

# SOCIAL AWAKENING AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH WOMEN MOVEMENTS DURING 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY IN TAMIL NADU

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## Abstract

*This article mainly focused on the contribution of women in social awakening, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Tamil Nadu. Over the years, women are lost their 'prominent status' which prevailed during ancient period in Tamil Nadu. Women are discriminated by the male centric thoughts and treated them as second grade citizens. However, some of the men are tried to change this mindset and acted to eradicate not only the social evils and the thoughts of the society. During 20<sup>th</sup> century, women are come forward to enhance their position and made several 'women organization' for upliftment of women status as equal to men on social, economical and political phenomenon. In Tamil Nadu (erstwhile Madras State) there are lot of major and minor organizations founded for the development of women such as Women India Association (WIA), All India Women Conference (AIWC), and National Council of Women in India (NCWI), Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), and Sri Sarada Ladies Union. . Indeed, these women organization retained the women status into better position over the years. Now, the women have placed high place in education, hygiene, and politics caused only the efforts of women organization.*

**Keywords:** Social awakening, Male-centric society, Women empowerment, Women organization.

## Introduction

Over the years, women are lost their 'prominent status' which prevailed during ancient period in Tamil Nadu. Women are discriminated by the male centric thoughts and treated them as second grade citizens. However, some of the men are tried to change this mindset and acted to eradicate not only the social evils and the thoughts of the society. During 20<sup>th</sup> century, women are come forward to enhance their position and made several 'women organization' for upliftment of women status as equal to men on social, economical and political phenomenon. In Tamil Nadu(erstwhile Madras State) there are lot of major and minor organizations founded for the development of women such as Women India Association(WIA), All India Women Conference(AIWC), and National Council of Women in India (NCWI), Young Women Christian Association(YWCA), and Sri Sarada Ladies Union. AIWC, WIA and NCWI are the impenitent movement fight for voting rights.<sup>1</sup>The First World War triggered the instinct of women to construct the organization for the objective of freedom. All over the world,<sup>2</sup>Women are moved through the empowerment with organized platform, and stirred up social awakening. This article mainly focused on the contribution of women in social awakening, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Tamil Nadu

## **Eminence of 20<sup>th</sup> century**

For much of the twentieth century social movements triggered high esteems like working class movements, peasant movements, and anti-colonial movements. From the early 1990s, the principle economic, social and political problems experienced by the mass of Indian women have in one way or another, become inextricably linked with the processes and policies of liberalization led globalization, Struggles around basic food, security, health, education, women's employment, livelihood and conditions of work declining child sex ratios, commoditization of women and human relations with attendant growth in violence against women.

Women of education and social position played leading roles in the development of the institution of social welfare in these decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. <sup>3</sup>Empowerment of women is a necessity for the very development of the society, since it enhances both the quality and quantitative of human resources available for the development. The path of human right and enhancement is the important procedural concerns on Empowerment .It is an active multi-dimensional process, which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. The life style, social status, struggle against injustice, opposition to various kinds of harassment in the society are in inbuilt qualities of women's empowerment.

## **Social Awakening and Women organization**

Women movements are well organized to the vision of freedom and equality of women. All movements are guided and ideological fighting with the oppression. Movement move on to achieve the goals of education, occupation, and legal rights both family and social life.<sup>4</sup>The character of a social movement as an instrument of social change is quite different from an initiative or emulative process of mobility and change.<sup>5</sup>Many social movements tend to be characterized by collective leadership with a division of labour among different types of elites. The British colonialism had made several impacts in the society and establishment of women movement, with the first all- India women's originations being formed in the 1920s.<sup>6</sup>

### **Women Indian Association (WIA)**

The Women Indian Association (WIA) is founded in 1917, made tremendous effort for the upgrade the women position in the male-dominated society. Also it awaken the people especially women for enhance their status in Social, economical, and political phenomenon. During the First World War, the people from the world got awakening and raise the organization for getting their rights in the form of organization. Also the women were started the origination to grasp their power and glory by their own Hands. The emergence of women India Association has the important organ, named "Stri Dharma", a monthly magazine made tremendous efforts for uplifting the position. This magazine continuously worked for social awakening from 1917 A.D. to 1923 A.D.<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, the members of the association have contributed the service to the society. The prominent leaders are actively participated the political forum and written the numerous articles in the magazine for the women empowerment, namely Annie Besant, Dorthy Jinarajadasa, Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Devi, Margaret Cousins and Muthulakshmi Reddy was the founder-president of WIA and nominated to the Madras Legislative council member in 1926.<sup>8</sup>Muthulakshmi Reddy This origination has motivated the women to enhance their level in Education, Domestic and Artistic platforms. This organization worked for the women empowerment for more than 21 years.<sup>9</sup>The women Indian Association has did the works like education for the lower classes and castes and outcastes. Also it was focused on Hygiene, prevention of disease, care of children, sanitation, cleanliness, citizenship, the duties of men and women to the community.

### **All Indian Women Association (AIWA)**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, all reformers campaign against to eradicate social evils in India. In 20<sup>th</sup> century, women are founded or organized for their development and empowerment. On the phenomenon, All India Women's Conference (AIWA) was founded in 1926;Margret cousins circulate the letter to all women, <sup>10</sup>and worked for the two prominent motives like Education and Health. It was incorporated with Women Indian Association from 1920s.All India Women's Conference was organized in 1927 by WIA, then it reconstituted by a permanent body.<sup>11</sup>Moreover it move forward to work against the social evils and social issues which prevailed on that time such as child marriage, divorce(inheritance), birth control, Devadasi system, and prostitution.Their vision and ideas disseminated in the Journal of Stri-Dharma(official magazine of WIA).<sup>12</sup> This conference has crating sisterhood among the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and Parsi women.<sup>13</sup> This association played significant role on legislative reforms such as Sarada Act, Hindu Code Bill, Devadasi Act, Universal Adult Franchise, Factory and Mines Act, Maternity and Benefits Act. This association has contributed much to women development and empowerment and made social awakening during 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Young Women Christian Women Association(YWCA)

The Europeans gradually settled in India, and their first ladies worked for the women development in India. Moreover, the Christian missionaries and the organization worked for women and poor people by educational institutions. This organization is affiliated with the “World’s Young Women’s Christian Association” which has its headquarters in London and numbers over 370000 members.<sup>14</sup> This is an international organization termed as “World’s YWCA” and it was founded in 1894 in England. The Young Women Christian Association has several branches in India; Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, North-West province, Punjab, and Ceylon.<sup>15</sup> It has worked for promote to develop the women and girls without any differentiate of race, creed and culture. Madras has started the Young women Association latterly, known as Bombay Association.<sup>16</sup> It has arranged All-India Training camp for guiders and trained the women in Nilgiris hills annually. Still, this organisation has existed in Madras (Chennai) and worked for the social works in rural areas.

### Sri Sarada Ladies Union(SLU)

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the women organizations are very meager in India and Tamil Nadu. R.S.Subbalakshmi was a beacon for women who worked for women upliftment and empowerment for her life. She was endearingly known as “*sahodari*”(“sister”), a term used for Catholic nuns. The Sri Sarada Ladies Union(SLU) might be the first association of Madras which has initiated on January 1, 1912 A.D.<sup>17</sup> by Sister Subbalakshmi. She is one of the founders of first school for high caste child widows.<sup>18</sup> In 1927, the residents around 12; five Brahmins, six non-Brahmins and one-untouchable, are united themselves and found Sarada Vidyalaya educational society.<sup>19</sup> In 1932, they started Padma Vilas Sarada women club in Luz Road, Chennai. In 1941, they started ‘Srividya Kalanilayam’ in the Vidya colony at Mylapore, Madras, which give tutorial for migrated from rural areas, and education to the old-age people and promote education. In 1942, the elementary school called ‘Madurantagam School’ at Madurantagam withincluded a hostel for 12 girl students and teachers. In 1947, SLU was officially affiliated with the Women Indian Association (WIA).<sup>20</sup> This organization has worked for widow’s education and their empowerment, widow’s education, and education of destitute and of belonging to lower castes.

### Conclusion

In 19<sup>th</sup> century male reformers come forward to eradicate social evils and awaken the women for enhancing their position socially, economical and political phenomenon. But the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the women reformers who come forward to organize themselves and initiate some works to forward towards social awakening. Between 1917 and 1927 there are four organizations were founded in India, and it spread all over India with establishment of several branches. On the path, the WIA, AIWA, YMCA and SLU have made innovative steps and promote plans to uplift the women and girls, to educate them. Indeed, these women organizations retained the women status into better position over the years. Now, the women have placed high place in education, hygiene, and politics caused only the efforts of women organizations.

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