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CONTRIBUTION OF SISTER R.S. SUBBULAKSHMI ON EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT:

Many great leaders have fought for women liberation and freedom of our country. One such great personality was sister Subbulakshmi of Tamilnadu. Being the lady of the soil of Tamilnadu and as already experienced child marriage women sister Subbulakshmi had to react and revolt aggressively against this noble cost. Child marriage, neglecting education, basic rights denied for women, made sister Subbulakshmi to enter into this issue and work hard for the upliftment of such affected, downtrodden, destitute women. Women education

was the only resource for solving such problems was sister Subbulakshmi in tension. Accordingly she work hard sacrificed her younger days and developed the stage of women from slavery to success through her motivation and determination. 'Learn and earn' was the remedy, to this problem was sister Subbulakshmi's vision. Through her past bitter experience she was able to fight out this mission successfully and fulfil her dreams.

KEYWORDS: Early Status of Women, Girls' Schools, Widow Education, Women Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

During the 19th and 20th centuries, the worldwide status of women in general was in a very undeveloped stage, likewise even our country Indian women status was also equally prevailing. The same problem existed even in our state. The basic rights, fundamental rights of women was curtailed, child marriage was easily practised those days. As a result young widows, young widows with children, women destitute, helpless and orphans increased gradually. Both in high society and

low society without any bar. Sister Subbulakshmi on seeing that pathetic condition of women brought about some great reforms to eradicate and abolish child marriage and other such social injustice created to women. Subsequently many women welfare schemes were introduced. Sister Subbulakshmi planned to motivate women education, accordingly after a great struggle and hard work; women were given educational rights and their position in increased gradually. 'Learn and earn' was her intention. By means of basic education women were able to face all their problems by themselves, earn their living and spend their life meaningfully and

happily.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the rehabilitation of child widows through education.
- To examine the liberation of women and empowerment.
- To highlight the impact of women education to the downtrodden people

METHODOLOGY

The narrative and analytical method has been used to the present

study. It critically examines the works and the contribution made by social reformer and educationist Subbulakshmi for the upliftment of downtrodden people and destitute widows.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION OF SUBBULAKSHMI

Subbulakshmi was born in 1886 at Mylapore in Madras as the first daughter of Visalakshi and R.V Subramanialyer. When she was less than five years old, in 1891, she was admitted to a primary school in saidapet. In those days it is not common for girls to be sent to school at all. She was ranked first in the public examination in the Chengalpet district, for the fourth form of the Madras Presidency at the age of nine. Before puberty she was married but her husband died soon after. After she was widowed, her parents continued her education at Presidency Training School, and then for her high school she was admitted at the Presentation Convent, Egmore. She went on to be admitted in of the few co-educational colleges at that time, the Presidency College, near the Marina in Madras. Then, in April 1911 she became the first Hindu woman to graduate from the Madras Presidency. She did this with first class Honours from Presidency College, Madras.

CAREER AND SOCIAL WORK

In 1911 she started her career as a teacher in Presidency school, Egmore. After the completion of teacher training she was promoted as head mistress. She also served as a head mistress in Lady Willingdon high school, Madras and Rajamagendram government high school. In 1912 the Sarada Illam was started by Subbulakshmi at her own house, Peeppul tree house, Egmore with the Sarada Ladies Union's first donation of Rs.2000/- Many young widows and destitute widow's downtrodden girls were joined and studied in this illam. Ms. Lynch got involved, bringing in government funding and they shifted to Triplicane's Adi cottage, for a rent of Rs.25/- per month.

In 1917 the first batch of trained girls who had joined Sarada Illam in 1912, entered the new college for women, Queen Mary's College, which had been in 1914. Kuppam School was originally started in 1920 for the children of the fisher man families next to the Widow's Home; it was located at the Ice House. In 1922 near to the school formerly inaugurated a Training School, by the Governor's Wife, the Lady Willingdon, later it was named Lady Willingdon Training School. Later on grew in numbers and became what is now the Lady Willingdon Training School.



A 100 CHILD WIDOWS AT THE SARADA ILLAM WITH SISTER R.S.SUBBULAKSHMI

Sister Subbulakshmi served as a school manager of Chennai Hobart School in 1932 and 1933. Then she was transferred to Cuddalore. In the same year Sarada Cheri School was started for the betterment of many downtrodden people, after that the school was hand over to social service institute of South Arcot. Wherever she was posted on Government duty, she started good schools, for the local communities and then handed them over to a local organisation or society to run them. Likewise Madhurandhagam School, Mangalambiga Padasalai of Vaikalathur. Later it was renamed Sri Visalakshi Subramaniam Kalvi Nilayam. These days Union's activities involves celebrating sister Subbulakshmi's

birthday in August, holding a Bhagavat Gita competition, and running of the Subbulakshmi's primary school in Guild Street, T.nagar. The Sarada Ladies Union celebrates its centenary in 2012.

ORIGIN OF MYLAPORE LADIES CLUB & VIDYA MANDIR SCHOOL

When the government would not permit single and married girls who were not widows from staying and studying at the Sarada Illam, the Sarada Ladies Union organised the Sarada Home in Fountain Lodge through privately raised funds.



They were also instrumental in facilitating the starting of the Sarada Vidyalaya Girls School with government funding and the Sarada Ladies Club in 1932, this club was later renamed as the Mylapore Ladies Club. She also established the Sri Vidya Kalanilayam, a school for adult women at Mylapore in 1942, and while she was the President of Mylapore Ladies Club, she formed the Mylapore Ladies Club School Society in 1956. Which was then renamed as Vidya Mandir School in Mylapore. In addition, she was involved in setting up a social welfare centre for Women and Children in Madampakkam village near Tambaram in 1954.

POLITICAL CAREER OF SUBBULAKSHMI

Subbulakshmi made efforts to abolish child marriage and to encourage education of girls. The historic, first All India Women's Conference called the "All India Women's Conference on Educational Reform" was held at the Fergusson College, Puna in January 1927. She was one of the 58 prominent delegates attending this meeting. She actively supported the Sarada Child Marriage Restraint Act, passed in 1930, and appeared before the Joshi Committee which formulated the Sarada Act instrumental in raising the marriageable age of girls to 14 and boys to 16. After retirement, she was involved in the activities of the Women's Indian Association, through which she befriended Annie Besant and others. She served as a nominated member of the Madras Legislative Council from 1952-1956.

As a nominated member of the State Legislative Council she has spoken boldly about various issues that are still relevant. Her work for adult education, rehabilitation of evacuees, and other work for the betterment of women and children were way ahead of her time. In November 1928, her evidence and interview for the "Age of Consent Committee", under Sir Moropant V. Joshi, was crucial in advocating education as the tool for delaying early marriage of girls.

ACHIEVEMENT OF SUBBULAKSHMI

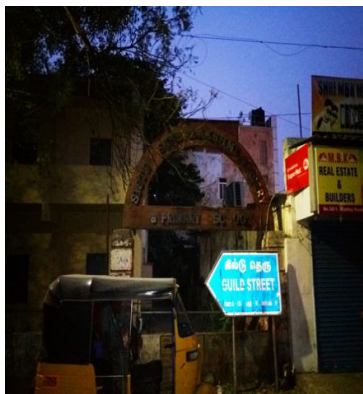
Sister Subbulakshmi was most well known for a rescue and education of child widows, many of whom went on to become leaders in various walks of life. Although that is what she was most known for, she was also responsible directly and indirectly, for the starting of many institutions that are even today consider forerunners in education. However her work had such a deep impact on society in general and women in particular, that the Government of India, both before and after independence honoured her work both with patronage and assistance as well as awards. Many of the women whom

she educated and helped, who went on to become prominent and celebrated people in society have praised her and thanked her in their speeches and books too.

Then the two prestigious awards that were public acknowledgment of her tireless efforts to empower women through education were, The Government of the British Raj honoured her the Kaisar-i-Hind Gold Medal for public service in 1920, and in 1958, after independence of India, the Indian Government awarded her the Padma shri.

TIMELINE OF PADMA SHRI SISTER R.S.SUBBULAKSHMI

- 1908 - She joined B.A. course in Madras Presidency Collage.
- 1911 - Opened Sarada illam/Sarada widow's home.
- 1912 - Founded Sarada Ladies Union.
- 1913 - L.T. Diploma in Teaching.
- 1922 - Principal of Lady Willingdon Training Collage.
- 1942 - Opened a School for adult women named, Srividya Kalanillayam at Mylapore.
- 1952 - Nominated Member of the Madras Legislative Council.
- 1956 - Pioneered the running of the Vidya Mandir school of Mylapore.



CONCLUSION

The part played by sister Subbulakshmi towards women Injustice is very much to be honoured and remembered. As a result sister Subbulakshmi Nursery Primary School stands existing T.Nagar in Chennai. It is only through the motivation, hard work, sacrifice and voluntary service, dedication of sister Subbulakshmi, women freedom was possible. Child marriage, other such social injustice were abolished. Women journey from slavery to success was achieved easily. As mentioned by the famous poet Bharadhi

“Nimirndhanannadai Nerkondapaarvaium
 Nilathilyarkumanjadhanerigalum
 Thimirndhanyanacherukumirrupadhal
 Semmaimadharthirambuvathilaiyam”

In today's scenario women are able to flourish in various field because of the seed sworn by sister Subbulakshmi. Today women can be grateful to her by means of their sincerity, honesty, hard work, responsibility in the work entrusted to them. Her vision and dreams of women freedom, happiness and self respect with dignity had no doubt attained its goal and suppose to overflow successfully.

The future women mission should continue to fulfil sister Subbulakshmi's past vision.

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