

CHAPTER –I

STATUS OF WOMEN IN TAMIL NADU

The status of woman in society is an argumentative topic among the modern scholars. During the Vedic period, women were considered as the masters of the house and she was free to get education in high order. In the Tamil society, she was subordinated to her husband. She was permitted to take food in the company of her husband. Some of the women contented life, they suppressed all their likings and feelings and dedicated themselves to bear children and obey the masters in the house¹⁹. The upper class women in selected areas enjoyed her freedom equally like men and involved in administrative powers. In the Later Vedic period, number of women was involved in domestic works, spent their times to read, arts and sciences. They enjoyed their freedom very much. In history, it happened that the queen had liberation to make suggestions to the king on the matters of common affairs. The state of marrying more than one persons existed among the kings and the wealthy classes during the Vijayanagar period ²⁰. Some women, they were enslaved by the male traditions. There were several evil practices existed in the Tamil Society. There were Sati, Devadasi system, Dowry system, Child Marriage and Widow Remarriage practiced in the society. The social evils of Dowry system came in to existence in the Tamil society. This evil practice went beyond the level among the large sets of society. They took different dimensions in the society. The practice of Sati by women emerged. It was a practice, burning themselves on funeral pyres of their husband existed among the higher castes.

1. Sati

Sati was a cruel social disorder impacted secure destruction in the 19th century in the Hindu society. Sati had originated in the remote past. It was prevalent even in the Rig Vedic period²¹. It evidently proved the social order where male domination over women prevalent everywhere. Sati implies the laws of dependence for the women. It became a practice in which widow should be prepared to mount on the federal pyre of her husband at his death. She was directed to, “go up the alter first”²². The practice of Sati caused much loss in the human life. Such situations brought out from the attention of social reformers. There were no places left for the cruel being. The British government created awareness towards this barbarious practice cropped up in the society. They tried to abolish this evil from the society. In general, Sati means self-immolation of widow on the funeral pyre of her dead husband. Self-immolation of widow is described in Tamil as “Teepaidal or Teekkulittal”. Teepaidal means jumping into the funeral fire and Teekkulittal means select the fire on her own body. The word Sati is derived from the Sanskrit from “Satyavata”, which indicates one lead a life of truth and the same is taken as “Vow”. In the language English, the feminine noun, which taken a verbal rule from the Sanskrit word²³. “Sat” which means truth. Therefore in Sati a widow, who is deemed virtuous and who identifies her life with that of her dead husband.. The Sanskrit equivalent to first was ‘Age’ which means ‘before’. But it was modified to ‘Agneh’ or fire. The meaning got shifted from “led the mother advanced to the alter first to”. “Led the mothers go in to the womb of fire”²⁴. Max Muller considers it a wanton tampering with the Rig Veda, which made prescription for the conduct of the funeral rites of the Aryans. Also, Sati crept into the Hindu Soul

¹⁹ Subramanian, N. *Caste System in the Tamil Country*, p.137.

²⁰ Mahalingam, T.V. *Administration and Social Life Under the Vijayanager*, p.250.

²¹ Manjumdar, R.C. *The History and Culture of the Indian People Vol.I*, p.393.

²² Express Magazine, Madurai, dated 19th, February.

²³ Paramarthalingam, C. *Social Reform Movement in Tamil Nadu*, p.69.

²⁴ Edward Thompson, *Suttee*, p.17.

system, where Ravana's daughter-in-law, Sulochana, who sacrificed herself in the burning corpse of her husband, Indrajit. Similarly, in the Epic Mahabharata, when the King Pandu died, his second wife Mathuri stepped into the funeral pyre of her husband²⁵. Sati was considered as a worst ordeal which the women were forced to undergo. This ordeal, which women were forced to undergo was found here and there mostly in Tanjore and Thiruchirappali Districts. But it was absent in the southern Districts like Madurai and Ramanathapuram. It is said that a person named Kizhavan Sethupathi had died; his 47 wives came before the funeral pyre to emulate themselves. This practice was mainly encouraged due to the subspecies attitude of the society and the belief of women and their chastity. In most of the cases, women were disinterested to practice it²⁶. But they were compelled to sacrifice their body in the fire. Many cases are reported that, women were given alcohol to perform this act. In the drunken mood, they were pushed in the fire. In this traditional male dominated society, man was given liberty to any number of wives for his personal pleasures. At the sametime, it was neglected in case of women. The widow was next allowed to marry and to live in the society to equal dignity.

Sati had been witnessed often in North India. And also it was a practice in South India too. The State, Bengal proved a high level for Sati among other States in North India. The practice of Sati in Tamil Nadu was less when compared with other States. In Tamil Nadu, it was practiced by nobles. Mostly K.K.Pillai however asserts that Sati was totally absent in Tamil Nadu²⁷. But his statement may not be proved accurate. The documented sources evidently said that Sati had existed in Tamil Nadu,

²⁵ Dodwell, H.H. *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol.V, pp. 40, 133-136.

²⁶ Issac Jayadhas, R. *History of Tamil Society and Culture*, p. 65.

²⁷ Pillay, K.K. *Tamilaka Varalarum, Makkalum, Panpatum*, p. 466.

since the Sangam period. The famous literary works in Tamil Tolkappiyam, Purananuru and Manimekalai proved the practice of Sati during the Sangam period²⁸. Tolkappiyam also refers to forced self- denial widowhood, which shows that the act of Sati was not compulsory even though it was venerated. The story of Manimekalai narrates the women life named Athirai,²⁹ who attempted her life in flames, when she got information that her husband was drowned in the sea.

Sati was practiced during the Chola period (A.D.850 – 1070) also, When Sundara Chola was dead in A.D.973 , his wife Vanavan Madevi stepped in the flames and scarified her life. When Marco Polo visited Tamil Nadu during the end of the 13th century³⁰, the practice of Sati existed in Tamil Nadu and there were evidence of victims held. There is also some evidences for Sati in the Purapporul Venba Malai, a medieval Tamil work on Grammar. There were some exceptional cases in Sati recorded during the seventeenth Century. When Tirumalai Nayak (A.D.1623/29-1659), the Nayak ruler of Madurai was dead, among his two hundred wives, a few committed Sati³¹.

Tanjore, the orthodox centre in Tamil Nadu in which Sati was practiced by the Royal ladies in the eighteenth century. When Raja Serafoji I (AD 1712-1728) died, one of his wives committed Sati. When the death of Raja Pratab Singh (AD.1739-1763) was heard, his third and fifth queens lifted themselves in the funeral pyre. When Raja Tulasi (AD.1763 – 1787) died in 1787 at his age of forty nine, two of his queens sacrificed themselves in Sati.

²⁸ Tolkappiyam, Porulathikaram, Puram Verse 19.

²⁹ Manimekalai: 16, Lines. 25-28.

³⁰ Nilakanta Sastri, K.A. (ed) *Foreign Notices of South India*, pp.1-7.

³¹ Subramanian, N. (ed) *Self- Immolation in Tamil Society*, pp.72-73.

When Abbe Dubbois quotes, an incident of Sati that took place in the year 1794 at Pudupettai, a village in Tanjore District, where a thirty two year old lady spared her wife in flames³². Abbe Dubious says that, the victim, who could not go round the funeral pyre for the third time as stipulated by the priests was physically lifted and thrown in to the pyre³³.

There were number of incidents happened during the nineteenth century. The act of Sati was witnessed in Tamil Nadu during this age. Sati stones were found in many places of Tamil Nadu, which shows that Sati did exist in this century. These stones were called as Teepaintal Koil (Sati Temple). Lord Wellesley (1789 -1803), the Governor General of India appointed a British official named Francis Buchanan to make an economic survey of the Madras Presidency and he referred some Sati temples in his report. He said “The Widow ought to burn herself with her husband’s corpse and this is still sometimes though very rarely practiced³⁴. The tombs of such women as have committed this action of Sati as considered as places of worship and their memory is generated as that of Saints.

In the State Tamil Nadu, Sati was first reported from Tanjore in the year 1802. According to the report submitted at Fort St.George on April 20th, 1802 addressed to the Chief Secretary to the Government stated that, the Raja of Tanjore, Amir Singh died on April 19th, 1802, his two wives namely Parvathi Bai, and Savithri Bai took place the cruelty of Sati. The relatives of the King’s family arranged the rituals and performed Sati. They decorated these ladies with ornaments and costly clothes. The Pyre pit was already dug two days before away from the palace. When the pyre was lighted, the first

³² Abbe Dubois, J.A. *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, pp.365-367.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

³⁴ Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras Through the Countries of Mysore, Kanara and Malabar*, Vol.II, p.330.

queen went around the pit thrice and threw herself in to the fire and was instantly charred to death. The second queen also followed the same³⁵. In the letter of C.M.Lushington, the Acting Magistrate of Tanjore in 1813 to the Secretary Judicial Department stated that, between 1806 and 1813, there were hundred cases of Sati recorded at Kumbakonam in Tanjore District. To quote him “.... I regret to say that Sagnanum (sati) is frequently practiced and particularly in Tanjore and in its vicinity, from the enquiries I have made I have ascertained that no less a number than hundred victims have fallen a sacrifice to this inhuman practice since the establishment of the court of Combaconum”³⁶. There are two more instances of Sati happened in Pudukottai and Tanjore during 1807 and 1717 respectively³⁷. W.Blackburne, the Resident of Tanjore in his letter to Lord William Cavendish Bentinck, Governor of Madras Presidency reported that when Raja Tondaiman of Pudukottai died on February 4th1807, his spouse ended her life in the flames leaving her two children. The second incident of Sati took place on August 2nd 1813 the village called, Agaramangudy near Kumbakonam in Tanjore District. One Narnapiah of the said village expend at 12 noon on August 2nd1813. His wife, Kaveri Ammal burnt herself to death with the body of her deceased husband, though attempts were made by the British officials to prevent the tragedy³⁸.

Between 1813 and 1816, there were a number of cases recorded in Tanjore District. Cotton, Magistrate of Tanjore reported the incidence 24 cases of Sati between December 16th 1819 and June 30th 1821³⁹. Though there was no incidence happened in

³⁵ Balasubramanian, K.R. *South Indian Celebrities*, p.49.

³⁶ Judicial Consultations, Vol.226, dated 2nd February, p.385.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 385-386.

³⁸ Papers Relating to East India Affairs, *Hindu Widows and Voluntary Immolations*, p.270.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol.158, dated 27th July, No.11, pp.2047-2029.

Chengalpat between 1819 to 1821. In 1816 the Criminal Judge of Tiruchinopoly District reported that no Sati took place in the District during the three years proceeding the transfer of the District to the East India Company in 1801 and only two cases was reported since 1816. According to the criminal Judge of Virudhachalam, there was no incident of Sati in that place. But a widow, who was prevented from performing Sati by the acting commercial Resident at Cuddalore⁴⁰. The Salem Criminal Judge reported a widow, who burned herself in the funeral pyre of her dead husband. It came to limelight after 2 years. In the District of Coimbatore, between 1812 and 1813 there were 2 widows, who resolved to burn themselves. But they were taken to Tanjore District and the evil rites were performed there.

In the District of Madurai, the report of the Criminal Judge stated that, there was no Sati performed there. But he reported a complaint received from a widow to commit a Sati, but she was finally convinced not to perform. There was no incident, recorded in Tirunelveli District. The above detailed study proves that there was not much incidents of Sati from Tamil Nadu in the nineteenth century⁴¹. From these analysis, Sati was prevalent in Tamil Nadu, but it was not often understand in the Tamil country. This was especially true of the early nineteenth century, Tamil Nadu. The Government expressed a deep regret to abolish the evil death of Sati. They submitted a proposal to the Governor General, Bentinck to eradicate this evil. Later, he issued the famous minute on Sati in 1829, by which Sati was made illegal. As soon as the Regulation XVII of 1829 for prohibiting Sati was announced Stephen Remold Lushington, the then

⁴⁰ Ibid., Vol.155 B, dated 6th April, pp.844-845.

⁴¹ Peggs, J. *Cry to Britain on Hindu Immolation Showing from Essays Published in India and Documents*, p.68.

Governor of Madras wrote a Minute, “the practice of sati of burning or pushing alive the widows of Hindu husband, illegal and punishable in the Criminal Court⁴².”

Abolition of Sati

During the 17th and 18th centuries, there was no plan for abolishing the evil practices existed in Tamil Nadu. Because these practices were prevailed in the traditional and religious context of Indian law. So the British Government did not think of abolishing Sati for fear of opposition from orthodox section. The British, as pointed out by a recent writes, “ For one thing, were strike by the love and devotion displayed by the Hindu women towards their deceased husbands”⁴³. So they could not take and steps to eradicate the evil. They were not ready to interfere in the religious matters of Indians. According to Cornwallis Regulation of 1793, the East India.

The Company forced to guarantee religious freedom to the people of India. Hence, the officials gave permission to do this religious rites. But the later administrator of British Government, Lord Wellesley, who announced Sati as a Criminal offence. His Regulation VII of 1802 stipulated that “If any person or persons shall hereafter from themselves into an Assembly for the purpose of aiding, assisting or witnessing Sati, they shall be considered as accomplices in the murder and death with accordingly as drugging a victim or compelling her to become a Sati against her wisher was made an offence. In the year 1813, the Governor General of India Lord Hastings, issued an order of the Judicial officials, directing them to create awareness among the public regarding the cruelty of the crime. It declared that, “It being a Fundamental Principle of the British Government to allow the most complete toleration in matters to

⁴² Lushington’s Minutes and the Government Order, Judicial Consultations, February 2nd, 1830.

⁴³ Kusumalatha Bai, B. *Humanitarian Ideas in Madras Administration, 1800-1857*, p.8.

religions to all classes of the native subjects⁴⁴, whilst at the same time justice and humanity forbid that a practice attended with the distinctive of human life and often productive of calamitous circumstances to the children of the deceased should be permitted beyond the extent of the rules prescribed for it in the Hindu Law.....⁴⁵ followed by Lord Hastings. Then Governor General Lord Amherst (AD – 1823-1827) declared the practice of Sati should not be tolerated any longer⁴⁶. J.Chamier, Chief Secretary to Government, Madras Presidency during the year 1802 attended a write up to W.Blackburne, the Resident of Tanjore to effect that the Government should not use force to prevent the crime. So the same to be graduated to many people, they collectively can put it to an end. The British Government took the issue and acted very seriously against this evil⁴⁷. The next move was carried out by the said “C.M.Lushington, the acting Magistrate of Tanjore. In his report on 1813 about the prevalence of Sati in Tamil Nadu, he not yet invested the powers to burn. But he waited for the instructions of Government for long time. So he decided to send a report about the cases recorded at Kumbakkonam between 1806 and 1813. He recommended that, “Prohibition of this practice could give universal satisfaction”⁴⁸. As a result, he instructed the Government to dissuade women widows from performing Sati. Meanwhile, in England the Humanitarian movement emerged as a powerful force. They demanded the court to consider the steps to be taken to end the social evils in India. The Parliament members in England exercised pressure to abolish Sati in India. In the year 1813, William Wilberforce, a parliament member and

⁴⁴ Demetrius, C. Boulger, *Rulers of Indian Series*, p.81.

⁴⁵ Judicial Consultations, op.cit., pp.853-854.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.85.

⁴⁷ Political Consultations, Vol. VI, dated 20th May, pp. 555-556.

⁴⁸ Judicial Despatches from England, 1817-1819, Vol.3, pp.36-41.

reformer placed before the House of Commons that demand that Sati should be put an end. He declared that “humanity consisted not in a squeamish ear but in being forward and active in relief”⁴⁹. At the result, of their happenings, the Court of Directors viewed the problem and issued direction to the Indian Government to consider and make remedial measures to avoid the evil doings, especially the abolition of Sati. Accordingly, Harrington, British Official in Bengal framed a Minute stating that, the Government should be careful enough to draw up legislation in such a way not to cause any harm to the public or the country. The Minute underscored the fact that even the higher class in India was not enlightened enough to feel the need for the abolition. It observed that the wisest course was the dissemination of education, which would result in leaving the wife to die a natural death⁵⁰.

In this regard, Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833) published pamphlets during the year 1818 and 1820. In these pamphlets, he declared that the widows did not willingly commit Sati of their accord, but they were induced by their relatives to do so. Infact, Raja Ram Mohan Roy was an eye witness of Sati⁵¹. Once it happened to see a woman who jumped over the flames forcibly into the pyre by her relatives. His writings drew the attention of Lord William Bentinck, when William Bentinck took over the charge as Governor General in July 1828, he acted himself as a reformer by temperament and declared his objective to represent the evil of Sati to the British Government. He sent various letters regarding the same. The hands of Bentinck was further strengthened, when the Nizamat Adulate supported the Governments proposal

⁴⁹ Dodwell, H.H. *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol.II, p.136.

⁵⁰ Judicial Consultations, Vol.182A, dated 4th February, pp.157-158.

⁵¹ Deena Nath Ganguli, *Memoir of Raja Ram Mohan Roy*, p.29.

to abolish Sati⁵². The report of the court in 1829 unanimously came to the effect that Sati should be permanently put to an end.

The Act of XVII of 1829

To eradicate the custom of evil practice of Sati deep rooted in the Indian soil, Bentinck along with many educated people moved forward in favour to preventive measures against Sati. Bentinck made a Bill on December 4th 1829, it was enacted into Law as Act XVII of 1829. It declared that “the practice of Sati or burning or burying alive the widows of Hindus, is hereby declared illegal and punishable by the Criminal Court⁵³. Lord William Bentinck has planned to translate the English version of the Act to Bengali Language. So that, the ordinary people can understand its importance. He asked the support of William Carey to translate it. As a result the Bengali version was printed on Sunday December 5th 1829. The Jubilation of the Governor General was manifest in the following lines”:.....“springing to his feet and throwing off his black coat, he cried , No church for me today..... If I delay an hour to translate and publish his, many a widow’s life may be sacrificed”⁵⁴. The Bill was passed only in Bengali Presidency. Unfortunately the matter was triggered by the opposite parties on January 14th 1830. The Orthodox Hindus of Bengali, submitted a memorial to the Governor General urged him to withdraw the act. But Lord William Bentinck was stubborn in his stand and forwarded the memorial to the Privy Council. The Council in turn dismissed the case on June 1832.

The same was followed by Stephen Rumbold Lushington, the Governor General of Madras. He prepared a Minute on January 19th 1830 entitled “The Madras

⁵² Demetrius, C. Boulger, op.cit., p.89.

⁵³ Regulations Passed by the Government of Bengal, Fort St. George and Bombay in the Year 1828, p.45.

⁵⁴ Deaville Walker, F. *William Carey*, p.310.

Sati Regulation I of 1830 similar to the Bengal Code, it declared that the practice of Sati or burning or burning alive the widows of Hindus is, hereby declared illegal and punishable by the criminal courts. The Declaration of act stated that the practice of Sati was very bad to the mind and that the Hindu tradition did not sanctioned it. The practice of Sati was seriously dealt with a view does a criminal act and such as liable for severe punishments. Also the Act stated that it was the duty of police official to rush on the spot it happened and make the receipt of information and be a guard to the victim from performing the act of Sati. If they do so they should be prosecuted under the law of Penal Code⁵⁵. The crime of encouraging or supporting was a punishable crime with penalty or imprisonment depending on the enormity of crime. The Court of Foujdari Adalat (Military Court of Justice) entitled to pass even death sentence of the guilty of on the grounds of having caused violence or abetted the crime⁵⁶. The judicial and police officials were instructed to maintain caution in enforcing legislation, If not so, they will be punished. The act also requested the magistrate to ensure the smooth relationship between the police and the public. The regulation on Sati was a landmark in the History of India. The Foujdari Adalat declared that the interest of humanity had been promoted by this enactment In the opinion of John William Kaye, the Act put an end to Sati throughout the territories of the East India Company⁵⁷. Though in the Madras Presidency, Sati was abolished by law in 1830, stay cases of Sati had been reported. When Sivaji II, last Maratha ruler of Tanjore died on October 27th 1855. His numerous wives committed Sati.

In fact, Sati took place few in numbers even after the abolition. Some Hindus particularly high caste communities were indifferent to this legislation. It could not be said that the legislation on Sati was not with the support of the people. But it was the

⁵⁵ Judicial Consultations, Vol.226, dated 2nd February, 1830, p.400.

⁵⁶ Judicial Despatches to England, Vol.IX, dated 17th January, 1834, p.7.

milestone in the annals of the history to provoke social reforms, not only in Tamil Nadu but all over India. Hence, the social environment was to certain extent was not hostile to the enlightened reform formulated by the British Government to put an end to Sati. On the basis of the sources available, Sati appears in Madras Presidency, there was no petitions submitted to the Government or any bodies, Sati become a rare and neglected evil spirit thrown away by the people. The people accepted the reform made by the British through newly emerging Tamil society and then the reformers concentrated on other problems such as Child Marriage, Widow Remarriage, Devadasi System and other social disabilities for the betterment of the women community.

Child Marriage

Child marriage was a social evil, which had been practised by the Tamil people. Those child wives, if their husbands happened to die, they turned as widows till their death. After the abolition of Sati in 1830, there were widows who struggled for their survival. In particular, widows of Brahmin families encouraged widow remarriage during 1850's⁵⁸. Those child widows were the victims of child marriage that took place between female and the oldman in the society.

The practice of child marriage was common among the Brahmins and other High caste Hindus. Among the Brahmins, the usual age of marriage was from 7 to 10⁵⁹. The average age of marriage of female among the Brahmins was from 6 to 7. Not only Brahmins, other caste people also practised the same. According the Census Report of the Madras Presidency during 1921, had a population of 2- ½ millions and had the

⁵⁷ John William Kaye, *The Administration of the East India Company- A History of Indian Progress*, p.541.

⁵⁸ Public Proceedings, G.O.No.2249, September 24th, 1885, p.14.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

highest percentage of girls in the whole of India married before the age of 5, 50 girls married out of every 1000 were married at this age⁶⁰.

In the older days, child marriage was very common in the society, by which the young children were betrothed and got married of a very young age. There were two instances of betrothed practiced in the ignorance society. When the baby was born, immediately the parents of this ward arranged betrothels. Promises were given and accepted regarding the future partner for the baby. Marriages were performed at the age of ignorance in which the boy or girl was not aware of anything in married life. Hence they were witnessed to the consequences of child marriages such as child widows in Tamil Nadu. According to D.Sadasivam's observation, he says, "it is the wide prevalence of child marriage and ill assorted marriage which made many young girls, widows"⁶¹. Thus the child marriage drew the attention of the social reformers. Manu, the ancient law giver sanctioned child marriage. He says "To a distinguished handsome suitor (of) equal caste should (a father) give his daughter in accordance with the prescribed rule, though she has attained the proper age. The people believe the superstitions thought that if a father failed to perform his daughters marriage at her infant stage, it was considered as a sin. Manu, again quotes "Reprehensible is the father, who gives not (his daughter in marriage) at the proper time, reprehensible is the husband who approaches not (his wife in one reason) and reprehensible is the son, who does not protect his mother after her husband had died"⁶².

⁶⁰ Subramanian, P. *Social History of the Tamils*, p.79.

⁶¹ Sadasivan, D, *Social Reform Movement in Tamil Nadu with Particular Reference to Women in Special Paper sent (ed) Social and Religious Movement in Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, p.351.

⁶² Max Muller, F (ed), *The Sacred Books of the East* , Vol.XXV, (The Laws of Manu), p.343.

Causes of Early Marriage

Due to various reasons, in India, child marriages are prevalent in many places. There are various reasons for being practiced child's marriage in Tamil Nadu. The prime reason is that the child's father plan to act his daughter married at an early age so that she would not be a burden to him⁶³. Next, it was socially believed that child marriage would bring about salvation to the girl's father and his ancestors. If she gets male child, it was believed that it would lead to the spiritual welfare of the family. When marriage took place within the specific group as regained by law or custom, there was a heavy demand for bridegrooms⁶⁴. This situation compel many parents to seek alliance for their daughters at an early age. Next, it was practiced to avoid the danger of the girl being forcibly abducted by a member of an alien tribe. The other reason is that if a girl, who remained spinster at puberty, was considered to be of low caste and her father was supposed to have committed a grave sin. Manu says that, "a man of thirty should marry a girl of twelve and a man of twenty four a girl of eight. And then, in order to maintain the moral standard of the family, parents arranged marriage of their daughters at an early age. They wanted protection for their female wards, when they were grown up. Moreover, in the patriarchal society parents desired to send their girl children as early as possible, so that they can facilitate division of their parental assets among the male children.

Negative Impact of Early Marriages:

The early marriages created many negative inputs in individuals life especially in their health and psychological levels. There are various harmful effects found out

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.328.

⁶⁴ Census of India, Vol.I, Part.I, 1901, p.431.

due to the early marriages. Early marriage weaken the young mother's health. Naturally, the children born were poor in health condition and they remained feeble, even affects they reached adulthood. Labour resulted in premature death. Those infant girls married to oldman were let to widowhood lives after the death of their age old partner⁶⁵. They were enforced to widowhood, at the young stage and created a pathetic situation in women's life.

Child Marriages were prevalent in Tamil Nadu as rightly pointed out before in madras presidency, Child Marriage was very common among the Brahmins the Kshatriyas and the Chettis. The Brahmins had their children married between the ages of six and seven which also, to a certain extent accounted for the increase in the percentage of widows⁶⁶.

In 1881, the total number of Hindu girls married in the Madras Presidency was 157, 466 and the number of widows in the same year was 5621⁶⁷. And it was reported that among them 434 girls were below 10 years when they got married, and 16 become widows⁶⁸. The Census Report of Madras Presidency during 1891 portrayed that the total number girls married between one and nine years was 166, and those became widows between one and four years were 988. The following table portrays the number of person in Madras Presidency who remained married, unmarried and widowed according to Census Report to 1881⁶⁹.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.344.

⁶⁶ Papers on Indian Reform, The Women of India, (n.p), dated on 4th June, 1889, p.56.

⁶⁷ Report of the Fifteenth National Social Conference Held in Bengal, dated 29th December, p.94.

⁶⁸ Lewis Mc Iver, *Imperial Census of 1881- Operations and Results in the Presidency of Madras*, p.69.

⁶⁹ Stuart, H.A. *Census of India*, Vol. XIII, p.128.

Table : 1.1.
Census Report of 1881

Civil Condition	Male	Female	1891 M	1891 F	1881 M	1881 F
	Total numbers		Number in 10,000			
Unmarried	9,488,413	6,703,462	5,387	3,723	5,469	3,642
Married	7,519,174	7,850,992	4,269	4,361	4,147	4,233
Widowed	604,791	3,448,851	344	1,916	384	2,125
Total	17,612,378	18,003,305	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000

According to the report of the Hindu in 1896 the basis of census, among six million young boys in the Madras Presidency, 10,000 of young were married before they reached the age of 14 and around 8,600 young boys got early married before they reached the age of four⁷⁰. And the girls in Madras Presidency among six million girls, 627,000 got married before they attained the age of 14, and out of 2.65 million as many as 24,000 were got married before the age of four. In addition the Hindu further reported that in Madras there were 28 percent of children born died before they reached the age of one, half of them were dead before they reached the age of nine⁷¹. The Hindu added, “before fathers at the age of 18 and girls become mothers at the age of 14 and many die in the prime life. This deplorable state of things is the legacy of ages and centuries. The Eleventh National Social Conference held at Amraoti on December 1897 stated that in Madras Presidency⁷², out of five women, one was a widow whereas in England it was one out of B that the high percentage was due to infant marriage.

⁷⁰ The Hindu, dated 1st June, 1896.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Report of the Eleventh National Social Conference, dated 30th December, Poona, 1897, p.107.

Widow – Remarriage

According to the Hindu customs, a marriage after the death of her husband was an offense. Widowed women were not supposed to marry for the second time. The Tamil society considered the state to being married to only one person at a time, so as to preserve the chastity of women. Very strict rules were placed on widows, who had lost their husbands. They were denied the freedom to remarry. From the Act XVII of 1829, it abolished the practice of Sati. They escaped from death on the funeral pyre of their dead husbands but they were still remain the victims of the social customs which did not allow them to get remarried. The Widow Remarriage Movement emerged as a remedial reaction in the nineteenth century and became a social reform measure. The Widow Remarriage System was not absolutely a new measure, but it existed in Rig Vedic period in which “childless women at the death of her husband married his brother⁷³. It is said more emphasized that “If the widow of a man who died without leaving issue raises up to him at son by a member of the family Sagotra⁷⁴ she shall deliver to that son the whole property whole belonged to the deceased.

According to Brahmacharis, they remain chaste and believed that they reached heaven. If a women desire to have offspring, they were considered as violating her duty towards her deceased husband brings on herself disgrace in this world and loses her place with her husband, in heaven⁷⁵. The ‘Niyoga’ form of marriage was in popularity in India from the beginning of Christian era. Thereafter, severe restrictions were imposed upon widows. No wonder, some widow preferred sati to widowhood. After the abolishment of Sati in Tamil Nadu, women felt lonely after the death of their husbands. After the colonization of British during the eighteenth century there sought some

⁷³ Majumdar, R.C. (ed) *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, p.393.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Subramanian, N. *op.cit.*, p.344.

changes took place in Hindu and Islamic Laws. The British progressed a good remedial measure that they tried to suppress the child marriage and enforced widowhood.

The Condition of Widows in Tamil Nadu

In Tamil Nadu, the widows were humiliated by the society by condition the social customs and blind ethical standards existed in the male dominated society. As rightly pointed out by S.Rajalakshmi that “the widows experienced the same humiliation in the Sangam Period as they did in the Vedic period⁷⁶. The above said women were not allowed to adorn flowers in their heads. And they were compelled to left uncombed. They took cooked rice and slept on the floor⁷⁷. They were not allowed to go for work. If they choose to work, they involved in spinning works. This type of widowhood is known as Tapatanilai in Tolkappiyam⁷⁸. The unpleasant experience of widows were a pitiable conditions. After the death of her husband, She was required to proceed the state of mourning till the end of her life. She was expected to undergo shaving of her head like a monk and even she was not allowed to chew betel. She was not supposed to wear jewels and required to dress in white sarees and let her forehead remain without Kumkom. The Saivite widow was allowed to smear her forehead with sacred ash only. She was not allowed to participate in family functions or any social functions like marriage and other ceremonies. The society blames such women that it they do participate in functions considered as evil omen⁷⁹. They had to work hard as well. If they happened to be a Brahmin widow, she was required to fast a Ekadasi Day. On that day she was not allowed to drink water. And she was lodged in a dark cabin in the house. Above all she has no legal right for her deceased husbands property. In short the Hindu widow symbolized the appalling degradation of Indian women.

⁷⁶ Rajalakshmi,S. *The Role of Women in the Sangam Age*, p.341.

⁷⁷ Purananuru, Verse -246.

⁷⁸ Tolkappiyam, Sutra 1025, Line-29.

⁷⁹ Abbe Dubois, J. *op.cit.*, p.336.

Widow Remarriage was firstly initiated by a great personality Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar, who was born in a poor Brahmin family in the year 1820. He struggled hard to educate himself and later by his hard work he became the Principal of Sanskrit College in Calcutta in 1851⁸⁰. He organized a powerful Movement for Widow Remarriage, which resulted the enactment of Widow Remarriage Act XV of 1856. Vidya Sagar tried to put an end to the suffering of Hindu widows two incidents in his life made him received of Widow Marriage System. In one incident, his friend who was of thirteen or fourteen age becomes a widow. The other incident happened when he was studying in Sanskrit College Calcutta. He came to know that young widow of a renowned family gave birth to a child on account of her friendship with a young man⁸¹. Because of guilty, the widow attempted to kill her baby. These incidents rooted him to thus remedial measure for widow remarriage. With the help of his parent, he took this as a challenge. He referred many Hindu scriptures to learn about marriage rules. And he found that Hindu Shastra's permitted widow remarriage⁸². He published a learned paper on the validity of remarriage of Hindu widows, which shock the very foundation of the orthodox circle. He later published a pamphlet which is of twenty pages in Bengali language entitled "Whether Widows Ought to be Married or not". He published the second pamphlet⁸³ on October 1855, in which he stated that, Para Sara Samhita permitted remarriage for a woman, who had lost her husband.

Widow Remarriage Act XV of 1856 and Its Provision

On October 4th, 1855 Vidyasagar submitted a petition to the Government of Calcutta by getting signature from 987 members stating that a law to remove illegal obstacles to the marriage of Hindu widows, and declare the issue of all such marriages

⁸⁰ Leonard John Greenfield, *Kandukuri Viresalingam, 1848-1919- A Biography of an Indian Social Reformer*, p.163.

⁸¹ Subal Chandra Mitra, *Isvar Chandra Vidhya Sager- A Story of His Life and Work*, p.266.

⁸² Parmarthalingam, C. *Social Reform Movement of TamilNadu*, p.108.

to be estimate. By seeing this petition, Indian Government was compelled to take action immediately. In November 1855, a Bill according permission for Widow Remarriage was introduced in the Legislation Council and in January 1856, it came before the selection committee. Thus the matter deserved the national importance. To support the same Bengal submitted 5/28 petitions and submitted committee gone through the petitions and submitted their report on 31st 1856⁸⁴. The Governor General of India Lord Dalhousie on July 25th 1856 declared that the legislation legalizing the marriage of widows, will interfere the talents of one set of men from inflicting miseries and vice upon the families of their neighbours, who are of a different and more human persuasion. The Act brought women a solace from the social system existed in the society. The Act implied that a Hindu widow was eligible for remarriage, provided she gave her consent and that the children born of instructed a widow, upon her second marriage. She was not supposed to claim any of deceased husband's assets⁸⁵. And also in the event of her deceased husband's failure to declare the widow as guardian of her children, the court could intervene and appoint a guardian from parental grant father mother or parental grandmother. Also it encompassed that if a widow who had no children was eligible to inherit the property of her deceased husband. The law instructed a widow by her remarriage was not entitled to forfeit her property or right except the before said terms. In case of widow, who was a major or whose marriage was not perfect her own consent was accepted and her remarriage as considered legal. But if a widow was minor and her first marriage was not consummated, she was not permitted to marry without the consent of her father or the guardian marriages country to this section were to be declared as illegal by the court of law and those involved

⁸³ Isvara Chandra Vidya Sagar, *Marriage of Hindu Widows*, (Pamphlet), p.7

⁸⁴ Judicial Department (Press), G.O.No. 383, dated 23rd March, 1858, Letter No-25.

⁸⁵ Arabinda Podder, *In His Introduction to Marriage of Hindu Widows by Isvar Chandra Vidya Sager*, p.12.

would be punished or fined or with both. There are defects and merits implementing this Act. The act failed to secure for the remarriage of widow the full enjoyment of her deceased husbands property. Even, her right to property was restricted. In other terms the widow was placed under severe restrictions. The remarried couple faced social ostracism and were forbidden from entering temples for worship. Surprisingly, this Act failed to provide any punishments for the offenders. Thus, a widow who remarried under this act was bound to lose her social status. This was quoted by the Eleventh National Social Conference held at Amraoti in 1897. It stated that the law of 1856 has proved inoperative to protect (sic.to.protect) her and the conference is of opinion that steps should be taken by the Social Reform Associations who favour such reform to adopt remedies to relax the stringency of caste usages and to secure a reconsideration of the principle of the act with a view to remedy its defects⁸⁶. In spite of the defects, it cannot be neglected. It created much positive impact the women folk. It marked a great milestone in the women set who march towards their emancipation. The emancipated were grateful to the Government who accorded the legal sanction to widow remarriage. The first widow remarriage took place in Calcutta on December 7th, 1856 under the patronage of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. In this case he faced severe opposition⁸⁷. It is reported that, he was tortured by a richman because of his active participation in this movement. Thus the implementation of this act created positive and negative effects.

Widow Re-marriage in Tamil Nadu

The Government of St.George instructed its Magistrate and police officials to investigate about any incidents taken place after implementing this Act in the year 1858. After investigate, they submitted a report stating the incident that in Salem, a

⁸⁶ Report of the Eleventh National Social Conference, dated 30th December, p.41.

⁸⁷ Public Proceedings, July 7th, 1809, Vol.359, p.4642.

young widow of thirteen years old belonged to Sudra Caste married a man of twenty two⁸⁸. Though the marriage was opposed by the relations of the bride, it took place with the presence of Thasildar and other officials. But the parents excommunicated this couple from their family and caste. Followed the same, another widow remarriage was performed in Bangalore in 1867 among the Maratha Brahmin family. The widow remarriage movement planned to extend the encouragement all over the place of Tamil Nadu. Especially in Nagercoil, there formed a widow Remarriage Society in the year 1873 by a Sessa Iyengar. He set a precedent by giving his widowed daughter remarried.

Hindu Remarriage Association of 1882

The main objectives of this Association was to advocate Virgin Widow Marriage on the ground that such marriages were not prohibited in the Hindu Law⁸⁹. This Association had its membership, by paying three rupees per year and Hindu can be member of this Association. It had branches at Nagapattinam, Coimbatore and Bangalore. This association not only supported widow remarriage, but also provided financial incentives to the couples and motivated the remarriage system. There were number of remarriage happened in Tamil Nadu. The first Hindu Women Remarriage Association was celebrated at Mylapore on June 7th 1883⁹⁰. The Widow Remarriage Movement achieved a special significance among the Hindu families in Tamil Nadu. Another important evil against women was existed in Tamil Society that (ie) Devadasi system. This system same to hare considerable portion in the Tamil Country. The following passage discusses elaborate the Devadasi system.

Devadasi System

⁸⁸ Salem Gazetteer, 1916, pp.123-124.

⁸⁹ The Asylem Press Almanac and Compendium of Intelligence, p.1085.

⁹⁰ Srivasachari, C.S. *History of the City of Madras*, pp.290-92.

Devadasi System is one of social agonies followed in Tamil culture. This caused a much more impact on the female community. As a child she was a burden of her parent and after marriage she had to be subservient to her husband and a sole responsible to the enter family. Devadasi System existed before the fountain of human society. The primitive man by his profession he went for hunting and for his free time he find sexual gratification on females. This fasciation of men of comfort formed the Devadasi System. In the history women dedicated herself to the service of God or Goddess as an object of worship is known as Devadasi. It is believed that the institutes of Devadasi is more than 1700 years old and had its origin in the 3rd century⁹¹. In the early age the priest of religion borrowed the system from the kings. They employed a number of women to keep up the status and for their pleasures. Girls from the economically poor background were offered to the God and for divine favours. Devadasi System is note deed for sensual pleasures, but as in noble purpose. Typically, Devadasi young women were utilized for singing dancing and for public relations. There were discipline and rules followed in the early age⁹². The women must here clothed descent affaires and it particulars they were next supposed to expose their bodies.

But the condition of Devadasi became so miserable and diverging themselves from singing and dancing to prostitution and illegal marriage relationships with other men. In Tamil country, the Devadasi System was in high peak during 9th and 10th century AD. This period witnessed a large number of temples constructed. Also the lords and kings maintained this has a social status and enjoyed during the medieval period of Vijayanagar Rule. They introduced prostitution also over the empire⁹³. The Kings Government regularized the prostitution and collected tax also. These women

⁹¹ Yesudhason, V. and Issac Jayadhas, R. *History of Tamil Society and Culture, Since 1336*, p.70.

⁹² South Indian Inscriptions, Vol.II, p.259.

loosed the state patronage and become victims of pleasure given to the male dominated society throughout the centuries. Also they were paid a merger amount to do this profession. During the 19th century then came social reformers⁹⁴ and religious persons to support the victimizing like Muthu Lakshmi Reddy and religious person like Amy Wilson Car Michel turned against to this system and protect the young children from this evils act of prostitution.

Muthu Lakshmi Reddy descendant of Brahmin family was a victim for Devadasi System in which her mother Chandra Amma was a Devadasi. She faced a lot of problems during her childhood stage due to this evil thing. But she had a courage and aim to abolish this cruel practice in the society. Her first aim was to become a doctor and achieved the profession. As a Gynecologist, she treated women patient and supported the women by giving free medical treatment and financial support. As a daughter of Devadasi Muthu Lakshmi experienced and observed the black spotted structure of the institution of Devadasi System as well as developed a hatred against it leading to its destruction, But the uprooted of thin deep rooted evil required pieces of legislation. She involved herself in varies organizations and movement to support her intention to abolish the Devadasi System in the society. After a long struggle the Subramanian Ministry passed a Bill on Feb 1st 1929⁹⁵. But it was a failure at first and in the next year 1930 the Devadasi System was totally removed by the Madras Bill XXXI of 1947⁹⁶. The outstanding efforts made by Muthu Lakshmi Reddy along with other reformers like Muthu Kutty Swamy fought against the evil thing of Devadasi System. The evil system disappeared in visible and reappeared in another fronts. The reappearance is exposed in every place and have been followed as a dignity over the process of Urbanization and Modern Civilization. The ignored Institution of Devadasi

⁹³ Manifesto of the Devadasi Association, Madras, 1927, p.8.

⁹⁴ Muthu Lakshmi Reddy, *Devadasi*, p.179.

⁹⁵ Muthu Lakshmi Reddy, Proceedings of the M.L.C. Vol.26, 1929, p.620.

System was disappeared and reappeared in the form of prostitution. In modern world, it is recognized as a growth for tourism, restraints and modern life styles.

Women in Modern Centuries

There were significant change occurred in social, economic and political status of women during in 18th and 19th centuries. The change in society attributed in various factors. Among them Social Legislation in English Education, Modern Medical Aids and Political Movements gave them good scope for development and change⁹⁷. Great social reformer like Ram Mohan Roy, Iswara Chandra Vidya Sagar, Sin Syed Ahmed Khan, Mahadev Ranade, Dayanand Saraswathi, Keshab Chandra Sen did yeoman's services for the cause of women in India. The status of women when compared with the early ages have been improved day by day. During the 19th century many reforms made women emancipated individually in their lives. The social legislation enacted by the Government eradicated many of the social evils like Sati, Purdah, Widowhood, Child Marriage, Widow Remarriage, Devadasi, Eve teasing and others⁹⁸. The helplessness of Hindu widows moved the hearts of many enlightened men like Iswara Chandra Vidya Sagar and M.B.Malabari, whose ceaseless efforts culminated in the form of the Act (1856) which legalized the remarriage of widows. Through to an Orthodox Hindu such act was most repugnant and contemptuous, they slowly but steadily led to far reaching changes in men in general and women in particular.

Another measure, which emancipated Hindu women from their former system was western education, whose influence was really ineffable and amazing. The contribution of Christian missionaries to the cause of female education is really commendable and marvelous⁹⁹. The missionaries were the pioneers in the field of female education and played the most important role in furthering this nobles cause. To

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Subramaniam, P. *op.cit.*, p.85.

⁹⁸ Tirunelvelly Gazetteer, 1917, p.98.

create an awareness on the part of the Indian population about the position of women they held competition, and discussion on subject relating to their emancipation on subject relating to their emancipation Rev. John Anderson conducted an essay competition even in 1840 on the subject women as she is India¹⁰⁰. Apart from these literacy competitions the missionaries conducted conferences at Ootacamund to discuss ways of overcoming the obstacles. Many Indian women leaders also worked for the liberation of women in the 19th century. The foremost among them was Pandit Rama Bai (1852-1922). She rose her voice against the social injustice done to the women in the society. She started classes for literate women and widow in the society.

The status of women in the modern century is highly connected with their financial postern by means of job opportunities and economic activities. Apart from, education is the base for all constructive growth of women. In modern century, they have been considerable growth in the entry of women in all sectors of employment in the state after the eradication of social evils against women, women initially have to empower themselves in political economic, social and legal fields¹⁰¹. In Post-Independence India after the implementation of 5 year plan, there have been witnessed constructive progressiveness in various fields, which included Education, Science, Medicine, Agriculture, Engineering and other fields. In this modern period the employability for women also favorably improved. Women have been given 33% of reservation rights for education and employment opportunity. While retracing the days after independence women were not given proper jobs and the literary rates also very

⁹⁹ Madras Christian College Magazine, Vol.30, p.414.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Sunita Singh Sengupta, *Women Leadership in Organization*, pp. 218-225.

low due to the social custom practical before. In the Pre Independence days, women had no option for employment and education. They were bounded at their house during household works, bring up children and acted as stereo typical labour in the family¹⁰². But in modern days there has been considerable growth in education, employment and economic status. Women are placed in various Government and Non-Governmental Organizations also. They involved in political parties by giving valid suggestion and ideas to empower the natures and for the welfare of human society. Even after establishment of various protection act and preventive measures undertaken by the government, women at the corners still face some issues in the society¹⁰³. The grievance given by women are seriously dealt with care and the colors are penalized. There are various cases rewarded in recent decades which have been judicially solved through appropriate legal provision. However today's newspapers trace some incidents happened in country.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.