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DRAFT OF INDIAN WOMAN'S CHARTER OF  
RIGHTS AND DUTIES PREPARED IN INDIA  
BY ALL INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE AND  
SUBMITTED BY MRS. HANSA-MEHTA FOR  
INFORMATION OF SUB-COMMISSION

## FOREWORD

During the past eighteen years of its existence the All-India Women's Conference has adopted many resolutions with the object of improving the status of the Indian woman and helping her to attain her rightful place in society which is by the side of man. The object of this charter is to crystallise these resolutions with a view to give a clear picture of the ideals for which we stand; to form a basis for future remedial legislation; and for the creation of opportunities to women for service for their attainment. These demands as embodied in the charter are by no means final, nor do they claim to be exhaustive. Changing circumstances and conditions may necessitate corresponding changes.

The charter pertains no less to rights than to duties. Today our country-women are entirely oblivious of their duties as citizens. Woman as an individual and as a citizen has duties to perform not only to herself and her family but to society of which she is a member. This realization on our part will be of immense help in attaining our ideal. It is, however, impossible to give an exhaustive list of the duties a woman is required to perform, whether as an individual or as a citizen. We can only lay down the basic principles which should govern our conduct as responsible members of our sex and as citizens.

DRAFT OF INDIAN WOMAN'S CHARTER OF  
RIGHTS AND DUTIES.

I. PREAMBLE

Whereas we believe that freedom and equality are essential to human developments and whereas woman is as much a human being as man and, therefore, entitled to share them with him;

Whereas we believe that well-being and progress of society depend on the extent to which both men and women are able to develop their full personality and are cognisant of their responsibilities to themselves and to each other;

Whereas we believe that woman has thus a definite role to play in the building of a free, healthy prosperous and moral society and that she can fulfil this obligation only as a free and responsible member;

Whereas we believe that the position of woman in India is far from satisfactory and is in large measure responsible for the backwardness of the country;

We think it essential that the status of Indian woman be improved and brought on a par with that of man so that she may contribute her legitimate share to the general reconstruction of the life of this country and to a wider world. It is with this object in view that we have framed our demands with regard to the rights of Indian woman whether as an individual or as a member of society and desire that they should form the basis of future legislation.

II. FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

Whereas in a democratic society, no citizen can be denied the fundamental rights which are founded on the basis of human equality and whereas women in this country are denied some of these rights, the All-India Women's Conference affirm that:-

- (a) all citizens are equal before the law, irrespective of

caste, creed or sex; and

(b) no disability attaches 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

### III. CIVIC RIGHTS

Whereas we cannot accept the present basis of franchise, which restricts the number of men and women specially the number of women - to a small percentage of the total population; and whereas we cannot accept the special qualification for women which requires a woman to be a wife of a voter who is enfranchised on a property qualification, the All-India Women's Conference affirm that:-

(a) Every man and woman of twenty-one and above, unless otherwise disqualified, shall have a right to vote in elections to the Legislatures, Central or Provincial, to municipalities and local bodies, and

(b) that woman shall have a right to be represented on Legislatures, Municipalities, Local Bodies and all Committees, Conferences, Commissions or delegations that Government may appoint or call whether for service at home or abroad.

### IV. EDUCATION

Whereas freedom from ignorance is one of the essential freedoms without which neither an individual nor a Nation can hope to go forward; and whereas this fundamental right has not been vouchsafed to the millions and millions of men and women in this country as can be seen from the total percentage of literacy which comes to about thirteen for the whole country and about two for women; and whereas the little education that is given is most defective in that it has not helped the cultural, intellectual, physical or spiritual growth of the people, the All-India Women's Conference demand that:-

(a) The present system of education be overhauled and a system

more suited to the needs and requirements of the country be adopted;

(b) There shall be no basic difference between the education of man and woman as their duties as citizens are the same;

(c) The (1) Pre-basic, (2) Basic, (3) Secondary (4) Vocational, (5) University and (6) Adult education form an integral part of the system of education; and the medium of instruction throughout be the recognized language of the Province;

(d) The Basic education be a Seven years' course and be made free and compulsory for every boy and girl between the ages of seven and fourteen;

(e) In view in particular of the lack of teachers, equipment and buildings, co-education be adopted in all stages. Exception may be made in the secondary stage until prejudice against it has been overcome.

(f) Government should through legislation, if necessary, make immediate efforts to eradicate the evils of child marriage, child labour, purda and untouchability which come in the way of education and specially of girl's education;

(g) Government should compensate such poor parents as are reluctant to send their girls to schools for economic reasons by way of giving scholarships to girls, providing books and materials free or by such other means;

(h) Government should help the brighter and more intelligent girls who should continue their studies even after the compulsory period is over and who are unable to do so for financial reasons by providing scholarships, freeships, books, or by such other means;

(i) Physical education through exercises and games and education for Health should form part of the School curricula;

- (j) Secondary education should be as varied as circumstances permit and should not be unduly restricted by the requirements of universities or examining bodies;
- (k) A large number of Secondary Schools should be provided so that such education may be within the reach of everyone who needs it;
- (l) In order to facilitate vocational training among women, there should be provision for Polytechnics on an extensive scale;
- (m) Regional Universities should be established so that more men and women can take advantage of higher education;
- (n) Education in Art, Music and Home science should form part of the University curricula;
- (o) Hostels should be provided to facilitate women to join the various educational institutions;
- (p) There should be a large number of Institutions for training of women teachers to meet the growing need; and scholarships and freeships be provided to induce more women to take the training; refresher courses for teachers be provided at regular intervals;
- (q) The status of teachers be improved in order to attract the better educated women by improving the conditions of their service, i.e., providing better pay and free housing; introducing the social insurance scheme which would include maternity benefit;
- (r) Primary schools, Secondary schools and others Educational Institutions should be housed in their own buildings;
- (s) Special facilities for the education of adult women in rural areas be provided by Government such as residential schools for the adults on the lines of the Folk Schools in Denmark;

- (t) Health education including nutrition and citizenship should form part of the curricula of adult education; and mobile exhibitions with competent lecturers who would demonstrate on all matters pertaining to village life including model homes, hygiene, sanitation, care of children kitchen, gardens, etc. etc., be organized;
- (u) Every village with a school should have a library and a reading room; and
- (v) Governments and Municipalities should actively help in the cultural education of the people by establishing Central Libraries, art galleries, museums and National theatres in order to enable them to make wise use of their leisure.

Foot note to a, b, c, and d. The A.-I. W. C. has supported in general the Sargent Scheme which has recognized Basic Education as the system best suited to India's needs. It is a matter of regret that the Government has not put this scheme into working order anywhere and that the Wardha Scheme of Education on which the Sargent Scheme is based has received scant support from Government.

#### V. HEALTH

Whereas the health of every man, woman and child is the nation's greatest asset and whereas conditions in this country are such that they have undermined the health of the people as can be seen from the appalling death rate and the figures for maternal and infant mortality, and whereas these conditions must be improved, the All-India Women's Conference demand that:-

- (a) A nation-wide plan of free health services, including medical, dental and hospital treatment and provision for free medical examination be adopted;
- (b) A nation-wide plan of free pre-natal and infant welfare clinics, maternity hospitals and nursing services be adopted;

- (c) All preventive measures such as medical inspection of school children, child welfare centres, sanitation, general hygiene, industrial hygiene, immunisation services be taken;
- (d) More facilities for the training of men and women doctors as well as health visitors be provided;
- (e) Steps be taken to popularise the profession of nursing in order to induce more women to join it and the conditions of service of the nurses and the probationers who are under training be improved by way of adequate housing, pay and allowances, regulating hours of work, facilities for recreation, holidays with pay and social insurance;
- (f) The training in nursing be given through the medium of a recognized provincial language;
- (g) The public be educated to recognize the early signs of disease such as tuberculosis, cancer, leprosy and venereal disease;
- (h) Adequate facilities be provided for the segregation and free treatment of infectious diseases including leprosy and venereal disease;
- (i) Governments or local bodies concerned should take steps for the provision of a clean water supply and drainage system as well as for the proper disposal of refuse in rural and urban areas;
- (j) Overcrowding in houses be stopped by law;
- (k) Government should take steps to improve the bad housing in urban as well as rural areas, such as:
  - (1) abolition of one-room tenements;
  - (2) fixing of a minimum standard for home in a town or village with regard to size, area and equipment and not to permit any building below this standard;
  - (3) to include a separate kitchen, separate bath room and a separate lavatory among the minimum requirements of the home;

- (4) homes with low rentals be built by Government or municipalities for persons with low income;
- (5) to include a small garden for each cottage and a playground for children for a group of cottages; and
- (6) Government or municipalities organize exhibitions, demonstrations and Cinema shows to educate the people, in particular women, to keep their homes and surroundings clean; and to beautify their homes and make them comfortable.

#### VI. MORAL STANDARD

The social conditions and the chronic economic distress have raised an ugly problem in this country viz., the traffic in women and children. Advantage is being taken of the helplessness of women destitutes to entice them for immoral purposes. No business, however, can thrive unless there is a demand for it. But unfortunately the men who are partners in the sin escape while the women suffer. The All-India Women's Conference, therefore, demand that:-

- (a) there should be an equal moral standard for men and women;
- (b) that rescue homes on scientific lines be established to rehabilitate women who have been victims of the evil;
- (c) Rules and Regulations be framed for the conduct of Homes and Hostels meant for women so that no nefarious practice may be carried on under the guise of running such homes; and
- (d) steps be taken to improve the social and economic condition of the people in order to minimise the evil.

#### VII. WOMEN AND WORK

Whereas in a democratic State the right to work is a fundamental right of every individual whether man or woman; and whereas no disability should attach to woman on the ground of her sex in regard to public employment, office of power or in the exercise of any trade or calling; and whereas woman must receive the same payment as



man for the same amount of work she does, the All-India Women's Conference demand that:

- (a) there should be no bar to the employment of married or unmarried women provided they are prepared to abide by the conditions of service;
- (b) no woman should be debarred from any work except on grounds of health as for example nursing and expectant mothers who must be debarred from work in heavy industries or underground work in mines;
- (c) while women workers should have the same facilities as men workers with regard to pay which should be a living wage, leave, hours of work, sickness allowance, holidays with pay and free medical treatment; and shall have the same amenities with regard to bathrooms, lavatories, canteens to serve hot meals, etc., they shall be allowed special facilities by way of:
  - (1) creches for their babies and Nursery schools;
  - (2) rest rooms for expectant and nursing mothers;
  - (3) milk canteens for the children, nursing and expectant mothers;
  - (4) break during the work for expectant and nursing mothers;and
  - (5) maternity benefits which should form part of a comprehensive scheme of social insurance.

#### VIII. WOMAN AS HOME-MAKER

Whereas the work of the house-wife has so far received no recognition in the sense that no steps have been taken or thought for the protection of one who works from morning till night without rest or leave or holiday; and whereas we believe the work of a house-wife to be as important as any other, it is essential in the interest of these women who are the home-makers and the mothers of the

race to take steps for the raising of their status, for the protection of their health and for providing leisure for them to enable them to improve their mind, the All-India Women's Conference, therefore, demand that:

- (a) the woman who works in the home shall have a right to a part of her husband's income to be used by her as she likes;
- (b) the husband shall have no right to dispose of his entire income without the consent of his wife;
- (c) in any scheme of social insurance that Government may introduce for the benefit of the workers who work outside home such workers in fields or factories, teachers or nurses, the home-maker shall be included for purposes of benefit; and any contribution to be made to the fund shall be deducted from the husband's income if the wife has no separate income of her own;
- (d) creches, infant classes and pre-basic schools shall be provided by the Government or Municipalities; and
- (e) facilities shall be provided for the woman to learn how to run her home in a systematic and scientific way.

#### IX. WOMAN AND PROPERTY RIGHTS

Whereas we believe that woman should have the same rights as man to hold, acquire, inherit and dispose of property; and whereas some of these rights are denied to women or if given are given on an unequal basis; the All-India Women's Conference demand that:

- (a) the sex disqualification by which Hindu women in general have hitherto been precluded from inheriting in various parts of India be removed;
- (b) woman shall inherit in her absolute right and the Hindu Woman's limited estate be abolished; and
- (c) there shall be no discrimination made between sons and daughters, i.e., both shall have equal shares in the property of their father or mother.

#### X. WOMAN AND MARRIAGE

Whereas we believe that the marriage laws in this country are one-sided and have made the social life of many a woman unbearable; and whereas we believe that this has led a number of them to commit suicide or go wrong, the All-India Women's Conference demand that the laws be improved and changed to suit modern conditions of life in the following way:

- (a) Neither party must have a husband or a wife living at the time of marriage.
- (b) The consent of both the parties concerned shall be necessary before their marriage;
- (c) No marriage shall take place if either the girl is below the age of sixteen or the boy is below the age of twenty-one.
- (d) There shall be no restriction to marriage on the grounds of caste or community; and no declaration shall be necessary to denounce their community which is based on religion before two persons can marry.
- (e) Either party can dissolve the marriage under certain conditions which will include cruelty, desertion for three years, suffering from incurable disease and impotency.
- (f) Such cases for divorce shall be conducted in camera before a special matrimonial court.
- (g) The divorced wife shall claim alimony from the husband until such time as she marries again or until she is able to earn her own living.
- (h) The dowry system be abolished by law.

#### XI. WOMAN'S PLACE IN THE FAMILY

Whereas we believe that the present conception of the family as an institution with man as the head who looks upon his wife and children as his property to do what he likes with them is wrong;

and whereas we believe that such a conception which has affected the laws of the country shall be changed and the family be regarded as a co-operative concern where every member has an equal place; the All-India Women's Conference demand that:

- (a) woman shall be considered as much a guardian of the children as man is;
- (b) man shall have no right to deprive her of this right;
- (c) in case of dispute as to the guardianship of the minor children, the Court shall decide taking into consideration the age and the sex of the child or children, the ability to maintain; and the fitness or otherwise of the parent concerned;
- (d) neither man nor woman shall have the right to adopt a child without the consent of the other if he or she is alive;
- (e) The child adopted can be of either sex and shall be less than seven years at the time of adoption;
- (f) such adoption will have to be made with the sanction of a Court of Law;
- (g) such adopted child shall have the same rights as a natural child would have to inherit the property of his or her adopted father and mother; and
- (h) Woman shall have a right to limit her family. It will be the duty of the state to provide the necessary knowledge to married women who desire to have it for health and economic reasons only through recognized hospitals or maternity homes.

### XII. DUTIES OF WOMAN

Whereas we believe that while woman has the same rights as man, she also has the same obligations towards the society of which she is a member. That whereas it is the duty of man and woman to be prepared to serve the nation when called upon to do so during a national crisis or calamity or in times of national need; and whereas national services in this country such as teaching, nursing, etc., suffer through lack

of women, the All-India Women's Conference call upon women in this country:

1. to come forward in large numbers to take to these essential services;
2. to come forward for work in time of national need;
3. to educate themselves for good citizenship;
4. to fight against the social evils which retard the progress of this country such as child marriage, purda, polygamy, caste communalism, untouchability, etc.;
5. to educate and bring up children if any to become good citizens;
6. to set and maintain a high standard of morality in all spheres of life; and
7. to strive to the utmost for world peace.

HANSA MEHTA.

RAJKUMARI AMRITKAUR.

LAKSHMI MENON.

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