

The Activities Of Women's Associations And Socio-Religious Organizations For Safe Guarding The Women's Rights

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Immoral Traffic act, 1930, protected women from physical diseases. The women's associations played a commendable role for the development of women and for relieving women from the ancient malicious ways of life. They are women's India Associations, All India Women's Conference, National council of women in India, Arya Vaisya Mahila Sabha, Kalvantula social Reform Society and Local Women's Associations worked for the wellbeing and protection of women in Tamil Nadu.

Women's associations aimed at fighting for rights of women in the first quarter of 20th Century. Social activists founded women associations and institution to wipe out the social evils of women. Western ideology had created awareness among the women for social change. They worked for the protection and attainment of women rights and legislations.

Womens' India Association:

Women India Association was the foremost women's association to make the progress of women in India. It was started in Adyar, Madras on 8th May 1917 by a multiethnic group of women. Its major aim was to gather women of all sects under the frame work of Theosophical society.

Tamil Mathar sangam was established in 1906 for creating alliance between

learned Tamil women and European ladies in Madras¹. Under the leadership of Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddi and others, W.I.A. Published the Journal Stri-Dharma edited by Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy which focused the matters of employment, health and education to women. It made a fight against child marriage, worked for Divorce Act, property Act, works to avoid Purdha - weaving, to outlaw of the Devadasi system, to create Avvai home etc. Struggle for women's Property bill Women's India Association struggled for women's property act. By its whole hearted effort and support the Hindu women's property right Bill, 1936 also called Dr. Deshmukh's women's property right bill was passed. The Hindu laws enacted before 1936, infact, allowed women to maintain properties but didn't legalize them as heirs to the properties of their parents if their brother was living. It is the greatest achievement of W.I.A.² Works to Avoid purdah - wearing

Once purdah system was most prevalent among Muslims and Ksathriya women and even medical treatment was denied for young women because of the faith in ancient religion and custom. That custom forced the women to experience relentless gender inequality due to no fault of their own. The W.I.A. took a very promising step forward to abolish the purdah system. Purdah selected the women and it affected them emotionally and psychologically. Hence the daughters of Muslims and Ksathriyas started to attend the schools without purdah.³ Struggle to outlaw Devadasi System

Even after checking the brothels in 1869 by legislation, Devadasis who were the serious traditional prostitutes, could not be prevented at once as the system was strongly built on the basis of pious outlook and as the government

feared that if it was disturbed, public agitation might arise. The members of WIA urged the Madras Legislative council to enact Devadasi Bill, 1929 and Immoral Traffics Act, 1930 to provide a legal veto for preventing that system. Birth of Avvai Home

Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy in her own personal interest, had started the Avvai Home for women and orphans in 1930. On June 23, 1930, three young girls, as they had nowhere to go and their relatives were not ready to take them in their house, came to Mrs. Reddi's house for seeking protection, immediately after their release from a brothel. Mrs. Reddi given asylum to them at Avvai Home. Now-a days, the Avvai Home serves as shelter for all women and children who look for protection and education, deserted wives, orphaned destitute girls and young windows who refused immolation. WIA worked for the welfare of women in all aspects.

All India women's conference

AIWC was an efficient women's organization in India, first established in June, 1927. Margaret Cousins, who was the founder and chairperson of the AIWC, addressed an appeal to women all over the country to form local committees to organize all India conferences on matters of women education and their problems. It urged for family planning, abolition of child marriage, Purdah - wearing, women's education etc.⁴ In 1930 AIWC had started 22 working women's hostels to give shelter to working women.

National Council of Women in India

NCWI was a network of women's association found in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta which founded as a working branch of International Council of women in 1925. It worked for promoting literacy, setting up shelters for widows and motivating ordinary women to overcome their problems and to lead life with renewed confidence.⁵

Arya Vaisya Ma hi hi Sabha:

In 1908 the Arya VaisyaMahila sabha was established as the womens wing of men's social organization in Madras and Hyderabad. Its main tasks were to create a right spirit in women to work for their progress in an independent manner. The 7th covention of sabha recommended compulsory education for all girl children below 10 years.

Local women's Associations:

In addition to the above said women's associations of National Importance, there were small women's associations, which were formed by local women for the purpose of sharing their knowledge and experience for flourishing the life of women. Their activities were mainly concerned with grouping women together to share their experience with each other for better planning for future. There were 20 of women's associations within the erstwhile Madras presidency in the early 1950s which encouraged the participations of women in the legislation and promotion of their well beings. Mrs. Sarah Tucker established a girls school in Palayamkottai in 1929.⁶

Women's Liberation could not be possible in Madras presidency without the active participation of women's associations during 1920-1937. Womens associations worked hard for the birth of womens freedom and rights and also ensured womens protection through their incessant measures undertaken in the society.

Socio Religious and Political Organisations:

The socio religious organizations which were started by renowned social reformers in Madras presidency for the enactment of various laws for the protection of women and to relieve them from the ancient barbaric customs and traditions which makes them in equal.⁷ It marked for the protection of women's birth rights. In 1920's there were 34 distinguished socio-religious and political organizations in Madras presidency of which the south Indian Liberal federations, self respect movement, Andhra Conference committee, Arya Vaisya Maha Sabha, Vaishya youth Association, Andhra Kshatriya Mahasabha, Vishakapattinam and West Godavari committees, Faculty of the Nataraja of Vijayanagaram, Association of Reddy caste Brahmanamaha sabha and lingayat Education Association were infavour of women's right in this province.

All the above mentioned organizations worked for the imperative legislations for women-care and protection of womens birth rights. The first man, who raised his tone of voice for womens emancipation in Tamilnadu was Periyar. Religious organizations like Brahma Samaj, Prarthanasamaj, Mohammedan Association, Sadharana Dharma, Vedanta Society, Ramakrishna

Math, Theosophical society, Madhava Siddhantonnahini sabha, Saiva Siddhanta Mahasamajam, Advaita school of Vedanta, Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, Vokkaligara Sanga and Christian missions worked for the removal of evil practices such as sati, inequality of women, denial of female education, child marriage, denial of Child Marriage, denial of Hindu remarriage subordinate status of women, wife torturing and female infanticide. However, the works of missionaries for women's right and uplift have to be remembered for women's success in their endeavours. In addition to the above, men's associations did their maximum efforts for the service of women.

Important constitutional and Legal provisions for women in Recent times

The constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres⁸. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993.

END NOTES

1. The Tamil Nadu Marumakkattiyam Act, 1932, Chennai, 2005, p.767 and the Tamil Nadu Christian Marriage Validation Act, 1934.
2. Dewan Bahadur Har Bilas Sarda, "Hindu Women's Right to Property Bill", in

- Stri Dharma, 19, 1936, pp. 182-183.
3. S. Sulochana, Women's movement and Role of Women Organization in Andhra Pradesh, Ph.D Thesis, Osmania University, Hyderabad, 2002, p.92.
 4. Patrica Loveridge, A study of selected women's organization in India, M.Phil Thesis, University of Delhi, 1992, pp.1-4.
 5. The Proceedings of the Arya Vaisya Mahila Sabha, 6th Conference at Salem, p.197.
 6. Swetha Narayanana, Women Taking Action : A Survey of Chennai Womens Organizations, Chennai, 2008, pp. 21-59.
 7. **Ibid.**
 8. T.S. Ravi, **Human Rights**, Chennai, 2009, p.91.