Though the \textit{Stri-Dharma} welcomed the Bill, it recommended an amendment. It pointed out that the word ‘prostitute’ was used in the Bill to denote the women only. It recommended the term to denote both the sexes.\textsuperscript{145}

During the discussion on the Bill, Muthulakshmi Reddy insisted that the government should establish rescue homes for accommodating girls and women rescued from the brothels.\textsuperscript{146} After analyzing all the clauses of the Bill in the council, it was passed into Law as the Madras Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act on 31\textsuperscript{st} January 1930.\textsuperscript{147} According to it, keeping brothels and allowing premises to be used as brothels was a punishable offence. Adequate provisions in the Act were made to remove girls under eighteen years of age from brothels.\textsuperscript{148}

The Government of Madras was, however not interested in implementing the Act; it refused to shoulder the responsibility for setting up rescue homes for the young girls rescued. The \textit{Swadesamitran} observed that it was not possible for those women to re-enter the community from where they had cut themselves because of their immoral practices\textsuperscript{149}. The elites and the press joined their voices to demand the implementation of the Act at least in Madras, where the numbers of brothels and sex workers kept increasing.

\textit{The Hindu} remarked that the Bill for the suppression of brothels was a useful measure of social legislation. It aimed at putting down the commercialized vice. An integral part of the Bill, as it originally emerged from the Select Committee, was the provision to rescue homes by the government where young girls whom the law saved might learn to lead a new and better life.

Unfortunately, the government refused to bear the financial responsibility for organizing such institutions. To start adequate number of rescue homes, private philanthropists came forward to share the financial responsibility with

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[144]\textsuperscript{G.O. Ms. No. 442, Law (Legal) Department, 14 October 1928, TNA; G.O. Ms. No. 438, Law (Legal) Department, 28 September 1929, TNA; Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Assembly 1928, Vol. XLIII, 1928, p. 271.}
\item[145]\textsuperscript{\textit{Stri-Dharma}, Madras, December 1929, p. 555.}
\item[146]\textsuperscript{Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council 1930, Vol. LI, 1930, p. 904.}
\item[147]\textsuperscript{\textit{Ibid.}, G.O.Ms. Nos. 177-178, Law (Legal) Department, 1 March 1930, TNA.}
\item[148]\textsuperscript{G.O. Ms. No. 283, Law (Legal) Department, 15 April 1930, TNA.}
\item[149]\textsuperscript{\textit{Swadesamitran}, Madras, 7 February 1930.}
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the government. An Islamic paper, Alma-e warned the government that unless due facilities such as rescue homes were afforded for the reclamation of those unfortunate girls, the Act might not accomplish its purpose. It did not blame the prostitutes for their profession and they were forced by the society to do, so it called them unfortunate girls.

A Christian paper Catholic Leader stated that it was a pity the government declined to take financial responsibility for the establishment of rescue homes where the girls whom the law saved might lead a new and a pure life. Without the provision of rescue homes, much of the usefulness of the measure might be lost and the rescued girls, who had no relations or whose relations had cast them off, might be stranded and their last state might be worse than the first.

The New India welcomed the passing of the Act, whereas it considered the provision of rescue homes as essential for the proper working of the Act. The Swadesamitran was worried that it did not know on whom the responsibility of showing the unfortunate girls a way thereafter to learn a decent living had fallen if the government did not provide for their livelihood.

Fortunately, number of organisations in the city came forward in co-operation with the reformers on this issue. Women’s Indian Association and Madras Vigilance Association with the help of the Stri-Dharma collected donations from the public to construct rescue homes for the rescued girls and women. The Madras Children’s Aid Society gave shelter and suitable training to those women to make them self reliant. The paper announced that the Women’s Indian Association itself had decided to establish a rescue home. It requested the, then Governor of Madras to ask the people as well as the government to donate liberally to establish rescue homes.

**Amendment of the Act**

---

150 *The Hindu*, Madras, 1 February 1930.
153 New India, Madras, 13 February 1930.
154 Swadesamitran, Madras, 7 February 1930.
155 Stri-Dharma, Madras, November 1930, pp. 5-6.
Even though the Government of Madras had not enforced the Act in practice properly, it decided to amend the Act to apply it only to the City of Madras in 1930. The proposed amendment was criticized by the press and the women’s organisations of Madras. The *Kudiyarasu* observed the move of the government as unfruitful. It stated that the word ‘prostitution’ denoted the slavery of the womankind, wherever the prostitution was practiced, there the women only be accused, and in such circumstances, minimizing the universe of the law would create a series of problems to the women community.\(^{159}\) The *India* warned that if the Act was applicable to the city alone, the prostitutes and procurers would be moved to adjacent cities and so it could not be got rid off.\(^{160}\) The *Stri-Dharma* assured the government that the women’s organisations would render their support and co-operation for the successful operation of the Act and wanted for its proper enforcement throughout the province.\(^{161}\) The efforts ended in vain, the Act was amended and passed in October 1931 applying it to the Madras city alone. Even after that, the government was not interested in enforcing the Act properly. It threw the ball into the hands of the social service organisations.\(^{162}\)

The press and the women’s organisations were not silent. The press laboured hard to press the government for the application of the Act to the entire province. The *India* remarked that several prostitutes had left the city as a result of the enforcement of the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act and that this caused great excitement among the public. It requested the government to repeal the amendment and enforce the act effectively.\(^{163}\) The *Thozhilalan* wrote against the amendment that nobody approved the way in which these prostitutes were treated; it did not think that the evil of prostitution would be removed merely by expelling the prostitutes from the city. It was not proper to treat them worse than beasts. It requested that more number of rescue homes should be opened for ‘fallen sisters’ and extend the act throughout the

\(^{159}\) *Kudiyarasu*, Erode, 26 October 1930, p. 10.


\(^{161}\) *Stri-Dharma*, Madras, May-June 1931, pp. 297-298.


province.\textsuperscript{164} Even from the beginning, most of the papers demanded for the extension of the Act throughout the province.

Because of the continuous efforts, the Act was extended to various places one by one. By the end of 1932 it was extended to the towns of Madurai, Thiruchirappalli and Srirangam.\textsuperscript{165} The \textit{Ananda Bodhini} expressed its gladness at the extension of the Act to Madurai, it requested to extend it to other places like pilgrimage centres and the district headquarters.\textsuperscript{166} The \textit{India} observed that prostitution was growing day by day in India because of the exemption; it urged the government to extend the Act without giving any form of exemption.\textsuperscript{167} The \textit{Tamilnadu} expressed its gratitude towards the Governor of Madras for the extension of the Act.\textsuperscript{168} Due to efforts, the Act came into force gradually one place after another in the Madras Presidency.

As a result of the co-operation rendered by the public and the press, over 105 houses of ill fame were suppressed within two years in the Madras city.\textsuperscript{169} According to the \textit{Anandha Bodhini} there were 262470 cases were treated in the hospitals.\textsuperscript{170} The \textit{Prajabandhu} observed that a slight change had come over Madras after the passing of the Brothels Act. It requested the government to establish protection-homes for the rescued girls and provide aid to the people who start such rescue homes.\textsuperscript{171}

Amendments were made in the Act in the years 1938 and 1940. In accordance with the Amendment of 1940 the police officers were empowered to enter into the brothels without prior order or the court.\textsuperscript{172} But the devadasis were exempted from the jurisdiction of the Act. The Act was further amended in 1947, and then it was renamed as The Madras Act XXXV of 1947. It made provisions for the detention in vigilance homes for periods ranging from two to five years of women less than thirty

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item G.O. Ms. No. 1200, Home, 4 March1939, TNA.
  \item Ananda Bodhini, Madras, 1 February 1933, p. 635; \textit{MNNPR}. Vol. I, 1933, P. 92.
  \item India, Madras, 3 February 1933, \textit{MNNPR}., Vol. I, 1933, p. 92.
  \item Tamilnadu, Salem, 15 February 1933, \textit{MNNPR}., Vol. I, 1933, p. 93.
  \item Stri-Dharma, Madras, April-May 1936, p. 76.
  \item Ananda Bodhini, Madras, March 1933, pp. 643-647.
  \item Report on the Administrative of the Madras Presidency 1940-1941, Madras, 1941, p. 5; G.O. Ms. No. 4027, Home, 30 September 1940, TNA.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
years of age who were found guilty of solicitation in the street or public place. These homes were acted as the Borstal schools in the case of adolescent offenders.  

**Attempts in Central Legislature**

Kunwar Raghbir Singh introduced the Girls Protection Bill in the Central Legislature on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1933 in order to prevent the sale of minor girls. The *Stri-Dharma* expressed its support to the Bill. But it felt that the provisions of the Bill were not sufficiently comprehensive to check the various evils. Holding this view, it made suggestions to the government. It suggested that the Bill should be amended not only to include cases of selling of minor girls in marriage to old men for money and other considerations, but also should include cases where parents and guardians allow their daughters to engage in prostitution for the purpose of profit and the punishment in the later case should be very severe. It added that it should also include those cases, who trained their girls purposely for prostitution, as it happened in certain communities in South India, and the age for the purpose of marriage should be eighteen and for other there should be no age limit according to the resolution of the League of Nations. It further pointed out that minor girls found living the company of individual prostitutes and the children of the prostitutes should be removed from their custody to a home intended for such girls and maintained by either the government or private philanthropic bodies and no class, caste or community could claim any exemption from the operation of this clause by reason of its long standing custom or usage. In spite of the support rendered by the press and the reformers, the Bill was withdrawn on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1934.

After independence, Article 23 of the Indian Constitution laid down that traffic in human beings should be prohibited and any contravention of this provision would be an offence punishable in accordance with the law. To add strength to this provision, the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act of 1956 was passed and it came into force from 1958 throughout India.

---

174 Home Department (Judicial) File No. 35/33, 1933, TNA.
175 *Stri-Dharma*, Madras, May 1933, p.79.
176 Home Department (Judicial), File No. 35/33, 1933, TNA.
When the initiative for the Prevention of the Immoral Traffic Act was carried out, the papers unanimously supported it. They succeeded in gathering the public opinion in favor of the Act. After passing of the Act, they promulgated the importance of the Act among the public. They served as the party of opposition whenever the government was ineffective in enforcing the Act properly. It was impossible to make a law without the active and committed cooperation of the press in Tamilnadu.

3. Abolition of Devadasi System

‘Devadasi’ is a Sanskrit word that can be split into ‘deva’ means God and ‘dasi’ means female slave. It gives literal meaning ‘a female slave or servant of God’. It was a religious practice found among the Hindu especially in Southern parts of India; whereby at puberty, a girl was married-off to a deity of a temple. After the dedication ritual, the girl becomes acolyte at the temple. The institution was called Devasasi system and the women in the profession were called devadasis, dasis and devaradiyars in Tamilnadu.177 From generation to generation this was their profession and a daughter of a devadasi had to become a devadasi.178 Every temple of repute in South India had its troop of these women. Every day they had to attend deeparadhana in front of the deity at sunset, singing hymns in praise of the deities, dancing before the idol and follow with the processional deity carrying the holy light and by singing and dancing.179

For dedication, the girl before puberty had to go through several rituals in the temple. The priest would tie the tali180 around her neck on behalf of the God. This ceremony was called as pottukattuthal. Symbolically she was bonded in marriage with a God and it was her chief duty to dance and sing before him to please him.181 The dedication of girl to the god was justified for the following reasons: a) if the parents were childless, they vowed to dedicate their first child, if it happened to be girl, b) if there were no sons in the family, the girl child was dedicated and could not marry, as she became a son for the family (earning the family’s livelihood), c) another economic

---

178 P.N.Premalatha, P.N., *op.cit.*, p.211.
180 Tali is a yellow thread tied around the neck of bride by the groom on the occasion of their marriage.
181 Premalatha, P.N., *op.cit.*, p. 213.
reason contributed to the dedication is that if the girl’s family had some property, the family ensured that it stayed within the family by turning the girl into ‘son’ by dedicating her.\(^{182}\)

The *dasi* could never become a widow, she was considered as *nityasumangali*. Devadasis were the only women in India who enjoyed the privilege of learning to read, to dance and to sing.\(^{183}\) They were given high respect at the society in the beginning. For their duties, they were paid by the temples depending on the wealth of the temple. In certain cases they were awarded *inams*\(^{184}\) in the form of land and revenue.\(^{185}\)

Originated with the noblest motives, the institution had gradually degenerated into something, highly objectionable. Because of the inadequacy of the emoluments, the devadasis started practicing prostitution. It constituted a significant source of income to the families of their origin. Priests, brokers and other groups had vested interest in the continuation of the system.\(^{186}\) The orthodox Hindus paid much interest in the survival of the system for their selfish motives. The government tried to put some restrictions by enforcing the new laws at the end of the nineteenth century. But it was not able to stop this practice.

**Mysore Instance**

In 1909, the Government of Mysore introduced a Bill to abolish the devadasi system in its jurisdiction. Initially the Government of Mysore appointed a committee of religious *pandits* and educationists to ascertain whether the devadasi system had any religious sanctions. The press in Tamilnadu praised the efforts taken by the Government of Mysore and that should be followed in Madras also. The *United India and the Native States* welcomed the measures taken by the Government of Mysore for the better future of the women kind.\(^{187}\) The *Madras Standard* expressed its opinion that the temples of Gods did not stand in need of the services of the devadasis,

\(^{184}\) *Inam* means donation.
\(^{185}\) G.O. Ms. No. 407, Judicial, 2 October 1924, TNA
\(^{186}\) Moni Nagi, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
thus the government could enact the legislation without any hesitation.188 The Wednesday Review wrote that the Government of Mysore deserved its heartiest congratulations and remarked that it was pity that there should be any difference of opinion in abolishing the devadasi system at Madras.189 After getting response from the religious pandits that there was no such sanction from Hinduism was in vague, the Government of Mysore issued an order debarring devadasis from rendering any temple service in their state.190 The press in Tamilnadu voiced the opinion that the Government of Madras should follow the Mysore precedence.

**Role of Central Legislature**

With regard to the abolition of Devadasi system, the Central Government had notified the signing of the International Convention on Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls on behalf of the concerned Provincial Governments. Hari Singh Gaur had a great role to play in its enactment. In 1912, three Bills to suppress prostitution were brought for further scrutiny and discussions by Dadhabhai, Mudholkar and Madge. Again in 1922, Gaur moved a resolution in the Madras Assembly for the abolition of devadasi system.191 The Stri-Dharma hoped that the members of the Legislative Assembly would use their powers in support of the Bill, and it trusted that the Bill would become law very soon.192 In 1927, V. Ramadoss Pantulu moved a resolution in the Council of State at Simla for introducing a legislation to prohibit the practice of dedication of minor girls to the temples. Being a religious matter, the Government did not accept this resolution.193

**Justice Ministry**

The Ministry of Justice Party took strong measures against the devadasi system which was practiced freely in Tamilnadu. The Swadesamitrani, from Madras acknowledged the measures taken by the Justice Ministry against the devadasi system.194 The devadasis numbered more in Tamilnadu than in North India. They were

---

189 *Sithannan, V.*, *op.cit.*, p. 20.
192 *Stri-Dharma*, Madras, March 1922, p. 66.
193 G.O. Ms. No. 4079, Law (General), 20 December 1927, TNA.
194 *Swadesamitrani*, Madras, 2 February 1929.
considered a menace for the social interaction on various grounds.\textsuperscript{195} It was calculated that there were more than two lakhs devadasis living in Madras State alone.\textsuperscript{196} The government realized that it was essential to rescue thousands of young innocent women from immorality and vice from long invalidity, suffering diseases like gonorrhea and syphilis.\textsuperscript{197}

**Role of Muthulakshmi Reddy**

Muthulakshmi Reddy, the Deputy President of the Madras Legislative Council decided to wage war against the devadasi system. She introduced a resolution on 5\textsuperscript{th} November 1927, demanding the Government of Madras to recommend the Government of India to craft legislation at a very early date to put an end to the practice of the dedication of young girls and young women to Hindu temples for immoral purposes under the pretext of caste, custom or religion.\textsuperscript{198} The *Non-Brahmin Youth* wrote in support of the Bill. It said that the Bill would evoke much discussion.\textsuperscript{199} It added that her enthusiastic campaign for ending the Devadasi system met with splendid success. More harm was done to people and to God by the persistence of the old order than by the traditional stage to which the office of the dancing girl was abolished. It conveyed its heartiest congratulations to her on the passing of the resolution.\textsuperscript{200} Gandhi rendered his whole hearted support to her attempts through his weekly *Young India*.\textsuperscript{201} The liberal press in Tamilnadu carried the news of Gandhi’s support to capture the mass support for the reform.

As said by the paper, the resolution was supported by many members of the council. It was considered as a clear verdict and right path for the abolition of devadasi system. But the orthodox leaders like S. Satyamurthi tried hard to save the existing system. Satyamurthi propagated anti-bill feelings among the conservatives. He argued against the Bill that the devadasis were the custodians of the traditional Indian Arts. To reply the argument of Satyamurthi, Muthulakshmi Reddy spoke in the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{195} Naik-Maratha Mandal, *Dedication to Gods, Plea for Prohibition by Law*, Bombay, 1928, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{197} G.O. Ms. No. 200, P.P.D., 1 April 1931, TNA; R.Natesan, *The Depressed Classes of India*, New Delhi, 1979, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{198} Madras Legislative Assembly Debates August 1939, Vol. XIII, Madras, 1939, p. 290.
\textsuperscript{199} *Non-Brahmin Youth*, Madras, February 1928, p. 16
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., pp. 37-38.
\textsuperscript{201} *Young India*, Ahmedabad, 29 August 1929.
\end{flushright}
Legislative council “such a caste was indeed necessary and since the Isai Vellalas (devadasis) had done it for so long, why don’t the Brahmin women take over from then on?” The Stri-Dharma wrote in support of her argument and the Bill that the men who sinned with the devadasis were often honoured and respected members of society, the women were the sufferers. It called the devadasis as innocent.

The Kudiyarasu blamed the orthodox people for their conservative attitude against the good cause. It strongly asked a whipping question that if the Brahmins such as Satyamurthi believed this evil as religious oriented and a blessing, should it be impossible for them to hand over this blessing to the women of their own community. This question shattered the entire province. It also condemned the conference organized by the orthodox section against the abolition of the Bill held in Tiruchirappalli in order to make the people aware of the evil.

The Government of Madras without trying to solve the problem simply communicated the resolution to the Government of India. It was then referred to a select committee. It took almost a year for Muthulakshmi Reddy to obtain sanction to introduce the Bill at the Madras Legislative Council. In the mean time, she made several efforts regarding the abolition of the devadasi system. As the resolution, Muthulakshmi Reddy symbolically appeared more or less similar to the resolution that was moved by V. Ramadoss Pantulu earlier in the Central Legislative Assembly on 12 September 1927, the Government of India kept it aside as a further step in the same direction. The Government of Madras also felt that it was an all India issue.

Amendment to the Hindu Religious Endowment Act

At this juncture, Muthulakshmi Reddy introduced a Bill for the amendment to the Hindu Religious Endowment Act in 1929 to grant pattas to the

---

203 Stri-Dharma, Madras, February 1928, p. 48.
204 “Kudiyarasu, Erode, 6 November 1927.
205 Kudiyarasu, Erode, 6 November 1927.
206 G.O. Ms. No. 4079, Law Department, 20 December 1927, TNA.
devadasis thereby free them from the obligation of temple service.\(^{207}\) The Bill faced both support and opposition. The opposition mostly came from the orthodox Hindus and even from some devadasis. A number of protest meetings was organized by them throughout Tamilnadu.

On the other side, her Bill invited innumerable letters, laurels and salvoes from the individuals, recognized social reform associations as well as other public bodies from the Madras Presidency. She wrote a number of articles about the problems faced by devadasis and tried to enlighten both men and women about the devadasi community.\(^ {208}\) Most of the liberal papers republished her articles to enlighten the society.

At a meeting held at Thiruvavaduthurai near Thanjavur in December 1927, R. Rajarathinam Pillai, a famous Nathasuram\(^ {209}\) musician from Isai Vellala community challenged the orthodox people and voiced that if the devadasi system would be maintained in the near future; Tamilnadu would witness a whirlpool of human blood. This spirited news ornamented the columns of the Swadesamitran. The paper urged the public to react against the existing evil by supporting the Bill.\(^ {210}\) Due to the support of the public and the press, the Bill was passed in February 1929.\(^ {211}\)

Viscount Goschen, the Governor of Madras and Baron Irwin, the Governor General gave their assent to the Bill on 13 May 1929.\(^ {212}\) By the Act, the Provincial Government was entrusted with the responsibility to have control over the management of the temples for the good of public. With the help of the Act, the devadasi community developed a sense of self-respect and dignity and the community itself understood the evils of the system.\(^ {213}\)

---

\(^{207}\) G.O. Ms. No. 2597, Revenue Department, 13 December 1929, TNA.


\(^{209}\) Nathasuram is a music instrument.

\(^{210}\) Swadesamitran, Madras, 3 December 1927.


\(^{212}\) G.O. Ms. No. 2597, Revenue Department, 13 December 1929, TNA.

\(^{213}\) G.O. Ms. Nos. 10-11, Revenue Department, 3 January 1935, TNA.
Devadasi Bill Again

During the time, V. Ramadoss Pantulu withdrew his resolution on the abolition of Devadasi system from the Central Legislature.\textsuperscript{214} The press in Tamilnadu continuously cried to abolish the evil enduringly. The \textit{Kudiyarasu} exposed wretchedly about a marriage procession where the devadasi ladies sang and danced. It also pointed out how a number of Brahmin women joyfully watched their performances and the paper questioned, “Why were these Brahmin ladies not in a position to understand the pains of devadasis? Which \textit{sastra} allowed such sadist attitude?” These whipping questions touched the sentiments of the people.\textsuperscript{215} This paper stated that such incidents would create opportunities for people like Miss Mayo to write about India decisively.\textsuperscript{216}

The \textit{Stri-Dharma} urged that nothing less than burning sympathy for the victims, the devadasis and their offspring-would win victory in such a cause. The reformers should need the chivalry of soul in men and women if the society was to win in this struggle.\textsuperscript{217} It also published the article of Muthulakshmi Reddy on devadasi system in support of the Bill.\textsuperscript{218}

Boosted by the public opinion in favor of the abolition of the devadasi system, Muthulakshmi Reddy introduced Prevention of Dedication of Hindu Temples Bill in Madras Legislative Council on 24\textsuperscript{th} January 1930. After making certain modifications by the Select Committee the Bill was circulated for the purpose of eliciting public opinion.\textsuperscript{219} At this juncture, the press in Tamilnadu was involved in propaganda for creating awareness and generating public opinion in favor of the Bill. The \textit{Kudiyarasu} pointed out that it was funny to seek public opinion for a long time debated Bill. Apart from that it published and circulated the leaflets, which contained the articles of Muthulakshmi Reddy.\textsuperscript{220} It published also the supporting stands of

\textsuperscript{214}G.O. Ms. No. 2161, Law General Department, 25 June 1928. p.1, TNA.
\textsuperscript{215}\textit{Kudiyarasu}, Erode, 14 April 1929.
\textsuperscript{216}\textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{217}\textit{Stri-Dharma}, Madras, March 1929, p. 213.
\textsuperscript{218}\textit{Ibid}., pp. 208-209.
\textsuperscript{220}\textit{Kudiyarasu}, Erode, 23 March 1930.
various organisations and associations for the Bill regularly to seek others support and boost up the passing of the Bill. 221

This paper published a matter under the headline ‘Opinion of E.V.R. in support of the Bill’ that the devadasis were suffering a lot from the venereal diseases, the forthcoming act would block the means of prostitution and the government should not give up its aim fearing of the sastras. It endorsed its full-fledged support to the Bill. 222 It published an article based on spiritual research, which it revealed how Sundaramurthy Nayanar, a Sivate leader of the past times himself recognized the abolition of dedication of women to the temples, and it raised a question why were the modern Sivates not ready to accept the reform. Thus, the article created an overwhelming response among the public. 223

At the same time Margret Cousins, Secretary of Women’s Indian Association observed that there was no need for the circulation of the Bill. 224 In support of this Bill, The Indian Ladies Magazine made public the resolution passed in the fifth All India Women’s Conference meeting held at Madras in November 1930 pleading the people to boycott these temples where the devadasi service was still admitted and to prevent the dedication of girls to temples by punishing the culprits. 225 The announcement for boycotting the temples was a revolutionary move.

The efforts of the press created full fledged support among the public for the passing of the Bill. Knowing that, the government was prompted to take an urgent and effective step expeditiously. 226 In the mid-half of 1930, the Government of Madras issued an order to the effect that the dedication of women to the temples was abolished by the law. The dedication of minor girls to the temples was considered as a crime. In the same year, Travancore State also abolished the evil system. 227 It was observed that the order of Madras Presidency was unable to root out the devadasi system thoroughly. With the support of the Brahmins and the temple trustees the evil

221 Ibid., 23 March 1930
222 Ibid., 30 March 1930.
223 Ibid., 2 November 1930.
224 G.O. Ms. No. 2147, Law (General) Department, 17 May 1930, pp. 70-71, TNA.
225 Indian Ladies Magazine, Madras, December 1930, p. 298.
227 Muthulakshmi Reddy, S., My Experience as a Legislator, p. 119.
found its survival. Before the issue of the order, Muthulakshmi Reddy resigned from the council due to the arrest of Gandhi. Despite that, she continued her works off the council for the above purpose.

All India women’s Conference appealed to the Hindu Religious Endowment Board of Madras to call upon all trustees of the temple under its jurisdiction totally to eradicate the devadasi service and the ceremony of dedication of girls in such temples by issuing an order. The Stri-Dharma published this matter in order to root out the system thoroughly. Even the Anandha Bodhini, one of the conservative papers of Madras expressed its positive observation regarding this matter. It observed how the devadasi system was found to be a bad omen for Hinduism, the existence of the evil would result in moral degeneration of the youth and a disgrace our country in the international arena.

Even after the resignation from the Council, Muthulakshmi Reddy didn’t renounce her efforts. She wrote a letter to C. Rajagopalachari, the leader of Tamilnadu Congress Committee, expressing vividly how the dedication of girls to the temple was found to be so bad a social sin as that of growing palm trees for the production of toddy. The Anandha Bodhini generously allotted its columns for publishing this letter. Rajagopalachari wrote to Muthulakshmi Reddy that he was over burdened with other matters and had no time to take up the question of devadasis, which sounds how he was not interested in such efforts.

In the mean time, Maharaja of Bobbli, the Premier of the Madras Presidency attended a public meeting, in which the devadasi women performed dance feast. Muthulakshmi Reddy criticized this occurrence. Krishna Iyer, the orthodox leader targeted her for her positive efforts through reports. He maintained that the system should be in vogue until other girls would be trained to perform the dances. Hearing this, she criticized his view by asking a question if he was willing to transform

---

231 Muthulakshmi Reddy Papers, Subject File No. 11, Part II, TNA.
other girls to devadasis. The *Anandha Bodhini* supported her efforts by publishing this virtual conversation between the two and requested the public to support her efforts.  

This paper further requested the parents not to force their girls to plunge into the evil. Even though there should be a punishment, the temple trustees did not care for the law, they conducted such *pottukattuthal* ceremonies freely in the rural areas. The paper advised the public to get rid of the evil, which was hated by Gandhi too. It further added that strict measures should be taken against the evil in order to prevent the venereal diseases.

The *Kumaran* published a Tamil song in 1931 entitled ‘which is Hindu religion?’ It criticized the Hindu religion for the prevalence of the devadasi evil. In the same issue, the paper published a utopian story in which how the Hindu Devars, Hindu Nayanmars, Maulavis of Islamism and the Christian Saints assembled in a conference in Heaven and passed the Abolition of Devadasi Act. The paper finally asked a question why the orthodox people were not ready to accept the reform, which was accepted by the Gods too.

Movaloor Ramamirtham Ammal, born in a devadasi family, who came out from the evil bravely fought for the abolition of the evil and worked for the wellbeing of escaped devadasis. She wrote a book *‘Dasikal mosavalai allthu Mathi Petra Minor’* (The Treacherous Net of Devadasis or the Minor Grown Wise). In this book, she dealt with the lives and struggles of devadasis, based on self experience. It explained how the escaped devadasis came forward to establish a social organization for the benefits of devadasis. The book brought mass awareness among the public. The *Kudiyarasu* gave vivid advertisement for the book in order to propagate awareness.

In an article in the paper, she asked a question whether there the dances and songs would be necessary for Gods in the Temples. The orthodox Brahmins argued that such ancestral jobs should not be left out. She condemned the views of Brahmins and asked them why did they leave their ancestral job of cattle rearing? The conservative...

---

234 *Kumaran*, Karaikudi, September – October 1931, pp. 92-93.
236 *Kudiyarasu*, Erode, 22 March 1936, p. 16.
arguments were waned by her question. The paper further advised the people to write their supportive opinions to the editor in support of the reform, which created public support for the abolition of the evil.\footnote{237}{Ibid., 5 June 1938, p. 8.}

The \textit{Stri-Dharma} revealed how the Princely State of Pudukottai abolished the devadasi system by amending the Hindu Laws of Inheritance so as to benefit the female heirs in the family. It wholeheartedly welcomed the abolition and it insisted that its readers might know that a similar Act was passed at Madras Legislative Council as an amendment to the Hindu Religious Endowment Act, but it was very regrettable that even in the city temples, service by the devadasi maids was allowed to go on owing partly to the non-interference policy of the government, and partly to the ignorance of the mass and the apathy of the so-called educated class among them.\footnote{238}{Stri-Dharma, Madras, August 1931, pp. 456-457.} Thus the paper asked its readers to be aware of the use of the existing laws regarding female emancipation.

The above paper reproduced the presidential address of Muthulakshmi Reddy in the \textit{Andhradesa Kalvanthula} Conference held at Tenali on 13\textsuperscript{th} August 1932. Her address elaborately discussed about the evils and the devadasi system, the Legislative efforts taken to abolish the evil and the role of the public to be played in this issue. Further she strongly suggested that without the public support, a reform could not be made. She appealed to the mothers not to dedicate their female children to the Hindu temples. The paper published this for raising the public support in favor of abolishing the devadasi system.\footnote{239}{Ibid., September – October 1932, pp. 608-615.}

The \textit{Grihalakshmi} was continuously insisting in its articles about the abolition of devadasi system. On 7\textsuperscript{th} August 1939 a new Bill related to the abolition of devadasi system was introduced in the Madras Legislative Council by Mrs. Ammanna Raja. She requested the government to send the Bill for the consideration of the select committee. But C. Rajagopalachri, the Premier of Madras Presidency announced that the Bill should be circulated for gathering public opinion. The said paper strongly
condemned his announcement and negative attitude towards the emancipation of women.\footnote{Grihalakshmi, Madras, 1 September 1939, pp. 577-579.}

The Bill had the provisions for the abolition of dedication of women, reorganization for the marriage of devadasis, the property rights to the children of the devadasis, and the arrangements for receiving their due share from the temple revenue even though they left their service.\footnote{Ibid., p. 578.} After public circulation, the Bill was sent to the Select Committee consisting of eight members, among them three were women. The \textit{Giruhalakshmi} registered its thanks for the papers which supported the Bill.\footnote{Ibid., p. 579.}

It also published the letter of Muthulakshmi Reddy regarding devadasi system. She pointed out how the dedication of girls over the age of eighteen years was performed secretly; it exposed the failure of reform acts. She sought the support the parents of girls until the evil was thoroughly abolished. She noted that the legislations would create the external changes only when the internal changes should take place only by the awareness.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 580-582.} In the same issue, it published a photo of devadasi female children with the caption “Oh, Society, Protect us”, which created sympathy among the readers.\footnote{Ibid., p. 582.}

It also published a photo of a devadasi young girl with news about her. She was 17 years old. She was forced to \textit{pottukattuthal} ceremony and then to prostitution. She was affected by a number of venereal diseases. After escaping from such premises she was admitted into the hospital. After three years of continuous treatment she was rescued and then admitted in an orphanage. The photo and the news about the devadasi girl created strong opinion against the evil.\footnote{Ibid., p. 583.}

Most of the people expected that the bill would be passed earlier; but the Second World War put a hurdle on the way. All the efforts ended in vain. During the Ministry of O.P. Ramasamy Reddiyar, another Bill was introduced by Dr. Subbarayan on 9th October 1947 in the Madras Legislative Assembly to abolish the devadasi
The Bill was sent to the Select Committee under the chairmanship of Mrs. Ammanna Raja. After the committee stage, the Bill became Law on 17th January 1948 and called as Act No. XXXI of 1947. It was also known as Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act, 1947. According to the Act, all forms of devadasi system were abolished in the Madras Presidency.249

Child Marriage Restraint Act, Prevention of Immoral Traffic Act and Devadasi Abolition Act were the important social legislations regarding the emancipation of women. The reformers found a lot of hurdles to enact the legislations and implement them. To avoid the unnecessary problems, the Government of Madras tried to appease the orthodox people by following its escaping mechanism called ‘religious neutrality’. Most of the papers requested the government to keep the policy away for the good things to be done.

Eventhough the conservative press made negative efforts against the Legislations; the majority of the papers defended them with social conscience. Thus, the press justified the right things, persuaded the government for them and stimulated the public for the noble cause regarding the emancipation of women.

The Ananda Bodhini observed an important thing “The government should stop the inhuman activities in the society eventhough it assured not to interfere in the social matters. Why doesn’t the government go for abolition of the evils which has humiliated the children and the women for a life time? Our leaders must pass the resolution and send them to the authorities by which the government should be stimulated.”250 This observation exposed the positive dimensions of the press regarding the liberation of women in Tamilnadu.

246 G.O. Ms. No. 37, Legal Department, 6 February 1948. TNA.
247 Ibid.
248 G.O. Ms. No.23, Legal Department, 26 January 1948, TNA.
249 Ibid.
250 "அந்தாண்டகத்தில் புத்தர்கள் நீர்வான நிரந்தரத்தினை நிற்க உள்ளூர்த்திக்கோவது. மனித அர்த்தகமாக நமது பொறியல் அம்சங்களுடன் விளம்பரம் பதிவுகளாக விளம்பரம் மறுக்கவும் மலர்கள் அவர்களின் குடைவர்களுடன் தொடரும் அண்ணல் சிகரமாக கூட்டும் விளம்பரம் நிறொழித்து நிறொழித்து? பாரும் அழகாக்கத் தொடர்களின் அரசாலைகளுக்கு குமரிக்கும் விளம்பரம் விளம்பரம் பதிவு அருகம் மறுக்கவும்" -Ananda Bodhini, Madras, July 1919, pp. 29-31.