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A Statement on the Political Status of Women
under
The New Indian Constitution

BY
MRS. P. SUBBARAYAN

March 1933

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With the best compliments of

MRS. P. SUBBARAYAN,

Kumaramangalam,

Salem District,

South India.

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I

KEY OF PROGRESS IN INDIA.

1. The position of women in the public life of a nation has become one of the most important criterion by which the civilisation of the nation is now judged. In India too, in the words of the Simon Commission "the women's movement holds the key of progress." Mahatma Gandhi also has repeatedly declared that the advancement of women is essential to the true regeneration of India. Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, the Prime Minister, remarked in August 1932 in his statement on the reservation of seats for women on the Legislatures, "it is not too much to say that India cannot reach the position to which it aspires in the world until its women play their due part as educated and influential citizens." I, too, fully believe that the participation of our women in civic rights and duties is essential to the progress and advancement not only of Indian women but of India herself. Our country can only be made a better and happier place for our children to live in, by the united and devoted efforts of men and women working together. I do not, of course, mean to infer for one moment that women should abandon their homes for public work. To the great majority of our women, their homes must and always will be, their principal occupation and first interest, but in addition to their home life I think our women should have the duties, responsibilities, and privileges of citizenship. Women should also have full opportunities for using their civic rights and should avail themselves of these opportunities, and only in this way shall we achieve a true civic spirit in India, perfectly compatible with home life. I am, therefore, keenly interested in the political status of women under the new constitution in India, and there are a few points of special importance with regard to this subject, which I feel deserve careful consideration.

STATUTORY DECLARATION ABOUT CIVIC RIGHTS.

2. In the first place, I think it essential that a clause should be inserted in the new constitution declaring that men and women



have fundamentally the same rights and duties as citizens. It should be made quite clear that women will be subject to no disability in the exercise of their civic rights merely because they are women. I strongly urged the importance of this Statutory declaration at both the First and Second Round Table Conferences and I earnestly hope that it will be embodied in our new constitution.

FRANCHISE.

PRESENT DISCREPANCY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN VOTING POWER.

3. The practical application of this principle of equal citizenship involves among other responsibilities the right to vote. Women have already secured the franchise in India for certain legislative bodies; but the franchise given on equal terms to men and women produces a very great discrepancy between them in voting power, for the simple reason that our franchise is based mainly on a property qualification, and very few women have that qualification in their own right. Statistics show that while the proportion of men voters to the total adult male population is 10 per cent. that of women voters to the total adult female population is only .6 per cent. Women form nearly half the population of our country but the women's electorate is less than one-twentieth of the men's electorate, there being only 315,651 women voters in a total electorate of 7,108,472 voters. There is no doubt, therefore, that, owing to the inadequate number of women voters, the women's vote has up till now been a negligible factor in elections.

METHODS FOR REMOVING THE DISPARITY IN THE VOTING STRENGTH OF MEN AND WOMEN.

4. All inequality would disappear if we had adult franchise, but the Simon Commission, the Franchise Sub-Committee of the Round Table Conference of 1930 and the Indian Franchise Committee, have after examining the question declared that adult franchise is not immediately possible, and can be reached only by stages. All these three responsible bodies, however, recognized that, in the case of women, theoretic equality under a restricted franchise would mean in practice extreme inequality, even if there was a broader franchise than the present one, and they

therefore recommended that there should be special qualifications for women in addition to the ordinary qualifications for franchise.

SUGGESTIONS FOR RAISING THE VOTING STRENGTH OF WOMEN.

5. Many proposals have been put forward for the special qualifications:

(1) The Indian Statutory Commission recommended the following special qualifications for women:

- (a) being the wife, over 25 years of age, of a man who has the property qualification to vote.
- (b) being the widow, over 25 years of age, whose husband, at the time of death was so qualified (Para 108, Report of Statutory Commission, Vol. II).

It should be noted that these proposals were also recommended by the deputation of women who gave evidence before the Statutory Commission at Lucknow except that these ladies thought that wives and daughters might be so enfranchised.

(2) At the First Round Table Conference, the women delegates emphasised the fact that adult franchise would provide a solution of the disparity between men and women voters. They, however, added that if adult franchise were not possible in the immediate future and could be achieved only by stages, there should be special franchise qualifications for women, as a temporary measure, and they put forward proposals supporting the recommendations of the Indian Statutory Commission, with the modification that the age limit for women should be the same as for men, *i.e.*, 21 and not 25 years.

(3) The Franchise Sub-Committee of that Conference (1930) agreed that special qualifications should be prescribed for women and stated, "no system of franchise can be considered as satisfactory or as likely to lead to good Government where such a great disparity exists between the two sexes. . . . We, therefore, recommend that the Franchise Commission should devote special attention to this question in the light of all evidence available including the recommendations of the Statutory Commission and the suggestion made at this Sub-Committee that the age limit mentioned in the proposals of the Statutory Commission should be lowered from 25 to 21." Under these proposals

the number of women voters would be approximately equal to that of men.

I should mention here that this method for giving adequate franchise to women was not a novel suggestion. It was adopted in England and other Western Countries when women were first enfranchised, and before these countries had adult suffrage. European women have told me that though there were a large number of unmarried women thus debarred from the vote, these women unselfishly gave up their claims as they realised that this method was the only practical expedient then possible for securing a substantial measure of women's enfranchisement. In other words they preferred half a loaf to a negligible proportion of bread, even though the former involved the setting up of a special qualification for women which many of them disliked. I may here remark that much the same choice now lies before Indian women.

(4) The Indian Franchise Committee which was appointed early in 1932 to examine the whole subject of the future franchise in India made certain proposals for the extension of franchise:

(a) *For the Provincial Councils* they recommended that for both men and women the property qualification should be substantially lowered, and that an educational qualification such as the passing of the Upper Primary should be introduced. They proposed in addition two special qualifications for women, literacy (ability to read or write in any language) and a certain property qualification of the husband. Under these proposals the Committee estimated the number of women who would be qualified to vote under each heading as:

(i) Own property qualification	1,929,000.
(ii) Literacy	1,265,000.
(iii) Husband's property qualification	4,306,000.

But as there would be overlapping between these voters, the total number estimated as likely to be enfranchised was approximately 6,620,000. If these proposals are accepted, women's voting strength will be definitely raised, but in no province will it be more than 1 : 4 and in a province like Bihar it will be only about 1 : 9. As I stated in my minute attached to the Report of this Committee (page 200) I wish that even under a restricted franchise, it were possible to have the voting strength of women equal

to that of men, but there seem to be many difficulties in the way of achieving this object. I would, however, point out that the Indian Franchise Committee's proposals for franchise for Provincial Councils will increase the women's electorate about twenty-one times and the men's only four and a half times (Chap. VIII, Report of the Indian Franchise Committee, Vol. I).

(b) *With regard to the franchise for the Assembly*, the Indian Franchise Committee recommended that it should be the same as that now in force for the Provincial Councils, supplemented by an educational qualification for both men and women. They suggested that in the case of men the educational qualification should be the possession of the matriculation or school leaving certificate or its equivalent. In the case of women they stated that as education has made much less progress among them, the names of all women entered on the new Provincial Council rolls under the literacy qualification should be added to the Assembly roll. They stated, however, that this proviso should apply only to the first roll of election to the Assembly and that thereafter while the names of all these women should be retained, the qualifications for the additional new women electors should be the Upper Primary Standard. They anticipated that under these proposals, the number of women on the electoral roll for the first Assembly would be about 1,500,000 in a total electorate of about 8,500,000. (Chap. XX, Report of Indian Franchise Committee).

My personal opinion is that the franchise for the future Provincial Councils and for the Assembly should be the same and I have already stated my reasons for it in my minute attached to the Committee's Report (page 201). I think the general opinion among Indian women is also the same. The memorandum of three All-India Women's organisations to the Indian Franchise Committee clearly stated that the franchise qualifications for the Federal and Provincial legislatures should be exactly the same. I feel that the majority of the Franchise Committee have not stated any convincing reasons to justify their recommendation of an unduly restricted and differential franchise for the Assembly. In any case I think the franchise proposals of the Indian Franchise Committee for women for such an important body as the Federal Assembly inadequate and I would urge that women should have for that Assembly the same special qualifications of literacy and of the husband's property qualification recommended by the Indian Franchise Committee for their future Provincial franchise.

DISCUSSIONS AT THE THIRD ROUND TABLE
CONFERENCE.

PROVINCIAL FRANCHISE.

6. The proposals of the Indian Franchise Committee were considered by the Third Round Table Conference and the Report states that there was a certain amount of opposition from the members of the Conference to the special qualifications for women. Some of the members urged that the educational qualification should be the same for women as for men and another section opposed the husband's property qualification for the Provincial Franchise. If the views of these two sections are accepted the number of women voters will be reduced by considerably more than half. If the passing of an examination or test is made the educational qualification for women, very few women will be qualified to vote and there will be a further increase in the disparity in numbers between men and women voters. It should be remembered that very many more boys than girls attend schools and pass examinations and this was still more the case in the days when the adults of today were boys and girls. If the husband's property qualification is dropped, the number of women voters will be reduced by more than half, as the estimated number of women who will be enfranchised by it is approximately 4,306,000 in a total of 6,620,000 women voters. There will then be only 2,314,000 women voters in a total electorate of about 30,000,000 voters, and the women's vote will continue to be a negligible factor in elections to the Provincial Councils.

WOMEN OPPOSED TO THE POSTPONEMENT OF THE FINAL CONSIDERATION OF THE QUESTION.

7. The Report also says, "that considerable support was forthcoming for a suggestion that it might be possible to deal with the problem of enfranchising an adequate number of women by giving to the various provinces some latitude to propose a method of enfranchisement of women in the light of local conditions, subject to a general injunction to aim at much the same ratio of men and women voters as had been recommended by the Franchise Committee, $4\frac{1}{2} : 1$, a ratio which the conference as a whole was disposed to regard as not unsuitable".

This proposal, however, is opposed to the wishes of Indian women. We have all along demanded that the question of women's political status should be settled now, along with other vital matters relating to our country, and at the very first Round Table

Conference the women delegates, Begum Shah Nawaz and I, stated this demand in clear terms. The new Central and Provincial legislatures will have many pressing questions to deal with and the questions affecting women and their status, will be crowded out unless candidates for election are responsible to a sufficiently powerful women's vote. We therefore urged that the claims of India's women should be dealt with at the same time as those of the rest of India and before the Bill for the new Indian Constitution is finally drafted and presented to Parliament. The Franchise Sub-Committee of that Conference accepted our contention when they recommended that the expert Franchise Committee should examine their case and report on it, and the Franchise (Lothian) Committee appointed at the conclusion of the Second Round Table Conference had definite instructions to do so in their terms of reference. They accordingly examined the question, taking into consideration all sections of opinion including that of Provincial Governments, and the vast amount of evidence and material available, before they arrived at any decisions. It is certainly not fair to the women of India to propose at this last stage that the matter be again referred to the Provincial Governments. The Provincial Governments must surely have considered this matter in detail when they made their recommendations to the Statutory Commission and the Indian Franchise Committee, and the majority of them have already stated that they are opposed to any scheme for the extension of women's franchise by means of special qualification. There is, therefore, no doubt that the proposal to refer this matter to them again, will be of no help to women.

FRANCHISE FOR THE FEDERAL ASSEMBLY.

8. In its chapter on the Federal Legislature, the Report of the Third Round Table Conference states that "the conference accepted generally the proposal that the franchise for the British India section of future Assembly shall be the existing franchise for the Provincial Legislative Councils"—"the conference was unable to agree as regards the adoption of an educational qualification for women voters for the Federal Assembly, the same arguments as were advanced for and against the proposal in the case of the Provincial Legislatures holding good in their view here also". I, too, would repeat my replies to those arguments when urging that the same special qualification of literacy should be prescribed for women for the Assembly Franchise also.

THE WHITE PAPER PROPOSALS.

FRANCHISE FOR PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLIES.

9. The Report of the Third Round Table Conference has been followed by the White Paper embodying the proposals of the British Government for Indian Constitutional Reform. Under these proposals the Franchise in general for Provincial Legislatures will be "essentially based on property, supplemented by an educational qualification, common to men and women alike, and by a qualification for women in respect of property held by the husband". These educational qualifications as defined in Appendix V of the White Paper would vary considerably in the different provinces, e.g., in Madras the educational qualification for both men and women would be literacy (ability to read or write in any language), in Bombay, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, and Central Provinces the passing of the Matriculation or School Leaving Certificate or its equivalent, in the United Provinces, Punjab and Assam "the completion of the educational course immediately below the Upper Primary Stage or its equivalent" and in North-West Frontier Province "in urban areas, the passing of the Middle School Examination; in rural areas, of the Upper Primary Standard; or of an examination accepted by the Local Government as the equivalent of either".

IMPORTANCE OF PRESCRIBING BARE LITERACY AS QUALIFICATION FOR WOMEN.

10. I would repeat my arguments against prescribing the passing of an examination as a qualification for women's franchise. Very few women will come on the register by this qualification, particularly in Provinces like Bihar and Orissa, United Provinces, Punjab and North-West Frontier Province where education among women is still very backward and the majority of even the few educated women have, because of social customs, never been to school or passed examinations. It is extremely unlikely that any adult women even if literate, would be allowed by social custom to sit for a public educational examination, of however low a standard, so that women already educated at home will not be qualified to vote because they have not passed a public examination. I have no doubt, therefore, that if the Government proposals are adopted the proportion of women to men voters will be far lower even than the Government estimate 1 : 7 and

the women's vote will continue to be a negligible factor in elections in those provinces where an educational qualification higher than bare literacy is prescribed for women.

Moreover, on general grounds a literacy qualification is to be encouraged, because it is a qualification the elector can easily acquire for herself independently of her husband and relations, if she is interested in public affairs. She could acquire literacy in her home and without the breach of social custom, involved in going to school or sitting for a public examination. If a general literacy qualification is practicable administratively in Madras, one of the largest of the provinces in area and population, surely it must be practicable administratively in other provinces also, and it would be an especially valuable qualification in Provinces like Bihar and Orissa where women's education is admittedly backward. The Hartog Committee's Report states in Chapter VII that Bihar is "exceptionally backward" in higher education and "only a few hundred pupils, mainly Indian Christians and Hindus, are to be found above the middle stage". In the same Chapter para. 33 table LXXVII shows that in 1927 in Bihar and Orissa there were only 4 High Schools (which prepare for Matriculation) for girls with 814 pupils and in the Central Provinces seven schools with 183 pupils. It is in such provinces in particular, that the spread of literacy among women should be encouraged and to set such a high standard for the franchise as passing the Matriculation Examination will be no encouragement to adult women to acquire literacy. Also the facilities for women's education are most inadequate in just those provinces where such a high educational qualification is to be prescribed for the franchise, and without a considerable women's vote, it is unlikely that these facilities will be improved in the near future.

FRANCHISE FOR THE FEDERAL ASSEMBLY.

11. The franchise for the House of Assembly under the British Government's proposals will be for practical purposes the existing franchise for the present provincial legislatures, supplemented by an educational qualification common to both men and women. The White Paper further states in para. 21 that the "ratio of women to men electors for the Federal Assembly will, for practical purposes, remain unchanged under the present proposals, although the number of women electors will be substantially increased". But it does not give any figures to explain how the Government arrived at that conclusion. I would

point out that under the new property qualification for the Assembly proposed by the White Paper which is the same as that now in force for the Provincial Legislatures, the proportion of women to men voters will certainly not be higher than under the existing Assembly qualification, as both are based on property held on the voter's own right. But, to the property qualification for the Assembly Franchise the White Paper proposes to add such a high educational qualification as the passing of the Matriculation or School Leaving Certificate Examination, common to men and women.

For reasons which I have already explained, it is obvious that far more men than women will be qualified for the franchise under this educational qualification. The Interim Report of the Indian Statutory Commission (Hartog Committee) states in Chapter VII, para. 7, "the disparity and the growing disparity between the figures for boys and those for girls is even more significant than appears at first sight, for it increases as we go up the educational ladder, starting from the lowest primary class. In the primary stage taken as a whole the number of girls is one-fourth of the number of boys. . . . In the middle schools for boys the number of pupils is 18 times as great as in the corresponding schools for girls and in the high school stage it is 34 times as great". The Indian Franchise Committee's Report (para. 409) mentions that the number of men obtaining the Matriculation or S.S.L.C. Certificate in recent years has been about 50,000 per annum while the number of women passing the Upper Primary Standard has been about 12,000 per annum, so that even if the Upper Primary qualification were adopted as the permanent qualification for women, the Report itself points out that the "number of women on the electoral roll for the Federal Assembly will be very small". To increase this number the Report suggested that the names of all women entered on the new Provincial Council rolls under the literacy qualification should be added to the first roll of electors to the Assembly. The White Paper by proposing an educational qualification of the Matriculation or S.S.L.C. examination for both men and women, will reduce the number of women voters for the Assembly far below the number who would be qualified were even such a low standard as the Upper Primary qualification accepted and I would point out that even this Upper Primary qualification was considered inadequate by the Indian Franchise Committee, unless modified by the special

temporary literacy qualification for women, proposed by them. The high educational qualification proposed by the White Paper will, therefore, surely lower the ratio of women to men electors below even its present inadequate figure.

A NEW REGULATION PROPOSED BY THE WHITE PAPER.

12. The White Paper further modifies the proposals of the Indian Franchise Committee by adding a proviso that for the first two elections "the claimants in respect of an educational qualification or of property held by a husband will be required to make application to be entered on the electoral roll to the returning officer" and that thereafter the Local Government will have the power of modifying this requirement. The Indian Franchise Committee suggested this condition only in the case of women who were not recorded as literate in the educational records and not of all women who would be qualified under these two special qualifications. The exact effect of this proposal of the White Paper cannot be measured now, but I fear that numerically it will be very serious indeed. It is bound to hamper the effect of the special qualifications for women voters devised in order to mitigate the present disparity in number between men and women voters. Under existing social conditions in India this proviso will press more hardly on women than it would on men voters, as certain social customs will make it difficult for some qualified women voters to fulfil this condition. It is also quite likely that men relations who are opposed to women participating in public activities may prevent women from making such an application. Another point to be considered is that as these women will have to enroll before the excitement of the election period has begun, many of them may not realise before it is too late that though they are qualified for the franchise, they are not entitled to vote unless they have made an application to the Returning Officer to have their names entered on the register. The only effect of this proviso must, therefore, be to decrease the women's vote, and lower its proportion in comparison to the men's vote, and thus diminish the value of the special qualifications for women. The importance of an adequate women's vote at the very beginning of our new constitution cannot be overestimated, and yet the White Paper recommends for the first two elections this new regulation which, as I have explained, will seriously affect the number and proportion of women voters. I

would, therefore, urge that this new condition should not be prescribed for women and that the recommendation of the Indian Franchise Committee on this point should be adopted as being fair and reasonable. If, however, this rule is insisted upon, I would propose that to compensate for the probability of a smaller number of women coming on the roll, the husband's property qualification should be extended to the wives of all men qualified under the property qualification instead of merely to the wives of men possessing the property qualification at present prescribed for the Provincial Councils.

RESERVED SEATS FOR WOMEN ON THE ASSEMBLY NO SUBSTITUTE FOR AN ADEQUATE WOMEN'S VOTE.

13. There is one other point that I should like to emphasise. Though the White Paper contains provision for reservation of seats for women for the Federal Assembly (Appendix II, page 76) this reservation of seats should not be considered as in any way a substitute for a women's vote large enough to demand consideration from candidates for the Assembly. Questions such as marriage and divorce, adoption, custody and guardianship of minors, wills and succession, will under the proposals of the White Paper be concurrent subjects for Provincial and Central legislation (Appendix VI, page III). As these are questions on which the views of men and women may differ, it is essential that the members of the House of Assembly should be responsive to a large women's vote, if the views of women are to have a fair chance of influencing legislation on these subjects,—subjects which all will agree are of the most vital and particular concern to Indian women. I do most earnestly hope that the Joint Select Committee will bear this in mind and will carefully consider the arguments that have been urged for enlarging the women's electorate both in the Provinces and in the Central legislatures, but more particularly for the House of Assembly. I hope that on consideration of these arguments they will modify the Government's proposals so as to enable women to have a share in the electorate more in proportion to their number and their importance to the country.

THE FEDERAL UPPER CHAMBER.

14. With regard to the Upper Chamber of the Federal Legislature no proposals have been made for ensuring that women will be eligible for election to this chamber. The White Paper

states that "since the British Indian seats in the Upper Chamber of the Federal Legislature will be filled by indirect election by the Provincial Legislatures, no question of franchise qualifications arises, though certain specific property or other qualifications will be required in members" (para. 20, page 6). Under the present qualifications for election to the Council of State the number of women who would be qualified to stand is infinitesimal. I drew the attention of the Federal Structure Committee of the Second Round Table Conference to this fact, and at my request the Committee added a recommendation to their draft report that the existing rules should be so modified as to prevent the virtual exclusion of women. (Para. 34, Third Report of the Federal Structure Committee). I would repeat that if the present qualifications are to be continued for the new Federal Upper Chamber some modification in them should be made for women candidates. If new qualifications for candidates are to be prescribed, I would urge that these new qualifications should be such as to secure the eligibility of a considerable number of women as candidates. I regret that the Third Round Table Conference and the White Paper seem to have completely ignored this point, but I hope that the Joint Select Committee will give their attention to it.

In this connection I may perhaps note here that in spite of a strong demand from women, the Council of State has not yet extended the right to vote or stand for election, even to those few women who possess the existing high qualifications. Under the present Act the power to give these rights is the exclusive concern of the Council of State itself, a power which it has not hitherto chosen to exercise. Practical experience on legislative measures affecting women, also has shown that this body is reactionary in its attitude to women, so that I am naturally anxious that the qualifications to serve on this body should be so modified as to make it possible for women to do so. The attitude of the Council of State illustrates the importance of the Statutory declaration that men and women have fundamentally the same rights and duties as citizens.

THE PRESENT SITUATION.

15. In summing up the present situation with regard to this question of women's franchise I would point out first, that the Indian Franchise Committee's recommendations were much more modest than those of the Indian Statutory Commission and of the

Franchise Sub-Committee of the First Indian Round Table Conference. Though the population of men and women is approximately equal, the Indian Franchise Committee recommended only a ratio of as 1 : 4½ for them on the electorate for the Provincial Assemblies, a ratio which seems to me scarcely adequate. The attitude of some of the members of the Round Table Conference appears to have been unfavourable to the specific proposals of the Indian Franchise Committee for special qualifications for women, but the Conference as a whole was disposed to regard the ratio of men and women voters recommended by that Committee as suitable. The White Paper, however, proposes to give women, a voting strength for the Provincial legislatures, less than even the modest one recommended by the Indian Franchise Committee—a voting strength which seems to me wholly inadequate. Again with regard to the Federal Assembly the Indian Franchise Committee's proposals would enfranchise about 1,500,000 women and about 7,000,000 men; and the Committee expected that the proportion of women voters would be 2.5 per cent. of the total adult population of women, while the proportion of men voters would be 10.2 per cent. of the total adult population of men. I would again emphasise that this strength is less than adequate, especially for a legislative body of such importance to women as the Federal Assembly. The Third Round Table Conference objected to a special educational qualification for women but they do not seem to have discussed figures and the ratio of men and women voters. I have already explained that under the proposals of the White Paper this ratio will be lower than that proposed by the Indian Franchise Committee, and lower even than what it is under the existing franchise, though the White Paper states it will remain unchanged but it gives no figures to show how the Government arrived at that conclusion. If the proposals of the White Paper are accepted the disparity between men and women voters for the Provincial and Federal Assemblies will be so great that the women's vote will continue to be ineffective in elections; though I am glad to note that the British Government have clearly stated that the Government fully appreciate the importance of a large women's electorate and are very anxious to secure an adequate proportion of women electors.

II

THE FUTURE.

CONSIDERATION OF THE QUESTION OF WOMEN'S FRANCHISE.

16. The question of women's franchise will be considered by the Joint Select Committee which will meet in May, and finally by the British Parliament when the new Indian Constitution Bill is presented to them for sanction. There is not the slightest hope that these bodies will recommend adult franchise in any form, and the system of franchise for some years under the new Constitution is therefore bound to be a restricted one. From the brief history I have given of women's franchise in India, it will be seen that the measure of franchise recommended for women by the Simon Commission, the first Statutory body appointed to report on our Constitutional advancement, was raised by the First Round Table Conference whose appointment followed that of the Commission, but it has since been steadily decreased by each successive body which has considered the subject, the Indian Franchise Committee, the Third Round Table Conference and now the British Government. The reason is obvious and it is a clear warning to our women that in an important matter like franchise, vague statements and emphasis on theories will not help us and that a practical and statesmanlike policy is necessary if we are to achieve any appreciable result. There is therefore a grave danger that the Joint Select Committee may also cut down even the modest proposals of the Indian Franchise Committee for women's franchise unless a strong resistance is put up by the women of India. It is greatly to be regretted that no memorandum on this subject was placed before the Third Round Table Conference, to enable that Conference to take cognizance of the views of Indian women on the proposals of the Indian Franchise Committee's report. The position to-day would perhaps have been better if our women had expressed in clear terms their opinion either supporting the Committee's proposals as the minimum they would accept or putting forward alternative practical proposals for giving them an adequate share of voting strength in a system of restricted franchise. In the absence of any clearly expressed opinion by Indian women on the Indian Franchise Committee's proposals, those opposed to an extension of women's franchise apparently succeeded in influencing the Government to modify the

proposals of the Indian Franchise Committee and the White Paper now recommends for women, a voting strength far less than that recommended by that Committee. It seems to me therefore that it is imperative for our women to give their immediate attention to this subject of vital importance to them, and to state clearly their views on it.

OPPONENTS TO SPECIAL FRANCHISE QUALIFICATIONS FOR WOMEN.

17. The present situation indicates opposition to an extension of the women's vote by special qualifications for women from various quarters:

(1) First and foremost from the Provincial Governments. Some of these Governments are most anxious to lessen the total electorate proposed by the Indian Franchise Committee in order to simplify the work of elections, and believe that the easiest way of doing so is by cutting down the Committee's recommendations for women's franchise. The fact that the proposals in the White Paper for women's franchise vary in different provinces and that the White Paper states that the Government made the proposals only after "exhaustive discussion with Indian authorities" indicates that the majority of provincial Governments are opposed to increasing the voting strength of women.

(2) The orthodox and conservative in India who are opposed to the idea of women in public life, and do not therefore favour any proposal to give women increased opportunities for participation in it. They are also afraid that it will break down some of our social customs like Purdah.

(3) A section of opinion in England and among Europeans in India which for various reasons is opposed to a progressive scheme of franchise for women in India.

(4) The opposition to special qualifications from a section of our own women. Three women's organisations, the all India Women's Conference, the Women's Indian Association and the Committee of the National Council of Women, have since May 1931 declared that they are strongly opposed to any form of special qualifications for women. Their views were voiced at the Second Round Table Conference by Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, one of the new delegates to that Conference, and she was supported by Begum Shah Nawaz who stated that she withdrew the proposals she had put forward the previous year. It should be noted, however, that their objections to special qualifications have been invariably coupled with a demand for adult franchise which would

secure for women real equality with men in voting power. Therefore these organisations demand a greater and not a lesser measure of enfranchisement for women than the Indian Franchise Committee offer.

It should also be noted that these objections were certainly not made unanimously by all branches or members of these associations and the evidence given before the Indian Franchise Committee shows that these views were not discussed at any session of a general meeting of these societies before they were presented to the Second Round Table Conference or to the Indian Franchise Committee. A very widely signed memorandum to the Indian Franchise Committee, from the women of Bengal, some of whom are prominent members of these associations, and included the President and a Vice-President of one of these organisations for the year 1932, supported these special qualifications. Many witnesses, some of them speaking on behalf of other important women's organisations, in both their oral and written evidence before the Indian Franchise Committee, also urged special qualifications.

Again, it is evident that there have been within these women's societies and among some of their members many fluctuations of opinion as different aspects of the matter have been put before them, a fluctuation perhaps natural in a question of such complexity. To give only a few instances, Begum Shah Nawaz, the woman delegate on all the three Round Table Conferences, stated at the First Round Table Conference in 1930 that she felt that "owing to practical difficulties adult franchise has still to be a goal for the future" but that "at the same time and during the transitional period we have to devise such ways and means as will make the Government of the country really representative". When the Franchise Sub-Committee of that Conference decided to recommend that adult franchise was not possible in the immediate future and put forward certain proposals for broadening the existing qualifications to enfranchise not less than 10 per cent and not more than 25 per cent of the total population, she pointed out that even under these new proposals, the franchise given to women would remain more or less nominal and stated that she would therefore ask that a special qualification should be prescribed for women. She recommended that "the wife or widow of a voter being 21 should have a vote" (pages 50 and 104, Report of proceedings of the Franchise Sub-Committee R.T.C. 1930). In 1931, during the session of the Second Round Table Conference she stated at the Minorities Committee of that Conference, that

she withdrew the proposals she had put forward the previous year as she had found that they were not acceptable to her countrywomen and that women belonging to almost all castes, creeds and sections, 90 per cent of the educated classes that she had met, had told her that they did not want special qualifications and that she therefore supported the memorandum presented to that Conference in the names of three organisations of women in India (page 1377, Proceedings of Minorities Committee, Second R.T.C. 1931). In February 1932, she supported the memorandum and the declaration presented to the Indian Franchise Committee on behalf of the same three organisations. This memorandum reiterated their demand for adult franchise and as a temporary expedient advocated it in its indirect form by a system of group voting, and the declaration stated "any Constitution for India which does not provide for adult suffrage and no special expedients and does not recognise the fundamental rights of citizenship in India as interpreted by us in the aforesaid memorandum will meet with our unqualified disapproval" (pages 89 & 90, Report of Franchise Committee Vol. V.). But later in 1932 during the Third Round Table Conference, Begum Shah Nawaz observed in a letter to the Press in England "I wish to make it quite clear that if we have been unable to get our full voting strength by means of adult franchise or the group system, nothing less than the strength recommended by the Indian Franchise Committee of some 6,600,000 voters will be acceptable to the women of India". Though this statement does not clearly particularise the methods she would recommend for securing this minimum voting strength, there is no doubt that she has modified her opinion and appreciates as she did in 1930 at the First Round Table Conference, the importance of women having, if not complete equality, at least such reasonable voting strength as is practically possible now as a first stage towards increasing their voting power until complete adult franchise is achieved.

The Women's Indian Association, one of the above mentioned three women's organisations, circulated a draft memorandum in March 1931, on women's political status, which stated that if adult franchise was not immediately possible, two special qualifications should be prescribed for women to raise their voting strength and recommended that all literate women and widows over 21 should be entitled to vote. They argued that "widows in this country carry a stigma. To remove that stigma and to raise their status in society, they should be treated as a special class and they should be armed with this political weapon

to retain their human birth rights." The memorandum also advocated that 20 per cent. of the seats on the legislatures should be reserved for women. In August 1931, however, this association was a signatory to the memorandum presented in the name of three women's organisations which demanded complete adult franchise and disclaimed any form of special provision for women in the new Constitution. The Memorandum presented by this Association to the Indian Franchise Committee in February 1932 supported the proposals put forward by the two other women's organisations, for immediate adult franchise. But in February 1933, "Stri Dharma", the official organ of the Women's Indian Association, remarked in a paragraph on women's franchise that "even if every woman is not enfranchised, we can still urge that at least a sufficient number of women, equal to that of the men voters, should be qualified for the vote so that the voting strength of the women population may influence the future elections in the country". The same journal of March 1933, gives a report of a meeting of women, held under the auspices of the Women's Indian Association in Madras, when prominent members of this Association "expressed strong dissatisfaction at the tentative conclusions of the Third Round Table Conference and the recommendations of the Indian Franchise Committee to enfranchise only about 6 millions of women in a women's total population of about 130 millions and an adult women's population of about 70 millions" and "strongly urged upon the British and the Indian Government that an adequate number of women at least equal in number to that of men may be enfranchised so that women voters may have an effective voice in public elections and in the affairs of the country". They also advocated a new proposal that "in addition to the number of women voters that will be qualified on the same terms as men, the women in all the Municipalities and towns, large or small, may be enfranchised on a system of adult suffrage so as to bring their numbers equal to that of men voters".

The February issue of "Stri Dharma" in a paragraph on the All-India Women's Conference held at Lucknow in December 1932, said "we found on enquiry and on consultation with representative women delegates at the Conference that they were anxious not to forego any of the principles for laying the foundation of a truly representative democratic and national constitution and they felt sure that no constitution would be acceptable to the majority of the people in India unless satisfied and approved by the representatives of the Congress". It also stated "we are glad that a representative Committee has been

appointed which will meet sometime in February or March in some central place in India in conjunction with representatives of the other two bodies, so as to discuss and arrive at some definite conclusion consistent with the principles embodied in their former memorandum''. I understand that these representatives will meet in Bombay in the last week of March to reconsider their decisions.

I have briefly stated these instances to show that it is quite possible that the spokeswomen of these three women's organisations may again revise their opinions and alter or modify their demands. Unfortunately opponents to women's franchise are ignoring these facts and unfairly using the opposition of this particular section of Indian women to special qualifications for women, as evidence that the women of India do not want even the measure of enfranchisement recommended for them by the Indian Franchise Committee. It is extremely difficult to measure and compare the amount of support accorded by women's organisations and by women in general in India to these two views on the methods of enfranchising Indian women, one advocating and the other opposing, special qualifications for women. It would be rash to state that a certain percentage of our women supported the one or the other view, but there can be no doubt that neither view, represents the unanimous opinion of Women's organisations or of the womanhood of India. Both views have strong and influential supporters among the educated and thinking women of India—one view being held by the section which maintains that adult franchise in some form or other is immediately practicable and the other is supported by the section which while agreeing that adult franchise is the ideal, appreciates that owing to practical difficulties it may not be possible to introduce it immediately and that therefore it is imperative to devise methods to give women a reasonable if not an equal voting strength under a restricted franchise. Supporters of both views are, however, agreed in demanding that women should have a real effective voice in the conduct of the affairs of our country.

There may be a few women inclined to attach great importance to theories, who may state that for the sake of a principle they are willing to incur any sacrifice and who prefer our women to have a negligible share of voting strength rather than accept special qualifications for enfranchising them. But surely the future welfare of our women in particular and of our country in

general should not depend on the varying opinion of any one section of women.

NOTE ON THE DEMAND FOR ADULT FRANCHISE IN TOWNS ONLY.

18. I have grave doubts whether the new proposal of some of our women to enfranchise all adult women in urban areas as a means for raising the voting strength of women will be accepted as a practical and reasonable measure. Certainly there cannot be any objection from women to the women's electorate being enlarged by the adoption of this measure in addition to the special qualifications for women recommended by the Indian Franchise Committee, but it would be most unfair to substitute this proposal for the recommendation of the Franchise Committee prescribing the possession of a specified property qualification by the husband as a special qualification for women, and I have no doubt that if such a substitution were adopted it would differentiate unfairly between women in urban areas and those in rural areas. Statistics show that under a property or tax qualification far more women will be qualified for the franchise in urban than in rural areas. In the Madras Presidency where the existing franchise for all local bodies is the same, namely, the payment of any tax of however small an amount, the proportion of women to men voters in Municipalities is approximately as 1 : 5, in District Boards as 1 : 8, while in most Taluk Boards it is lower still. As education is more advanced in towns than in villages, an educational qualification of however low a standard, will also undoubtedly result in the number of women qualified to vote being larger in urban than in rural areas. I feel that a fair distribution of voting power among women in rural and urban areas is as important as an adequate number of women electors in the electorate, and as I have shown, both the property qualification on their own right, and the proposed educational qualification will increase the proportion of women voters in urban areas more than they will increase it in rural areas. If therefore to these qualifications which already favour women in urban areas, is added adult suffrage for women in urban areas in place of the husband's property qualification which would have enfranchised women in rural areas also, the result will be a women's vote of which women in urban areas will have a far greater share than the women in rural areas.

I am aware that it is argued that "as for some years more, it will be from the urban dwellers only that women candidates are

likely to stand for election to the legislatures, the large discrepancy between urban and rural women voters, that will result under this new proposal need not be taken into account." But I feel that this contention does serious injustice to the educated few in villages, who are doing useful public work. My home is in a village, 35 miles from the nearest Municipal town and I have also toured extensively in my own and other districts in our Province and I am thus well acquainted with the conditions prevailing in the rural areas in our Presidency. I think it is quite likely that educated women of public experience living in villages will seek election to the legislatures, for in the province of Madras, there are over a hundred women on local boards, living in villages and elected by rural constituencies, doing valuable work on these bodies and endeavouring to improve the conditions in our villages in spite of many difficulties. These women certainly deserve encouragement to stand for election to the legislatures and I am sure that their practical experience of work on administrative public bodies will be of great value to our legislatures.

When examining the question of women's franchise we must bear in mind the importance of a large women's vote not only in the case of women candidates but also in the election of candidates in general, besides of course the educative value of the franchise itself to women. In India, women in rural areas are in a much less advanced stage than the women in urban areas and they specially need the stimulating effect of the franchise to awaken in them a full sense of civic responsibility. The vote therefore is of far greater importance and value to them in educating them and raising their status generally than it is to the women in towns, and the denial of this right to them, will, I fear, retard the already regrettably slow advancement of women in rural areas. It should also be noted that in a vast and predominantly agricultural country like India, the population in villages is much larger than that in towns and forms nearly 90 per cent. of the total population in the country, and that this large percentage would receive only a negligible share of women's vote under this new proposal. Is it fair to deprive these women of their rightful share of the women's vote and all the advantages that go with it and thereby cause them grave injustice for no fault of their own? Are the interests of these women to be sacrificed merely because some women have a personal and theoretic dislike for special qualifications? From personal knowledge I have no hesitation in stating that the women in rural areas who

will be adversely affected by the dropping of the husband's property qualification, have themselves no such feeling towards this special qualification. Many of them believe that it is neither strange nor wrong for a woman to have the vote by virtue of her husband's property qualification just as she accepts his name and shares his home and some even feel that it will strengthen their status and position in the home and society. I am also sure that there is a strong desire among them to have the franchise and I am confident that they will make good use of it when they secure it. For these reasons I would strongly urge that the proposal of the Indian Franchise Committee to prescribe the husband's property qualification as a franchise qualification for women should not be abandoned. I feel that it is a practical and reasonable proposal and will be equally fair to women in urban areas and in rural areas and it has also been supported by responsible bodies which have examined this question.

MY PERSONAL VIEWS ON WOMEN'S FRANCHISE.

19. I think I should briefly explain here my own attitude on this whole question. During the session of the First Round Table Conference, I stated to the Franchise Sub-Committee that "I strongly supported the proposal for adult franchise as being the method best adapted for reflecting the views and aims of all sections of people" but added that if adult franchise could not be immediately introduced, I would recommend that there should be a special franchise for women to bring their voting strength up to that of men. As the Committee was not prepared to recommend immediate introduction of adult franchise, my colleague Begum Shah Nawaz and I jointly put forward certain proposals on the question of the political status of women and we did so only after making a careful study of the subject and after consulting as far as possible the views of such Indian women in India and in England as we could approach in the short space of time at our disposal and we clearly understood that we had their support. Our proposals were also largely in agreement with the suggestions made by the women's deputation who gave evidence before the Simon Commission. The views of the three women's organisations who later repudiated these proposals and disclaimed any form of special treatment with regard to franchise and representation, were then not available, though I tried to ascertain them. They gave us no intimation of their opinion

nor did they send any memorandum to that conference on this question of such vital importance to the future position of our women (pages 99 and 173, Report of Franchise Committee Vol. V). Their only memorandum to any conference was the one presented on their behalf by Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, supported by Begum Shah Nawaz, to the Minorities Committee of the Second Round Table Conference on 16th November 1931. It will not be out of place, if I mention here that in September 1930, prior to my sailing for England to attend the first Round Table Conference I appealed to Indian women to let me have their views on the political status of women under our future constitution. The Committee of the Women's Indian Association, one of these three women's organisations, stated in their reply to me which they also published in the Press, that in April 1930 their Association made it quite clear that they would not be in favour of a representation to the Round Table Conference "unless there is a preliminary statement from the Government recognising the claim of India to complete Dominion Status without reservations, the method by which to give effect to this right being the subject to be discussed at the Round Table Conference" and that at meetings held under their auspices in May that year, they had called upon H. E. the Viceroy to "make an immediate announcement that the framing of a Constitution for India as a self-governing Dominion shall be the duty of the Round Table Conference, this being the essential first step towards restoring Peace and Goodwill in India." They added "in accordance with these resolutions which have already been communicated to our representatives in London and in the present circumstances in which the Round Table Conference is constituted without the inclusion of any of the leaders—men or women—of the majority party of the country and the Government having made no pronouncement such as we asked for, nor any promise "to frame a constitution" as your letter incorrectly states, the Committee has no desire to send the opinions of this association through you or through any other Indian woman to the conference." However, among the women whom I consulted before I formed any definite views on the question of women's franchise and representation were several members of this Association and of the other two organisations. On my return to India at the conclusion of the First Round Table Conference, I continued my discussions with them and other women on this subject and I found that they were all still of opinion that under the existing conditions in our country our women will be obliged to have some special provisions in the new Constitution

for giving them adequate franchise and minimum representation on legislatures. It was only in May 1931 that I learnt that there was a divergence of views among women in India. I again gave much anxious thought to the matter but I found myself unable to agree with the views put forward in the names of these three women's organizations and to give up the opinions I had arrived at, after much study and deliberation, and which I believed to be in the best interests of our women and which I knew were shared by a large section of our women. I feel that the ideals which all our women hold are the same and that we differ only as to our methods of achieving them. I took advantage of the opportunities I had of further studying the question in detail, when I was on the Indian Franchise Committee and it was with a full sense of responsibility and of the importance of the subject, that I arrived at certain conclusions on it and signed the Committee's report attaching a separate minute to it. I continued to apply my mind to it even after the conclusion of the labours of that Committee and the publication of their report, and I may also mention here that I have had some personal experience of elections to public bodies by an educated electorate as well as by a territorial rural constituency. In 1924 I was elected by the registered graduates of the Madras University to a seat on the Senate of that University and then elected by the Senate to the Syndicate of that University. Again, in March 1933, I was elected by the Senate of the Madras University to its Syndicate. In November 1932 I successfully stood for election to the District Board of Salem from a general (as distinct from a reserved seat for women) territorial rural constituency. Realising that there is at the present juncture a grave danger of our women being given a wholly inadequate voting strength at the beginning of our new constitution, I feel it my duty to place my considered views before the public. I do so with the object of serving the best interests of our women and of our country and I earnestly trust that my arguments will receive careful consideration because of the importance of the subject.

REASONS FOR THE IMMEDIATE AND WIDE EXTENSION OF FRANCHISE FOR WOMEN.

20. It is quite clear that if adult franchise is not immediately possible, women will not be able to have an effective influence in all elections unless there are special franchise qualifications for them. In the absence of special qualifications, women will

only have a mere paper equality resulting under a restricted franchise in an almost negligible proportion of votes. As I stated at the two Round Table Conferences, we can achieve our ideal only by practical methods and since it is impossible to have an ideally perfect scheme immediately, women must try to secure what is practicably possible now. In my opinion the Indian Franchise Committee's proposals for raising the voting strength of women are modest, reasonable and practical. I admit they are not perfect, but no scheme for meeting this particular difficulty about the women's vote under a restricted form of franchise can be perfect. Besides this scheme is not a permanent one and it is only a definite stepping stone towards raising the voting strength of women, until we have complete adult franchise. At this moment and in our present circumstances a practical advance is worth far more than theories which do not appreciate the realities of the situation. There are two important points that must be borne in mind while examining the franchise question. Our new legislatures will have many pressing questions to deal with and the questions affecting women's interests will be crowded out unless candidates for election are responsible to a women's vote too considerable for them to dare to ignore it. On whom will the loss fall if women's questions recede to the background? Not so much on the few thousands of educated and politically conscious women who are ready and able to fight on their own behalf but on those inarticulate millions who have not come out into public life, and acquired political consciousness and self-confidence, and who are still in a state of civic inertia, and liable to remain in that condition unless some special effort is made to awaken them. I earnestly trust that the Joint Select Committee will not allow the views of opponents to women's franchise to influence them to deprive the whole or any section of the womanhood of India of their rightful share in returning representatives to our legislatures, Provincial and Federal, from the very inauguration of our new constitution. I would also point out that our women are anxious to serve side by side with our men in the building up of the new India, and they desire to secure adequate opportunities to contribute to this great service when it is most needed, during the first formative and vital years of India's life under the new constitution.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

21. After making a detailed and careful study of the subject of our future franchise I would recommend the following proposals for enfranchising women:

CONSIDERATION OF WOMEN'S INTERESTS BEFORE THE BILL FOR NEW CONSTITUTION IS FINALLY DRAFTED.

(1) In the first place, I would urge that the consideration of the question of the political status of women under the new Constitution should not be postponed or left to be dealt with by the Central and Provincial Governments or legislatures at some future and uncertain date. The claims of women should be examined at the same time as those of the rest of India and before the Bill for the new Indian Constitution is finally drafted and presented to Parliament.

CIVIC RIGHTS AND DUTIES.

(2) A clause should be inserted in the new Constitution safeguarding women from disabilities imposed on them as women in the exercise of civic rights and duties as citizens. Men and women should have fundamentally the same rights and duties as citizens.

FRANCHISE.

(3) With regard to the proposals for women's franchise I would urge the following:—

(a) *For the Provincial Assemblies:*

1. Property qualifications the same as men.
2. Qualification of bare literacy.
3. Qualification of being the wife of a man having a specific property qualification. A woman once placed on the roll in respect of this qualification to continue to be on the roll even if she should become a widow.

These proposals support the recommendations of the Indian Franchise Committee and I am quite definite that no smaller proportion of women voters than that committee have recommended will satisfy Indian women or will be just to them.

(b) *For the Federal Assembly:*

In view of the special importance of an effective women's vote for this Assembly, I feel that neither the Indian Franchise Committee's recommendations nor those of the White Paper are satisfactory or fair to women. I would urge that for the Federal Assembly franchise, women should have the same qualifications of literacy and of the husband's property qualification recommended for them by the Indian Franchise Committee for the future provincial franchise.

(c) *For the Upper Chamber:*

The qualifications should be such as to secure the eligibility of considerable number of women.

I am strongly of opinion that these are very modest proposals and that nothing less than the measure of franchise given by these proposals will be acceptable to Indian women, or will be fair and just to them considering their numbers and importance in the country. A democratic state should reflect the views and aims of all sections of its people, and we cannot have a really happy and progressive India unless this is the case. It is, therefore, essential that in the new India on whose threshold we now stand, the views of women should have their due weight in the conduct of her affairs, and we can only achieve this by ensuring that women have adequate voting power under the new Constitution.

