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All-India Women's Conference

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ALL INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

The All India Women's Conference (AIWC) was created for the purpose of improving women's education in India. Today, it is one of the oldest women's organizations in the country. The AIWC currently has 100,000 members in 500 branches throughout India, engaged in work on a range of issues, including education, development, economic empowerment, and social welfare. The organization also runs 150 educational institutions, and its headquarters are located in New Delhi, India.

Background

In 1926, at the suggestion of the organization's founder, Margaret Cousins, a number of regional conferences were held throughout the country to discuss specific local issues regarding educational reform. In January 1927, delegates from these regional conferences were invited to attend the first official AIWC. Approximately 2,000 people attended this national gathering, which took place in Poona, India. The conference and the participation of women from a range of communities and backgrounds signified an important chapter in the development of the women's movement in India. During this time, a number of resolutions were adopted aimed at enriching the content of primary education, vocational training, and collegiate-level programs. The AIWC was critical in helping to increase societal acceptance of women's education and in working toward increasing women's literacy rates.

During subsequent conferences and following significant debate on the issue, the organization decided to expand the scope of its work beyond its educational focus to include a social reform agenda. The organization became actively involved in legislative advocacy aimed at ending the practice of child marriage and securing women's rights to divorce and inheritance. The group also participated in efforts to improve women's working conditions and to secure women's right to vote. Several members of the AIWC participated in the framing of the constitution following India's independence, and many of the organization's past presidents went on to hold significant political positions. The AIWC also worked to expand its visibility and build connections beyond India. The group participated in several international conferences and serves as a consultant to several international agencies on economic and social issues impacting women.

Contemporary Work

The AIWC's current work involves a range of activities and projects aimed at improving educational opportunities and increasing women's workforce participation. The group utilizes a range of strategies, including public awareness campaigns, protest meetings, leadership training, and legislative advocacy. The organization works on issues such as health and family welfare, women's labor, trafficking, disaster relief, developing rural energy, and microcredit programs. The AIWC has also initiated several projects aimed at training and employing women in fields ranging from computing to textile weaving to hair and skin care.

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See also Naidu, Sarojini; NGOs and Grassroots Organizing; Ramabai, Pandita

Further Readings

- Basu, A., & Ray, B. (2003). *Women's struggle: A history of the All India Women's Conference 1927–2002*. New Delhi, India: Manohar.
- Kumar, R. (1993). *The history of doing: An illustrated account of movements for women's rights and feminism in India 1800–1990*. New Delhi, India: Kali for Women.

ALPHA MALE

An *alpha male* is a high-ranking member of a group or pack. He is aggressive and dominates the other *beta males*, lower-ranking, weaker members of the group, usually through force and intimidation. Members of a group often defer to the alpha male, bestowing upon him authority, decision-making power, and privilege. The alpha male is often larger, stronger, and more intelligent than the other males in the group. As a result, he has the greatest choice of and success with the females. His size, strength, and status are often appealing to the female members of the group, as these characteristics are predictors of desirable genes that may be passed down to their offspring. The alpha male also denies the other males' access to the females. The alpha male is therefore more often reproductively successful, repeatedly spawning and caring for a greater number of offspring than the other beta males. From an evolutionary perspective, this ensures the "survival of the fittest," as the stronger, more