

## THE WORLD WOMAN'S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION: AN EARLY TRANSNATIONAL WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION AND ITS WORK IN INDIA, 1883-1900

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In 1887 Indian activist Pandita Ramabai traveled to the United States, giving presentations and seeking support for her work with child widows in India. She and Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) president and social reformer Frances Willard met in July of that year, and this meeting proved a turning point for both of them.<sup>1</sup> For Ramabai, it opened the American reform world to her work and garnered key moral and financial support for the new school for child widows she was planning. For Willard, it revealed a way to act on some long-held concerns and goals, including the global need for women's education and her idea of making the WCTU a worldwide reform organization. Willard quickly mobilized the WCTU, inviting Ramabai to attend and speak at the WCTU convention in



November 1887. Willard called upon WCTU members to support Ramabai, encouraging them to join her in forming Ramabai Circles, where each member would pledge to give a minimum of a dollar per year for ten years to support the Indian activist and her school. In the spring of 1888 Ramabai visited Willard's home in Evanston, Illinois, and their mutual respect and interest in each other's work led them to further plan and organize. Ramabai returned to India in June of 1888, not only with Willard's and the WCTU's support, but also as National Lecturer for the WCTU. That same year, Mary Clement

**Portrait of Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati (1858-1922), frontispiece from Ramabai Sarasvati, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* (Philadelphia: Press of the J. B. Rodgers Printing Co., 1887).**

1 No actual date or location of their meeting is mentioned, but the first report by Willard of their meeting and of Pandita Ramabai's work was published in *The Union Signal* (Chicago, Woman's Temperance Publishing

Assn, microfilm edition) 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.



**Photograph of Frances Willard from the Bain News Service, n.d. Library of Congress, LC-B2- 598-10 [P&P] ggb2004002864.**

Leavitt, the World WCTU's first Round-the-World Missionary, stopped in India on her world tour and formed the first unions there.

Scholars in recent years have discovered the World WCTU (WWCTU), and its story is part of the growing conversation about the nineteenth-century development of a transnational women's movement.<sup>2</sup> Taking this new scholarship into account, I believe an in-depth look at the work of the WWCTU in India, especially in its founding years, is fruitful to increase understanding of the significance of its global work. Newly discovered records of the organization in the WCTU archives in Evanston, Illinois (where I serve as a processing archivist), reveal how the WCTU of India developed

and influenced the growth of the worldwide organization.<sup>3</sup> The relationship of Pandita Ramabai, Willard, and the WWCTU is just one of many discoveries that show the depth of the connection between the organization and India. More importantly, I believe that the work of the WWCTU in India furnished an experimental space for the organization in its earliest years, providing key knowledge and experience that allowed it to develop into one of the earliest and most influential transnational women's organizations and a model for other transnational movements. A re-examination of the WWCTU's work in India, therefore, helps us more fully understand how this movement was organized and grew to be as successful as it was from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Tyrell is the pioneering scholar of the history of the World Woman's Christian Temperance Union in his books *Woman's World, Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1991); and more recently *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2013). The Japanese WCTU has been written about in some detail by Rumi Yasutake, *Transnational Women's Activism: The United States, Japan and Japanese Immigrant Communities in California 1859-1920* (New York, 2004). Edith Blumhofer discusses the connection between the organization and Pandita Ramabai, in "From India's Coral Strand," in *The Foreign Missionary*

*Enterprise at Home*, ed. Daniel Bays and Grant Wacker, 152-70 (Tuscaloosa, AL, 2003). Eric Colvard writes about the temperance movement in India and includes the WWCTU: Robert Eric Colvard, "A World Without Drink: Temperance in Modern India, 1880-1940," Ph.D.

diss., University of Iowa, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> 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; Papers of Frances E. Willard; and *The Union*

*Signal: A Journal of Social Welfare* (originals and microfilm edition), 1880-1900, 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.

## Background

Born in New York in 1839, Frances Willard moved to the Midwest early in her life, spending most of her childhood in Wisconsin. She came to Evanston to attend North Western Female College in 1858<sup>4</sup> and started her working life as a school teacher, eventually rising to the prestigious position of Dean of Women at Northwestern University. Willard early on felt the limitations placed on her because of her gender, and as she grew older she sought ever wider arenas for working on what she called “the woman question.” The American temperance movement was gaining momentum in the 1870s, and women were showing a growing interest in temperance activism due to the overwhelming problem of alcoholism in many families. Willard followed news of the women’s temperance crusades in the spring of 1874, and when the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union was organized later that year, she joined it and was elected corresponding secretary. She quickly 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 from the beginning 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 and most influential women’s organization the world had ever known, increasing its membership from 13,000 in 1876 to 200,000 in 1890 in the United States alone. This dramatic success was due to the strength of Willard’s organizational strategy, captured in her motto: “Do Everything.” By this she meant that “every question of practical philanthropy or reform has its temperance aspect.”<sup>5</sup> She organized the WCTU into departments, each with its own activity and leadership. There were national departments for work in a wide array of issues and causes, including Work Among Foreign People; Health and Heredity; Non-Alcoholic Medication; Physical Culture (Exercise); Relation of Temperance to Capital and Labor; School of Methods and Parliamentary Usage; Narcotics; Kindergarten; Penal and Reformatory Work; Securing Homes for Homeless Children; Work Among Lumbermen; Purity; Peace and Arbitration; and Franchise (Woman Suffrage).<sup>6</sup> State or local unions could choose which of the national departments they would set up, according to their members’ interests and political persuasions or the issues they were facing in their own communities. New departments could be created as new issues arose and interests developed — and these could come from the local or state unions as

4 Willard attended for three terms, graduating with a “Laureate of Science” in 1859.

5 *Minutes of the World WCTU Convention*, 1893, 39.

6 This list is a selection from the *Minutes of the National WCTU Convention*, 1895.

well as from the national organization. The organization was led both from the top down as well as from the bottom up, and everyone could find a place within it to work on something personally meaningful. This in turn gave WCTU members the skills to become leaders in their communities and active participants in their own lives. This flexible leadership approach and Willard's growing personal appeal attracted younger women looking for a way to become active in the world.<sup>7</sup> For Willard, the most important words in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union's name were Woman and Union. Christian and Temperance were important too, but came second to the idea that the WCTU was a women's organization where women worked together for their own advancement.<sup>8</sup>

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 before 1883.<sup>9</sup> That year, Willard formally called for the formation of the World WCTU and started to adapt her successful strategy to a worldwide organization. She was creating the blueprint for this as she went along because there was no existing model to follow.<sup>10</sup> Tapping into relationships she had established with other reformers, especially her good friend and co-worker Isabel Somerset in England, Willard outlined the goals of the new organization under the slogan "For God and Home and Every Land."<sup>11</sup> Just as it did in the U.S., the WWCTU would become a world protective agency, not solely by providing actual protection (by working toward changing policies and laws) but by giving women the tools and skills they needed to protect themselves. Margaret Bright Lucas was appointed president in 1884, but the work of the WWCTU was limited due to its loose organizational structure and far-flung workers. During these early years, the organization expanded primarily through the work of Mary Clement Leavitt, who spent eight years traveling the globe for the organization. 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 the WTCU had done in the U.S., the reach of the WWCTU began to grow dramatically under her leadership.<sup>12</sup>

7 Key background sources for Willard and the WCTU include: Frances E. Willard, *Glimpses of Fifty Years: The Autobiography of an American Woman* (Chicago, 1889); Ruth Brigitta Anderson Bordin, *Frances Willard: A Biography* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1981); idem, *Women and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty: 1873-1900* (New Brunswick, 1990); and Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford, ed., *Writing Out My Heart: Selections from the Journal of Frances E. Willard* (Urbana and Chicago, 1995).

8 It is in Bordin's *Women and Temperance* published in 1990 that an argument for the WCTU's global significance and a description of Willard's truly feminist stance are first included in a well-researched and objective history of the organization. Bordin also discussed how historians (particularly women's historians) often ignore the impact of this early women's organization. Bordin, *Women and Temperance*, xxv — xxvi.

9 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.

10 Though missionary organizations operated globally at this time, and the WCTU was intimately connected to their work with many women being members of both, they were not looking to grow their membership per se. They were looking to expand the church, which is not the same thing as growing an interdenominational, interfaith organization that is made up only of women and for their benefit. Patricia Ruth Hill, *The World Their Household:*

*The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1985); Dana Lee Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA, 1996); and Tyrell,

*Reforming the World*, provide context.

11 The leadership of the WWCTU officially adopted this slogan at the first convention of the organization in Boston in November of 1891. *World WCTU Convention Minutes*, 1891.

12 Forty countries were listed as being members of the WWCTU in 1891 at the first convention of the organization. In 1900, after Willard's death less than ten years later, there were an additional twenty-three.

One of the ways the organization 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, but its full impact came about a century later as the worldwide trade network grew and the substantial number of British citizens and military began to make their presence felt on the Indian subcontinent. By the time of the Revolutionary War in America, the British Empire was a significant presence in South Asia; its presence only grew more pronounced by the 1850s, when the British government took over control from the East India Company and began managing India under its own administration.<sup>13</sup>

The WWCTU also turned to the network of Christian missionaries in places around the globe as they were an existing and ready source of connections.<sup>14</sup> Christian missionaries began working in India in the early nineteenth century after prohibitions against them were lifted by the East India Company in 1813. Their network grew dramatically and quickly, especially as the American missionary movement and the involvement of women picked up steam in the years leading up to and then after the Civil War. The WCTU leadership knew the advantages of working within Protestant church networks as this had been one of the primary ways the WCTU expanded in its early years within the United States.<sup>15</sup>

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 the distribution of alcohol both became significant tax and license revenue sources for the British in the nineteenth century as the empire expanded. Consequently, the problems of substance abuse also rose. Increased activism in the 1860s and 1870s by a growing nationalist movement, including activism by indigenous women, effectively spurred the Indian temperance movement on.<sup>16</sup> By the time the WWCTU was founded and looking

13 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); 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).

14 Much work has been done on the presence of American missionaries in India. Key sources for this paper were 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* (Durham, NC, 2010).

15 Borden, *Women and Temperance*, 29.

16 Sources for the development of the indigenous social reform movement in India and women's involvement in it are numerous. For this paper, these provided important background information: 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).

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.

### **The Work, Accomplishments, and Challenges of the WWCTU in India, 1887-1900**

The WWCTU's active work in India began in August of 1887 when Mary Clement Leavitt arrived. Leavitt stayed in the country for almost a full year. She landed in Calcutta (Kolkata), the capital of British India, but quickly left for the hill station towns in the mountains to escape the summer heat. In Simla (Shimla), Leavitt connected with Rev. Robinson of Union Church (British, Nondenominational Protestant) and held several public meetings for Europeans, indigenous Christians, and British soldiers. She met with the viceroy's wife, Lady Dufferin; Mr Lyell, the governor of the Province; and Sir Frederick Roberts, the commander-in-chief of the Army. Leavitt continued to visit hill stations, holding public meetings and forming unions, including the first official union in Mussoorie. In Bareilly, she was especially impressed by her first meeting with a large group of Hindu men and "begged them to form native total abstinence societies" to protect themselves, their families, and communities, and the elderly leader of the group promised to do something.<sup>17</sup>

She followed a similar pattern throughout her year in India, holding public meetings with separate groups; having private meetings, teas, and receptions with interested European ladies; and forming unions as she went. Her reports show a growing understanding of the country "after some months of study." She began to see the need for work with indigenous men: "If I do good work in India I must organize men's societies as well as women's." And she began to see that temperance might not be the main issue: "The women's unions will help the temperance cause, but they will help the women more." She remarked on the difficulty of working with such a stratified and segregated society: "Many classes are to be reached who cannot come together." She also discovered that the language of the WCTU could not just be translated. The pledge and constitution needed to be changed "to suit the needs" of this new audience, especially removing references to Christianity and allowing for different issues on the ground than in the U.S.<sup>18</sup>

17 Leavitt made regular reports to the WCTU leaders, which *The Union Signal* featured. Her annual reports (as well as those of other leaders in India) were published in the minutes of the World's and National WCTU Conventions. *The Union Signal*, November 17, 1887, p. 4.

18 *The Union Signal*, December 15, 1887, pp. 4-5; and January 12, 1888, p. 4.

Leavitt finished her visit to northern India with a return to Calcutta, where she met with existing reform and temperance organizations

and with the viceroy, Lord Dufferin. Heading south to Madras (Chennai) and Hyderabad, Leavitt had her first encounter with unenthusiastic British church officials who did not approve of her public speaking. She pressed on and met with the British minister of education to discuss the creation of educational materials for indigenous children. She concluded her year with a report on the “present posture of the drink traffic and habit in India,” noting that though it was the British who had the biggest problem with excessive drinking, the 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.” At the end of her year, sixteen European unions had been formed and thirteen Indian temperance unions “composed of gentlemen of all religions.”<sup>19</sup>

However, a survey of the status of the WWCTU in India in the April of 1889 by Rev. V. B. Knox showed that much of Leavitt’s progress did not last without her presence in the country. He outlined the reasons for the lack of stability, which included the resistance of the British to women speaking in public as well as to woman suffrage or other women’s rights activism in general; the use of alcohol by the British as regular practice; the limitations of British women associating with indigenous women; the lack of awareness of the problems caused by alcohol; alcohol use by clergy; the busy lives of missionaries that made adding temperance work impossible; and the small number of Americans in India, the WWCTU’s natural supporters.<sup>20</sup> As sporadic reports showed, some WWCTU work did continue in these years, even if on a small scale. In Madras in 1889 there was a joint union of forty-three members including English, Eurasian, and indigenous women. They had formed a WTCU children’s group called “Band of Hope” to work with indigenous boys and girls and were active in writing and translating temperance literature into the indigenous languages.<sup>21</sup> In Lucknow, the work included pledge and petition signing, working with female prisoners; creating temperance literature, working with children, and reaching out to sympathetic newspapers.<sup>22</sup> Pandita Ramabai’s school for young Hindu widows opened in Bombay (Mumbai) in the spring of 1889, and the WWCTU was actively supportive of her work. The 1891 report for the first WWCTU convention in Boston listed Mrs. M.D. MacDonald (a Scottish Presbyterian missionary) as the provisional national president, but there was actually no formal national organization yet, just the scattered local unions that remained.

19 *The Union Signal*, June 28, 1888, p. 4.

20 *The Union Signal*, April 18, 1889, p. 5.

21 *The Union Signal*, May 16, 1889, p. 11. The Band of Hope was a WTCU children’s group.

22 *The Union Signal*, July 18, 1889, p. 10.

In 1893 Jessie Ackerman, the second Round-the-World missionary of the WWCTU, 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 once again tapped into the missionary network and increased the focus on working with indigenous Christians. Ackerman also started “zenana visits” (to women in purdah/seclusion).<sup>23</sup> During her time in India, it also became clear that a big focus of the WWCTU would be the issue of state sponsored prostitution. The WWCTU’s Social Purity Department had been formed under the leadership of Josephine Butler in 1891 to work on this issue around the globe.<sup>24</sup> Kate Bushnell and Elizabeth Wheeler Andrews, the third and fourth Round-the-World missionaries, were sent to India in 1893 to research the issue there, surreptitiously visiting a number of cantonments where British soldiers were stationed. They published reports on the matter in *The Union Signal* in May of 1893 and then presented their official findings before the British High Commission formed to investigate the issue in June. The work of Bushnell and Andrews in India solidified the idea of the organization’s functioning as a “great world’s protective agency” to protect women from those who would exploit them. Though their critique of British reliance on revenue from the trade in alcohol and opium remained strong, their focus on the exploitation of women and girls became equally important. Wheeler and Andrews articulated this growing connection and concern for indigenous women and girls: “The white ribbon woman does not recognize that gulf [between races], she has passed it long ago.”<sup>25</sup>

23 *The Union Signal*, May 11, 1893, p. 3. It was common for Indian women, especially Muslim women, to be restricted to their homes and allowed contact only with close family members. The members of the WCTU of India worked hard to figure out ways to make their contact with these women appropriate and accepted.

24 Josephine Butler was a British activist instrumental in bringing worldwide attention to the issue of state-sponsored prostitution by the British government in its colonial outposts. In 1891, Butler was well known throughout reform circles for her successful campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Act, which controlled the spread of venereal diseases through the forced examination of prostitutes.

25 *The Union Signal*, November 2, 1893, p. 4. The symbol of the WCTU was the White Ribbon, and many WCTU members wore actual white ribbons to demonstrate their support.

In 1893, the WCTU of India was officially organized as the 19th international union of the WWCTU. Jeannette Hauser, a longtime missionary in India, was appointed president (a paid position) in August 1893, and Pandita Ramabai was listed as a national lecturer. The headquarters of the organization moved to Lucknow, where Hauser was based, and Hauser quickly began to work. She started the publication of a new national newsletter, *The White Ribbon*, and arranged for its production and distribution through the Methodist Publishing House. She began the process of replicating the organizational model of the WCTU in India: forming departments for work on various issues and creating regional and local divisions to disperse responsibility and workload. Creating literature in the many vernacular languages of India became an important focus as well as a great challenge. Hauser held a national essay contest and a short story contest in Hindi and had the WCTU pledge (which all members

were required to sign) as well as speeches and other presentations translated. She called for increased work at railway stations, especially literature distribution, and with railway workers (who traveled throughout the country and could spread the word). The Indian WCTU also undertook traditional temperance work, including visits to “grogshops” to get them to close, flower deliveries to hospitals, and large public meetings that were “gospel temperance” in style.<sup>26</sup>

Hauser made two key adaptations, which were designed to meet the needs of India specifically. She formed the “All-India” union for women who were scattered throughout the country (mostly in missionary appointments) in places where there were not enough Europeans to form a local union. She also created and began recruiting for the Indian Women’s Temperance Union, which was for indigenous, non-Christian women. Hauser also expanded the WCTU’s work in the larger cities of Calcutta and Bombay. In Calcutta, she met with women connected with Brahma Samaj, an Indian reform group, and expanded the work of the Social Purity Department, called forth by the research and reports of Bushnell and Andrews. Under her leadership the Calcutta WCTU also began fundraising for a school for girls who were victims of the sex trade.

During her year as president, Hauser placed a great deal of emphasis on local unions, collecting signatures for the Polyglot Petition. Willard and the WWCTU had initiated this project to gather signatures from around the globe to convince world leaders to end the global traffic in alcohol and opium. The Polyglot Petition eventually garnered more than six million signatures, and Willard and the WWCTU leadership hoped that the simple act of signing the petition would accomplish several things at once: it would spur membership and support for the WWCTU, capture media attention for the cause, and truly influence world leaders to make change. Most importantly, in a time and in places where voting rights and other means of expressing one’s opinion were not available, petition-signing was often the only way political opinions and demands could be aired. Hauser urged the members of the WCTU of India to make a good showing among the other WWCTU’s by collecting as many signatures as they could. Hauser’s reports revealed some of her struggles: communication was difficult and slow; not everyone, including the missionaries, was fully on board with total abstinence; and there were simply not enough interested Europeans or Americans to form local unions, so the sense of joint work so important to the WCTU was lacking.<sup>27</sup>

26 Hauser’s reports to *The Union Signal* were not as regular as Leavitt’s, but *The White Ribbon* newsletter is an important source for this time period and the years that followed. *The White Ribbon*, August 1, 1893; September 21, 1893; October 30, 1893; December 1, 1893; January 1, 1894; February 1, 1894; April 1, 1894. Also important were the India Reports Hauser wrote to the WWCTU Conventions; this quote is from *World WCTU Convention Minutes*, 1893. “Grog shops” were places where alcohol could be purchased. “Gospel temperance” meetings were like church services and included prayers, singing of hymns and temperance songs, and speeches/sermons.

27 *The Union Signal*, October 5, 1893, p. 10; February 8, 1894, p. 10; February 22, 1894, p. 11.

Hauser returned to the U.S. in the summer of 1894, and Mary Phillips took over the presidency of the Indian WCTU. Phillips was the wife of James Phillips, the head of the India Sunday School Union, one of the key missionary organizations in the country. Phillips continued Hauser's work in advancing the literature and publication wing of the organization and in having translations made of key documents. Phillips enlarged *The White Ribbon* to a full-size newsletter and hired a secretary to manage the publications. She also moved the headquarters back to Calcutta to be closer to her home base and to that of the government. Under her leadership, the publication department started working regularly with outside publications like the *Bombay Guardian* and *Indian Witness*. Phillips, like her predecessors, traveled widely and met with unions all over the country. She completed the shift to a divisional structure for the organization with national, local and state unions, and actively promoted the formation of issue-based departments. This mimicked the structure found in the U.S. and was meant to bring a sense of camaraderie to the work while maintaining the unity of the organization.<sup>28</sup>

28 *The Union Signal*, October 15, 1894, p. 4-5; January 23, 1896, p. 10; October 20, 1896, p. 10; November 5, 1896, p. 10.

29 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, no. 4 (2006): 266-89.

30 India Report, *World WCTU Convention Minutes*, 1895.

31 *The Union Signal*, April 1, 1897, p. 11.

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

During these years, the organization began active fundraising for an indigenous girls' school in Lucknow (what became the Isabella Thoburn school)<sup>29</sup> and also continued to support Pandita Ramabai's school, which had moved from Bombay to Poona (Pune). It also began forming Loyal Temperance Legion groups, which were the youth program of the WCTU. The first official convention of the Indian WCTU was held in December 1895 in Calcutta. Mary Phillips noted in her annual report to the WWCTU that work with indigenous women remained a top priority: "Native ladies are taking their places in the great reforms." Three Indian women were mentioned in particular: a Dr. Kgramaka in Bombay; Pandita Ramabai in Poona; and Kandambini Ganguli in Calcutta.<sup>30</sup> The second WCTU of India convention was held in Bangalore in 1895 and the third in Poona (with Pandita Ramabai as host and featured speaker) in 1896. At the Poona Convention, Ramabai was formally appointed National Superintendent of Native Work.<sup>31</sup> The number of unions was reported to be thirty English-speaking and nine indigenous, for a total of thirty-nine. In 1896, Phillips reported 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."<sup>32</sup>

By 1897, the number of local unions had almost doubled to sixty-one (thirty-six European and twenty-five indigenous ones), with the

growth in the indigenous community being particularly dramatic. At the 1897 convention in Allahabad, Phillips noted the increased presence of indigenous Christian women.<sup>33</sup> That year also saw the organization dealing with the twin catastrophes of plague and famine in the south and attempting to respond to these humanitarian crises as best as they could. These early efforts of the WCTU to offer humanitarian support to indigenous communities were influential in creating a shift in the American government's policy abroad.<sup>34</sup>

In 1898, Florence Mansell became president of the WCTU of India and began to grapple with how to manage the work of such a sprawling organization. While maintaining the divisional and department format, she created an executive committee to manage the day-to-day work of the organization. "Rescue work," they called it, with widows and prostitutes expanded, with Pandita Ramabai in charge of this department. Other departments included the Evangelistic, Press, Finance, Juvenile, Sunday Schools, Mother's Meetings, Flower Mission, Scientific Temperance Instruction, and Prevention of Cruelty to Children departments – once again modeling the work and priorities of the American WCTU. The WCTU of India began fundraising for a temperance hospital in Bombay and discussed establishing a "coffee house and exchange for women" and a "temperance restaurant and hotel" in Calcutta while still supporting the Home for Inebriates there.<sup>35</sup> All of this activity made the WCTU of India reports to the world organization very positive, and the growth in India was very encouraging compared to other countries. By 1899, when total membership numbers were first reported, there were 1,125 members with slightly more indigenous (611) than European (514). The national convention was held in Madras in 1898, and the WCTU of India sought and received funding for paid organizers in each of the six divisions in the country from the world organization. The Home for Inebriates in Calcutta was renamed in memory of Willard, who had died in February of 1898.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

Several important conclusions can be drawn from this in-depth look at the work of the WCTU of India. First, the World WCTU and the WCTU of India were actually forming at the same time — and in many ways, they were both experimenting with how to organize a worldwide organization in India. This meant that they had to be flexible and learn as they went along. Second, the leaders of the organization started out following a well-known pattern that worked

33 *The Union Signal*, June 3, 1897, p. 9; and June 10, 1897. India Report, *World WCTU Convention Minutes*, 1897.

34 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*.

35 *The Union Signal*, April 14, 1898; May 19, 1898; November 3, 1898; India Report, *World WCTU Convention Minutes*, 1899.

36 *World WCTU Convention Minutes*, 1899.

in the United States: they tapped into the Christian missionary network, they used their influence and contacts to meet with “leading” people, they began work with experienced organizers and tightly linked members, they got women who knew the country involved — women who were also connected to prominent men and networks, they did research to discover the extent of the problem and to define what the problem was, and they started with things they knew how to do — that is, holding meetings and creating literature. Third, the activists adapted their work to the conditions they found: they formed national as well as local unions (something they did not do in the U.S. where membership was tied to one’s local and state union — not the national one); and they connected to indigenous women and worked to involve the indigenous population, including men (this also was very different from the U.S. operations, where men were only allowed to be auxiliary members). Finally, they used temperance as they did in the U.S., to open the door for their broader activism for women’s empowerment; however, in India this was not just about their own empowerment but also about the empowerment of Indian women, with whom they began to identify and sympathize across wide cultural differences.

One of my earliest research questions has been whether or not the “American-ness” of the WCTU activists in India mattered to them, and I think the answer is yes. Their criticism 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 was expanded to include censure of the opium trade. And, later, as the Social Purity movement grew, the double standard (different moral standards for men and women) of the sex trade came to the forefront.<sup>37</sup> This criticism of colonial power on the part of these American women harked back to their cultural memories of having been members of a British colony themselves. They began to sympathize with the indigenous people in India, wishing the same freedom of self-governance for them that they cherished at home. Though it may seem hypocritical, or at a minimum blinded by national pride within the contemporary context of growing American colonial aspirations, this attitude of the WCTU’s activists in India still presented an influential critical stance toward the British Empire.

Finally, I believe that the time these American women spent in India helped them to see how their own gender role was constructed as they reflected on how this role was constructed in an entirely different

37 The link between drug and alcohol use, on the one hand, and sexual promiscuity and abuse, on the other, has been an underlying issue for the WCTU throughout its history. It is not then surprising that they discovered this link in a new way in India.

culture.<sup>38</sup> To some extent, they could see all that they were fighting for in stark relief there — India had “separate spheres” to an extreme. And, there were things in India that the activists admired. For example, even an early worker like Mary Clement Leavitt saw some good things in the East: “The more I see of the light, graceful, beautiful Eastern dress, when it is modest (and it generally is) and the more I compare it, on the spot, with the Western dress, the more I wish for some change in the latter...”<sup>39</sup> Some years later, Kate Bushnell also stressed the great benefit of women’s collaboration across borders when she described a “great world-wide sisterhood of women, that is teaching us better things than in the old days of narrowness and prejudice.”<sup>40</sup>

Though American WCTU members started out as Christian temperance workers with a well-defined agenda, they ended up losing these identifying markers in their connection to indigenous women and men. Temperance work allowed them to enter this new world and connect with indigenous women of different religious beliefs — in fact, it required it. And this contact forced them to see the world from another point of view. I would not say that the leaders and members of the WCTU of India developed a thorough critique of imperialism, nor did they completely break through barriers of race and class. They were women of their time and place. But they did try to act in the interests of indigenous women, and they did protest the sexism inherent in colonial society and Indian culture. All this, I believe, made the women of the WCTU more than just the “maternal imperialists” or “colonial busy-bodies” that they have often been made out to be.<sup>41</sup>

If the WCTU of India was not the earliest women’s organization to operate in India, it was a very early one. The WWCTU’s work provided an important bridge between Christian missionaries and the Indian reform world; it involved both indigenous men and women early on and worked to maintain its own organizational culture while respecting (however successfully) indigenous culture and religion; it articulated one of the key arguments of Indian nationalists in its criticism of the British for their reliance on revenue from the alcohol and opium trade; and it brought American views, values, and organizational procedures to India, encouraging the development of indigenous ideas of reform and democracy. Finally, in India, the

38 Jeffery Paine in *Father India* develops this idea of how the construction of your identity can be seen

once you’ve viewed it from another culture. Jeffery Paine, *Father India: How Encounters*

with an Ancient Culture Transformed the Modern West (New York, 1998).

39 *The Union Signal*, February 16, 1888, p. 4.

40 *The Union Signal*, November 2, 1893, p. 4.

41 The discussion around this topic has grown in 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. 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* (Manchester, 1998); Clare Midgley, Alison Twells, and Julie Carlier, eds., *Women in Transnational History: Connecting the Local and the Global* (New York, 2016); 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*.

WWCTU took what it learned from its expansive growth in the U.S. and successfully adapted 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 since 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.

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