



Women's Movement in Coastal Andhra

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Abstract:

Women constitute half of the population. No society can progress if awareness and development are absent among women. The women are backward in social, political and economic sector, is a stark fact which can never be ignored. Hence, a women's programme is absolutely necessary. Our main and important duty consists in bringing about all round development of the talents and capacities of women. It is not possible for one individual to take the light of knowledge to women who suffering under intellectual slavery. Therefore a movement becomes imperative.

Key Words: awareness, Women's Movement, re-marriage activity

INTRODUCTION

Mary Wollstone Craft, an English girl, is perhaps the first woman philosopher to make a place for herself in history. She published her book entitled 'Securing Women's Rights' which heralded an important signal for women's movement. The Indian Women's movement emerged as a part of the social reform movement in 1800's. Initially men and later women reformers devotedly bare social ridicule, religious excommunication and loneliness to fight against some of the injustices perpetrated on women. The first mahila mandals were organized by Aarya Samaj and Brahma Samaj. The Indian Women have been slowly yet steadily emerging out into the public life. The awakening of women resulted in the establishment of women organizations.

After the mid-nineteenth century, some social reformers formed several women organizations. For example, the members of the Brahma Samaj in Bengal and Prarthana Samaj in the Bombay Presidency. It may be noted that the first social reformers were men

only. In the early decades of this century educated women came forward to form women's organizations. Some of the important organizations were "Ladies Social and Literary Club (1902)", the Gujarat stree mandal (1903), the women's Zoroastrian Association (1903) etc. During the 1910's and 1920's some more organizations operating at an all India level came into existence. 'The Bharat Stree Mahamandal' was one such national level organizations founded by Sarala Devi Choudharani in 1910, who may be regarded as the first feminist as well as the first women political leader in modern times.

Women's Organisations In Coastal Andhra :

The awakening of women resulted in the establishment of associations in coastal Andhra both in the 19th and the 20th centuries. Veeresalingam for his precious work was aptly described as the ' Father of Telugu Women's Movement' by late Mrs. Kanuparthi Varalakshamma who was the first recipient of the prestigious



Golden Armlet awarded by Kesari of Madras for her contribution to the Women's movement. Many women associations were started mainly to educate women, to champion their rights and effect social reforms, and ultimately to bring about an all-sided upliftment of women. All the organization were unanimous about the spread of female education.

As far back as 1870, an association called Veeresalingam Kavi Club was established at Kumudavalli(near Bhimavaram in West Godavari dist.); it held regular meetings and annual functions till almost the 1920's. Veeresalingam was actively associated with this club. In Rajahmundry, Kandukuri Rajya Lakshamma managed the women's wing of the Prarthana Samaj. Every Sunday Rajya Lakshamma met and talked with all the inmates of women's wing and neighboring women she used to conduct prayer meetings to infuse independent spirit in their minds. Besides the prayer meetings she was fully involved in widow re-marriage activity. The earliest organization was the women's association which was established in 1902 at Rajahmundry by Kotikallapudi Seethamma. It worked for the spread of women's education.

A big step in the upliftment of the women was the establishment of Brindavanapura Stree Samajam in 1902 in Masulipatnam under the leadership of Bhandaru Atchamamba and Oruganti Sundari Ratnamamba. The objectives of the association were to meet at regular intervals, to discuss, day to day problems of women and to develop women education. Stree Vidyarthini Samaj of Kakinada, founded in 1903, was another

active reformist organisation. The association conducted essay competition and awarded gold medals to the winners. In Pithapuram, one ladies association was formed under the presidentship of Rani Chinnamma Devi. They met daily in the afternoon, and spent two hours together. The first hour was used for reading and discussions and the second hour was used for entertainment. A library was also maintained by the members.

In Vizianagaram, Satya Sam Vardhini Samaj was setup in 1911, with just small number of 18 members. It maintained a library of 100 books. The Mahalakshmi Association of Srikakulam in 1912 laid emphasis on devotion of God and virtuous life. The Andhra Women's Conference held at Masulipatnam in March, 1913. In Visakhapatnam, Andhra Stree Vidyarthini Samaj was established in 1915. It managed one Industrial School, the first of its kind, where in addition to reading and writing the students were taught painting, garment making, embroidery, knitting and other handicrafts. Another important association was the Tripura Sunadri Samaj at Bapatla, which was established by Choragudi Sitamma.

The Godavari District Association conference at Rajahmundry(1914) and peddapuram (1915), where the question of women education received special attention. Women organizations and conferences served as the most effective instruments to bring public awakening.

The Women's Indian Association :

As early as in 1917, the women's Indian Association was started in Madras for the emancipation of the Indian



women. Annie Besant became the first president with Margaret Cousins, Dorothy jinarajadasa, and Mrs. Malathi Patwardhan, Mrs. Ammu Swami Nathan and Mrs. Ambujammal as honorary secretaries. Annie Besant had urged women to join the Home Rule League and the Swadesi Movement from the beginning the members of the WIA accepted the necessity of political freedom for concrete social reform. When Annie Besant was arrested for Home Rule WIA branches took active part in obtaining her release. The WIA had many branches in different places in coastal Andhra Bezwada, Srikakulam, Madanapalli, Narasapuram, Nellore, Rajahmundry, Guntur and Visakhapatnam. Activities organized and administered by women since 1917 were: compulsory primary education for girls, classes for spinning and handicrafts for women, establishment of orphanages, leper works and leper homes, prohibition propaganda.

The National Council of Women in India :

The National Council of Women in India (NCWI) was founded in 1925 by Lady Aberdeena, Lady Tata and others.

All India Women's Conference :

The most important of the women's organizations, the All India Conference (AIWC) first met in Poona in January 1927. The president as Maharni Chimnabai Gackwar of Baroda. Margaret Cousins was the secretary. Renowned women like Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Renuka Roy, Rajkumari Amrith Kaur, Rameswari Nehru, Begum Hamid Ali, Dr. Muthu Lakshmi Reddy etc., were in the leadership of the

organization. Its aims were mainly concerned with social work related to the upliftment and welfare of women and children, that the organizations had not been formed with any political purpose. But the circumstances of colonial India inevitably led it to politics.

The Women's Indian Association (1917) and All India Conference (1927) helped to take up the cause of women. The services of these two organizations paved the way for the formation of Andhra Provincial Women's Conference of 1929, under the presidentship of Dr. Muthu Lakshmi Reddy at Vijayawada. Later every year in the month of November the session of APWC was held. The services of APWC's, particularly during 1929 to 1942 were noteworthy, because in this period they were directed towards the upliftment of women. Not only as a result of conference but also by the effects of Margaret Cousins, Dr. Annie Besant, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Dr. Muthu Lakshmi Reddy, women got their right to vote. The APWC strongly condemned social evils. The members of the conference dedicated their life to the emancipation of women and started separate journals to achieve this end.

In the beginning the awakening was limited to the educated few. But the advent of Gandhiji into political arena and the rapid progress of reform movement under his leadership was responsible for a large number of women workers to take more vigorous part in matters connected with women's welfare. They participated in political meetings, led processions, underwent the imprisonment and thus defied the traditional limitations. Leftist ideas began to attract women who joined in



considerable numbers. The Communist party in Andhra took the initiative to form mass organizations of all the toiling women. The women of the lower strata participated in the class struggles of the workers and peasants and also in the Freedom Movement.

Yet, these women's organizations can claim a twofold importance in women history. First they signified the transfer of leadership of women's movements from men to women. Issues and questions were raised from women's angles rather than those of men. Second, women political activists, even if not informed with a conscious feminist ideology, were intimately associated with women organizations, thereby establishing between the Freedom Struggle and women's movements.

Thus, these women organizations and conferences for women were the products of National Movement. The impact of Gandhiji on women was deep and the women expressed their feelings through these organizations another impact on women was that they established the number of institutions for women not only for sheltering but also to implement the constructive programmes of Gandhiji. The education imparted in these institutions was purely on national lines. They worked for the upliftment of the women by imparting education, giving training in vocational courses, celebrating communal marriages and widow re-marriages. Thus these women's organizations, institutions and

conferences played a notable role in the national struggle for freedom. They brought awakening among women of Coastal Andhra Districts.

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