

### **Book Review**

M.D. David, *A Saga of the YWCA of Bombay (1875-2016)*, YWCA of Bombay, Mumbai, 2017, pp. 237, Price not mentioned.

M.D. David is a known author of Christianity and Christian institutions in western India. The book under review is one more work by him on the subject. He has discussed the YWCA from its beginning to the present times, pointing out the transformation it has undergone over the years.

Once the YMCA Movement commenced in London in 1844, it was a matter of time for it to reach India. Henriette Butt and some other women established a YWCA in Bombay in 1875 which was also the first YWCA in India. It adopted a constitution in 1899. A new building was opened in 1901. YWCA Hostel was built especially to provide a secure and living place for employed young women obliged to live away from home. Its programmes touched the lives of young women at all levels catering to their spiritual, social and intellectual needs. They included social gatherings, social service, Bible classes and prayer meetings. In short, they aimed to develop perfect womanhood. The young women who came to stay in it were teachers, typists, clerks, telephone operators, shop assistants, dressmakers, nurses, students and others. The demand for accommodation was so great that a long waiting list emerged. Its branches were established as also a holiday home in Lonavala. Since it met a variety of needs, it gained popularity. However, it was under European spell. The Willingdon Hostel residents were mostly Europeans and Anglo-Indians. Only a few beds were given to the Indians provided they were willing to live in a European style. Wives of the governors of Bombay invariably became its patronesses. Lady Rani Maharaj Singh was the first Indian patroness in 1947.

The author points out that as the country moved towards freedom, the process of YMCA's Indianisation commenced. Mrs. John Mathai became the vice-president in 1941 and then became the first Indian president. This process was complete when Shahala Wilson was appointed as its General Secretary. The first Republic Day was celebrated with flag hoisting and other patriotic functions. In the same year it completed 75 years of its service. The multi-national character of the YWCA underwent a sea change after 1947. By 1949-1950 its members were largely Indians. Its leadership and personnel also changed from foreigners to Indians which was accompanied by a transformation in its outlook. To ensure that girls with lower incomes were not unduly burdened, rooms were graded with varying charges. Its objectives today are to meet the needs of young women by way of three services, i.e., (i) providing residential accommodation to young working women, (2) Finding suitable jobs for them through its employment

bureau, and (iii) providing vocational skills to enable them to find employment and lead a decent life.

Besides, it has undertaken rehabilitation of girls from rescue homes. From 1980s its resources are being increasingly used to meet the requirements of the marginalized members of the society. In 1988 it opened a Drop-in-Centre to cater to the psychological and social needs of women in distress. Shortly thereafter, it became a full-fledged counselling centre. It enlists police support and undertakes follow-up home visits, referrals and legal aid. It also strives to create awareness in the society regarding the law and rights of women. Nor has the YWCA neglected the street children. In 1999 a team from Plus Channel made a documentary on their life under the Savli project after talking to them and their teachers. The film showed what difference the project made in their lives.

The author writes that the YWCA has a vision. It is concerned with the problems which the society is facing today. This is especially with respect to harassment of women at work place, violence against them and so on. At the end of the book there is a list of its presidents and general secretaries from 1947 to 2016 as well as a bibliography.

The author stresses that the sign of the YWCA is the Blue Triangle. It indicates that it is a service and fellowship organisation. It promises friendship, understanding and assistance to young women in need. The blue colour stands for service whose limit is the sky. The equilateral triangle indicates that its objective is the all-round development of mind, body and spirit of young women. All this is to be achieved by providing opportunities for fellowship, education, recreation, service and worship.

There are not many works on the histories of social service organizations and so the book covers a relatively neglected field. Inclusion of rare pictures regarding the YWCA adds to the interest of the reader. It may be added that it is not just a story of the achievements of YWCA. The author has written it in an objective manner and has not refrained from writing what is not complimentary to it. For instance, on pp. 94-95 he writes about the workers' strike.

Overall, the book paves the way for more studies on these lines.