

# THE ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

SEVENTEENTH SESSION



BOMBAY

APRIL 7, 1944 TO 10, 1944

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THE  
ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE



**Shrimati KAMALADEVI. *President, All-India Women's Conference, Bombay, 1944.***

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**PATRONESSES**  
**of the**  
**ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE**

Lady Dorothy Halifax  
Her Highness Maharani Chimnabai Gaekwar of Baroda  
Lady Rama Varma of Cochin  
Her Highness Maharani Sucharu Devi of Mayurbhanj  
Rani Saheba Lalita Kumari Devi of Vizianagaram  
Mrs. Sarojini Naidu  
Dr. Mrs. Muthulakshmi Reddi  
Mrs. P. K. Ray  
Lady Vidyagauri R. Nilkanth  
Lady Abdul Qadir  
Mrs. Rustomji Faridoonji  
Her Highness Maharani Setu Parvati Bai of Travancore  
Mrs. M. E. Cousins  
Rajkumari Amrit Kaur  
Rani Lakshmibai Rajwade  
Begum Shareefah Hamid Ali  
Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru  
Shrimati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit



• **Names of Chairwomen and Hony. General Secretaries**  
**From 1926-1943**

Year.	Chairwoman.	Hony. General Secretary.
1926	—	Mrs. M. E. Cousins
1927	Mrs. M. E. Cousins	Mrs. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya
1928	Begum Hamid Ali	" " "
1929	Mrs. Huidekoper	" " "
1930	Mrs. Sushama Sen	Mrs. Kamaladevi, Mrs. Sushama Sen and Rani Lakshmibai Rajwade
1931	Rajkumari Amrit Kaur	Rani Lakshmibai Rajwade
1932	" " "	" " "
1933	Dr. Mrs. Muthulakshmi Reddi	" " "
1934	Rani Lakshmibai Rajwade	Mrs. S. C. Mukerjee
1935	" " "	" " " "
1936	Mrs. S. C. Mukerjee	Shrimati Ammu Swaminadhan
1937	Shrimati Ammu Swaminadhan	Mrs. Dina Asana
1938	Rajkumari Amrit Kaur	" " "
1939	Rani Lakshmibai Rajwade	Dr. Mrs. Malinibai B. Sukthankar
1940	Begum Hamid Ali	Mrs. Lakshmi N. Menon
1941	Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru	Mrs. Urmila Mehta
1942	Shrimati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit	" " "
1943	" " "	" " "

**ASSOCIATION  
of the  
ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE**

**List of Members of the Standing Committee 1944.**

**President and Chairwoman**

Shrimati Kamaladevi, 15th Road, Khar, Bombay 21.

**Vice-Presidents**

Lady Rama Rau, "North End," Carmichael Road, Bombay.  
Lady Premlila Thackersey, Damodar Bhuvan, Warden Road, Bombay 6.  
Mrs. Hannah Sen, Lady Irwin College, Sikandra Road, New Delhi.  
Mrs. Hansa Mehta, Khambatta Hall, Altamount Road, Bombay 26.  
Mrs. S. C. Mukerjee, 25/1, Rowland Road, Calcutta.  
Mrs. Hosain Ali Khan, Khairtabad, Hyderabad (Dn.).

**Hon. General Secretary**

Mrs. Kulsum Sayani, "Rupa Villa," Cumballa Road, Bombay 26.

**Hon. Organising Secretary**

Shrimati Mridulaben Sarabhai, Kashmere House, Top Floor, 94, Nepean Sea Road, Bombay 6.

**Hon. Treasurer**

Dr. (Mrs.) Malinibai B. Sukthankar, Shantaram House, Malabar Hill, Bombay 6.

**Patrons on the Standing Committee**

Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Hyderabad (Dn.)  
Lady Vidyagauri R. Nilkanth, Bhadra, Ahmedabad.  
Mrs. Rustomji Faridoonji, Hyderabad (Dn.).  
Mrs. M. E. Cousins, "Ghat View," Kotagiri, The Nilgiris.  
Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, "Manorville," Simla W.  
Rani Lakshuibai Rajwade, 78, Koregaon Park, Poona.  
Begum Hamid Ali, Southwood, Moosoorie, U.P.  
Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru, 2, Warris Road, Lahore.  
Dr. (Mrs.) Muthulakshmi Reddi, "Shanti," Besant Avenue, Adyar, Madras.  
Shrimati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 2, Mukerjee Road, Allahabad U.P.

**Member-in-Charge, Constitution**

Lady Rama Rau, "North End," Carmichael Road, Bombay.

**Liaison Officer**

Shrimati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 2, Mukerjee Road, Allahabad.

**Editor of the Roshni**

Mrs. Rajan Nehru, 18, Hardinge Avenue, New Delhi.

**Hon. Secretary, A.-I. W. Education Fund Association**

Mrs. Sewa Singh Gill, 6, Jantar Mantar Road, New Delhi.

**Hon. Secretary, All-India Save the Children Committee**

Mrs. Urmila Mehta, 15th Road, Khar, Bombay 21.

**Members-in-Charge of Sections and Sub-Sections.**

**Social Section—Mrs. Kitty Shiva Rao (in-charge).**

*Legal Disabilities*—Mrs. Kitty Shiva Rao, 7, Barakhamba Road, New Delhi.

*Social Legislation including Health Insurance*—Mrs. J. R. Doctor, 93, Gowalia Tank Road, Bachually Chambers, Bombay 26.

*Harijan Welfare*—Mrs. M. S. H. Jhabwala, "Hermitage," 10th Road, Khar, Bombay.

*Traffic in Women and Children*—Mrs. Renu Chakravarty, 8/13, Cornfield Road, Calcutta.

**Economic Section—Mrs. Renuka Ray (in-charge), 6, Store Road, Ballygunge, Calcutta.**

*Food Problem*—Shrimati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 2, Mukerjee Road, Allahabad.

*Indigenous Industries*—Mrs. Krishnabai Panjkar, Saraswat Colony, Dharwar.

*Labour*—Mrs. Sudha Majumdar, 1, Robinson Street, Calcutta.

*Mines*—Miss Shantabai Bhalerao, "Radha Nivas," Parsi Colony, Dadar, Bombay.

**Health Section—Dr. Maitreyi Bose (in-charge).**

*Health Services*—Dr. Maitreyi Bose, 47, Chowringhee Road, Calcutta.

*General Health*—Mrs. Kamalabai Nimbkar, "Amerind", 15th Road, Khar, Bombay.

**Educational Section—Miss Leilamani Naidu (in-charge).**

*General Education*—Miss Leilamani Naidu, Hyderabad (Dn.).

*Special Education*—Shrimati Premvati Thapar, 1/A, Golf Road, Lahore.

*Adult Education*—Mrs. Dina Asana, Near Gujarat College, Ahmedabad.

**Political Section—Mrs. Hansa Mehta (in-charge).**

*Civil Liberties*—Mrs. Hansa Mehta, Khambatta Hall, Altamount Road, Bombay 6.

*Franchise*—Mrs. Anasuyabai Kale, Dhantoli, Nagpur, C. P.

*Citizenship*—Shrimati Ammu Swaminadhan, Gilchrist Gardens, Chetput, Madras.

**\*Cultural Section—**

### **Branch Representatives**

*Andhra* : Shrimati Parvathyamma, B.A., Guntur, South India.

*Assam* : Shrimati Shantabai Desai, Alcapore, Shillong, Assam.

*Baroda* : Mrs. Nivedita Desai, "Aram", Sampatrao Road, Baroda.

*Bengal Central* : Miss Amiya Das Gupta, Head Mistress, Carmichael Girls' School, Krishnagar, Dt. Nadia (Bengal).

*Bengal East* : Mrs. Prativa Nag, 3, Foulder Street, Wari, Dacca, Bengal.

*Bengal West* : Mrs. Asoka Gupta, Judge's House, Bankura, Bengal.

*Berar* : Mrs. Tarabai Ranadive, Amraoti Camp, Berar.

*Bihar* : Mrs. Vidyavati Varma, c/o. Justice Varma, Patna, Bihar.

*Bombay* : Mrs. Krishnabai Mote, 3, West View, Napoo Road, Bombay 14.

*Calcutta* : Mrs. Ayesha Ahmed, 103, Ballygunge Place, Calcutta.

*C. P. North* : Mrs. K. Mehta, 13th Marhatal, Jubbulpore, C. P.

*C. P. South* : Miss Tara K. Pradhan, Krishna Bhuvan, Humpyard Road, Nagpur, C. P.

*Cochin* : Mrs. A. N. Menon, M.L.C., Ernaulam, Cochin State.

*Delhi* : Mrs. Rajan Nehru, 18, Hardinge Avenue, New Delhi.

*Gujarat* : Mrs. Vatsala Subhedar, Rampura, Surat.

*Gwalior* : Mrs. Chandrakala Sahai, 10, J. A. Hospital, Gwalior, C. I.

*Hyderabad (Dn.)* : Mrs. P. Gupta, Bashir Baug, Bashir Baug Road, Hyderabad (Dn.).

*Hyderabad (Sind)* : Miss Thakuri V. Lakhani, Thakuri Lodge, Hyderabad (Sind).

*Indore* : Mrs. Sumatibai Patwardhan, 23, Krishnapura, Indore City, C. I.

*Jath* : Mrs. Manoramabai Khabade, Kanyasala, Jath State (Bijapur).

*Karnatak* : Mrs. Krishnabai Panjekar, Saraswat Colony, Dharwar.

*Kashmir* : Mrs. B. Ghani, Inspectress of Girls' Schools, Abiguzar, Srinagar.

*Kolhapur* : Mrs. Urmilabai Sabnis, Rajaram Prasad, Shahupuri, Kolhapur State.

*Konkan* : Dr. Miss Ratan Fattarpakar, M.B., Alibagh, Dt. Kolaba.

*Madras* : Shrimati Sita Devi, Sylvan Lodge, Mylapore, Madras.

*Maharashtra* : Mrs. Yamutai Kirloskar, Kirloskarwadi, (Maharashtra).

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\*Appointment will be made at the next meeting of the *Standing Committee*.

(vi)

*Malabar* : Miss S. K. Sharda, Chalapuram, Calicut, S. Malabar.

*Mysore* : Mrs. Kamalamma Dasappa, Mahila Seva Samaja, Basavangudi, Bangalore.

*N.-W. F. P.* : Mrs. Kazi Mir Ahmed, Ahmed Manzil, Peshawar Cantt., N.-W. F. P.

*Orissa* : Shrimati Sarladevi, M.L.A., Telengabazar, Cuttack, (Orissa).

*Phaltan* : Mrs. Janakibai Godbole, Phaltan State (Deccan).

*Punjab Central* : Mrs. Perin Ramehschandra, "Kapilavastu," 14, Edward's Road, Lahore.

*Punjab East*—

*Sangli* : Mrs. Sumatibai Gokhale, New Extension, Sangli. S.M.C.

*Sind* : Mrs. Sati Mirchandani, Bank of India Bldg., Bunder Rd., Karachi.

*Tamil Nad* : Dr. Mrs. A. G. Gomathinathan, Koilpatti, S. I. Rly.

*U. P. Agra* : Mrs. S. Anand, 27, Chatham Lines, Allahabad, U. P.

*U. P. Oudh* : Mrs. Mohini Rudra, 40, Major Bank's Road, Lucknow, U.P.

**Members of the Executive Committee**

Shrimati Kamaladevi, *President*.

Mrs. Kulsum Sayani, *Hon. General Secretary*.

Dr. Mrs. Malinibai Sukthankar, *Hon. Treasurer*.

Shrimati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, *Patron*.

Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru, *Patron*.

Lady Rama Rau, *Member-in-Charge, Constitution*.

Mrs. Hannah Sen, *Vice-President*.

Mrs. Hansa Mehta, *Vice-President*.

Rani Lakshmibai Rajwade.

Mrs. Urmila Mehta.

Mrs. Asoka Gupta, Branch Representative, Bengal West.

Mrs. Vatsala Subhedar, Branch Representative, Gujarat.

Mrs. Chandrakala Sahai, Branch Representative, Gwalior.

Mrs. Perin Ramesh Chandra, Branch Representative, Punjab Central.

Shrimati Mridula Sarabhai, Hon. Organising Secretary.

## LIST OF DELEGATES

17th Session—Bombay

### BARODA—

Mrs. Gangubai Patwardhan  
Mrs. Shanta Adur  
Mrs. Dina Irani  
Dr. Mrs. Krishnabai Patel  
Mrs. Gool Wadia  
Miss Sudha Pandit  
Mrs. Pramila Dixit

### BENGAL EAST—

Mrs. Rebecca Ghosh  
Miss Lila Das Gupta  
Mrs. Pratibha Dutta  
Mrs. Kanak Das

### BENGAL WEST—

Mrs. Asoka Gupta  
Mrs. Usha Halder  
Mrs. Sushila Das

### BERAR—

Mrs. Tara Ranadive  
Mrs. Savitribai Bhat

### BOMBAY—

Mrs. Urmila Mehta  
Lady Rama Rau  
Mrs. G. R. Billimoria  
Mrs. Kamala Nimbkar  
Mrs. Hansa Mehta  
Mrs. J. R. Doctor  
Mrs. Kulsum Sayani  
Miss Kamal Wagle  
Miss N. F. Wadia  
Mrs. Sofia Ahmed  
Mrs. Dinshah Chari

Mrs. Babiben Moolji  
Mrs. Vimal Ranadive  
Mrs. Kamalabai Sohani  
Mrs. Malati Nagarkar  
Mrs. Sushila Munshi  
Miss Anasuya Bharatiya  
Mrs. Vina Desai  
Mrs. M. S. H. Jhabwala  
Mrs. Prabhavati Gupte  
Mrs. Krishna Joshi  
Mrs. Indumati Dharap  
Mrs. Shanti Sen Gupta  
Mrs. Manorama Phadke  
Mrs. Indumati Joshi  
Mrs. Yamutai Oak  
Mrs. Vasumati Divetia  
Mrs. Lilavati Banker  
Mrs. Dixit  
Mrs. Narmada Parikh  
Mrs. A. Bhandarkar  
Miss K. Khandwala  
Mrs. Madhurika Nanavati  
Mrs. Rose Rane  
Mrs. Vaidehi Char  
Mrs. K. Mote  
Mrs. Sulochana Mody  
Mrs. Lilavati Munshi

### CALCUTTA—

Mrs. S. C. Mukerjee  
Mrs. Renuka Ray  
Mrs. Renu Chakravarty  
Mrs. Sudha Mazumdar  
Mrs. Ayesha Ahmed  
Mrs. Sudha Sen  
Mrs. Ela Sen  
Miss Sujata Bose  
Mrs. Lavanyalata Chanda

Dr. Mrs. Maitreyi Bose  
Miss Phulrenu Dutta  
Mrs. S. C. Roy  
Mrs. Saudamini Mehta  
Mrs. S. K. Sen

**C. P. NORTH—**

Mrs. Kelkar

**C. P. SOUTH—**

Mrs. Anasuyabai Kale  
Mrs. B. Abhyankar  
Miss Tara K. Pradhan  
Mrs. Shantabai Bhatwadekar  
Mrs. Shanta Mankeshwar  
Mrs. Laxmibai Gokhale  
Mrs. Durgabai Manjrekar

**COCHIN—**

Mrs. Thankamma N. Menon, M.L.C.  
Miss Janaki Menon  
Mrs. B. Menon  
Mrs. K. Gangabai

**DELHI—**

Mrs. Hannah Sen  
Mrs. Kitty Shiva Rau  
Mrs. S. Choudhury  
Miss Sarala Gupta  
Mrs. Rajan Nehru  
Mrs. Daya Vira  
Miss K. Gupta  
Mrs. Ramprasad

**GUJARAT—**

Shrimati Mridula Sarabhai  
Shrimati Savitaben Sarayya  
Mrs. Vidya Thacker  
Mrs. Kusum C. Shah  
Mrs. V. Subhedar  
Dr. (Miss) L. E. Dunn

Mrs. D. R. Vakharia  
Mrs. Virmati Desai  
Mrs. Pushpavati Mehta  
Mrs. Vinodini Nilkanth  
Mrs. Dina Asana

**GWALIOR—**

Mrs. Kamala Ratnam  
Mrs. Chandrakala Sahai  
Mrs. Pushpalata Dutta  
Mrs. Krishnabai Bhagwat

**HYDERABAD (DN.)—**

Shrimati Sarojini Naidu  
Miss Leilamani Naidu  
Mrs. Syed Hussain  
Mrs. M. Nizamuddin  
Mrs. Obul Reddy  
Begum Abdul Jabbar  
Miss Abdul Jabbar  
Begum Kadir Yar Jung  
Begum Anwarulla  
Begum Ali Akbar  
Mrs. Hosain Ali Khan  
Mrs. Sogra Humayun Mirza

**HYDERABAD (SIND)—**

Mrs. Sati Kevalram  
Miss A. Khemchand  
Mrs. Rukhi Bhavnani  
Mrs. Lila Advani

**INDORE—**

Mrs. Jyotsna Mehta  
Mrs. Manoramabai Tambe  
Mrs. Bhanumati Turkhud  
Mrs. Shalinibai Joglekar  
Mrs. Savitribai Oak  
Mrs. Ahilya Udar

**JATH—**

Miss Manorama Khabade

**KARNATAK—**

Shrimati Kamaladevi  
Mrs. Krishnabai Panjekar  
Mrs. Umabai Kundapur  
Mrs. Charumati Sathe  
Mrs. Sushilaben Nayak  
Mrs. Sumitrabai Nayak  
Miss Indumati Gunji

**KOLHAPUR—**

Mrs. Urmila Sabnis  
Mrs. Shirgaonkar  
Mrs. Keshar Kelekar  
Miss Vatsala Redkar

**KONKAN—**

Kashibai Bhatt  
Mrs. Saraswatibai Inamdar

**MAHARASTRA—**

Rani Lakshuibai Rajwade  
Mrs. Yamutai Kirloskar  
Mrs. Phalnikar  
Mrs. Apte  
Miss Tara Ranadive  
Mrs. Radhabai Ranade  
Mrs. Ramabai Vartak  
Miss Shanta Bhalerao  
Mrs. Malatibai Joshi  
Mrs. Manorama Kharker  
Mrs. Vanamala Bhawalkar  
Miss Tara Ranade  
Mrs. Tarabai Patwardhan  
Mrs. Champutai Sathe  
Mrs. Sushilabai Vaidya  
Miss Kamal Tulpule  
Mrs. Shanta Kirloskar

Mrs. Bhate  
Mrs. Kamalabai Jambhekar  
Mrs. Indirabai Limaye  
Mrs. Indirabai Deodhar  
Miss Sulochana Deulgaonkar  
Mrs. Shantabai Bal  
Mrs. Rangutai Watve  
Mrs. Venutai Lele  
Mrs. Tarabai Gole  
Mrs. Ramabai Kotwal

**MYSORE—**

Mrs. A. N. Kalappa  
Miss A. T. Sharada  
Miss P. R. Kamalamma  
Miss Indirabai Vasudev Murthy  
Mrs. Vijayabai N. Rao  
Mrs. Akhilabegum Md. Sharif  
Mrs. Kamalamma Dasappa  
Mrs. Mandyam

**PHALTAN—**

Mrs. Janakibai Godbole  
Mrs. Kamalabai Karnik  
Mrs. Kamalabai Phatak  
Mrs. Laxmibai Keskar  
Mrs. Sunanda Dani  
Mrs. Ramabai Kanitkar  
Mrs. Parvatibai Sardesai  
Mrs. Devibai Gogia  
Mrs. Shantabai Likhite  
Mrs. Radhabai Joshi  
Mrs. Saraswatibai Tathwadekar  
Mrs. Indutai Apte.

**PUNJAB CENTRAL—**

Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru  
Mrs. Kunti Bhandari  
Miss Khadija Minhaj  
Mrs. Perin Rameshchandra  
Miss Suvira Mahey



(x)

**SANGLI—**

Dr. (Mrs.) Malinibai Sukthankar  
Mrs. Indumati Mokashi

Mrs. Krishna Chadda  
Mrs. Prabha Banerjee  
Mrs. Hazra Begum

**SIND (KARACHI)—**

Mrs. Guli Sadarangani  
Miss Mohini Chandiramani

**U. P. OUDH—**

Mrs. Lakshmi N. Menon  
Begum Hamida Naqvi  
Shrimati Prema Rao  
Miss Gladys Owen  
Mrs. Rokey

**U. P. AGRA—**

Shrimati Vijayalakshmi Pandit  
Mrs. Santosh Anand

## **THE SEVENTEENTH SESSION OF THE ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE**

For the second time in its short life of 18 years the Annual Session of the All-India Women's Conference was held in Bombay. This Session was held after a gap of 2 years. Unfortunately, owing to the unsettled political condition of the country and the imprisonment of both President and President-elect no Session could be held in 1943. The enthusiasm with which this Session was received and acclaimed all over India proves without a doubt the hold the Women's Conference has on the hearts of women throughout the country and its influence and importance as a lead-giving organisation.

The arrangements made by the Reception Committee, the grandeur of the pandal and the abnormal crowds of visitors that attended all the four days' sessions, did full justice to Bombay's reputation as the premier city of India. Not only was the material arrangements for the comfort of the delegates on a good scale but the whole spirit both intellectual and emotional of the Session was on a scale and of a character not known hitherto. The delegates were in wonderful form, their arguments cogent. A spirit of go-aheadness pervaded the discussions. There were many new comers. The younger section of educated women seemed to have woken to the potentialities of the Women's Conference and made a determined bid to utilise it to its fullest extent. The old system of Subjects' Committee and Plenary Session was reverted to as the Group System had been tried and found wanting. A departure from the usual procedure was made in that, men of repute were invited during the Session to give their specialised views and findings on subjects involved in the resolutions, e.g. Dr. Anjaria spoke on "Food and Inflation," and Mr. Motilal Setalvad, one of the leaders of the Bombay Bar and an authority on Hindu Law, on "Hindu Women's Position under Hindu Law."

The Seventeenth Session will ever remain a historic one because of the address presented to Shrimati Sarojini Naidu, the Bulbul-i-Hind by the A.I.W.C., the National Council of Women in India, the Bombay Presidency Women's Council, the Reception Committee, the Constituent Branches of the A.I.W.C., in Bombay and its Suburbs, and 75 other social service organisations belonging to the city of Bombay, for her life-long services to the cause of the

country in general and women in particular. Sarojini Devi was buried twice over in garlands and the surge of emotion rose to an indescribable climax. The anti-climax lay in the fact that Sarojini Devi could reply to this overwhelming expression of love and affection only by a Namaste, the Government of India having sealed her lips in speech.

A Civic Reception was accorded by the Mayor and the Municipal Corporation of Bombay to welcome the President and the members of the Standing Committee to the hospitable city of Bombay.

The Delegates who had come to Bombay prepared to rough things, having heard all about the rationing scheme and the food saving, were pleasurably surprised at the lavish arrangements of the Reception Committee. The At Homes and Dinners given by institutions and individuals and Her Highness Maharani Bhakti Devi of Nepal's Banquet also came as a welcome surprise, and also her magnificent donation of Rs. 20,000 towards the Kasturba Memorial Fund.

The artistic excellence of the Variety Entertainment and the Handicraft and Swadeshi Exhibition which have become customary features of every session, were in keeping with the general scheme of things, and the mammoth crowds of the public meeting of women organised by the Dadar-Matunga and Parel Constituent Branches filled the hearts of the delegates with envy.

Our sincerest thanks are due to Lady Premmila Thackersey, the Chairwoman of the Reception Committee and her band of indefatigable Secretaries whose labours resulted in a smooth, successful and happy Session.

## PROCEEDINGS

The 17th Session of the All-India Women's Conference was held in a spacious pandal erected in the grounds of Vanita Vishram, Sandhurst Road, Bombay, on Friday, April 7, 1944. The proceedings began with a prayer rendered by pupils of the School of Indian Music, after which Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, the retiring President addressed the Conference.

Speaking in Hindi, Mrs. Pandit recalled that the Conference was meeting after two years, the last session having been held at Cocanada in 1941. In the period that had intervened between the last session and the present, many notable events had taken place all over the world. In India specially the last year had been a tragic one and circumstances beyond the control of the Conference had come in the way of its normal work. For many months some of our best workers had been in detention and it had not been

possible to give effect to many of the resolutions passed at Cocanada. It is to our credit that throughout this difficult period members individually and collectively had kept the spirit of the Conference alive.

Mrs. Pandit expressed the opinion that reforms in the political, social and economic sphere were interdependent. While it was true that the main aim of the Conference was to raise Indian womanhood to its rightful place, they could not be blind to the political situation. If the Conference wished to progress rapidly towards its ideal it could not afford to keep out of politics—not the limited party politics of any group but those wider issues which face humanity. We must bring this wider political interest within our purview and attempt to solve our problems in the National interest rather in the limited circle of our own immediate needs. The world is engaged in a War for freedom and we cannot forget that our country consisting of one-fifth of the human race is also a part of the world. For the satisfactory solution of any of the difficulties that face us as a group or which face the country, freedom is the first essential and only then can we help towards the building up of a better world.

The women's movement in India has forged ahead with a rapidity which, if one understands the handicaps we have had to overcome, has been remarkable. The Indian woman reformer has not been the enemy of man—our men have helped us in our fight for equality and the bitter antagonism which existed in the West between the sexes never found its way into our ranks. Our ancient tradition has been one of comradeship and we look forward in the future to its growth.

She was glad to state that the membership of the Conference was on the increase and that more and more women in the mofussil areas were beginning to realise the advantages of joining the women's movement. She hoped the time would soon come when hundreds of branches of the Conference would spring up all over the country.

The work of the Conference during the two years that had passed since the last session was mainly relief work for the sufferers in the calamities which had overtaken Midnapore and subsequently the whole of Bengal, and Bijapur District in Bombay Province. Workers of the Conference had not only collected funds but had rendered help in the distressed areas in every possible way. In this connection she referred to the All-India Save the Children Committee which had come into existence as a result of conditions in Bengal.

Mrs. Pandit referred to another tragedy which had cast a gloom in every Indian home viz the death of Kasturba Gandhi who was the symbol of ideal Indian womanhood to thousands all over the country. She appealed

to women to help in the collections for raising a suitable memorial, which it had been suggested, should take form of an organisation for advancement of women's education, a subject with which the Conference was very much concerned.

Paying a tribute to Shrimati Kamaladevi, Mrs. Pandit observed that the Conference was fortunate in having her as their President for the year. She was one of the foundation members of the Conference and a valued worker. Her work for women both in India and abroad had done much to raise the prestige of Indian women. Mrs. Pandit was specially happy to hand over charge to a woman who was her comrade in another and bigger sphere. She felt that all she had left undone during her term as President would be more worthily accomplished by Kamaladevi who would guide the Conference with ability and courage.

Lady Vidyaben Nilkanth seconding the proposal of Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit that Shrimati Kamaladevi do take the chair said : It is my great pleasure to second the proposal that was so ably put before you by Mrs. Pandit. We all agree that Shrimati Kamaladevi is pre-eminently fitted to conduct this 17th session of the All-India Women's Conference. She has, as her predecessor told us, gone round the world and has increased the prestige of our institution as well as that of the womanhood of India. I am sure you will all agree with me that we should offer the chair to Kamaladevi, and I am sure she will conduct the business very ably throughout the session as well as during the year till we meet again. I hope you will all carry this with acclamation.

Lady Thackersey garlanded Shrimati Kamaladevi, who then occupied Chair.

Mrs. Urmila Mehta, Hon. General Secretary, then read the messages received from the following persons and institutions wishing the Conference success :—

Begum Hamid Ali, Mussoorie.  
 Sir C. P. Ramaswamy, Ayer,  
 Trivandrum.  
 Shri G. D. Birla, Calcutta.  
 Miss Vera Brittain, London.  
 Dr. James Cousins, Bangalore.  
 Mrs. M. E. Cousins, Bangalore.  
 Maharani Lalita Kumari Devi of  
 Vizianagram.  
 Mrs. Rustomji Faridoonji, Hyderabad  
 (Deccan).

Lady Wazir Hasan, Lucknow.  
 Miss Agatha Harrison, London.  
 Dr. M. R. Jayakar, Bombay.  
 Dr. Amar Nath Jha, Allahabad.  
 Shri N. M. Joshi, Bombay.  
 Diwan Bahadur V. V. Joshi, Baroda.  
 Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Simla.  
 Mrs. Grace Lankester, England.  
 Mrs. Indirabai Maydeo, Poona.  
 Mrs. Sharadaben Mehta, Ahmedabad.



Lady PREMLILA THACKERSEY, *Chairwoman*, Reception Committee, Bombay.

Shri Pranlal Devkaran Nanji,  
Bombay.  
Mrs. Savitri Rajan, Madras.  
Sir S. Radhakrishnan, Benares.  
Dr. Mrs. Muthulakshmi Reddi,  
Madras.  
H. H. the Rani Saheba of Sangli.  
Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Allahabad.  
Shri Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, Calcutta.  
Mrs. Edina Sinclair, London.  
Shrimati Ammu Swaminadhan,  
Madras.  
Miss Maud Dickinson, Editor, Bulletin of Indian Women's Movement,  
London.  
Shri A. V. Thakkar, Delhi.

Mrs. Sufi Tyabi, Bombay.  
Mrs. Katherine Bompas, Secy., International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship.  
Mr. Krishna Menon, Secy., India League, London.  
Mrs. Corbett Ashbey, President, International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship.  
Lady Hartog, Women's Advisory Council of Indian Affairs, London.  
National Committee and Staff, W. C. A., Lucknow.  
Mrs. Katherine Innes, Secy., Women's International League, London.

### WELCOME ADDRESS

Lady Premlila Thackersey, Chairwoman of the Reception Committee, welcoming the President and Delegates said : I wanted to deliver this address in Gujarati which is my mother tongue, but I chose Hindi because it is important I should speak in a language which delegates from other parts of the country can understand. There is no other language except Hindi for that purpose. If we all learn Hindi there will be no need for us to learn any other language.

After a lapse of fourteen years we have met again in Bombay. Bombay has not remained impervious to the many changes that have taken place during this period. Although it is not the capital of India, Bombay is undoubtedly the greatest City in India and it has always given the lead in the matter of helping the rest of India, and relieving distress wherever it occurs. Bombay has played an important part in the organisation of the Women's Conference. Although the Conference came into existence in 1926 its foundations were laid on a firm basis in 1930 at the session held in Bombay. Here I am reminded of late Lady Dorab Tata, the then President of the Reception Committee. Let me hope that the silver jubilee of the Conference will also be celebrated in Bombay. Last year we could not hold the Conference because of the political turmoil and the arrest of our national leaders. Even today we are meeting under the shadow of grief. The passing away of Kasturba, the greatest of our women, is a matter of profound

sorrow to us. She was the embodiment of the virtues of Aryan womanhood and we all can draw inspiration from her.

Her death has caused a void in Gandhiji's life which cannot be filled. Even so it has caused a void in the life of our country. Indian women owe a great debt to Gandhiji for the progress and advance they have achieved.

The sad demise of Shri Ranjit Pandit is still fresh in our memory. Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, the President of our last Session and the soul of our Conference has made great sacrifices with Mr. Pandit for the awakening and freedom of our country. We all sympathise with Mrs. Pandit in her very sad bereavement.

We keenly feel the absence of Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, one of our closest friends and very sincere and active workers on account of her detention under the Defence of India Rules.

It is our fortune, Kamaladevi, that you are here to preside over this conference. In what terms shall I introduce you to the gathering? You are the embodiment of world womanhood. You have done the greatest service to your sisters in this country by the most favourable impression you have created abroad. You have taken the keenest interest in our Conference. You were responsible for the opening of branches in different parts of the country. In recognition of your services the Conference elected you general secretary thrice. Now when vital problems face us you have assumed the presidentship of the Conference. You are clever, cultured, gifted and talented; you are a great organiser and you have great capacity for service. By participating in the international women's conferences at Berlin, Geneva, Prague and Elisnor as India's representative and very ably presenting our problems you did a great service to us and won us the esteem of outside world. You also dispelled many wrong notions about India that prevailed in other countries. I am confident that in the present critical juncture you will be able to lead us along the right path.

It is a great pleasure, we have in our midst today Mrs. Sarojini Naidu who has gone through a long period of detention and illness. She is not quite well as yet, and it is her great interest in our Conference that has brought her here today. Srimati Naidu, we welcome you from the core of our hearts. I am sure that the Conference by presenting an address to you will show its gratitude for all that you have done for us and the country. You have raised the status of Indian women as no other person has done, and your contribution to Indian culture is by no means small. Your presence here is a great inspiration to us all. You have brought lustre on Indian womanhood. May you be long spared to us.



There are many grave problems facing us today. The war of the great powers is still raging furiously, and it is exacting greater sacrifices from the people. Although we have no concern with the war we have been dragged into it. India has made great sacrifices both in men, money and material. We are experiencing great hardships in travelling and getting the daily necessities of life. No one appears to worry about the needs of the people ; and there appears to be no prospect of any improvement in the situation. All round, we see distress and famine is stalking Bengal and other parts of the country. It is a matter of shame for our rulers that in a vast agricultural country like India there should be such famines. It is imperative that under such circumstances we should know what is our duty. I hope the Conference will give right and proper guidance in this matter.

I am aware that India is a vast country and there are numerous difficulties in our way. We are divided. There are provincial, linguistic and other differences which come in the way of our progress. But if we approach our task in the right spirit I am sure we can accomplish it. We have a great task awaiting us in the villages. Owing to certain difficulties we have not been able to give as much attention to this question as it deserves. The vast masses of village women are illiterate and ignorant. They are like frogs in the well. Their outlook on life needs to be liberalised and broadened. In this task we have a duty to perform. You have set up a committee to deal with this problem. But I think greater emphasis should be laid on this work than hitherto.

The Conference publishes a magazine "Roshni." Many people do not know anything about it, indeed they have not even heard its name, because it is in English. I trust that it will be published in Hindi.

As a result of the war many educated middle class girls and women have secured employment. It is necessary to utter a word of caution that in this going forward there would be no blind imitation, for such imitation would not help the promotion of culture. It is equally important that there is no neglect of the moral side of education. It goes without saying that strong morality and character are essential to success.

There are several women's organisations functioning in this country. I think that there should be a close co-ordination of their efforts. If they all worked in unity and under a single organisation and direction we could achieve better results.

Once again I extend on behalf of the Reception Committee a warm welcome to the Delegates and Visitors to the Conference. I hope you will excuse us for our shortcomings. Let us hope that by the time our next Session

is held the war clouds will scatter away, and there will be harmony and peace in the world, and India will acquire its proper place in the world under the guidance of the apostle of peace, Mahatma Gandhi.

Mrs. Urmila Mehta, Hon. General Secretary, then read the report of the activities of the Conference for 1942-43.

## REPORT

1942 and 1943

The two years under review have been full of unexpected developments both in India and abroad and the Conference has not escaped from the reactions of the political and economic upheavals. In spite of this our Branches have continued to carry on many of their activities.

Since the last Session held in Cocanada in December 1941 the amended Constitution has come into force whereby all Constituent Branches have now an equal status. The Standing Committee met four times during the period under review at Abrama, Poona, Khar-Bombay and Delhi. The Annual Session of the Conference was not held in 1943 owing to the abnormal situation in the country. During a period of eight months while the President, Shrimati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and Hon. General Secretary were in detention—Lady Rama Rau and Mrs. Kulsum Sayani acted as Chairman and General Secretary respectively.

The main features of the work undertaken during the period under review were :—

1. Scheme for Training of women for Social Service.
2. Agitation in support of the Hindu Law Committee.
3. Relief work in connection with floods and famine in different parts of the country.
4. Miscellaneous.

The Scheme for training women for social service was drawn up as a consequence of the lack of trained women to carry on work in our Branches. A training camp organised and run under the personal supervision of Shrimati Kamaladevi was held at Abrama (Gujarat) from March 1942 to June 1942. The Hon. General Secretary, Shrimati Mridula Sarabhai and Shrimati Miraben helped in organising the Camp and our thanks are due to them, in particular to Shrimati Miraben for her pioneer work in planning the Camp and helping with the construction.

49 women out of whom 11 were Muslims received training in the following subjects amongst others :—

1. Home Industries.
2. Spinning.
3. Co-operative Societies.
4. Health Visitor and Midwifery courses.
5. Adult and Primary Education.
6. Health and Hygiene.
7. Civics.
8. Scouting.

The special feature of the Camp was the harmony and understanding which existed between the young women belonging to different communities and who came from different parts of India. Emphasis was laid on the cultural aspect and folk dancing and community singing were encouraged.

The Tata Graduate School of Social Science placed five of its lecturers at the disposal of the Camp and the thanks of the Conference are due to them for their generous help. The thanks of the Conference are also due to the many eminent men and women who visited the Camp, gave their time and the benefit of their knowledge to the students.

The normal course of three months' training was curtailed to a period of two months to allow University students to avail themselves of this opportunity during their summer vacations. About a dozen University students attended.

Mrs. Renuka Ray was nominated to the Central Legislative Assembly as a representative of the All-India Women's Conference during the pendency of the Intestate Succession and Marriage Bills. Propaganda on both these Bills was carried on intensively by all our Branches.

Funds were collected by all our Branches for relief in Midnapore after the devastating cyclone of October 1942. Special mention may be made of the Delhi Branch as having contributed a sum of Rs. 13,000/- for this purpose.

In connection with the famine in Bijapur work was organised under the guidance of Lady Rama Rau who visited the distressed areas several times and helped to collect large sum of money for relief operations. The Khar-Santacruz Constituency helped actively by sending 3,500 garments and organising an embroidery and needle-work centre for the women of that district. In the light of the experience of conditions in Bijapur a revision of the Famine Code of Bombay was specially demanded by the Standing Committee held at Khar in May 1943.

July 1943 saw the culmination of the food crisis in Bengal which resulted in the terrible famine. The President and the Honorary General Secretary toured the affected areas on two occasions to devise a scheme of relief work.

The Calcutta Branch issued an appeal to all our Branches for help and the sum of Rs. 60,000/- was received. Besides this, some of the Branches sent donations to other relief organisations which were already functioning in Bengal.

The Calcutta Branch and the Branches in the districts were responsible for starting milk centres for infants and nursing mothers, gruel kitchens and medical relief.

The attention of the President was drawn to the helpless condition of thousands of destitute children in the famine areas and a scheme for starting children's homes was immediately undertaken. A central fund called Save the Children Fund was started. This name was subsequently changed to All-India Save the Children Committee as an organisation called "Save the Children Fund" was already in existence in Geneva with Branches in London and New York.

The first meeting of this Committee was held in Calcutta in February 1944 and the following office-bearers were elected :—

President :—Shrimati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit.

Secretary :—Mrs. Urmila Mehta.

Treasurer :—Mr. Nalini Ranjan Sarkar.

In response to the President's appeal large sums of money were received both in India and from China, America and Britain.

The Conference quarterly, *Roshni*, which was ably edited by Mrs. Lakshmi N. Menon, was taken over by Mrs. Indira Maydeo in March 1943. In spite of difficulties in obtaining paper, etc., the *Roshni* has appeared regularly.

The Lady Irwin College has made steady progress under the able guidance of Mrs. Hannah Sen and the number of students has increased.

Since the removal by Government of the ban on women working underground in mines, the Conference has protested vigorously against this relaxation.

The reports of work done by Branches will be submitted separately and is not being mentioned here. In view of the difficult times through which the country is passing, the sum total of work has not been entirely unsatisfactory. Lack of sufficient funds at the Centre has, however, prevented

many schemes from being taken up and expansion of work is not possible without money.

It is hoped that the public will be generous in their support of the Conference and help with donations for the Central Fund.

**Shrimati Kamaladevi :** There will be a slight alteration in the programme. We will first have the visitors' speeches and then I shall address the Conference. I now call upon His Worship the Mayor to address the Conference.

**Mr. M. R. Masani, the Mayor :** Madame President, delegates to the Conference, ladies and gentlemen : I must first apologise to you for the disappointment caused to you by Shrimati Kamaladevi's announcement of the slight change in the programme. I am sure you would rather not have had the change.

I would like at the outset to say that while two days ago I had the pleasure of welcoming your President elect and members of the Standing Committee to this city on behalf of the Municipal Corporation, now that I understand a larger number of delegates has come in. I would like to convey to them as well the warm welcome which the citizens of Bombay would desire me to give them on this occasion. It is all the more pleasant to welcome you all because in a way this is the first time since August 1942 that we are having a gathering of this nature in the city. One cannot help looking back and being reminded of occasions of this sort in the past which are no longer permissible in these days in our country or in our city. You have brought added life to the city and raised the level of its consciousness, and in that sense your Conference has contributed to our civic life.

Having said that, I confess to an amount of bewilderment as to the capacity in which I and my distinguished fellow-citizens who are invited here today are before you. I can only surmise that our capacity is something approximating to that of fraternal delegates from a fortunately non-existent All-India Men's Conference. (Laughter). At the same time, the fact that the majority of the speakers on the opening day of the All-India Women's Conference should be men is one which cannot but appeal to the vanity of the mere male. I do hope it means an admission that even when you foregather, you cannot really do without us.

There are just one or two points made by the retiring President and the Annual Report of the General Secretary to which I would like to draw attention. The first point, which was made by Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, was that this is non-partisan organisation. That is a point which is well worth stressing, because I think that is the secret of the successful growth

and development of the Conference. I think this Conference is bound to grow and become more and more powerful as a factor in our national life only to the extent that you can manage to retain that non-partisan character. We have seen unfortunately in the case of certain other organisations of this nature, whether they were of the workers, peasants or students, that they have all come to grief because of attempts in a certain quarter to permeate and capture those organisations for partisan ends. I do hope that your Conference will be able to survive any such attempts and repel them firmly and will keep its broad-based national character.

The other point is with reference to the Secretary's Report pertaining to the Abrama Training Camp. That Camp has set a very fine example of what your Conference can do to meet the growing demand for trained women workers of various kinds in our countryside. There is a growing need for doctors, teachers, nurses and technicians of every kind, including those in social services, as well as engineers, chemists and others. And that want has to be met. When one reads of a plan like the Fifteen Years Plan, what one is worried about is not where the money is going to come from, but where the men and women are to come from, because such a plan requires lakhs of trained technicians, both men and women, of various kinds. Today, those men and women simply do not exist in sufficient numbers in our country. For every doctor we have today, if we are to reach the United Kingdom's standards, we need at least 16 doctors. And for every nurse we have in this country, we need 320 nurses if we are to get anywhere near the British standard. There is such a terrific leeway to make up, and I do hope that you will follow the example you have set at Abrama and have camps throughout the country, in every province, and turn out a large number of women, trained in social and other sciences, so that when our country is free to embark on big plans of development, women will be there, to take up the work. I wish your session every success, and, apart from being useful, I hope you will find your stay in Bombay pleasant. (Cheers).

**The President:** Shri Bhulabhai Desai will now address the Conference.

**Mr. Bhulabhai J. Desai:** Madame President, Delegates to the All-India Women's Conference and Friends, I myself wonder as the last speaker has done as to the actual place I occupy when I am invited to attend the Conference. If I was asked to do so as a survival of those who used to hold what were euphemistically called social conferences at the end of every session of the Indian National Congress, then I wish to repel the suggestion. For I am one of those who feel that the progress of the nation, and particularly our own, no longer depends on the vicissitudes through which other countries passed in the experiments of halting nature which were their fate. We stand today in a very different world in every sense of the term. While

there is the shadow of a world war, there is also the inspiration of a great example of the greatest experiment of a stupendous character in the application of freedom and equality to the relations of men and women and men and men in the world's history. It is that experiment which is the outstanding event of this war, and of this world. And it is that experiment which is going now to be fore-runner of the work of reconstruction of society in the human world. For it is not by means of halting, individual measures that we are going to rejuvenate and revitalise this land, where no doubt in theory, in times gone by as was pointed out sometimes ago by the retiring President, there was an acceptance of the equality of men and women ; then there was period of intervening darkness when women fell back, fell behind and fell into a state when the world began to look upon them with a certain amount of askance. It is not therefore by retracing this step, but by entirely reorganising our life that the women of this country are going to lead the world. I feel, if you look at the way in which the problem of women in India has during the last 25 years been tackled, I think it deserves a considerable amount of congratulation. For there never was what may be called a militant movement which speaks for the fact that there was never any resistance to the claim which they made. An equality in the sphere of life, an equality for the purpose of doing their duty, and service to mankind, an equality claimed as the result of work, is an equality which could in modern times be never resisted. It is not a mere matter of historical anachronism, but it is a case in which we felt that in this country we escaped the vicissitudes of militant womanhood in other lands, and for the simple reason that it proceeded in a manner which evoked not merely the enthusiasm, but the assistance of men whom you have invited here to address you. They feel that it is not by assisting you that they have done anything, but they realise that you have made your own progress unimpeded by men so far as this country is concerned. It is a silent and tacit recognition of a principle which the world learned after a great deal of time and trouble.

For that reason, I feel, standing before you today and looking back to your work for the last 17 years, it is a great pleasure to find that we stand where we stand today where no question can be raised. If you look at the history of the last three or four years in the matter of franchise, the other day counting it over I found that while in every country, even in the European world, there was the question whether franchise should be granted or not, we had a franchise of one in every ten women throughout the country. I do not see any reason why there should not be the adult franchise applicable to women as well as men. How they won the last elections is a matter of history and a matter of great satisfaction to me ; it is a matter for great pride in the way in which they acquitted themselves so far as the organisation of the national life of this country is concerned.

I also wish to add a word about what was stated in regard to one of the matters in which the Conference holds a strong opinion. That is, with reference to the pending legislation, as regards the rights of women as they are called. I would prefer to call them the restitution of their actual position. Whether it is the matter of intestate succession, or whether it is the matter of marriage, the application of correct principles of life is an obligation and it is not a matter to be begged for. There are before the Assembly two bills, the Bill of Intestate Succession where ungrudgingly they have recognised the right of inheritance of the sisters along with their brothers in almost every sphere and every grade. There is also before the Assembly a Bill codifying the Hindu Law on the question of marriage. It deals with two types of marriages, the sacramental and the civil, but even in sacramental marriage, the principle of monogamy is sought to be obligatorily enforced. The principle, while it appears revolutionary, will restore that self-respect and dignity to man and woman which alone will place us in the position in which we wish to be placed before the world today.

There are other matters which will arise before the Conference, but so far as I am concerned, I feel that there should no more be any argument about principles. The world has seen, as I said, stupendous experimental success of the application of equality and freedom in all spheres of life and how it has vindicated itself in the vindication of freedom and democracy today. Let us now under the inspiring guidance of the application of this principle proceed so that our sisters will have no cause to say that Indian men did not assist in the restitution of their society, in the rehabilitation of their own life, and in the reconstruction of the future which belongs to this land as much as any other. I thank you for the invitation.

**The President:** The Hon'ble Justice Chagla will kindly address the Conference.

**Mr. Justice M. C. Chagla:** Madam President, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have ceased to be a politician and I no longer understand politics. But without understanding politics I do realise that our country is at present passing through a period of frustration and disillusionment and I congratulate the All-India Women's Conference for not falling a victim to the prevailing atmosphere.

One has only to look at this gathering to realise how full of life and enthusiasm the All-India Women's Conference is. The one great appeal that this conference has for me is that it has created a platform where united womanhood can stand. Women of all communities, of all castes, and if I may say so of all races, from different parts of the country have come and sat on this platform, and as the previous speakers have pointed out the main feature



of this conference is that it is a nationalist, non-partisan institution. If Indian men have failed to create such a platform, all the greater glory to Indian women. (Applause).

Ladies and gentlemen, I am sure that women of India do not claim any rights as women. The rights they claim are as human beings ; they want to have the same rights as men have. The rights they claim are legal rights, civic rights and economic rights. They claim that they should have the same legal status in society as men have ; they claim that they should have the same rights of citizenship as the men have ; they claim that economically they should not be dependent upon the father or the husband, but should be independent economic units. I feel certain that there is no danger of the Indian Women's Conference constituting itself into a separatist body. For Heaven's sake, we do not want any more differences in our country and we do not want a sex war between men and women.

It is my profound conviction that social reform can only be achieved by women. Men are not sufficiently interested in social reform. They may be interested in the political freedom of the country ; they may be interested in economic or industrial advancement ; but so far as social reform is concerned it leaves them cold, because our present society is a man-made society ; men have made the laws and have administered them and even if this world is in a mess it is a masculine mess. (Laughter). But it is time, ladies and gentlemen, that women redressed the balance of the old world. All that they claim is that the society of the future should be a society which must be made jointly by men and women. The laws which should govern society must be laws unitedly made by men and women and I do not think that claim is too highly placed.

Ladies and gentlemen, the previous speakers wondered what role exactly we speakers were supposed to play on this platform. I can offer an explanation. When Madam President instead of first delivering her presidential address asked us to speak I realised that we were to play, to use the language of the theatre, the part of curtain raisers and that we were to precede the going-up of the curtain for the presidential address. I shall be the last person to stand between the audience and the raising of the curtain. I am sure that during the term of office of your new President the conference will reach greater success.

**The President:** Mr. B. J. Wadia, Vice-Chancellor of the Bombay University, will now speak.

**Mr. B. J. Wadia:** Madam President, Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of the University of Bombay I welcome the Women's Conference to the City of Bombay, and wish it every success.

I have a grievance ; but it is not against the President for having changed the programme. My grievance is against the organisers of the programme, because when I asked what I was to speak on, I was told—'Nothing in particular ; you can speak generally and say a few words.' (Laughter).

I shall therefore, say only a few words, and will stand aside for Madam President to go on with her speech. In this world, and at this particular moment, we are going through enormous changes. We take new views of the past, we entertain new views and ideas of the present, and we are making any number of plans for the future. So that we are entirely in a state of flux. In the West, especially in England, women had to fight long to attain the position which they have attained. They got the right to vote after many years. Having got the right to vote they also wanted a change in the rights to membership of property. The old adage of the law was 'husband and wife are one'; but the wife retorted : 'The husband is the one and not I.' They gradually got many changes made in their favour.

In India things have not yet attained that stage. In England women have attained the stage of absolute independence ; but I do not comment it as ideal, that men should be independent of women and women should be independent of men. I would rather that there was interdependence between the two. Without the two combining, no progress will be possible.

I am sometimes told that education is making enormous progress in India. Judged from the larger number of students attending schools and colleges, that may be so, but the statement is not borne out by the figures of literacy in the country. In a country in which only 12 per cent of the population is literate the progress of education cannot be said to be satisfactory. In cities like Bombay the number of girls attending colleges is on the increase, but in the villages, which is the real India, the progress of literacy is very slow indeed. I am looking forward to the time when this progress will become more rapid, and I am sure that you are all also looking forward to the same end. I am sure that with the removal of the dead hand of the past, and when the tyranny of custom, tradition, and superstition, is no more, our women will make greater progress in education, which will ultimately lead to their emancipation.

Some of you may have heard, if not studied, what is known as the Sargent scheme of education. It is a colossal scheme involving a colossal sum of money, and I for one am not so very optimistic as not to care where the money comes from. Undoubtedly, an army of men and women teachers will be required, and I am sure that amongst our educated men and women we shall find many able and willing to teach. The right to vote is important, but it is not everything. In countries like France, Switzerland, Syria and Egypt women have not got the

vote. Everything does not depend on the vote. Much depends on the social position of the women. In China they say the wife rules the husband. I do not know how far it is true, but I read somewhere that there is no country where there are more henpecked husbands than in China. (Laughter). What is really required is that the position of women should be equalised, and for that purpose we welcome the different reforms relating to position of inheritance, divorce and various other matters. I especially look forward to the amelioration of the position of widows because I cannot forget the words of Swami Vivekanand when he said : ' I shall have no respect for any religion in the world, which does not wipe a widow's tears nor bring a morsel of food to an orphan's mouth'. This was his great ideal. That is the ideal which we in India must look forward to.

Food has become a great problem in India, and when we think of the work done by women in the Bengal and Bijapur crisis, we men will never grudge the extent done to the women for the great part they have played in this humanitarian work. I am sure we shall soon have many more women workers amongst us and when we shall have the real emancipation of women, men and women will become interdependent. It is a truism that no country can advance unless its women, the mothers of future generations, advance. We are all looking forward to a large increase in educational activity. I do not believe in, what they used to call in former times blue-stockings, nor do I believe in what they now call the highbrows ; but there is a tendency amongst our women graduates nowadays to ride the high horse, especially when they get higher honours in the University examinations than some of our boys do. I have no respect for highbrows, but I look forward to women who will not only give us the educators of the future, but above all who will produce the servants who will serve in millions upon millions of Indian homes in the village where their work is most necessary. Madam President, I wish your conference great success, and I thank you for the great honour you have done me by asking me to address it this evening.

**The President:** Sir Sitaram Patkar, ex-Judge, Bombay High Court, will now speak.

**Sir Sitaram Patkar:** Shrimati Kamaladevi, Mrs. Pandit, Lady Thackersey, Delegates, ladies and gentlemen, I have no complaint to make why I have been asked to speak on this occasion, nor why I have been asked to speak before the President has delivered her address. I am only anxious that I should not detain you and delay your hearing the Presidential address. I shall, therefore, try to make my observations as brief as possible.

During the last quarter of a century the Women's Conference has done great service to the country. They have brought to bear considerable influence

upon the consideration of many political and social questions affecting the country. They have also been a source, a spring of popular imagination and popular ideas. Women's associations have done great service for the political rejuvenation of the country.

The only question to which I shall now address myself is in regard to the social and legal status of Hindu women. Their rights and liberties have been curtailed on account of archaic rules of Hindu Law which were framed centuries ago. They are inelastic, wooden, and antediluvian. They have no relation to and are not in consonance with the present environments of society.

There are two forces which militate against the progress of Indian womanhood. The first is the pursuit of out-of-date customs and the tendency to maintain inherited traditions, and the second is the preservation of archaic laws by judicial decisions. The remedy against the first is education of public opinion by means of the press, the public platform, and by meetings like this. But with regard to the laws of inheritance or laws of marriage they have become quite fixed and static as the result of rulings given by final judicial decisions, and these rulings are now in force throughout the whole country. The only remedy against the mischief caused by the preservation of archaic laws by judicial decisions is through legislation. I will give one instance of how the ancient texts were framed and how the Vedic texts were misapplied. There was a Vedic text which related to the prohibition of participation of *Soma* juice by women on account of their weakness and it was misapplied by Bodhayana who laid down on the strength of the text that women were not entitled to any portion of the inheritance. Manu, another lawgiver, came to the conclusion that women were incompetent and, therefore, not entitled to get any share in the inheritance. I have reason to believe that if Manu and Bodhayana were present at this gathering they would have modified their opinions as regards weakness and incompetence of women. I am quite sure that the force of public opinion generated by women's associations will be instrumental in withstanding the opposition which is prevalent in some parts of the country. Already the efforts of women's associations have borne fruit. In the past they have been responsible for shaping legislation, and I have no doubt that in the near future they will succeed in attaining the ideals which they have in view.

It is a matter of satisfaction that the Rau Committee was appointed. Its re-appointment was the direct result of the agitation carried on by the Women's Conference. Another instance in which women successfully carried on agitation in the Bombay Legislative Assembly was Mr. Desai's Bill of Adoption which had to be given up on account of their opposition. The Women's Conference and the associations affiliated to it have been doing immense service to Indian womanhood.

The Rau Committee has fortunately now submitted their well-considered views in the two Bills, one relating to intestate succession and the other to marriage. The criterion of the civilization and culture of any society is to be judged from the position accorded to the woman by that society, and I think the Rau Committee has done a great service to Indian womanhood by providing rules of inheritance and marriage which are in consonance with justice and equity. In the civil form and also in the case of the sacramental form of marriage it has been provided that monogamy shall be the rule. In the case of inheritance the Rau Committee has recommended that the daughter should get a share simultaneously with the son.

In the past women's organisations have done great service in the cause of education, but this work is more urgently needed in the rural areas than in the urban areas. I should like, therefore, to suggest to members of this conference that they should extend their activities to rural areas, where much work remains to be done. They should also consider Mr. Sargent's scheme of education so far as it affects women.

In conclusion, I would appeal to the members of the conference to go on agitating till they secure equality of status and equality of opportunity in the competition of life, and equality of rights and obligations, which are the guiding principles in determining the status of women which in its turn is the true index of the civilization and culture of any society.

**The President (Shrimati Kamaladevi)** made a few introductory remarks before reading her address. She said : It is customary on occasions such as this to precede the address by an expression of great humility and the undeservedness on the part of the person who has been elected to preside. But I do not want to indulge in such remarks because my feelings of pride and pleasure more than counterbalance my feeling of humility. I feel this in rather a personal way because of the tremendous response this Conference has had as also because of the rather creditable achievements of the Conference in the course of the last 17 years, and if this gathering of happy faces before me is any indication I think I should feel proud and happy because I have been very closely associated with this Conference from its very inception. I am also particularly glad that this conference meets in Bombay and during the National Week, a week full of poignant memories and associations for us and I, at least in my heart, and I think several others will be with me, dedicate this Conference and its work as one of the many national aspects of national service that we can perform in memory of the National Week.

Shrimati Kamaladevi then read her Presidential address.

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Friends,

I should like at the outset to offer our sincerest sympathies to Shrimati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, our retiring President, in the irreparable loss she has sustained, and send our greetings to Mrs. Margaret Cousins, who may be justly called the founder of this Conference, now lying on her sick bed, to wish her a speedy recovery.

Although the women's movement has fairly advanced and matured, I feel the need today more than ever to restate its case, because of the continued misunderstanding of its nature and growth by a large number of men and quite a few women alike. The women's movement is essentially a social movement and part of the process of enabling a constituent part of society to adjust itself to the constantly changing social and economic conditions, and trying to influence those changes and conditions with a view to minimising irritations and conflicts and making for the largest measure of harmony. Thus it operates as an integral part of the progressive social structure in the broadest sense, and is not a sex war as so many mechanically believe or are led to believe. For the issues round which it revolves, such as right of votes, inheritance, entry into professions and the like, are an intrinsic part of the bigger issues striving to overcome the prevailing undemocratic practices that deny common rights to certain sections of society. It is therefore a comrade to the struggle of the backward castes and the long oppressed classes seeking alike to regain the lost inheritance of man's inalienable rights. To give it any other interpretation or shear it off to isolate it from the main current, is socially injurious. It is equally erroneous to hold the "nature of man" responsible for women's disabilities and give the women's movement an anti-man twist. It is the nature of our society which is at fault and our drive has to be directed against faulty social institutions.

The women's movement, therefore, does not seek to make women either fight men or imitate them. It rather seeks to instil into them a consciousness of their own faculties and functions and create a respect for those of the other sex. Thus alone can society be conditioned to accept the two as equals. To fit women theoretically and practically into this scheme, women have to be encouraged to develop their gifts and talents. This has, therefore to be one of the main planks of the movement.

Closely allied to a false conception of the women's movement is also the false value allotted to the women's economic worth. The correct premise to start from is the recognition of the social division of labour between the sexes, which gives the lie direct to the middle and upper class conception of women as domestic and social parasites, living off their husbands and contributing

nothing. Woman power is basic and the woman must be recognised as a social and economic factor on her own, not as an assistant to man. Little recognised are the tremendous labours of the housewife and even in the most highly industrialised countries, house-keeping still remains the major industry, and the housewives still form the majority. To state blandly that woman produces children and rears them, cooks food, cleans, washes, is not enough. According to industrial economy she produces labour power, and labour power is basic, for, without it none of the other kinds of power can be made to operate. But that too is not good enough. The housewife is as much of a working woman as a factory worker. She expends more energy and time and skill in the production of commodities than the unionised, legally protected worker, for her hours are unlimited and her tools countless. Tradition has always tended to place a lower value on the home production and services. One reason may be because such goods and services do not come on the market but only cater to the family group as consumers. Yet, really speaking, this very fact should make them as one writer says "Priceless." For, since society depends upon the family not only for biological perpetuation but cultural as well, woman as the guardian of the home and one of its stabilising factors, will also continue to remain "Priceless." The tragedy is that its very non-pecuniary and non-competitive character has lowered the prestige of the woman's role. Husbands who claim they "support" their wives simply because the latter do not bring home a pay cheque, are being anti-social, upsetting the harmonious social equilibrium and breaking social solidarity. For it is time society recognised that every housewife supports herself though she may not scratch at a desk or run a machine, by the social labour she performs and the contribution she makes towards the maintenance of the home and its happiness.

The entrance of women into extra-domestic activities has to be welcomed, for it provides a wider field for the women's talents, breaks the relative segregation of the women as a sex, relaxes the restrictions that otherwise narrow women's functions. What is strange is that as long as woman confines herself to her domestic duties, she is censured as a burden on man, whereas if she tries to earn a livelihood outside the home, she is equally condemned as a competitor of man, trying to take his livelihood away from him. Truly did Robert Ingersoll say that a fact will fit all other facts, but a lie will fit nothing except another lie made expressly for that purpose. Correctly viewed and rightly interpreted, the women's movement is found resting on a scientific basis, shaped by a rational ideology and indispensable in the social scheme of things.

The field of operations that lie before the Conference is ever-widening. Many varied activities beckon and the temptation to rush in all directions is

great. But like an autumnal matron who has developed a high sense of discrimination but not lost her youthful vigour and enthusiasm, the Conference would do well to concentrate on a few items and do them well. First in importance I would place the training of social services, so eminently needed yet so grievously neglected. It had been my privilege to have my modest little experiment in this field accepted by the Conference. The ready response and co-operation it received from other organisations, workers and the public heartens me once again to appeal to the provincial branches of the Conference to make this one of the chief programmes of work for the year, with any necessary modifications in the original scheme. Closely allied to this is the necessity for training women in handicrafts and fostering hand industries. Those of our branches who are already working in this direction, one of them even turning out paper, will testify to the utility of such ventures. They will provide a means of livelihood to many helpless women. Incidentally, they will add to the industrial production of our country at a time when it is not able to meet our needs. Every Branch should initiate whatever industries can run best. In such undertakings, I am sure, we can always count on the help and co-operation of other experienced bodies who are already in the field but who do not attempt, specially, to train and employ women, a task this Conference is best fitted for.

As essential and as scarce are the health-services, particularly nursing. A rough set of figures say, there is one Nurse for every 56,000 people or to 256 square miles. The Health visitors are about one per 3,50,000. The maternity and child welfare movement is mostly a week-end show and the entire country can boast of only 800 centres to cater to such a vast area and population. All this makes an appalling picture. While admitting that the Women's Conference is not the body which can build up a complete health service to meet the country's requirements, I feel sure it can make a small but appreciable contribution. It can recruit women to the nursing profession, encourage many more girls to take courses in public health, nursing, first aid, industrial hygiene, etc., and also get more of such courses introduced into our educational and social institutions. It can help to organise shorter courses in the general principles of nursing to meet the present emergency in the country. At the same time it should agitate to raise the standard of housing allowance, training and pay of the nursing staff, with a view to popularise and secure social recognition to this long despised but most noble of professions. The Conference can also organise relief units out of the available material and co-operate with such bodies as the Women's Reserve Medical Unit formed by the medical women in Delhi, which did such excellent service in Bengal. Such work deserves our warmest commendation and I can only hope that this worthy example will be followed by other provinces in distress. The Branches and Sub-Branche



can certainly dot the country with numerous maternity and child welfare centres, creches, etc.

Although the food problem is the most frightening at the moment and tends to overshadow most others, its causes are beyond the Conference's power to remedy. As long as India's economy continues to be throttled and perverted by foreign interests, hunger and starvation must stalk this land of plenty. Only a careful development of its vast untapped wealth based on an economy designed to meet the needs of the people by a free Indian people's government, can aspire to overcome this dreadful scourge of perpetual famines. But that cannot by any means be our final word on it. As women happen to be the regulators of food in the home they should be more sensitive now than ever to the care and preservation of food, avoid waste in daily consumption as also in lavish hospitality which in the present setting strikes one as painfully incongruous. Working out of balanced diets with the limited things available, would also help. The worst sufferers in this tragic drama are the children. In very responsible society they have the first claim on the available resources, particularly milk. But today in our country the man who pays the price gets the milk. So, while adults who are not wholly dependent on this article are able to get large supplies and sometimes even thoughtlessly waste it, children who solely subsist on it are forced to go without it if they do not have sufficient means. Ways and methods must be sought by us to alter this and see that our children, which in reality means several future generations to come, are not hopelessly undermined. We shall be guilty of a grave crime if we do not get this righted immediately.

In catering to the daily needs of the mere man we too often grossly neglect the cultural side, the delicate creations in word, song and colour in which the dreams of mankind find expression. The Conference must realise its responsibility in fostering creative work. It can encourage women artists and introduce them to the public. It can place their writings with publishers, articles with editors, it can organise concerts and exhibitions and help playwrights produce their plays. This would help release floods of creative streams and direct them into useful channels, thereby enriching the cultural wealth of our country, a wealth which can only be measured by the happiness it brings to them that give and them that receive.

Two happenings affecting women have considerably agitated the public mind :—the re-employment of women in mines and the Bills emerging from the deliberations of the Rau Committee, now before the Central Assembly. The former, an act perpetrated in violation of an International agreement and intense national feeling, has raised such a storm of protest both in India and abroad as to bear ample testimony to its unpopularity. The Government arguments that no compulsion is applied and that wages have been increased,

have no reality. Poverty drives people to any risks. The very fact that three annas a day is paid for surface work as against eight annas underground is explanation enough. The wage even after this grand increase is about Rs. 15, while the average in other industries in the neighbourhood is around Rs. 25 to 30. In addition, the general conditions are very bad, housing deplorable and inadequate. Although the agitation against this measure has been considerable, it has not been effective, and none of us can rest while it continues. The Women's Conference, if it is to prove an effective instrument for safeguarding women's interests, must get women out of the mines as speedily as possible.

All progressive elements in India have long dreamed of the establishment of a common national legal code, operating irrespective of caste or creed. It is as a step towards this that we welcome the codification of the Hindu Law undertaken by the Rau Committee, and not as an end in itself. I hope this attempt will fructify in the near future and give us the entire codification as a complete picture, instead of in bits and pieces which so easily lend themselves to distortion when isolated from the whole. The Conference has supported the Intestate Succession Bill in spite of its inadequate nature, because it seeks to give recognition to the principle of women's right. It is regrettable that in the Marriage Bill the barriers of caste and *gotra* which have lost most of their significance in modern society, have not been overcome. The clause on monogamy is welcome though it would not serve the purpose without certain other changes which are envisaged. The Women's Conference, along with other liberal sections of society has always stood for the institution of marriage. The strong allegiance of women to this institution hardly needs reiteration, for it is proverbial. Instinctively in their own interest and in the interest of social stability so deeply ingrained in them, they will always strive to keep this intact. But all societies including the Hindu, have recognised the need for modification, in its legal attitudes. Laws have had to change from time to time under changing conditions. Those who seek a relaxation in a rigid marriage law or a law that makes differences between the sexes in dispensing justice, do not do so on flimsy grounds but on a deep respect for and understanding of the function of law which is to enable harmonious living. Where it becomes a social injustice, the need for an adjustment has to be recognised by society as imperative.

Some mental and verbal agitation has been afoot over the political nature of the Women's Conference. To a subject people politics is its very life-breath. To deny that urge is to deny life. Weighed down though we may be by chains, we continue to live on dreams and thoughts of freedom and a striving towards it. To formulate political sensitiveness into an accusation, is to charge the organisation for being alive. The Women's Conference can-

not remain impervious to natural inner urges and cataclysmic outer events. The members of the Conference may have different political affiliations, but I have no doubt they represent an effort to reach the same cherished goal of national freedom by varied paths. To lose sight of that goal would mean the negation of the very objective this great organisation stands for: self-respect and social solidarity. But it is in the very nature of its role and function that it should remain non-partisan, unattached to any political school or party. It has been our pride in the past to maintain that and it shall be our duty in the future to preserve it. Those who think and act otherwise, I have no hesitation in saying most emphatically, are no friends of the Conference.

Our peninsular outline has widened into the global, with an increasing awareness that we and the rest of the world are but part of a single sphere, that our destinies are inevitably linked, our paths interlocked. Therefore, world policies and events are as much our concern as our affairs, their responsibilities. War as much as peace reveals that the world cannot be divided into islands of freedom and slavery, that the present system of one people holding another down by armed might, no matter with what smooth explanations, leads ultimately to world enslavement by fear and violence, and to colossal human, material and moral destruction. Just as national freedom is but an extension of the social freedom, the Conference is fighting for, the establishment of the same principle all the world over is of equal interest to us. Until this present system is not only outlawed in principle but abolished in practice, all talk of peace and freedom becomes transitory and meaningless. For peace is not to be achieved by armed victories or by refusing to bear arms, but by the removal of the root causes: imperialism and colonial exploitation that menace peace. Today we witness the fantastic spectacle of big world powers claiming to fight for the larger freedom and greater happiness of mankind feeling no sense of shame or humiliation in denying those very principles to millions of the people they still continue to exploit and dominate. It is not idle curiosity or cheap sentiment which shapes the question that haunts and harasses every diplomat like a family ghost: "What about India"? We may well say "Everything," for while England continues to hold India in political and economic bondage, the United Nations do nothing short of perpetrating a colossal lie on humanity. India is more than a test, it is a symbol. It is the mirror in which the world sees the shape of things to be. Today we are witnessing the fantastic spectacle of two warring groups, each assiduously claiming to fight for the larger freedom and greater happiness of mankind. It is towards a world which recognises the right of every nation to determine and rule its own destiny but in a co-operative world order, that the women of India and of the world have to strive for, if humanity is ever to enjoy decency, peace and happiness, and world wars banished from amongst our seasonal pests.

Before closing, I should like to send my thoughts to those millions all over the world whose homes have been gripped by the plight of death and destruction, and whose spirits lacerated by untold suffering, and offer them sincerest sympathies. In particular, my thoughts turn to the distressed areas within our own homeland and I take this opportunity to pay my humble tribute to the various organisations, volunteer corps and individuals who are so selflessly serving to alleviate suffering. I should like particularly to congratulate our Bengal Branch for its splendid work in this terrible distress.

The air is heavy with gloom, the sky rent with cries of pain. Civil liberties, one of the main planks of the Conference, are under perpetual assault. Shadows of suspicion and insincerity deepen and lengthen blacking out those neon lights mankind had succeeded in lighting through the ages, a growing disregard for the common Courtesies and human decencies and a ruthless flouting of popular feeling make a mockery of life. The continued detention of our valued and irreplaceable leaders and comrades who alone at the helm could transform the scene from despair to hope and weave order out of chaos, often dulls our spirit and stays our hand. But this very tragedy should in truth, galvanize us into greater and mightier action, for our responsibility becomes doubly great. There are some who turn to post-war reconstruction as an escape from the terrors of the present. Others believe that in large scale industrialisation lies the cure. Those who have faith in these patent pills have only to glance at some of the highly industrialised countries to note the havoc wrought out of priceless natural resources and marvellous technical opportunities. Hunger, unemployment, slums, human degradation, all bear eloquent testimony to this tragedy. It is not enough to produce more. It is more important to determine its basis, and the principles that will guide the distribution, in short, who controls and directs the economy. We cannot surely subscribe to a system in which many produce but few enjoy the benefit, in which artificial scarcity is created by arbitrarily denying men the right to produce, and destroying natural wealth. Women can have real freedom only in a society which will uphold the sanctity of life and the dignity of labour, a society which will give every child the fullest opportunities for development, enforce and practise those fundamental economic and social rights that entitle every individual to a decent life, the fruits of his or her labour, and the benefits of science and culture. To achieve this the Women's Conference should ally itself with all the progressive forces in the country and develop a vital identity with other oppressed sections of the society to pull its full weight on the side of progress in order to overcome reaction. Thus alone can it meet the present challenge and play an accredited role in the national regeneration of the country.

**Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru**, speaking in Hindustani, said :—For the last two hours you have been listening the speeches by eminent public men and also to the instructive speech of the President. I do not, therefore, wish to take up any of your time, and will perform in the fewest words possible the happy duty of proposing a vote of thanks to all those concerned in making this Session a success. First of all I thank the local Branch of the Conference who have made excellent arrangements for more than 200 delegates from all parts of India. Our admiration and appreciation of their work is all the greater when we think of the many difficulties they have had to contend with, such as rationing of food and petrol and difficulties of transport. Lady Thackersey, the Chairman of the Reception Committee, deserves our sincerest thanks. The arrangements made for us leave nothing to be desired.

I hope I shall be excused if I make a few comments on the welcome speech delivered by Lady Thackersey. I appreciate it because I regard it as a contribution for the furtherance of Hindustani as the *lingua franca* of India. It must have cost her an effort to write in Hindustani as it is not her mother tongue. But disregarding the inconveniences she has set an example which is well worth emulation.

We are most thankful to the numerous volunteers who have been working day and night. They have spared no pains to make us comfortable and have succeeded wonderfully in their efforts. I also thank heartily the gentlemen, who addressed us this evening and gave us the benefit of their knowledge and experience.

We are also grateful to all men and women who have graced this occasion with their presence. What a contrast this Conference is to the days when the organisers had to go from house to house to collect a small gathering. Compared to those days we have made considerable progress, but it will not do to rest on our laurels. What we have done but touched the fringe of the problems that face us. A great many things still remain to be done and it is necessary that we must have a much larger army of workers than we have at present.

At this time of her retirement the Conference remembers with gratitude the unique services rendered by Shrimati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit during the two years of her Presidentship—And that she has done in spite of many personal difficulties. In Shrimati Kamaladevi, our President for the coming year we have a dynamic personality who is bound to leave her impression on the Conference. In her Presidential address she has given us an indication of the work she would like the Conference to pursue and we must all put our shoulders

to the wheel. Finally, I appeal to all to contribute to the save the Children Fund.

**Dr. (Mrs.) Malinibai Sukthankar** said :—I have great pleasure in seconding the vote of thanks so ably moved by our ex-President and Patroness, Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru. The Conference, which we claim to be the premier institution working for the welfare of women, has met in this premier city of Bombay after a lapse of 14 years. We are thankful to all those who have helped us and have made it possible to hold this conference in Bombay despite the difficult times through which we are passing. We have in our midst today our popular Mayor, Mr. Masani, who is at the helm of civic affairs, Mr. Bhulabhai Desai, the prominent Congress leader, Mr. Justice Chagla, who has been taking a sympathetic interest in the women's movement, and two prominent educationists, the Vice-Chancellor and the Chancellor of the two Universities in Bombay. We are thankful to them for acceding to our request and coming here and speaking to us.

It is not possible in a short space of time to mention all those who have helped us in holding the conference and I may be pardoned if I mention only a few of them. We are thankful to all our hostesses, to the Gopaldas Charities, to the A. R. P. Authorities and the B. E. S. T. and to those who have helped us to make the conference a success. The aim of this conference is to strive for equality for women and to make her an equal and responsible partner in every sphere of life. With the able guidance of our President we shall go forward and soon attain our aims. Above all I must thank all those ladies and gentlemen who have graced this occasion by their presence.

**The President:** I have two announcements to make. The first is that the exhibition organised by the Reception Committee of the All-India Women's Conference is open daily from 3-30 p.m. to 7-30 p.m. till the 16th instant. Secondly, I have to announce that the old Standing Committee still continues and will meet at Lady Thackersey's House tomorrow morning at 9.

The Conference adjourned till 11-30 a.m. on Saturday, after the singing of "Jana Gana Mana" by girls.

# **ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE**

**First sitting 8th April 1944**

**11-30 A.M. to 6 P.M.**

When the Conference resumed its sitting on Saturday morning, the President called upon the Hon. General Secretary to take the attendance of the delegates.

The President next called upon the Member-in-Charge of Special Subjects to read their reports. Shrimati Kamaladevi said : " I shall give Members-in-Charge three to five minutes each. Then Branch reports will follow. I want to be very strict with regard to time so that the delegates will have more time to speak on the resolutions."

The following reports were presented :—

## **REPORT ON GENERAL EDUCATION, 1942-43**

**Mrs. Hannah Sen, Member-in-Charge.**

Due to the general pre-occupation with the situation created by the War and with the distress and famine so wide-spread in the Country, little thought or attention could be given to Education and other important peace-time-activities. The constituent Branches of the Conference found themselves more deeply concerned, and perhaps rightly, with problems that were mainly political and economic, in particular with the inequitable distribution of food and clothing. There were, however, during the year, two valuable contributions of an All-India Character towards the reorganisation and development of education : the Delhi University Bill and Mr. John Sargent's Memorandum on Post-War Educational Development in India.

The Delhi University Bill, whose passage through the Central Legislature was of the utmost interest to educationists, emerged recently as a full-blown Act, which, it is hoped, will be the precursor of similar reforms in other Indian universities. In my Report on General Education, which I placed before the Session of the Conference at Cocanada, I gave a brief account of the outstanding changes that were then contemplated : namely the abolition of the Intermediate Course, the institution of a three-year Degree Course and the addition

of one year to the school course. It was felt that these changes, accompanied by a complete overhauling of the school system, would result in the first place in so raising the standard of the final examination that Matriculates would be better equipped to deal with the problems of life and in the second place in ensuring to university entrants an educational background that would enable them to make fuller and more effective use of their college studies. These changes have now been incorporated into the Delhi University Act.

The success or failure of the Delhi experiment will profoundly affect educational policy and practice throughout the country. It is gratifying to us—the members of the Women's Conference—to know that one of our colleagues, Mrs. Renuka Ray, has shared in the task of shaping the Delhi University Bill.

Mr. John Sargent's Memorandum made its public appearance some time in October last year. He has drawn up a comprehensive scheme for national education at an estimated annual cost of 277 crores of rupees. His Memorandum embodies the main proposals contained in the reports of the various Committees appointed by the Central Advisory Board of Education, and it deserves the full support of all well wishers of the people. Here again the Conference has indirectly played a part. For two of their active members, Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur Saheba and Mrs. Renuka Ray, have served on the Central Advisory Board and its several Committees.

Mention might be made also of another effort towards educational reconstruction. The Women's Voluntary Service has appointed a Special Committee to frame a scheme of comprehensive post-war reforms, particularly in regard to women and children. The Educational Sub-Committee of this Special Committee, has as its Chairwoman, Mrs. Rustomji Fariodoonji, a Patron of the Women's Conference.

We are indeed glad that, in spite of other pressing needs, the problems of education are not being entirely forgotten and that some of our members are contributing vitally to educational reform and advancement.

#### REPORT ON HEALTH, 1942-43.

Mrs. Kamalabai Nimbkar, Member-in-Charge.

When appointed Member for Health in January 1942 no material on the subject was made available from past Members for Health nor was there any definite programme of work. However, from the "Scheme for the Extension of the Work of the All-India Women's Conference" in the Allahabad Report by Rani Lakshuibai Rajwade, I realized the need for material. This material should cover all types of health work. It should form the basis of suggestions



to the Branches, of programmes of work and of pamphlets for carrying out such programmes. Immediately I set myself to the task of collecting a library on Health Subjects and wrote to over twenty-five health and social organizations with whom I was associated when a Statistician in America, for their publications, subscribed to a number of magazines such as "The Crippled Child," "Sight Saving Review" and the Bulletin Service of the National Recreation Association. Among the organizations who have sent us their material are The American Heart Association, National Society for the Prevention of Blindness, The Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., The Children's Bureau of the United States Department of Labour, The New York Tuberculosis and Health Association, The International Society for Crippled Children, several state health departments, and The Philadelphia school of Occupational Therapy. The last mentioned not only sent us articles on Occupational Therapy but wrote, "should be very happy to have an Indian girl for training, and could, I believe, assist her with scholarship funds. Lacking that, it might be possible to find one of our graduates who would be interested in going to India."

The American organizations were written to first as I knew it would take many months to receive material from them. I am glad to tell you that through the generosity of these organizations we have today a library of over two pamphlets most recently published in America on health matters and some twenty posters. Many of the organizations are sending us their monthly bulletins and any new material as it is published.

As the material was received it was listed in the quarterly issues of *Roshni* and two articles, one on Occupational Therapy and the other on Venereal Disease Control, was published in *Roshni*. To find out how useful the material would be to the Branches and to let them know what I was doing I have purchased a duplicating machine and with it prepared three Health Bulletins, each one containing a Health Story. From my own experience in educational work I knew that the right type of health education material does not exist in a readily available form here. I am most happy to tell you that a number of our Branches have written me that they are distributing copies to schools, some even going to the trouble of translating the stories into their local vernacular. The son of our Standing Committee Member for Baroda has translated the stories into Marathi and one of them has been published in a Marathi Children's Magazine.

With the third Health Bulletin a scheme of work for the Branches was suggested which I hoped would be provocative and encourage them to take up more of their local health problems. Only one Branch acknowledged this letter and wrote saying that they were trying to follow my suggestions. More recently the Branch Representatives have been asked to come to this Con-

ference prepared with suggestions as to how the Member for Health can help them with their local health programmes. I should like to say at this point that those with whom I have talked since their arrival have been most interested and helpful and I trust that we will be able to develop a real programme of Health Work in each Branch before the year is out.

**Nursing Study :** At the Standing Committee Meeting held at Abrama in May 1942 it was proposed that I should take up the Nursing Study which had been started a few years before by Rani Rajwade. Much of that material was not up-to-date by the time I received it. When in Delhi this last November I went to see Miss E. E. Hutchings, Chief Lady Superintendent, Auxiliary Nursing Service of India. She told me that a very comprehensive study was being made, that it would be available to us in a few months, and suggested that to avoid duplicating work we should wait for her Report and then if we wished further material, we could ask the various hospitals and nurses training institutions for it.

**Public Health in India :** In order to avoid duplication and to have a better knowledge of our own problems I have more recently written to the Directors of Public Health of all the Provinces, the larger Indian States and the Health Officers of our largest cities. The material is daily pouring in and I am delighted to find that many Health Officers are not only ready for our co-operation but eager.

**Health Survey and Development Committee :** When attending our Standing Committee Meeting in Delhi last November the opportunity was taken to contact the Secretary of the Health Survey and Development Committee. His Committee is primarily engaged in a study of the existing health conditions in India but is also collecting material for recommendations to be made at a much later date. He was particularly interested to see the Health Education material with me as some of it is not available elsewhere, being the original work done in that field by the Bellevue-Yorkville Health Demonstration of New York City of which I had the honour of being the Statistician in charge of Research for two years before coming to India.

From the above you will see that the first stage of a Health Programme is largely complete. There has been a beginning in the dissemination of information. I trust that whosoever works as Member for Health for the coming year, will have your co-operation to make the best use of the material which is now available.

In closing I should like to thank those Branches who have encouraged me by asking for additional copies of the Health Bulletin and who have expressed their interest and desire to carry out more health work in their areas.

## REPORT ON LABOUR-WOMEN &amp; CHILD LABOUR 1942-43

Mrs. Sudha Mazumdar—Member-in-charge

No Legislative measures of importance dealing with Women and Child Labour was passed by the Provincial and Central Governments in 1942.

In 1943, as a first step in Social Insurance in Indian Labour Legislation, the Govt. of India started preparing a Health Insurance Scheme. A questionnaire on Sickness Insurance was circulated. In this there are 2 questions specially concerned with women labour, namely Maternity and Funeral Benefits. There is a suggestion whether the Maternity Benefit Act prevalent in many provinces in India, should be transferred to the Health Insurance Scheme under consideration. Dr. Adarkar, Professor of Allahabad University, has been specially deputed by the Government of India to prepare the Scheme. The Bengal Government are reserving their opinion until they see the definite proposals framed by him. Personally, I feel the Maternity Benefit should be brought under Sickness Insurance, as this is the practice in all modern industrialised countries with sound social legislation. Besides, in this way it will be better administered, specially amongst bad and indifferent employers, the number of whom is considerable in this country. As for the Funeral Benefit it is a normal part of Sickness Insurance Scheme in other countries. Cash of Rs. 50/- in each case, I think, should be the extent and nature of each Benefit.

1. It was felt that the members of our Conference should also study the questionnaire and give their considered opinion on the measures proposed, and their further suggestions, if any, as to the betterment of the conditions of women labour generally, for placing the same before the Government. Accordingly, in August last, circulars were sent to all our Standing Committee Members. I am grateful to the Gujarat, Hyderabad (Sind), and Gwalior Branches for their replies. As most of us have been busy with Famine Relief measures, the Circular must have been laid aside for the purpose. As replies were so few, no further action has been taken in the matter.

2. In August 1943, the Central Government exempted all coal mines in the Central Provinces from the provision of the Indian Mines Act which prohibits the employment of women in underground workings. This was done, it was said, to maintain adequate labour in the mines, particularly during the monsoon when labour is inclined to leave the mines for cultivation. The position in the C. P. coal fields was unique. There was an adequate wagon supply for transporting coal, but shortage of labour prevented a maximum output. It was hoped that by the temporary relaxation of the present regulation, women labour would be attracted to the fields, and that the output would increase.

This Govt. Notification on the relaxation of provisions of the Indian Mines Act, forbidding employment of women underground, created much dissatisfaction amongst women who have worked so long for the amelioration of the deplorable conditions of women labour in this country. Accordingly a strongly worded protest was sent from our Conference, in the form of a telegram to the Hon'ble Member in Charge of Labour in the Viceroy's Executive Council, and also to the Private Secretary to H. E. the Viceroy.

It is a matter of much regret that Govt. so far has not taken any further action in the matter. If it is impossible to retract Govt. decision in the present times, it should be urged on Govt. that greater amenities and better wages be provided for the women labour employed underground. It is also felt that the labour shortage in the mines would not have arisen, if wages had been liberal.

3. The Bengal Government's Tea Estates Maternity Benefit Bill, as passed by the Legislative Council in 1941, has not yet received sanction of the Legislative Assembly. It is likely that it may be taken into consideration in the next Budget Sessions of 1944-45.

4. It is indeed regrettable that the Bengal Government in spite of our requests, have not yet appointed a woman Factory Inspector.

5. It is felt the Indian Factories Act needs amendment. A few suggestions are as follows :—

I. A half day's holiday with pay once a week to be made a general rule for all factories employing women labour. A mid week day, preferably Wednesday afternoon, might be declared a half day for all women. The need for this is great as most of them are mothers. From early morning till late in the afternoon they labour in the factory. Evening means the usual cooking for the family, after which there is little time for household work, and very little energy left for it either. Sundays are largely washing days, and they enjoy no leisure. Consequently hardworked in both factory and home, the woman labourer is worn out before her time. The measure proposed would be good thing for the men too, who get little rest on Sundays with the women turning over the home to tidy it. They could enjoy a complete rest with their families, if all this was done on a Wednesday the women's off day. The children also will be benefitted, for many are compelled to miss school and stay at home, with odd bits of domestic duties, their mothers leave behind, for them to finish.

This mid week break would mean better health for the women, and it can be reasonably hoped that in the long run, they will be able to work better, and make up their quota in the week.

As a war time measure this mid week break has been a practice prevalent in the West, but it undoubtedly has its peace time values as well. It would greatly help to ameliorate conditions of women labour, if it is adopted here in India.

II. Baby Creches may be made a compulsory provision for all factory owners who employ women labour. The number of creches are deplorably few. Unless the State embodies it in the Factories Act, it is futile to hope that all Factory owners will possess the same civic sense and humanity.

III. Most of the labour quarters provided by factories have no separate latrines, and bathing taps for women. Men and women are compelled to line up for their turn at these places. It is felt these primary necessities should also be made a compulsory provision in the Factories Act. One need not elaborate on the importance of the subject. Women, no matter what strata of life they come from, are entitled in all decency to privacy for these purposes.

IV. In some Departments of certain factories the work of women labourers involve standing up for long hours. This is injurious to women, particularly harmful to those of child bearing capacities. Medical science has much to say against such practice. This may be investigated, and measures taken to make the job fitted to the woman, and not the woman to the job. High stools might be provided in these departments.

V. Since the Central Government is pressing for a provision, that Labour Officers be appointed by every factory employing more than 500 labour, it is felt, it should be also made compulsory to have a woman Welfare Officer for every factory employing more than 250 women.

Being a woman, this officer would have a privileged entry into the homes, and serve the special needs of women and children. Helping and advising on all questions of health and hygiene, she would be instrumental in bettering the homes, by which eventually the men would be benefitted as well. It is a known fact that both by temperament and nature, women make better welfare workers. In the West their number far exceeds those of the men employed for this purpose.

6. In November 1942, the Calcutta University, jointly with the Indian Jute Mills Association, started Social Welfare Classes. It is a Diploma Course of one year, and is both theoretical and practical. This year, the University has sought the co-operation of industrial concerns, inviting them to send their representatives to avail of this course, women being eligible. It is felt a nursing, midwifery or a teacher's degree would be an asset for this course,

as it would help to make the women better fitted for their welfare work. Thus a new field of work has been opened for our women.

7. One woman has been appointed by the Senate of the Calcutta University to represent women on the Board. Incidentally, she also happens to work for the Indian Jute Mills Association. The problems of labour generally, and women in particular, are studied by her and form part of her duties. Another woman has been specially deputed by the Association for Field Study, and research into the peculiar problems of women labourers in jute mills, restricted for a start solely to Titagur and Kamarhatty area, about 20 miles from Calcutta.

It is gratifying to note the forward step taken by the Association in appointing the first woman Labour Officer in Bengal.

Apart from the above mentioned 2 women, another has been appointed to study labour legislation problems generally by the Bengal Chamber of Commerce.

The Central Government has also appointed a woman to look after the welfare of women labourers in coal mines, and another in their Labour Department.

The Indian Mining Association has very recently appointed a woman Welfare Officer for their coal mines.

8. A new Ordinance providing for the constitution of a Fund for the promotion of welfare of Labour in coal mines, was promulgated in January last. It has been made compulsory for all colliery owners to contribute to the Fund a cess on all coal and soft coke despatched from their collieries in British India for the purpose of promoting the welfare of labour employed in the mining industry. While it is satisfactory to note the various benefits the Ordinance seeks to bring about, it is hoped special attention will be paid to the particular needs of women labour.

After careful perusal of the Ordinance, it is apprehended that the overhead charges mentioned in it, like the salaries of the Inspecting staff, allowances of the Members of the Advisory Board, etc., will be a big drain on the Fund. It is felt these items of expenditure together with all expenses incurred for administration of the Fund, should be borne by the Central Govt. The nett proceeds of the cess should be entirely devoted to actual welfare activities, for the labour concerned. Otherwise, there will be every chance of a substantial portion of it being swallowed up by these expenses, defeating its object. Much forethought will have to be given to this by the Government.

9. It would be well to promulgate another Ordinance to check the flagrant profiteering that is rampant ever since the starting of Defence works in this country. These have involved the employment of a certain class of manual

labour who depend solely on this work which they get through the Contractors. Amongst them there is a considerable number of women and children. The military are known to pay handsomely for the work they order, but it is the Contractor who is profiting largely by this windfall brought about by the war, while those who actually contribute so much to the work itself, are mostly underpaid. Since the little amenities offered by factories cannot be obtainable by this kind of labour, surely the State can help them to secure reasonable wages from these Contractors, who are fattening at their cost.

10. The courageous venture of the Standard Pharmaceutical Works of Calcutta is to be commended greatly. As far as it can be ascertained it is the only factory in Bengal which has had the vision and initiative to employ women workers in both skilled and unskilled labour. They are distributed all over the factory and office as packers, checkers, laboratory and office assistants, etc. In the glass blowing and biological departments they are said to be a particular success. I was told they were superior to the men workers, as they were found to be more conscientious and painstaking. The scheme started in 1942 as an experimental measure. A small number were taken at a time and were carefully trained for 3 months before being allowed to handle their work independently. They came from the backbone of the country, the middle and the lower classes. There were graduates, as well as those who were not even matriculates. Mostly came from sheltered homes that still clung to time worn tradition, and were at first handicapped much by their backgrounds of life. Their ages range from 21 to 32. Many of them are unmarried, but several are married, and a few are widows. They draw the same salary as the men, and work side by side with them. To attract them to this work, which necessitated the casting aside of many a prejudice, they were at the beginning paid at a slightly higher rate than the men. A hostel for these working women appeared to be crying need here. Better housed, and better nourished and consequently in better health, their output of work stands every chance of increasing.

In conclusion, mention must be made of the remarkable couple responsible for opening this new venue of employment for our women. Dr. H. Ghosh the Scientific Director of the Institution together with his gifted wife, has been instrumental in building up this factory which is a purely Indian concern. Within the short span of 10 years, starting with a devoted group of only 14 men, it is at present employing 700 workers out of whom 56 are women. It produces potent serum, vaccines, and other, biologicals besides a large variety of chemotherapeutic and pharmacopical preparations of quality.

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that ever since its inauguration the Standard Pharmaceutical Works, has a woman as its Managing Director. All through its lean years, till now as it stands assured in its success, she has been

at the helm of affairs, guiding things with wisdom and foresight. She happens to be the wife of Dr. H. Ghosh, herself an erstwhile student of the Pasteur Institute of Paris, and incidentally connected for many years with the Calcutta Branch of our Conference, of which she is an active member.

## REPORT ON LEGISLATION AND LEGAL DISABILITIES

Mrs. Kitty Shiva Rao—Member-in-Charge

The report submitted herewith is not really an Annual Report but a report of almost 2½ years since there was no Annual Conference in December 1942. This report therefore covers the period from December 1941 to April 1944.

During the early part of 1942 I was in constant touch with the Hindu Law Committee which drafted two bills, a bill to amend and codify the Hindu Law relating to Intestate Succession and a bill to codify the Hindu Law relating to Marriage. The Bills were published early in June and 150 copies of of both the Bills were sent to the Hon. General Secretary for distribution to the branches and Standing Committee members who were asked for opinions.

The main features of the Succession Bill are :—

- (1) that it embodies a common law of intestate succession for all Hindus in British India ;
- (2) that it removes the sex disqualification ; and
- (3) that it abolishes the Hindu women's " limited estate."

The Marriage Bill seeks to abolish polygamy. Another provision of this Bill validates—though indirectly—inter-caste marriages by providing that, once such marriages have been completed, their legality can no longer be questioned. The Bill does not deal with the question of divorce except in regard to civil marriages. The authors of the Bill have reserved this subject for a future occasion.

The half-yearly meeting of the Standing Committee which met in Abrama on June 7th and 8th, 1942, passed a resolution appreciating the work of the Hindu Law Committee and urging on Government the necessity for the codification of the whole of Hindu Law. The meeting also requested Government to nominate at least one woman to the Central Legislative Assembly for the period of the discussions on the Succession and Marriage Bills provided the nominations were made from a panel of names suggested by the A.I.W.C.

The opinions of the Standing Committee members and branches were received by the Honorary General Secretary and myself by early August 1942. On analysing them we found that all the branches favoured the provisions of the Bills except Bihar. The Government of Bombay had asked for the con-



solidated opinion of the A.I.W.C. not later than August 15th, and the Honorary General Secretary and myself drafted a reply which was sent to the President for approval. This letter was also to have been read at a public meeting due to be held in Bombay under the Presidentship of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu. Unfortunately Mrs. Pandit was in jail before she received the letter, and the public meeting could not be held owing to the then prevailing curfew order in Bombay. We had therefore to send the letter to Government after consulting as many members as we could manage to get hold of, and it was sent under the signature of the Honorary General Secretary ; it supported the main principles of the Bills and strongly urged the completion of the Hindu Code. It also requested Government to nominate at least one woman member from the following panel of names ; Rani Lakshuibai Rajwade, Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru and Mrs. Renuka Ray.

At the beginning of December 1942 some of the Standing Committee members in Delhi including myself went in deputation to the Hon'ble the Law Member and other members of the Viceroy's Executive Council and requested them to introduce the Bills in the Budget Session of the Assembly due to be held from January to April 1943. We got little encouragement however and were told that some of the members were strongly opposed to the Bills and it was not likely that they would be introduced. I reported this fact to the Standing Committee which met in Poona in December 1942 and suggested that a deputation of women might be sent to wait on the members of the Assembly and the members of the Viceroy's Executive Council to request their support for the Bills. The Standing Committee suggested a number of names to form the deputation which later on was further enlarged. The deputation however never had an opportunity to wait on the members of the Assembly or the Viceroy's Executive Council.

In the middle of January 1943 some of us in Delhi went to the Law Member again to find out what the position was, but we could not get a definite reply. It was only at the end of February that he sent for us and informed us that he had decided to introduce the Succession as well as the Marriage Bill, but that he would only move the Succession Bill for Select Committee in that session. We requested him to refer the Marriage Bill as well to Select Committee, but he assured us that there was so much opposition to the latter, that it had no chance at all and that it might even prejudice the passage of the Succession Bill. - At that stage we also reminded him that we wanted a woman to be nominated to the Assembly, but he said he could not promise that.

The Bills were introduced into the Assembly on March 2nd and only after that the Law Member informed me that he would nominate one of our members if a panel of names were sent to him. Rani Rajwade not being able to accept nomination and Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru being in jail a new panel was sent

consisting of Mrs. Renuka Ray, Mrs. Shyam Kumari Nehru and Mrs. Lam. Subsequently Lady Rama Rau's and Mrs. Tambe's names were added, but Government had already decided to nominate Mrs. Renuka Ray.

The branches and Standing Committee Members were requested to wire their support to the Bill to the Law Member in time for the discussion which was tabled for March 24th, 29th and 30th. I believe many messages were received by the Law Member from our members. Mrs. Ray and I did a considerable amount of canvassing amongst the members of the Assembly as soon as the Bills were introduced. To start with most of the members we saw in this connection promised their unqualified support though some of them withdrew from that position later on, on the ground that not enough support had been received from the public specially from Bengal and Bihar.

The general trend of the discussion in the Legislative Assembly showed that the main objections to the Succession Bill were that :—

- (1) that a daughter should not get even half the share of a son, on the ground that property would be disintegrated ; and
- (2) that the widow should not be given an " absolute estate " because if she re-married, the property would go into another family.

Mrs. Ray made an excellent speech, replying to most of the arguments against the Bill, which was very well received by the members of the Assembly as well as by the press. She was also made a member of the Joint Select Committee, which met in May 1943 in Simla for about a month.

The Joint Select Committee submitted their report on the Intestate Succession Bill on November 8th, 1943. Of the 18 members, 16 have annexed minutes of dissent on particular points. As the result of the report, the Bill has been sent out for recirculation.

The most important of the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee was that the Hindu Law Committee be revived so that the other topics of Hindu Law may be codified and a complete picture made available. The Council of State also passed a resolution to that effect.

The main changes made in the Intestate Succession Bill by the Joint Select Committee are :

- (1) *In Clause 5* of the Bill the parents, if dependent upon the intestate owner, and the widowed daughter-in-law have been included amongst the simultaneous heirs, along with the widow, the son and the daughter have been allotted specific shares in the property instead of maintenance.

- (2) *In Clause 13* in the devolution of *Stridhan*, the son and the daughter have been given simultaneous rights, instead of the daughter coming before the son ; similarly, a daughter's son and a daughter's daughter, and a son's son and a son's daughter, and, just as in the father's property, the daughter gets half a share of a son, so in the mother's *Stridhan* the Joint Select Committee give the son half the share of a daughter.
- (3) *In Clause 5* the brother's daughter and the sister's daughter have been included among the heirs immediately after the sister's son.

As a result of the Joint Select Committee's recommendations and insistent public pressure the Hindu Law Committee was re-constituted in January 1944 and held its first session at the end of that month, a year and a half after the publication of the Succession and Marriage Bills. We hope the Committee will draft a comprehensive code dealing with all branches of Hindu Law.

The motion to refer the Marriage Bill to Select Committee was made in the Central Legislative Assembly on March 3rd 1944. Mrs. Renuka Ray replied to a number of arguments forwarded by the Opposition. She challenged the remark that educated women who were in favour of this and other reforms were "unrepresentative" of the big mass of women by pointing out that in a country where literacy was only 8 per cent. only a few men could boast of education. "If women," she said, "had to be denied the right to voice the grievances of their sisters, what right had the members of the Legislature to speak and make laws for the nation as a whole."

The Marriage Bill was referred to a Joint Select Committee without division on April 3rd, 1944.

Members are doubtless aware that the Hindu Law Committee in their report recommended the immediate enactment in the several Provinces of complementary legislation extending the Deshmukh Act to agricultural land. The Standing Committee took up this matter and passed a resolution in the subject. Provincial Governments and States were addressed in due course, and the replies so far received are encouraging. The Assam Legislature is going to discuss the question and may have already done so. Bengal has undertaken to take necessary action as early as possible. The N.W.F. Province has already passed a complementary Governor's Act. Sind has a Bill ready and has probably introduced it already in its Legislative Assembly, as it contemplated doing. Madras has postponed taking action owing to certain technical difficulties ; it is to be hoped that these difficulties will not prove insuperable. The Governor of the Central Provinces and Berar has already made an Act. Mysore has already a comprehensive Regulation and Gwalior has prepared a draft

Bill for the same purpose. It is interesting to note that the Gwalior Bill proposes to give the Hindu widow an absolute estate.

In conclusion I would like to thank the Branch Representatives, Standing Committee Members and the Corresponding Members for the help they have given me throughout and very often at very short notice.

REPORT OF WORK IN THE CENTRAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
MARCH 1943—APRIL 1944

Mrs. Renuka Ray, M.L.A.

I was appointed to the Central Legislative Assembly during the Budget Session of 1943 at the instance of this Conference, A.I.W.C., to represent women, particularly in regard to the Hindu Intestate Succession Bill and the Marriage Bill drawn up by the Rau Committee and introduced by the Law Member during the above session. The Intestate Succession Bill came up on a motion to be referred to a Select Committee of both Houses of the Legislature within a few days of my appointment. The Conference is aware and so it is unnecessary for me to go into the details of the opposition that we have encountered towards this Bill both in the Central Legislative Assembly from some of the Hindu Members and in the country outside. While this motion was under discussion, I had to reply to a number of objections. It was also said by those who, in other respects, have shown no concern for the Congress, that had the Congress members who "represented the majority of elected Hindus" been present, they would have opposed these reforms. I pointed out that the Congress had already given eloquent proof, both in its election manifesto and otherwise by its actions, of its attitude towards women's rights and that it would be willing to go much further than these cautious reforms. Subsequently the Select Committee was appointed and met for a month in Simla in June of last year and I was a member of this Committee and attended throughout. Quite a number of those who accepted membership of this Joint Select Committee did so without subscribing to the main principles of the Bill. Mrs. Prem Chand was also selected from the National Council of Women as an Adviser to this Select Committee, but she was unable to attend the meetings at Simla and only attended the last meeting held in Delhi. We had a very strenuous time in the Select Committee. Evidence was taken on both sides. A deputation of Simla women presented a memorandum outlining our views and were examined by the Committee and they stood this examination very creditably. I should like to acknowledge my thanks to all those branches who sent prompt replies and signatures supporting the Bill and also to Women's Organisations, such as the National Council of Women, the Atma Raksha Samiti and others who sent wires. It enabled me to make an analysis of the membership and strength of different women's organisations supporting the

measure which was presented to the Select Committee and which was subsequently included in its report. It showed that only one women's organisation from Bombay with a small membership had opposed the Bill in its major principles. I shall not go into the details of the changes recommended by the Select Committee as these are incorporated in its report and the Member for Legislation has also referred to them. Suffice it is for me to say that apart from certain minor changes which have made an improvement in the Bill, there were changes in regard to the heirs who come under simultaneous succession. As the members are aware, the daughter-in-law as well as the parents, if indigent, were included amongst these heirs by the Select Committee. This was done by some who genuinely supported the broad principles of the Bill but did not understand the implication that it might mean re-circulation of the whole Bill, particularly if parents were added and was also fully supported by those in opposition with a view to re-circulation. Six members of the Committee including myself signed a note of dissent against re-circulation but as the majority were in favour they had their way. Fortunately we were able to get the Joint Select Committee to strongly recommend the re-appointment of the Rau Committee with a view to wholesale codification. A resolution was also passed unanimously in the Council of State in the November Session endorsing the Select Committee's proposal in this respect. As the Conference is aware, the Law Member has since implemented this recommendation, the Rau Committee has started functioning again, and before long we can hope to have the entire code ready. This will make things much easier and will remove the opposition of a certain section who did not favour the bill as a single measure as its operation in actual fact would be to cover those governed by *Dayabhag* law in entirety while only covering separate property under *Mitakashara*. This has been made one of the grounds for objection against the bill. The bill was subsequently re-circulated in the November Session for a year. Here I think I should mention that in regard to the Hindu Intestate Succession Bill and other social bills of this nature, the Government has expressed the view that this will support them in their final stages only if there is a majority of elected Hindu members in favour.

The Marriage Bill which was also introduced in the Budget Session of last year was not taken up for consideration for a whole year, and was in danger of lapsing altogether. The new Law Member brought it up on a motion to refer it to a Joint Select Committee of both Houses in the last Budget Session. The Bill in itself, as members are aware, is incomplete and only deals with celebration of marriage in regard to sacramental marriages. No provision for separation or dissolution of marriage has been made in regard to such marriages. Secondly, though it makes indirect provisions for inter-caste marriage in certain circumstances, it does not do away with the barriers

of caste as both parties to the marriage must belong to the same caste and separate gotras and pravaras. The only outstanding reform it seeks to inaugurate is the enforcement of monogamy. It will certainly need to be changed somewhat in Select Committee and we can also hope that by that time the Rau Committee will have drawn up the second part of the Marriage Code introducing provisions for dissolution, separation and maintenance rights. I spoke on the above lines and mentioned that we welcomed the measure for reference to Select Committee as the bill is incomplete and needs some changes. On the last day of the debate on the Marriage Bill certain developments took place which have justified the stand taken by me as your representative in the Budget Session of last year.

The contention that the largest group of elected Hindu Members did not support these bills was definitely proved to be untrue. The Congress members attending the Session participated in the business of the assembly in only what they considered to be vital issues. They gave their support to the Bill. Mrs. Subarayan and Mr. Hedge who spoke on their behalf made it clear that they supported these bills as a step in the right direction. Mrs. Subarayan pointed out that the election manifesto of the Congress had included equal rights for man and woman and they stood pledged to it. After these speeches, those in opposition did not even challenge a division and the marriage bill was referred to a Joint Select Committee which is due to meet sometime in June.

There is every chance that the entire Hindu Code will be introduced by the Budget Session of the next year. A great deal of work will have to be done. The opposition are up and doing and are trying hard, and have already succeeded, to some extent, in getting the support of Hindu women who are ignorant or who do not understand the provisions of the Bills by saying that Hindu society is in danger. We shall have to concentrate some of our energies in explaining these Bills and also insist that the Government translate and distribute them in all the Provinces. It will be necessary to see that the reactionary elements and their propaganda are counteracted step by step. As soon as the entire revised Code is ready, I hope all branches will take an active interest in seeing that its purport is explained to the ignorant as well as the semi-educated both men and women.

The work before us is still to be done and I do not know how far we will succeed. All that we can claim so far is that a certain amount of spade work has been done, and we have also been successful in obtaining the reappointment of the Rau Committee. This Conference has always stood for wholesale revision and codification, and during the past year although certain disappointments have faced us, these were probably inevitable under

the circumstances. It may be that as a result of all this, we shall be able to go forward quicker in the future and obtain what we really want.

Apart from these two bills, I have participated in the work of the Legislature in regard to the Delhi University Bill, the Food debate and the adjournment motion which I brought early in the Budget Session 1944, censoring the Government for removing the ban on under-ground work for women in mines. I have taken part on each occasion with the consent and in consonance with the ideals of the A. I. W. C. In regard to the Delhi University Bill, I was appointed on the Select Committee and I think we were able to bring in certain improvements, particularly a more democratic method of appointing the Vice-Chancellor. It was based on a compromise. I tried to establish the principle of election rather than nomination for the two women representatives but did not succeed though I put in a note of dissent and also moved an amendment to this effect when the bill was finally considered in the House.

In the Food debate in the November Session, I brought forward, in particular, the obstacles that voluntary relief organisations suffered in their work in Bengal and cited instances from the experience of the Calcutta Branch relief committee. I am glad to inform the Standing Committee that this did have some effect not only in exposing the procedure but in changing it to some extent.

I received a letter from the General Secretary late in January asking me to bring up the matter of the withdrawal of the ban on under-ground labour for women in mines. It was too late for a resolution and so I brought an adjournment motion. It did not succeed as it was out-voted but it made our attitude very clear and has been commented upon even by the House of Commons. It is yet to be seen whether the pressure of public opinion may succeed but so far there are no signs of it.

Before I conclude, I must acknowledge my deep gratitude to Mrs. Kitty Shivarau, member for Legislation, for all the help and co-operation that I have received from her. I can assure you that without her willing and unceasing help I should have found my task impossible. I should also like to thank the President and the Hon. General Secretary as well as all the Branches for their help. I am fully aware of the confidence you have placed in me as your representative in the Central Legislative Assembly and I assure you that I will endeavour to do my best to deserve it. The task is not easy due to the orthodoxy and ignorance that confronts us but let us hope that we shall achieve success in spite of all drawbacks.

**REPORT OF THE ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S EDUCATION FUND  
ASSOCIATION AND THE LADY IRWIN COLLEGE  
FOR 1942 AND 1943**

Mrs. B. Seva Singh Gill, Honorary Secretary

As no Annual Session of the Conference was held in 1942, the report, which I am presenting to-day on behalf of the Association and the College, covers a period of approximately two years—1942 and 1943.

At the commencement of the period under review, we learnt that the Government of India had sanctioned a non-recurring grant of Rs. 50,000/- for the College, as well as a recurring grant, to enable us to provide for a larger number of students and new courses of studies. A special Expansion Committee was appointed to deal with this and they recommended that

- (a) the teaching accommodation should be doubled and the new hostel should consist of twelve self-contained flats, each to serve as a practising home unit ;
- (b) there should be four grades of courses : a degree course, a teachers' training course, a diploma course and certificate courses in individual subjects, such as needlework and dressmaking, arts and handicrafts, institutional management, business management and interior decoration.

On the completion of our plans and schemes for expansion, we found that we could not obtain some of the materials necessary for the construction of the building and that the prices of others had risen considerably. We, therefore, had regretfully to postpone our proposed development till a more favourable opportunity. We fear that the work cannot be taken in hand till after the war. None-the-less we are glad that the value of our work has been sufficiently recognised by the Government for they agree to new substantial grants, when the war makes such a heavy demand on their finances.

There was, however, one bit of important work which the Association was able to carry out and that was the institution of a provident fund for the staff of the College. Incidentally also we drew up a set of Service Rules and Leave Rules, Financial Rules and Rules for Scholarships.

The College has now completed eleven years of work. It was informally launched on the 14th of November, 1932. Representing, as this report does, the accumulated results of eleven years of endeavour, it might be worthwhile, in the course of its brief survey, not only to take stock of the present position but also to sketch the developments that have taken place.



*The Staff* : When the College was founded, three teachers apart from the Directress, comprised the entire Staff. Now we have eight full time teachers, a hostel superintendent, five part time workers and an honorary Medical Officer. Among our Teachers are three of our former students.

*The Students* : From 13 students in 1932 the figure has risen to 187 and could well have reached 300, if more accommodation, as envisaged in our expansion scheme, had been available. With our present limited space, we are compelled every year to refuse admission to a large number of applicants. Because of the geographical position of Delhi, a good many of our students come from the Punjab, but the other provinces and some of the states are also represented.

*Courses of Studies* : The courses of studies have undergone little modification since their inception. They cover a wide range of subjects, intended in part for the efficient teacher of Domestic Science and in part for use in home and civic life. There is provision for a Home Science Certificate Course, a Home Science Diploma Course, a Teachers' Training Diploma Course and Needlework Certificate Course. The last named was added to the list in September 1941 and is gaining in popularity. The Home Science Certificate Course was introduced in September 1943.

All the Courses lay due emphasis on practical and laboratory work. This side of the training continues to have two important adjuncts, namely, a wide range of hostel duties and a comprehensive programme of domestic work in one of the practising cottages.

*Optional Subjects* : Music, both vocal and instrumental and Indian Dancing have always formed part of our extra-curricular hobbies. Hindustani and Arts and Crafts were later addition, and for some years now Physical Culture has been a popular pastime. Recently Shorthand and Typing began to receive more serious attention.

The main difficulty in promoting this section of our work has been one of finance. Except for a small sum ear-marked for Hindustani and Physical Culture in the College budget, the Teachers engaged for these subjects are paid whatever is realised in fees from the students. Such an arrangement has its inherent defects and prevents a smooth, regular and uninterrupted functioning of the classes.

*Hostel Life* : The opportunities offered by a residential College for interests other than those which are purely academic have been well utilised by the students. The Union, with its committees for literary pursuits, debates, entertainments, games and social service have been active.

In regard to debates, the Union representatives have generally given a good account of themselves. At inter-collegiate debates, one prize or another has usually been secured. Their greatest triumph was at the All-India Inter-College Debate held at the Law Hall during this year, while the College team won the Challenge Trophy, the prize for the best individual speaker and the prize for the best lady speaker.

On the side of entertainment, ample scope has, for some years, been provided by the communal festivals, in the celebration of which all students join together. Dramatic talent, musical ability and culinary skill have had opportunities, thus, to express themselves. During the last two years, the Dramatic Committee of the Union arranged, in addition, for each section of the students to present an original and varied programme of entertainment for the rest of the College, thereby offering new facilities for initiative and self expression.

In the field of sports, the College record has been a steadily improving one. In the Olympic Meet, held in December 1942, our students were several points ahead of other women competitors and secured most of the trophies, including the Challenge Cup for the Best Institution. In the Olympic Meet for 1943, held actually in January 1944, the college representatives secured all the nine challenge trophies offered for the women's section.

The social service activities of the students have been somewhat curtailed. Due to petrol rationing and the difficulties of transport, their work in connection with a neighbouring village had to cease altogether. But they were able to carry on with their literacy, needlework and general educational classes, and go to Najafgarh for their annual training in rural economics.

*Buildings.* Though we have progressed far in regard to buildings since 1932, when we had accommodation for six resident students only, we cannot but feel disappointed that our programme for further extension might have to be held over for some considerable time. At present we have adequate space in a separate College block for the teaching of 150 students, in a hostel block for housing 81 boarders and in two practising cottages for 11 trainees. We have had, for several reasons, to admit more than these convenient numbers.

*Our Graduates.* Over 125 of our students have qualified during the last eleven years as teachers of Domestic Science and most of them have been engaged by schools in different parts of the country. A few months ago, a new avenue of employment, as dietiticians in military hospitals, was thrown open to them.

## FINANCES

At the close of 1942 our capital account stood as follows :—

Building and Endowment Funds of the Lady Irwin College	5,09,935-0-0
(b) All-India Women's Education Fund Association	1,14,202-0-0
	<hr/>
Total	6,24,137-0-0

These figures take no account of the cost or the current value of the College and Hostel buildings, the large grounds, the furniture and the equipment. The buildings alone cost nearly Rs. 3½ lacs.

The income from this capital is not large enough to enable us to meet the net administrative cost of maintaining the College with its Hostel at a high standard of efficiency, nor can the capital amount be utilised for any large scheme of expansion. The need for substantial donations and government grants is obvious, if the Association and College are to continue to serve the country in the cause which they represent.

Before concluding, I would like to say how glad we are that the Standing Committee of the All-India Women's Conference were able to hold their recent session in the College. Our only regret was that we could not extend to their distinguished President, Mrs. Vijaya Lakashmi Pandit and the members, the hospitality that we offered two years ago to the Village Reconstruction Committee.

#### LIAISON GROUP IN GREAT BRITAIN CO-OPERATING WITH THE ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE, 1942 AND 1943

Mrs. Grace Lankester, Liaison Officer.

In giving a report of its work during the past two years, the Liaison Group of British Women's Societies co-operating with the All-India Women's Conference regrets that it will not be delivered in person by one of the representatives whom the Standing Committee so kindly invited to be present at the annual session this year. It wishes to place on record its great appreciation of the invitation extended to two members of the Liaison Group Committee,—Miss Agatha Harrison and Mrs. Lankester, and also to Miss Vera Brittain. They desire that the Conference should know that only the insuperable difficulties of transport prevent any of them from coming to renew our links of friendship and understanding. Nevertheless, those links are now strong enough to stand the test of separation, and the Liaison Group would assure the Conference that their thoughts will bridge the distance during the second week in April, and that they will eagerly look forward to receiving full accounts of your deliberations and decisions.

Here in England the Liaison Group has been persistently striving to get a better understanding and appreciation of the objects and work of the A.I.W.C., although because of the difficult times in which we are living, there is, perhaps, nothing spectacular to report. Its activities have included keeping a watchful eye on all matters affecting your work and making representations to those here in authority at various times.

The Bulletin has continued to be issued, though not as frequently as formerly, owing to the difficulty of communications between here and India. Miss Maitland, who took on the Editorship from Mrs. Lankester, was obliged to retire at the end of 1942, after several years of much appreciated service. Since then Miss Maud Dickinson, a member of the Executive of the Women's International League has become Editor (and Hon. Treasurer) and she hopes that members of the A.I.W.C. and others in India are receiving their Bulletins safely. The last four numbers have been issued respectively in December 1942, May and September 1943 and January 1944. Interest in the Bulletin is steadily maintained and many copies are sold at meetings, and it is satisfactory to report the addition of new subscribers and other readers within the last year, several of them including important individuals and organisations both here and overseas. As regards its contents, priority has, of course, been given to A.I.W.C. news and resolutions, and we were glad to be able to include in the January issue the full account that reached us of the important meeting of the Standing Committee held in November last.

The Liaison Group joined with the Women's Advisory Council on Indian Affairs in giving a reception for Lady Wavell before her departure for India, and is keeping in touch with her by means of the Bulletin.

We, in this country, have been greatly concerned with the tragedy of the famine conditions in various parts of India, and with all the terrible consequences that have followed:—disease, poverty and homelessness. We believe that this tragedy has brought home to many of our country-men and women the needs of India, and they realise as never before how necessary a new outlook is with regard to both the political and economic situation. Our Liaison Group has given its help to the various funds set up in this country and especially to the Famine Relief Committee, which we understand is sending a large part of its funds for the work which the A. I. W. C. is doing among famine orphans and in other directions.

Members of the Liaison Group Committee serve on the Famine Relief Committee and have spoken at meetings for the fund. They have also established cordial relations with the Women's Committee connected with the India League, and representatives attend their conferences. Several members of our Committee also serve on the Executive Committee of the Women's Advisory

Council on Indian Affairs and are able, when need arises, to put the view point of the A.I.W.C.

The co-operation between societies in our Group is being well and happily maintained, and representatives attend committee meetings whenever they are held, and help in various ways to spread knowledge of the women's movement in India among their own members.

Mrs. Corbett Ashby continues to be our valued Chairman, and although she has many and wide interests and responsibilities, and has just been fighting a Parliamentary by-election, she keeps a keen and abiding interest in the work of the A.I.W.C. The Committee is indebted to Miss Solomon, the Vice-Chairman, who has also been acting as Hon. Secretary and to Miss Agatha Harrison who helps us so much through her close contacts with India. It is also especially grateful to Miss Dickinson, for the time and enthusiasm she puts into editing the Bulletin and in treasuring and collecting our funds.

In conclusion, the Liaison Group send their warmest good wishes for a very successful annual session. We realise the immensity of the tasks and the problems that will confront your Conference, but we believe that the vision and zeal of your officers and members will surmount all obstacles and that in the coming years the All-India Women's Conference will play a large part in helping to solve the problems that confront your country. We pray that before the Conference meets again for an annual session, peace may have come to this unhappy war-racked world,—a peace that shall be constructive and vigorous in building up a new civilisation on better foundations than in the past, and we ardently hope to see India bringing her own free, rich contribution to that peace.

#### REPORTS OF THE BRANCHES

The Reports of the Branches of the All-India Women's Conference were then presented. On account of want of time reports of Bengal East, Bengal West, Bombay and Calcutta Branches could only be read.

Before breaking up for an hour's recess, the **President** made an announcement regarding the procedure of electing Vice-Presidents and the Hon. General Secretary. The nomination papers were to be submitted before 4 p.m. that day.

#### RESOLUTIONS

When the session met on Saturday afternoon, at 2-45 p.m., **Shrimati Kamaladevi**, announcing that they would now pass on to resolutions, stated that every resolution would be translated into Hindusthani, Gujarati and Marathi. She said: "I think it will be more convenient if the first six

resolutions (regarding condolences) are taken together because we have to pass the resolutions standing."

**Mrs. Sarojini Naidu:** Madame Chairman, May I add the name of Mr. Ramanand Chatterjee, who has a great name not only in Bengal, but also in other provinces.

**The President:** There is a suggestion that the name of Mr. Ramanand Chatterjee be also added. I have accepted the suggestion and included the name of Shri Ramanand Chatterjee.

### CONDOLENCE RESOLUTIONS

The following resolutions were then moved from the Chair :—

1. This meeting of the All-India Women's Conference records its deep sense of sorrow at the untimely death of Mr. R. S. Pandit and offers its heartfelt condolences to Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit in her sad bereavement.
2. This meeting of the A. I. W. C. puts on record its deep sense of sorrow at the tragic death of Kasturba Gandhi while in detention and expresses its sympathy with Mahatma Gandhi and other members of the family in their sad bereavement.
3. This Conference deeply mourns the death of Begum Azad and conveys its heartfelt sympathy to Moulana Abul Kalam Azad.
4. This Conference mourns the untimely death of Shriman Mahadeo Desai and conveys its sympathy to his family.
5. This Conference places on record its deep sorrow at the death of Shrimati Shyamalabai Belgaumkar, the Branch representative of Karnatak.
6. This Conference is deeply grieved at the death of Mr. V. M. Joshi, Principal of the Women's College of the Indian Women's University at Poona.
7. This Conference is deeply grieved at the death of Shri Ramanand Chatterjee, Editor of *Modern Review* and *Pravasi*, and conveys its sympathy to his family.

Each one of the resolutions was then translated into the vernacular languages and passed unanimously, all the members of the gathering standing.

## SOCIAL SCIENCES

**Miss Gladys Owen:** (U. P. Oudh) then moved the following resolution :—

“ This Conference recommends that the study of social sciences be introduced in all stages of education, with particular emphasis on practical war.

“ Bearing in mind the need for the spread of adult education and literacy and other social service activities this Conference calls upon the higher educational institutions to define a scheme, whereby it will be incumbent on students to serve a period in one of the recognized social activities before they are qualified to receive a certificate, diploma or a degree.”

**Miss Owen** said : “ I have much pleasure in moving these resolutions. Some of you might have studied this question and found the great need for workers in the social field. Many of you have had experience and are well aware of the millions of illiterate people in India. We know how difficult it is to educate adults, and yet we feel the great necessity of it. I do not think that the spread of adult education can be done by just a few individuals, though I believe that individual work also should be done. We want something more than individual work, and practically we have to depend upon the young people who are going through high schools and colleges who should be urged to take up this work for their country.

“ This is a very practical resolution which is before you. This experiment has already been tried in some countries. I am particularly aware how it was done in China a few years ago. That is the only way how learning can be spread in the country. Students passing through high schools and colleges should do a practical piece of work in helping to educate their less fortunate brothers and sisters. It is through no fault of their own that millions of people in the country are unable to read and write. So I have really very much pleasure in moving the resolution, and I hope you will pass it unanimously.”

**Shrimati Kamala Ratnam** (Gwalior) seconded the resolution. She said that social service for the betterment of the community was essential, and the women were fortunate in according their approval of the resolution. It was unfortunate that illiteracy was prevalent in the country on such a vast scale, and adult education was necessary if the country was to progress.

**Begum Anwarullah** (Hyderabad-Deccan) further supported the resolution and spoke in Urdu.

**Shrimati Umabai Kundapur** (Karnatak) also favouring the resolution, gave her experience of the work done in connection with the promotion of adult education at Hubli, which she said, was one of the important centres in Bombay province. The grant they got for the Hubli centre from Government was Rs. 4 per female adult who passed the literacy test. What was being done at Hubli was that young boys and girls were asked to teach their illiterate mothers and sisters, and after the newly made literates were examined, each boy or girl was paid Rs. 2 for his work of teaching. The balance of Rs. 2 was spent in this way : Re. 1 was given for the class teacher ; eight annas to the headmaster of the school, and out of the eight annas remaining, they bought the first primary book for the mother or sister as the case might be. The remaining amount was spent for a post-literacy library. Thus they would see that for the little expenses made they got the best results they could possibly get. Their whole idea was that everybody should be made literate, and the above scheme, in her opinion, was most practicable and least expensive.

**Shrimati Sushila Munshi** (Bombay) " Looking at the results of the University examinations every year, one finds that the education of women has made an appreciable amount of progress during the last quarter of a century. We can see distinctly that the number of girl students that appear for the various examinations increases from year to year. However, in spite of this large number of matriculates and graduates, there is a substantial portion of society which is illiterate to the core, and which keeps down the percentage of literacy which compares most unfavourably with the state of literacy as it obtains in other civilised countries of the world.

" India is principally an agricultural country, and if we want to satisfy her needs, we must turn first to the villages because the village, which forms the normal social unit in all countries, has a special significance as far as the social structure of this country is concerned. It will hardly serve any useful purpose to apportion blame for the pitiable plight in which we find the villages today. The most immediate need therefore seems to me to be the general welfare of the villagers based upon the broad foundations of primary education and social work.

" It is really very satisfactory to see honorary work being done in several spheres of social activities partly out of pure love for bringing about social uplift or out of a generous impulse for humanitarian work. All credit is due to those women workers who render service through institutions meant for the moral and social well being of several groups of society. But at present we are not in a position to supply honorary workers in as large a number as the present needs of villages demand. The work that lies before us is vast and the workers are few. The needs of villages can only be



satisfied by requisitioning the services of a large number of paid workers to supplement the voluntary efforts of the honorary workers of today. But the paid workers can hardly serve any useful purpose unless they have undergone the necessary training based upon a theoretical study of the social sciences.

“ My fundamental idea is that in the present state of our country there is need for opening a large number of training colleges for women where they can receive a sound professional education in the art of teaching, including training in social work, through the medium of the mother tongue. I visualise these collegiate institutions to be the seminaries to provide social workers with opportunities for advanced study and training on a scientific basis.

“ The curricula should be rendered sufficiently comprehensive to embrace the study of social subjects with special reference to social work. The proposed syllabus should also include the knowledge of First Aid and elementary nursing, and of health and of sanitation. I need hardly emphasise the fact that all these subjects should be taught entirely through the medium of the mother tongue, because some existing institutions where such studies are carried on in the English language are very costly and as such are admittedly meant for the very few holding high degrees.

“ If we want to spread primary education throughout the length and breadth of India, to work for village uplift and to lay the foundations of the economic betterment of society, a beginning should be made to open such colleges as I have mentioned above, so that villages may be served by efficient women teachers who would perform the two-fold task of expelling illiteracy from the village and at the same time spread the ideas of public health and sanitation amongst the people.

“ By opening such colleges imparting training in the combined courses of teaching and social work, with special reference to practical training in field work, primary education will receive a fresh impetus ; educated women shall find an opening for employment ; social work will find itself placed in suitable hands ; women shall have better chances of training in public life ; and finally, those who desire will find emancipation from the economic thralldom of men. The work that lies before us is as hard as it is vast, and unless the best amongst us come forward with a zeal to put their shoulders to the wheel, no appreciable progress can be expected within the near future.

“ We cannot expect success in every social endeavour that we undertake, but success or failure is no criterion for those who selflessly pursue the good of mankind ; and I may be permitted to conclude in the inspiring words of the late Mr. Gokhale that where the call of duty is clear, it is better to labour and to fail than not to labour at all.”

The resolution was put to the vote and declared carried unanimously.

#### HINDUSTAN SCOUTS

The following resolution was then moved from the Chair :—

“ This Conference is of the opinion that the Hindusthan Scout Movement should be encouraged and special attempt be made to popularise its women's section.”

The resolution was passed.

#### BARODA MARRIAGE

**Mrs. Venutai Lele** (Maharashtra) moved the following resolution :—

“ This Conference strongly condemns the action of the Maharaja of Baroda in violating the law of monogamy in force in his State and considers his anti-social action as tending to retard the social progress of Hindu society.”

Speaking on the resolution, **Mrs. Lele** said that Baroda was one of the foremost States in the whole of the country and the State had enacted laws bringing about social reform. Among the foremost of those laws were two, namely, the law on monogamy and the law on divorce. By entering into a second marriage under circumstances which could not be justified, the Maharaja had done an act which the Conference should condemn in as strong a language as possible.

The laws on monogamy and divorce were enacted after the present Maharaja came into power, and this should have pleased the late Highness, Sir Sayaji Rao. But when they considered the second marriage, the late Sir Sayaji Rao would have felt ashamed. If they had a Ruler who broke his own laws, she wanted to know whether such a Ruler would lead his State towards progress or degradation. For that reason alone, the second marriage of the Maharaja of Baroda should be condemned.

**Mrs. M. S. H. Jhabvala** (Bombay) seconded the resolution. She said that the action of the Maharaja of Baroda denoted the greatest dishonour and disrespect to the womanhood of India. Woman was equal to man and was known as the better half. Were the better halves to follow the example of their Rulers. In her opinion, the Maharaja had done the greatest wrong, and she expressed the view that society would not make any progress where woman's honour was unprotected.

At this stage, the **President** wanted to know whether the members would like to speak on the resolution. As this matter had been agitating the women of the country for some time now, there was a rush of women to the platform.

**Mrs. Savitribai Oak** (Indore), speaking in Marathi, supported the resolution.

**Shrimati Shantabai Mankeshwar** (C. P. South) moved an amendment seeking to include in the resolution the name of the woman whom the Maharaja had married. Mrs. Mankeshwar said that the woman (Maharaja's second wife) had dishonoured the members of her own sex and had, along with the Maharaja, committed this error. The Maharaja had disobeyed his own law, and the Conference ought to condemn the woman who was rather a party to the violation of the law. By her action, she had offended the high sense and honour of motherhood and wifehood.

**Mrs. Shantabai Bhatwadekar** (C. P. South) seconded the amendment. She said that even if they assumed that a man was willing to a second marriage, he could not do so unless the woman gave her consent. So the action of the woman who consented and thus enabled the Maharaja to marry a second time should also be condemned.

**Shrimati Babiben Mulji** (Bombay) supported the amendment, and said that whoever might have done such a thing deserved condemnation. The woman, by her action, had brought dishonour to her sisters.

**Shrimati Kamala Ratnam** (Gwalior) opposed the amendment. She stated that the basis of the original resolution veered round the legal point, namely, that they were condemning the action of a person who, in this instance, had disobeyed a law for the enactment of which he was responsible. It was therefore out of place to bring in the name of the woman who was not a subject of the State.

**Mrs. Sogra Humayun Mirza** (Hyderabad-Deccan), condemning the action of the Maharaja, made a humorous speech, and advised women not to give their daughters in marriage to persons who had their first wives living, because in such alliances their daughters' lives would never be happy. She gave the example of birds and animals and said that when birds collected together, they established relations, and once a relationship was established, they took care to see that those relations were not violated. She concluded by quoting an Urdu couplet and stating that one husband and one wife are a happy couple.

**Rani Lakshmibai Rajwade** received an ovation when she rose to address the gathering.

She said that the question of the second marriage of the Maharaja of Baroda, during the lifetime of his first Maharani, could not be ignored as an act of individual aberration. It was a matter which concerned society as a whole because of the existence of the law of monogamy in the Baroda state. Such a step taken by a person of lesser social importance would probably

have been ignored by society, but the act of the Maharaja could not be so treated because of the far-reaching repercussions which it was bound to have not only on the subjects of the Baroda state, but the nation as a whole.

Soon after assuming the reigns of office, the present Maharaja of Baroda promulgated the law of monogamy and divorce in his State, which was considered to be the crowning piece of work connected with social reforms initiated by His late Highness Maharaja Sayaji Rao. But within a short period of this praiseworthy act, the present Maharaja has set aside his own legislation for the breach of which many of his subjects were now undergoing various terms of imprisonment. She wanted to know why the ruler was above his own law.

Recently in the Central Legislature an attempt was made to raise the question of the second marriage of the Maharaja of Baroda, but Government did not allow it. There were at present two very important social bills—the Rao Bills—before the Central Legislature and the country. By allowing discussion on the 'Baroda marriage case,' Government would have indicated which way their sympathies lay. As the public at large are apt to be influenced by the attitude of the Government in such matters, a clear indication of the Government's attitude in this particular case would have greatly facilitated the passage of the above two bills through the legislature. But Government have lost the opportunity for reasons best known to themselves.

In the draft resolution placed by the speaker before the Subjects Committee of the A. I. W. C. she had suggested that the Baroda ruler should be asked to abdicate. Such power was vested either in the subjects of the State or the Government of India. In their present condition the people of any state were powerless to enforce their will on the ruler for the breach of any law however serious, and the Government of India had shown their unwillingness to take any steps in the matter. In these circumstances the above suggestion of the speaker—had it been adopted although it had no practical value, would at least have been a strong indication of what the women of this country were thinking about this deplorable act.

**Shrimati Leilamani Naidu** (Hyderabad-Deccan) said she wanted to make certain verbal changes in the resolution. She sought to delete the words "and considers his anti-social action as tending to retard the social progress of Hindu society," and substitute instead the words "and deplors the action as definitely detrimental to the progress of society in India."

Opposing the amendment, **Shrimati Leilamani Naidu** said that by inserting the name of Princess Sita Devi in this resolution, they were going to weaken their common condemnation which at the moment was completely

impersonal. The Maharaja, as the guardian of law and order in a State, had been guilty of a breach of law. She added : " If you now introduce Sita Devi's name, as she has nothing to do with the State rules, you are completely individualising the case which at the moment is universal. I would beg the members to think over the point before introducing the change as is sought for by the amendment."

Proceeding, the speaker said that there were thousands of men and women in India who had committed such errors. She also suggested that the amendment was not in order.

The amendment when put to the vote was declared lost. The verbal changes having been accepted by Mrs. Venutai Lele, the mover, the resolution as verbally changed was adopted as follows :—

" This Conference strongly condemns the action of the Maharaja of Baroda in violating the law of monogamy in force in his State and deplores the action as definitely detrimental to the progress of society in India."

#### SHARIAT BILL

**Miss Khadija Minhaj** moved the following resolution on the Shariat Bill.

" This meeting of the All-India Women's Conference supports the Shariat Bill introduced by Baji Rashida Latiff in the Punjab Legislative Assembly."

Speaking on the resolution, **Miss Minhaj** (Punjab Central) said that so far Muslim women in the Punjab were concerned, in regard to inheritance, they were governed by the Hindu Law. The Shariat Bill sought to alter this so as to make the Muslim Law applicable to women's inheritance. She thought it was a move in the right direction.

**Begum Anwarullah** (Hyderabad-Deccan) seconding the proposal, expressed her pleasure in seeing that women in India were vigilant and alert regarding their own rights. She then explained the principles of Muslim law so far as division of property was concerned, and added that if the Shariat Bill was passed by the Punjab Assembly, daughters would get half the share of the sons.

**Begum Hussain Ali Khan** (Hyderabad-Deccan) supported the resolution.

**Shrimati Rajan Nehru** (Delhi) further supporting the resolution, said that their support was whole-hearted, and she entertained hope that Muslim women would extend the same sympathy in support of causes concerning Hindu women as the latter were now showing to the women of the Punjab.

**Mrs. Yamutai Kirloskar** (Maharashtra) referred to the recommendations of the Rau Committee in regard to the inheritance of Hindu women and said that as they were now seeking to get a share in property according to the proposals now before the Central Assembly, it was only proper that they should support the Punjab Muslim women in their attempt to get a right to inherit property.

**Miss Kapila Khandwala** (Bombay) also spoke in favour of the resolution which was passed unanimously.

### HEALTH INSURANCE

**Rani Lakshmibai Rajwade** then moved the next resolution which was as follows :

“ In view of the extremely inadequate provision which exists for medical aid in India, this Conference urges upon the Government to take effective steps that medical help is made available for every citizen of this country by a scheme of compulsory health insurance.”

Observing that there was utter lack of medical aid in the country, **Rani Lakshmibai**, speaking on the resolution referred to the committee appointed by the Government of India in connection with this question, and said that they were now looking forward to the publication of the committee's report. The health of the people of India as compared to the health of the people of western countries was deplorable. In his latest publication—*ONE WORLD*—**Mr. Wendell Willkie** had said that he found the Asiatic countries which he had recently visited, in various stages of political and economic development. But the one common factor in them all, observed by him was the almost utter lack of a knowledge of hygiene and sanitation. She was sure that if he had visited India he would have found the same state of affairs in this country.

According to the census of 1939, there were 42,000 doctors and 4,500 nurses in India. Considering the population these figures worked out at one doctor for every 9,000 persons and one nurse for every 86,000 persons. The corresponding figures for the United Kingdom were one doctor for every 776 persons and one nurse for every 435 persons. The number of hospitals and dispensaries in British India was 7,300 working out at one hospital or dispensary for every 41,000 people. Adequate provision for maternity needs was almost negligible in this country. In the year 1939 the number of deaths in childbirth amounted to 200,000, and it is considered that 80% of these could have been prevented if adequate maternity services were available. The figures for infant mortality under one year per 1,000 live births were 21.8 in India as compared with 12.2 in the United Kingdom. It is the right of every woman to have skilled attendance during pregnancy and childbirth and it was the duty of the Conference to

bring pressure on the Government to make adequate provision for maternity services at an early date without bringing forward the usual plea of lack of finance. Speaking about the Health Committee appointed by the Government of India Rani Lakshmbai could not express in optimistic terms the way in which the recommendations of that committee would be implemented by Government. In their experience, the Central Government, when dealing with the demand for health and other nation-building activities had always raised the question of finance. But as far as the war and allied matters were concerned they could always find ample money.

In the recent scheme (15 Year Plan) published by Sir Purshottamdas Thakurdas and other industrialists, they had worked out the cost of building and maintaining hospitals and dispensaries both for the urban and rural population of India. The figures have gone into crores, but if there is a real desire to improve the health of the nation, money would always be found. A good beginning might be made by a levy of a universal tax of eight annas or more per head per year towards health insurance. She appealed to the Conference to take a keen interest in the problem of health.

**Miss Khemchand** (Hyderabad, Sind) seconded the resolution. She said that it would be superfluous to add anything to the speech made by Rani Lakshmbai, who had covered the question from every point of view. While seconding the resolution, the speaker wanted the delegates and other women attending the Conference to realise the importance of the question before them and try and do what they could in the interests of their womenfolk. The problem of nurses was a serious one, and it was up to them to see that many of the girls took up nursing and thus gave relief to the ailing.

The resolution was passed.

#### MR. M. C. SETALVAD'S SPEECH ON HINDU LAW

**Shrimati Kamaladevi** introducing **Mr. M. C. Setalvad**, one of the leaders of the Bombay Bar, said that he would speak on some of the legal subjects that were interesting women at the moment.

**Mr. Setalvad:** Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is not by mistake that I have used the word 'Mr.' I have used it because I visualise in this gathering a determined spirit in women to attain equality with men. I think it will be true to say that at no time during recent Indian history has Indian womanhood grown in status as during the last 20 years. For many years social and political conditions in the country led to a gradual decline in the status of women and with everything else the cause of women also suffered. With the spread of liberal education during the last 50 years, men and women both began to visualise the larger aspects of life, and a great

impetus to the growth of women was given by the national movement which spread over the whole country. I think nothing has uplifted women so much as the national movement which so powerfully surged throughout the land.

Ladies and gentlemen, throughout the length and breadth of the land a new spirit seems to be dominating women ; and our women, whether Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, Sikh or Christian, are in the forefront of national leadership. They have a large part in the country's struggle for freedom, and equally prominent has been their role in the realm of literature, art, politics, statecraft and local self-government.

It is natural that in these circumstances women should demand a more liberalised law governing the relationship between man and woman and the rights in women over property. Women's rights from a legal point of view fall mainly under four heads. (1) rights as to inheritance ; (2) rights generally over property ; (3) rights in respect of marriage laws ; and finally (4) the law relating to divorce. I shall deal very briefly with each of these four heads in so far as it may interest you.

First, dealing with the law of inheritance, and remembering that this is a gathering not only of one community but of all communities, I shall refer to one important fact that so far as Muslim and Christian women are concerned their laws have for a long time given women the right to inherit from their parents. The Islamic law ever since its birth has recognised the right of the widow and of the daughter to a share of the inheritance left by man ; and so has the Christian law for a very long time in this country as well as outside. But the position in regard to the Hindu law and, therefore, the position in so far as Hindu women are concerned, has been very different. The cause of this difference lies perhaps in the ancient structure of Hindu society. Hindu society as known to ancient times, was very averse to the division of property whether it be between man and man or between man and woman. We had what are called village communities and later joint families who owned property jointly ; transfer of property, particularly landed property was practically prohibited. Owing partly to this but mainly to the belief that women deserved only to be maintained but not to inherit, women generally were denied a share in the inheritance. No doubt there are in the ancient Smritis some which recognise, for example, a daughter's share. But that was done in exceptional circumstances, for example, when a man died leaving only a daughter and no son, in which case the daughter was given a share in the belief or at any rate under the legal fiction that she was like a son. That is how in some exceptional cases a daughter was given a share. But it would be correct to say that generally speaking a daughter was denied a share though the law made provision for her maintenance, marriage expenses etc.



The fundamental fact, however, remained that a widow after the husband's death and a daughter after father's were denied a share.

Naturally Hindu society, with its growing sense of the rights and the rising responsibilities of women, has raised a protest against the denial of a share to the daughter. With regard to widows social pressure has been even greater and sometime ago legislation was enacted by which certain rights to succeed to the husband's property were given to widows. Nothing has so far been done with regard to giving the daughter a share.

However, many of you are doubtless aware that for sometime past attempts have been made to codify Hindu Law and certain bills have been put forward in the legislature concerning two important subjects. The first relates to the Law of Intestate succession, i.e. the law which lays down how the property of a man who has died without leaving a will is to be divided. In regard to that law the Bill which has been put forward in the Assembly does provide for a share being given to a daughter. The scheme of that Bill is that on a person's death without leaving a will his property should go to the widow, sons, and daughters, all of them taking together. The result, therefore, will be that the daughter will become a sharer with the widow and the son, and the scheme of the Bill is that the daughter should get half the share of the son. That is what the Bill provides and the effect of it will be to put the daughter in very much the same position as a Christian daughter or a Parsi daughter is.

That is a great step forward. What is now needed is that public opinion should be fully educated and made vocal so that the proposed bill may be accepted by the legislature. It was not very long ago that one of these bills came before the legislature and you will remember the vehemence with which the orthodox view was put forward. I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that every possible effort by all women's and other organisations will be needed in order to fully support those who are promoting this legislation and to enable it to be carried through its various stages before it can become law.

There are those who hold a more extreme view, not without justification, in regard to a daughter's share. Their view is that a daughter should have a share equal to that of a son. I have every sympathy for that view but it is always expedient in seeking changes not to ask for too much. Once the principle that a daughter is entitled to a share is adopted, changes may follow later which may satisfy the larger demand I have mentioned. That is one provision in the intended legislation which will, if the bill becomes law, work a very great change in the status of Hindu women in this country.

The same Bill deals with another matter which concerns what I have described as the second head, *viz*, women's right to property. I am sure you are aware that at the moment if a woman inherits something anywhere outside Bombay she gets what is called a woman's estate in it which is very different from a man's estate. If a woman gets property from her husband as heir the law in Bombay and outside says that she cannot deal with it except for certain purposes. Supposing the husband leave a house which she inherits she cannot sell it or convert it into cash except for certain very limited purposes. In Bombay, however, if a husband leaves movable property such as cash, ornaments, and shares, she may deal with it. Outside Bombay the position is that whatever the property left by the husband cannot be dealt with by the wife except for certain purposes, but she can use the income out of it for her maintenance. On her death the property goes to her husband's heirs, mostly, may be, brothers and nephews etc. That has been working a great injustice and hardship to women in general.

The Bombay view in regard to daughters has been for a long time different from the view outside Bombay. Daughters in Bombay when they get the property there being no son get what they inherit from their father "absolutely," *i.e.* that they can do what they like with it. Now the proposal in the Bill which I have mentioned in regard to rights to property is this all property which a woman gets whether from her husband or father, is to be regarded as *Streedhan* *i.e.* a woman's property to which she is absolutely entitled as if she were a male as distinguished from property over which she has a limited right. If this legislation is carried through it will be a very great step forward, because whatever a woman gets by way of inheritance will be her own absolute property. She will be able to deal with it as she likes in her lifetime and she could make will of it or she can do anything she likes with it just as a man could do with his own property. The distinction between absolute rights in men and the limited rights of women was based on the view that woman is not able to take care of her belongings. Now a law based on such a theory cannot absolutely subsist contemporaneously with the existence of women legislators and women corporators, who are able to look after not only their own affairs, but are competently taking part in the management of the affairs of cities, provinces and of the whole country. It is only right that this distinction between women's rights and men's rights over property should now completely disappear. That is an important feature of the Bill which is now awaiting disposal by the legislature.

It is necessary to repeat that it is vital to your interests that you should force public opinion, organise it all over the country and ensure the safe passage of this Bill through the legislature.

The third head is, you will remember, the vexed subject of marriage. Here we enter a very controversial field indeed. The first question which arises in this connection is the question of monogamy. And this is a question which concerns not only Hindu women, but also Muslim women. I am not conscious of any agitation raised among Muslim women against polygamy. A Muslim male can take as many as four wives, and even if he takes a fifth, that marriage is not void though it may be considered irregular. Among Hindus, the present-day position is that there is no limit to the number of wives a man can marry. That certainly is a position which no modern society can tolerate. At any rate, that is the predominating feeling which one sees in cities and larger towns.

But the matter must not be allowed to rest merely with the expression of their feeling by some women or a large number of men in the city. The matter must arouse the feelings of the country as a whole. If monogamy is to be incorporated in Hindu Law it will require in its support a nation-wide appeal from Hindu women all over the country. It may be surprising ; but I have come across Hindu women who have expressed themselves against the abolition of polygamy. It may be that these Hindu women are backward or orthodox in their views ; but one does come across such views not only in elderly women but in some young women too. It is, therefore, up to you to organise, if possible, a complete unanimity in favour of the introduction of monogamy as a cardinal principle of Hindu marriage law. Monogamy and a monogamous marriage are found in most well grown and highly civilised societies. It is undoubtedly time that Hindu society took a step forward and adopted the principle of monogamy in regard to Hindu marriages.

It is a matter of satisfaction that in the Bill now pending before the Assembly it is proposed to enact that Hindu marriage will be monogamous. But the matter rests merely in a proposal which is yet to become the law. You are all aware that cries have been raised against monogamy in the name of the right of Hinduism to exist, to expand and to grow. It has been said that if monogamy is introduced in Hindu society, the population of Hindus will go down and that Hindu society will lose the importance which it enjoys at present. It is said that in the interest of Hinduism as a whole, polygamy should continue to exist. I will not pretend to pronounce an opinion on a subject which only sociologists and economists can investigate and speak with authority. The feeling which one has, however, is that this cry is raised by the orthodox so that under a new pretext they may stop the progress of the society towards monogamy. If that is the true nature of the opposition, we should resist and fight it. Women can attain an honoured position only in a society which sternly sets its face against polygamy.

We next come to the very controversial question whether Hindu Law system should provide for a sacramental marriage only or for both a sacramental and a civil marriage. Civil marriage, as you are aware, is different from a sacramental marriage in this way that its binding nature arises from not religion or *samskar*, but from agreement of parties. It is in the nature of a contractual marriage. In the legislation which has been proposed there are two classes of marriage. One has been described as the sacramental marriage and the other as civil marriage. A sacramental marriage would be performed with certain simple ceremonies in front of the sacred fire, whereas the civil marriage would be performed as under the Special Marriages Act by merely going through certain formalities and signing the register. It is a matter for deep consideration whether one should allow to be introduced in the Hindu Law the form of civil marriage.

It is to be remembered that civil marriages have been taking place among Hindus for about 20 years now. Formerly, if a person was a Hindu, so long as he described himself as a Hindu, he could not contract a civil marriage. Thus a Hindu could not contract a monogamous marriage. Somewhere about 1923, the Special Marriage Act was amended to enable Hindus, Jains and others also to enter into civil marriages which were monogamous marriages. What is now proposed is that freedom to enter into a contract of civil marriage should now be incorporated in Hindu Law and that such a civil marriage should be recognised as one of the forms of Hindu marriage. That is one point of view.

But there is another point of view that has been put forward by certain organisations of women in this country. That point of view holds that in Hindu Law you should not introduce the contract or civil marriage. It is suggested that it should be outside the pale of Hindu Law and that in Hindu Law you should have only the sacramental marriage. The rigour and restriction in sacramental marriages may however be relaxed. It is suggested that it should make it a more liberal form of marriage, still keeping it sacramental, so that it can be entered into between Hindus and Jains and Buddhists or Sikhs *inter se* and thus liberalise the whole system of Hindu marriage. This is undoubtedly a proposal which is in a sense wider and more liberal than the proposal which is now put forward in the Bill before the Assembly. It is wider in as much as it enables Hindus to marry outside their castes, and it is more liberal because it dispenses with certain ceremonies which otherwise are necessary in a Hindu form of marriage. But from another point of view the proposal is less liberal because it prevents the civil marriage being regarded as a form of Hindu marriage. Perhaps this difference is more a matter of detail than a distinction in principle, because both views accept the position that a Hindu may enter into a civil marriage, the only controversy being whether you should call the marriage contracted a Hindu marriage or a civil

marriage outside the Hindu Law. I have no doubt that when the Bill comes back for further debate this question will be dealt with in a spirit of compromise.

I now come to the fourth head, namely divorce. It is a subject closely connected with the third head and is perhaps the most controversial of the subjects agitating Hindu society. The present position is that the rights of divorce in both Hindu and Muslim women are very limited indeed. Muslim women have the right to divorce only in exceptional cases. The Hindu law knows no divorce, although there are a large number of Hindu sects who have introduced divorce by custom and this custom has been recognised by the courts. The matter is very simple among them. It is a matter arranged to the satisfaction of the parties concerned done by their own caste or by their village elders. Among a number of communities it resolves into a matter really of the choice of parties. A husband and wife may disagree and it is open to the wife in such a case to divorce the husband, subject of course to approval by the elders of the community or caste. That system seems to have worked very admirably.

If one discards prejudice and has regard for actual facts of life there is no reason why Hindu Law should not have incorporated into it a system of divorce which enable couples who have tried their best to agree but cannot get along together to dissolve the tie between them. After the application of the Special Marriage Act to the Hindus there have been civil marriages among Hindus carrying with them the right of divorce. The right to divorce in these cases is analogous to the right of divorce among Christians. For 20 years there have taken place among Hindus civil marriages carrying the rights of divorce, and we have large masses of Hindu society who are in favour of divorce. I think that the right of divorce with suitable restrictions should now find a place in the Hindu system of Law.

It is urged that Hindu marriage is sacramental (*Samskar*) and that divorce is fundamentally opposed to sacrament or *Samskar*. That I am not in a position to dispute, but have we not now reached the stage at which Hindu Law as a law should be able to recognise *Samskar* marriages as well as marriages based on a hypothesis other than *Samskar*? The Hindu system of law and philosophy have been for ages very liberal minded and elastic. These have embraced within their fold a number of divergent and inconsistent opinions and beliefs. I think we will be but acting in the true spirit underlying this elastic and wide embracing system of law if we introduce into it marriages of the two types I have mentioned. Far from doing any violence to the true spirit of Hindu Law we shall really be carrying out its true spirit. That seems to me to be the true position in regard to the right of divorce.

There is at the moment no legislation pending with regard to divorce. That will be a matter to be brought forward after the Marriage Bill has been dealt with. I am sure that legislation in this subject will be a very delicate matter and will have to be very carefully handled. If the proposal that divorce should be introduced in the Hindu system evokes strong opposition it may be wiser to be content to make a beginning by introducing only ; and leave the question of divorce for all Hindu marriages to be dealt with in future. Once you have monogamy, divorce is sure to follow quickly because monogamous marriages without divorce in proper cases will be tolerated by no society.

I think I have dealt briefly with all the four heads. It is up to women to organise in the various directions I have mentioned and to create a sound public opinion in order to help forward the legislation which has been and which will be introduced. Man is by nature and instinct conservative and women generally do not want a change so that any proposal for a change is always opposed. And this is truer still when the proposed changes relate to methods which have been in vogue for centuries. Another thing which one may not forget is that law has been made and moulded by man for what he considered the best interest of society. But now woman has come to share in the moulding of the law, and it is up to her to endeavour to so mould and liberalise it as enable woman to take her true place along with man in the building of a well-balanced and truly graceful social structure. Indian nationhood can attain true greatness only when its men and women live and grow under the aegis of such a social structure.

**The President:** We all had the pleasure of listening to the very informative talk and we must be grateful to Mr. Setalvad for having illustrated some of the ticklish yet important points agitating our minds.

#### PROCEEDINGS OF THIRD DAY 9TH APRIL 1944

**The All-India Women's Conference re-assembled at 12-30 p.m. on Sunday, when the President said :**

I wish to say a few words before we start our proceedings. There has been a certain amount of excitement caused by some posters stuck up at the entrance to our Pandal. On these were written names of candidates who were standing for election to certain offices. The posters indicated that the delegates should vote for these people. I wish to say on behalf of all the candidates that we, the Standing Committee, the office and the candidates, none of them is responsible for these posters. I also dissociate the office entirely from this move.

I am not aware, nor are my colleagues aware, who stuck those posters. All that I can say is that it is a very unfortunate thing that has happened. I hope you will appreciate this explanation that I am making that neither the office nor the candidates nor the Standing Committee had a hand in it.

This is an open election. It is open to any delegate to stand for any office and it is perfectly open to delegates to vote for any candidate they choose, for it is an entirely free election. I wish to make this statement of policy of the Conference as President.

There is another charge which has been made for past several days. That is that the Congress and Congress women have been using this organisation for their own purposes as a kind of instrument. As a Congress woman myself I want to deny that charge emphatically on behalf of Congress women.

A Voice : And prove it.

Continuing the President observed : I should like to remind the Conference if its memory is short that Congress women have been in this Conference right from its very inception. It is my pride that the founder and the original workers of this Conference were Congress women and Congress women have contributed much of it. Mrs. Cousins was the original founder and when she was Chairman I worked under her for four years as secretary. I do not think that the charge could have ever been made against this organisation or against the Congress women because it is not still an instrument of the Congress. The fact, on the contrary, that there are so many non-Congress elements here bears testimony to that statement.

We could have made this into an instrument of the Congress if we wanted to, but the Congress is wide enough for us and provides enough scope for carrying on work among all sections including women. I hope and expect that it is the policy of all those who are working in this organisation to keep it a non-party Organisation.

I made that declaration in unequivocal terms in my presidential address. Somebody asked me to prove it. My very existence in this organization is proof.

Mrs. Margaret Cousins is a Congress woman. The long list of illustrious presidents contains a number of Congress women, and that they have not made any attempt to make this Conference a tool of the Congress is borne out by the fact that so many non-Congress women are in it, and also by the fact that we have an imposing list of non-Congress women as Presidents. To those who cannot understand that, I can only say that they have not got ordinary commonsense.

Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, speaking in Hindustani also explained the position of the Conference and emphasised that it was a non-party organisation. The Conference, she said, had always attempted to carry on its work on democratic lines and by the rule of majority. Although the Conference was composed of women belonging to different shades of political opinion care had been taken to see that no split should take place. They must continue to look at all questions from a wide national point of view and with a spirit of democracy.

Mrs. Pandit also made it clear that neither the Standing Committee nor the Office had anything to do with the election posters.

### POST-WAR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Hamiah Sen (Delhi) then moved the following resolution :—

“ This Conference welcomes the report of the Central Advisory Board of Education on Post-war Educational Development as an effort towards universal and compulsory education, and authorises the appointment of a Representative Committee to submit within a specified time, the considered views and recommendations for presentation before the next meeting of the Standing Committee.”

Mrs. Hannah Sen said : I should like to give a few reasons why we are so anxious to take up the study of the report of the Central Advisory Board of Education on Post-war Educational Development and the reasons are to be found in the clauses of the report and in the personnel of the various committees whose views are embodied in the report.

The main clauses of the report provide for (1) universal and free primary education for all boys and girls. (2) nursery schools for smaller children, particularly in areas where housing conditions are unsatisfactory ; (3) secondary or high school education of a varied type for students who show a capacity for benefiting by it ; (4) university education, including post-graduate and research facilities ; (5) technical, commercial and art education ; the location of these will necessarily be determined to a large extent by the requirements of industry and commerce ; (6) adult education, including vocational training, to meet the needs of those who were denied adequate opportunities in their earlier years ; (7) the training of an army of teachers ; (8) an efficient school medical service, which will see that children are made healthy and kept healthy, with arrangements for proper nourishment in the case of ill-fed children. The health policy postulates the provision of ideal school buildings in suitable surroundings, with facilities for games and physical training ; (9) special schools for children suffering from mental or physical handicaps ; (10) recreational facilities of all kinds ; (11) employment



bureaux under the control of the education departments and the adjustment of the outlook of schools to the capacity of the labour market ; and (12) an administrative system which will place the initiative in the hands of those who understand and care about education.

These 12 are the main provisions of the report published by the Central Advisory Board of Education after two years of research, and they envisage a system of national education for India. The research was carried on with the help of various committees, which consisted of officials, educationists and politicians, both men and women. The committees that worked under the aegis of the Central Board of Education were of representative character. Among the women who contributed to the building up of this report were two of our prominent workers, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, a Patron of the Conference, and Mrs. Renuka Ray, a member of the Central Legislative Assembly. So that, when we consider this report, we have to bear in mind that all shades of opinion, including that of the Women's Conference, have played a part in shaping the recommendations, on the basis of which the report has been drafted. I, therefore, propose that the report be taken up for serious study by a representative committee of the Conference, the appointment of which is suggested in the resolution before you.

Mrs. Kulsum Sayani (Bombay) translated the above resolution in Hindustani. She said : I have great pleasure in seconding the resolution just moved by Mrs. Sen. This is the first time in the history of India that a comprehensive scheme of education has been drawn up and placed before the public. We are pleasantly surprised that the Government of India are actually thinking of spending a stupendous sum on that orphan—Indian education. So far our experience has been that money for every other cause but Indian education has always been plentiful. Being interested in Adult Education myself, I am very glad to find that the recommendations of the Central Advisory Board have given adult education a place of primary importance, and the suggestions given by our Member-in-charge of Adult Education, Mrs. Renuka Ray, have been incorporated. The work of liquidating illiteracy should have been undertaken generations ago. However, better late than never. No country can achieve progress or national self-respect until every child and adult in it is at least literate.

Mrs. R. B. Billimoria, supporting the resolution, said : Madam President, Sister Delegates, and friends, Mrs. Sen has placed before you the various clauses of the Report and so I shall only make a few general remarks about the Sargent scheme as a whole. There is no doubt about it that the Sargent scheme has created very great interest in the educational world, particularly as it opens, vast possibilities. The scheme provides, as you all know, a minimum education up to a standard for all boys and

girls and guarantees higher education of various kinds to those who are admitted to college. Even if this part alone of the scheme fructifies it will be no small achievement. The expenditure connected with the scheme is so great that some people have condemned the report on the ground that it talks in terms of astronomical figures. But those who look upon education as a nation-building activity feel that no expenditure, however great, should stand in the way of the education of our children or giving them the minimum laid down in the scheme. Therefore, it is our duty to fight such criticism tooth and nail.

The war has shown us that if money is needed it will be forthcoming. For an activity like education money must be found because no nation can hope to advance if it allows its masses to remain uneducated.

The importance of the Sargent scheme really lies in its comprehensiveness. Every aspect of education from the primary to the University stage has been dealt with. It also lays down the various directions in which education should be given to provide for the various needs of the country.

One great point on which the Sargent scheme lays particular stress is the training of teachers. In our various conferences we have passed resolutions on the importance of the training of teachers and on the conditions of employment and status. The Sargent scheme has laid the greatest emphasis on this most important problem.

It is not necessary for me to take up your time by offering comments or criticism on the various clauses, since all that this resolution asks for is that every aspect of the report should be carefully studied. I am certain you will therefore have no objection to pass this resolution unanimously.

**Shrimati Gangubai Patwardhan** (Baroda) further supported the resolution in a Marathi speech. She said that the report of the Central Advisory Board of Education was a most comprehensive document and each clause of it deserved the most careful study. The object of the resolution was not to accept the recommendations in toto. It merely recommended a thorough study of the report. Education was a field in which women could make an immense contribution and every Branch must therefore study the report and make its views known so that when the time came for implementing the recommendations obtained in the report the women's point of view was not ignored.

The resolution was put to vote and passed unanimously.

## WOMEN IN MINES

Miss Shanta Bhalerao (Maharashtra) then moved the following resolution :—

“ The All-India Women's Conference condemns the action of the Government of India in withdrawing by a notification the prohibition on women to work underground in the coal mines in India, as a retrograde and reprehensible step, infringing a convention of the International Labour Organisation. No circumstances justify the employment of women underground, and hence the Conference urges upon the Government to restore the ban immediately.”

Miss Bhalerao translated the resolution into Marathi also. Proceeding she said : The resolutions demanding the withdrawal of the order removing the ban on the employment of women in coal mines in India have been adopted by most of our branches. We as a Conference were naturally shocked when Government first made the declaration that the ban was going to be lifted, because we were among those who had first demanded that such a ban should be imposed. This Conference sent a committee of investigation to the coal fields at Jharia some years ago before the ban was imposed and the ban came in consequence of the demand made, among others, by the various women's organisations. Why did we demand that ban ? Are we against women being employed ? Certainly not. We want to be employed as teachers, nurses and workers in factories and industrial establishments. But the conditions of women's work in mines are so abominable and horrible that it is against decency to allow women to work in mines.

This is a resolution which is not at all controversial. All through the world, in most civilised countries, there is a ban on women's employment underground. Such a ban was put into operation in England as the result of agitation carried on by social workers one hundred years ago. So for the last 100 years women have not been allowed to work underground in mines in England. The ban was actually introduced in our country some ten years ago and 50,000 women who used to work underground all stopped doing so by 1937. Now the Government by reversing the policy is trying to put back these women underground. Why ? It is because woman's labour is cheaper, and employers find it easier to secure women's labour more cheaply than men's.

When we made these protests, what was the reply of Government ? Government said, that there was a dearth of coal in the country, there was coal famine. Factories and railways had to stop because there was no coal in the country. As you all know, there was a dearth of fuel in our homes and coal could not be had even for domestic consumption. Government said they regretted it very much, but they had to lift the ban because there was no

other way to secure labour. For the word 'labour' we should substitute the word 'cheap labour' in order to realise the meaning. As you all know there is men's labour to be found in ample quantity in our country. The argument that was advanced by Government that women's labour was necessary in order to increase production of coal has no value at all in our country. That is why we protested against it. When there was a storm of protest, not only in our country but also abroad, Government replied with their own propaganda with which we have by now become familiar. Perhaps, you have read the report of the discussions in Parliament, and the replies given by Mr. Amery and Mr. Butler. What did Mr. Amery say? He made a statement which was ridiculous. He said that men in India working in mines worked better because their women worked with them. They were jealous husbands and did not like their women to be left alone at home. This is against decency and most insulting to Indian sentiment. We as the Women's Conference should take up this question of our sisters in the mines and combat this attack on their honour.

Is it really a fact that production will suffer if women are not employed? A prominent member of our Conference, Mrs. Renuka Ray, had brought an adjournment motion in the Assembly on this question, and I will only refer to you one particular point that was brought up at that time. In a speech the Leader of the European Group in the Assembly is reported to have said that owners of coal mines did not produce more coal because if they did so they would have to forgo all profits on account of the Excess Profits Tax. Now that is exactly the reason why coal is not being produced. It is not because men workers are not available there. More coal is not produced because there is no profit for the employers. That was what we were told on the floor of the Legislative Assembly.

But we as women need not enter into arguments here whether or not women should be sent down to the mines. As a conference, we must stress the necessity of proper conditions for women workers in consonance with their dignity as human beings. With all our international sisterhood let us demand here that under no circumstances should women be sent down the mines (cheers). I hope you will pass this resolution without any division and demand the immediate withdrawal of the order removing the ban on employment of women underground (cheers).

**Shrimati Sarala Gupta** (Hyderabad Dn.), seconding the resolution, spoke in Hindi. She said: As a body whose sole function was to protect the interests of women the All-India Women's Conference was most concerned with the order of the Government, withdrawing the ban on employment of women underground. By that Government had broken the International convention to which they were also a party. She described as being lame the excuse given by

Government of shortage of labour and expressed the opinion that if adequate wages were paid male labour could be had in plenty. Side by side with better wages there must also be an improvement in the living conditions of the miners. In conclusion she demanded immediate reimposition of the ban.

**Dr. (Mrs.) Krishnabai Patil** (Baroda) further supporting the resolution said : I have come here to support this resolution, and I will give two or three reasons why women should not be employed underground in mines from the medical point of view. Already the health of women in India generally is poor. The expectation of life in India is very much lower than in western countries and there is a high rate of infant mortality and mortality of women during child-birth. Growing poverty of the people, inadequate housing, insufficiency of clothing, all lower the vitality of the people. The poor man's diet also is unbalanced. This is one aspect which has long been neglected on which much propaganda is needed. These are the conditions of women in India generally, and in the mining districts the situation is much worse. In the circumstances how could women be allowed to work in mines ?

**Mrs. Mankeshwar** (C.P. South) further supporting the resolution in a Marathi speech said that the removal of the ban amounted to nothing less than a well-planned murder of women. It was said that male labour was not available. If Government could get men for the fighting forces why could not they get them for the mines also ?

**Mrs. Ramabai Kotwal** of Dhulia (Maharashtra) also supported the resolution. Speaking in Marathi, she thought that the explanation for the removal of the ban was that higher wages had to be paid to men. It was argued on behalf of Government that men preferred that their womenfolk should work alongside with them. Such an excuse, she felt, could only be given in a subject country. She wondered if the British Government would have dared to give such an excuse in England.

**Mrs. Jyotsna Mehta** (Indore) while further supporting the resolution in a Hindi speech, said she wanted to sound a note of warning. She pointed out that already as a result of the removal of the ban a number of women must have been employed underground in mines. If the ban was re-imposed all at once, all these women would be unemployed, and starvation might result. Arrangements must therefore be made to avoid starvation among these women. She also suggested that representatives of the Conference should be sent to the coal mining districts to inquire into the conditions of women labourers and make arrangements for help, if necessary.

The resolution was put to the vote and carried.

At this stage the session adjourned at 1-50 p.m. for half an hour. Before adjourning the President reminded the delegates that the ballot boxes were open so that none might complain afterwards that they had forgotten to cast their votes. The ballot boxes, she said, would be closed at 4 p.m.

The Conference re-assembled at 2-45 p.m.

### TRAFFIC IN WOMEN AND CHILDREN

**Mrs. S. C. Mukerjee** (Calcutta) moved the following resolution :—

“ The grave economic distress in famine areas has raised a special problem with regard to traffic in women and children. Advantage is being taken of the helplessness of women destitutes, who are being enticed away for immoral purposes. This Conference emphatically condemns such exploitation and urges

- (a) that exemplary punishment be meted out to the culprits by official authorities, and
- (b) that recognised organisations take immediate steps for the protection and rehabilitation of such women, and Government by legislative and executive action safeguard their interests.”

**Mrs. Mukerjee** said : The Conference has for some years now passed resolutions to agitate against traffic in women and children and discussed and carried on propaganda and have succeeded in getting legal measures enacted in all the provinces and states to punish those who are dealing in commercialised vice and also to protect women who are victimised due to economic reasons. The Conference also appointed a member to make a special study of the subject. It is a difficult subject to tackle, but I am glad to report that more and more branches are taking an interest in this question.

Famine conditions have brought the question very much to the forefront again. The menace of commercialised vice has once again raised its head and they are all aware of the terrible plight of women who have been forced to a life of shame on account of economic distress. For that reason, I am sure the resolution will all the more be welcome. In this connection, a report submitted by our Standing Committee at one of our annual sessions gave some practical suggestions as to the nature of work that our branches could do in the matter. Some of the branches, I am glad to say, have been agitating for suitable amendments of the law to make it more effective. The suggestion made by the Standing Committee was that provincial and state governments should form a social questions section with an officer, preferably a woman, to co-ordinate social questions and provide necessary finance. It was also suggested that such social questions sections should direct an intensive campaign

against traffic in women and children; that every branch of the All-India Women's Conference should have in each province trained women welfare workers and also welfare centres and rest houses for stranded women, provincial governments and municipalities being asked to contribute towards their upkeep.

I leave it to the other speakers to tell you what difficulties women are facing in the famine stricken areas.

**Shrimati Chandrakala Sahai** (Gwalior) seconded the resolution, and speaking in Hindustani, said that women had been the worst sufferers in the famine stricken areas. Reduced to a state of helplessness, they were preyed upon by unscrupulous persons who led them astray. She sounded a note of warning that what was happening in Bengal today might easily happen in other parts of the country and stressed the need for taking preventive action. That was why the resolution suggested deterrent punishment to persons engaged in commercialised vice and steps were sought to be taken for the protection of women. It was all the more necessary now that the law dealing with the subject should be strictly enforced and should not remain a dead letter. In connection with the rehabilitation of women, she suggested the opening of industrial training centres and employment bureaux.

**Shrimati Renu Chakravarti** (Bengal), supporting the resolution said :—I rise to support this resolution because I feel that this is one of the most serious problems facing women in this country, and it is therefore in the fitness of things that the A.-I.W.C. should take the initiative in focussing attention and working for the alleviation of this most dire threat to the whole moral and social life of our women.

Leaving aside the legal aspect of the resolution which undoubtedly is necessary, and without which we would be helpless against those sharks of human life who trade on human flesh I should like to focus more on the social and economic aspects of the problem.

There is a growing tendency to believe that the Bengal food crisis is over. Although things may not be as acute as they were last year, we are fast moving towards another cataclysm mightier and more terrible than before. But the famine of last year has already left in its train those innumerable mangled remnants of humanity who have nothing to call their own—neither home, nor sustenance, nor honour.

It is a phenomenon in very many parts of Bengal that large sections of the population are women. Their menfolk have either died, or due to extreme economic distress have abandoned them. Others again have gone away to work and are often unable to support their families. The women and children

are left abandoned, without shelter, without means of subsistence, diseased, emaciated on the point of physical and moral extinction.

Let me give you a typical story—one that could fit in with thousands of others in thousands of villages all over the stricken areas. It is that of a weaver's family in a little East Bengal village in Dacca. I met her on a foot-path in Calcutta. Before the famine they were an honest hardworking family, never prosperous but honest, industrious and making ends meet. As prices began to go up they slowly sold off their few ornaments, then their brass utensils, then their land, and finally their handloom—the implement of livelihood that they had cherished for many generations.

Homeless they took to the road. Her elder daughter had died of cholera. Her husband went in search of food and never returned. Then her only son fell ill. Driven to desperation, she was forced into circumstances which when I saw her had turned her at the age of 26 into a diseased old woman. Even in middle class families these tragic circumstances are not unknown. Just a few miles out of Calcutta in 24-Paraganas, one can find how young helpless girls are often forced into secret shame.

Daily these things are happening. How can we rest a moment whilst such humiliation, such tragedies are shaking to the roots the very foundations of all we have held dear. We must agitate that all those inhuman beings who have sought to make profit out of helpless womanhood must get exemplary punishment.

But side by side with this we must not sit with hands folded whilst economic stress forces them to a life of shame. It is our job to save them from it by doing all we can to reinstate them and make them self-supporting, respectable members of society without any social stain whatsoever.

In Bengal we have not sat quietly. A joint co-ordinated organisation of over 14 men's and women's organisations have come forward under the name of the Nari Seva Sangh with such organisations as the Servants of India Society, the B. P. C. W., Maharashtra Bhagini Samaj, All-Bengal Flood and Famine Relief Society, Ramakrishna Mission, the M.A.R.S. serving on it to set up homes for these helpless women. The homes are of two kinds :—

(a) Residential homes with an industrial department where the shelterless will be provided ;

(b) Non-residential industrial centres where the surrounding village women can come and work.

The attempt of these homes will be to rehabilitate and nurse back to life all those women who have been beaten and battered in the economic struggle



for life and to baffle and provide against those sharks who are ever ready to trade with human misery.

It is our sisters who are suffering the agency of shame. Today it is Bengal, tomorrow it may be your province. Today it may seem far from you, tomorrow you may live to see your neighbour's shame. We from the Women's Conference must do our bit to save our women from their sad plight. Let us save them to save ourselves as well as save the honour of our country.

**Mrs. Yamutai Kirloskar** (Maharashtra) supporting the resolution in a Marathi speech, said that the menace of unscrupulous persons who took advantage of the helplessness of women who found it difficult even to get a morsel of food was on the increase. When the stomach was empty what one was most concerned with was to get food and one resorted to the most desperate measures. There was no love greater than maternal love, but instances were not lacking in Bengal where mothers had parted with their children and sold them for even as little a sum as four annas. The motive for the sale, of course, was not to obtain the four annas, but made in the hope that the child might get food at the hands of the purchaser.

**Mrs. Rebecca Ghosh** (Bengal East) supporting the resolution said : From time immemorial there has been the evil of traffic in women and I am afraid this evil will ever be. Whether in these universal practices, nature is the greater predominate cause or economic distress is a matter for conjecture. But I am now not interested in this traffic in the universal sense. I am now confining myself to Bengal and particularly East Bengal which recently passed through one of the worst famines in Indian history.

The war with all its implications has been only one of the main causes of prostitution and purchase. Prostitution took on many forms. There were the professional procurers who, taking advantage of economic distress bargained with helpless women and girls and in some cases secured them even for four chapatis. This procurement seemed to them an easy way in which to make some sort of livelihood and many were too deep into it when our free kitchens were opened to crawl out of it.

It is useless for me to tell you that disease and physical rampage struck out in horrifying proportions and some places became unsafe from a civic viewpoint. But aside from this dreadful traffic due to this famine, on investigation we found that there were brothels which bought female children from guardians and parents even while the child was too young to know about life itself. It is on this point especially I appeal to the Conference.

In a small area which was investigated, nearly forty brothels bought these children, and more are springing up every day. Ladies, I hope

this Conference demands that stringent legal provisions be enacted for adequate punishment of such persons ; that this Conference demands that destitute homes be established for rehabilitation of female children removed from houses of prostitution ; that this Conference demands that facilities be provided to those fallen women who wish to extricate themselves from their present situation and become useful members of society.

**Mrs. Usha Haldar** (Bengal West) said : Bengal is very grateful to her sister provinces for the response from them to her appeal for aid and relief, but she is more than grateful to Shrimati Vijaya Lakshmi for the love and sympathy she has shown to her unfortunate sisters by coming all the way to Bengal to share personally their sorrows and affliction. To her the call was imperative. - As she has said unless one sees with her own eyes, it is impossible to realise their condition. There were other ladies from Bombay, and Delhi who went to Bengal, and we owe our gratitude to them also. There are so many factors that have left the women of Bengal absolutely homeless and without protection. Most of them have lost everything, and sold everything else they had.

During the Midnapore cyclone, while women had to take to the tops of trees to save their little babies, the menfolk were swept away by the flood while trying to save their old parents and cattle. Then, the war in the Assam borders has taken away the support of the families, leaving their homes unprotected. Thirdly, due to the consequences of famine, it was men who had to leave their homes first in search of food, leaving their womenfolk to live on what they could get. It is impossible to imagine the tragic pain of these separations and the breaking up of homes. I wish to point out particularly that it is the foremost duty of every woman of India today to see that while she is secure in her own home, her sisters do not have to sell their bodies to save their little children and their old parents and fall a prey to the traffickers who are taking advantage of the insecure and helpless condition of these unfortunate and uncared for women.

The resolution was passed unanimously.

#### WOMEN IN LABOUR ORGANISATIONS

**Mrs. Sudha Mazumdar** (Bengal) moved the following resolution :—

“ This meeting of the All-India Women's Conference is of opinion that all efforts should be made to co-operate with other organisations, including Trade Unions, to help women workers to obtain their maternity benefits without fear of dismissal.

It further resolves that the Indian Factories Act may be amended to include the following provisions :

(a) Proper houses, equipped with separate water taps and latrines for women ;

(b) High stools in those departments of factories in which women are made to labour for long hours in a standing position.”

**Mrs. Mazumdar :** Regarding clause (a) most of the labour quarters provided by factories have no separate latrines and bathing taps for women. Labourers of both sexes have to line up for their turn at common latrines and bathing places. There is little chance of this being rectified unless these primary necessities are made a compulsory provision in the Factories Act. One need not elaborate on the importance of the subject. Women, no matter what strata of life they come from, are entitled in all decency to privacy for these purposes.

Regarding clause (b) in some departments of certain factories the work of women labourers involves standing up for long hours. This is injurious to women, particularly harmful to those of child bearing capacities. Medical science has much to say against such practice. This should be investigated and measures taken to make the job fitted to the woman and not the woman to the job.

At present these are the two provisions we want to be provided for women labourers in factories. It should be our endeavour to make every effort to improve the conditions of women labour. The Maternity Benefit Act is in force in many provinces in India, and there is a provision that no notice of dismissal can be given by an employer to a woman within a period of 6 months before her delivery, shall have the effect of depriving her of Maternity Benefit which but for such notice she may have become entitled to under the Act. An employer is also liable to a fine which may extend to 500 rupees for contravention of the Act. This and a few other sections of the Maternity Benefit Act are of help to the woman labourer. But it is difficult for her to seek redress of her wrongs unless she is helped by Trade Unions and other organisations, at the time of her trouble.

**Miss Kamal Wagle (Bombay)** seconded the resolution. In a Marathi speech she said that she was glad that she was given the opportunity of seconding the resolution, because it showed that the Women's Conference did not neglect their sisters of the working classes. She agreed with the previous speaker that the full benefit of the Act did not reach women in factories, and

said that it was necessary to work among the women and see that the advantages of the Act were not denied to them. The sanitary arrangements at the factories and the labour colonies also left much to be desired.

The resolution was put to vote and carried unanimously.

### HINDU LAW

**Mrs. Kitty Shiva Rao** (Delhi) moved the following resolution :

“(a) This Conference welcomes the reappointment of the Hindu Law Committee and hopes that, as soon as the entire Code has been completed, it will be enacted into law. The Conference, however, regrets the exclusion of Diwan Bahadur V. V. Joshi from the Committee, who is a wellknown champion of women's rights.

(b) This Conference notes with satisfaction that the Marriage Bill was referred to a Joint Select Committee without a division. But it feels that there should be some provision for the dissolution of marriages under specific conditions. They, therefore, draw the attention of the Hindu Law Committee to the urgent need of incorporating such provision in the final draft of the Code as a whole.

(c) While reaffirming the claim for equal rights for both men and women, this Conference supports the Intestate Succession Bill as originally introduced in the legislature and deplotes the changes suggested by the Select Committee in regard to the addition of simultaneous heirs, as this has resulted in the dilatory tactics of re-circulating the Bill.”

**Mrs. Shiva Rao** said : I am going to be very brief, because I understand there are many members who want to speak on this resolution. I shall therefore only explain the clauses of the resolution and give you a short review of what has happened, starting with the last clause (c). As you know, the Intestate Succession Bill was referred to the Select Committee in March 1943. The Committee made several changes partly with a view to have the Bill re-circulated in order to delay it. The main changes the Select Committee suggested were : *in clause 5*, the parents, if dependent upon the intestate owner, and the widowed daughter-in-law have been included amongst the simultaneous heirs, along with the widow, the son, and the daughter, and have been allotted specific shares in the property.

This alteration is likely to be objected to, because it may lead to excessive fragmentation of property.

In clause 13, the devolution of *stridhan*, son and daughter have been given simultaneous rights instead of the daughter coming before the son. I

think we should welcome this suggestion, since on principle we stand for equal rights of men and women.

On the whole, however, I feel we should support the Succession Bill as introduced into the Legislative Assembly originally except that we reiterate our demand for equal shares for the son and the daughter in place of the half share for the daughter which the Bill provides for.

(b) With regard to the Marriage Bill, it was introduced along with the Succession Bill in March, 1943, but was not taken up for discussion till April, 1944. Against all expectations, it had a much smoother passage up to the Select Committee stage than the Intestate Bill, which was mainly due to the fact that a large number of elected members including Congress Members were present in the Assembly who naturally supported it as a progressive measure. The Marriage Bill, as you know, stands mainly for monogamy and the framers of the Bill have said that it only deals with the celebration of marriages. It does not deal with dissolution of marriage, maintenance and separation. It, therefore, becomes necessary for us to urge upon the newly reappointed Hindu Law Committee the necessity for making provisions to include these clauses, namely, dissolution of marriage, maintenance and separation into the rest of the Code, which they are framing. We are told that the Hindu Law Committee is working on the completion of the entire Hindu Code and we hope this Code may be published some time during the summer.

The Conference Office will circularise the Code to all the Branch representatives and members of the Select Committee and I appeal to you to take it up in earnest, translate it if necessary and make it known to all women in your area. This is very important work. It is a renewed chance for us to reaffirm our demands and press for equal rights for men and women, dissolution of marriage, and generally a higher social status for women. I do not want to say any more about these Bills and the Code. I only ask you to support the resolution.

**Mrs. J. R. Doctor** (Bombay) seconded the resolution in Gujarati. She emphasised the need for making a provision for dissolution of marriage side by side with the legislation for monogamy. She pointed out the state of the law among the Parsis in regard to marriage, divorce and maintenance. On account of the latter Parsi women did not suffer from the disabilities which Hindu women experienced. She added that although she herself was not a Hindu she supported the resolution because she was aware of the very strong public feeling in favour of monogamy.

**Shrimati Indira Devdhar** (Maharashtra) speaking in Marathi said various branches of the Conference had held so many meetings and discussions that they were all now acquainted with the nature of the reforms suggested.

She said that it was necessary to combat the orthodox section which had launched a campaign against the Bill. This section was not only carrying on a vigorous campaign against the reforms but was collecting signatures on a representation opposing the reforms. She asked the delegates to see that these propagandists did not gain any ground.

The orthodox section, said, "hands off" to Government on the ground that it was a religious matter and as such not one in which Government should interfere. As a matter of fact, however, it was not a religious question at all. It was a question affecting society. The orthodox section argued that the present generation had no right to change what their wise forefathers thought was good for them. The reformists did not lack in their esteem for their forefathers, but, carried to its logical conclusion, the argument of the orthodox section would mean that the people should begin to jump from tree to tree because, according to Darwin's theory, our remote ancestors were apes (laughter).

Mrs. Babiben Moolji (Bombay) speaking on the resolution in Hindi said that she did not want to say anything about the Succession Bill. But she wanted to explain the view point of certain women's organisations in Bombay on the Marriage Bill. These organisations had given their most careful consideration to the Bill. They came to the conclusion that generally speaking it was a good measure, except for certain features. There were two kinds of marriages—sacramental and civil. Many of them considered that civil marriage was no marriage at all, but a kind of business transaction.

She urged that marriages under the proposed legislation should be performed by licensed priests, and that there should be a registration of such marriages.

Mrs. Rameshwari Nehru, speaking in Hindusthani, said that it was a question which had been before them for some years. It was a matter for congratulation that many women were taking interest in this subject and studied it well. She did not think that there was anyone among them who was opposed to it. The Bill would soon be before the Select Committee of the Central Legislature, and she was sure that the women's representative, Mrs. Renuka Ray, would secure in the Select Committee such changes as were considered desirable. She suggested that a copy of the resolution passed by the Conference should be forwarded to the Select Committee members. She appealed to the Conference to pass the resolution unanimously.

Shrimati Thankamma Menon (Cochin), supporting the resolution, said : It is very essential that there should be a provision for the dissolution of marriage, so I strongly support the move to incorporate this provision in the Hindu Law. I find that there is a very great misapprehension among the

Sanatani Hindus that if women are given the right to divorce, they will begin to change their husbands every now and then as they change their sarees. I call the attention of the so called Sanatanis to the women of Kerala, who enjoy better rights than our sisters elsewhere.

Though I represent Cochin State, I am speaking on behalf of those women in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar (i.e. Kerala), who follow the matriarchal system. I am proud to say, we have got full liberty to divorce our husbands and *vice versa*. I would ask the Sanatani Hindus to inquire whether we are abusing the right given to us, whether we divorce our husbands every now and then. Certainly not. On the contrary, I may say that we are more attached to our husbands than any one else. If the provision of dissolution of marriage is incorporated you may rest assured that the husbands would be more careful in their behaviour towards their wives.

In the matter of property also we women of Kerala enjoy our full rights. In many of the ancient and aristocratic families in Kerala the whole property is vested with the seniormost lady, and I am glad to say that she manages the affairs of the family to the entire satisfaction of all the members (both male and female). So, let there be no cause of fear that women will squander away or mismanage property if it is vested in them. With these few words I very strongly support the resolution.

**The President :** I want to remind the delegates that the time for voting is over. The ballot boxes will now be removed and a scrutiny will be started.

**Lady Vidyagauri Nilkanth**, speaking on the resolution in Gujarati, made a spirited reply to those who were lukewarm in their support of the Marriage Bill. She said that she did not understand on what grounds the opposition to monogamy was based. Throughout the Hindu religion monogamy had been practised, and praised and held up as an ideal. What then, she asked, was the objection to its being legalised. She could not understand the mentality of those people who called civil marriage a business transaction while those very same people were guilty of practically selling their children of tender age in the name of marriage. At the present time inter-caste marriages were not recognised in the Hindu Law and one found people even changing their religions in order to get recognition of such marriages. She did not understand why divorce under certain conditions should not be granted. Mr. Setalvad had told them only the day before that once monogamy was introduced divorce was bound to follow. It was wrong to say that either religion or society was in danger as a result of the proposed legislation. It was necessary to remove certain disabilities under which Hindu women laboured and it should be welcomed by all women and women's organisations.

**Shrimati Jyotsna Mehta** (Indore) opposing Mrs. Mulji's statement that all civil marriages were like bargains in the market, said that it was an insult to the parties who were contracting civil marriages, because, bodily bargains were made by prostitutes. The delegates had no right to compare respectable women, who had contracted civil marriages, with prostitutes. On the contrary, she thought, marriages were like bargains among those castes where dowries were compulsory.

**Mrs. Pushpaben Mehta** (Gujarat) supporting the resolution in a Gujarati speech said that the question had been discussed threadbare. The Hindu Law was a man-made law and they had every right to change it. The law that was being put forward was not a new one but a very old law. The change had become necessary in the interests of women themselves and those who opposed it were actuated by re-actionary sentiments. Women had certain rights as human beings and it was one such right that the Bill sought to confirm. She appealed to women to look at the question from that point of view and she felt sure that all opposition to the Bill would disappear. She agreed that the resolution should be carried without further discussion.

The resolution was passed unanimously.

**The President :** I have to make a slight diversion from the proceedings of the Conference. This morning I made a statement with regard to certain unfortunate incidents that had taken place—incidents which were beyond the control of the office-bearers and the office as a whole. That statement I made had been reiterated by my predecessor Mrs. Pandit. There is a resolution that Miss Leilamani Naidu has handed in to me and this resolution seeks to express the very sentiments that we had expressed on behalf of the office and the candidates who were standing for election and on behalf of myself and Mrs. Pandit.

I am not exercising my right as President to rule out this resolution, because I think you understand the implication of such a resolution especially after the statement by two office-bearers. It means that our statements have not been accepted. Therefore, I do not wish to rule it out, but I leave it to the House.

If you wish to have an expression on behalf of the entire Conference it is open to you to do so, the implication being that the statement we had made on behalf of the office and the candidates and on our own behalf has not been accepted. That is questioning the very *bona fides* of this office.

I would ask you, therefore, whether you would like to discuss this resolution.



**A Voice:** Can a resolution which has not been brought up before the Standing Committee be taken up ?

**The President:** I am willing to admit the resolution if the House wants this resolution, because it means that the House has not accepted the statement made by Mrs. Pandit and myself. I have also Mrs. Pandit's authority to associate her in the statement that I am making. You accept the *bona fides* of this office or you do not. In the latter case you take up this resolution, and accept all the implications of it.

**A Voice:** Miss Naidu should have the right to make an explanation. The resolution does not challenge the *bona fides* of the President.

**The President:** This resolution embodies the very thing we had mentioned in our statements. Do you want this resolution or do you not ?

Cries of "no, no."

A delegate sitting on the dais said that the resolution might be read.

**The President** read the resolution as follows : " This Conference records its emphatic protest against the obnoxious practice of canvassing and in view of the President's and ex-President's statements it is hereby declared that such methods are opposed to the principles of the Conference and would not be tolerated either at the Centre or in the local branches."

**The President:** We have already expressed our opinion on this question and we have expressed these very sentiments and I hoped that in expressing those sentiments I could take the liberty of associating the entire Conference with it. In spite of it do you wish to take up this resolution ?

**Miss Naidu:** It does not mean that at all.

**The President:** When I make a statement of policy of the Conference as President I take the liberty to express the opinion not individually but on behalf of the Conference and if you are not satisfied with that statement then you can pass resolutions. If you feel my statement expresses your sentiment then we have dealt with the subject already.

**Miss Naidu:** I seek permission to say only two words in defence of the position. . . .

**The President:** I will not allow any speakers.

**Miss Naidu:** I seek permission to reply.

**The President :** I do not give you permission.

A delegate from the audience speaking in Marathi said that those who could not understand English were confused as to what was happening and would like to have an explanation. (Laughter).

**Miss Naidu :** I crave your indulgence for a single second, as I wish to clear the very misleading interpretation that has been put on this resolution. It is very far from the object of this resolution to imply any censure either on you or on Mrs. Pandit. It is only in whole-hearted support of what the President said this morning, the object being that the statement of Policy will be on record. In other words, the object is only to crystalise and place on record what you so beautifully clarified this morning. (hear, hear). That was the only motive since the President's statement will not be on record.

**Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit** translated the resolution into Hindustani and explained the points of view of the President and Miss Naidu.

**The President :** Does the House want to take up this resolution for discussion ? Those in favour of doing so please raise their hands.

On a show of hands the President observed : I take it that you have accepted the statements which were made before you this morning, by my predecessor and myself. (cheers) I hope you recognise that when you elect a President and the President makes a statement she realises her responsibilities. I was not speaking individually and I made it very clear. Therefore, you either accept my statement as expressing your views or if you don't you can bring a resolution, and I will not rule it out. That is why I placed this resolution before you.

At this stage tea was served to delegates and visitors in their seats, Lady Thackersey being the hostess.

After tea the resolution on Food was taken up for discussion.

#### FOOD RESOLUTION

**Mrs. Renuka Ray** (Béngal) moved the following resolution :—

“ This Conference views with the utmost alarm the food situation in Bengal, Orissa and elsewhere and emphatically condemns the wholly unsatisfactory handling of the situation by the authorities concerned. It firmly believes that continued lack of planning by the Central and Provincial Governments, their failure to prevent inflation and hoarding by large stockists, and to tap India's vast resources, and their inability to secure and distribute stocks are contributory factors.

“ Whilst affirming that the only adequate solution lies in the hands of a representative Government responsible to the people, it is of opinion that the present distress can to some extent be mitigated in co-operation with popular food committees by the following measures :—

- (a) The stoppage of depletion of rural areas to feed cities.
- (b) The feeding of cities directly by Government through imports and surpluses.
- (c) Uniform policy of control and rationing of the necessities of life at prices commensurate with the economic conditions of the people.
- (d) Drastic steps to stop the prevailing wide-spread corruption and unscrupulous handling whether by Government or officials, particularly in rural areas.
- (e) A more developed and practical form of the ‘ Grow More Food ’ campaign, with subsidies to cultivators to grow more food grains in preference to more paying commercial products.
- (f) Arrangements and priority for the supply of adequate milk for children and invalids.
- (g) The prevention of export of food-grains in the period of the food crisis.
- (h) The discontinuation of the denial policy which is prevalent in Bihar and elsewhere.”

**Mrs. Renuka Ray** moving the resolution said—this resolution that is now before the House, is very comprehensive and so I will only deal with the main aspects of the question. I know there are large number of speakers who are anxious to speak on this resolution, many of whom have done work in regard to the food crisis in the affected areas in this country, and I am sure you would like to hear their experience also.

This resolution can be divided into two parts. The first, the long term or the wider aspect, dealing with the root causes which have led to the progressive deterioration of the food situation in a country, which nature has made a land of plenty and of vast natural resources. Shrimati Kamaladevi has referred to this aspect in her presidential address. The second portion deals with the immediate causes and how to counter-act this. These together are the causes which have given rise to the present grave crisis that has overwhelmed Bengal and other devastated areas.

The food problem is one which can ultimately only be solved by State action. No matter what individuals do to alleviate suffering in times of crisis it is the duty of the State to prevent such happenings. From the point of view of a long term economy, every effort has to be made to develop the country

resources on a sound planned basis. The people of a country must be ensured a minimum standard of health, education, and above all such food as will include the essential requisites of a diet that can build up able-bodied citizens. But what is the present position in India? The average wage of the agricultural labourer is between -/2/- and -/4/- annas a day. A large percentage of agricultural holdings is a one acre holding. This is the state of affairs in the 20th century. How can we expect to bring in improved and scientific methods of agriculture to improve the condition of the people? Two centuries ago, agricultural holdings in India, though they were small holdings were not as small as they are today. So while other countries have improved in agricultural methods, India has declined.

What of the health of the population? We find that it has progressively deteriorated and one of the most significant causes is the lack both in the quantity and quality of food. I am going to quote to you a line from a report made by a former Director of Public Health in Bengal. He says "the people of this Province are on a diet that even rats cannot survive for more than few weeks." This was stated in 1934. What could he say now? Again in 1933 Sir John Megaw, Director, Indian Medical Service said "80 millions of people in India are perpetually hungry"—these are official records. And I think you will all agree with me that it is obvious that only a State which has the interests of the country at heart, a State that considers the needs of the people above all else, can cope with the problem that is before us.

But in the meantime, what can we do about it? It is this that the second part of the resolution deals with. You have all read graphic accounts in the Press and heard from individuals who have visited affected areas of what happened in those areas last year and what, I maintain, still continues in Bengal. I have no time to go into a descriptive analysis but only those who have visited these affected areas can have any conception of the desolation that has been wrought.

There are few points in this resolution to which I want particularly to draw your attention. One is the question of inflation. The unchecked inflation in this country is one of the prime factors which has made the food situation so acute. It is true also, that hoarding by large stockists has accentuated the situation. Hoarding and speculation are no special characteristics of the Indian people. In every country there are stockists and hoarders who take advantage of the situation unless the State is competent and able to stop this by firm action. I might mention here that it is wholly false to say that the small-land holder hoarded in Bengal during the acute crisis. Tempted by soaring prices, he sold out and also starved.

I think you must all be aware of the acute milk shortage in this country. The problem of an adequate milk supply for children, nursing mothers and invalids is one which faces us. The milk famine throughout the country is intensified in Eastern Bengal where there is not a drop of milk for those who need it most. The unprecedented slaughter of cattle which has aggravated this problem beyond measure must be stopped. I have no time now to go into the details and leave this for subsequent speakers to elaborate. I must however refer to the fatal effects of the boat denial policy. I have seen for myself that fishermen have suffered terribly on account of it. Some of the wealthy villages of the fisher-folk are today completely desolate. Large numbers died of starvation and those who remain are emaciated and devitalised beyond recognition.

I earnestly appeal to women all over India to think out carefully and do whatever it is humanly possible, for each one of us to do, to help in this matter. Obviously, it is not a problem that women themselves can tackle effectively but this does not bar us from doing all that it is in our power to do. We must prepare, so that we can organize effective relief work when a crisis arises on a wide scale for the sufferers and also organise rehabilitation. We can come forward and help illiterate people in rationed areas. We can compel the notice of the public and the Government to the instances of failure that is constantly taking place in regard to the distribution of food grains and also of milk. We must not forget that what has happened in Bengal and is still happening is likely to become country wide. I am not one of those optimists who proclaim that because Bengal has had a bumper winter crop famine will not re-occur, for obviously, the causes which led to the death by starvation of countless numbers of our people was not due mainly to natural causes. Unless all the factors which contributed towards the last famine are removed what guarantee is there and what cause for optimism is there, I fail to see.

In East Bengal the price of rice is much higher even today than the prices fixed by Government and there is every likelihood that things will worsen. This part of Bengal has been made into a jute growing area. Rice has to be transported there. One of the chief factors responsible for the famine last year was the lack of transport facilities and this state of things still exists.

I have taken more time than I had meant. There are so many aspects of this problem and I hope subsequent speakers will deal with them. I ask you to accept this resolution and in adopting it, I hope that each of us will realise how necessary it is that we should concentrate in the coming months on doing what we can, to alleviate suffering and prevent future disasters.

**Miss Phulrenu Dutt** (Calcutta) seconding the resolution said :—The problem of food in India cannot be solved by the methods so far pursued by the Central and Provincial Governments. In other countries like Britain and

the U.S.A. the food problem has not only been controlled but the level of nutrition has actually been raised during the war by a food policy scientifically formulated and sincerely executed, whereas in Bengal alone according to Government reports 70 lakhs of people died from famine and its aftermath which is more than the number killed in this war in the whole of the British Empire.

Some of the chief features of the food policy in Britain and America are (a) the estimation of the food requirements of the nation based on nutritional considerations ; (b) assessment of the existing food production and the formulation and implementing of a well-planned programme of food production ; (c) rationing of all principal food-stuffs, which started in England and America right at the beginning of the war and in Germany even before the war, taking into consideration the needs of the different groups of the population ; (d) control of supplies which rationing involved ; (e) a vigorous price control which has been rendered effective not simply by Government decrees regarding prices, but by a generous government subsidy to the food producers, which in the case of Britain, has amounted to 102 million pounds in 1942, which included 17 million pounds under the national milk scheme for providing free and cheap milk to several millions of British children. This subsidy is the only effective means of controlling prices right at the source. It helps to distribute the burden over the whole nation and encourages the growers to grow more food. That is one of the reasons why there has been no death from starvation in Britain although her food production relative to the population is less than ours. Profiteering and anti-social hoarding cannot be checked and prices cannot be effectively controlled unless the co-ordinated means I have mentioned are undertaken.

We demand subsidies both in cash and kind to the producers of food and thereby bring down prices within the reach of the lowest income groups; (2) rationed milk with priorities for infants, children, expectant and nursing mothers and the sick. The last step is most urgent and it has been taken in most of the belligerent countries throughout this war. For this reason we should not forget to demand that slaughter of cattle be prohibited so long as scarcity of milch cows and draught cattle prevails and milk used for industrial purposes be prohibited forthwith throughout India. We should also demand the provision of food satisfying accepted nutritional standards for all people without exception. And for that we must have immediate rationing of all important foodstuffs, including cereals, greens, pulses, oils, salt, ginger, eggs, fish, meat, milk and milk products.

Mrs. Ela Sen (Calcutta) supporting the resolution said:—I have nothing to say about the clauses of this resolution except to remark that you are likely to be told by Governments concerned that a start has been made in every direction. But I wish to say that at the moment the authorities concerned are

like the man who believed in fasting for health and started to try it on his dog. He said : " And I was just proving that food is not necessary at all. My dog had just got used to not eating at all when the ungrateful creature went and died." We want rational rationing, rational measures. Even in normal times, Bengal was undernourished and half-starved. Now Bengal has been reduced to beggary, but, my friends, we are not a nation of beggars. We have self-respect still and we are conscious of national dignity and interests. We are an integral part of India. We may not be cut off from our national life and interests as a gangrened limb may be. We know there are many provincial bodies, but only one Indian soul. We, therefore, are determined that Bengal's suffering may not be in vain. Bengal's experience must be a lesson to all India. We have died in our thousands, particularly the silent and illiterate amongst us. This need not have been, but what has been may once again be. We have come, therefore, to say by right of bitter experience that no Government but a representative Government can do their duty by the Indian people.

They say a representative government is not possible. Why not ? Because Indians cannot get together ? You know the joke. When are Indians not Indians ? Only when to outsiders they are Pakistanis and other-stanis. To the outside world we Indians must be just Indians and the only question is a national Indian Government. So long as to outsiders we show an Indian face and carry out an Indian policy at home and abroad, of what concern is it to them if we have differing parties, policies and creeds ? It is the right of man to have and to hold his own opinion and to differ from others. Of course, the opinions must be responsible. Democracy means, this right to one's own opinion and on the playing fields of party politics we shall win our national victories.

Even here, in this Conference, drop the word " woman " and we are as all-India a body as any. For experiment if the power were put into our hands to form a government would it not be national and representative ? In a trice our leaders would be freed, our country mobilised against all comers and our people prepared for the struggle for existence.

I confess I believe that without a representative Government it will be impossible to have truly popular food committees, however much we may labour. I doubt if without a responsible Indian national government, responsible Indian people would dare suggest that we can form popular committees able to function effectively. Relief workers know that sweat and tears and blood that they shed as they toiled because of the red-tape wooden officialdom in power today. The independence of India and the welfare of humanity are

our guiding principles. We wish to put these principles into action. So we affirm the necessity of a representative government and we press for an honest and determined effort by all concerned to implement our suggestions.

**Mrs. S. C. Roy.** (Bengal) said : I rise to support this resolution, fully conscious that this is the most important and central resolution before the Conference. The greatest crisis facing the country at the moment is the food crisis—a result, no doubt, of the political deadlock and the lack of confidence of the people in the government.

You all know the tragic sufferings of Bengal. I want to dispel from your minds the illusion that the famine is over in Bengal. Already the rising price of rice indicates that we are again heading for disaster—a disaster mightier and more shattering in its consequences than we have ever witnessed before. Before it is too late we must all raise our voice unitedly to demand rationing in all towns so that we can share out, however much or little we have, equitably amongst all our people, so that some people do not starve to death whilst others feed themselves to a point of extravagance from the black market. It is no good saying that rationing is what the government wants. It may have very many fine paper plans but the amount of planning, organisation and goodwill required to put rationing into effect is something which Government has not got. It is up to the people to agitate, to put pressure upon Government and to force it to put rationing into effect and to keep an ever watchful eye through representative and powerful non-official food committees and moholla committees to see that no corruption takes place, to put an end to bad, inadequate quantities of rice, to be the watchful custodians of the people. The stronger these committees can be, the more effective will be rationing.

Today you might not be able to have a fully satisfactory solution of the food crisis without a representative government of the people. But our job is to do whatever little we can to mitigate the sufferings of the people, to save from death and dehumanisation the people of the land of Tagore and Desh Bandhu Das.

**Hazra Begum** (U. P. Agra) speaking in Urdu, supported the resolution. She said that while it was true that the only solution to the grave situation which the country was facing was a national government, it would not do for people to give themselves up to despair. They must see that whatever is produced is properly distributed, carry on propaganda against hoarding and induce people to grow more food. These things could be done through popular food committees. The speaker also said that corruption prevalent among government officials also greatly contributed to the hardships of the people. This anti-social practice must be checked.



**Shrimati Narbada Parekh** (Bombay), supporting the resolution, said in her Gujarati speech that the crisis that the country was now facing had no precedent in the history of a country in which 75 per cent. of the people were engaged in agriculture. That her children on whom our social and economic prosperity and political freedom depend, have to take recourse to garbage heaps for food like dogs and cats, was a sad commentary on the way things were managed in this country. Such a state of affairs is only due to our political slavery. It was said that we women were responsible for the present condition of our country. If we unite through the branches of All-India Women's Conference, we can, in no time, be independent and can relieve our brethren from the present food crisis. It was said that food grains were still being exported from the country ; if it was true it was scandalous that the authorities should allow exports, all exports must cease.

**Mrs. Umabai Kundapur** (Karnatak) speaking in Hindi, said that were a number of anomalies in the existing rationing system. While rationing was being introduced in urban areas on the basis of population, areas without that minimum population and the rural areas were being sadly neglected. No provision was made for children under 2 years, except in the case of sugar, as if they could live on just that. There were a number of children who could not be fed on mother's milk except in the first few months after birth. Were they to be starved ? Even it was difficult to get milk for love or money because of the supplies sent to the military and the slaughter of milch cattle. I hope the Conference will pass this resolution unanimously.

**Shrimati Jyotsna Mehta** (Indore) speaking in Hindi, said that she wanted only to draw attention to one aspect of the question of milk supply to which attention had not been previously drawn. That was in regard to the large quantities of milk which went in the manufacture of sweets. In her opinion a ban should be imposed on the manufacture and sale of sweets made of milk.

**The President** stated that other delegates, who had given intimation of their intention to speak on the resolution, had decided not to speak in view of the necessity of economising time. She, therefore, put the resolution to vote, and it was passed unanimously.

**The President** then called upon **Mr. J. J. Anjaria** to address the meeting.

#### THE FOOD PROBLEM AND INFLATION

**Professor Anjaria** said that war economy implied that you must produce as much as you could from all the resources at your command, and, secondly, that you must retrench consumption so as to release resources for war needs. In a country like India, the scope for the former was very great, as our

resources had not yet been fully utilised ; in this sense we had a larger war potential than some of the industrially advanced countries of the west. But the scope for restricting or reducing consumption was very small as we had been living on the margin for several decades. And, yet, the economic policy in this country had gone just the other way about. Production had increased but slightly, whereas consumption had been curtailed severely. This was a sad contrast with the policy in other countries, such as England, where the State took good care to see that the war effort did not mean such a reduction in the standard of life as to impair the health, vitality and efficiency of the people.

The method of inflation adopted by Government in order to finance the war was calculated to throw the burden of the war effort on the poorer classes ; it made the rich richer and the poor poorer. That a large proportion of the destitutes in Calcutta comprised the landless labourers showed how the food problem and inflation were linked with one another. So long as the method of inflation was continued, it would be always difficult to work any Price Control scheme successfully, and it might happen that even at these controlled prices, people whose incomes had not risen sufficiently with the rise in prices would find themselves unable to purchase their food requirements.

Reviewing the food situation and the food policy of the Central and Provincial Governments, the speaker said that the position was on the whole far from reassuring, and Mr. Amery himself had admitted as much. A policy of favouring urban areas at the expense of or to the neglect of rural areas was fraught with grave danger, and the speaker was afraid that some of the measures of procurement on a compulsory levy basis were liable to deprive the farmer of his foodgrains and compel him to buy a part of his requirements from the black market.

A satisfactory solution of the problem would be complete control by Government of all production and distribution and a scheme of universal rationing. This was administratively impossible, for ours was a Law and Order administration not suited to such tasks. Apart from the real difficulties due to shortage, there were at present difficulties due to the wide prevalence of corruption.

Concluding, Professor Anjaria said that we shall have to pay the price for the Government of India's lack of foresight in the matter of food supplies and management ; it was difficult at this stage to evolve a completely satisfactory scheme. Given, however, alertness and sympathy on the part of the authorities concerned, and a real co-operation between them and the people, it would yet be possible to save the country from widespread suffering and disaster. The food problem as well as the problem of inflation could be solved

only if the people were actively behind the Government. The new policy should aim at larger imports, more production and equitable distribution of supplies thus obtained, the full implications of which, the speaker pointed out, were really far-reaching. In the last analysis, the question was bound up with the major political issue before the country.

**The President:** I should like to thank Professor Anjaria for having spread the time to give us a talk.

I will now call upon Mrs. Billimoria to submit the annual accounts of the Conference.

Mrs. R. B. Billimoria presented the accounts which were adopted on the motion of Mrs. Rajan Nehru, and seconded by Mrs. Kulsum Sayani.

**The President:** We will now adjourn for a pleasant function, that is the presentation of an address to Shrimati Sarojini Naidu. This address is being presented on behalf of the All-India Women's Conference and the Reception Committee of the Conference. I shall now read the address. But before I do so we will have a welcome song.

After the welcome songs had been sung, The President read the following address in Hindi :

### श्रीमती सरोजिनी नायडू

पूजनीय बहिन ।

ये हमारी खुशकिसमती है कि आज हमने आपके दर्शन पाये । पिछले डेढ़ साल में जो आपने तकलीफें उठायीं और जिनकी वजहसे आपकी सेहत पर इतना खराब असर पडा उसके समाचार से हमारे दिल परेशान थे, इस वजहसे आज हमारी खुशी और भी दुबाला है ।

आपने देश की सेवा जिन्दगी के इतने जियादा हलकों में की है कि उनका वर्णन करना हमारे लिए नामुमकिन है । साहित्यरत्नों में तो आपका शुमार था ही लेकिन आपने देशकी सियासी जिन्दगी में हिस्सा लेकर अपनी बहिनों को यह अनमोल सबक सिखाया कि औरतें भी पुरुषों के साथ बराबरी के बोझे उठा सकती हैं । उसकी सब में बडी मिसाल वो थी जब आपको काँग्रेस की सदारत पर बिठाकर हमारे भाईयोंने स्त्री पुरुष की बराबरी के उसूल को देश के सामने प्रत्यक्ष रूप में रखा । आपने सियासी जीवन के भ्रमर से अलग रहकर उन ऊँचे उसूलों पर निगाह रखी जिसकी वजहसे आपका सियासी काम भी हमारे सामने एक आदर्श बन गया ।

आप की शखसियतने हिन्दू और मुसलिम दोनों ही को एकता की तरफ खींचा और आपने देश के स्त्री और पुरुषों के सामने वह आदर्श रखा जिसके लिये हर देश निवासी के दिल में जगह होनी चाहिये ।

ये सब कठिन काम करते हुवे भी आप औरतों के खास सवालों को नहीं भूलीं, और न सिर्फ हिन्दुस्तान बल्के परदेशों में भी हमारी प्रतिनिधी बनकर हमारी दिक्कतों को दुनिया के सामने रक्खा ।

परमात्मा से हमारी हार्दिक प्रार्थना है कि आपको खुशिके साथ हमारे सर पर सलामत रखे और हमको ये ताकत दे कि आपके दिखाए हुए मार्ग पर चल सकें ।

आपकी,

अखिल भारत महिला परिषद् की बहिनें

बम्बई, ९ एप्रिल, १९४४.

*The English translation of the above*

“It is our good fortune to be able to have your darshan today. We were very much perturbed by the news of your ill-health as a result of the sufferings you have undergone during the last one and a half years. Your presence here today has given us all greater pleasure on that account.

It is impossible for us to describe your services to the country, which extend to a period of long years in your life and which cover wide fields. You have taken your place among the greatest of literateurs but the part you have played in the political life of the country has been an invaluable lesson and an example to the women of India that they can have the national burden on an equal footing with men. The greatest example of this was your election to the presidentship of the Congress by which the principle of equality of women with men was given a practical expression.

You have always remained detached from the excitement and uncertainties of political life and at the same time you have emphasised the highest principles. For this reason your political work has become an ideal for us.

In your private life you have drawn Hindus and Muslims towards unity and you have placed before the men and women of this country the ideal of Unity.

Despite your preoccupation in all these activities you have not forgotten the study of problems affecting women. You have agitated for women not only in India but also in other countries as a representative of India.

We sincerely pray to God to give you a long and happy life and that we may follow the path you have shown.”

Lady Thackersey speaking next in Hindi referred to the high place Mrs. Naidu held in the field of literature and the great efforts she had made in leading the country towards freedom. She had not only raised the status of Indian women but by her speeches and writings given expression to the yearnings and aspirations of the people.



**Shrimati SAROJINI NAIDU, Patron, A.-I. W. C.**

**Mrs. Rameshwari Nehru:** I have been asked to say a few words in praise of Mrs. Naidu, but doing so would be like holding a candle to the sun. There is, however, one thing which I must tell the audience and that is that 35 years ago when I was still young I attended a meeting addressed by Shri-mati Sarojini Naidu. I can hardly describe to you the thrill that speech gave me. That speech has left a lasting impression on my mind and given me inspiration. I feel as if that great speech still rings in my ears. When it is realised that I am only one of the millions of women in India who have received their inspiration from her it will be recognised how great her services to the country are. May God give her long life, and spare her long to guide us in the path to freedom.

**Begum Humayoon Mirza** speaking in Urdu said that as delegate from Hyderabad she felt truly proud on the occasion, because Mrs. Naidu also belonged to Hyderabad. She described the natural beauties of Hyderabad and said that it was from that place that this "bul-bul" had flown out to the wider world to sing praise of the country and to increase its prestige. On this occasion they should not omit to pay a tribute to Dr. Naidu, without whose co-operation, Mrs. Naidu's debut in public life would not have been possible. When Mrs. Naidu was away he looked after the home and four children (laughter).

**Mrs. S. C. Mukerjee** said : So many speakers have expressed feelingly what I myself feel about Mrs. Naidu. I have been asked to say a few words by Mrs. Pandit. I feel it a proud privilege to have this opportunity of paying a tribute to Mrs. Naidu on behalf of the Conference. The occasion on which we are meeting today is one which gives us pleasure and gratification that we are honouring one who has endeared herself to us in more ways than we can enumerate. It is also a unique occasion. As Indians we are proud that she is one of us ; as women we are prouder still that she is not only an Indian but a woman of genius, ability and courage, one of the greatest living personalities of our age, over-riding all national borders. She has the simplicity and charm of the truly great. She wins hearts by her truly human qualities. Her total disregard and forgetfulness of her own condition make young and old alike happy in her company. Her wit is proverbial. To describe all that we feel about her is difficult. She has given us guidance in all our work and activities. It is a matter of sorrow to us that she has to be silent today on account of the ban imposed on her by Government. She has been with us throughout the session as on previous occasions and she has always spared time to help us. We look forward to the day when destiny of our country will be in our own hands.

**Mrs. Indira Devdhar** speaking in Marathi said that it was a Red Letter Day for the Women's Conference, for by honouring such a great personality

they were honouring themselves. She referred to the fact that Mrs. Naidu was the only woman president of the Indian National Congress. It was a pity that a woman of her attainments and eminence should be gagged.

Mrs. Naidu was garlanded by the President who also presented the address which was enclosed in a silver frame. Nearly a hundred women's organisations in Bombay and outside sent garlands through their representatives who garlanded Mrs. Naidu, as their names were called out by Mrs. Jaishree Raiji.

The President announced that along with the address a sari and a purse of Rs. 1,561 had been presented to Mrs. Naidu. It was more in the nature of a token than its worth in money.

**The President** continuing said : Now that this pleasant function is over, I find that it is impossible to carry on and finish the session today. We have already encroached upon the hospitality of very hospitable Bombay. Bombay has most generously extended the hospitality by one more day so that we can have our session without having to rush through. So we shall meet here tomorrow at 9 a.m. and conclude the session by 11.

**The President** then announced the result of the election which was as follows :—

Vice-Presidents : Lady Rama Rau, Lady Premleela Thackersey, Mrs. Hannah Sen, Mrs. Hansa Mehta, Mrs. S. C. Mukerjee and Mrs. Husain Ali Khan.

Hon. General Secretary : Mrs. Kulsum Sayani.

Honorary Organising Secretary : Miss Mridula Sarabhai.

Honorary Treasurer : Dr. (Mrs.) Malinibai Sukthankar.

The Conference then adjourned for the day.

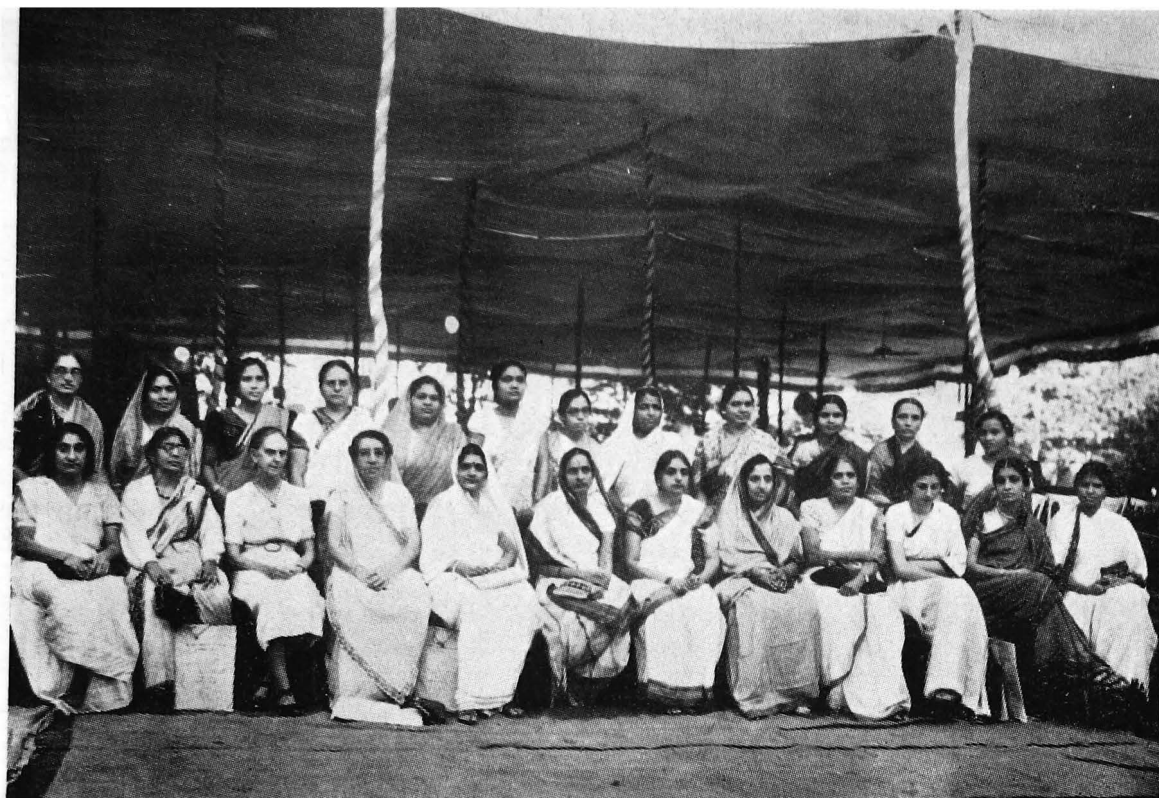
The Conference re-assembled on Monday at 9-20 a.m.

#### CIVIL LIBERTIES

Mrs. Hansa Mehta moved the following resolution :—

This Conference reiterates the resolution on Civil Liberties passed at the 16th Session of the All-India Women's Conference at Cocanada, and records its emphatic protest against the continued attempt to curtail the fundamental rights of the Indian people, in particular those of personal security and free speech. The Conference demands :

- (a) the immediate and unconditional release of all citizens who have been detained in jail without charge or trial, and
- (b) the cancellation of the arbitrary and high-handed order on Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and others forbidding them to make any public speech or statement.



Members of the Standing Committee of the A.-I. W. C., 1942-43.



Mrs. Hansa Mehta said : I shall not waste your time by reading the resolution that was passed at Cocanada. Many things have happened since that resolution was passed. Thousands of our countrymen and women have been locked up in jail without trial now for over a year and a half, the press has been gagged and there is no freedom of speech. You must have noticed yesterday that Mrs. Naidu could not reply to the address given to her though she was bursting to give a reply.

The Four Freedom of which President Roosevelt has told the United Nations are fighting for do not exist in this country. Our civil liberties have been largely curtailed and in some cases have been totally destroyed. I am not going to give you instances. Those of you who read papers are aware of them.

It may be urged that such emergency powers exist in other countries during times of crisis. I grant that. But there are measures and measures. In England also there is the "Emergency Powers Act." We are told that the Defence of India Act is based on the Defence of the Realm Act of England, but I am going to show you in short the difference between the two Acts and you will be in a position to judge for yourself how things are in this country.

In England, regulations under the Emergency Powers Act are made by His Majesty the King by an order in Council. This order has to be placed, within a short period of its promulgation, before Parliament and any member of either House can ask for its annulment. In India rules under the Defence of India Act are made by the Governor-General-in-Council. They are promulgated as Ordinances and the Legislatures have no voice in the matter. They cannot annul them. They cannot alter them. Then again, in England if a person is detained he can object to his detention and his objections are examined and considered by an advisory committee who can recommend the release of the person. The Secretary of State is not bound to accept the recommendation but whenever he does not do so, he has to explain his reasons to the Parliament.

In India there is no advisory committee. The executive has wide powers to detain any one, even if objections are raised. There is no advisory committee to consider these objections. I think some of the members of the Council of State, I know Pandit Kunzru for one, asked for the establishment of such an Advisory Committee, but the suggestion was not accepted by the Central Government.

Again, in England, under the Emergency Powers Act, very few persons have been detained and most of those who are under detention are of hostile origin and aliens from whom danger can be expected. But in India thousands of our own countrymen have been detained under the Act, India has to be

defended not against aliens but against Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Can anything be more absurd than that ?

One could describe the Defence of India Act not as the Defence of India Act but the Defence of the British Government in India Act. That would be a more true description of the Defence of India Act.

In the circumstances, this Conference ought to demand that the emergency powers be used in the defence of the freedom of this country and demand the release of all our countrymen who are in jail without trial, and ask that they may be immediately released or brought to trial before an impartial tribunal. We should also demand the restoration of freedom of speech to Shrimati Sarojini Naidu and several others who have been deprived of freedom of speech. I hope the House will unanimously pass the resolution. (Applause).

**Shrimati Lakshmi N. Menon** (Lucknow) in seconding the resolution said: I wish to draw your attention to the fact that not only are civil liberties in danger in India and the world at large but also in this very organisation which is going to support this resolution. Yesterday we saw how an attempt, however ineffective, was made to deny the right of freedom of speech to one of our members. When we support resolutions of this kind we must bear in mind the vast implications of the right of freedom of speech and the right of freedom of discussion. It is no good passing resolutions unless we are prepared to have them applied to ourselves.

In history we read of the long struggle and sacrifices made by men and women for hundreds of years for the recognition of this elementary inalienable right of human liberty, the liberty to express oneself freely and the recognition by Government of the freedom of dissent. How many revolutions have failed because they have by denying to others the rights they demand wrecked themselves on the very rocks which they tried to avoid ? We fight for freedom, we organise ourselves into revolutionary parties, but when we find that our regime has been attacked by those who differ from us we deny them the very rights for which we have fought. That is what happened in France and Russia. Suppression is easy and when you have power it is very much easier to suppress opposition. This Conference or any other organisation which believes in civil liberties must begin by guaranteeing these at least to its members and I would like to point out this that when we pass resolutions of this kind it is our duty and responsibility to realise that those priceless treasures which have been handed to us by generations of men and women should be preserved intact. If today we regard democracy as the best form of Government, notwithstanding its delays and ineffectiveness, if today we regard democracy as the best form of Government notwithstanding the high mechanical efficiency of dictatorships, whether Fascist, Communist or Bureaucratic,

it is then because democracy at least attempts to guarantee civil liberties. I hope members of this Conference will realise the consequences of the suppression of these rights, and support the resolution wholeheartedly.

Miss Shanta Bhalerao (Maharashtra) speaking in Marathi said that the resolution was one of the most important before the Conference. It was a pity that men like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, himself the President of the Civil Liberties Union should be a victim of the policy of denial of these elementary human rights. It was argued on behalf of Government that restrictions similar to those imposed in India were also in force in England, but as has been pointed out there was a vast difference between the two. So sweeping was the character of the regulations in this country that even a harmless organisation like the Maharashtra Mahila Mandal.—Branch of the A.-I.W.C.—was prevented from holding its annual conference the previous year. The suppression of fundamental liberties had cast a gloom over the entire country and it was therefore, necessary to re-emphasise the resolution passed at Cocanada and to see that these restrictions were removed.

The second clause of the resolution referred to the ban on Mrs. Naidu and other leaders. It was a most unfair order.

Miss Khemchand (Hyderabad Sind) said : Everything has been explained to you by the mover of the resolution. Being one of those who has suffered and who has experienced jail life and knows what it means to lose civil liberty, she has given a thorough analysis. I think therefore it is not necessary for me to expatiate further on the resolution. I will, however, say this that in my own province of Sind as well as in other provinces even people who had nothing to do with the August 1942 resolution and who either on account of their health or for other reasons had practically left the Congress were arrested and detained without trial. Mr. Jairamdas Daulatram who had for some time not taken an active part in politics on account of ill-health and who had left his sick bed to engage himself in flood relief work in Sind was taken to jail and it was only after nearly two years that an absurd and untrue charge sheet was framed against him. These are the atrocities of the Defence of India Act carried out in the various provinces under instructions from the Central Government. We have seen in other countries that the suppression of these liberties ultimately leads to dictatorship. It is a human instinct that when one gets power one tries to become dictatorial. Such tendencies must be checked. With all the force at my command, I call upon every member of the Conference help to bring public opinion to bear upon Government to remove these restrictions and to release our imprisoned leaders. It is a shame that Rajkumari Amrit Kaur who is a pillar of this Conference is now interned in her own home in Simla and cannot attend this session. Another victim of

the restriction of freedom of speech is our friend Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru. She had been doing important uplift and social work and all that work now has to suffer because of the ban. Our great leader beloved of the whole country is today in prison without trial.

Miss Khemchand concluded by pointing out how absurd this position was after President Roosevelt's declaration of the Four Freedoms.

Mrs. A. S. R. Chari (Bombay) said : This is a simple but very vital resolution. I shall only remind you of what happened last evening. Our great leader Mrs. Sarojini Naidu stood there literally struggling under the load of garlands that we gave her as a token of our love and loyalty. What did you, I and all of us feel ? All of us longed to hear Sarojini Devi speak. We hoped that somehow she might be able to give us a few words of guidance, which would inspire us to face tremendous difficulties that face us.

That she should be allowed to speak is the demand that is made in the resolution clause (b). But this is not all. Sarojini Devi's case is only the acute expression of the general paralysis of life that has been brought about in the country. Under the guise of war emergency and the defence of India, several thousand citizens, great leaders and small, have been locked inside prisons.

What is their crime ? Nothing. Government have no charges against them except imaginary fears and vague suspicions. It dare not put them up for trial. We remember that at Cocanada we protested against the attacks on the fundamental liberties of the people under the plea of the defence of India.

Once again, we record our protest, but under difficult and different conditions. Inside Bengal fifty lakhs have died for want of food, and many more are dying for want of medicine and adequate relief. Famine is raging in many more provinces and there is a danger of its spreading all over the country. In the country utter despair reigns, a spirit of helplessness, because the leaders whose guidance, advice and direction we want now more than at any other time in history are still detained.

We all know how the very presence of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu among us gave us strength that we sorely needed, filled us with a faith in our future and gave a certain strength to our spirit. Imagine then how very different the spirit of the people will be if all those who are at present detained are released. If Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal and others were back again with us, no difficulties could be insurmountable, no hardships too difficult.

We must also remember that we are not the only ones to make this demand. All over the country, all sections of people have voiced this demand

in clear words. All over the world the freedom loving people have also joined in our demand.

**Shrimati Radhabai Apte** said that to deny the right of speech was to deny nature itself. It was the most elementary right given to human beings by God himself. That a person of Mrs. Naidu's eminence should be gagged and prevented from imparting the benefit of her knowledge and experience was the most reprehensible thing. In her own experience a most amusing thing had once happened which made her wonder whether a new ban against facial expressions also would not be issued. During the 1932 Civil Disobedience movement she attended a trial in a Mamlatdar's court. When one of the witnesses was giving evidence she could not help smiling and the Magistrate, noticing the smile on her face, told her that if she behaved in that fashion she would be turned out of the Court. When she said "why?" the Magistrate told her that it would amount to giving an indication to the witness.

The resolution was put to the vote and carried.

## REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

**Mrs. Saudamini Mehta** (Calcutta) moved the following resolution :—

"This Conference, realising, that the gravity of the present crisis in the country is the result largely of the political impasse and lack of public confidence in the present administration, is firmly of the opinion that the only effective solution to the problem is the formation of a representative Government responsible to the people."

**Shrimati Saudamini Mehta** said, in a Gujarati speech, that today we needed more than ever before a responsible Government at the Centre. None but our own leaders could handle the present food situation. If there had been a national government in the country tragedies like the Bengal famine would have been prevented. No national Government could afford to allow such a thing to happen. Even the terrible tragedy of Bengal did not seem to have moved Government. If India's leaders were free they would have helped much to alleviate suffering in the distressed areas and the fact that Government preferred to keep them locked up in jail could only be interpreted to mean that those in charge of the Government now were afraid of being eclipsed. It was sought to be made out that the Government now functioning in India was an Indian Government with an Executive Council which had eleven Indian members on it. The fact, however, was that they were self-seekers and represented nobody. She concluded by saying that merely Executive Councillors with no following in the country could by no means make the Government representative.

**Mrs. Krishnabai Panjkar** (Karnatak) seconding the resolution in Hindustani said that the present political impasse was entirely a creation of the rulers. They always created such deadlocks whenever the people demanded and agitated for a representative national government, on the early formation of which depended our very existence. Was there anybody in the country who was not behind that demand? They would attain that goal—nobody would dare deny it to them—if they all united and were prepared for any sacrifice.

**Mrs. Perin Rameschandra** (Punjab) : We have passed many resolutions yesterday—resolution on women's social rights, about women in mines, women workers and labour organisations. We have spoken on the food problem, the Hindu Law Bill and this problem and that problem. But of all these problems which vitally affect every single woman I think this resolution dealing with the political situation is by far the most important even for a women's conference. This resolution which states the case of the Indian people deals with their social, political and economic rights. It clearly says that the grave situation in our country is the result largely of the political impasse. I do not think that women need be told of this grave crisis in this country.

We have only to ask our sisters from Bengal what the famine means to them. We have only to look at the hundreds and thousands of destitute women not only in Calcutta but also in the villages of Bengal to know what the political deadlock in the country means. We have only to think of the thousands who have died of starvation and the millions who are dying today of malaria. This will bring home to us the importance of having our own government.

The political impasse started almost 2 years ago on August 9, when our trusted and beloved leaders were arrested. This problem which at that moment affected vast sections which were politically conscious now affects vaster sections which were not alive to the political issues facing our country. The arrest of the leaders did not affect only a small section, but every one of the 40 crores of Indians. Why? because it did not remain simply a political crisis. It did not mean simply that the leaders were in jail or that we did not have a representative Government. It meant that the economy of our country, health, medical and other problems continued to worsen. It meant that Government did not want the co-operation of the people, Government did not dare take the co-operation of the patriotic people of the country, although it was impossible for them to solve the food problem and the problem of defence without their co-operation.

Let me remind you that only a few days ago Mr. Bhulabhai Desai, set out in the Assembly clearly the case of the Indian people when he said that the lesson of Burma and Bengal is this Government can no longer rule this country, no longer solve its urgent problems because this government refuses

to take the co-operation of a single individual. It has not only led to the economic problem and the food problem, family life is breaking up, and it has created vast social problems for our people.

Many may say that this problem of representative Government and the problem of release of leaders is a matter of civil liberties. It is India's democratic right to have a representative Government, to have the right of civil liberties. But for us it is no longer a matter of civil liberty or democracy. It is a matter of life and death to the Indian nation. If we want to save ourselves we must secure the release of our leaders and have a representative Government, responsible to the people (applause). That is exactly why in our own country today there is a unanimity of opinion on this question, that in order to help to get food for the people, to relieve suffering of the people, there is only one way, namely the release of the leaders and the formation of a representative Government which has the backing, support and co-operation of the people.

Today every section of the people in the country, even people like Liberals and Moderates, have voiced this demand. Even Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru has declared that this Government can no longer claim that they have the co-operation of the people, nor that they are in any sense of the word, responsible to and representative of the people. I know, a few supporters of Government and may be a few others talk of it as a National Government, because there are so many Indians sitting on the Executive Council. We are not interested in the colour of those who sit on the Council. We only want to know what patriotic policy they follow, and what their laws are and how they help the people. That is the standard by which people judge them. And not only is there unanimous demand for the leaders' release and the formation of representative Government in our own country, but that demand is growing even outside India. It is being taken up by every section of the people, even those who used to oppose us before. Even those who were our enemies before are compelled, after the tragic events of Bengal, after the disaster which faced the British in Burma, to think that if India's problems are to be solved there must be a Government responsible to the people and which has the backing of the people who are behind the prison bars.

Many of us may ask why the All-India Women's Conference has taken up this demand. Because, as the President in her address stated, it is time that the Women's Conference allied itself with the progressive forces who wish to end the present state of things and wish for a proper Government which could deal with the problems of this country. If the Conference passes this resolution it will have the backing not only of its members but also of the widest sections of Indian women. This Conference represents all sections of India's womanhood, every important section of political thought and

creed. Every woman who wants to work in the cause of India is within the fold of this Conference. And it is just because this political deadlock has women and children as its worst victims that this Conference must take note of it. Vast sections of women who know nothing of politics, who are not interested in politics come and ask us to tell them more about the Congress, to tell them everything in detail, why their leaders were in jail, why they were not having a proper Government. Every section of Indian women whatever their interest in politics in the past, are today vitally interested in the problems affecting the country. To vast majority of Indian women the political deadlock means shortage of food and clothing. The political crisis has led to a crisis in the kitchen, and that is why vast sections of women are united in asking for a Government that will help them to keep their homes intact. That is why this Conference has to put forward this demand. We will unite more and more every section of Indian womanhood on this demand and work for its fulfilment. (applause).

**Shrimati Vimal Ranadive** (Bombay) speaking in Marathi explained the food situation, as it was in the country at present, was extremely dangerous. With the Japanese on the Assam Border, the country might soon have to face a much greater and more widespread calamity than last year's Bengal famine.

There was no way out for our people unless they secure the release of National Leaders and compel the bureaucracy to concede the demand for a National Government. The demand was supported by a growingly large section of British people also. A United India could easily defeat all bureaucratic opposition to the release of National Leaders and establishment of a National Government. She advised people not to give themselves up in despair, because a nation of 400 million people could not for ever be kept in subjection.

**Mrs. Rebecca Ghose** (Bengal) : Freedom of press, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly are inviolable birthrights. Removal of these rights is a sign of fear, and fear is a sign of weakness. These three freedoms are the foundation upon which every democratic nation is based and any crack in these weakens the foundation and it lies in grave danger of crumbling and falling to the ground. Freedom is a thing which cannot be asked for. It is something which must be realised within each individual. And this very unifying strength of thinking must automatically bring about a strong unified government.

Mrs. Rebecca Ghosh concluded by urging that the resolution be adopted.

**Mrs. Babiben Moolji** (Bombay) in a Hindi speech said that whenever there were complaints that there was shortage of food quick came the retort that there was hoarding, and black markets. Who started these black markets ? In Bombay, Government was forcing people to eat barley instead of wheat,



while on the other hand lakhs of tons of food grains were still being exported. Who cared whether Indians lived or died ?

**Hazra Begum (U.P. Agra):** Speaking in Urdu asserted that a representative National Government capable of carrying the nation's confidence was the only solution to the crisis.

**Mrs. Hansa Mehta:** I had no desire to speak on this resolution because I find there is complete unanimity on this resolution. Everyone today is demanding a national responsible and representative government, and therefore it is not necessary to waste more words on that demand. But I feel that I must place before you the point of view of the Congress. The Congress had demanded national responsible government in 1942, for which the leaders of the Congress are in jail today. At that time the entire country was not prepared to back up that demand. Today it is gratifying to note that everyone in this country is behind that demand. Why ? Because, even those who were afraid of the Congress point of view now feel that they are helpless and that wherever they turned there was a stone wall. They can do nothing but break their heads against the stone wall. Government is not prepared to listen to any of their demands. The Government have failed in Bengal and we do not know what is going to happen to the rest of our country tomorrow. The food situation is getting worse and worse, and the story of Bengal is going to be repeated in other parts of the country unless the Government of the country is changed. And that is why we ask for a responsible government. You know that the popular demonstration of our displeasure was made when the budget was thrown out in the Assembly (applause). That was a major defeat for Government. In England when the Government sustained a defeat over a minor issue, Mr. Churchill demanded a vote of confidence. But here, in spite of the fact that the budget was thrown out the Government still remains. What can the people do except ask for a responsible and representative Government ? I hope you will back the Congress demand and fight with us for such a cause.

**Shrimati Shanti Sen Gupta (Bombay)** referred to the various difficulties women had to experience in getting their daily necessities of life. She urged the members and delegates to see that their voice was heard.

The resolution was put to vote and carried unanimously.

**The President:** I am afraid it is 11 o'clock and we have to close the session. There are still a few resolutions on the agenda, but as they are of a non-controversial nature I propose to move them from the chair.

The following resolutions, one by one, were then moved from the Chair. and passed unanimously :

### ATROCITIES ON WOMEN

“ This Conference records its deep resentment at Government's attitude to the atrocities committed on women at Chimur, Midnapore and elsewhere, and, believing that such atrocities still occur in various parts of the country; hopes that information of specific cases will be supplied by public spirited citizens to the Conference authorities.”

### MEDICAL RELIEF

“ The All-India Women's Conference welcomes Dr. B. C. Roy's efforts to unite all Medical Relief work in Bengal under the banner of the Medical Relief Co-ordination Committee and extends its whole-hearted support to this patriotic endeavour.”

### WOMEN FRANCHISE IN THE PUNJAB

“ This Conference reaffirms the principle of equality as between men and women in the right of exercising the vote and, therefore, strongly condemns the action of the Punjab Government in depriving women of the franchise in the coming Municipal Corporation elections. It urges the immediate withdrawal of this retrogressive step.”

**The President** winding up the session said : I have certain suggestions to make to you in order that the various resolutions we have passed might be implemented. Item (1) : each provincial branch should organise a social workers training camp in its province on the lines of the Abrams Camp with any necessary modification. If you need any literature and guidance on this question please write to the General Secretary and she will give you the necessary information and any instructions that can be given from the Central office. This is a very very important item because unless we have a sufficient number of trained workers work becomes inefficient and slack and we have to depend upon leisure time activities of a few energetic people. So I think that this work is absolutely foundational.

Item (2) : Next thing to do is to launch an energetic drive to recruit women to go in for training as nurses and find employment for them. We shall be able to give you more details about this from our health section which will now be a part of the Central Office. Please keep this in mind. This year you have got to make a special drive. Make it through vigorous propaganda. Raise the general status of the profession and improve the conditions of service and housing, impress upon the people that this is a very noble profession and that women should take to nursing. It will be important to improve the status of the profession as otherwise few women would be attracted to it.

At the present rate of progress it will take us 150 years to have an organised form of health service. Therefore it is necessary to quicken the rate of progress in this direction. People with experience of health service say that it is possible to have shorter courses of training under which the basic principles of nursing can be imparted to women. Under such a scheme we can have a larger number of trained nurses. It may be possible to make a similar move in the health services course. I have seen literature on the subject in different countries and it is a matter of gratification to me to find that very similar training for social work and health service is being organised all over the world because of the war emergency. So in a way we have initiated this move and you have only to extend it to include some other service.

Item (3) : We should have a two-year plan to establish infant welfare and maternity centres and clinics. Every one of the branches must do this work. In the course of the two years we must establish two or five such centres. If you draw up a definite plan you will be able to check up from time to time what progress we have made and I hope by the time we meet again each branch will be able to give us a satisfactory account of how the 2-year plan was progressing.

Item (4) : Every constituency and sub-constituency should run classes for training women in hand industries. Such classes in course of time develop into publicly recognised institutions. We do not produce enough in this country to meet our needs. Our imports have fallen far low and therefore it is very necessary that we should increase production. All this time we complained that we were flooded with foreign goods. We cannot make that complaint now. But we are not making as much as we should to fill up the deficiency. Those branches which have already carried on experiments and have some experience in this matter find that this work can be successfully carried out. If such classes are started not only can we help women who have missed opportunities of any vocational training in their younger days but we can also help women to be economically independent. It is necessary we should start these small hand industries and develop them. The classes should be organised on such lines that they should earn recognition. We must maintain a high standard and have a regular syllabus and must be in a position to issue certificates which will help trainees to secure employment.

Then there is another item which I had referred to in my presidential speech. I am personally very much interested in cultural work and I feel that it is a field which has been so grossly neglected by us. I think the Women's Conference should make it a special point to do something to make up for this long neglect. We should encourage women writers, artists of different kinds, painters, dancers ; we should do everything possible to encourage such people and give them opportunities of being introduced to the public and receiving

public recognition. This can easily be done. We make it a point always to invite speakers to our branches and give them recognition. But we do not think it necessary that artists and women engaged in creative work deserve even greater recognition from the public. It is very difficult for a woman artist to make her way. Being an artist myself I know how difficult it is. It is the duty of Women's Organisations to encourage women who have powers of creative expression and they should be given opportunities of being introduced to the public and being recognised. Many of our professions today in the cultural field have become more or less amateur. Unless a person has some other means of livelihood it is difficult for her to make headway. So I place this before you as an important item not merely for consideration but for action and I hope at the next Conference, branches will be able to report that a move has been made in this direction.

We have had resolutions on atrocities on women, traffic in women and on civil liberty. We have decided that information must be called for on these subjects so that the Central Office can be in touch with some of the things going on in the different parts of the country. I would suggest that each branch appoint a special member in charge of each of the three subjects of atrocities on women, traffic in women as a result of distress, and civil liberties. If you have a special member in charge that member will make it her business to collect information. It must be authentic information and we must be in a position to put forth evidence. The Central Office will keep records of such information. In the last few days I have been receiving many letters containing such information. All manner of things must be going on. There is no doubt about it. If we have no records we have no authentic information. Let each branch please appoint a member in charge of each of these subjects, and communicate your information to the Central Office.

I want to put very special emphasis on two questions. One is about the supply of milk to children. You will have to carry on a very vigorous campaign, something very special and immediate and you must all put heart and soul into this campaign. I would suggest that a "Milk for Children" Week should be organised, in order to draw attention to the imperative need of supplying milk to the children. Local self-government institutions should be urged to assist in the augmentation of milk supply and demand the rationing of milk in which priority should be given to children. Maximum emphasis should be put on visual propaganda through posters, placards and slides, and printed matter. We are hoping to issue a pamphlet on this subject from the Central Office and copies would be supplied to the branches. I do appeal to women to have a raging campaign. It is hardly necessary to emphasise the gravity of the situation facing the country, and of the tremendous havoc wrought by undermining children. I do not know for how many generations the effect of



Delegates to the XVII Session of the All-India Women's Conference, Bombay.

this will be felt. As it is we are a weak nation physically: we are undernourished, and if there is greater undernourishment I wonder what our fate will be.

Do not go away with the idea that the Conference just passes resolutions. We have got to implement them. You have got a President who is going to sit on your head and make you work. The question of women in mines also needs immediate attention. We have decided to send a commission of enquiry into the mining areas so that we will be able to get first hand information.

I hope this programme will be accepted and appreciated by the Conference. No one has got an excuse to say that she did not know what was to be done. You have got a working programme before you and I hope you will try to carry out every single item of this programme.

I am now going to close this session. But before I do so I should like to thank the Delegates for the co-operation they have given me by being brief in their remarks, and at the same time being vigorous. It has been a great pleasure to watch the lively, smiling faces and the energetic voices, and I hope it is an indication that in the coming months we are going to have a lively, energetic army of workers going about.

There is a little suggestion that we should also train people to learn shorthand and typewriting. When you have the social workers training classes I have suggested arrangements can be made for this kind of training. I started my shorthand and typewriting when I was secretary of this Conference and it stood me in good stead. I was my own secretary and clerk.

I should like to thank all the office bearers who have co-operated with me in carrying on my onerous duties during this session.

I must give my heartfelt thanks to our retiring Honorary General Secretary. It is hardly necessary for me to go into the details of her work or to praise her because everyone of us can bear out that she has been conscientious and energetic worker, and she has done her work loyally. I should also like to thank the Reception Committee for its very wonderful hospitality. Being a Bombayite myself, in a way, it will be out of place to wax eloquent. Nevertheless, it is necessary for me to thank the Reception Committee for their hospitality, their very warm welcome and their courtsey. (applause).

**Mrs. Hannah Sen:** Madam President, I am speaking here, I hope, on behalf of the Standing Committee and the other delegates. Time is passing and I am sure most of you wish to leave as early as possible. And as my friend Miss Leilamani Naidu pointed out to me a moment ago, rationing has become the order of the day and that there should be rationing not only in food but also in words. I shall try to be as economical as I can in the use of words. I shall begin my vote of thanks by thanking Shrimati Kamaladevi. She has

done a considerable amount of work for the Conference from its inception, and the part she has been playing in recent years and the part she hopes to play in the years to come make us feel extremely grateful to her indeed. She has shown great ability in the conduct of this session of the conference and has managed its affairs with patience, calm and dignity. In the months that lie ahead she will no doubt import into her task that efficiency, and those dynamic qualities which have hitherto characterised her efforts and her work in connection with the Conference. We wish her all success and we extend to her our fullest co-operation and confidence.

I have now to thank the Reception Committee, the Vice-Presidents, the volunteers, secretaries and others responsible for the excellent arrangements made for the Conference. Next on the list are our hostesses who have given us so ungrudgingly the use of their homes and have fed our delegates in this difficult times of rationing and scarcity

Now comes our expression of gratitude to Mrs. Billimoria. Mrs. Billimoria's ability and good work have become proverbial. We thank her for all that she has done and we sincerely hope that she will continue to be with us on the Standing Committee to guide the work of the Conference for many years. Last but not least we have to thank Mrs. Urmila Mehta. She is one of the three women who have held the office of General Secretary for three years in succession, the other two being Shrimati Kamaladevi and Rani Lakshmi Bai Rajwade.

**Begum Abdul Jabbar** (Hyderabad Deccan) thanked the hostesses and Chairman of the Reception Committee and also complimented Mrs. Jhabvala.

**Lady Thackersey** asked the delegates to excuse any shortcomings that might be found in the arrangements for the Conference. She also thanked the volunteers and the members of the Exhibition and Publicity Committee.

**Mrs. Anasuyabai Kale** thanked Lady Thackersey.

**Mrs. Jaishree Raiji** thanked, on behalf of the Reception Committee the various hostesses, public institutions, individuals and firms, the Press and the Press Photographers for helping the Committee in various ways. The success of the session was not to a small extent due to their efforts.

**Miss Leilamani Naidu** called for three cheers to the President to which there was a hearty response from the audience.

## RESOLUTIONS PASSED AT THE 17TH SESSION

**Condolence Resolutions :**

1. This meeting of the All-India Women's Conference records its deep sense of sorrow at the untimely death of Mr. R. S. Pandit and offers its heartfelt condolences to Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit in her sad bereavement.

2. This meeting of the A.-I.W.C. puts on record its deep sense of sorrow at the tragic death of Kasturba Gandhi while in detention and expresses its sympathy with Mahatma Gandhi and other members of the family in their sad bereavement.

3. This Conference deeply mourns the death of Begum Azad and conveys its heartfelt sympathy to Moulana Abul Kalam Azad.

4. This Conference mourns the untimely death of Shriman Mahadeo Desai and conveys its sympathy to his family.

5. This Conference places on record its deep sorrow at the death of Shrimati Shyamalabai Belgaumkar, the Branch Representative of Karnataka.

6. This Conference is deeply grieved at the death of Mr. V. M. Joshi, Principal of the Women's College of the Indian Women's University at Poona.

7. This Conference deeply regrets the death of Sjt. Ramand Chaterjee Editor of *Modern Review* and *Pravasi* and conveys its sympathy to his family.

**Children's Homes:—**This Conference congratulates the Bengal Branches of the A.-I.W.C. on the excellent relief work they have undertaken in opening milk centres for starving children and homes for destitute children. This Conference records its very great appreciation of Shrimati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and Mrs. Urmila Mehta's admirable work in personally visiting villages affected by famine, the result of which has been the formation of the All-India Save the Children Committee.

**Recommendations of the Central Advisory Board of Education.—**This Conference welcomes the Report of the Central Advisory Board of Education on Post-war Educational Development as an effort towards universal and compulsory education, and authorises the appointment of a Representative Committee to submit within a specified time, the considered views and recommendations for presentation before the next meeting of the Standing Committee.

**Social Science and Adult Education.—**This Conference recommends that the study of social sciences be introduced in all stages of Education, with particular emphasis on practical work.

Bearing in mind the need for the spread of adult education and literacy and other social service activities this Conference calls upon the higher educa-



tional institutions to define a scheme, whereby it will be incumbent on students to serve a period in one of the recognised social activities before they are qualified to receive a certificate, Diploma or a degree.

**Hindustan Scouts.**—This conference is of the opinion that the Hindustan Scout Movement should be encouraged and special attempts be made to popularise its women's section.

**Traffic in Women and Children.**—The grave economic distress in famine areas has raised a special problem with regard to traffic in women and children. Advantage is being taken of the helplessness of women destitutes, who are being enticed away for immoral purposes. This Conference emphatically condemns such exploitation and urges.

- (a) that exemplary punishment be meted out to the culprits by official authorities, and
- (b) that recognised organisations take immediate steps for the protection and re-habilitation of such women, and Government by legislative and executive action safeguard their interests.

**Baroda Marriage.**—This Conference strongly condemns the action of the Maharaja of Baroda in violating the law of monogamy in force in his State and deplors the action as definitely detrimental to the progress of Society in India.

**Shariat Bill.**—This meeting of the All-India Women's Conference supports the Shariat Bill introduced by Baji Rashida Latiff in the Punjab Legislative Assembly.

**Women in Labour Organisations.**—This Meeting of the All-India Women's Conference is of opinion that all efforts should be made to co-operate with other organisations, including Trade Unions, to help women workers to obtain their maternity benefits without fear of dismissal.

It further resolves that the Indian Factories Act may be amended to include the following provisions :—

- (a) Proper houses equipped with separate water taps and bathing taps and latrines for women.
- (b) High stools in those departments of factories in which women are made to labour for long hours in a standing position.

**Health Insurance.**—In view of the extremely inadequate provision which exists for medical aid in India, this Conference urges upon the Government to take effective steps that medical help is made available for every citizen of this country by a scheme of compulsory health insurance.

**Women in Mines.**—The All-India Women's Conference condemns the action of the Government of India in withdrawing by a notification the prohibition on women to work underground in the coal mines in India, as a retrograde and reprehensible step, infringing a convention of the International Labour Organisation. No circumstances justify the employment of women underground, and hence the Conference urges upon the Government to restore the same immediately.

**Hindu Law** (a) This Conference welcomes the re-appointment of the Hindu Law Committee and hopes that, as soon as the entire Code has been completed, it will be enacted into law. The Conference, however, regrets the exclusion of Diwan Bahadur V. V. Joshi from the Committee, who is a well-known champion of women's rights.

- (b) This Conference notes with satisfaction that the Marriage Bill was referred to a Joint Select Committee without a division. But it feels that there should be some provision for the dissolution of marriage under specific conditions. They therefore, draw the attention of the Hindu Law Committee to the urgent need of incorporating such provision in the final draft of the Code as a whole.
- (c) While re-affirming the claim for equal rights for both men and women, this Conference supports the Intestate Succession Bill as originally introduced into the legislature and deplors the changes suggested by the Select Committee in regard to the addition of simultaneous heirs, as this has resulted in the dilatory tactics of re-circulating the Bill.

**Civil Liberties.** This Conference reiterates the resolution on Civil Liberties passed at the 16th Session of the All-India Women's Conference at Cocanada, and records its emphatic protest against the continued attempt to curtail the fundamental rights of the Indian people, in particular those of personal security and free speech. The Conference demands :

- (a) The immediate and unconditional release of all citizens who have been detained in jail without charge or trial, and
- (b) The cancellation of the arbitrary and high-handed order on Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and others forbidding them to make any public speech or statement.

**Franchise in Municipalities in Punjab.** This Conference reaffirms the principle of equality as between men and women in the right of exercising the vote and, therefore, strongly condemns the action of the Punjab Government in depriving women of the franchise in the coming Municipal Corporation elections. It urges the immediate withdrawal of this retrogressive step.

**Atrocities on Women.** This Conference records its deep resentment at Government's attitude to the atrocities committed on women at Chimur, Midnapore and elsewhere, and, believing that such atrocities still occur in various parts of the country, hopes that information of specific cases will be supplied by public spirited citizens to the Conference authorities.

**Medical Relief.** The All-India Women's Conference welcomes Dr. B. C. Roy's efforts to unite all Medical Relief Work in Bengal under the banner of the Medical Relief Co-ordination Committee and extends its whole-hearted support to this patriotic endeavour.

**Representative Government.** This Conference, realising that the gravity of the present crisis in the country is the result largely of the political impasse and the lack of public confidence in the present administration, is firmly of the opinion that the only effective solution to the problem is the formation of representative government responsible to the people,

**Food Resolution.** This Conference views with the utmost alarm the food situation in Bengal, Orissa and elsewhere and emphatically condemns the wholly unsatisfactory handling of the situation by the authorities concerned. It firmly believes that continued lack of planning by the Central and Provincial Governments, their failure to prevent inflation and hoarding by large stockists, and to tap India's vast resources, and their inability to secure and distribute stocks are contributory factors.

Whilst affirming that the only adequate solution lies in the hands of a representative Government responsible to the people, it is of opinion that the present distress can to some extent be mitigated in co-operation with popular food committees by the following measures :—

- (a) The stoppage of depletion of rural areas to feed cities.
- (b) The feeding of cities directly by Government through imports and surpluses.
- (c) Uniform policy of control and rationing of the necessities of life at prices commensurate with the economic conditions of the people.
- (d) Drastic steps to stop the prevailing wide-spread corruption and unscrupulous handling whether by Government or officials, particularly in rural areas.
- (e) A more developed and practical form of the 'Grow More Food' campaign, with subsidies to cultivators to grow more food grains in preference to more paying commercial products.
- (f) Arrangements and priority for the supply of adequate milk for children and invalids.
- (g) The prevention of export of food-grains in the period of the food crisis.
- (h) The discontinuation of the denial policy which is prevalent in Bihar and elsewhere.



**THE ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S**  
Receipts and Payments Account for the

	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.
<b>To Balance on 1st November, 1941 :</b>		
Fixed Deposit in the National Bank ...	5,680 0 0	
Fixed Deposit in the Bank of India ...	2,931 12 0	
With the National Bank ...	885 15 9	
With the National Bank Account 2 (Pro- vident Fund) ...	174 0 0	
With Mrs. Mehta (Social Section) ...	15 15 6	
With Hon. Gen. Secretary ...	100 6 0	
With Hon. Treasurer ...	5 15 0	
		9,794 0 8
„ Registration Fees of Delegates ...		790 0 0
„ Donation for A.I.W.C. Assn. Expenses ...		3,488 0 0
„ Donation ear-marked for Village Project & Women's Training Camp ...		1,555 0 0
„ Donation for Tagore Memorial ...		180 0 0
„ Affiliation Fees ...		700 0 0
„ <b>Constituencies &amp; Sub-Constituencies :</b>		
For extra copies of Circulars ...		266 6 0
„ Cocanada Reception Committee		1,000 0 0
„ Vice-Presidentship Subscription ...		10 0 0
„ Member-in-Charge Subscription ...		48 0 0
„ Education Fund Association ...		15 0 0
„ Sale of Annual Reports ...		45 2 0
„ Return of Advance to Cocanada Reception Committee ...		50 0 0
„ Sale Proceeds of Photographs of Chinese Banner ...		26 0 0
„ Provident Fund Contribution ...		180 0 0
„ Interest on Fixed Deposit ...		161 8 0
		18,259 0 8
<b>Total Rs. ...</b>		<b>18,259 0 8</b>

**CONFERENCE**

Year ending 31st October, 1942

	Rs.	a.	p.	Rs.	a.	p.
By Hon. Gen. Secretary's Expenses...*				1,354	5	0
„ Salary of Personal Asst. to Hon. Gen. Secretary				1,800	0	0
„ A.I.W.C. Assn.'s Contribution towards Provident Fund				90	0	0
„ Printing and Stationery				1,037	0	0
„ Village Project and Workers' Training Camp Expenses				2,035	0	0
„ "ROSHNI" Magazine Expenses				146	8	0
„ Miss Akhtar Hussein for 1937-39 Expenses				66	12	0
„ Affiliation Fee to International Alliance of Women's Suffrage (£2/-)				27	8	8
„ Mrs. Rajan Nehru, Member-in-Charge Expenses				13	10	0
„ Mrs. Cousins—Village Project Expenses				38	8	0
„ Information Collection Sub-Committee Expenses				8	8	8
„ Miss Martha Maltha—return of Circular money				10	0	0
„ Hon. Treasurer's Expenses				24	1	6
„ Bank's Commission & Charges				11	5	0
„ Bank and Other Balances :						
Fixed Deposit with National Bank	5,790	0	0			
Fixed Deposit with Bank of India	2,983	1	0			
With the National Bank	2,348	0	8			
„ the National Bank Account 2 (Provident Fund)	354	0	0			
„ Hon. Gen. Secretary	73	9	0			
„ Convener, Indigenous Industries	20	0	0			
„ Mrs. Doctor Member-in-Charge	21	0	0			
„ Hon. Treasurer	6	14	0	11,596	8	8
<b>Total Rs.</b>				<b>18,259</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>

\* Details of the Office Expenses of the Hon. Gen. Secretary :

	Rs.	a.	p.
Travelling Expenses	314	4	0
Printing & Stationery	389	11	6
Postages, Telegrams, Telephones, Registration Charges etc.	380	8	9
House Rent	181	0	0
Repairs to Typewriters and Miscellaneous Expenses	59	7	9
Cost of Photos of Chinese Banner	12	6	0
Freight etc., for despatch of records	16	15	0
<b>Total Rs.</b>	<b>1,354</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>

Examined and found correct.

Bombay,  
18th January, 1943.SORAB S. ENGINEER & CO.,  
Incorporated Accountants,  
Registered Accountants,  
Hon. Auditors.

**THE ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S**  
**Receipts and Payments Account for the**

To Balance on 1st November, 1942 :	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.
Fixed Deposit in the National Bank ...	5,790 0 0	
Fixed Deposit in the Bank of India ...	2,988 1 0	
With the National Bank ...	2,348 0 3	
„ the National Bank Account No. 2 (Provident Fund) ...	354 0 0	
„ Hon. General Secretary ...	78 9 0	
„ Convener Indigenous Industries ...	20 0 0	
„ Mrs. J. R. Doctor Member-in-Charge	21 0 0	
„ Hon. Treasurer ...	6 14 0	
		11,596 8 3
To Donation for All-India Women's Con- ference Association Expenses ...		2,657 8 0
„ Donation ear-marked for Village Recon- struction project ...		1,065 10 0
„ Donation for proposed "ORPHANAGE SCHEME" of All-India Women's Conference ...		1,000 0 0
„ Bijapur Famine Relief Fund (as per contra)		597 8 0
„ Bengal Famine Relief Fund (as per contra)		2,227 8 0
„ Tagore Memorial Fund ...		2 0 0
„ Education Fund Association ...		10 0 0
„ Subscription towards "ROSHNI" Expenses		153 0 0
„ Affiliation Fees ...		725 0 0
„ Sale Proceeds of Circulars ...		151 0 0
„ Sale of Annual Reports ...		4 11 0
„ Fees of Member-in-Charge ...		9 0 0
„ Provident Fund Contribution ...		180 0 0
Total Rs. ...		20,379 5 3

**CONFERENCE**

Year ending 31st October, 1943

	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.
<b>By Hon. General Secretary's Expenses*</b> ...		850 11 0
„ Salary of Personal Assistant to Hon. Gen. Secretary ...		1,800 0 0
„ All-India Women's Conference Association's Contribution towards Provident Fund ...		90 0 0
„ "ROSHNI" Magazine Expenses ...		491 6 0
„ Mrs. Muzumdar Member-in-Charge Expenses ...		14 9 6
„ Bengal Relief Fund (as per contra) ...		2,227 8 0
„ Bijapur Relief Fund (as per contra) ...		597 8 0
„ Tagore Memorial Fund ...		132 0 0
„ Women's Training Camp Expenses ...		20 0 0
„ Education Fund Association ...		15 0 0
„ Hon. Treasurer's Expenses ...		15 2 0
„ Bank's Commission and Charges ...		5 15 0
<b>By Bank and Other Balances :</b>		
Fixed Deposit with National Bank ...	5,790 0 0	
Fixed Deposit with Bank of India ...	2,988 1 0	
With National Bank of India ...	4,664 14 3	
„ National Bank of India Account No. 2 (Provident Fund) ...	533 15 0	
„ Hon. General Secretary ...	87 9 0	
„ Convener Indigenous Industries ...	20 0 0	
„ Mrs. J. R. Doctor ...	21 0 0	
„ Mrs. Muzumdar (Member-in-Charge) ...	5 6 6	
„ Hon. Treasurer ...	13 12 0	
		14,119 9 9
<b>Total Rs. ...</b>		<b>20,379 5 3</b>

## \* Details of the Office Expenses of the Hon. General Secretary :

	Rs. a. p.
Travelling Expenses ...	132 5 9
Printing and Stationery ...	193 15 0
Postage, Telegrams, Telephones, Registration Charges, etc. ...	303 18 9
House Rent ...	181 8 0
Miscellaneous Expenses ...	32 1 6
Price of book ...	3 6 0
Railway Freight ...	3 9 0
<b>Total Rs. ...</b>	<b>850 11 0</b>

As the Interest on Fixed Deposit with Banks is Credited by the Banks in 1943-44 no Credit for Interest has been taken in this year's Accounts.

Examined and found correct.

Bombay,  
30th March, 1944.

SORAB S. ENGINEER & CO,  
Incorporated Accountants,  
Registered Accountants,  
Hon. Auditors.



**STATEMENT REGARDING REGISTRATION**

The All-India Women's Conference has been duly registered under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860 on the 18th July, 1930.

**Memorandum of Association of the All-India Women's Conference.**

1. The name of the Conference shall be "The All-India Women's Conference."
2. The Conference shall not engage in party politics but unite on such points as affect women and children.
3. The object of the Conference shall be :
  - (a) To promote in India the education of both sexes at all stages ;
  - (b) To deal with all questions affecting the welfare of women and children.

**Signature of witnesses.**

(Sd.) Sarojini Naidu.  
 „ Sushama Sen  
 „ Margaret Cousins  
 „ Rameshwari Nehru  
 „ A. L. Huidekoper  
 „ Shareefah Hamid Ali  
 „ Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya.

4. The Standing Committee Members become the Governing Body of the Association.

**THE CONSTITUTION OF A.-I.W.C.****ARTICLE I****Name:**

The name of the organisation shall be "The Association of the All-India Women's Conference," hereinafter to be called the "A.-I.W.C."

**ARTICLE II.****(a) Policy:**

The A.-I.W.C. shall not belong to any political organisation nor take an active part in party politics, but shall be free to discuss and contribute to all questions and matters affecting the welfare of the people of India with particular reference to women and children.

**(b) Aims and Objects :**

1. To work actively for the general progress and welfare of women and children.
2. To inculcate in women and children the ideals of true citizenship.
3. To promote education along right lines.
4. To work and press for social reform.
5. To strive to establish equal rights and opportunities for all.
6. To work for a united India.
7. To set and demand a high moral standard in all departments of life.
8. To stand for international good will and world peace.

**ARTICLE III.**

**Composition :**

- (a) Patrons.
- (b) Office-Bearers.
- (c) Standing Committee.
- (d) Branches.

**(a) Patrons :**

- (i) Past Presidents.
- (ii) By special invitation of the A.-I.W.C.

**(b) Office-Bearers :**

- (i) President and Chairwoman.
- (ii) Six Vice-Presidents.

*Note :* A Chairwoman of the Standing Committee shall be elected for the year from amongst the Vice-Presidents in case the President does not desire to fill the office.

- (iii) Treasurer.
- (iv) General Secretary.
- (v) Organising Secretary.
- (vi) Sectional Secretaries (if required).

*Note :* No paid officers of the A.-I.W.C. shall be entitled to vote.

**(c) Standing Committee.**

- (i) The Office-Bearers.
- (ii) Members-in-charge of Special Subjects.
- (iii) Branch Representatives.
- (iv) The Liaison Officer in India.
- (v) The Secretary of the All-India Women's Education Fund Association.

**(vi). Ten Patrons :**

- (a) The retiring President ;
- (b) 9 Patrons elected by the Standing Committee.

**(vii) Conveners of Sub-Committees whenever such Sub-Committees are appointed.****(viii) Co-opted Members :**

- (a) " Ordinary," not more than 7.
- (b) " Extraordinary," not more than 10.

**(d) Branches :**

Areas in Provinces and States, as decided on by the Standing Committee from time to time.

**Note :** Patrons shall be entitled to attend the Conference of the A.-I.W.C. and to vote at the open sessions.

Life Associates under the old Constitution will have the right of attending the open sessions of the Conference and voting as hitherto.

**ARTICLE IV.****Agencies of Work :**

The work of the A.-I.W.C. shall be carried out through :

- (1) The Standing Committee and its Executive ;
- (2) The Branches, Constituent Branches and their Committees, by means of
  - (a) Conference.
  - (b) Meetings.
  - (c) Correspondence.
  - (d) Publications.

**ARTICLE V.****Conferences :****I. The All-India Conference :**

- (a) Conferences of the A.-I.W.C. shall be held periodically, at a time and place fixed by the Standing Committee.
- (b) The following shall be entitled to attend :
  - (i) Patrons.
  - (ii) Standing Committee Members.
  - (iii) Branch Delegates.
  - (vi) Reception Committee Delegates.

(v) Special Delegates (by invitation by the Standing Committee.)

(vi) Visitors (not allowed to participate in the deliberations).

**Note:** Life Associates under the old Constitution will have the right of attending the open Sessions of the Conference and voting as hitherto.

## II. Branch Conferences :

Public Conferences shall be convened annually by all the Branches and their Constituent Branches.

## ARTICLE VI.

### Branches and Constituent Branches

#### 1. Constituent Branches.

Any group of ten members, which accepts the aims and objects of the A.-I. W. C., may, subject to the approval of the Standing Committee, become a Constituent Branch and carry on the work of the A.-I.W.C.

#### 2. Branch :

A Branch shall be an association of the A.-I. W. C. in a specified area, with a minimum membership of 50, and shall consist of all the Constituent Branches within that area.

(**Note:**—In event of there being only one Constituent Branch in a given area, its provisional recognition as a Branch shall be decided on by the Standing Committee.)

**Specified Areas:** Ajmere-Merwara, Andhra, Assam, Baroda, Bengal East, Bengal West, Berar, Bihar, Bombay City and Suburbs, Calcutta City and Suburbs, C. P. North, C. P. South, Cochin, Delhi, Gujarat, Gwalior, Hyderabad-Deccan, Hyderabad-Sind, Indore, Jath, Karnatak, Kashmir, Kolhapur, Konkan, Madras City and Suburbs, Maharastra, Malabar, Mysore, N. W. F. P., Orissa (Utkal), Phaltan, Punjab Central, Punjab East, Sangli, Sind, Tamil Nad, Travancore, U. P. Oudh, Bengal Central.

3. Each Branch shall carry out the ideals of the A.-I. W. C. and work under its direction.
4. Each Branch shall be responsible for its own finance.
5. Every Branch shall frame its own Constitution in keeping with the Articles and Bye-Laws of the A.-I. W. C. Association and subject to the approval of the A.-I. W. C. Executive Committee to which all proposed amendmends and alteration also shall be submitted.

**6. Representation :**

Constituent Branches shall be entitled to ask for the privilege, in rotation, of electing the Branch Representatives, S.C.M.

**7. Membership :**

Any woman in India, over the age of 16, shall be eligible to become a member of a Branch of the A.I.W.C. on payment of subscription to, and in accordance with the rules of, that Branch.

## ARTICLE VII.

**Delegations :**

- (a) Only Branch Members shall be entitled to attend the annual session of the A.-I. W. C. Conference as Branch Delegates. They shall be nominated and elected by the members of the Branch.
- (b) The quota of representation for each Branch shall determined by allotting one delegate to a number of members which is equal to the total number of members divided by the number of delegates.
- (c) The number of delegates to any annual session of the A.-I.W.C. Conference shall be fixed arbitrarily by the Standing Committee at its half-yearly meeting.
- (d) The quota of representation shall be based on the half-yearly returns of membership submitted by the Branches.

**Example :**

(1941) Total A.-I. W. C. Membership	8,000
Total number of Delegates	200
Therefore, <i>One Delegate for every</i>	40 Members
If a Branch has 400 members, it gets $\frac{400}{40} = 10$ Delegates.	

## ARTICLE VIII.

**Finance :**

1. All moneys received shall be held in deposit by the Treasurer at a Scheduled Bank, in the name of the A.-I. W. C.  
Cheques shall be signed by any two of the following Office-Bearers :  
President, Treasurer and General Secretary.
2. Each Branch shall send annually to the Treasurer, before July the 1st, a minimum affiliation fee of Rs. 25/-.

## ARTICLE IX.

## I. Bye-Laws :

1. The Standing Committee shall have power to make Bye-Laws and Regulations for carrying out the work of the A.-I. W. C. and to alter them and add to them from time to time as occasion may require.
2. These Bye-Laws and Regulations may not be altered or added to except by the Standing Committee, at one of its meetings, by a two-thirds majority of the members present, and provided that :
  - (a) notice of such proposed alteration or addition shall have been sent in writing, by registered post, to every member of the Standing Committee at least three months before the meeting, and
  - (b) the Bye-Law in question has been in existence for at least a year.

## II. Alteration of Constitution :

The Constitution of the A.-I. W. C. may not be altered except at a Conference Session by a two-thirds majority of the members present, provided that a notice of such proposed alteration shall have been sent in writing, by registered post or under certificate of posting to every member of the Standing Committee, at least three months before the Conference.

## BYE-LAWS (A.-I. W. C.)

## I

## THE CENTRAL OFFICE

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No.

- (1) There shall be a Central Office of the A.-I. W. C., in a town selected by the Standing Committee.  
*Note—Until such time as the Central Office Scheme materialises, the office shall be where the General Secretary resides.*
- (2) The staff of the Central Office shall consist of : —
  - (i) The General Secretary, in charge.
  - (ii) The Organising Secretary.
  - (iii) The Personal Assistant to the General Secretary.
- (3) **Publications :—**The Central Office shall be responsible for the proper publication and distribution of :—
  1. a full report of each Conference Session.
  2. a duly edited volume of reports, annually, of work done by all the Branches, as well as important information collected by them or by Members-in-charge of Special Subjects and Conveners of Sub-Committees.

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3. a short sketch of the history of the A.-I. W. C., together with a memorandum of important resolutions passed at previous conferences, the Constitution and Bye-Laws of the A.-I. W. C. and other relevant matters, brought up-to-date each year.

(4) **Library** :—There shall be a Reference Library of the A.-I.W.C. housing all reports, journals and file-information received at the Central Office.

(5) **Records** :—Copies of the A.-I. W. C. records shall be available to Standing Committee Members, from the Central Office, on a written application to the General Secretary.

Any of the original records shall be open to inspection by the Standing Committee Members, at one of its meetings, provided due notice has been received by the General Secretary.

(6) **Circulars, Minutes, etc.**

1 (a) **Branch Representatives (S. C. M.)** shall receive from the Central Office, the circulars, minutes and other official literature, on payment of the full Branch-subscription for the year.

(b) On payment of Rs. 10/-, three extra sets of the circulars, minutes etc., may be obtained by a Branch Representative (S. C. M.) in order to facilitate the work of her Branch.

(c) All Constituent-Branches shall be entitled to receive, for information only, circulars and other literature from the Head Office of the A.-I. W. C., on payment of Rs. 7/- for one set or Rs. 10/- for three sets, annually to the Honorary Treasurer, A.-I. W. C.

2. **Standing Committee Members**, other than the Secretaries and Branch representatives, shall pay a subscription of Rs. 3/- for the circulars, minutes, and other official literature received by them from the Central Office for the current year.

3. **Patrons and Ex-Office Bearers**, who are not members of the Standing Committee for the year, shall be entitled to receive the circulars and minutes on a payment of Rs. 10/-.

## II

### APPOINTMENTS

(7) All paid officers and workers of the A.-I. W. C. shall be appointed by the Standing Committee and be responsible to it.

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### III ELECTIONS

#### (8) Rules of Election :

1. Elections shall be conducted by ballot.
2. The election of all Office Bearers excluding the President, shall be held at the time and place of each Conference Session.
3. No one shall be eligible to stand for an office of the A.-I. W. C. except that of the President, unless she has already served on the Standing Committee for at least one year.
4. Nominations not in conformity with the following rules shall be considered invalid :—

(a) The Names of members eligible to stand for election shall be duly proposed and seconded by those qualified to nominate, and shall be sent in writing to the General Secretary within the time specified.

(b) All nominations, except those for the office of the President shall bear the written consent of the nominees.

5. Once a nominee has given her consent for election to any office other than the Presidentship, she shall not withdraw without the consent of the Executive Committee.

#### (9) Election of Office Bearers :

##### I. President :

(a) Every member of the Standing Committee shall be entitled to send in one nomination for the Presidentship. Such nomination shall reach the General Secretary within 3 months after the last session of the A.-I. W. C. Conference.

The General Secretary, before circulating the nominations received for the Presidentship, should ascertain whether the nominees are willing to stand for election or not, and mention the names of nominees who have withdrawn from the election.

(b) Nominees for the Presidentship wishing to withdraw their names shall inform the General Secretary to that effect within three weeks of the complete list of nominations being sent to them by the Central Office.

A candidate wishing to withdraw her name after the specified time shall communicate her reasons immediately to the Chairwoman who shall consult the Executive Committee on the matter.



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(c) Voting papers, with the nominations mentioned in alphabetical order, shall be sent to all Standing Committee Members who shall then forward their votes, by registered post so as to reach the General Secretary at least a fortnight before the date of the half-yearly meeting of the Standing Committee.

*Note—Nominations and voting papers not in accordance with Rules (a) and (c) above, shall be considered invalid.*

2. **Chairwoman:** The Chairwoman, when elected to act for any President who does not desire to fill the office, shall be nominated and elected by members of the Standing Committee, from among the Patrons (S. C. M.), Vice-Presidents and Ex-Vice-Presidents immediately after the session of the Conference.

3. **Vice-Presidents:** Vice-Presidents shall be nominated by the members of the Standing Committee and elected by the General Body. No one shall be eligible to stand for a Vice-Presidentship for more than four consecutive years.

4. **Secretaries:** When the General Secretary or the Organising Secretary is honorary, she shall be nominated and elected by the General Body.

5. **Treasurer:** The Honorary Treasurer shall be nominated and elected by the general body of the Conference.

(10) **Election of other Standing Committee Members:**

1. **Patrons (S. C. M.):** Nine Patrons shall be elected to the new Standing Committee by the General Body.

2. **Members-in-charge of Special Subjects:** Members-in-charge of Special Subjects shall, as required, be elected annually by the new Standing Committee from among past or present members of the Standing Committee. Should the person selected be from among past members of the Standing Committee, she shall first be co-opted to the Standing Committee, as an Ordinary Member.

3. **Branch Representatives (S. C. M.)** shall be nominated and elected by their respective Branches in accordance with their constitutions.

4. **Liaison Officers**

(a) Liaison Officers for organizations abroad and those appointed to act as Liaison Officers between the A.-I. W. C. and other organisations, shall be nominated and elected by, and from among, members of the Standing Committee.

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(b) Liaison Officers representing other Bodies on the Standing Committee of the A.-I. W. C. shall be appointed by the Committees of their respective organizations.

5. **Conveners of Sub-Committees** shall be nominated and elected by, and from among, the members of the Standing Committee.

#### . IV COMMITTEES

##### THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- (11) An Executive Committee shall be appointed annually by the Standing Committee to administer the affairs of the A.-I. W. C. within the terms defined.
- (12) **Composition** :—The Executive Committee shall consist of :—  
*Ex-Officios* :—
- (a) The Chairwoman
  - (b) The Honorary General Secretary
  - (c) The Honorary Treasurer
  - (d) The Member-in-charge of Constitution
- (*Elected by and from among, members of the Standing Committee* :—
- (e) Not more than two Patrons (S. C. M.)
  - (f) Not more than two Vice-Presidents
  - (g) Six other members, of whom not less than four shall be Branch Representatives (S. C. M.)
- (13) **Quorum** :—The quorum of the Executive Committee shall be seven members.
- (14) **Powers** :—*Inviations*—The Committee shall be empowered, in exceptional circumstances, to invite Special Delegates and Special Visitors to a Conference Session.
- (15) **Duties** :—The Executive Committee shall, among other things,
1. ratify constitutions of Branches and Constituent-branches as submitted through the Constitution Member.
  2. recommend, for inclusion in the Conference agenda, any from among urgent and important resolutions apart from those sent in by the Branches or those drafted by members of the Standing Committee other than Branch Representatives.
  3. decide any other matters referred to it by the Standing Committee, or urgent matters referred to it by the Chairwoman.

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### THE STANDING COMMITTEE.

- (16) The Standing Committee shall administer the affairs of the A.-I. W. C. and decide questions affecting its policy, subject to the Constitution, and shall carry out any general or special instructions that may be issued by the General Body.
- (17) **Business :—**
1. The business of the Standing Committee shall be carried out through :—
    - (a) Meetings
    - (b) Circulars
    - (c) The Executive Committee, within the terms defined.
  2. At every annual meeting of the Standing Committee, there shall be presented :—
    - (a) The report of the General Secretary for the year.
    - (b) A duly audited Balance Sheet, by the Honorary Treasurer.
    - (c) The Organising Secretary's report for the year.
    - (d) Reports of the Fund Association and the Lady Irwin College, by the Secretary of the Fund Association.
    - (e) Reports of their work by :
      - (i) Members-in-charge of Special Subjects.
      - (ii) Conveners of Sub-Committees (if any).
- (18) **Quorum :—**The Quorum of the Standing Committee shall include at least four Branch Representatives (S. C. M.), and shall be one-sixth of the total number of members on that Committee.
- (19) **Powers :—**The Standing Committee shall, among other things, have power to :
1. co-opt, subject to Article III (C) of the Constitution
    - (a) Ordinary Members :
    - (b) Extraordinary Members :
      - (i) Experts on any subject.
      - (ii) Representatives of other All-India Women's Organizations, on a reciprocal basis.
  2. appoint, from among the members of the Standing Committee, as many assistant secretaries as may be required from time to time ;
  3. appoint Sub-Committees and *Ad Hoc* Committees ;
  4. appoint one or more of its members to represent the A.-I. W. C. on any other Body or at any meeting inviting it to do so ;

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5. appoint delegations in response to invitations from abroad or for any special purpose ;
6. decide the question of affiliation of the A.-I. W. C. to any International Women's Organisation ;
7. invite Special Delegates and Special Visitors to attend a Conference session ;
8. refer urgent matters to the Executive Committee, within the terms defined.

(20) **Duties:—**At its first meeting held after the Conference, the Standing Committee shall select special subjects for study, research or practical work. Such subjects shall be under the care of Members-in-charge of Special Subjects appointed in accordance with the rules of election.

The powers and terms of reference of such members shall be clearly defined by the Standing Committee at the time of their appointment.

(21) **Meetings:—**

1. Ordinary Meetings of the Standing Committee shall be convened at least twice a year, the Half-yearly meeting, and the Annual Meeting, at a time and place selected by the Standing Committee.
2. Extraordinary Meetings of the Standing Committee shall be called on the written requisition of at least two-thirds of the total number of members on the Standing Committee.

(22) **Agenda:—**

1. All items for the Agenda shall be sent so as to reach the General Secretary at least four weeks before the date of the meeting.
2. The agenda shall be sent, by the General Secretary, to all members of the Standing Committee, and others entitled to receive it, at least a fortnight before the meeting.

(23) **Minutes:—**The Minutes of the Standing Committee Meetings shall be recorded by the General Secretary.

A copy of the Minutes shall be posted to every member of the Standing Committee and others entitled to receive it.

(24) **Decisions:—**

1. Important decisions taken by the Standing Committee shall be in the form of resolutions duly proposed and seconded.

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2. Important proposals for decision by circulation shall be sent under postal certificate to every member of the Standing Committee. The decision shall be declared according to the majority of replies received from at least one-half of the total number of members on the Committee within the period fixed for the purpose. Should the requisite number of replies be not received, or should the majority of replies received show any objection to the matter being decided by circulation, the question shall be laid before the Standing Committee at its next meeting.

Urgent business not conflicting with the general policy of the A.-I. W. C. shall be referred for decision to the Executive Committee.

(25)

**Attendance :—**

1. **Chair :—**In the absence of the Chairwoman, the Chair shall be taken by some one elected by, and from among, the members present at the meeting. The order of selection shall be as follows :

Patrons (S. C. M.)

Vice-Presidents

Members-in-Charge of Special Subjects

Liaison Officers, subject to the rules

Branch Representatives

other members entitled to the vote.

2. **The General Secretary :—**If the General Secretary is unable to attend a meeting of the Standing Committee, she shall, in consultation with the Chairwoman, delegate her duties *pro tem.*, to some other member of the Standing Committee, preferably an *ex-Secretary*.

3. **The Honorary Treasurer :—**Should the Honorary Treasurer be unable to attend a meeting of the Standing Committee, she shall delegate her powers, *pro tem.*, to the General Secretary or to some other responsible member of the Standing Committee, preferably an *Ex-Treasurer*.

4. **Branch Representatives :—**In case a Branch Representative is not able to attend a meeting of the Standing Committee, the Local Committee of her Branch shall authorise her to send a substitute whose name shall be notified to the General Secretary at least a week before the meeting.

**SUBJECTS COMMITTEE**

(26)

The need or otherwise of calling a Subjects Committee for the forthcoming session of the A.-I. W. C. Conference shall be annually

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decided by the Standing Committee at its Half-yearly meeting. In case no Subjects Committee is formed, the Standing Committee shall be summoned to function in its stead.

(27) The Subjects Committee, subject to Bye-Law No. 26, shall consist of :—

- (i) All members of the Standing Committee for the year.
- (ii) Branch Representatives as elected to serve on the new Standing Committee for the ensuing year.

*Note :—In the event of any present Branch Representative having been re-elected for ensuing year, the Branch Committee shall appoint one of its delegates as second Subjects Committee Member.*

(28) The Subjects Committee shall meet before the session of the Conference and may further be summoned during the session if required.

(29) The Subjects Committee shall examine, and draft the final form of the resolutions to be brought up for discussion at the Conference. It may resolve itself into sub-committees for this purpose and may refer on points to the Standing or Executive Committee.

The Subjects Committee may limit the number of resolutions so as to facilitate fuller discussion and suggestions of practical importance.

#### Sub-Committee :

(30) 1. The period of life of a Sub-Committee appointed to carry out the work of the A.-I. W. C. shall be one year. The Sub-Committee may be re-appointed if required.

2. *Ad Hoc* Committees may be appointed to deal with problems that arise from time to time. Conveners of these may be co-opted as Extraordinary Members of the Standing Committee, if desired.

(31) Conveners of Sub-Committees shall have power to co-opt upto 3 additional members who shall have specialised in the subject dealt with by the Sub-Committee.

(32) The Chairwoman and General Secretary shall, *ex-officio*, be members of all Sub-Committees.

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## V

## VACANCIES

- (33) **Vacancies Occurring between the elections**
1. among the Office Bearers shall, subject to the rules, be filled by the Executive Committee from among past or present members of the Standing Committee.
  2. among members of the Executive Committee shall be filled by that Committee, subject to the rules, from among members of the Standing Committee.
  3. among Members of the Standing Committee other than the Office Bearers, Branch Representatives or representatives of other organisations shall be filled by the Standing Committee.
  4. among Branch Representatives (S. C. M.) or representatives of other organisations shall be filled by the Branch or organisation in question.
  5. on a Sub-Committee shall be filled by the Convener from among members of the Standing Committee.
- (34) **Paid Officers and Workers:** Any vacancy among paid officers and workers of the A.-I. W. C. shall be filled by the Standing Committee.

## VI

## DUTIES

- (35) **General:—All Members of the Standing Committee shall**
- (a) be conversant with the Constitution, Bye-Laws and Regulations and modes of procedure of the A.-I. W. C., and shall be responsible to the Standing Committee for the efficient discharge of their official duties ;
  - (b) whenever possible, tour in their respective areas on behalf of the A.-I. W. C. In the case of a Branch Representative (S. C. M.) this duty may be relegated, by her local committee, to some other person ;
  - (c) make it a point of attending all meetings of the Standing Committee held during the year. Reasons for unavoidable absence must be communicated, without delay, to the General Secretary.
- (36) **The Chairwoman** shall be responsible for the proper conduct and order of all meetings at which she presides.

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- (37) **Patrons (S. C. M.) and Vice-Presidents** shall fulfil any special duties deputed to them by the Standing Committee, and shall co-operate with the Chairwoman and members of the Standing Committee in matters affecting the welfare of the A.-I. W. C.
- (38) **The General Secretary** shall
1. be in charge of the Central Office and carry out such other duties as may be decided on by the Standing Committee from time to time.
  2. issue circulars to the Standing Committee Members at least once in every two months. A summary of the information received in answer to such circulars, together with other relevant matter in regard to the progress of work, shall be issued by her for information of the Executive Committee from time to time.
  3. circulate, as soon as possible after receiving it, any information which a Standing Committee Member may send to her for that purpose within four weeks before the Half-yearly Meeting or within six weeks before a Conference-Session meeting of the Standing Committee. Urgent matters may be attended to at the discretion of the General Secretary ;
  4. arrange for Railway concessions for all the Office Bearers, Standing Committee Members and Delegates attending the meetings or conferences of the A.-I. W. C.;
  5. convene the meetings of the Standing Committee.
- (39) **The Organising Secretary** shall, as directed by the Standing Committee, assist in the formation, organisation and development of the branches and sub-branches of the A.-I.W.C. in various areas of the country., She shall also assist the General Secretary in the work of the Central Office, and shall carry out any other instructions that may be issued by the Standing Committee from time to time.
- (40) **The Honorary Treasurer** shall be responsible for (a) the collection and distribution of all moneys, and for the proper maintenance of accounts, pertaining to the A.-I. W. C. (b) the framing and presentation of a Draft Budget at the first meeting of the New Standing Committee.
- (41) **Duties of Branch Representatives (S. C. M.)**
1. A Branch Representative (S. C. M.) shall be one of the Secretaries of the Branch Association and must be resident in the area in which the headquarters of the branch happens to be.



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2. The Branch Representative (S. C. M. ) shall be the liaison Officer between the branch and the Standing Committee of the A.-I.W.C. She shall present the views of her branch on all important issues arising for discussion at meetings of the Standing Committee, and shall attend to all A.-I. W. C. circulars and correspondence in consultation with her local committee.

3. The Branch Representative (S. C. M.) shall be responsible for carrying out the work suggested in the annual time-table of the A.-I. W. C. She shall forward to the General Secretary :—

(a) Three weeks before the Half-yearly meeting of the Standing Committee ; a six-monthly report of the work done by her branch, and items for the agenda of the Standing Committee meeting.

(b) Six weeks before the Conference Session : a copy of all resolutions passed by the branch conference, duly classified ; and items for the agenda of the Standing Committee Meeting.

(c) Four weeks before the Conference Session :—

(i) the names of the Branch Delegates and Ordinary Visitors attending the All-India Women's Conference.

(ii) the name of the Branch Representative (S. C. M.) as elected for the ensuing year.

(iii) the name of a second Subjects Committee Member *in case* she herself has been re-elected as Branch Representative for the ensuing year.

(iv) The full annual report of the Branch Association.

(d) The names of any Special Delegates or Special Visitors to the A.-I. W. C. Conference that may be recommended by the Branch.

(42) **Members-in-Charge of Special Subjects & Conveners of Sub-Committees shall**

(a) within their terms of reference, collect and disseminate information, do propaganda work, file relevant press-cuttings, and keep in touch with other members dealing with similar subjects in the branches ;

(b) keep the Central Office in close touch with their work and, as far as possible, posted up-to-date in regard to any legislation dealing with their special subjects which has been introduced, or is pending, in the legislature ;

(c) forward detailed six-monthly and annual reports, one at the time of the Half-yearly meeting of the Standing Committee and the other at the time of the Conference.

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- (43) **The Liaison Officers** for organizations abroad shall regularly send to the Chairwoman and the General Secretary A.-I. W. C. important extracts from their correspondence.
2. *Liaison Members* between the A.-I. W. C. and other organisations shall represent the views of the A.-I. W. C. at committee meetings of the bodies to which they have been elected and shall be responsible for supplying the Standing Committee of the A.-I. W. C. with all information required.

## VII

### THE A.-I. W. C. CONFERENCE SESSION.

- (44) **Invitation**
- Any Branch wishing to invite either the A.-I. W. C. to hold its conference or the Standing Committee to hold one of its meetings within the Branch area, shall extend a formal invitation through the Branch Representative (S. C. M.) to the Chairwoman of the Standing Committee
- (45) **The Reception Committee**
1. A Reception Committee of women shall be organized by the Branch Representative (S. C. M.) as soon as possible after the invitation to hold the Conference Session in her Branch area has been accepted by the A.-I. W. C.
  2. The Reception Committee of the Conference Session shall, *pro tem.*, be deemed to be a separate unit and, as such, shall be entitled to elect five delegates from among its members. The other members of the Reception Committee may attend the Conference as Special Visitors.
  3. The entire amount of Delegates' fees shall be credited to the account of the A.-I. W. C. Association.
  4. Half the proceeds of the Variety Entertainment organised by the Reception Committee, plus half the surplus of the money collected by the Reception Committee for the Conference Session, after the expenses are paid, shall be handed over to the A.-I. W. C. Fund.
- (46) **Programme:** After a formal discussion of the provisional programme by the Standing Committee, at its Half-yearly meeting, the General Secretary shall be responsible for drawing up the final programme of the Conference Session, in consultation with the Chairwoman of the A.-I.W.C. and the Branch Representative (S.C.M.) of the place where the session is to be held,

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- (47) **Delegates to the All-India Women's Conference shall be :**
- (a) All Members of the Standing Committee.
  - (b) *Special Delegates :*
    - (i) Patrons who are not members of the Standing Committee for the year.
    - (ii) Those invited to attend as Special Delegates.
  - (c) *Ordinary Delegates :*
    - (i) A.-I. W. C. Branch Delegates.
    - (ii) Five Reception Committee Delegates.
- (48) **Special Delegates** shall have all the rights of Ordinary Delegates, and shall further be entitled to attend, by invitation of the Standing Committee, any of the other meetings of the A.-I. W. C. held during the Conference Session. *At such meetings*, they shall not, except by permission of the Chair, participate in the discussions ; they shall not, in any case, vote at such meetings.
- (49) **Visitors :**
1. Special Visitors may, by permission of the Chair, speak during the open discussion of the Conference but shall not have the right to vote.
  2. Ordinary Visitors may attend the Conference meetings but shall not be entitled either to speak or to vote.
- (50) **Resolutions :**
1. Only those resolutions which are passed at the Branch Conferences or are drafted by Standing Committee Members other than Branch Representatives, and which are duly forwarded to the General Secretary, shall be considered for inclusion in the agenda of the A.-I. W. C. Conference. Exceptions may be made by advice of the Executive Committee, in the case of important or urgent resolutions.
- All such resolutions shall be subject to alteration, revision or rejection by the Subjects Committee (or by the Standing Committee if no Subjects Committee has been called for that session).
2. Resolutions for the agenda of the A.-I. W. C. Conference shall reach the General Secretary not later than six weeks before the date of the Conference. They shall be sent duly classified according to the subject-matter, and should be marked as follows :—
- (a) "Urgent" (such as those relating to Bills pending in Legislatures)

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(b) \*\* (those of special importance because of their All-India application)

(c) † (local resolutions for which the backing of the A.-I.W.C. Conference is needed).

3. Copies of all resolutions, properly classified, shall be issued by the General Secretary to the members of the Standing Committee and to all others attending the Conference as Delegates.

(51) **Amendment :—**

1. Amendments to the original resolutions may be moved by members of the Subjects Committee during any of its sittings.

2. Amendments to the resolutions as placed on the agenda of the Conference may be proposed by any Delegate. Such amendments shall be given to the General Secretary, in writing, one day before the Conference-sitting at which the resolution is due to be moved.

A delegate wishing to propose an amendment to an amendment during a sessional sitting of the Conference shall send it up, in writing, to the Chair.

(52) **Business :—**At every session of the All-India Women's Conference there shall be presented :—

(a) A report of the A.-I. W. C. work done since the previous conference (General Secretary).

(b) A duly audited Balance Sheet, (Honorary Treasurer).

(c) Resumés of the Branch Reports (Branch Representatives).

(d) Reports from Members-in-Charge of Special Subjects.

(e) Sub-Committee reports, if any (Conveners).

(f) Brief reports of the A.-I. W. E. Fund Association and the Lady Irwin College (Honorary Secretary, Fund Association.).

(53) **Procedure :—**

1. **Language :—**At sessional sittings of the Conference the speeches shall, as far as possible, be in Hindustani. At the discretion of the Chair, important speeches may be translated into the language of the area in which the Conference is held.

2. **Time and Conduct :—**The amount of time to be allowed to each speaker, and the conduct of the proceedings, shall be left to the discretion of the President, subject to the rules of procedure followed

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by the Indian Central Legislature modified, where necessary, by the Standing Committee.

### VIII

#### PATRONS

- (54) 1. Patrons who are not members of the Standing Committee for the year, shall be entitled to attend the Conference Sessions as Special Delegates. They may also participate, but without power to vote in all other meetings the A.-I. W. C.

### IX

#### CO-OPTED MEMBERS

- (55) 1. **Ordinary Co-opted Members** shall have the full rights of Standing Committee Members.
2. **Extraordinary Co-opted Members** :—
- (a) Representatives of other organisations on the Standing Committee.
- (b) Those co-opted for special purposes or for stated periods of time only.

Extraordinary members shall not have the right to vote except as delegates.

### X

#### JOURNALS

- (56) 1. A journal shall be regularly published in the name of the All-India Women's Conference, in accordance with directions issued from time to time by the Standing Committee.

### XI

#### PUBLICITY

- (57) 1. Proper publicity arrangements shall be made by the Reception Committee at the time and place of a Conference Session. The General Secretary (A.-I. W. C.,) and others appointed by the Standing Committee to assist her, shall fully co-operate with the Reception Committee in this matter
2. **Statements** :—No statement on behalf of the A.-I. W. C. shall be released for publication unless it has the approval and signature of the Chairwoman.

Bye-Law  
No.

## XII

### ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S EDUCATION FUND ASSOCIATION

#### A.-I. W. C.

- (58) 1. **A.-I. W. C. Liaison Officer:** The Standing Committee shall appoint, from among the twelve elected members on the Governing body of the A.-I. W. E. Fund Association, one to act as the Liaison Officer between the A.-I. W. C. and the Lady Irwin College. Such member shall represent the views of the A.-I. W. C. at meetings of the Fund Association and shall keep herself up-to-date in matters pertaining to the College.
2. **Rules for Election.** The rules for election to the Governing Body of the A.-I. W. E. Fund Association shall be published along with the Constitution and Bye-Laws of the All-India Women's Conference Association.

## XIII

### FINANCE

- of the Association of the All-India Women's Conference.
- (59) 1. **Reserve Fund.** All donations shall be credited to a Reserve Fund
2. **The Financial Year** of the A.-I. W. C. shall be from the 1st of November to October the 31st.
3. **Balance Sheet and Donors.** The Annual Balance Sheet, as ratified by the Standing Committee, and the names of all Donors paying Rs. 10/- or more for the current year, shall be printed in the Annual Report of the A.-I. W. C.
4. **Affiliation and Registration Fees** shall be sent to the Honorary Treasurer, A.-I. W. C., before the Half-yearly meeting of the Standing Committee of that year.
5. **Delegates' Fees:** Each delegate to the A.-I.W.C. Conference shall pay a fee of Rs. 10/- to the Honorary Treasurer.
6. **Standing Committee Members:** Members-in-Charge of Special Subjects, Liaison Officers and Conveners of Sub-Committees (if any), shall be allotted certain sums, to be determined by the Standing Committee, for their expenses. Any further expenditure incurred by these members shall require the sanction of the Executive Committee.

**Bye-Law  
No.**

**7. Paid Officers and Workers :** The salaries, increase or decrease in salaries, and the allowances (if any) of all paid officers and workers of the A.-I. W. C. shall be decided on by the Standing Committee.

## XIV

## THE A.-I. W. C. CONSTITUTION &amp; BYE-LAWS

(Vide Article No. IX.)

- (60) 1. All proposals of alteration to the Articles, Bye-Laws and Regulations of the A.-I. W. C. shall be stated in the exact form in which the alteration is desired to be effected, and copies shall be forwarded to the General Secretary and the Constitution Member by registered post.
2. All proposals of alteration to the
- (i) **Articles** must reach the General Secretary at least four months before the date of the Conference Session.
  - (ii) **Bye-Laws and Regulations** must reach the General Secretary at least two months prior to the Half-yearly meeting or the Conference-Session meeting of the Standing Committee.

## THE ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S EDUCATION FUND ASSOCIATION

(As the All-India Women's Conference is strongly represented on the Governing Body of the All-India Women's Education Fund Association, which came into existence through the Conference after its first Delhi session, it recommends this Fund to all those interested in the development of girls' education along the lines of its Memorandum.)

### MEMORANDUM OF ASSOCIATION

1. The name of the Association is "The All-India Women's Education Fund Association."
2. The objects for which the Association is established are :—
  - (1) The management of the Fund known as "The All-India Women's Education Fund."
  - (2) The promotion of the education of women and girls of India including :—

- (a) The aid of any schemes for the furtherance of education in all its branches, of the women and girls of India as may from time to time be recommended by the Conference known as the All-India Women's Conference or under such other names as the Conference may hereafter be registered (hereinafter and in the Rules and Regulations of the Association referred to as the All-India Women's Conference).
- (b) The institution of propaganda for the education of the women and girls of India.
- (c) The increase of the supply of better trained teachers, having particular regard to the inclusion of training in domestic subjects.
- (d) The encouragement of the production of better text-books and attractive and suitable literature in the vernacular.
- (e) The exploration and initiation of schemes for the education of children of Kindergarten age, for the extension of suitable education amongst children in rural areas, for the support where possible of approved schemes which already exist, and for the provision of suitable housing accommodation for women teachers, especially in rural areas.
- (f) The extension of facilities in existing educational institutions for courses of training in home-craft, fine arts, domestic science, physical culture and other suitable subjects.
- (3) The purchase or acquisition on lease, or in exchange, or on hire or otherwise, of any real or personal property, and any rights of privileges necessary or convenient for the purpose of the Association.
- (4) The erection, construction, alteration and maintenance of any buildings necessary or convenient for the purpose of the Association.
- (5) The sale, improvement, management and development of all or any part of the property of the Association.
- (6) The promotion and establishment of branches and of other societies or associations with similar objects particularly in the constituent areas of the All-India Women's Conference, and the affiliation or amalgamation of such societies or associations with this Association.
- (7) The doing of all other such things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objects or any of them.



**RULES AND REGULATIONS****I. MEMBERSHIP**

1. There shall be the following grades of members of the Association :—  
 (a) President. (b) Patrons. (c) Vice-Patrons. (d) Life Fellows.  
 (e) Life Members. (f) Members.
2. The President shall be elected at a General Meeting for a period of three years.
3. The Patrons of the Association shall be donors of sums amounting in the aggregate to not less than Rs. 20,000, and such other distinguished persons as the Governing Body may think proper to appoint. Every patron shall be at liberty to appoint a representative to attend and vote at the General Meetings of the Association on his or her behalf.
4. Vice-Patrons shall be donors of sums amounting in the aggregate to Rs. 10,000. Life Fellows shall be donors of sums amounting in the aggregate to Rs. 500. Life Members shall be donors of sums of not less than Rs. 100.
5. Members shall be persons who pay an annual subscription of not less than Rs. 5, such subscription shall be due in advance on the 1st November in every year.
6. The Governing Body may elect any person to honorary membership of any grade in recognition of services rendered to the Association.
7. The Honorary Secretary of the Association shall maintain a register of members of the Association and this register shall be open to inspection.

**II. GENERAL MEETING.**

8. (a) The Annual General Meeting of the Association shall be held once a year at Delhi at an interval of not less than 10 and not more than 15 months. The Executive Committee, however, shall have power to alter the venue for any especial reasons (Notice of such Annual General Meetings shall be given at least one month before the date fixed and such notice shall specify the business to be transacted. Members of all grades shall be entitled to attend and to vote on any question that may be submitted to the meeting for determination).
- (b) At such Annual General Meeting the report and balance sheet for the past year, and the budget for the next year, shall be presented and an Auditor appointed for auditing the account of the next year. Any other business may be brought forward with the assent of the Chair.
9. (a) An Extraordinary General Meeting of the Association may be convened at any time by the President for any purpose connected with

the Association and shall be convened on the written requisition of at least 30 members stating the object of such meeting.

(b) At least 18 days' notice shall be given of such meeting, with the agenda to be brought before it, provided that accidental omission to give such notice to any member shall not invalidate any Resolution passed at such meeting, and no business other than that specified in such agenda shall be transacted.

10. (a) All General Meetings of the Association shall be presided over by the President or in her absence by the Chairwoman of the Governing Body, or in absence of both by some other person elected by those present.

(b) All questions shall be decided by the votes of the members present, taken by show of hands, but anyone present may demand a division which shall forthwith be taken and the result declared by the officer presiding.

(c) In case of equality of votes, the officer presiding shall have a second or casting vote.

### III THE GOVERNING BODY

11. (1) The Governing Body of the Association for the purpose of the Act XXI of 1860 shall consist of the President and 21 members including an Honorary Secretary and an Honorary Treasurer, all of whom with the exception of the Honorary Treasurer, shall be women.

(2) From and after the Annual General Meeting of 1938 the Governing Body shall consist of :—

(a) the President, the Honorary Secretary and the Honorary Treasurer.

(b) Nineteen members of the Association elected triennially as follows :—7 elected by the Association and 12 elected by the Standing Committee of the All-India Women's Conference of whom 2 shall be from Indian States.

(3) The members of the Governing Body shall all be members of the Fund Association.

(4) Casual vacancies among office-holders or members of the Governing Body shall be filled by the Governing Body and any person so chosen shall retain his or her office so long as the vacating member would have retained the same if no vacancy had occurred. In the event of a vacancy or vacancies occurring among those members elected by the Standing Committee of the All-India Women's Conference, the Governing Body shall fill it or them from among names submitted to them by the said Standing Committee. No action

of the Governing Body which may be otherwise valid, shall be rendered invalid by the reason of any such vacancy remaining unfilled, provided, however, that the number of vacancies so remaining unfilled shall not at any time exceed 3 (three). An absence of 12 months out of India shall constitute a vacancy.

(5) The Governing Body shall have power, when necessary, to co-opt persons having expert knowledge in any Branch of the Association's work. The number of persons so co-opted shall not at any one time exceed five. Any co-option shall cease at the will of the Governing Body.

12. The Governing Body shall hold their Annual Meeting on the same day and at the same place as and immediately after the Annual General Meeting of the Association or at such other place and time as the Executive Committee may decide. The Governing Body shall, at the Annual Meeting, elect from among themselves a Chairwoman who will preside in the absence of the President and a Vice-Chairwoman who in the absence of the Chairwoman shall conduct her duties and exercise her powers. In the absence of both at any meeting, such meeting may elect its own Chairwoman from those present. Any vacancies in these offices shall be filled up by the Governing Body.

13. Ordinary meetings of the Governing Body shall be held at such place and time as may be fixed by the Executive Committee. The annual budget and report of the Association shall be considered at one such meeting in each year.

14. An extraordinary meeting of the Governing Body may be called at any time by the President or Chairwoman.

15. Upon a requisition in writing made by any five members of the Governing Body stating the object the President or Chairwoman shall call an extraordinary meeting.

16. Eighteen days' clear notice of any meeting of the Governing Body, specifying the place, day and hour of the meeting and the general nature of the business to be transacted shall be given to every member of the Governing Body by notice sent under postal certificate, provided that the failure to give such notice to any of the members shall not invalidate any resolution at such meeting.

17. At a meeting of the Governing Body six members must be present in person to form a quorum.

18. If no quorum is present within an hour of the time fixed for a meeting of the Governing Body, the meeting shall be held after an interval of 24 hours. If there again be no quorum, only urgent business may be transacted, and at such meeting three members shall form a quorum.

19. In the event of an equality of votes at any meeting, the presiding officer shall have a second or casting vote.

20. (1) The Governing Body shall at their annual meeting elect the Honorary Secretary and the Honorary Treasurer. They may also appoint an Honorary Assistant Secretary and an Honorary Assistant Treasurer. These shall not, ex-officio, be members of the Governing Body but in the event of the absence from any meeting of the Secretary or Treasurer they shall act in their respective offices as members of the Governing Body. Persons holding these offices shall be eligible for re-election. Any vacancies in these offices occurring during the year shall be filled up by the Governing Body.

(2) All other appointments shall be made by the Executive Committee.

21. The Governing Body, subject to these Rules, shall have general control of the affairs of the Association with authority to make standing orders regulating its own procedure, the procedure of the Executive Committee, and the powers and duties of its officers. In particular it shall provide for a proper record of all proceedings, and for an accurate account of all receipts and payments to be opened to the inspection of the auditor.

22. In addition to the powers and authorities conferred on them either by Statute or Rules of the Association, the Governing Body shall have power to do all such acts as are to be done by the Association, with the exception of those which by these Rules or by Statute are expressly directed to be done by the Association in General Meetings.

#### IV. COMMITTEES

23. The Governing Body shall at their annual meeting elect an Executive Committee of eight members besides the office-bearers. Any vacancies in the elected members of the Executive Committee occurring during the year shall be filled by the Executive Committee.

This Executive Committee will perform the current duties of the Association and such other duties as the Governing Body may prescribe. The transactions of the Executive Committee shall be duly recorded and laid before the Governing Body at its next meeting for information or confirmation. In case of emergency the Executive Committee may perform any duty and exercise any power of the Governing Body. The Executive Committee may appoint any sub-committee and delegate to it any powers which may be necessary, but the proceedings of such sub-committees shall in every case be reported for information or confirmation to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee shall meet at such time and in such places as they think proper and at all their meetings four shall form a quorum.

24. The Chairwoman, Vice-Chairwoman, Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer, shall be ex-officio members of the Executive Committee. The Honorary Secretary shall be ex-officio member of all sub-Committees (In the absence of either Honorary Secretary or Honorary Treasurer their Assistants, if any, act as members of the Executive Committee and any of the Sub-Committees).

25. (1) All matters affecting the finance of the Association shall be referred to the Executive Committee before being determined by the Governing Body.

(2) The Executive Committee shall scrutinise the accounts of the Association and shall consider the Report of the Auditor. It shall also prepare the annual budget and submit it through the Governing Body, to the General Meeting of the Association.

26. When a Branch of the Association is formed, or any other body having for its objects the purposes for which the Association is established desires affiliation, the case shall be examined by the Executive Committee before being submitted to the Governing Body, and no such branch shall be recognised or body affiliated without the vote of the Governing Body. It shall be a condition of recognition or affiliation that each such branch or body shall have a regularly constituted committee, and shall pay an annual affiliation fee to be fixed by the Governing Body, and that its accounts be audited by an auditor approved by the Governing Body.

27. Unless otherwise desired by them, branches and affiliated bodies shall remain independent in the administration of their funds and in the conduct of their operations but they shall furnish to the Governing Body such reports and information as may be required by the Governing Body and shall assist by correspondence and conference in the furtherance of their common objects. The Governing Body shall have power, subject to the Rules to assist branches and affiliated bodies in such manner and to such an extent as it may consider to be conducive to the objects of the Association.

28. The Governing Body shall be at liberty to appoint sub-committees for such purposes and with such powers as they may think proper.

## V. GENERAL

29. All moneys at any time standing to the credit of the general account which shall not be required for current expenses, and which the Governing Body shall not determine to transfer to the Building or any other account, shall be invested by the Honorary Treasurer, with approval of the Executive Committee in securities authorised by law for the investment of trust funds.

30. The Bankers of the Association shall be the Imperial Bank of India and also if necessary the Central Bank of India Ltd.

31. The Executive Committee shall provide a seal and also provide for its safe custody, and the seal shall never be used except by the authority of the Executive Committee previously given and in the presence of two Members of the Executive Committee who shall sign every instrument to which the seal is fixed, and every such instrument shall be countersigned by the Honorary Secretary or some other person appointed by the Executive Committee.

32. If any corporation, firm, school, college or body of trustees makes any subscription or donation to the Association, the privileges which such subscription or donation carries shall be exercised by a person whom the above-mentioned may from time to time nominate for a period not exceeding ten years to be determined by the Governing Body.

33. (1) None of these Rules shall be repealed or altered and no new Rules shall be made except by Resolution passed by majority of not less than three-fifths of the members of the Governing Body present at an ordinary meeting and confirmed by Resolution passed by a subsequent General Meeting of the Association.

(2) Interpretation of these Rules shall be vested entirely in the Governing Body.

#### BYE-LAWS FOR THE ELECTION OF MEMBERS TO THE GOVERNING BODY

1. The Executive Committee shall conduct all elections to the Governing Body.

2. Every candidate for election to the Governing Body shall be a member of the Association and shall be nominated by a member of the Association. Nomination forms for membership for the Governing Body shall be posted to each member of the Association in such form and at such time as the Executive Committee may think proper. No person can nominate herself or himself.

3. The nomination forms must be returned to the Honorary Secretary of the Association by the date fixed for that purpose accompanied by the consent in writing of the candidate nominated.

4. All nominations shall be scrutinised by the Executive Committee who shall have absolute discretion to reject any nominee. Notice of the names of all candidates so nominated together with voting papers in the form approved by the Executive Committee and instructions as to voting shall be posted to each member of the Association. The voting papers must be returned to the

Honorary Secretary in special envelopes provided only for this purpose by the date fixed in the notice.

5. The voting papers shall be opened and scrutinised at a meeting of the Executive Committee or by the Honorary Secretary and two scrutinisers appointed by the Executive Committee. The votes for candidates will be counted separately and the candidate or candidates, as the case may be, receiving the highest number of votes shall be declared elected. In the event of two or more candidates for one vacancy heading the poll with the same number of votes, the Chairwoman of the Executive Committee shall exercise a casting vote.

6. The declaration of the Chairwoman of the Executive Committee declaring the candidates elected shall be final and shall be reported to the Association at the Annual General Meeting. Successful candidates shall be notified immediately of their election.

7. If, during the interval between the posting of the nomination papers and the counting of the votes, a candidate, nominated by a member of the Association, is elected to the Governing Body by the Standing Committee of the All-India Women's Conference her name shall be removed from the voting paper.

8. The Standing Committee of the All-India Women's Conference shall have power to nominate not more than 3 (three) names for each vacancy occurring during any year in the Governing Body among its representatives. In the event of these nominations not being sent in to the Honorary Secretary of the Association within one month of the request for such nominations, the Governing Body shall fill the vacancy or vacancies themselves.

9. In order to simplify elections for office-holders of the Executive Committee nominations for these should be sent in by the members of the Governing Body to the Honorary Secretary at least 3 (three) days before the Annual General Meeting.

## **HISTORY OF THE ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE**

### **1. Origin of the All-India Women's Conference.**

The All-India Women's Conference owes its origin to a circular letter from Mrs. Margaret E. Cousins who, in the autumn of 1926, as Secretary of the Women's Indian Association, Adyar, Madras, addressed an appeal to women all over the country to form local committees and hold Constituent Conferences in each of the Provinces and in certain other clearly defined districts and Indian States, for the purpose of declaring their views on problems of education.

The original stimulus which gave rise to Mrs. Cousins' letter was an appeal made by the Director of Public Instruction, Bengal, at the Prize-Giving function of the Bethune College, Calcutta, in which he called on Indian Women to "tell us with one voice what they want, and keep on telling us till they get it." Mrs. A. L. Huidekoper, an ex-Principal of the Bethune College (who, we are glad to say, is still one of our very active members), made use of this appeal as the basis of two articles which were published in *Stri Dharma*, the monthly magazine, of the Women's Indian Association, and it was after this that Mrs. Cousins took up the matter in the way just described. Her appeal met with a wide and enthusiastic response, and Constituent Conferences were held in 22 places during the months of September to December, 1926, and the First All-India Women's Conference was organised to take place at Poona, where it was duly held from January 5th to 8th 1927, under the distinguished Presidentship of Her Highness the Maharani Chinnabai Saheb Gaekwar of Baroda,—Mrs. Cousins being the first Honorary Organising Secretary. The Resolutions passed at that Conference related almost without exception to education, ranging from matters concerning Primary Schools up to those relating to College and Adult Education. The sole exception was a Resolution condemning the practice of early marriage, as it interfered with education and supporting Sir Hari Singh Gour's Age of Consent Bill, which was then about to come before the Legislative Assembly.

## 2. The Second Conference.

In 1928, the Second Conference was held in Delhi under the Presidentship of Her Highness the Begum Mother of Bhopal, the proceedings being opened by Her Excellency Lady Irwin (Lady Halifax). In addition to reaffirming most of the Resolutions of the First Conference, notable Resolutions were passed relating to Rai Saheb Harbilas Sarda's Bill for the restraint of Early Marriage, which was at that time under consideration, as well as urging the Government to give representation to women in the Central Legislature, so that they might be able to express their views on pending measures affecting the interests of women and girls. The Second Conference was noteworthy also as the origin of All-India Fund for Women's Education.

## 3. The Third Conference.

The Third Conference, that of 1929, was held at Patna, with Her Highness the Dowager Rani of Mandi as President. It was on this occasion that the scope of the Conference was definitely widened to include Social Reform and a separate section for Social Reform was created to work on lines parallel to those of the Section concerned with Educational Reform. Three Sub-Committees of the Educational Reform Section were appointed to carry on work throughout the year in the following directions :



- (a) The drafting of a special curriculum for schools, based on the ideals underlying the Resolutions passed by the Conference.
- (b) The revising and creating of new text-books.
- (c) The investigation of the conditions of the training of teachers in all parts of India. Under the Social Reform Section also a Sub-Committee was appointed to carry on the campaign to raise the age of marriage.

#### 4. The Fourth Conference :

By 1930, when the Fourth Conference was held in Bombay under the Presidentship of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, the increased efficiency of the organisation had become very noticeable : and the Honorary Organising Secretary, Mrs. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, was able to report the accomplishment of a large amount of very effective work done by the constituent bodies in many parts of India. Prominent among the list of reforms effected through the support of the Conference and its members was the passing of the Sarda Act which, (while in the opinion of the Conference the age-limits specified in the Act were much too low, and the Act possessed some other obvious defects) was yet a bold step in the right direction. Following up that success the Social Reform Section of the Conference took a very active part in the agitation for Reform of the Laws of Inheritance as affecting women, while on the educational side an immense amount of useful constructive work, in addition to propaganda, was done by local members and committees of the Conference and its Constituencies in such direction as the opening of new girls' schools, Industrial Schools, Schools for children of the Depressed Classes, Adult Education, Prison Visiting, Relief to Women passengers on the Railways and Child Welfare and Maternity work. A new field of work, that in connection with female labour, was opened up through the opportunity of giving evidence before the Labour Commission, while by the delegation of distinguished members to International Conferences, such as the Berlin International Congress of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, the work of the Conference became known to women of other countries and *vice versa*.

It was in 1930, that the Committee of the Education Fund which had been registered the year before as the "All-India Women's Education Fund Association," decided to make a full inquiry about a suitable education for girls. An All-India Committee was appointed to investigate this matter. The members of the Committee made inquiries in their own provinces at first and then met together at Pachmarhi, C. P., in July and made their Report.

#### 5. The Fifth Conference :

The Fifth Conference was held at Lahore, in 1931 with Dr. (Mrs.) Muthulakshmi Reddi as President. Although the year 1930-31 had been one

of great difficulties owing to the pre-occupation of the country with political matters, it was nevertheless a year in which the work of the Conference made great forward strides. The number of Constituencies had by this time risen to 33, and many more schools, hostels and centres for adult education were reported as having been started through the efforts of members. The institution of the observance of March 1 as 'Women's day' and the holding of meetings in almost all the Constituencies on that day to popularise and explain the work of the Conference, was another noteworthy innovation. Vigorous and well-timed propaganda was carried on with a view to safeguarding the Sarda Act from amendments designed to nullify its usefulness; work was continued, in the direction of getting the laws of inheritance amended, and new work was undertaken in Baroda towards getting the State to lead the way in putting on the Statute Book a Divorce Act for Hindus. There were increasing signs all over the country that the propaganda of the members of the Conference in their various Constituencies was beginning to bear fruit in the changed attitude of the public towards the amelioration of the conditions of women in general, their better education, their proper representation in legislative and administrative bodies, and in the judiciary as Honorary Magistrates. The question of abolition of untouchability began to be tackled, too, in some Constituencies, notably in Madras, and while the attempt to deal with Labour questions (for which the formation of a special Conference had been contemplated) suffered a temporary setback owing to the disturbed conditions of the times, the keenness of members to tackle that among the other many difficult problems of the day, was intensified rather than diminished.

#### **6. The Sixth Conference :**

It was in 1932, when the Conference had Madras as its venue, and its President was Mrs. P. K. Ray, that it was clearly seen that although the constitution of the Conference debarred it from taking part in *Party* politics, it could not, if it were to perform its function of establishing women in their rightful position in the state and in society, avoid concerning itself with politics in widest sense of the term. The status of women in the new constitution of India, particularly in relation to their fundamental rights, their representation in the various bodies and the conditions of their enfranchisement, was a matter of vital importance not only to politicians, but to the whole country : and it was overwhelmingly felt that every opportunity must be taken before the constitution was actually drawn up in details, to impress upon those concerned in framing it, views of nearly half of those who would have to abide by it when framed. To this end, in April, 1931, a representative meeting was held in Bombay, under the Presidentship of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, the outcome of which was that the All-India Women's Conference, the Women's Indian Association, and the National Council of Women in India, conjointly

drew up a Memorandum to be placed before the Franchise Sub-Committee of the Round Table Conference. In May this Memorandum was submitted to all the Constituencies, with an invitation to them to give their considered opinion upon the views stated therein, and again in its final form, before it was actually submitted to the Franchise Committee, the Memorandum was circulated to the Constituencies, from which no dissentient opinion was received. I need hardly remind you that the essential points which were decided to press in the Memorandum were as follows :

- (1) Equal rights and obligations of all citizens without any bar on account of sex.
- (2) No disability to attach to any citizen by reason of his or her religion, caste, creed or sex, in regard to public employment, office of power or honour, and in the exercise of any trade or calling.
- (3) Adult suffrage.
- (4) Women to fight elections on equal terms with men, in mixed general electorates.
- (5) No reservation of seats for women as such, nor special nomination or co-optation.

A deputation of ladies belonging to the All-India Women's Conference also waited on His Excellency the Viceroy, in May, and presented a Memorandum asking for women to be represented at the Round Table Conference.

The Social Reforms Section was kept busy again this year in agitating against the attempts to amend the Sarda Act. Rai Saheb Harbilasji Sarda's Bill to secure a share for Hindu Widows in their husbands' family property was very widely supported in the Constituencies. The year was also noteworthy for the number of laws passed in Indian States, safeguarding women's rights, or enhancing their status.

The work of the Education Section went forward with unabated vigour on the usual lines, progress being made with the scheme for opening a Women's College for Home Science, Educational Research, and Training of Teachers. The Text-book Sub-Committee made considerable progress with its arduous labour, as did also the Sub-Committee on Labour, and Indigenous Industries.

## **7. The Seventh Conference :**

The Seventh Conference met at Lucknow in 1933 under the Presidentship of Lady Ramanbhai Nilkanth. In the work of the preceding year, that of representing the viewpoint of Indian Womanhood on the constitutional question had remained uppermost, owing to the fact that the Indian Franchise Committee

was occupied with its labours in India during the cold season of that year, and the Standing Committee of the Conference felt it obligatory that it should continue to press the views laid down in the Memorandum presented the year before to the Round Table Conference. Nine members of the All-India Women's Conference gave evidence at various centres, that of Rajkumari Amrit Kaur (Chairwoman of the Standing Committee) being specially noteworthy for the firm stand which she made upon the principles laid down in the Memorandum in spite of the fire of searching cross-examination. From the point of view of immediate results however, those efforts were, alas ! in vain, and the publication of the Communal Award was the signal for an outburst of protests from our Constituencies.

The work of the Social Section went on apace ; in many Constituencies the earnest practical efforts towards the removal of untouchability and caste restrictions proved conclusively, to those who have eyes to see, that women are not—as they are usually supposed to be—the custodians of orthodoxy and conservatism. In many of the State Constituencies as well as those of British India there was a strong movement in favour of providing for divorce in Hindu society, and its equalisation for men and women among Muslims. The promotion of the cause of Swadeshi and of indigenous industries was also a very important feature of the year's work, as was also the number of instances in which members of the Conference were successful contesting on terms of equality with men elections for seats on Municipal Corporations and academic bodies of Universities.

The opening of the Lady Irwin College for women, at Delhi, on November 10, 1932 was the event of the year in the Educational Section,—concrete evidence of the value of the work which had quietly and steadily been proceeding since the starting of the Education Fund four years ago. Important as was that event, however, one must not allow it to overshadow all the other less spectacular day-to-day work of members in the Constituencies, for without that real underlying zeal for the educational uplift of women, throughout the land, in villages as well as in towns in quiet and devoted care and service, as well as in laying of foundation-stones and presiding over public meetings, our Conference would have never grown into the solid organisation that it now is.

### **8. The Eighth Conference :**

- Our Eighth Session was held at Calcutta. Lady Abdul Qadir being the President on that occasion. The most prominent feature of the work of 1933 had again been the political one. Owing to the publication of the White Paper in which it was seen that the attempt made by our representatives in 1931 and 1932, to gain equal status had completely failed, it became neces-

sary to frame a second memorandum in which while it was reiterated that the proposals contained in the first Memorandum provided the only satisfactory solution, the White Paper proposals were examined and a clear statement made as to how far they could be regarded as even an adequate "second best". This Memorandum was submitted to the Joint Parliamentary Committee of the British Parliament, and later, three elected members representing our Conference, as also the National Council of Women in India, and the Women's Indian Association, were invited to London to give evidence before the Joint Parliamentary Committee. Suffice it to say here that through Memorandum II and the firm stand taken by our delegates in giving their evidence, we showed that, while willing to adopt an accommodating attitude in regard to details during the period of transition we stood immovably for the principle of equal status and against that of communal and special representation.

One very useful outcome of the political work outside India has been the many contacts that our delegates made with women's organisations of other countries and with institutions of international scope including the various organisations connected with the League of Nations.

Wider and wider though the scope of our activities has become, it must not be thought that this had the effect of making the current of local work flow more sluggishly. On the contrary, the work of the Educational and Social Reform Sections grows even more intensive as it grows extensive. As a whole our Movement gathers force everyday from new streams of local enterprise.

### 9. The Ninth Conference :

The Ninth Session of the All-India Women's Conference held its sitting in December, 1934, at Karachi under the Presidentship of Mrs. Rustomji Faridoonji. Practical achievement was the key-note of the Conference in the year 1934—for, in spite of many handicaps particularly of funds and workers the reports of work in the various Constituencies showed that a distinct advance was being made due to the unbounded enthusiasm of the members. For Bihar Earthquake Relief Fund the Constituencies of the Conference itself raised over thirty thousand rupees apart from the fact that they helped in the collection of other Central Funds.

The extracts relating to women in the Report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee were studied in detail by the Conference, and deep disappointment was felt that the clear demands of Indian women were being ignored and it was decided that even at that eleventh hour efforts should again be made to impress on the British Parliament the united desire of Indian women for a non-communal electorate for women at least and their dislike of the wife-hood

qualification which was being imposed on them. A resolution to this effect was forwarded to the Secretary of the Joint Select Committee and to the Secretary of State for India through the Liaison Officer, and this resolution was reiterated unanimously at the Half-yearly meeting.

A successful effort was made during the course of the year to create a widespread demand for the appointment of a Commission on the legal disabilities of Indian Women, which would suggest reforms in the light of modern conditions. An All-India Day was held on November 24, 1934, when meetings were held in every Constituency, and thousands of signatures were collected to support this demand. Until there is success in obtaining a more equitable system of laws, this work will be continued, as the members of the Conference feel that they cannot carry out their duties as citizens as long as they are hampered by legal restrictions both personal and civic.

The interesting report of the Committee appointed by the Conference to investigate the conditions in mines, and its suggestions that women should be eliminated from underground work aroused a great interest in the Conference and the desire there evinced to help the unfortunate women miners showed clearly how real was the claim that the Conference aimed at improving the conditions of women of all classes.

A notable feature of this year was that for the first time a permanent contact was made with the British Women's Organisations. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was appointed as the Liaison Officer for the Conference to keep in touch with Mrs. Lankester the Liaison Officer of the British Women's Organisations appointed for the same purpose. The presence of distinguished Special Visitors like Dr. Maude Royden and Mrs. Corbett Ashby during the Conference session was a proof of the great interest evinced by women in the ideals and problems of each other.

Year by year the activities of the Conference are increasing and the success with which it is tackling every new problem is abundant proof that the women of India are not only conscious of their duties but intend to contribute their due share in the task of nation-building.

#### 10. The Tenth Conference :

The Tenth Session was held in Trivandrum in December 1935 under the presidentship of Her Highness Maharani Setu Parvati Bayi of Travancore. Her guidance and keen interest in the proceedings of the Conference and in the discussions made this one of the most successful sessions.

It was the first time that the Conference was held in an Indian State, a State where the percentage of literacy amongst women is higher than in any other part of India, where the purdah system is unknown and where women

have equal rights and privileges,—in other words where women's rights are recognised.

An important feature of the year's work was the tremendous increase in the number of constituencies which have taken up village uplift work in earnest and have already achieved considerable progress. Rural-work, Maternity and Child welfare centres have been organised and systematic courses of lectures on sanitation and health arranged.

The Sub-Committee on the Child Marriage Restraint Act did good work during the year. A Bulletin was issued giving the statistics of child marriage in our country. A good deal of propaganda was done during the year through the Press to create opinion in favour of amending the Sarda Act. It is a matter of pride to note that Mr. B. Das was given permission to introduce a Bill in the Legislative Assembly to amend the Sarda Act and most of his amendments were based on the suggestions made by the Conference.

The immediate necessity for a common language for India was recognised by the Conference. A Sub-Committee was appointed to report on the ways and means that could be adopted for the realisation of this ideal. Another Sub-Committee was appointed for the spread of literacy in the country. It was realised that unless a concerted and intensive campaign against illiteracy was organised, the normal and material progress of the land was bound to be hampered.

The work of the Liaison Group which was appointed for the first time last year had gone on well during the year. The establishment of this contact with the British women's organisations has been of great service to the Conference. The Group as a whole, worked increasingly to press the demand of the Conference concerning Franchise and did their best to educate public opinion in England. The Group also arranged busy programmes for Conference members during their stay in England. This gave them an opportunity of speaking about the Conference. Ample publicity was given in English newspapers to all they said and did on behalf of the Conference.

The Constituencies had collected funds in the previous year for relief of people in Bihar stricken by the earthquake ; this year also funds were raised in the same way for the Quetta Earthquake Relief. Special mention must be made here of the organised help that was given by the members of Constituencies in Central Punjab, Sind and North-West Frontier Province to the refugees in Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar and other places.

With regard to franchise there was nothing much left to be done. All efforts to alter the qualifications for franchise mentioned in the Government of India Bill were of no avail ; repeated demands, representations, and statements met with but little success and the Government of India Bill was passed

into an Act. A resolution was passed reiterating the disapproval of the Conference of the franchise qualifications but urging on the women to use the powers granted to them by the Act, however inadequate they may be.

There was lively discussion on the question of Birth Control during the proceedings of the Tenth Session. The Conference was fortunate in having Mrs. Sanger, one of the prominent workers in the United States of America, whose vast experience and knowledge was helpful. The Conference passed by a large majority the resolution supporting the necessity for instruction in methods of Birth Control through recognised clinics.

Notable visitors from foreign countries, U. S. A., England, Japan and China were present at this Session. It was a source of great encouragement and inspiration to all. The women's cause is the same all over the world and it gave one an opportunity of exchanging ideas and learning one another's experiences.

The number of Constituencies and members had been increasing during the year. The report of the work done in the different constituencies showed that women were taking a much greater interest in social work. The activities had increased and most of the constituencies had undertaken practical work in some direction.

#### 11. The Eleventh Conference :

The Eleventh Session of the A.-I. W. C. was held at Ahmedabad in December 1936, under the Presidentship of Mrs. M. E. Cousins. This year we entered the second decade of our work. It is gratifying to note from the work of the past ten years that the A.-I. W. C. has now taken its rightful place as a representative and fully established women's organisation in India. This year more concentration was given to the need for medical inspection in schools and to the opening of hostels for girls and for the removal of illiteracy by starting even night schools. The year 1936 should be mentioned for the outstanding event of the year, *viz.*, the opening of the State Temples of Travancore to all classes of Hindus by H. H. the Maharaja of Travancore, when H. H. Maharani Setu Parvati Bayi, his illustrious mother, was our President. A great deal of propaganda work was carried out by our Constituencies by holding meetings and enlisting public support for the Social Bills introduced in the Legislative Assembly—*e.g.*, Dr. Deshmukh's Bill to amend the Hindu Law governing Hindu Women's Rights to Property, Mr. B. Das's Bill to amend the Sarda Act in order to make it more stringent, Dr. Bhagwan Das's Bill seeking recognition of inter-caste marriages, and Mr. Hafiz Abdullah's Muslim Personal Law Application Bill,—and to urge their adoption by the Assembly.



Our Constituencies also tried to introduce improvements with regard to sanitation, health and education in the villages and this year was also devoted to the uplift of Harijans. Leper relief, tuberculosis work, maternity and child welfare encouragement of indigenous industries were dealt with during the year. The Special feature of this year was the work done by our Franchise Sub-Committee for the enrolment of women voters for the new Legislature, Municipalities and District Boards. At the request of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, a Memorandum on the Political, Legal, Social and Educational Status of Women in India was submitted to the League of Nations and the Government of India. The question of a Central Office to meet the expansion of our work was also considered and a scheme for the same was also prepared. We had this year Special Visitors from England, Australia and other visitors from U.S.A. and Holland who attended the Conference.

## 12. The Twelfth Conference :

The Twelfth Session of the All-India Women's Conference was held at Nagpur in December, 1937, under the Presidentship of Rajkumari Amrit Kaur.

The most notable feature of the year 1937 was the inclusion of about 60 women in the Legislatures of the various provinces, which was possible on account of the facilities given to women to contest elections held under the Government of India Act 1935. One of these, namely, the Hon'ble Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was elected to be a Cabinet Minister which shows gigantic strides made by the women's movements in the country. A few of our women have been elected as Deputy Speakers of various Legislatures and some have been appointed Parliamentary Secretaries.

More constructive work was undertaken by the Branches. The Standing Committee considered the draft curriculum of girls, primary schools in India, and the suggestions made by us were considered helpful by the Educational Commissioner to the Government of India. Some of the Constituencies have started conducting village schools and also other useful village work, such as, adult classes, night schools, etc. A scheme has been prepared by the Convener of the Common Language Sub-Committee, which is expected to be useful for solving the common language problem.

The Standing Committee prepared a programme of legislation for improving the social status of women and the same was forwarded to the Prime Ministers of the new Provincial Governments and to the new women members of the Legislatures. Also brochures dealing with such vital problems as child marriage, birth control, temperance, etc., have been prepared in different vernaculars and forwarded to local committees. Much propaganda was done and

meetings were held regarding the legal disabilities of women and resolutions expressing public opinion in the matter were forwarded to proper quarters.

Mrs. S. C. Mukerjee, an ex-Chairwoman of the Standing Committee, was appointed by the Government of India as Indian delegate to the Conference of the Central Authorities of the League of Nations in Eastern Countries for combating traffic in women and children, held at Bandoeng, Java, in February, 1937. An excellent report on the women suffrage movement was prepared by Rani Lakshmbai Rajwade, which is expected to educate women on the subject.

Mr. Ekstrand, Director of Opium Traffic and Social Questions Section of the League of Nations, visited India on his way back from Java and gave lectures under the auspices of the A.-I. W. C. stressing the work to be done for children suffering from physical and mental congenital defects and some of our Constituencies have started work on the lines suggested by him.

Propaganda against child marriage was vigorously carried on and steps were taken to file complaints and to prosecute cases against offending parents and priests, with some measure of success.

Mrs. Grace Lankester, our Liaison Officer in England, was present at the Nagpur Session. It is gratifying to note that our Liaison work is getting on satisfactorily. There has been increasing contact with other countries in the world and an invitation was received from British Guiana to attend the Centenary Celebration of the Indian Emigration.

Untouchability work has been pushed ahead, and as a result some Municipalities have thrown open tanks and wells to Harijans. One of our Constituencies is running a free Harijan School. Following the example of the Travancore State, some other Indian States have allowed Temple entry to all Hindus. Some members of Constituencies are paying regular visits to Jails and provincial and State Governments are being urged to take steps to improve the condition of women prisoners, and also to provide suitable occupations for women labourers eliminated from the mines.

Swadeshi Exhibitions were held in many Constituencies and there was a large sale of Swadeshi articles. A directory of Swadeshi articles has been prepared. The Indigenous Industries Sub-Committee prepared a Scheme which was forwarded to the Director of Industries in various provinces and states. A scheme for unregulated industries is in hand.

New Sub-Constituencies have been opened at Bhusawal, Kirloskerwadi Bijapur, Belgaum, Patan, Mehsana, Visnagar, Navsari; Amreli, Surat, Broach and Rajpipla. This brings the list of sub-constituencies to more than 100. There are now 38 working Constituencies.

The most important development this year was the Resolution tabled at the Session at Nagpur for widening the scope of the Conference by amending Article II of the Constitution so as to enable the Conference to take part in the progressive welfare of the people of India in all directions and not merely in educational and social spheres. To this resolution several amendments were tabled. For want of the necessary four-fifths majority required for changing the Constitution, the question remained undecided. But the discussion showed a keen desire amongst the members to widen the scope of the activities of the Conference.

### 13. The Thirteenth Conference :

The Thirteenth Session of the All-India Women's Conference was held in Delhi in December, 1938, under the Presidentship of Rani Lakshmbai Rajwade. The Conference had distinguished visitors, Miss Mary A. Dingman, President of the Peace and Disarmament Committee of the International Women's Organisations, Mlle. P. Hage of the International Labour Office, Geneva, Mrs. Ali from Japan, Mrs. Harlow from the United States of America, Miss G. F. Greig of Australia, and Miss Agatha Harrison. Most active work was done in the removal of illiteracy and this was not restricted to towns but was extended to the villages as well. Schools have been started for Harijans and practical knowledge on subjects of sanitation and hygiene given. The Conference studied in detail the Wardha Education Scheme and a practical scheme of working Nursery schools was drawn up.

A Common Language Sub-Committee carried its work and suggested a constructive scheme which was followed by many Branches. The social work of the Conference has been extensive. Public opinion was created regarding bills introduced in the Provinces and in the Central Legislature in particular dealing with Divorce, Monogamy, Restraint of Polygamy and the Legal Disabilities of women.

Exhibitions of the products of agriculture and various industries, such as home-craft, painting, leather-work, clay-modelling, needle-work, etc., were held.

Considerable attention was given to maternity and child welfare. Several of our Branches conduct maternity and child welfare clinics. The Health Sub-Committee devoted itself to improving the sanitary conditions prevailing in the schools of their Provinces and persuaded the authorities to improve living conditions of workers. Indigenous industries were encouraged by helping the sale of the products of cottage industries by canvassing orders for them.

Another important feature was the promotion of inter-communal harmony by the formation of what is called the " Family Circle " which includes men and women of all castes and creeds and communities.

Propaganda against child marriage continued as before.

The Liaison Group in England continued its work of giving publicity to the work of the A.-I. W. C. abroad.

The newest venture, however, is the publication of a journal belonging to the Conference.

The work of the Conference has extended and there are now 40 Branches and 150 Sub-Branchees. New Branches were opened in Jath and Kathiawad during the year. Work in several other Branches was re-organised through the services of an Organising Secretary.

#### **14. The Fourteenth Conference :**

The Fourteenth session of the Conference was held in Allahabad under the presidentship of Begum Hamid Ali. Owing to the International situation, overseas members were not able to come. The Conference continued its work but the horror of totalitarian wars and the insecurity of small states were too near and recent not to have brought out the wholesale condemnation of such wars by the Conference. The procedure followed in the previous Conference held at Delhi was continued at Allahabad. The group discussions naturally reduced the time available for plenary sessions but it was felt that free and frank discussions and exchange of experiences were more valuable and educative than platform oratory.

The Liaison group in Great Britain continued its work of not only giving publicity to the women's work in India but also of creating public opinion to recognise the just claims of this country in the political sphere.

The creation of a new liaison officer for South Africa was another feature of this session.

For the first time the General Secretary of the year was made responsible for the Bulletin of the Conference and with the help of the President and Patrons and other members of the Conference four issues of the Bulletin were published with two supplements, one on Education and the other on Health.

The appointment of an Organising Secretary for the United Provinces was followed by further activities in this direction and resulted in the organisation of a new Branch in Dehra Dun and the re-organisation of the Benares unit. The total number of Branches at present is 35, the number of units 121, and total membership is 8607.

#### **15. The Fifteenth Conference :**

The Fifteenth session of the Conference was held at Bangalore in December 1940, under the Presidentship of Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru. After the Tenth

session this was the first time that the Conference met in an Indian State. Though the country was passing through very critical times and though some of our leading workers were in jail still a fairly large number of delegates attended the Conference. The decision to send a goodwill mission to China on behalf of the A.-I. W. C. was postponed due to unavoidable reasons. A welcome feature of this session was that some of our sisters from Ceylon were present and it is sincerely hoped that this precedent will be followed by our sisters from other neighbouring countries to foster better understanding amongst the Asiatic nations.

The Branches of the Association carried on their various activities during the year and while some of them did very valuable work, the activities of others were only nominal. Almost all the Branches did some valuable work to tackle the problem of the appalling illiteracy of our masses and it is a matter of legitimate pleasure and pride to us that their activities bore useful fruit. Besides, various Branches did useful work in other directions, such as opening hostels for girl students, opening maternity and child welfare clinics, opening nursery schools and organising Swadeshi exhibitions.

As a result of the agitation carried on by the Conference the Government of India was persuaded to appoint a Committee to examine the injustice done to women under the Hindu Law. The Conference raised its emphatic protest against the limitations imposed by the terms of reference to the Committee so appointed. It is a matter of deep regret that the Government has not realised the futility of such piecemeal legislation when the whole problem of the position of woman under Hindu Law requires a full and comprehensive examination in order to adapt the law to meet modern conditions.

The Lady Irwin College continued to progress satisfactorily during the year under review. The number of admissions was increased during the year and the increasing number of applications for admission to the College demonstrate its great utility and popularity.

Mrs. Lakshmi N. Menon continued to render valuable service to the Conference as Editor of the *Roshni*. *Roshni* has become a valuable instrument for carrying on the propaganda of the Conference and for expressing the feelings of the womanhood of India. We hope this mouthpiece of the Conference will continue to expand its manifold services to the cause.

The Conference represents the womanhood of India of all castes and creeds and of all shades of opinion. Its primary object is the amelioration of the conditions of the women of our country and all its propaganda and activities are directed towards achieving that primary aim.

## 16. The Sixteenth Conference.

The Sixteenth Conference met at Cocanada in December 1941 under the Presidentship of Shrimati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. In spite of the comparatively smaller attendance due perhaps to the remoteness of Cocanada, the enthusiasm and seriousness evinced by those present made the Conference a great success.

The resolutions of the Session covered a wide field of national and international importance such as War and Peace, Civil Liberties, Control of Prices and Communal Harmony, etc. The Conference adopted two concrete proposals, the village Reconstruction Project and the Scheme of starting a training Camp for Provincial Organisers and other women workers. Both these resolutions were implemented with considerable success.

Despite the worsening internal and international situation, constructive work of various kinds was undertaken by the Conference and its Branches. New Branches were opened at Kashmir and Hyderabad (Sind) and several moribund Branches were revived. All the Branches worked for the spread of literacy among adults. The notable success of the Bombay Branch in conducting thirty classes earned well-merited recognition from the Bombay Government which sanctioned a grant for six months of Rs. 500/- a month, the maximum it pays to any society.

The questionnaire of the Hindu Law Committee engaged the serious attention of all the Branches. The detailed replies of the Branches were consolidated and sent to the Rau Committee. The Standing Committee of the Conference urged in its report to the Hindu Law Committee the appointment of at least two representatives on the Committee and the extension of the terms of reference so as to include an inquiry into all the disabilities of women under Hindu Law.

The Lady Irwin College by raising the status of Domestic Science as a school subject progressed steadily.

The Branches rendered valuable service to the cause of the health and welfare of women and children by running nursery schools, physical activity centres, clinics, and by arranging distribution of milk to needy children, lectures on sanitation and dietetics, hospital visiting, T.B., investigation, etc. Harijan work and general educational activities were also undertaken by some of the Branches.

The training of women in small cottage industries and the marketing of these products as well as the finding of employment for women formed important planks of the programmes of some Branches. Exhibitions, organised by local Conferences of the Branches, of women's handicrafts, particularly of

swadeshi materials, attracted much attention and thus popularised the use of swadeshi.

At the beginning of the Session, Shrimati Kamaladevi formally presented to the All-India Women's Conference a beautiful Chinese scroll worked in silk—the picture of an Eagle perched on a pine tree before the rising sun. It is the gift of Madame Chiang Kai Shek and when Shrimati Kamaladevi was in Chungking she received it on behalf of the women of India. It will always be treasured as a symbol of the good fellowship between China and our country.