

The World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union and its Work in India, 1900-1939

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Background – WCTU – 19th century

The American temperance movement, which had its origins in the late 18th century, gained momentum after the Civil War, and American women showed a growing interest in temperance activism due to the overwhelming problem of alcohol for families. In the winter of 1873-74 the Woman's Crusades took place, with thousands of women taking to the streets in small towns, singing and praying at saloons to shut them down. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union was organized in November 1874 to solidify the work of the crusades. Educator Frances Willard was elected Corresponding Secretary and quickly grew in leadership of the new organization. She saw the potential of the movement, realizing that through it, women could take on public roles that they would hesitate to take on otherwise. For Willard, the WCTU was about training women for a wider sphere of public action and providing the skills needed in this larger world. Willard was elected President of the WCTU in 1879. Within a short period of time, she built it into the largest women's organization the world had ever known, increasing its membership from thirteen thousand in 1876 to over two hundred thousand in 1890.¹

¹ Primary sources consulted for this paper include: Records of the World Woman's Christian Temperance Union; Records of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of India; and *The Union Signal: A Journal of Social Welfare* (originals and microfilm edition), 1880-1940, all held in the Frances Willard Memorial Library and Archives in Evanston, Illinois. The Union Signal was the weekly newspaper of the National (U.S.) WCTU but also included news from the World WCTU. Key secondary sources for Willard and the WCTU include: Ruth Bordin, *Frances Willard: A Biography* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1986) and Ruth Bordin, *Women and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty: 1873-1900* (New Jersey, 1990).

Ideas were circulating for an International Women's Temperance Union as early as 1875, but only informal work beyond U.S. and British borders took place until 1883.² That year, Willard called for the formation of the World WCTU and started to adapt her successful strategy to a worldwide organization. Willard outlined the goals of the new organization under the slogan "For God and Home and Every Land." During these early years, the organization expanded primarily through the work of Mary Clement Leavitt, who spent eight years travelling the globe for the organization, and her visit to India in 1887-1888 marked the first work of the organization in that country. It was not until 1891 that the WWCTU was formally organized and held its first convention. Willard was appointed president at this time and, as in the U.S., the WWCTU began to grow dramatically under her leadership.

Background - World WCTU - 19th Century

One of the ways the World WCTU first began working internationally was to tap into relationships Willard and other leaders had established with other reformers through the expansive world of the British Empire. The British Empire had spread to India starting in the early 1600s, and by the time of the Revolutionary War in America, it was a significant presence in South Asia.³ The WWCTU also turned to the network of

² Ian Tyrell is the pioneering scholar of the history of the World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union: Ian Tyrell, *Woman's World, Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1991) and more recently in *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2013). Willard and the WCTU leadership discussed forming an international organization in anticipation of the celebration of the centennial of the United States at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876. Tyrell, *Woman's World, Woman's Empire*, 524.

³ There are numerous histories of India in the colonial time period. Those I consulted for this paper include: William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857* (London, 2006); Charles Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform* (Princeton, NJ, 1964); John Keay, *India: A History* (New York, 2000); Pankaj Mishra, *India In Mind, An Anthology* (New York, 2005); Geoffrey Moorhouse, *India Britannica* (Chicago, 2000); Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (New York, 2005); Alex von Tunzelmann, *Indian Summer: the Secret History of the End of an Empire* (New York, 2007). For the purposes of this paper, I use the Indian place names that were used in this time period, not modern place names (i.e. Madras rather than Chennai).

Christian missionaries in places around the globe.⁴ Christian missionaries began working in India in the early nineteenth century after prohibitions against them were lifted in 1813. Their network grew dramatically and quickly, especially as the American missionary movement and the involvement of women picked up in the years leading up to and then after the Civil War. In India, the WCTU also connected to an emerging indigenous movement for social reform, including a small temperance movement that had begun in the 1830s and reached an apex with the first Indian National Congress in 1885. Alcohol itself was not a significant problem in India before the British arrived; neither was the use of opium. But the trade in opium and alcohol both became significant revenue sources for the British in the nineteenth century as the Empire expanded. Consequently, the problems of substance abuse also rose.⁵ By the time the WWCTU was founded and looking to grow in India, all three of these networks (British colonials and institutions; American Christian missionaries; and the Indian reform movement) were well-established and poised for use.

WCTU of India – 19th Century

The World WCTU began its work in India in August of 1887 with the arrival of Mary Clement Leavitt, its first “Round-the-World” missionary. She travelled in India for

⁴ Much work has been done on the presence of American missionaries in India. Key sources for this paper were: Padma Anagol, “Indian Christian Women and Indigenous Feminism c.1850-c.1920” in Clare Midgley, ed. *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester, 1998); Ruth Compton Brouwer, *New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and India Missions: 1876-1914* (Toronto, 1990); Leslie A. Flemming, *Women's Work for Women: Missionaries and Social Change in Asia* (Boulder, CO, 1989); Dana Robert, *American Women in Mission*; Maina Chawla Singh, *Gender, Women and the Heathen Lands: American Missionary Women in South Asia, 1860s-1940s* (London, 1999); Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, Connie Anne Shemo, eds., *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960*, eds. (Durham, NC, 2010).

⁵ Sources for the development of the indigenous social reform movement in India and women’s involvement in it in the 19th century include: Uma Chakravarti, *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai* (New Delhi, 1998); Geraldine Hancock Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge, 1996); Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*; Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990* (London, 1993).

almost a full year and followed a similar pattern wherever she went: holding large public meetings; having smaller private meetings, teas, and receptions; and forming unions as interest developed. She concluded her year noting that the alcohol problem was getting worse in the indigenous population, and “European influence and English power” were the cause: “The drink traffic has been created and pushed for revenue in India.” Once Leavitt left the country, the organization struggled to maintain momentum, though some WWCTU work did continue in these years. Most significantly, Indian reformer Pandita Ramabai opened her school for young Hindu widows in Bombay (Mumbai) in the spring of 1889 and the WWCTU was actively supportive of her work, through Willard’s growing friendship with Ramabai (they had met in 1887 when Ramabai visited the U.S.).⁶

In 1893 Jessie Ackerman, the second “Round-the-World” missionary, was sent to India to formalize its organization. She traveled to many of the same communities as Leavitt and either met with existing unions or started new ones. She tapped into the missionary network and increased the focus on working with indigenous Christians. Ackerman also started “zenana visits” (to women in purdah/seclusion).⁷ During her visit, the issue of state sponsored prostitution and the growing social purity movement gained prominence. Kate Bushnell and Elizabeth Wheeler Andrews, the third and fourth Round-the-World missionaries, were sent to India later in 1893 to research the issue.

In 1893, the WCTU of India was officially organized as the 19th international union of the WWCTU. Jeannette Hauser was elected President and she began the

⁶ No actual date or location of their meeting is known, but the first report by Willard of their meeting and of Pandita Ramabai’s work was published in *The Union Signal* on August 4, 1887 and is dated July 21, 1887. Robert Erik Frykenberg, ed. *Pandita Ramabai’s America: Conditions of Life in the United States* (Cambridge, 2003) details the connection between Willard and Ramabai, and Ramabai herself includes a section on American women in the book that highlights her connection to Willard and the temperance movement.

⁷ *The Union Signal*, May 11, 1893, p. 3.

process of replicating the organizational model of the WCTU in India. The focus on growing in the indigenous community continued in these years, including creating literature in the many vernacular languages and recruiting for the Indian Women's Temperance Union, which was for indigenous non-Christian women. President Mary Phillips noted in her 1895 annual report to the WWCTU that: "Native ladies are taking their places in the great reforms." Three Indian women were mentioned in particular: Dr. Kgramaka in Bombay; Pandita Ramabai in Poona; and Kandambini Ganguly in Calcutta.⁸ In 1896, Phillips reported again on progress in work with indigenous women, remarking that "native women are advancing and taking a higher stand" and that "distinctions of race and color are lessened in many places where the white ribbon work is advancing."⁹ By 1899, when total membership numbers were first reported, there were a total of 1,125 members with slightly more indigenous (611) than European (514).

It is important to note that the work of the World WCTU in India was done in these early years primarily by American women and this gave it a particularly American flavor. Their critique of the British administration in India, which had encouraged the rampant use of alcohol and relied on revenue from licenses and sales, came early, persisted, and expanded to include the opium trade. As Americans, this critique of colonial power harkened back to their cultural memories of being a British colony

⁸ India Report, *World WCTU Convention Minutes*, 1895. I have yet to find further information about Dr. Kgramaki. Kandambini Bose Ganguly (1861-1923) "was one of the first two women graduates of Calcutta University in 1883, and entered medical college in 1884, becoming the first female medical student, but was unable to secure a medical degree because she failed in the paper on medicine. She went to Britain in 1892 for further training, worked for awhile in Lady Dufferin Hospital, and later took to private practice. She married Brahma leader and educationist Dwarakanath Ganguly. She was also one of the first female delegates to the [Indian National] Congress session in Bombay." Bharati Ray, *Early Feminists of Colonial India* (Delhi, 2002). Her daughter was Jyotirmoyee Ganguli (1889-1945).

⁹ *The Union Signal*, June 4, 1896, p. 10.

themselves. And, though it came at a time of growing American colonial aspirations, this attitude of the WCTU's activists in India still was an influential critical stance against the British Empire.

Background – WCTU – 1900-1939

In 1898, Frances Willard died of complications from her long battle with pernicious anemia. Willard's death marked a sea change for the organization. In the United States, the organization began to shift away from Willard's broad focus on social reform to the more narrow and manageable focus of prohibition. Though connected to the suffrage movement and to the growing women's peace movement (especially in and around the two World Wars) the WCTU in the U.S. was increasingly a one-issue organization. The 18th (Prohibition) amendment of the U.S. Constitution passed in 1919. For the National WCTU (based in the U.S.) there was great rejoicing at their success, and their membership numbers and influence grew. The tide then turned with repeal of the 18th amendment in 1933 and a period of re-evaluation and retrenchment began. For the World WCTU, repeal was not as devastating a blow as the global prohibition movement continued to grow, especially in places like India.

For the World WCTU, continued expansion without Willard was different but still a challenge. In the 1890s Willard had turned her focus to the issues women faced globally and had begun to move beyond alcohol and see the need for the WCTU in women's lives as part of a global expansion of women's leadership and public presence. This focus continued once she was gone, with the World WCTU leadership shifting from the U.S. to Canada and England - and a consequent shift back to the larger stage of the British empire. The World WCTUs issues in these years were similar

to those of the 19th century, including women's suffrage and political rights; the women's labor movement; women's access to education; and, of course, prohibition. There was also a big effort in the growing Social Purity movement - which included anti-prostitution efforts - and a new focus on child welfare and maternal health. The World WCTU had national unions in 40 countries in 1920 and in 48 at the onset of WWII.

For women more broadly, this was a time of great advances - and the role of the WCTU in providing women the leadership skills they needed changed. Secular organizations began to grow stronger. The women's suffrage movement picked up steam and took over the women's rights agenda in the U.S. and in Britain, leading to suffrage advances in both countries. Education advances were continuing to be made and many more women were entering the workforce, both in professional and non-professional jobs. The WCTU was not needed as the leadership training ground it once was, but, it was still a key player in the global women's movement and was included in all international meetings and conventions on social reform issues of importance to women.

Background – India – 1900-1939

The three factors that had most influenced the work of the World WCTU in India in the 19th century - the British Empire, the Christian Missionary network, and the indigenous reform movement - continued to play roles in their work into the early years of the 20th century but with significant changes in each. And, falling significantly in the middle of the years I'm examining, the impact of WWI cannot be overstated. I will only offer broad summaries of this time period - which was so significant for India especially - to give some context to their work.

The beginning of the 20th century was the apex of the British Empire, and especially in India where control of the country strengthened and expanded leading up to WWI. But these years also saw the imperial model undergoing significant change and stress - and then rapidly diminishing after WWI. In India, this meant that the Empire began a period of self-examination where it considered how best to retain and release power - both political and economic. A series of government moves to allow for gradual implementation of self-rule caused rising expectations among the Indian population and then increasing frustration with the slow progress.

The mobilization that WWI had required, and the vast destruction it had caused, as well as the high cost in physical resources and human lives, left the British empire in a precarious position at its end. The British government had called on its colonies for support in the war effort, and India had for the most part responded as a ready and willing participant. Thousands of Indian men served in the British army and the country's agriculture and industrial output was mobilized to supply the battlefields and the home front. But when the war ended, many in India felt this mobilization was not sufficiently recognized and there were increasingly louder rumblings for change. The political leadership, the business powers, and the British population (both in India and in Britain) were conflicted as to how best to manage this change. Interesting for the purposes of the American women of the WCTU, was the growth of America as a global power in these years. New ideas of how American power would be expressed on the global stage were developed - and the global work of humanitarian organizations like the WCTU influenced this development.¹⁰

¹⁰ The shift by the American government and citizens working abroad to a kind of imperialism that emphasized humanitarian relief and moral choices in international work is described by Ian Tyrell in *Reforming the World*.

The Christian missionary movement also changed dramatically in these years - with a more international and ecumenical approach developing. There was less focus on conversion and more on the development and promotion of humanistic values across national and religious boundaries. Missionaries started to reflect a “more liberal Christianity that did not totally condemn other religions” and looked to other kinds of influence including “interdenominational cooperation” and the “self-supporting native church.”¹¹ India had never been a very successful place for missionary work, where the level of true conversions was always small. It was a natural move for the Christian church to shift to work that was less religious - to working with the poor, providing education, economic support, agriculture training, and disaster relief.

Most importantly though, were the dramatic changes in the indigenous reform movement in these years, including the development of a full-fledged nationalist movement and the growth of an indigenous women’s movement. The Indian National Congress (INC) was formalized as a political party in these years and became a stronger voice for Indian independence. By WWI the frustration with India’s continuing status as a colony (when Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada had been given “Dominion” status) and increasing restraints on the basic freedoms of Indian people led to the call for “Purna Swaraj” or complete self-rule by the INC.

These years saw the growth of Mahatma Gandhi's leadership of the movement. He began quietly in 1917 with local actions to protest specific conditions but by spring of 1919, Gandhi called for a nationwide strike to protest the continuation of war-time restrictions on freedoms. The 1930s saw the Non-Cooperation Movement led by Gandhi

¹¹ Singh, *Gender, Women and the Heathen Lands*, p. 159.

develop into a powerful force for both in India and abroad. Alcohol and opium surfaced as key issues for the Nationalist movement (due to the British government's involvement and encouragement of the trade in both substances) and Gandhi was a proponent of both personal temperance and government legislation supporting prohibition. His eleven-point ultimatum to the government in 1930 included nationwide prohibition of alcohol and he actively supported women taking a public role protesting against liquor shops, as he felt this was appropriate public action for women when others might not be.¹² The British government eventually responded to the self-rule movement with a new set of policies to govern the country in 1935 - giving the franchise to millions of Indians, including women - but this felt like too little too late. With the beginning of WWII all of this was put on hold as the entire country mobilized for the war effort.¹³

A new factor emerged that was critical to the work of the WCTU of India in these years was the growth of an Indigenous women's movement. Indian women had long been a part of the reform movement in the country, and women's issues (education, sati or wife-burning, child marriage, state-sponsored prostitution, etc.) were one of the primary areas of reform work. But much of the reform work was done by individuals (like Pandita Ramabai) and was scattered, local or regional, and not sustained over time. It was in the early 20th century that Indian women began to come together to work for reform.¹⁴ This was due to forces that really took hold in the 20th century, including: legal

¹² Kumar, *History of Doing*, p. 83. The WCTU recognized this attitude as it was similar to what had happened when the women's temperance movement began in the U.S. in the 19th century. Temperance activism was not considered outside women's traditional role, providing women the cover they needed to do public work without criticism.

¹³ Keay, *India: A History*; von Tunzelmann, *Indian Summer*.

¹⁴ Books consulted for the 20th century Indian women's movement include: Aparna Basu and Bharati Ray, *Women's Struggle: A History of the All-India Women's Conference, 1927-1990* (New Delhi, 1990); Maitrayee

reforms; access to education (partly through Christian missionary network); more professional opportunities for women; more women included in the nationalist movement and the growing labor movement; connections to the global women's rights movement; and women's growing print culture and access to media.¹⁵ The result was the formation of a truly independent women's movement that allowed women to speak for the needs of Indian women beyond the needs of the country, or any particular religion, caste or community.

In 1917, the Women's India Association (WIA) was founded in Madras and it was later described as the "first purely feminist organization" in India. British reformer and spiritualist Annie Besant was a founder, along with a group of Indian women. The work of the WIA was limited in these years to support of the Nationalist movement and then WWI intervened in any further progress. Women were active in the years following WWI as the Nationalist movement grew and civil disobedience called for the mass organization and action of many people. The National Council of Women in India, the organization that represented India at the International Council of Women, was formed in 1924 by two British women - though it included many Indian and Anglo-Indian women. Much of its focus in the early years was on child and maternal welfare, and girl's education, and it was supportive of British rule as might be expected. The WIA

Chaudhuri, *Indian Women's Movement: Reform and Revival* (New Delhi, 1993); Kumar, *History of Doing*; Deborah Anne Logan, *The Indian Ladies Magazine: 1901-1938* (Bethlehem, PA, 2016); Karen Offen, ed. *Globalizing Feminisms: 1789-1945* (London, 2010); Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1990); Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar, eds., *Women and Social Reform in Modern India: A Reader* (Bloomington, IN, 2008).

¹⁵ Anagol, "Indian Christian Women" in *Gender and Imperialism*; Clare Midgley, Alison Twells, and Julie Carlier, eds., *Women in Transnational History: Connecting the Local and the Global* (New York, 2016); Ray, *Early Feminists of Colonial India*; Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, Connie Anne Shemo, eds., *Competing Kingdoms*; Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: the Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham, NC, 2006).

continued its connection with the Nationalist movement but also began to work on female workers rights and welfare.

In 1927, the first All-India Women's Conference was held, and this provided the foundation for the first true All-India women's organization. Margaret Cousins, who was Secretary of the WIA, called for a gathering of women to discuss women's education reform and the first meeting was held in Poona, a center of reform and home to Pandita Ramabai. Though the focus was on education, the conference did briefly touch on other issues, including early marriage. By the fifth conference in 1932, the organization had a new constitution, created committees to work on a broad range of social reforms, and was joining with the two other women's organizations to call for women's right to vote. By the 1940s the AIWC became the leading voice of the women's social reform movement in India and changed its name officially to the All-India Women's Conference for Education and Social Reform.¹⁶

WCTU of India – 20th Century

In the early years of the 20th century, the WCTU continued its work much as it had done in the 1890s. Departments of work included: Evangelistic; Literature; Social Purity and Rescue Work; Press; Translation; Flower Mission; Anti-Narcotics; Scientific Temperance Instruction; Juvenile Work; Soldiers, Seamen and Railwaymen Work; Mother's Meetings; Drawing Room and Public Meetings; Medal Contest; and Young WCTU. The National Organizer from 1903-1906 was Helen Dunhill who was Anglo-Indian and she did similar things as her predecessors: she held meetings (with large groups, with local and regional government officials, with other reformers); traveled

¹⁶ Kumar, *History of Doing*; Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*.

throughout the country; and organized local unions, and Loyal Temperance Legions and Youth Temperance Councils (which were the main youth programs of the WWCTU). The headquarters was located wherever the President resided, but much of the work was now taking place in the three main divisions: Bengal; Madras; and the United Provinces. In her presidential address at the 1905 Annual Convention in Calcutta, Florence Mansell noted that: “temperance sentiment is on the increase, as is evidenced by the little societies springing up here and there” and that “this Temperance work must have its roots well planted in native soil, before we will have done all of our duty.”¹⁷

In 1907, the joint publication of the WCTUs newsletter with the Calcutta Temperance Federation (all male) began and the name was changed to *The Indian Temperance Record and White Ribbon*. This continued until 1914 when the WCTU resumed its own publication under the name *Indian Temperance News and White Ribbon*. Also, in 1907, Agnes Slack, who was the Secretary of the World WCTU and Vice President of the British Women’s Temperance Association, visited India and traveled to various provinces, meeting with local and national WCTU and India Temperance Association officials, holding gatherings and gaining a sense of the work going on in the country. In Bombay she held a public meeting with 600 people reportedly in attendance and met with Cornelia Sorabji, a prominent local lawyer and reformer, who agreed to have a union at her school. She also met with British reformer and spiritualist Annie Besant and several Indian men who were temperance supporters. This visit provided a boost of encouragement to the India WCTU.¹⁸

¹⁷ *Minutes and Report of the 9th National Convention of the WCTU of India, 1905*, p. 8.

¹⁸ Agnes Slack, *My Travels in India* (London: British Women’s Temperance Association, 1908). The names of the male Indian reformers she met with were: Professor Ram Sahni, Das Suri, and Dev Raton.

In 1911, the May newsletter included reports of Anglo and Indian unions from throughout the country, with a total of 14 Indian (meaning non-European) unions listed.¹⁹ The Bengal Division boasted the highest level of activity and in Calcutta the Indian Union Secretary was an Anglo-Indian woman named Mrs. M.N. Ghosh and one of their main projects was to work with the Industrial Home and Alms House. The 1913 Convention in Calcutta was the first time there was an Indian Convention in addition to the Anglo (English speaking) Convention, and this convention was for Indian attendees and was held in Hindi and Bengali. At the Indian Convention, the India WCTU president spoke in English and her speech was simultaneously translated into Bengali. In the Convention report for 1913, there was a separate department for Unions for Non-Christians and these Unions could also be for men and women. There were new Indian Unions listed for Bangalore, Madras, Salem and a big focus of their work was preventing the “White Slave Traffic” and promoting both “sobriety and purity.”²⁰

Clearly, the years leading up to WWI were years where they were considering how they could continue to grow in the indigenous population. They were relying in part on the small but growing number of Indian Christian women who had attended Christian missionary schools. For these women, Christianity offered a way out of the restraints they felt in both Hindu and Muslim religions - and offered access to a feminism they could make their own. As Padma Anagol describes, “Indian Christian women developed a strong feminist consciousness.”²¹ The WCTU of India’s leadership began to shift in this area - and the consideration of how to include non-Christians was also a big

¹⁹ *Indian Temperance Record and White Ribbon*, May 1911.

²⁰ *Minutes and Report of the 13th Annual Convention of the WCTU of India, 1913*, p. 12.

²¹ Padma Anagol, “Indian Christian Women,” in *Gender and Imperialism*, p. 98.

concern. They were still actively writing and translating literature designed for the indigenous population and their work with students in schools and student associations was growing - with temperance essay contests being very popular and YWCTU branches growing in number. Temperance education was also a growing interest of the Government and the India WCTU was asked to create a temperance textbook for schools. In 1918 there were 4,015 members of the India WCTU and 585,000 members of the WWCTU.

The war years were quiet as the country was mobilized to defend the Empire. After the war, the focus on peace and international understanding was strong. The India WCTU followed this new trajectory: "It appears to us that much might be done in these days of class feelings and racial animosities to get into sympathetic touch with Indian men and women." Mary Campbell, the World WCTU representative to India, reported that she was "reaching all classes and creeds" through her public meetings where she was speaking "Hindustani" - "Being able to speak in the vernacular I can reach many thousands more than if I used English alone."²² At the 1919 Convention, representatives of the All India Temperance Federation were in attendance, and in 1920 the annual report describes the ongoing need for translation work this way: "What is needed is temperance literature dealing with Indian conditions, presenting facts and figures for India, and portraying Indian surroundings."²³ Work with their youth programs was a big focus and house-to-house visits with mothers was also a growing area of work.

²² *Indian Temperance News and White Ribbon*, June 1919, p. 82.

²³ *Minutes and Report of the 15th Annual Convention of the WCTU of India, 1920*, p. 57.

By 1926, Mary Campbell was President of the India WCTU and the integration of Indian women as leaders had become a priority. The list of Departments of Work in that year included four with Indian women as superintendents and a Miss M.N. Banerji was Assistant Recording Secretary (a leadership position). The Translation Department reported that they were producing books and leaflets in Hindi, Urdu, Assamese, and Marathi.²⁴ In January of 1926 the All-India Prohibition Convention was held and the All-India Prohibition League was formed. Helen Maya Das, who was head of the Punjab Division of the India WCTU, spoke at the Purdah (women only) meeting of the convention and India WCTU President Mary Campbell was elected Vice President of the League. A resolution supporting “National Harmony” was passed, encouraging “the practice and teaching of tolerance, the harmonizing of communal differences.”²⁵ In 1928 discussions began for the construction of a headquarters in Delhi (following the government of India’s move there).²⁶ In 1929, Satyavati Chitamber was elected 2nd Vice President, and Helen Maya Das, Marion Navalkar, and M. Narayan Das were all listed as National Organizers. That same year, the newsletter included reports from the All-India Prohibition League and the Prohibition Committee of the Indian National Congress.²⁷ They also reported on cooperative work with the “Women’s Education Conferences” (AIWC) and Social Service League.²⁸ Mrs. Y. Bashkare, who was head of the Citizenship Department of the India WCTU, attended the AIWC meeting in 1928 and

²⁴ *Minutes and Report of the 17th Annual Convention of the WCTU of India, 1926*, p. 46.

²⁵ *Indian Temperance News and White Ribbon*, March 1926, p. 18.

²⁶ *Indian Temperance News and White Ribbon*, December 1934.

²⁷ *Indian Temperance News and White Ribbon*, October 1929.

²⁸ *Minutes and Report of the 19th Annual Convention of the WCTU of India, 1929*, p. 16.

reported that “we have seen the progress of women” and the “non-Christian women are awake.”²⁹

The 1930s were years of big changes for the India WCTU. They opened their new headquarters in Delhi in 1931 (which they still own and operate from today) and Helen Maya Das was based there and working as both a National Organizer and manager of headquarters. They were actively forming native language Women’s Temperance Unions (non-Christian) and reported 6000 members. And, in their annual report to the World WCTU, they mentioned their work with the new Indian women’s organizations: “There is growing recognition that the many women’s organization in India should seek closer co-operation with each other. The All-India Women’s Conference, the NCW [National Council of Women], the Women’s Medical Association, the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, are organizations in which our WCTU women find opportunities.”³⁰

Child welfare was now a big focus of their work and they organized “Mother’s Meetings” where they discussed proper childcare and addressed the growing problem of opium use with babies and young children. They were still working hard at translating and distributing literature. They attended religious festivals and National Congress meetings and had booths with literature and exhibits of charts and posters on display. They were also still focused on youth education and developing materials and programs for temperance instruction in schools (charts and lantern slides, text books, songs, poems and stories); medal contests; singing contests for villages (where literacy levels

²⁹ *Minutes and Report of the 19th Annual Convention of the WCTU of India, 1929*, p. 60.

³⁰ *Report of the 15th Convention of the World WCTU, 1934*, p. 66

were low); and work with their youth groups - Loyal Temperance Legion and the Young People's Branch.³¹

In November 1934, Satyavati Singh Chitambar was elected President of the India WCTU. She was a graduate of Isabella Thoburn College³² and also a member of All India Women's Conference (AIWC). She wrote in the newsletter that she accepted the position because: "These are days of indigenous leadership. We Indian women will not grow as we should unless we take responsibilities upon us and learn to stand on our feet."³³ The historic nature of the election of Mrs. Chitambar was mentioned: "It was a crystalization of the feeling that the auspicious time had arrived when the leadership of this great organization should be given into the hands of the most outstanding Indian woman in our ranks today." Mrs. Chitambar's speech outlined her view of the organizations mission: "We are not cranks just on one subject. Ours is an organization for social welfare. We aim at having good and healthy homes and nations from a physical, mental and spiritual point of view, which will be at peace with one another."³⁴ She mentioned a need for "self-control" against the things that would "rob" people of their "physical, mental and spiritual power and influence." And she mentioned the other women's organizations in which she was involved: "In the past few years, we have been encouraged and strengthened by the resolutions passed by the AIWC. We welcome all

³¹ *Report of the 15th Annual Convention of the World WCTU, 1934*, p. 66.

³² Isabella Thoburn was an American Christian missionary whose work in India focused on providing education to women. The school she founded in Lucknow, which was later named for her, was and is one of the top schools for women in India. The connection between Thoburn and the WCTU is unexplored, though Martha Nalini provides some background about Thoburn and the school: Martha Nalini, "Gender Dynamics of Missionary Work in India and its Impact on Women's Education: Isabella Thoburn (1840-1901), A Case Study," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 7(4): 266-289. Many WCTU of India leaders were (and are still) educated at the college.

³³ *Indian Temperance News and White Ribbon*, December 1934, p. 3.

³⁴ *Indian Temperance News and White Ribbon*, December 1934, p.15.

of our sisters in this wide organization.”³⁵ Helen Maya Das was elected Corresponding Secretary at this convention as well. Das was also a member of the AIWC. The editor notes: “From the beginning of the convention Indian leadership and comradeship was evident.” And “...one would be blind indeed who failed to recognize that Indian women were taking responsibility as never before. It is a glad day, and a day when everyone should stand ready as never before to give of his experience, his strength and his ability in this mighty task.”³⁶

At that same Convention, the new headquarters in Delhi was officially opened with a visit from the Viceroy (head of the British government) of India’s wife. There were also official visits from representatives of the Social and Moral Hygiene Association of India, the YWCA, and the AIWC. Shelomith Vincent of the both the India WCTU and the AIWC spoke: “Never before has the opinion of women been taken seriously in public affairs. Today the Indian woman is expressing her innermost thoughts on social, political, and religious matters.”³⁷ In 1935, President Chitamber again mentioned the connection of the AIWC and the WCTU: “if there’s a local organization [AIWC] in our station, we join it, and if there is none, we start one thereby urging the women of all communities to get together” with the overall intent that the WCTU of India should be a “blessing” to the new organization and its members.³⁸ She also spoke on a major issue for the World organization during these years - how non-Christians could be involved in the organization: “Through correspondence we have been asked by what arrangement

³⁵ In the 1930s, the AIWC regularly included resolutions in support of temperance and prohibition (of alcohol and opium) at their annual conferences. Microfilm edition, All India Women’s Conference records at Jawaharlal Nehru Library, Delhi.

³⁶ *Indian Temperance News and White Ribbon*, December 1934, p. 9.

³⁷ *Indian Temperance News and White Ribbon*, December 1934, p. 5.

³⁸ *Indian Temperance News and White Ribbon*, April 1935, p. 3.

non-Christian women can become members of the WCTU. There is no obstacle whatsoever for those who will sign the pledge and pay the annual membership fee. Membership is not limited to Christians, though the organization is founded and run on Christian principles.”³⁹

In 1936, as war loomed once again, the issues of international peace and understanding were reintroduced. Once again the issue of brothels in military cantonments, and the distributing of “sex literature” came up - and the need for understanding of “the close relation that exists between total abstinence from alcoholic beverages and narcotic drugs, and a controlled sex life” was highlighted as an area of work.⁴⁰ In 1937, the newsletter reported that “The Indian National Congress and Mr. Gandhi's movement among the Depressed Classes are both strong on Prohibition.”⁴¹ And in 1938, there were several mentions of Gandhi's support of temperance education in schools; his lectures on drugs and alcohol; his use of temperance literature; and his advocacy for tea shops to replace liquor shops. The editor noted the WCTUs support: “We feel like garlanding Mahatma Gandhi for this wise step.”⁴² In these years, many of the provinces in India were experimenting with dry districts (Madras; Bihar; Central Provinces; United Provinces; North West Frontier; Bengal; and Bombay all had periods of full prohibition of alcohol) and the newsletter included reports from each province. In September of 1939, war began and, once again, the work for temperance and prohibition quieted as priorities changed.

Conclusion

³⁹ *Indian Temperance News and White Ribbon*, December 1935, p. 28.

⁴⁰ *Indian Temperance News and White Ribbon*, August 1936, p. 8.

⁴¹ *Report of the 16th Annual Convention of the World WCTU, 1937*, p. 80.

⁴² *Indian Temperance News and White Ribbon*, March 1938, p. 6.

The World WCTU was founded in the late 19th century on growing ideas of global sisterhood - where women's issues were not defined or limited by national borders or the needs of countries.⁴³ Willard and other leaders in the global women's movement believed that women were connected simply by their gender - and that if women banded together they could address the issues they collectively faced and make significant change. In the 20th century the idea of global sisterhood shifted with the development of "international feminism" and the accompanying developments of internationalism, pacifism and ideas of "world friendship." In many ways, the WWCTUs work was an experiment in making all these ideas happen on the ground. Because the main goals of the WWCTU were to reach as many people as possible with their message and to grow their organization, they had to reach out to indigenous women individually and meet them where they were. As advances were made in women's lives across the globe, it became much more common for interaction between groups that would normally have had no interaction at all. And, as we have seen in India, the organization slowly grew more integrated. It is made up entirely Indian Christian women today.

I believe this all this speaks to the need for a larger understanding of the impact of colonialism and the interactions that happened between the east and the west. The idea that colonial power could provide "some good" for women goes against the idea of "malevolent imperialism" so often found in academic work these days.⁴⁴ This narrow view shows an inaccurate understanding of the actual problems women faced and

⁴³ Jane Haggis, "White Women and Colonialism," in Midgley, *Gender and Imperialism*; Offen, *Globalizing Feminisms*; Tyrell, *Women's World/Women's Empire*.

⁴⁴ Padma Anagol, "Rebellious Wives and Dysfunctional Marriages: Indian Women's Discourses and Participation in the Debates over Restitution of Conjugal Rights and the Child Marriage Controversy in the 1880s and 1890s" in Sarkar, *Women and Social Reform in Modern India*.

diminishes the good that western women did to address these problems. It also lumps all western women into one category, and as I have noted, the WCTU was primarily an American women's organization with American ideas underlying its organization.⁴⁵ Peg Strobel describes an approach that I believe is more accurate - that western women played an "ambiguous" role in the empire. They "advanced the interests of the empire" by maintaining a "social distance" from indigenous people, but they also often identified with them and sought to "ameliorate the worst effects" of the empire.

I think we can see the ambiguity clearly in the work of the WCTU of India in these years. And though these western women did not question "the practice of imperialism itself" and often acted in a maternalistic way toward the colonized, their work provide a critical stance that threw illuminating light on the ways the empire worked.⁴⁶ In addition, I would argue that the WCTU of India provided a place for a "cultural exchange" between two very different cultures that was much more of a two-way street - and that the impact of "the influences of global encounters on the missionaries themselves" cannot be underestimated.⁴⁷ And, most importantly, it provided a location for Indian

⁴⁵ The discussion around this topic has grown over recent years. Earlier works tended to be more critical, more recent works take a more nuanced view of the work of European women in the global arena. Padma Anagol, "Rebellious Wives and Dysfunctional Marriages," in Sarkar and Sarkar eds., *Women and Social Reform in Modern India: A Reader*; Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: Indian Women, British Feminists and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill, 1994); Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds., *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington, 1992); Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Colonial Rule* (New York, 1995); Margaret McFadden, *Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth-Century Feminism* (Lexington, KY, 1999); Clare Midgley, ed. *Gender and Imperialism*; Clare Midgley, Alison Twells, and Julie Carlier, eds., *Women in Transnational History*; Barbara Ramusack and Sharon L. Sievers, *Women in Asia: Restoring Women to History* (Bloomington IN, 1999); Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, NJ, 1997); Marie Sandell, *The Rise of Women's Transnational Activism: Identity and Sisterhood between the World Wars* (London, 2015); Margaret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire* (Bloomington IN, 1991); Tyrell, *Reforming the World*.

⁴⁶ Margaret Strobel, "Gender, Race and Empire in 19th Century and 20th Century Africa and South Asia," in Renate Bridenthal, *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston, 1998).

⁴⁷ Jane Hunter, "Women's Mission in Historical Perspective: American Identity and Christian Internationalism" in Reeves-Ellington, Sklar, Shemo, eds. *Competing Kingdoms*; Kristen Kobes Du Mez, *A New Gospel for Women: Katharine Bushnell and the Challenge of Christian Feminism*, (Oxford, 2015).

women to find their own agency and empowerment. And this was the whole point of the World WCTU as defined by Willard and subsequent leaders – to give women the skills they needed to define and tackle the problems they faced on their own. Temperance activism served in India (as it did in many places) as entry-level feminism.

To summarize: the WWCTU's work in India provided an important bridge between Christian missionaries and the Indian reform world; it early on involved both indigenous men and women and grew dramatically in indigenous leadership in the early 20th century; it articulated and encouraged one of the key arguments of Indian nationalists in its criticism of the British; and it brought American views, values, and organizational procedures to India. Finally, the WWCTU took what it learned from its expansive growth in the U.S. and worked to adapt it to new circumstances abroad, providing a model for both the indigenous and transnational women's organizations that followed. The mostly untold story of the work of the WWCTU in India thus deserves further exploration, not just because the recovery of a lost story is important in itself, but also as it reveals how the exchange of ideas across what may appear to be impenetrable borders of race, class, and gender can happen and can initiate lasting change.