

# CONCLUSION

The term, "Press", at present, refers to dailies, weeklies, monthlies and journals. In the words of A.R. Desai, the Press in India was an effective weapon in the hands of social reform groups to expose social evils. The Press in the Colonial Tamil Nadu, during the period of this study, richly contributed to the growth of the social reforms movement also, which, to a large extent was part of the national movement. Sita Ram Singh observed, that nationalism and social reform 'went hand in glove' during the national movement in India. What he said about the close alliance between nationalism and social reform in India between 1885 and 1947, was true of the Colonial Tamil Nadu during the period between 1891 and 1947.

Majority of the nationalist press in the Colonial Tamil Nadu, supported the various issues connected with social reform. However, a few papers, like the *The Hindu*, *Swadesamitan*, *New India*, *Indian Patriot*, *Tamil Nadu*, *Swarjya* highlighted nationalist ideas and expressed very conservative opinions on aspects connected with the social reform. *The Hindu*, under G.Subramania Iyer gave equal importance to the political and social issues while *The Hindu*, under Kasturi Renga Iyengar, concentrated only on national movement and freedom struggle. These newspapers

created political awareness among the people in Colonial Tamil Nadu.

Another noteworthy feature was that pro- British papers like the *Madras Mail*, *Andhra Prakasika*, *Justice*, *Non-Brahman*, *Dravidian*, *Kudi Arasu*, *Puratchi*, *Revolt*, also supported various social reforms like abolition of child marriages, uplift of women and the improvement of the condition of women.

The Tamil press was typical of the rest of the Indian press in that it was a plant of recent growth. While the first newspaper was published in England in 1622, the earliest Tamil periodical appeared only in 1831. One reason for the late arrival was the late introduction of the printing press in India. A second reason was that Tamil prose itself was comparatively of recent origin. Only recently, Tamil prose has made an attempt to appeal to the masses. The slow development of primary education was another factor responsible for the tardy growth of the press. Moreover, the rule of the British in India, through the medium of the English language, the repressive press legislation and the imposition of heavy taxes on the press, were other factors which retarded the development of the press. The outlook of the average citizen, including that of the educated classes, continued to conform to the traditional pattern until recently.

Women in the Vedic period and particularly during the Sangam age in Tamil Nadu were in an enviable position. But during the medieval and early modern period they got very low status in the society. Child marriage, seclusion of widows, devadasi system, dowry system, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, gradually began to decline because of the press and the social reformers opposed the marriage institutions, which were eating into the very vitals of the nation and sapping the vigour of both its manhood and womanhood. They considered them as the crux of social evils in Indian society. They were of the opinion that the marriage institution was a “crying scandal, a flagrant offence against society, the innocent girls suffering under the twin tyranny of custom and the passion of man. Many associations and others tried to bring out reforms in the system of marriage.

They mobilised the public opinion by way of conducting meetings, writing articles and letters to journals and periodicals condemning the practice. Thus, the educated reformers sowed the seeds of reforms in villages and towns. The forced young widowhood was also put under severe criticism. The efforts of the government and social organisations rendered most useful service to the cause of widow remarriage movement by arousing public awareness to the miseries of widows. The educated and enlightened persons have advocated education of widows as the most important

means for their emancipation. The relief work of press gave impetus to this movement. The periodicals served to rouse Indian people from their deep slumber and made them aware of their own backwardness and degeneration. The devadasi system and the institution of prostitution were also severely criticised and a movement was started to emancipate them from such sloth conditions.

In spite of all these efforts, emancipation of women was not so easy. To raise the status of a section of the society, a need for strong will, social awareness, a determination and an initiative was felt. First of all, it was realized that the awakening of the society to the ground reality was a must. It is needless to say that a change for an awakening which could come through education only.

The press played a dominant role in the shaping awareness of the people towards the emancipation of women. Some noteworthy achievements by women in different fields appeared in the press from time to time in almost all the Indian languages. The important newspapers were *The Madras Mail*, *The Hindu*, *Swadesamithran*, *Kudi Arasu*, *New India*, *Stri-Dharma*, *Madhar Marumanam*, etc. The *Madras Mail* commented that women should be given equal rights with men in all spheres of life.' The deplorable condition of women in the society was highlighted time to time. Child marriage

was condemned in the editorial of *Madras Mail*. Swappaneswari Ammal, the editor of *Tamil Women*, discussed the position of women in Sangam Period and compared it with the women of the nineteenth century and discussed broadly about the various causes for the deteriorating condition of women.

*Swadeswamitran* published the views of the Madras Mahajana Sabha and their concern about child marriage and its physiological impact on the young married girls. Again, it congratulated the third Indian National Social Conference held at Bombay in 1889 for passing a resolution on raising the age of consent to fourteen. *The Hindu* particularly devoted its editorial columns as the forum for debate on the age of consent, when the orthodox Indians tried to organize a mass rebellion. The supporters of the Age of Consent Bill convened a public meeting, in October 1890 at Madras. It received great importance in *Hindu* and *Swadesamitran*. The *Madras Times* congratulated a group of social reformers who endorsed a petition to the Government of India to pass the proposed Bill on the Age of Consent. The *Swadesamitran*, referred to this evil practice of child marriage and suggested that all public bodies and associations should simultaneously send memoranda to the Government, praying that the age at which a girl might be allowed to unite with her husband, should be raised from ten to twelve, thereby help women enjoy equal right with men.

The *Karnataka Prakasika* stated that a child of nine months was married to a man of thirty five years in Bengal. Hence the Government should take step in and fix a maximum age for marriage. V.S. Sastiri, Additional Member in the Legislative Council, introduced a bill to declare the validity of marriages of Hindu women after puberty. The bill was welcomed by almost all the non-official Indian members. According to the *Indian Patriot*, there was no violent opposition to the Bill. *The Hindu* commented on the Bill that it was not an attempt to interfere with the Hindu religion. *The Hindu* supported the Post Puberty Marriage Bill and demanded the Government to raise the age of marriage of the Indian girls.

The *Wednesday Review* from Trichinopoly, published two articles, one from the fore most authority on Hindu Law, S. Subramaniya Ayyar, who presented the 'other side of the case' with regard to the Post Puberty Marriage Bill. It concluded that "after all, the inroad that has been made into orthodoxy by the Widow Marriage Act (1856) is more serious than can possibly be made by the post-puberty Marriage Bill". A public meeting was held on 25 January 1915 in the Anderson Hall, Madras, to support this Bill. This was amply highlighted in *New India* in order to educate the people and also to inform the Government.

The *Swadesamitran* gave a wide coverage to the Madras ladies organizations who conducted a meeting under the presidentship of Sadasiva Ayyar in favour of the Post Puberty Marriage Bill. Leaders like G. Subramania Iyer advocated the need for the Widow Re-Marriage Bill and he held the view that widow remarriage would surely help the women folk to get emancipation from the evils of widowhood. He not only advocated widow remarriages but also set an example by marrying of his own daughter who had become a widow. This was highlighted in *The Hindu*. Thus the press helped the people as well as the government to be informed about social issues.

Annie Besant wrote in *New India* about the abolition of child marriage. *New India* supported the Post Puberty Marriage Bill in the Central Legislative Council. Besant had written in the *New India* that it became the primary duty of every patriot, who had the welfare of the country at heart, to strive towards promoting the intellectual advancement of our women. Again she emphasized in the paper, *New India* that “only if they educated the girls, the country will show progress. India needs nobly trained wives and mothers who would serve their husbands rather than girls educated for the learned profession”.

*Madhar Marumanam*, a journal from Madras, encouraged men to marry the widows. Widow remarriage was highlighted in this journal. Further, it demanded the Government to pass legislation in favour of widow-remarriage. Child marriage and popularization of widow remarriages were given coverage in the *Kudi Arasu*. The journal *Sindhamani* explained the problems of women and demanded the Government to pass a law in raising marriageable age. The W.I.A.'s official publication *Sri-Dharma*, argued against the evil system of dedicating girls as Devadasis. *Swadesamitran* also demanded the Government to pass legislation in favour of the abolition of Devadasi System. It considered that this system was the worst specimen for deteriorating the condition of women.

In the editorial column of *Kudi Arasu*, it was stressed that if women did not have the right to property, it would be against their self respect. Like men, women too should have the right to property and right to work. Another paper, *Suguna Bodhini* created awareness among women by stating that "if the education were to spread quickly, the educated women will write articles concerning equal rights for women. Now, articles related to women in the journals are very few in number". *Sri- Dharma* appealed to the Government that "women should have the right to vote and then only women would have an equal share in the society".



In 1937, the Government of India passed the Hindu Women's Right to Property Act in the Central Legislative Assembly. *Kudi Arasu* propounded an alternative idea that "giving a share of our property to our daughters, the daughters-in-law will also bring in their share of property to our family. In such a case, there will not be any profit or loss in the family". The press worked for the abolition of child marriages, encouraged widow remarriages, mobilized support for Post Puberty Marriage Bill, worked for the right to divorce for women, discouraged prostitution and abolished Devadasi System and in short stood for the total emancipation of women.

Today, the modern women of Tamil Nadu realise the fact that home is not the only environment of activity. In spite of education, Tamil Nadu remains one of the upcoming states in women's literacy. At present, women's movements are trying to build up a new womanhood. Woman is realising her worth as a human being with her independent personality. Presently, Tamil Nadu, like any other state, consists of many lady I.A.S officers, doctors, professors, eminent, politicians, central ministers, representatives in the State and Central legislatures.

Legislative measures and Government agencies are the major outlets to sponsor such raising. Wide spread social awareness about

the position of women and their problems would lead to improved attitudes regarding these aspects. To promote this cause, the need for a potential press media arises. The media and communication system can be rightly utilised to influence the attitudes and change the behavioral pattern towards women's issues. Press media with its social responsibilities gears up towards common cause of uplifting woman in her social status. Persistent portrayal of such images of women by the press media serves to reinforce a kind of stereotype woman as being subordinate and dependent on men.

The press communication media has a great potential as a vehicle for social change and could exercise a significant influence in helping to remove prejudices and stereotypes, accelerating the acceptance of women. Men are expanding their roles in society and promoting their integration into the development as equal partners.

Press media being the most powerful source of influencing the public mind in decision making, should be made to mobilise all forces in order to change the stereo typed images of women and replace them by truthful and honest representation of women. It is also noteworthy that in almost all news items, the tone of reporting is sensational and a serious lack of sympathetic understandings of the incident is evident.

The serious press in India has, by and large, not degraded the status of women. News high lighting the role of women have been published whenever possible. Some note worthy achievements by women in different fields appear in daily newspapers from time to time. The major dailies and the dailies in almost all the Indian languages carry out a weekly women's section. A content analysis of this section would be needed before any comment can be made on the subject matters of the sections and their views on the role and status of women.

A citizen should be able to appeal against misuse of his or her name by the press. For instance, in the report about rape, abduction or other such incidents, the press should not mention the name of the girl, or of her relatives. The press is supported to exercise restraint and not publicise news which may affect a woman's reputation.

The press encourages women's emancipation by providing information from every nook and corner, in order that the women in Tamil Nadu do not lack behind in any sphere. The press arranges meetings and introduces social workers and professionals to the world to boost women's emancipation.

The Press never fails to voice the problems faced by women for their emancipation. It also brings forward the pros and cons of

women's liberalisation. Even achievement, be it small or big, is praised and encouraged by the press. It gives prominence to their achievements and lends support financially. In this way, the press plays a commendable role in the evolution of women's emancipation.

In cities, about eighty percent of people read dailies. In villages also most of the people read them and thus, come to know about different subjects of life. Newspapers are available at a lesser price in order to enable the ordinary people informed of the global and national events. Therefore, the problem of women are discussed today even by illiterate people. There is no doubt that even in future, the press will analyse women's problems and publish them for the benefit of the people.