

University of Macedonia
Department of International and European Studies

MSc Thesis

The role of Women in Indian Politics

Submitted by: SAIME DOCE

Supervisor: SPYRIDON N. LITSAS, Ph.D.

FEBRUARY 14, 2022

Introduction

“Well behaved women rarely make history “-

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

Until 1860-1870 there was not even a history of the evolution of the family. According to Friedrich Engels, the science of history was still under the influence of the five books of Moses. Allegedly, the patriarchal form was the only form presented besides the existence of polygamy. F. Engels notes that in ancient society polyandry was widespread and women had a more significant role in society. Johann J. Bachofen in his work 'Ancient Matriarchy' puts forward some theses. He claims that in ancient society there were unlimited sexual relations between people and it was difficult to determine who the father was. According to him, then, one can know one's origin by knowing who one's mother is. Because women were the only real parents, they had an important influence in society and enjoyed a higher degree of respect and esteem. On the Malabar Coast in southwestern India, a matriarchal social organization prevailed.¹ History is ambiguous and changes according to the interests of its own society, Orwell could not define it better: “Every record has been destroyed or falsified, every book rewritten, every picture has been repainted, every statue and street building has been renamed, every date has been altered. And the process is continuing day by day and minute by minute. History has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right.”² “Religion seeks to regulate not only the private life of the Hindu, but also his domestic and national relations, and no contingencies are possible for which it has not provided laws. To treat, then, of the ordinary life of the Hindu is to describe the Hindu religion”³ It must be noted that the knowledge of the Indians was limited many generations before because there was no prose literature, periodicals, novels, or newspapers. Their knowledge was based exclusively on mythological representations. Therefore, the writings were full of differences between them and therefore the beliefs and practices also differed significantly.⁴

¹ Naresh Rout, 'Role of women in ancient India'

² George Orwell, 1984

³ Wilkins, W, J. Modern Hinduism' pg.12

⁴ Wilkins, W, J. Modern Hinduism'

Already in the great epics Ramayana and Mahabharata great respect was shown to woman. She could participate in public ceremonies and, like Sita and Draupadi, she could travel with her husband and help him with his daily chores.⁵

I. Pre-Vedic society

Over the years, society changes and strives to improve its status, regardless of gender. India has yet to remove deep-rooted obstacles related to the acceptance of women's independence and their ability to take on great responsibilities, be it that of a nation. History shows that Indian society has been reluctant to change the status of women for millennia. Over time, the status of women deteriorated more and more. In ancient India, it was especially the early Vedic age. Neera Desai in her book 'Women in Modern India 1957' states that women in this era were sometimes portrayed as goddesses and sometimes as slaves who have no personality. Inferior beings who exist to obey, as Aristotle characterized women. During the early Vedic age, they had a high status within society. Participation in politics and making decisions related to administrative procedures was prevalent.⁶ Women could reach an intellectual and spiritual standard. No sati performance or early marriage was associated with the pre-Vedic era.⁷ The birth of a daughter was not seen as advantageous as that of a son. But no distinction was made in education. There were even women called Brahmavaadini who devoted their lives to studies or the Sadyodvāhās who studied the Vedas until they married.⁸ Women could attend festivals, fairs and meetings. They were allowed to move about freely. Marriages were contracted with the consent of both partners, never forced, and were contracted only when the women were mature. They could choose their own husband through swayamvarai. The widows could remarry.⁹

⁵ Chimmabai II.; Mitra, Siddha Mohana, 1856-1925, 'The position of women in Indian life.'

⁶ Dr.Radhika Kapoor, 'Status of women in ancient India'

⁷ Naresh Rout, 'Role of Women in ancient India, Dr.Radhika Kapoor, 'Status of women in ancient India'

⁸ Naresh Rout, 'Role of Women in ancient India'

⁹ Desai Neera, 'Women in Modern India 1957'

II. The Later Vedic Period

In the Ramayana of Valmiki and the Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa¹⁰ women are portrayed as the source of dharma¹¹, prosperity and pleasure. Their position carried great weight in society, they had economic freedom and could move about freely. They worked side by side with their husband in seasonal activities or engaged in spinning to support the family. The Mahabharata emphasizes the important role that women played in improving family life. The practice of Devadasis emerged during this period.¹² Also known as the temple girls. They first appeared in South India and then spread to Puree and some other parts of India. These girls were destined to be the servants and slaves of the gods. They had to dance and sing before the temple gods.¹³ They were without exception courtesans allowed by the religion and society.¹⁴ Courtesans oftentimes were literate and talented in dancing and music.¹⁵ This practice was so much connected with the Hindu religion that the performance of the rituals could not be fully carried out without the presence of the devadasis. These girls were also indirectly considered the property of the priests.¹⁶

III. Buddhism Period

The Vedic tradition continued until the advent of Buddhism. With the invasion of the Aryans¹⁷ who called themselves 'Nobel'.¹⁸ They brought with them a simple faith based on the teachings of Vedantism. There were no temples for worship yet, only some rituals. Time passed and more and more ceremonies and prayers had to be memorized. Inevitably, everything was worshipped.

¹⁰ Indian epics

¹¹ Right behavior and social order

¹² Bhaswati Pal, Volume 23, pg180-184

¹³ 'According to the Madras census report of 1881, there were 11,573 women " dancers " in the Presidency.' (Marcus, B. Fuller. 'The wrongs of Indian womanhood' pg. 118)

¹⁴ Marcus, B. Fuller, 'The wrongs of Indian Womanhood'

¹⁵ Naresh Rout, 'Role of women in ancient India'

¹⁶ Marcus, B. Fuller, 'The wrongs of Indian Womanhood'

¹⁷ The period when Aryans invaded India is unknown. (Frazer, Robert Watson. 'A literary history of India' pg.

15)

¹⁸ Frazer, Robert Watson. 'A literary history of India'

The increasing superstition subsequently led to the emergence of the despotic Brahmin priests, the caste system and the deterioration of the situation of women.¹⁹

Unlike the native Indians, the Aryans were light-skinned and saw themselves in a higher position than the dark-skinned, which caused the caste system. They introduced new customs into Indian society that degraded the status of women. They grouped themselves into tribes. They were monogamous. The woman was bought from a neighboring clan or forcibly taken from a hostile tribe, and after being taken to her new home, the woman was subject to the husband. He could decide whether she was allowed to live or die.²⁰ Human sacrifice²¹ probably originated in the Aryan period. The Brahmins²² were the high society of the Aryans who exercised religious and political power over the inhabitants. Buddhism arose as a social revolt to revise the Aryan social patterns imposed upon them. During this period, Buddhists promoted gender equality. They were considered capable of pursuing educational careers and were encouraged to strive for freedom.²³ Men and women could have access to nirvana if they attained self-control and self-mastery. Although the highest state was obtained in relation to Bhikkhu male²⁴ she was still considered as inferior. The birth of a girl was not considered a doom and it is believed that the age of marriage was between sixteen and twenty. Anyone could join the order, even prostitutes. If an unmarried woman wanted to join the order, the consent of both parents had to be obtained. Divorce was possible under certain conditions. For the first time, women felt a glimmer of hope, but the victory was only temporary. Society lacked a radical change that would allow the acceptance of a religion as democratic as Buddhism.²⁵ They did not have enough strength to form a strong variety of elements and create a unifying body that would resist disintegration by the foreign

¹⁹ D, A "The Indian child's mother" pg.29

²⁰ Frazer, Robert Watson. 'A literary history of India'

²¹ Probably the author means the custom of the Sati, in which the widowed women were to throw themselves on the funeral pyre of their husband.

²² The Brahmins were the first-born, they came from the most excellent part, and being the sole possessors of the Veda, they had an unquestionable right over the people. He is the protector of Darma. (Murdoch, John 1898. 'The laws of Manu, English translation')

²³ Bhaswati Pal, Volume 23, pg180-184

²⁴ Male monastic.

²⁵ Desai Neera. 'Women in Modern India (1957)

invasions.²⁶ The reactionary orthodox pattern surpassed for a short time the progress achieved by the Buddhas. During this time, social life declined. The advent of Islam was a precondition for the deterioration of women in society. This deterioration continued until the arrival of the British.²⁷

IV. Status of women during the Puranic Hindu society

Puranas are believed to have originated as a means of disseminating religious ideology among the pre-educated and clan-bound groups that acculturated. The Purana composers underwent radical changes related to the Brahmanism of the Dharma sastra.²⁸ With the advent of Buddhism and Jainism, which asserted that there was no need for another person to act as a link between man and God, the authority of the Brahmins came under threat, so the Purans were composed to ensure the Brahmins the highest recognition in society. Hindu society underwent a major upsurge in the status of classes and the status of women. The husband had to be worshipped just as a god is worshipped. No matter what the husband was, he had to be provided for and satisfied. During the Puranic period, this submission was praised as "Pativrata Dharma." In society, marriages before puberty prevailed. This custom or rule, unimaginable to many countries, began to spread in Hindu society around 200 AD. In 1000 AD, the age of ten was considered the age at which girls reached puberty. Sometimes even the age of four was considered the appropriate age for marriage.²⁹ Infanticide was a common act. The birth of a girl was undesirable, it was even justified to kill her by strangulation or other means. The girl's body was considered so insignificant that it was not worthy of either the rite of burning her dead body.³⁰

The Muslim invaders brought another cruelty to Hindu society, the purdah system and the custom of 'zenana'. Women were forced to live in secluded rooms and their bodies and faces were covered except for their eyes. The Hindus took precautions to protect their women from the

²⁶ Frazer, Robert Watson. 'A literary history of India'

²⁷ Desai Neera, 'Women in Modern India 1957'

²⁸ Vijay Nath "From 'Brahmanism' to 'Hinduism': Negotiating the Myth of the Great Tradition. Vol. 29, No. 3/4

²⁹ Desai Neera, 'Women in Modern India 1957'

³⁰ Billington, Mary Frances 1895 "Woman in India"

Mohammedan invaders by keeping them within four walls and veiling them. In Bengal, the northwest, and the north, where the Mohammedan presence was very large, this system was more prevalent among the Hindus. It should be noted that the system was not widespread among the lower castes, as their income needs forced them to make their wives work.³¹

V. Post-Vedic Society

During this period, Indian society underwent a great change. The status of women deteriorated visibly. The laws of Manu³² were cruel and his doctrine wicked as far as women were concerned, for these treaties degraded the rights of women.³³ These codes are primarily responsible for the subjugation and miserable position of women. The actual author of the codices is literally inaccurate. Manu may have written some of the codices, but not the entire book. The book was written by different people from different times. The authors who wrote it and claimed it as divine authority are unknown. It is one of the four books of the world³⁴ that has had a significant impact on the habits and mindset of Hindus.³⁵ When the Muslims invaded, fifteen years after these laws had already come into force, the conquerors did not find it difficult to obey them, for women were completely restricted in their dress. They were considered undignified and were not to be trusted. Independence was not allowed for women; they were subjugated.³⁶ Either to her father's house was she allowed to act on her own free will. "While a child she must be submissive to her father; in youth to her husband and if the husband is dead, she must be under the subordination of her sons. If there are no sons she must be under subordination to the nearest kinsman of her husband."³⁷ Although the husband has bad vices, the wife must respect him with full devotion and adoration. She must be faithful to him even if the husband is not, and divorce

³¹ Fuller, Marcus B. *'The wrongs of Indian womanhood'*

³² The Manava Dharma Sastra is a sacred Sanskrit book in which the laws of Manu are collected. It is one of the oldest works after the Vedas and Sutras. (Murdoch, John. *'The laws of Manu; English translation'*) The treaties of Manu must be taught by Brahmans to his pupils but not be taught by any other. (*'The wrongs of Indian womanhood'* Fuller, Marcus B.)

³³ Wilkins, W.J. *'Modern Hinduism'*

³⁴ One of the four books that had and still have in impact in various societies. For example: the Pentateuch to the Jews, the New Testament to Christians, the Koran to Mahomedans, and Manu to Hindus. (Storrow, Edward *"Our Indian Sisters"* pg.19)

³⁵ Storrow, Edward *"Our Indian Sisters"* pg.17

³⁶ Wilkins, W.J. *'Modern Hinduism'*

³⁷ Murdoch, John. *'The laws of Manu; English translation'* pg.19

was unthinkable. In case of divorce, the woman should return to her father's house as a widow, which is much worse than living under one roof with a bad husband.³⁸ The husband was allowed to take a second wife in case no sons were born or only daughters. "A sterile wife may be replaced in the eight years. When her children have died in the tenth; she who gives birth only to daughters in the eleventh; and she who is bad-tempered without lateness"³⁹ The right of education was unapproachable for the women.

Pre-puberty marriage was the ideal age for a girl to have a husband.⁴⁰ Child marriage occupied an important role in the society.⁴¹ Thus, the possibility of education was not an option for a woman, which is indispensable to obtain knowledge. We can clearly see here the analogy between the status of women and Plato's cave. Plato wanted to convey to us the importance of education and the effects that the lack of education has on human nature. The laws of Manu exclude the desire for emancipation. During the time of the Dhama sastras Manu smriti, women were forbidden to participate in prayers, sacrifices, and religious journeys, as they were considered second-class citizens. Even praying alone was not allowed.

Their husbands were their gods and they had to treat them as such.⁴² "A man thirty years of age can marry a girl of twelve who pleases him, or a man of twenty-four a damsel of eight; if the performance of his duties would otherwise be hindered, let him marry sooner"⁴³ This paragraph indicates the really young age little girls were given for marriage. Years after it had to come to a tragic death of an eleven-year-old child-wife who was raped by her husband that the government decided to rise the age of marriage to twelve. Many of this horrible happening have occurred but no one ever had the power to rise their voice. Although the child-wife had to bear all kind of atrocities she had no place where to turn for help. The mothers considered them as dead when they gave them for marriage. No case against cruelty could be raised against the cruel husband because no one would witness against her husband. The only fervor these little girls would ever see would be their wedding day. With fireworks, sweets beautiful clothes and being the center of attention for the first time in their lives. In her brain she considers what's happening

³⁸ *Wilkins, W.J. 'Modern Hinduism'*

³⁹ *Murdoch, John. 'The laws of Manu; English translation pg.36'*

⁴⁰ *Desai Neera, 'Women in Modern India 1957'*

⁴¹ *Bhaswati Pal, Volume 23, pg180-184*

⁴² *Bhaswati Pal, Volume 23, pg180-184*

⁴³ *Murdoch, John. 'The laws of Manu; English translation pg.36'*

around her was a tamasha⁴⁴she wasn't really perceiving the real drift of all this tamasha around her. ⁴⁵ As for property rights, according to Manu, women could only own what was given to her by her father, mother, or brother at the wedding fire, at the bridal show, or as a token of love. If the father has no son, the daughter's son inherits all his property.⁴⁶ An indissoluble bond unites the husband and wife even after death. Although their participation in religious practices was forbidden, those who committed sati were praised and proclaimed as goddesses by patriarchal society. Those who did not commit sati lived a disgraceful and miserable life. Self-immolation was a normal act at that time, with women convinced that this practice would ensure them a lasting bond with their husband after life. ⁴⁷Even by death their bond was unable to be destroyed. ⁴⁸ According to the codices of Manu, a widow could never remarry. According to the law, a widow must remain a widow until the end of her life." Let her emaciate her body by living on pure flowers, fruits and roots; but she must never even mention the name of another man. Like these chaste men, a virtuous wife ascends to heaven, though childless, if after the death of her lord, she remains chaste. But a widow, who from a wish to bear children is unfaithful to her dead husband, disgraces herself here, and loses her place with her husband (in heaven). Off- spring begotten on a woman by any other than her husband is no offspring of hers; no more than a child begotten on the wife of another man (belongs to the begetter); nor is a second husband anywhere allowed to a virtuous woman." ⁴⁹ Although the ritual was not obligatory and it was assumed that the women committed self-immolation of their own free will, there was no doubt that they were induced to do so. If she changed her mind at the last moment, she would have no family to return to and would no longer belong to any caste. To prevent this, preventive measures were taken, like drugging and binding her body. If a widow had never seen her husband before and he died suddenly before they could even marry, society still knew no mercy. A seven-year-old girl who became a widow before she even knew her husband had to endure some harsh customs. Her head was shaved, she was not allowed to wear colorful clothes or jewelry. Seeing a widow on the street was considered a bad omen. So, she had to seclude herself and spend her whole life

⁴⁴ show. (Fuller, Marcus B. *The wrongs of Indian womanhood*.pg 34)

⁴⁵ Fuller, Marcus B. *The wrongs of Indian womanhood*

⁴⁶ Murdoch, John. *The laws of Manu; English translation* pg.37

⁴⁷ Desai Neera, *Women in Modern India 1957*

⁴⁸ Wilkins, W.J. *Modern Hinduism*

⁴⁹ Murdoch, John. *The laws of Manu; English translation* pg.19

punishing herself for the sins she had committed in her past life according to the Hindu religion. Perhaps she had been unfaithful or had killed her husband. A widow has no right to ever experience happiness in her life. She had to live in shame and was not allowed to shed even a tear of her pain, because she would have been accused of crying for another man.⁵⁰ Women were seen only as sexual objects whose duty was to obey their husbands sexually. According to the Manu smriti, their only main duty in life was to submit to the sexual desires of their master.⁵¹ In the Manu codification, women are described as vicious because it is in their nature to seduce not only a fool, but also a wise man, and to tempt him to pleasure and anger. In this period, women were confined to the desolation of their homes.⁵²

VI. Conclusion

⁵⁰ Fuller, Marcus B, "The wrongs of Indian womanhood"

⁵¹ Bhaswati Pal, Volume 23, pg180-184

⁵² Desai Neera, 'Women in Modern India 1957'

John M. and Peter J. claim that societies under colonial or neo-colonial rule very often undergo enormous changes when the prevailing religious beliefs fail to provide adequate solutions to vital problems. In this case, strong religious beliefs emerge, often led by a prophet who claims to have found a solution to every problem facing society. These movements are called millenarian and are led by people who claim to have the authority of the divine. In this way, they bring about intense changes in religion and secularism in order to solve the crisis that people are facing.⁵³ The laws of Manu, presented as divine scriptures by the Brahmins of Hindu society, are an example of what Max Weber calls 'routinizing charisma'. A man's plan to keep his women pure and his house holy, as Marcus Fuller would quote. The moment the laws were institutionalized, it was the women who suffered the most and lost their identity because they were judged by their own time-honored laws (the laws of Manu) and customs. Due to seclusion and exclusion from education and ignorance, women had no understanding of their own potential, what they could be and achieve. The belief that their position could not be changed and that this had always been the case, led them to believe in their seclusion and even to be content with it.⁵⁴

CHAPTER II

1. On the verge of British occupation. Bhakti movement

The female who can read and write is branded as the heir of misfortunes.⁵⁵ They are slaves of superstition and customs. Without knowing how to read and listen to an intelligent conversation what an Indian Woman can offer is not much.

⁵³ John Monaghan & Peter Just "Social and cultural anthropology." pg.142

⁵⁴ Wilkins, W. J. (William Joseph), 1843-1902. 'Modern Hinduism: being an account of the religion and life of the Hindus in northern India'

⁵⁵ Storrow, Edward. "Our Indian Sisters." pg..45

During the years 1556-1605 when Akbar⁵⁶ When Akbar ruled in India, changes were made by him. He found the old methods primitive and only by abandoning old traditions would the unification of the Hindus be possible. Of the many changes he made, the one in favor of women was that he allowed widows to remarry. Remarriage was legalized, but among Hindus, remarriage of a widow was unthinkable. He forbade sati or suttee unless the widow had self-immolated of her own free will. And he also forbade child marriage.⁵⁷ Upper caste women began to enroll in education and attend training centers. The lower caste women had a small possibility to enhance the culture of education due to their daily obligations, but still they had some free time for creative activities that they enjoyed. The system of purdah, on the other hand, prevailed in the upper caste, especially among Muslims. The lower caste and Hindus did not adhere to this custom. Polygamy was in vogue. The only women who had any freedom, unlike the others, were those with a bad reputation. Regardless of their reputation, most of these women could sing, write poetry, and dance.⁵⁸ The light at the end of the tunnel was not long-lasting. Illiteracy prevailed, child marriage dominated society, and sati continued to be practiced. Devadasi, the offering of young girls to the temples, also continued to be common.⁵⁹ During the second Muslim invasion in the eleventh century, the Bhakti cult came into existence. Threatened by the Muslim religion and anticipating even greater oppression of the Hindus by the Muslims, a movement arose out of necessity to prevent this threat and alleviate social oppression, the Bhakti movement. The movement was led by religious teachers such as Ramanand, Chaitanya, and Nanak, who sought to introduce new trends into Hindu social life. The influence on the lower castes and women was impressive. The religious teachers, who belonged to different castes, preached against the superiority of the Brahmin caste and against the oppression of the lower caste.⁶⁰ The Brahmins, who enjoyed a high status, began to fade away, and in South India, where

⁵⁶ Mughal Period

⁵⁷ Frazer, Robert Watson "A literary history of India"

⁵⁸ Dr. Radhika Kapoor. "Status of women in pre-independence India."

⁵⁹ Padma Sharma "Status of women in India"

⁶⁰(Desai Neera, 'Women in Modern India 1957' pg.41-47)

the Bakhti movement arose.⁶¹ They proclaimed that one can unite with God without needing a mediator and that the religious rituals are unnecessary to achieve the salvation that can be attained through bhakti. Bhakti was a simple religion where one must have a sincere and pure love for God without needing any sacrifice, ritual or mediator to unite with God. Women also had the right to worship God, and some prominent Bakhta leaders were women. These women first appeared in each province and dedicated themselves to God. With the freedom to worship God, they were able to secure other social freedoms such as access to literature. But without a social theory and program, the movement began to be individual rather than collective. It was difficult to eliminate social differences, whether caste or gender, without making radical economic changes. Although it did not last long, the Bakhti movement was the first Indian movement to raise its voice against injustice and oppression.⁶²

II. East India Company and the first social reformers

In 1600, India's fortunes changed when Elizabeth I signed a royal charter allowing a group of merchants to trade with the Orient. At that time, the merchants were more interested in fighting the French, Dutch and Portuguese in the East Indies. In 1640, the East India Company focused on the Indian subcontinent, where it managed to secure land in southern India - a crucial moment when Indian land became the direct property of the British. By 1700, there were several hundred officers living in India who were part of the East India Company. The British managed to recruit thousands of Indian soldiers for their army by offering them good pay. The British army had 150,000 men, of whom only one-third were British. Since the Indians lacked the ideology of unification, they were easy prey for the foreigners and the British naturally took advantage of that. Another reason the British were accepted as newcomers rather than invaders was their ability to attract bankers and merchants who convinced them of the many economic opportunities the alliance between them would bring.⁶³ During the 18th century, the power of the Mughal Empire, which dominated almost all of India, began to wane, leading to the widespread involvement of Europeans in Indian affairs. In the mid-18th century, the Maratha

⁶¹ *Karen Helene Halvorsen 'Colonial perceptions of Indian Womanhood'*

⁶² *Desai Neera, 'Women in Modern India 1957' pg.41-47*

⁶³ *Gianni Sofri 'Gandhi and India'*

Empire emerged with the decline of the Mughal Empire due to the many ongoing invasions by the Afghans, Persians, and Indians. The Mughal Empire and the Maratha Empire coexisted during this period, but the Maratha Empire was able to hold on to power for almost 80 years. The British, on the other hand, who had a superior fleet, brought in more and more men with a sophisticated strategy to defeat the other European conquerors and the two empires. By the 19th century, the British were the leading colonizers in India and established the largest empire ever seen in India.⁶⁴ The East India Company implemented economic and social reforms that changed the status of Indian women. They made primary education compulsory for girls.⁶⁵ In 1847 in Calcutta the first school for girl was established.⁶⁶ Ram Mohun Roy born in 1774 at Radhanagar was one of the greatest reformers who succeeded to make noteworthy improvements in the society.⁶⁷ When he was twenty, he studied English and obtained a position with the East India Company. As a Brahmin, he was the first to openly address the evils of Hindu religion and customs.⁶⁸ Ram Mohun Roy called for the abolition of the cruel rite of Sati. He also focused on women's education, inheritance, dowry, the situation of widows and marriage. He believed that not granting inheritance rights to women was the main cause of the deterioration of their status.⁶⁹ In 1828 the society was founded and this monotheistic church was called 'Brahma Samaj'. Another great reformer was Devendra Nath Tagore, born in 1818. In 1839 he founded the society 'Tattvabodini Sabha'. In North India, Pundit Dayananda Sarasvati, who founded the sect 'Arya Samaj', preached for the education of women. The remarriage of widows gained many sympathizers⁷⁰

Isvara Chandra Vidyasagar, who fought against enforced widowhood in 1855, was able to prove that this rite is nowhere to be found in the Vedic scriptures by interpreting the Shastri text correctly.⁷¹ In 1849, Vidyasagar and Mr. Bethune, who was a member of the Viceroy's Executive

⁶⁴ 'How did Britain conquer India' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DzDwz18ng7w>

⁶⁵ Padma Sharma 'Status of Women in India'

⁶⁶ Radhika Kapoor 'Status of women in pre-independence India' pg.11

⁶⁷ Frazer, Robert Watson 'A literary history of India' pg.391

⁶⁸ W.J Wilkins 'Modern Hinduisms'. Pg.355

⁶⁹ Tausif Fatima 'Women's rights and Hindu law of inheritance: the approach of Rammohun Roy'

⁷⁰ W.J Wilkins 'Modern Hinduisms'.355-360

⁷¹ Frazer, Robert Watson 'A literary history of India' pg. 412'

Committee, founded Bethune College. Initially, the students were male, but in time girls also began to attend the college. They were picked up by bus. Between 1855-58, he established forty schools for girls. The girls were provided with all the necessary school materials so that no economic obstacle could prevent them from attending school. He had many European friends who supported him financially in achieving his goals.⁷² In 1856, the law was passed stating that sons of remarried Hindu widows should be considered legitimate heirs. Akhay Kumar Datta and Isvara Chandra Vidyasagar and many other able writers who flourished in the last decade used the art of writing to enlighten the people and bring light and truth to the society through the reforms. Their works on history and biography and their satirical tales criticizing social customs and mores aroused widespread skepticism among the citizens. It is important to mention another great reformist who was the first to create the first free press. Although the first newspaper was founded by an Englishman, Behramji Malabari (1853-1912) was convinced that India needed its own free newspaper. The newspaper criticized the government, which did not take this criticism well and felt threatened, so it tried to prevent the newspaper from circulating. But the free press did not see this as an obstacle, and its circulation expanded and became an important tool against the rulers.⁷³ Malabari is also known as one of the reformers who fought for the enactment against child marriage. In 1894 his work on infant marriage and enforced widowhood was published. He encourages Universities and institutions to antagonize child marriage.⁷⁴ Child marriage and forced widowhood were the two greatest evils that placed extreme limits on the improvement of women and their enlightenment. According to Malabari, the abolition of these two customs will bring the emancipation of women. Malabari considered women as the future and without their emancipation there could be no social liberation. The age of consent was raised to twelve years old.⁷⁵

III. The effect of Western

⁷² Desai Neera 'Women in Modern India' pg.74-5

⁷³ Karkaria R. P 'India forty years of progress and Reform'

⁷⁴ Desai Neera 'Women in modern India 1957' pg.76-77

⁷⁵ Karkaria R. P 'India forty years of progress and Reform' pg.130

Before the total invasion by the British, the economy of India was based on a village community in which agriculture and handicrafts were combined primarily for consumption.⁷⁶ The relations between one village and another were non-existent. The only time there was a relationship between the villages and the state was when the annual taxes were collected.⁷⁷ By the time the British arrived, the Hindus were divided among a large number of communities. The British established railroads, telegraphs, and postal services that facilitated contact between civilians by placing them under a political rule. The railroads made it easier for citizens to get around and ensured that the social reform movement spread more quickly. Dr. Shashi Tharoor explains that the railroads were brought to India only to bring resources to England and to provide troops in case of a popular uprising.⁷⁸ The declaration by the British that all citizens are equal before the law was an impetus that changed legal relations among Indians. European literature, especially liberal philosophy, spread among Indian intellectuals because of the opportunities made available. The educational and administrative system established by the British acquired Western knowledge for the workers. Subsequently, the British established a network of educational institutions where Western education was imparted, which was used as a means of economic exploitation and domination.⁷⁹ As Shashi Tharoor notes, colonialism was more akin to theft, often resulting in destruction and death. In 1700, according to Dr. Shashi Tharoor, India was the richest country in the world with a GDP of 27% of the global GDP. When the British left the country, life expectancy was 27 and 90% of the population lived below the poverty line. Although new innovations were introduced, they were only used for British interests, which led to a slowdown in the Indian economy. Due to the exploitation of the economy, the country fell into stagnation.⁸⁰ Social forces emerged composed of educated Indians influenced by the French Revolution and the liberation ideology of Rousseau and Voltaire. They embraced ideas such as unification, liberty, and equality and critically examined the situation of Indians.⁸¹ When Greece was subjugated by Rome, the latter could not help but be inspired by Greek literature. In this case, the victim of the exchange was not the conqueror, but the subjugator. The great Roman

⁷⁶ Desai Neera, *'Women in Modern India 1957'* pg.53

⁷⁷ Gianni Sofri *'Gandhi and India'*

⁷⁸ Dr Shashi Tharoor

⁷⁹ Desai Nera *'Women in modern India 1957'* pg.54-5

⁸⁰ Gianni Sofri *'Gandhi and India'*

⁸¹ Desai Nera *'Women in modern India 1957'*

writers imitated the Greek writers and adapted their literature. The opposite happened with the British colonialists who introduced their language and literature into Hindu society and adapted and introduced the language into almost all institutions and schools, which is still the case today.⁸² Dr. Shashi Tharoor in one of his speeches inferred that the actual purpose of Indians learning English was to serve as interpreters between the governors and the governed.⁸³ The Indians were considered savages by the Europeans, and the British felt it their duty to uproot them and bring them into civilization. All this was done not by oppressing the Hindus by force, but by allowing them to establish schools intended only to educate a mass of Indians who, as Shashi Tharoor said, would serve as interpreters and to create cultural and political societies as long as they did not challenge their sovereignty.⁸⁴ The British used all means to convince the inhabitants of their good intentions, which may have been the case, but personal interests prevailed when it came to the emancipation of India. The result of two hundred years of rule was the death of thirty-five million people.⁸⁵ The economy was fatally destroyed causing appalling famine.⁸⁶ In 1770, six million citizens died as a result of famine, and in 1943-44, four and a half million people lost their lives, all caused by British policies. The great famine in Bengal was caused by droughts, but nevertheless the British were ordered by Churchill to deliver grain from Bengal at any cost and ship it to Europe to replenish supplies for a possible occupation of Greece and Yugoslavia. When Churchill was made aware of the deaths his decision was causing, he replied: "I hate Indians they are beastly people with beastly religion it's all their fault anyway for breeding like rabbits."⁸⁷ The British felt guilty about the death of so many Indians and decided to set up a labor campus where people worked to earn a half share. Dr. Tharoor explains that the ratio was less than half of what Hitler gave those in the concentration camps to be sent to the gas chambers. (*Dr Shashi Tharoor*) The drastic changes in the economy were the catalyst for the development of liberal aspirations among the Indian people. The enlightened Indians, the social

⁸² R.P Karkaria, "*India: Forty Years of Progress and Reform*"

⁸³ *Dr Shashi Tharoor - Looking Back at the British Raj in India*

⁸⁴ Gianni Sofri '*Gandhi and India*'

⁸⁵ *Dr Shashi Tharoor*

⁸⁶ Gianni Sofri '*Gandhi and India*'

⁸⁷ *Dr Shashi Tharoor*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OB5ykS--CI>

reformers, were the first to spread the liberal ideology, giving birth to various social, political, economic and cultural movements. The English language helped the enlightened to use it in a sharp way and to develop radical and critical ideas that implicitly became the language of Indian nationalism, as Dr. Shashi Tharoor has noted. They were the pioneers who made possible the improvement of the status of women.⁸⁸

IV.A glint of light

Although the British made nine major reforms in favor of women between 1772 and 1947, including infanticide, child marriage, inheritance laws, and allowing widows to remarry, their true intentions were nebulous and not much was done about their religion and that their laws were merely based on unwritten customs.⁸⁹ The administration reached a point where it realized that the British legal system could not be applied in India because of the great cultural differences between the two countries.⁹⁰⁹¹ In 1772, the governor of Bengal, Warren Hastings, enforced the Brahmin religious texts as the sole legal authority for all Hindus. This measure was certainly not intended to soften the position of women, but to ensure that the restrictions to which a woman of a high caste had to submit were made known and imposed on the lower castes as well. They kept India in darkness and subjugation by allowing laws to continue to be based on custom, thus hindering social change. In the nineteenth century, Wellesley, Governor General of India, attempted to abolish the rite of Sati, but his pleas were repeatedly rejected by the British Parliament. In 1812-15-17, the British government only prohibited the use of force or intoxication of women to incite them to be burned at the stake, but it did not abolish the rite itself. Thus, if a woman, with her own consent, wished to throw herself at the stake, she could do so. It was not until 1829 that this cruel rite was banned; the credit for this goes to the Liberal Governor General Bentinck. What the British did regarding the status of women was ambiguous and undoubtedly strategic. They restricted some women and liberalized them for some other.

⁸⁸ Desai Neera 'Women in modern India' pg.58

⁸⁹ Joanna Liddle, Rama Joshi. 'Gender and colonialism: Women's organization under the Raj'

⁹⁰ Karen Helene Halvorsen 'Colonial perceptions of Indian Womanhood'

⁹¹ Karen Helene Halvorsen 'The Vassareddy succession dispute: female agency under the Company Raj An exploration of south Indian womanhood'. Master Thesis in History Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History University of Oslo Autumn 2008

Patriarchy was a tool that the British used.⁹² During the 1857 uprising, Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, the second wife of the ruler of Jhansi, exemplifies patriotism. She fought against the British troops because she refused to give up Jhansi and died on the battlefield. Many women were inspired by her courage.⁹³ When the power of change entered women's lives, there was no turning back. Women's meetings were held in which they talked about their status and how to improve it. The various social reforms mentioned above played an important role, supporting and guiding them.⁹⁴

V. The Indian National Congress

The first non-political party was formed in 1885 under the name of National Congress, which acquired a political character thanks to Mahatma Gandhi. The Congress was composed of notable Indian and British personalities. British sovereignty was not questioned.⁹⁵ What the National Congress tried to do is to hinder the creation of hostility with the British.⁹⁶ The National Congress asked for a vaster participation in administration of the Indians. No space was given to the Indians in administration nonetheless in political decisions thus secret sects were mobilizing in Bengal, Punjab, Maharashtra.⁹⁷ At a meeting of the National Congress in Bengal in 1889, ten of the participants were women. These women came from an educated background and were already known for their work and played an important role in the emancipation of their gender: Swarna Kumari Devi, a well-known Bengali writer, Kadambini Ganguli, the first woman doctor, Pandita Ramabai, social reformer, educator and well-known Sanskrit scholar.⁹⁸ In 1887 the National Social Conference came into existence serving as a platform where social issues were

⁹² Joanna Liddle, Rama Joshi. 'Gender and colonialism: Women's organization under the Raj.'

⁹³ Manraj Singh 'Role of women in India's struggle for freedom' Research Scholar Panjab University Chandigarh.

⁹⁴ Neera Desai, Usha Thakkar 'Women in Indian society' pg.4

⁹⁵ Gianni Sofri 'Gandhi and India'

⁹⁶ Geraldine Forbes 'The politics of respectability: Indian Women and the Indian National Congress'

⁹⁷ Gianni Sofri 'Gandhi and India'

⁹⁸ Geraldine Forbes 'The politics of respectability: Indian Women and the Indian National Congress' pg.56

raised.⁹⁹ The National Social Conference¹⁰⁰The National Social Conference pressured the government to pass a resolution calling for raising the age of consent to twelve, protecting girls under twelve regardless of their status, and removing all legal barriers to widow remarriage.¹⁰¹ M.G Ranade was one of the initiators of the National Social Conference. He was an exponent of liberal philosophy and fought for the education of women.¹⁰² For him there was no difference in the importance of political or social affairs. According to Ranade, these two areas should be addressed simultaneously. There were already some small social reform institutions in different parts of India, but their existence was short-lived because they lacked outside support and ceased to exist after a short time. The National Social Conference was a pioneering institution that brought into focus all the struggles that were being waged by the other social reform institutions mentioned above. In order to organize the country's activities and spread propaganda, it was necessary to create a more solid reform institution to form a network of local units, which is why the National Social Conference was created. Regarding the status of women, the conference condemned customs such as child marriage, polygyny, the custom of zenana, devadasi, nautch parties, and the sale of girls during marriage, which were still prevalent in society.¹⁰³ In addition to denouncing social ills and establishing social reforms that they saw as solutions to those social ills; the conference also encouraged the establishment of other social reform organizations. In 1904, a women's organization, the Bharat Mahlia Parishad, came into being with the aim of strengthening sympathy between different groups of women and fighting for women's liberation.¹⁰⁴ We know that two women were delegates to the Indian National Congress in 1890, and that fifty-six girls sang at the Congress session in 1901; but beyond this there is very little data' ¹⁰⁵ Risley notes that movements for social reform were most common among the upper

⁹⁹ Neera Desai, *Usha Thakkar* 'Women in Indian society' pg.4

¹⁰⁰ The National Congress decided to evade the subject related with women's problems like child marriage, polygamy, education, widowhood so as not to promote antagonism. (*Geraldine Forbes* 'The politics of respectability: Indian Women and the Indian National Congress' pg. 55)

¹⁰¹ *Geraldine Forbes* 'The politics of respectability: Indian Women and the Indian National Congress' pg.56

¹⁰² *Desai Neera* 'Women in modern India 1957' pg.84

¹⁰³ Here the excessive dowry that the girl's family had to pay to the bridegroom is implied. The amount of money or jewelry they had to give them exceeded the economic possibilities, so the girl's father was very often the victim of a usurer who lent money at an excessive interest rate.

¹⁰⁴ *Desai Neera* 'Women in modern India 1957' pg.123-128

¹⁰⁵ *Geraldine Forbes* 'The politics of respectability: Indian Women and the Indian National Congress' pg.59

classes and in cities, while the lower classes and villagers were not even aware of the existence of such a movement. Forbes expresses that even the presence of women in the National Conference came from upper class women. Their participation and influence in politics began after the 1st World War. Two Indian women, Bhikhaji Rustom K. R. Cama and Sarojini Naidu, and an Englishwoman, Anne Besant, became national leaders in the early twentieth century. Madame Cama was the creator of the Indian flag. When she lived in Europe after her marriage in 1907, she constantly gave speeches among Indians who lived and studied in Europe. Her speeches were very impressive and she urged Indians to overthrow their foreign rulers.¹⁰⁶ Anne Besant (1847-1933) was the pioneer of one of the first women's revolts in London. For many decades she was the president of the Theosophical Society in England. In 1893, Anne came to India with a wide-ranging background for the annual conference of the Theosophical Society. Her ideology was remarkably different from what was expected of a European woman. She proposed that Indians should not lose their identity and should preserve their past in modern institutions 'The ancient and wise way was training, educating and raising the women, putting her more and more on a high level, and then giving her a reasonable and dignified liberty.'¹⁰⁷ Anne Besant was opposed to any education that would denationalize citizens and deprive them of any sense of nationhood. The government saw her as a threat and asked her to leave the country. When she refused, she was interned. Her sympathizers protested for her release, which led to her being elected president of the Calcutta Congress in 1917. In 1917, she was also elected president of the Women's Indian Association, an organization that advocated social reform and women's suffrage. Sarojini Naidu was born in 1879 and studied in England. In 1904, she attended her first Congress session in Bombay. She became a well-known public speaker, advocating for the improvement of the situation of Hindu widows and, in general, for the improvement of the position of women, which she associated with the freedom of Indians. In her

¹⁰⁶Geraldine Forbes *'The politics of respectability: Indian Women and the Indian National Congress'* "

¹⁰⁷ 'Mrs. Besant on Indian Womanhood', *Indian Ladies Margarine I.*, (hereafter *ILM*), vol. I, no. 7, Jan. 1902, pp. 195-7

opinion, women's freedom would lead to India's freedom.^{108 109 110} Women realized that it was important to create their own platform and as a result a few organizations were created like the: Stri Zarthosti Mandal (Parsi Women's Circle), Arya Mahila Samaj, the Bharata Mahila Parishad, Anjuman-e- Khawatin-e-Islam (Muslim Women's Association) etc. latter on the All-India Women's Conference (AIWC), the National Council for Women in India (NCWI) and the Women's Indian Association (WIA) came into existence which gave voice to women's matters. Since its first establishment the WIA played an important role by supporting women no matter their, religion, race or culture. They were the first association which requested for women to vote. The organization also provided accommodation for widows and food for the poor. The NCWI which was created in 1925 made of women from wealthy family which held an important status in the society, The women of this association were more driven by the philanthropic notion and not much interested in the issue of independence. The AIWC established in 1927 had as their main purpose the education of women.¹¹¹In 1927, 30 educational conferences for women were held. The second conference, held in Delhi, was attended by women representatives from all parts of India. They were women from different faiths and castes, all gathered with the aim of showing the world what women can give to civilization.¹¹²

In a short time, it developed into an organization where not only issues within the country were discussed, but also issues that affected the world. They were against child marriages, polygamy, the lack of right to divorce, and overpopulation. The AIWC fought to improve working conditions for women and to increase wages. It was one of the largest organizations and, thanks to its spread in different parts of the country, it managed to influence women and make them aware of women's independence. Although it tried to be a non-political organization, in time it transformed into a political organization, supporting Gandhi's ideology and striving for the

¹⁰⁸Gianni Sofri 'Gandhi and India' pg.83

¹⁰⁹ Geraldine Forbes 'The politics of respectability: Indian Women and the Indian National Congress, pg.61-62

¹¹⁰ Desai Neera 'Women in modern India (1957)' pg.110

¹¹¹ Neera Desai, Usha Thakkar' Women in Indian society' pg.4-5

¹¹² Choksi Mithan 'Women In Modern India'

liberation of the country.¹¹³ The AIWC has been propagating against the trafficking of children and women since 1931¹¹⁴ They also fought for the improvement of working conditions, for the improvement of the conditions in which women worked underground, also for the increase of low wages. The association was an important organization that attracted the attention of the government whenever the opportunity arose. Its platform changed many lives for the better during its more than two decades of existence, but it still failed to implement the resolutions it hoped to achieve, nor did it influence all the masses. Its scope remains limited to the cities where middle- and upper-class women live.¹¹⁵

VI. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

The Indian forces agreed to fight in World War I under some conditions promised by the British. One of the promises was the inclusion and recruitment of more natives in the administration or in various fields. But what was said did not materialize. Indians felt frustrated and disappointed. After World War 1, the situation worsened, the British held special courts for those who had committed political crimes, people were imprisoned on mere suspicion. These measures fueled the anger of Indians.¹¹⁶ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a terrorist grouping formed among nationalists that was responsible for many murders. These terrorists densified mostly in Bengal, Punjab, and Maharashtra. The terrorist actions continued even during the period when Gandhi appeared on the scene.¹¹⁷ Gandhi, who played one of the most important roles in gaining independence to demonstrate against these cruel laws, started a great campaign

¹¹³Neera Desai, Usha Thakkar' *Women in Indian society*' pg.4-5

¹¹⁴Trafficking escalated especially during the Bengal famine (1946) when human flesh was sold. The AIWC organization urged the government to enforce the law against cruel practices and human trafficking and to take action by establishing rescue shelters. (*Desai Neera* ' *Women in modern India 1957*')

¹¹⁵ Desai Neera ' *Women in modern India 1957* ' pg.150-54

¹¹⁶ Gianni Sofri ' *Gandhi and India* '

¹¹⁷ Sharp Gene, ' *Gandhi as a political strategist: with essays on ethics and politics* ' pg.6

of non-violent non-cooperation (Satyagraha Sabba) with some of his followers. The masses began to demonstrate and protest in a peaceful manner by distributing Gandhi's writings, which were banned by the police.¹¹⁸ 'Non-violence (wrote Gandhi in 1920) does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means the pitting of one's whole soul against the will of tyrant.... And so, I am not pleading for India to practice non-violence because she is weak. I want her to practice non-violence being conscious of her strength and power.'¹¹⁹ The nonviolent campaign of noncooperation lost its value within a short period of time when violent riots broke out, killing four hundred citizens in Amritsar.¹²⁰ Gandhi abandoned the campaign and went on a mission to better explain to Hindus and Muslims his ideology of Satyagraha, which was to lead Hindus and Muslims to unity. Non-cooperation was announced. Demonstrations broke out again throughout the country. Indian government employees went on strike. Legislative bodies, schools, courts and public administration were paralyzed. British products were also boycotted.¹²¹ The Great Depression also occurred during this period. British exports to India fell enormously, losing millions of pounds sterling. Riots escalated and violence spread throughout the country. Many demonstrators were arrested, including Gandhi. After that, the peaceful relationship between Muslims and Hindus was over. He found himself in a country where it was difficult to embody nonviolence. It was difficult to be exempted by many that nonviolence is not cowardice, on the contrary, according to Gandhi, those who practiced satyagraha were braver than any fencing fight. For Gandhi, it was important that the Indian people stopped being passive and submitting to their rulers, which he believed were two of the

¹¹⁸ *Gianni Sofri 'Gandhi and India'*

¹¹⁹ *Sharp, Gene 'Gandhi as a political strategist: with essays on ethics and politics' pg.9*

¹²⁰ The number of killed people it is thought to be more than four hundred citizens probably one thousand. (*Gianni Sofri 'Gandhi and India'*)

¹²¹ *Gianni Sofri 'India and Gandhi'*

main reasons that the British still ruled.¹²² He continued his journey and propagated for Satyagraha the emancipation of women, supported the untouchables and fought against child marriage.¹²³ Gandhi had a tremendous impact on today's society. He encouraged women to fight for themselves, to fight for their development and not to be seen only as 'sex objects'. 'The wife,' Gandhi asserts, 'is not a slave of her husband, but a comrade, his better half, colleague and friend. She is co-sharer with him of equal rights and duties.' To call women the weaker sex is a libel. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater courage.? Without her, man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, then the future is with women. '¹²⁴ Gandhi also encouraged women to fight side by side with men for independence. He gave them support and confidence by showing them how important the support and presence of women was to the National Congress.¹²⁵ Gandhi reminded women of Sita's sacrifice for her country and so should they be, patriots fighting against the Raj. In 1918, Gandhi delivered a sophisticated speech on women before the Bhagini Samaj, in which he mentioned the high percentage of 85% of women who lived in poverty and ignorance. The women had to take the Swadeshi vow by using only local goods and also spinning yarn. He assigned an important role to women, even if they could not participate directly in the movement, they could help from home by spinning.¹²⁶ Gandhi was a spur to even the strictest religious women who would never have undergone this action, driven only by the desire to increase economic gain. He called on mothers to help the country, that motherhood would save India. 'Serve the great Mother! The Mother is in chains, sacrifice for her, suffer for her!'" This call for mothers to serve their country caused womankind to march and defy every decree. Indian intellectuals were harder to convince to boycott foreign

¹²² Sharp, Gene 'Gandhi as a political strategist: with essays on ethics and politics' pg.135

¹²³ Gianni Sofri 'India and Gandhi'

¹²⁴ S. R. Bakshi, *Gandhi and Status of Women* (New Delhi, 1987), p. 99

¹²⁵ Lyn Norvell 'Gandhi and the Indian women's movement'

¹²⁶ Geraldine Forbes 'The politics of respectability: Indian Women and the Indian National Congress' pg.63-64

clothing because they did not have enough confidence in Khadar. This changed, and upper-class women recalled the old style by having their saris spun themselves and also agreeing to fight for their mother. The women proved to be stronger. In the legislative assembly elections in Bombay on September 3, 1930, the Gandhi Party considered the elections as collaboration with the government and therefore had to boycott them. Although it rained heavily for the last 36 hours, the women went to each polling place to picket. The next day, they gathered again for a picket where four hundred women were arrested. Nonviolence was taken seriously by them, although they knew that if the police attacked them, they could not retaliate, which did not intimidate them. For example, in an attack at the Darsana salt flats, where the women led by Sarojini Naidu were holding a vigil, they were stopped by the police. They could not fight back against the police, so they just sat down in the middle of the road, determined not to move. For hours they sat under the burning sun without food or water and had to endure the beatings of the police without responding in kind. This did not discourage them; on the contrary, it made them stronger. Their determination was an incentive for other women to stand up and join them. The struggle for non-cooperation brought new opportunities for women's freedom. Many of them who were imprisoned had to endure sometimes terrible conditions. This gives an idea of how strong the Indian women were and that they were ready to endure anything, they showed extraordinary courage. The wave of patriotic feeling opened the doors to freedom for them. Never again will they return to the dark hole they had to live in, never again will they allow themselves to be marginalized and not raise their voices, and never again will they allow a Brahmin to deny religious knowledge. For the first time in over two thousand years, it was a Brahmin woman who lit the funeral pyre of a young Gandhi devotee who threw herself in front of a truck carrying foreign goods. The national movement was a religious movement for these women, the reasons why they fought were purely spiritual, they were serving the Great Mother! The national movement and Gandhi's movement of non-cooperation gave Indian women the strength to break the chains that would probably have taken them generations to break.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ *Frieda Hauswirth 'Purdah Indian Women'. pg.231-242*

Gandhi's policy

It is of great importance to write down a brief understanding of Gandhi's national politics to understand not only how Satyagraha improved the status of women but also to achieve independence without resorting to violence. In 1924 and 1928, the country experienced new and old conflicts that made the political situation very complicated and tense. Thus, in 1924, an Indian Communist Party was founded, which, although it played only an insignificant role within India, succeeded in spreading Marxism and a preference for the Soviet Union. Jawaharlal Nehru was also influenced by revolutionary ideas. The communist was committed to the establishment of trade unions. The radical ideas were the reason for many demonstrations among peasants and trade unions. Many were arrested and sentenced to harsh sentences. Gandhi rejected the Bolshevik faction. The spread had to end, because according to Gandhi, nothing good comes out of it. He feared that violent social revolutions would make poor people as bad as their exploiters. In 1930, Gandhi was arrested along with other thousands of Indians who had followed Gandhi on his journey because they boycotted British products and used what nature offered them. This was used by the British as a reason to suppress the citizens. In 1931, when Gandhi was released from prison, the Gandhi-Irwin ¹²⁸ Pact was concluded. The pact provided, for example, for the release of all political prisoners except those guilty of violence. The pact also allowed residents who lived near the territorial sea to collect or manufacture small amounts of salt. Peaceful picketing for alcohol was allowed and law enforcement ceased. Application of the pact was difficult. The pact caused an uproar. Lord Willington, the new viceroy, ordered repressive measures and many nationalist leaders were arrested, including Gandhi. In 1939, India entered the war, a decision made by the Viceroy. Unwilling and unprepared, India became involved in the war. Gandhi wrote an appeal against India's participation in the war in the name of Satyagraha. A new Satyagraha movement was launched and all Congress ministers resigned and joined the campaign. ¹²⁹ In the same year, Gandhi was convinced that India would agree to military defense because it was inevitable because the masses were in favor of creating one. Gandhi still hoped

¹²⁸ Lord Irwin was at the time viceroy of India. Contrary to his predecessor he was against repressive methods and tried many times to find a common language with the Indian leaders

¹²⁹ Gianni Sofri 'Gandhi and India' 1999. pg.98-116

that the Congress would rely on nonviolent means and use the military only for defense and not for warfare. But Congress and Gandhi had different views. World War II and the way it was fought convinced Gandhi more and more of the importance of satyagraha as a national defense and of India's duty to spread nonviolence as a means of ending the war.¹³⁰

“...There is no hope for the aching world except through the narrow and straight path of non-violence.”¹³¹

And so, I am not pleading for India to practice non-violence because she is weak. I want her to practice non-violence being conscious of her strength and power. No training in arms is required for realization of her strength and power. We seem to need it, because we seem to think that we are but a lamp of flesh. I want India to recognize that she has a soul that cannot perish and that can rise triumphant above every physical weakness and defy the physical combination of a whole world...I believe absolutely that she has a mission for the World.¹³²

Chapter III

Hindu Code Bill

In the early 1930s, a few piecemeal laws were intended to eliminate some of the obvious injustices, but they created more uncertainty and confusion. The movement to abolish legal disability for women succeeded in gaining the support of people across the country. They demanded an official investigation of the laws in order to fundamentally change the existing laws, which had been created in an unsystematic way. The government felt compelled to set up a

¹³⁰ Sharp Gene *“Gandhi as a political strategist: with essays on ethics and politics”* 1979. Pg.156-160

¹³¹ Harijan 1947 –*Non-violence in Peace and War II* pg.266

¹³² Sharp Gene *“Gandhi as a political strategist: with essays on ethics and politics”* 1979. pg.160

committee to look into the whole question of reforming Hindu law.¹³³ Members had called for equal opportunity, an organized healthcare system, economic and political rights, social insurance, a child care system, and protection of children's rights.¹³⁴

The bills introduced were:

1. **Hindu Child Marriage Bill.** The bill was introduced by Rai Sahib Harbilas Sarda. In the appointed committee in which the bill was considered by the Assembly, only one woman was present, Mrs. Rameshwari Nehru. The bill was passed in October 1929, but did not come into force until April 1930. The Sarda Act was like a non-existent law, as no action was taken against those who continued to perform child marriages.¹³⁵
2. **Right to property Act, 1937** One of the most important enactments of Mr. Deshmukh. According to this law, if the householder did not leave a will before his death, the widow would receive the same share as a son.
3. **The Hindu Succession Act. 1956** adjust inheritance and succession. The law was prepared by the Rao Committee Bill and amended by the Select Committee in 1948. The enactment brought many positive changes, for example:
 - The Act makes no distinction between female and male heirs.
 - The Act gave certain female heirs the right to achieve the interests of the deceased co-owner.
 - The Act has abolished the discrimination between different classifications of daughters (such as married, unmarried, with or without children, poor or rich)
 - According to the law, the woman is an absolute owner.

¹³³ Renuka Ray” *The Background of the Hindu Code Bill*”- source: *Pacific Affairs*, Sep., 1952, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Sep., 1952), pg. 268-277

¹³⁴ Neera Desai, Usha Thakar “*Women in Indian society*” pg.10

¹³⁵ Forbes, Geraldine Hancock ‘*Women in modern India*’ 1998 pg.85-91

4. The reduction of work hours for women. In 1934, working hours for women were reduced to 10 hours per day. In 1948, the maximum working time for women was reduced to 9 hours per day.

5. The enactment of salary regulations for women.

6. Maternity pay

7. Employees' State insurance Act. 1951.

In reality, it was more difficult to enforce the laws because patriarchal norms still prevailed among Hindus in those years. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize the enormous social upheaval that the law caused, because it opened a new chapter of equality between men and women.¹³⁶ It must be emphasized that while the changes were tremendous, they were also inadequate and poorly implemented. However, the roots of women's disability lie deep in the social structure. Legislation in itself is not enough. Legislation itself is the product and reflection of the prevailing ideology in society. Even a good law would go unused if the general climate of social life is not conducive to its implementation. Legislative measures did not make a decisive difference in the social life of women. Child marriage was still widespread. The law of monogamy was circumvented by men, and women's domestic life continued to be full of deprivation and mental anguish. Thus, the content and spirit of the legislation had to be changed. The mechanisms for implementing existing legislation had to be made efficient, cost-effective, and simple, and the need to enact a comprehensive, common, and uniform civil code based on a thorough understanding of the problems of Indian women also became increasingly urgent. It was important for women to become aware of their rights and to work tirelessly for the realization of the rights granted to them, and also to continue the struggle for further rights.¹³⁷ Women played an important role in agitational politics, but they did not develop their own political organizations, nor were they integrated into the decision-making bodies of the Congress. Their participation undoubtedly helped mobilize others to the cause, but it is clear that they did not establish political organizations or attain positions of power in the Indian National Congress. The tendency to focus on women as a collective rather than a specific group of women

¹³⁶ Desai Neera " Women in modern India "1957 pg.183-200

¹³⁷ Desai Neera- 'Women in Modern India' 1957 pg.200-02

is one of the legacies of the independence struggle. Turning the nationalist movement into a mass movement required support from various groups. Gail Pearson has argued that nationalist leaders deliberately manipulated the word "women" to suggest the "participation of a unified social universe."¹³⁸ For contemporary historians, this generalized category is an obstacle to building a coherent picture of the relationships of different groups of women to Congress. For there were two groups of women, educated women and less educated women, who fulfilled their "double duty"-to their beloved Gandhi, who urged them to rise up to liberate their enslaved country, and to their guardians, who urged (or ordered) them to join the Congress. The less educated women generally followed the men, and the data suggest that participation, if it had a long-term impact on their lives, was not in the realm of politics. Only in urban areas were there organizations that could combine feminism and nationalism. In the early twentieth century, there were some women who felt that male-dominated associations did not take women's concerns into account. To counter this, they formed their own women's organizations, led by women, where women's problems were discussed. Faced with the need for a disciplined approach during the nationalist movement, they resorted to this model and established woman's political organizations. This approach had many advantages:

Women retained leadership positions and there was ample opportunity for women to learn how to run organizations.

They were a safe haven for women just emerging from purdah, and they operated in accordance with the social conventions of female modesty. On the other hand, this structure made it difficult to work closely with the Indian National Congress website.

Consequently, few of these women learned the realities of political power. Since their stated goal was independence, they did not build organizations that would last beyond the duration of the struggle for independence. In a society that was not yet accustomed to upper- and middle-class women participating in life outside the home, the entry of women into political life could have posed serious problems.

¹³⁸ Gail Pearson, 'Nationalism, Universalization and the Extended Female Space', in Gail Minault, ed., *Tire Extended Family: Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan* (Delhi, Chanakya Publications, 1981), pg. 176-7

However, this did not happen because women participated in politics either with their guardians - fathers, brothers or husbands - or under the protection of a women's organization. Indian National Congress. The women of Bombay and Calcutta were moved by Gandhi's words. He made them feel important, enthused them to help the country, and promised that they would be rewarded for their efforts. When he urged women to "do what you can," many of them felt that they were fully participating in the nationalist movement by spinning at home. And the women leaders believed

Gandhi when he told them that women would be fully integrated into the political bodies of the country. But there were other leaders - both national and local - who did not share Gandhi's vision for Indian women. It was not until the 1937 elections that a confrontation occurred. Activist women expected to run for safe seats, but few of them had attained positions of power and influence in the party. In the eyes of party leaders, the fact that women shunned backroom politics in favor of a respectable image meant that they were ill-prepared to run for office.

Finally, we must ask whether the different ideologies that coexisted were compatible and could have been incorporated into a women's section or women's platform acceptable to the Congress. Gandhi's view of women's equality was certainly convincing and consistent with his social ideals, but he could not accept women's sexuality. To convey his ideas, he used a simplified religious model. Ultimately, the religious model was remembered, and the modernist aspects of his message were lost. The urban leaders were educated and influenced by an ideology of women's rights and even feminism. But few of them dared to voice their beliefs: Many, like Latika Ghosh, resorted to simple religious messages when speaking to women. They succeeded in mobilizing women, but at a high price for the ideological position which linked political independence and women's emancipation. It is extremely difficult to measure or even describe the inspirational role of women during this period.¹³⁹

Education

¹³⁹ *Geraldine Forbes-"The politics of respectability: Indian women and the Indian National Congress" pg.87-90
Delhi Oxford University press BOMBAY CALCUTIA MADRAS 1988*

Society has always viewed education as a gateway that enables individuals to equip themselves for the world of work, to become useful citizens, and to develop personally. The journey from acceptance of the legitimacy of education for women to the recognition of education as a means of empowering women has been long and drawn out, marked by recurring questions and struggles that have led to reluctant concessions of legitimacy. The entrance of women into the formal education system began in the mid-nineteenth century, but it was not widely accepted until the mid-nineteenth century. The government was slow to advocate measures to promote education, but social reformers and women's organizations recognized the importance of women's education at all levels. The attempts of Maharshi Karve, Mahatma Gandhi, Maharshi Tagore as well as organizations like the All-India Women's Conference not only advocated that woman should have access to education but also stated that education helped women to perform their duties and become useful citizens.¹⁴⁰ Since education was a necessary prerequisite for the social empowerment of women, it was intended to make a positive contribution to women's agency and to free them from the passive victim role that colonial society had imposed on them. At the beginning of the colonial period, missionaries often took up the issue of women's education to enlighten poor, heathen women. However, native forces soon championed women's education and worked to spread it.¹⁴¹

Education has been one of the strongest influences which have been exerted on modern India, but it is an influence which has affected men far more than women. Ignorance, with the exception of religion, legendary lore and domestic matters, was considered the natural lot of women. But the percentage of women who could read was not more than 2%. Even if a woman could write, she had to give a negative answer, because a woman who could write was not considered a respectable woman.¹⁴² Due to the practice of child marriage in India, women are not able to devote themselves seriously to education. It is, therefore, necessary to raise the age of marriage if the spread of education among Indian women is to be accelerated. The progress of

¹⁴⁰ Neera Desai, Usha Thakkar 'Women in Indian Society' pg.47

¹⁴¹ Chapter Author(s): Rachana Chakraborty. Chapter Title: 'Women's Education and Empowerment in Colonial Bengal' pg.98
Book Title: *Responding to the West*

¹⁴² Malley L.s.s.o *Modern India and The West*. 1941 pg.686

education among women would in turn help to raise the age of marriage. Education has not yet reached the masses of women. For literacy to increase, measures like free compulsory education need to be taken.¹⁴³ The demand for education grew as the number of educated young men increased. Parents who chose their sons wives began to regard knowledge as a desirable qualification, no less than a rich dowry or a "wheat-colored" skin. It is argued that educating women is a more effective means of serving the national interest: "You educate a woman, you educate a whole household," no educated mother will leave her children uneducated.¹⁴⁴ The fact that women were among the laggards in the newly organized educational space was fraught with the full weight of the power/knowledge syndrome, to an extent that Michel Foucault, the author of this hypothesis, could not have imagined. Education was constantly linked to the divide between caste, class, and ethnicity, which was exacerbated by discrimination based on gender. During the colonial period, education not only emancipated women, but also brought them into the vortex of another struggle, the struggle to empower.¹⁴⁵

The late 19th and early 20th century 'the new woman'

1931-40 was for women the period where they were determined to take direct action and not follow Gandhi's way of non-violence. They fought without having fear alongside with men determined to gain independence no matter the cost.¹⁴⁶ Late December 1931 brought Gandhi's return from the Round Table Conference in London and his immediate arrest. The Congress was

¹⁴³ Desai Neera " Women in modern India " 1957 pg.212

¹⁴⁴ Malley L.s.s.o 'Modern India and the west' 1941 pg.691

¹⁴⁵ Chapter Author(s): Rachana Chakraborty. Chapter Title: 'Women's Education and Empowerment in Colonial Bengal' pg.100

¹⁴⁶ Manraj Singh " Role of Women in India's Struggle for Freedom " -International Journal of Research (IJR), Vol-1, Issue-2, March, 2014

declared illegal, as were the RSS¹⁴⁷ and the DSS¹⁴⁸. Both the RSS and the DSS were disbanded by their leaders and their funds and records were turned over to the "First Sevika" to be passed on to the next in line if arrested. In the meantime, vigils in the market resumed, public meetings were called, and a flood of leaflets was distributed. As it was predicted, "the leaders were arrested and imprisoned, and the leadership was passed on to the next in line. The women continued their vigil even after the numbers gradually dwindled and conditions became increasingly dangerous. In 1932, following the Hindu-Muslim riots, the DSS ceased to work¹⁴⁹ In Bengal which was considered as a center for pursuing non-violent protests after 1931 became

¹⁴⁷ *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (meaning: Nationalist volunteers) was founded in 1925 at a time when Indian nationalists were already in a position to organize one of the largest mass movements in history. It was the most powerful organizer and carrier of Hindu Right politics, and the founder and teacher of a whole series of mass and electoral wings tied to its educational program and general guidance. The Rashtriasevika (the word indicates women who serve the country) samiti, its women's wing was established in 1936. - Sarkar, Tanika; Butalia, Urvashi 'Women and right-wing movements: Indian experiences' 1996 pg.183*

¹⁴⁸ *The leaders of the Rashtriya Stree Sangha, knew that not all of their members would be willing to go on a strike, called for the formation of a separate volunteer corps for daily work. These women formed the Desh Sevika Sangh. Each woman took an oath that she would spin and wear khaddar, a saffron sari with a white blouse. The Kesari saris were meant to revive up images of Rajput women sending their men into battle and then donning such saris before performing Johor (suicide by fire) to avoid being taken captive. Desh Sevika Sangh (Women serving the Country), which took on the task of designing and overseeing the picketing campaign. Initially, picketing seemed to be an exciting activity and DSS membership increased to 560. As it turned out, many of these women were more "decorative sevikas" and membership declined and remained stable at about 300. For the Desh Sevika Sangh the ornamental sevikas were more of a nuisance, but the "undesirable women" were a bigger problem for them. After being approached by them, the DSS leaders made it clear that they only wanted to bring in from the "good classes." According to Goshibehn Captain, this was necessary if the pickets were to gain respect from the public. Female pickets would have to maintain their "dignity and inborn modesty," and this would be impossible if they marched side by side with women of "undesirable" character, (she considered them as a low-class) or even 'leftists' who had suggested tactics such as lying down in the entrances of foreign cloth stores. Geraldine Forbs 'The politics of respectability: Indian Women and the Indian National Congress' (DELHI OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS BOMBAY CALCUTIA MADRAS 1988) pg.72-74
Members of the organization were asked to put themselves in one of four categories:*

A - willing to storm toddy stores, be publicly offended, and go to jail; B - willing to storm cloth stores and be arrested, but not willing to face bodily harm or go to jail; C - willing to go from house-to-house preaching swadeshi (this was directed at women with young children); and D - willing to teach spinning from house to house.

'Awakened Womanhood of India', BC, 23 Jul. 1930; Booklet from Gandhi Seva Sangh, pg. 5

¹⁴⁹ *Geraldine Forbs 'The politics of respectability: Indian Women and the Indian National Congress' pg.77*

famous for women pursuing courageous demonstrations and assassinations. The number of women who appeared in public, emancipated women who participated in social gatherings and went to cinemas, theaters and restaurants in cities and towns, all this was unthinkable 20 years ago, for example, the All-India Women's conference in one of its sessions in 1938 women attendance was 4,000 delegates. This kind of emancipation was still seen mainly in the cities, although the rural masses, stressed by the economic situation and the desire for education for their daughters, gave an impetus to change the situation of women.¹⁵⁰ Since the early twenties, the Gandhian struggle had gradually drawn women from the urban middle class, but also from peasant and tribal strata, into open 'mass' movements.¹⁵¹ At the next call of Gandhi, they overcame the terrible caste barriers and purdah as if they were made of clay. They did not even wait for the men's approval. Many men lacked courage and felt a kind of relief when the need to act was relieved from them by the bold women; breaking the purdah and stepping out into the open was a sign of the courage and power of the new regeneration that was sweeping India.¹⁵²

By the end of the nineteenth century, there were many educated, articulate, mobile, and increasingly involved women in public life. In the countryside, life for both men and women was dominated by the household. With increasing urbanization and the emergence of new professions that accompanied colonial rule, work became increasingly separate from the household. The establishment of new religious societies and educational institutions paralleled the other changes. The 'new women' were very often educated at home and then later sent to a girls' school. Parents interested in education waited until their daughters were old enough to arrange their marriage, or allowed the young married girls to continue their education. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the number of schools and the number of girls attending them had greatly increased. Now parents had more options; they could choose the type of institution, the curriculum, and

¹⁵⁰ Malley L.s.s.o 'Modern India and The West' 1941 pg.693

¹⁵¹ Sarkar, Tanika; Butalia, Urvashi 'Women and right-wing movements: Indian experiences' 1996 pg.183

¹⁵² Frieda Hauswirth 'Purdah Indian Women' 1932 pg.257

even the language of instruction. These alternatives allayed the fears of conservatives and liberals, the religious and the non-religious, those who desire radical change and the traditionalists, the Anglophiles and the Anglophobes. Although the educational system was very conservative, this did not stop the women of the first generation from writing about their lives and the situation of women. The second generation acted. They articulated women's needs, criticized their society and foreign rulers, and developed their own institutions. Unfortunately, their power was not unlimited. No matter how hard they tried to develop the institutions that dealt with women, the conservative thoughts seemed to be deeply rooted and could not be uprooted. Importantly, in the early years of the twentieth century, women took their future into their own hands and redefined it.¹⁵³ There was an incredible change during the late nineteenth century, such as the high demand for a Western type of education. With an increasing number of girls studying at universities in India and Britain and then entering various professions such as teaching and medicine. The greatest impetus, however, came from the spirit of nationalism. This permeated the walls of Zenana and many Purdah women, convicted of inaction, stirred their husbands to action. In the early nineteenth century, it was men who sought movements for their education and the redress of grievances that directly affected them, but in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth women were the one who started to organize movements to improve their living conditions, not only through political action, but also through the formation of public opinion, the abolition of the purdah system, maternity and child care. The home and the health of mothers and children came first, but social and economic independence was sought by changing the laws on marriage, divorce, and inheritance. The movement wanted to create a nation in which women would be equal partners with men. At that time, feminism and nationalism went hand in hand.¹⁵⁴

Franchise under the Government of India Act 1935¹⁵⁵

The following conditions were required for women's suffrage:

Women who were 21 years of age and older were allowed to vote under certain conditions:

¹⁵³ Forbes, Geraldine Hancock, 1943-' *Women in modern India* ' pg.28-63

¹⁵⁴ Malley L.s.s.o ' *Modern India and the West* ' 1941 pg.693-96

¹⁵⁵ Desai Neera ' *Women in modern India* ' 1957 pg.220

- Those who could read and write in any Indian language.
- Those who had a certain level of property and tax qualifications like men
- Widows or wives of a retired or pensioned officer or soldier of His Majesty's regular armed forces
- Widows or wives of persons who had the requisite property qualifications

Although women welcomed the law as a step forward in the struggle for equality, they were nevertheless dissatisfied with the provision because it attached certain conditions to the right to vote, thereby limiting it. Before these provisions were included in the law, the organizations Women's India Association, All Indian Women Conference and National Council of Women in India issued a joint statement criticizing the main shortcomings of the law. The declaration points out that the property requirement attached to the right to vote in a poor country like India automatically excludes the majority of women from the right to vote. The mistake was that those eligible to vote had to apply to be registered as voters. This, of course, was a major handicap for a large proportion of women who, out of ignorance, failed to fulfill this requirement and therefore did not become voters, even though they were entitled to vote under the law. The government gave three reasons for not granting women universal suffrage. 1. it would bring insurmountable difficulties for the administrative machinery. 2. the backward social conditions in the country did not justify such an important and far-reaching reform. The objections raised by the government were lazy excuses. The law did, however, give a greater number of women the right to vote. Specifically, to women with educational background, property and wives of men of military service.

The role of women in the nationalist struggle is not simply the story of puppets who were told when to march and where to demonstrate. First, the number of women who played a role in this movement far exceeded expectations: The nature of their work influenced how women saw themselves and how others saw their potential contribution to national development. At the same time, their involvement contributed to how women saw themselves and their task. Unlike the women in Bombay, the women in Bengal organized smaller demonstrations but with more radical activities. The women in Calcutta made and sold salt, set up vigils outside cloth and liquor stores, preached the value of khaddar, and took protest actions to the streets. In villages and district towns, women joined the march, carrying khaddar and hiding fleeing revolutionaries.

Bengali nationalism had always upheld violence, and this ethos profoundly influenced Bengali women's participation in the freedom struggle. The first formal organization mobilizing women for political work was founded in 1928. Mahila Rashtriya Sangha (MRS) was started by Latika Ghosh, an Oxford-educated teacher. MRS pursued the same goals as the RSS in Bombay, namely to achieve Swaraj and improve the status of women. Only in this way could the nation be free. MRS ideologies were radical, but they followed a mobilization strategy that constructed women as inherently religious. The majority of women involved in revolutionary groups at this time were students. Young people are those who are naturally attracted to revolutionary ideals, but these young women had very little physical autonomy and were raised to be modest. It is important to note that revolutionary activities were rarely their first political experience. Most of them took a liking to secret societies after working in women's organizations and Congress. The most famous young revolutionary is Bina Das a young student who fired a pistol at Governor Jackson. Bina, her older sister Kalyani, Kamala Das Gupta and Surama Mitra first decided to form a student organization to discuss political issues. The organization was called Chattri Sangha (Association for Female Students), where many study courses were organized, swimming clubs, libraries, cooperative stores and a youth hostel. The Congress very often looked for recruits at Chattri Sangha, since they were already girls accustomed to public life. During this time, the older revolutionary leaders lost control of their organizations. Previously, a few leaders made all the decisions and members took vows of obedience and celibacy, but the young members were no longer willing to wait for orders from above. They were convinced that; 'the time was ripe for the movement', as Kalyani wrote about the appeal of revolutionary ideology to women. They formed new organizations, recruited women, and planned daring attacks. If women had previously supported the revolutionaries by running the household for them, spreading propaganda, collecting funds, hiding and transporting weapons, and even making explosives, they were now directly involved in revolutionary actions. Two Comilla students shot Magistrate Steven on December 14, 1931, as he was signing a petition to authorize a swimming competition. While he was signing the petition, the two girls, Santi and Suniti, pulled their revolvers from under their shawls and shot the magistrate. When they admitted their guilt, the girls were angry because they were not hanged. They wanted to be the first female martyrs. Pritilata Waddedar , a teacher from Chittagong, led fifteen men in a raid on the Chittagong club, where they began shooting, injuring ten to twelve people and killing an elderly European

woman. When the lights went out, the attackers fled. Pritilata killed herself by swallowing poison during the escapade. She had left a testament:

*'I wonder why there should be any distinction between males and females in a fight for the cause of the country's freedom? If our brothers can join a fight for the cause of the motherland why can't the sisters? Instances are not rare that the Rajput ladies of hallowed memory fought bravely in the battlefields and did not hesitate to kill their country's enemies. The pages of history are replete with high admiration for the historic exploits of these distinguished ladies. Then why should we, the modern Indian women, be deprived of joining this noble fight to redeem our country from foreign domination? If sisters can stand side by side with the brothers in a Satyagraha movement, why are they not so entitled in a revolutionary movement?'*¹⁵⁶

The demonstrations of the women in Delhi had a great effect on the men who watched them. The women were unwavering in the face of police attacks and amazed everyone with their bravery. In the North, women of the elite and women without any education were engaged in the political movement. They belonged to two different worlds, but they shared the burden of social norms that limited their autonomy. The women leaders wanted to prepare their less educated sisters for political action and knew that this could not be done without the consent of their fathers and husbands. Therefore, it was tactically wise to focus on nationalist issues in their speeches and leave feminist issues out of it. Women's participation in the freedom movement also shaped the movement for women's rights and legitimized their claim to a place in Indian government. In the years following the civil disobedience movement, women gained great respect for their political work, more and more women entered the professions, and some men learned to work side by side with them as colleagues. The legal structure of family law was reviewed and efforts were made to change it. There was also psychological progress. The legal structure of family law was reviewed and efforts were made to change it. There was also progress psychologically. Many women who had been married and widowed in their younger years, and to whom nothing important had ever happened, saw the movement as the happiest days of their lives, when for the first time they could truly rebel and feel freedom. Regional differences were evident in the

¹⁵⁶ Forbes, Geraldine Hancock, 1943-1998 'Women in Modern India' pg.122-141

number of women who joined and the extent to which they linked women's interests to nationalist issues. The women in Bombay were the best organized, the most independent, and participated in the largest demonstrations. They attracted a great deal of attention because of their militancy. Most of their leaders belonged to women's organizations and espoused a distinct 'feminist nationalism.' These women became the subject of popular songs and legends. But still, women in the cities did little to create feminist consciousness. They marched and demonstrated in gender-segregated groups and usually wore orange or white saris to emphasize their purity and sacrifice. The orders came from the Congress Committee. Rural women, unless they were widows, protested with their families. Male guardianship prevailed even though the Indian freedom movement was not characterized by 'patriarchal nationalism'. Women were allowed to come out when the house (land) was on fire. Once the fire was out, women were expected to go inside. The theme of decolonization took worldwide attention. The Americans exercised pressure on the British government. But Churchill couldn't accept to leave India. The labor party government that succeeded Churchill were willing to leave India and stop the suffering. The problem now facing the Indian politicians was with the Muslim league which had grown stronger. The situation between the Muslims and the Hindus was enormously tense before partition. The Muslim League, which had grown stronger in recent years, decided to stop relying on constitutional methods and take direct action and declare war. The Muslim League had never fought the British, but it declared war on the Hindus. The Hindus and the Muslims committed bloody massacres that triggered a civil war. The partition of India into two dominions was inevitable because of the increasing violence, forced talks, and rapes that were commonplace. The partition caused one million deaths and about ten million refugees. Gandhi had tried in all possible ways to oppose separation. To save the unity of the country, he was ready to hand over the government to the Muslims. His prediction for an independent India was that of a federation of village communities where power was shared and where it would be possible to accept and appreciate all differences. Between 1946 and 1947, he tried to end the massacres between the two religions. In the past, Muslims had listened to him and had become his disciples. Gandhi therefore became a target of attacks by Hindu extremists and refugee groups. After so many battles and lost lives, India finally gained its independence from British rule on August 14, 1947. Independence found India divided and underdeveloped, where conflict was prevalent. On January 30, 1948, he was assassinated by a young Hindu fanatic who had hidden in the crowd

waiting for him in a garden to offer evening prayers. He accused Gandhi of doing too much for the Muslims.¹⁵⁷

*'All Indians lived through terrible, dark months after Independence. With the Partition of the country and the unexpected, cruel and unhappy exchanges of populations between Pakistan and India forced on the peoples of both countries, tragedies of a magnitude and intensity beyond the grimmest imagination of any leader were enacted...The rejoicing of our nation on its liberation from nearly two hundred years of colonial rule was turned to mourning at the suffering of our people who were driven from their homes in Pakistan'*¹⁵⁸

When partition was finally consummated, many found their lives devastated. Social feminism had nothing to offer women after partition. Unfortunately for women activists, the ideologies that replaced social feminism did not advocate emancipation from patriarchy, and none of them were seriously interested in gender justice.

Post-Independence

When partition was finally accomplished, many found their lives disrupted. Social feminism had nothing to offer women after partition. Women had begun to work with a variety of parties and organizations, but none of them were seriously interested in gender justice. In the years between 1947 and 1964, Nehru's figure dominated not only his person but also the Congress Party's domination of elections. During the Nehru era, the Congress never received less than forty percent of the vote in national elections and always had an absolute majority of seats in Parliament. It also ruled in many areas of the Single Union Seats. However, this supremacy was threatened by several rivals. To the right of the Congress was the Hindu Mahasabha (Great Hindu Assembly), though it was banned for a time after one of its members assassinated Gandhi, though it was later legalized again. In 1964, the Communist Party, which was to the left of the Congress, split off to form the pro-Soviet Indian Communist Party. Later, in 1967, a third party was formed, the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party, which grew out of the peasant and student rebellion of the 'Naxalites' (named after the town of Naxalbari in Bengal where it broke out).

¹⁵⁷ Gianni Sofri 'Gandhi and India'

¹⁵⁸ Forbes, Geraldine Hancock 1943- 'Women in modern India' pg.223

After independence, Nehru and Patel (Home Minister) alternated close cooperation rather than open opposition. They worked together, for example, to address and resolve problems related to the unity of the nation. Both agreed to solve the problem of princely states through tough military intervention. The Nehru years were marked by great political stability. In the last two years of his tenure (and his life), Nehru's reputation declined somewhat. He was criticized for his economic decisions and for India's failure in the 1962 politico-military war with China. Nehru was succeeded after his death by an old friend of Gandhi, L.B. Shastri, who died two years later, immediately after concluding a pact to end the armed conflict with Pakistan. After the death of Shastri, a second face began for India. The phase of Indira Gandhi. She was only 39 years old when she was elected prime minister. She was the only child of Jawaharlal. She was in no way related to Gandhi, although they shared the same surname, which she had received from her husband. She worked alongside her father for a long time and held a ministerial post in the Shastri government. As prime minister, she pursued her father's political goals and even sought to accelerate their realization through greater central control of social and economic life. It reinforced Nehru's managerial and protectionist tendencies: it nationalized the banks. She also had to face all the problems that had already arisen in the last two years of her father's life. She had to deal with the Congress Party's worrying electoral losses and a fierce struggle for power within the party that ended in a split. She succeeded in winning over her opponents, limiting the damage caused by the split and winning a great victory in 1971. She was identified as 'the mother goddess' and became the object of a true cult of personality.¹⁵⁹

In the period immediately following independence, three important observations can be made. First, the celebration of the victory was displaced by the refugee issue. Second, there was resentment among women over issues of institutionalization and bureaucratization. And third, while some women accepted congressional supremacy during the struggle for independence, others did not. Many of these women collaborated with the revolutionary fringe, and these tendencies continued after independence.¹⁶⁰ Even after a decade of independence, Indian women continued to suffer from ignorance, poverty, disease, and overcrowding. Women villagers continued to be kept in the dark. Even in the legislative arena, the lack of a uniform civil code

¹⁵⁹ Gianni Sofri 'Gandhi and India' pg.137-141

¹⁶⁰Forbes, Geraldine Hancock, 1943 'Women in Modern India' pg.226

applicable to all communities shows that progress in the women's emancipation movement has been slow. In 1955 alone, 1983 women committed suicide, indicating the distressing situation of women. The causes of the suicides were reported to be: poverty, domestic disputes, unemployment, joint family life, abuse, disappointment in love and other. Women's problems were sociological rather than psychological. All the above causes prove that their problems were not yet solved. Their status was still low, and the only way to break their bonds was suicide.¹⁶¹

Indian women try to find a balance between instinctive needs and intellectual pursuits. They are deeply exhausted by this trapeze act and become further confused when the existential absurdity of life is exposed before them, when they are confronted with loneliness and a lack of communication and community, and finally fall into a psychological crisis when male and institutional pressures are added to further aggravate them.¹⁶²

Women in India face tremendous problems. Mao Tse-tung noted that unlike the three mountains a Chinese man carried on his back, the Chinese woman carried four on her shoulders: colonial oppression from without, feudal oppression from within, and his own backwardness. The fourth mountain for the women is the Chinese man. The women of India must also shake off the four mountains on her back. She must shake off the shackles of karma. She must overcome the legacy of centuries of humiliation, dependence, resignation and silence.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Desai Neera 'Women in modern India 1957' pg.262

¹⁶² Shantha Krishnaswamy 'The woman in Indian fiction in English, 1950-80' pg.10

¹⁶³ Shantha Krishnaswamy 'The woman in Indian fiction in English, 1950-80' pg.8

“She now knows that in real life Cinderella does not get her prince, that life is never a rosy dream. Hence, she reads about Madame Bovary, Jane Eyre. Anna Karenina, Gauri¹⁶⁴, Rukmani and Monisha and keeps her eyes open. She has to see the new dawn through her own eyes.”¹⁶⁵

Post-Independence

The right to vote can be seen as the starting point for women's struggle for political equality and participation. A decade after independence, the situation of women was still extremely terrible. Feudal and pre-feudal authoritarian social institutions continued to maintain their iron control over women. Women continued to be treated barbarically. Child marriage, the tragic situation of widows, and the old custom of bride buying persisted. The number of suicides was still high, the records of women's welfare institutions and rescue homes dealt with the same problems as before independence.

The economic situation of women had not changed significantly. Those who belonged to wealthy families were able to secure more property rights through legislation. Some women who belonged to the upper class obtained good positions and posts. Middle- and lower-class women did not really benefit.¹⁶⁶ In 1947 and 1964, not only Nehru's character dominated, but also the Congress Party's dominance in elections. During the Nehru era, the Congress never received less than forty percent of the vote in national elections and always had an absolute majority of seats in Parliament. It also ruled over many territories of the individual union seats. However, this supremacy was threatened by several rivals. The Hindu Mahasabha (Great Hindu Assembly), which was banned for a time after Gandhi's assassination by one of its members but later legalized, and the Communist Party, which split into the pro-Soviet Indian Communist Party in 1964. Later in 1967, a third party was

¹⁶⁴ Gauri is the main female character in the novel by Mulk Raj Anand 'The Old Women and the Cow'. The story is about Gauri, a peasant girl who was disowned by her husband due to the usual Hindu charges of inauspiciousness and impropriety and returned to her mother, only to be sold by her own mother as a concubine to an old merchant. With the money, the mother frees her cow from the clutches of the pawnbroker. The author shows us how Gauri, the simple, uneducated girl, learns to be a competent nurse and midwife under the guidance of the kind doctor who takes her in. Thus, she succeeds in standing on her own feet and resisting domestic injustice and tyrannical guardianship. She was personified as the 'modern Mother India'. (pg. 26)

¹⁶⁵ Shantha Krishnaswamy 'The woman in Indian fiction in English, 1950-80' pg.21

¹⁶⁶ Desai Neera ' Women in modern India ' publication date 1957, pg.289-90

formed, the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party, which grew out of the peasant and student uprising of the 'Naxalites' (named after the place Naxalbari in Bengal where it broke out). Nehru and Patel (Home Minister) worked closely together rather than contradicting each other. For example, they worked together to solve problems affecting the unity of the nation. Both agreed that tough military intervention was needed to solve the problem of the princely states. The Nehru years were marked by great political stability. In the last two years of his administration (and his life), he was criticized for his economic decisions. The war with China, in which India failed politically-militarily, caused his reputation to decline somewhat. After his death, he was succeeded by L.B. Shastri, who died two years later, immediately after signing a pact to end the armed conflict with Pakistan. With the death of Shastri, a new phase began for India. The phase of Indira Gandhi (the only child of Jawaharlal and Kamala, a Gandhian and leader of women's demonstrations in northern India). She was only thirty-nine years old when she was elected prime minister. The Congress party, Forbes said, wanted a 'Nehru' as prime minister and believed she could be easily controlled. She was in no way relate to Gandhi. She worked alongside her father for a long time and held a ministerial post in the Shastri government. She pursued her father's political goals and even tried to accelerate their realization through greater central control of social and economic life. She reinforced Nehru's management-oriented and protectionist tendencies: she nationalized the banks. She also had to face all the problems that had already appeared in the last two years of her father's life. Such as the worrying electoral defeats of the Congress Party and a bitter power struggle within the party that ended in a split. In 1971, however, she managed to defeat her opponents and limit the damage caused by the split. She was identified as 'the mother goddess' and became the object of a true cult of personality.¹⁶⁷

Mrs. Gandhi's long tenure ended with her assassination on October 31, 1984. Her only political defeat came in 1977, after she declared a 'state of emergency' in India and suspended a number of constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties. In this way, she managed to temporarily save her position. Indira proved to be more powerful than predicted. In 1977 and 1980, she was in opposition. After she returned to power, she responded to threats to her power in a particular pattern. She declared breakaway states ungovernable, proclaimed presidential rule, and used the central police and intelligence services to suppress regional opposition. Indira Gandhi has always

¹⁶⁷ Gianni Sofri 'Gandhi and India' pg.137-141

denied being a feminist. During one of her speeches in New Delhi College, she said, 'I am not a feminist and I do not believe that anyone should get preferential treatment just because they are a woman.'¹⁶⁸ But at the same time, she referred to Indian women as the most oppressed minority in the world. Referring to herself, however, she denied that gender had played a role in her political success. When asked about the role of women in politics, Indira replied that Indian men, starting with Mahatma Gandhi, welcomed women's participation in power. Moreover, she said, they had fought for women's rights in the past and could be trusted to do so in the future. She did not believe that more women in parliament would affect the political scene. She believed that women's emancipation would come only if women and men, like her father, worked together to make the Constitution a reality.¹⁶⁹ Indian women slowly began to realize that the promised equality was not so easy to achieve. As the euphoria over the newfound freedom waned, the complicated and convoluted structure of politics, with its various castes, languages, religions, and division of family structures and cultural traditions, became apparent. Women's participation in the struggle for the nation's liberation had given them self-confidence and access to positions of power and responsibility, but positions of power were not easy to come by. The women's movement and the proclamation of 1975 as the Year of Women and later the years 1975 to 1985 as the Decade of Women led to some change in the attitude of political parties toward women. The government also accepted the approach of seeing women as participants in the development process rather than as mere beneficiaries of welfare programs.¹⁷⁰

The National Emergency of 1975–1977

The National Emergency sparked many contemporary movements such as the women's movement, but it also shaped prevailing notions of what it meant to be political while suppressing a host of issues that came to a head during the period. As much as these movements were born out of necessity, they were also shaped by the experience that power is primarily oppressive, and by the need for resistance that is largely oppositional. Between the ratification of the Constitution on January 26, 1950, and the lifting of the internal emergency on March 22, 1977, the nation was in

¹⁶⁸ *Verinder Grover and Ranjana Arora: Indira Gandhi' Great Women of Modern India' vol. VII 1993, pg.169*

¹⁶⁹ *Forbes, Geraldine Hancock,1998 'Women in modern India' pg.230-35*

¹⁷⁰ *Neera Desai, Usha Thakkar' Women in Indian Society' pg.101-2*

a state of emergency for almost half of those years, with the difference that the other years were completely "consensual," being a response to an external threat and war (the war with China in 1962, the war with Pakistan in 1964, and the war to "liberate" Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971), the internal state of emergency was declared quickly and secretly. It is estimated that 150,000 people were forcibly detained and their basic rights violated. Indira Gandhi, upon her return, suspended basic democratic rights, arrested tens of thousands of political opponents, and subjected the urban poor to forced evictions and sterilizations. All that happened could be called "The Autumn of the Matriarch." When Indira Gandhi's leadership position threatened to be challenged by the Allahabad High Court order, it necessitated a new level of centralization through emergency powers, for which there was considerable support, at least initially. For one thing, the mechanisms that had previously ensured a balance of power-between the center and the states, the business community and the landed gentry-were lost. For another, popular resistance to these government programs arose, especially against the poor in northern India and against relocation to the cities and the expansion of family planning programs.

The rise of the women's movement dates back to the years of the state of emergency, when women within leftist political groups-particularly the more militant left, such as the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)-suffered as much as their male comrades from the repression of the time. Many of them re-formed as women's organizations in 1978 and 1979 and spoke of "autonomy," which meant autonomy from leftist political formations. The Indian government set up a Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) in 1971. Without knowing the members of the committee, this was done at the behest of the United Nations as a preparatory step for the preparation of country reports for the upcoming International Year of Women in 1975. The state of emergency was declared barely after the CSWI report was published in December 1974 and a tiny research center was established at a women's college. While the repressive arm of the state did its work, the other arm allowed Towards Equality to travel to the UN conference in Mexico with all its negative findings. Equally indicative of the complex relationship between women's studies and the state was the first institutional response by a government agency to the challenges raised in the report. The government-funded Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) began its first sponsored program in women's studies in 1975, immediately after the proclamation

of the state of emergency. This situation prompted Vina Mazumdar, one of the founders of the field, to remark ironically that women's studies owe its beginnings to the state of emergency.¹⁷¹

The issues that feminism took up after the 1990s, especially in India, came from a field indelibly marked by Marxism. Feminist scholarship on labor insists that the 'public' and 'private' aspects of labor are intertwined. The Marxist view is complicated by feminist scholarship when it intertwines (public) wage labor with (private) family and reproductive structures. Work is not a discrete, homogeneous social group, but, as becomes clear when engaging with empirical material, lived everyday experiences and practices. Madhumita Dutta argues that there were many reasons for women to leave the home and pursue paid work. These included "poverty, oppressive households, violence, a difficult childhood, unpaid loans, responsibility for siblings, or illness in the family," but for many it was a personal sense of failure or desire to be independent that drove them out of the home. According to Dutta (2016:3), it is important to look at the structures of social relations outside of wage labor that women face on a daily basis to better understand why they agree to work in highly efficient and strenuous labor systems.¹⁷²

Women in politics now and a decade before

Dr. Arun Kumar Sharma and Praveen Singh write in their article (2014), "Indian society is full of orthodoxies. On the one hand, foreigners flock to India in search of spiritual solace, but on the other hand, Indians are among the most corrupt nations in the world. India spends millions and billions to send satellites into space to justify its scientific progress, but the state cannot provide almost half of the population with the basic needs of food, education, health and shelter. The same irony exists for women. The social rank and status of women's political participation cannot be analyzed in isolation. Rather, it is linked to socioeconomic conditions, the political environment, and inequalities in the customary social structure, its norms and values, customs and rituals. All these factors together determine the actual social status of women. In addition, the status of women differs according to region, caste, class, and religion, as well as taking into account tribal, rural,

¹⁷¹ Mary E. John - 'The Emergency in India: some reflections on the legibility of the political'

¹⁷² Chapter Author(s): Nivedita Menon 'MARXISM, FEMINISM AND CASTE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA' pg.139

and urban areas. Historically, women are destined to adopt the traditions, norms and values of society. The socialization process they undergo in their families does not prepare them for non-traditional roles. In the Indian context, a constitutional amendment became necessary to ensure the active participation of women due to the existing socio-economic and political situation of women in India. Indian culture and social character are largely dominated by a patriarchal value system. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act ¹⁷³ was a silent revolution in the country: for the first time in India's political history, one-third of the seats in local self-government institutions were filled by women. Due to deeply rooted social attitudes and practices, women are not independent decision makers in the country. In most cases, male family members have influenced decisions. As a result, they are discriminated against in access to food and medical care. They are also discriminated against in the economic and political spheres. Manu Bhaskar argues that women's limited participation in politics is due to biological factors: "The inferior status of women in political institutions also results from the underlying biologism (biologism means a gender bias that determines gender roles by biologically assigned characteristics) of male-dominated gender equality policies."¹⁷⁴ The reasons for the marginalization of women in politics are not hard to find. There are many obstacles to the integration of women in the process of decision-making that operate at different levels. Women themselves are responsible for their political isolation. The main problem is that women are judged by themselves according to two standards: 1. Their femininity: in the private world they are considered breadwinners, passive, emotional, domestically oriented and subordinate to their husbands. 2. Their modern role: the public world expects women to be rational, active, achievement-oriented, ambitious and competitive. This separation between the private and the public has an exclusionary effect on women. In such a situation, they have two choices: conform to the rules of politics and be labeled 'unfeminine' or

¹⁷³ The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the 1992 Constitution of India declared panchayats and municipalities as institutions of self-government. This law empowered the people at the local level, which is a significant step towards decentralization of power. An important aspect of the 73rd Amendment was that it gave power not only to local people but also to those who had been subjected to discrimination, social injustice and zealotry for centuries.

Anu Malik, The LNM Institute of Information Technology Jaipur 'Is Reservation Enough for Political Inclusion of Women and Dalits in Panchayat Raj Institutions in India?'

¹⁷⁴ Dr. Arun Kumar Sharma, Mr. Praveen Singh' *WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION –PAST TO PRESENT*'pg.303

conform to the norm of femininity in politics and be seen as inferior. This division makes it very difficult for women to choose appropriate behavior. So, by definition, a woman who goes into politics is considered antagonistic, calculating, and practical, and is not expected to be soft and emotional. Because of the proclamation of the Decade of Women 1975-85, the government was forced to appoint commissions and committees to initiate certain assistance measures to promote gender equality. Various international agencies helped implement programs to empower women. Many projects for rural women were launched. These programs also led to the establishment of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) through which many development programs were implemented.¹⁷⁵

The History of Women's Inclusion in Political Representation in India

1946 - Of the 150 members of the Constituent Assembly, 16 were women.

1957- When Panchayat Raj ¹⁷⁶was introduced, the concept was to co-opt two women "interested in working with women and children" (Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report).

1961-Maharashtra Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti Act of 1961 provided for the "nomination of one or two women" to the Panchayat bodies "in case women were not elected". **1973**- West Bengal Panchayat Act, also provided for co-opting 2 women.

1976 - The report of the Committee on the Status of Women (CSWI) called for women's representation in the panchayat and the establishment of an "all-women panchayat at the village level."

¹⁷⁵ Neera Desa, Usha Thakkar 'Women in Indian Society' 111-13

¹⁷⁶ The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act took effect in April 1993, and as a result, all states amended their local government laws. As a result, the role and importance of Panchayati Raj structures became very critical and significant. The Panchayat can prove to be a model for an effective local organization representing the interests of the people. State authorities can formulate policies, while panchayats serve as potential instruments for effective delivery of programs and services. -

Dr. Arun Kumar Sharma, Mr. Praveen Singh' WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION –PAST TO PRESENT'pg.305

1978- In Maharashtra Panchayat, only 6 women were elected although 314 were nominated. In most parts of India, women were brought into the panchayat only by co-option.

1983- In the Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayat Samitis, Mandal Panchayat and Nyaya Panchayat Act of 1983, up to 25 percent of seats were reserved for women. Elections under this Act were delayed for various reasons and could not be held until 1987. Of the 30,000 candidates who contested, about 14,000 women were elected.

1988- Elections were held in Uttar Pradesh for 74,000 village Sabhas, the first elections in 22 years. Provision was made for only one woman to be co-opted. Less than one percent of women were elected in the panchayat elections.

1991- Orissa Panchayat Samiti provided for "not less than one third of the total number of seats to be reserved for women". Elections were held in **1992** and over 22,000 women were elected. In Kerala Districts Councils elections, while 30 percent seats were reserved for women, 35 percent seats were won by women.

1993- About 71,000 women candidates contested elections and with 33 percent seat reservation, 24,900 women came in through the ballot box.

1994- In Madhya Pradesh, 150,500 women were elected to village, block and zilla Panchayats. 33 percent of village Panchayat seats were reserved for women and 43 percent of seats were held by women.

2009- The Union Cabinet of the Government of India approved 50% reservation for women in PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions) on August 27, 2009. The Indian states that have already introduced 50% reservation for women in PRIs are Madhya Pradesh Bihar, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.

2011- On November 25, 2011, the states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, and Tripura also reserved 50% of their posts for women. ¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Dr. Arun Kumar Sharma, Mr. Praveen Singh' *WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION –PAST TO PRESENT*'pg.307

Reserving seats has increased the representation of the oppressed. The crucial question now is: **does reservation increase women's participation?**

In 1996, the Women's Reservation Bill was first introduced in Parliament and then several more times, in 1998, 1999, 2003, and 2008. The most recent version was passed by the Rajya Sabha in 2010. This law includes: The reservation of 1/3 of all seats in the Loks Sabha¹⁷⁸ and Legislative Assemblies¹⁷⁹ for women, with 1/3 of the seats reserved for women from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The reservation is valid for 15 years after the passage of the law. ¹⁸⁰ Twenty-five years after its introduction in Parliament, the Women's Reservation Act has still not come into force and has yet to be implemented.

Usually, it is the upper caste women from wealthy families in the village who contest the elections. But their power is only a facade, because even if the elected head of the village is a woman, male dominance prevents the woman from exercising the power she possesses. Women do not have the economic independence to pay for elections; these funds are usually provided by a dominant male family member. In a country where patriarchy is deeply embedded in the culture, this has proven to be the easiest way to gain control of positions of authority. In villages, it has become routine that if the gram Pradhan¹⁸¹ is female, all governance-related tasks and finance-related decisions are made by the prominent male figure. There is a huge gap between representation and participation, and therefore we need to focus on certain key aspects of power and dominance that are responsible for this. This gap not only affects women and Dalits, but is also related to the gap between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless. There were several reports in major newspapers highlighting the reckless use of black money in the elections. For women, the path to politics is difficult due to family and financial constraints, sexism and patriarchal structures within political parties, gender roles, and the perception that women are not suited for the job. This mindset is instilled in people from a young age. There is growing evidence that women's leadership

¹⁷⁸ The House of people. The President, Rajya Sabha (Council of States) and Lok Sabha constitute the Parliament.

¹⁷⁹ The Legislative Assembly is the lower house of the legislature. The work of the Legislative Assembly is similar to that of the Lok Sabha. Members are elected directly by the people through general elections.

¹⁸⁰ *'All you need to know about the Women's Reservation Bill'*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcNK4eZfc24>

¹⁸¹ Village Council

in politics improves governance. It helps advance gender equality and influences both the range of policy issues and the types of solutions proposed.¹⁸² There is also strong evidence that quality of life improves when more women are elected to politics and that the priorities of families, women, and ethnic and racial minorities are addressed. But the reality is that the actual decision-making power and the finances and money flows are managed by an unelected man of the upper caste. Most national and regional parties do not give more than 20% of MLA¹⁸³ and MP¹⁸⁴ tickets to women. Studies and experts agree that a lack of women's political participation impacts policy making and diversity in decision making. "There is enough empirical evidence to suggest that feminization of political governance leads to changes in public policy decisions and expenditure patterns. Studies have also found that such representation favors women's preferences in fiscal policymaking," Lekha Chakraborty, professor at New Delhi-based National Institute of Public Finance and Policy.¹⁸⁵

Muslim Woman

Hinduism and Islam, two of the most important religions in India, have adopted different attitudes toward women since the 12th century AD, when Islam was introduced into India. From a purely legal point of view, Muslim women seemed to fare better, because they could own and dispose of property, they could divorce without social stigma or do business. But in practice, Muslim women were not much better off because men were the ones who interpreted and enforced the laws. All these rights came at a price: they had to live in the strict seclusion of the women's quarter if the family was rich enough to afford these luxuries, and they had to veil themselves from all men. Working Muslim women, both rural and urban, were not constrained by so many social rules. They

¹⁸² Anu Malik 'Is Reservation Enough for Political Inclusion of Women and Dalits in Panchayat Raj Institutions in India?' pg.3-5

¹⁸³ Member of the Legislative Assembly. An MLA is the elected representative of the legislative assembly of a state. He or she represents the people of the constituency in which he or she was elected.

¹⁸⁴ A MP is a member of the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha. They work for the parliamentary constituency they represent.

¹⁸⁵ India: 25 years on, Women's Reservation Bill still not a reality
<https://www.aljazeera.com/>

had to do their part to earn a living. However, this fact did not change their social status in terms of rights and duties.

Although Indian women live under the Hindu Code Bill, which gives women equal rights, most Muslim women are restricted by the Muslim Personal Law.¹⁸⁶

Muslim women became an important part of the Pakistani movement after the League called for the creation of Pakistan at its 1940 session. Women in Pakistan had a much harder time getting their rights recognized. This is because religion was the driving force in the creation of Pakistan. However, in 1954, the Women's Rights Charter was finally adopted, which granted women equality of status, equal opportunities, equal pay for equal work, and all rights under Islamic personal law. But the legal guarantees of the charter did not do much to improve the situation of the majority of women in Pakistani society. There was not much difference between the experience of a Hindu woman and a Muslim woman. They were both disadvantaged in education, employment, and occupation. Prejudice and religious bias created barriers for many women, and this is still the case today.

When Visram, Rozina published her book in 1992, the situation of Muslim women was not much different than it is today, although slow changes can be observed in the big cities. She notes, "The legal guarantees of the Charter have not helped to improve the situation of the majority of women in Pakistani society. Women are still disadvantaged in education, employment, industry, and the labor market. Customs and religious prejudices are obstacles for many women. The gap between urban and rural women remains wide."¹⁸⁷

What kept Muslim women in backwardness? With the arrival of European traders in India in the 16th century CE, the situation of women had completely deteriorated. The British came to India with the promise of a new culture and new social values. Only a select portion of upper-class women were able to benefit from the new culture, but Hindu attitudes and behavior patterns

¹⁸⁶ Gaur, Albertine " *Women in India*" 1980 pg.3-4

¹⁸⁷ Visram, Rozina " *Women in India and Pakistan: the struggle for independence from British rule* " pub:1992 pg.12

changed drastically, while Muslims were unable to benefit from this new culture. They remained loyal to their narratives and refused to adopt democratic values or even modern education. This created the divide between the Hindus and the Muslims, which eventually led to an inequality of status for which no one but the Muslims themselves were held responsible. The fact that they were a minority in India kept Muslims from adopting contemporary culture and values. They were skeptical about adopting democratic culture, fearing the loss of their identity, and preserved old customs and traditions, supported by their religious leaders. This attitude had a detrimental effect on the development of Muslim women. The medieval restrictions imposed on them prevented them from attaining modern guardianship and employment. The backwardness of Muslim society inhibits the progress of its women, who have a far greater role to play in the socialization of their offspring. Although seven decades have passed since India's independence, women in Muslim communities still face significant challenges as citizens of this country and as members of India's largest minority. Their poor socioeconomic status reflects a lack of social opportunity that, while not unique to Muslim women, is exacerbated by their marginal status in a context where most Indian women are already disadvantaged. Muslims account for less than 3 percent of public employment. With such a picture of marginalization, it is inevitable that the corresponding numbers for Muslim women will continue to decline. Most Muslim women remain "invisible" workers in the informal economy. The lack of information about Muslim women helps reinforce cultural stereotypes and confuse their life experiences and struggles. As a result, there is a widespread perception that the status of Muslim women in India is due to certain ascribed, undeniable "Islamic" characteristics.

In recent decades, several "networks" or "coalitions" of Muslim women's organizations have formed in an attempt to develop dialog among themselves, with the clerical establishment, and within the larger community on women's issues in general, rather than focusing on individual women. To this end, they hold conferences at which resolutions are adopted and then published in the media, and they organize rallies, often in cooperation with secular women's organizations. They also hold "awareness camps" for poor women in rural areas and urban slums, and often intervene when a seemingly "anti-women fatwa (religious ruling)" is issued by clerics in the country to attract public attention. The lack of social opportunities for Muslim women is a critical

problem that must be urgently addressed. Improving literacy rates would directly impact the socioeconomic and political status of Muslim women as citizens of India.¹⁸⁸

What needs to be done to improve the situation of Indian Muslim women?

Enrollment in educational institutions needs to be increased. A report by the National Bureau of Statistics shows the extremely low literacy rate among Muslims and the severity of their academic marginalization in India. Ensure equal opportunities in the workplace, a work environment free of discrimination and harassment. Honoring female role models through cross-media campaigns by national and state governments can help eliminate stereotypes, build community, and celebrate the achievements of Indian Muslim women. Persistent stereotypes about Muslim women continue to permeate dominant discourses-sometimes silently, but sometimes resurgent when the political time is ripe. It is important to re-examine this terrain, not only to fill gaps in knowledge about Muslim women, but also to explore the diversity of aspirations and agency in various aspects of Muslim women's everyday lives. Although we are in the 21st century, we can see how Muslim women's lives are constituted not only by being Muslim, but also by their majority and minority positions.¹⁸⁹

Conclusion

In the 20th century, as the political movement gained momentum, especially under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, women participated in large numbers, demanding equal rights in various areas of life through their own organizations. Higher education was more widespread among women, and it was not only upper-middle-class women who took up studies. The first two decades after independence were filled with optimism about the achievement of goals. Quite a few women who had actively participated in the freedom movement held important positions in government, educational institutions and social welfare organizations. In 1974, UN requested all member states to prepare a report on the status of women in their respective countries. The Indian government also set up a committee to study the status of women. The committee toured the country, met with

¹⁸⁸ Shakeel Ahmad Wani, Sayed Aaqib Qadri” *Perspectives on the Status of Muslim Women in India: Prospects and Challenges*” pg.1-6

¹⁸⁹ Patricia Jeffery, Kaveri Qureshi” *Muslim Woman/Muslim women: lived experiences beyond religion and gender in South Asia and its diasporas.*” pg.1-15

women from different walks of life, commissioned research in various areas, and produced a report entitled Towards Equality. Not only was the report seen as an eye-opener in terms of the real situation of women, but the findings also helped to bring the women's issue into focus after two decades of "silence." The results were sad indicators of the failure of government programs and policies initiated after independence to improve the status of women.¹⁹⁰ Even though so many decades have passed, the situation of women and their limitations still play an important role, perhaps somewhat mitigated, but patriarchy is still their biggest obstacle on the road to emancipation.

‘Men believe that politics is a demanding career that requires perseverance, fighting spirit, ideological convictions, and loyalty to the party to which they belong. Hard work, extensive travel, the ability to raise funds and build party units are not tasks that these men can accomplish without courage and drive.’¹⁹¹ With the idea that a woman is not fit to be a capable and successful politician, men and many citizens who have the same idea deprive themselves of a woman's potential and the possibility of seeing another side of a future that may even be freer in every aspect of life, be it for women or even for the lower classes. Shashi Tharoor says in one of his interviews that Indians need to wake up and realize that women have the same rights as everyone else, the constitution guarantees them these rights, but society does not. This awakening must come from everyone, from the people in the public space, in the media, in the public discourse and definitely more space must be given to the educated generation of politicians who are open-minded, progressive, and think in terms of the 21st century.

References:

¹⁹⁰ Neera Desai, Usha Thakkar 'Women in Indian society' pg. 180-97

¹⁹¹ Dr. Arun Kumar Sharma, Mr. Praveen Singh' WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION –PAST TO PRESENT'pg.309

1. Naresh Rout, 'Role of women in ancient India'
2. Geroge Orwell, 1984
3. Wilkins, W. J. (William Joseph), 1843-1902.' Modern Hinduism: being an account of the religion and life of the Hindus in northern India'
4. Chimnabai II.; Mitra, Siddha Mohana, 1856-1925,'The position of women in Indian life.'
5. Dr.Radhika Kapoor, 'Status of women in ancient India'
6. Desai Neera, 'Women in Modern India 1957'
7. Bhaswati Pal, Volume 23
8. Marcus, B. Fuller. 'The wrongs of Indian womanhood'
9. Frazer, Robert Watson. 'A literary history of India'
10. D, A "The Indian child's mother"
11. Murdoch, John 1898. 'The laws of Manu, English translation'
12. Vijay Nath "From 'Brahmanism' to 'Hinduism': Negotiating the Myth of the Great Tradition. Vol. 29, No. 3/4
13. Billington, Mary Frances 1895 "Woman in India"
14. Storrow, Edward "Our Indian Sisters"
15. John Monaghan & Peter Just 'Social and cultural anthropology.'
16. Dr. Radhika Kapoor.' Status of women in pre-independence India.'
17. Padma Sharma 'Status of women in India'
18. Karen Helene Halvorsen 'Colonial perceptions of Indian Womanhood'
19. Gianni Sofri 'Gandhi and India'
20. 'How did Britain conquer India' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DzDwz18ng7w>
21. Tausif Fatima 'Women's rights and Hindu law of inheritance: the approach of Rammohun Roy'
22. Karkaria R. P 'India forty years of progress and Reform'
23. Dr Shashi Tharoor - Looking Back at the British Raj in India
24. Dr Shashi Tharoor. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OB5yKS-_-CI
25. Joanna Liddle, Rama Joshi. 'Gender and colonialism: Women's organization under the Raj'
26. Karen Helene Halvorsen 'The Vassareddy succession dispute: female agency under the Company Raj. An exploration of south Indian womanhood'.

27. Manraj Singh 'Role of women in India's struggle for freedom' Research Scholar Panjab University Chandigarh.
28. Neera Desai, Usha Thakkar. 'Women in Indian society'
29. Geraldine Forbes 'The politics of respectability: Indian Women and the Indian National Congress' Delhi Oxford University press BOMBAY CALCUTIA MADRAS 1988
30. 'Mrs. Besant on Indian Womanhood', Indian Ladies Margarine I., (hereafter ILM), vol. I, no. 7, Jan. 1902
31. Choksi Mithan 'Women In Modern India'
32. Sharp Gene, 'Gandhi as a political strategist: with essays on ethics and politics''
33. S. R. Bakshi, Gandhi and Status of Women (New Delhi, 1987)
34. Lyn Norvell 'Gandhi and the Indian women's movement'
35. Frieda Hauswirth 'Purdah Indian Women'
36. Harijan 1947 –Non-violence in Peace and War II
37. Renuka Ray” The Background of the Hindu Code Bill”- source: Pacific Affairs, Sep., 1952, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Sep., 1952)
38. Forbes, Geraldine Hancock 'Women in modern India' 1998
39. Gail Pearson, 'Nationalism, Universalization and the Extended Female Space', in Gail Minault, ed., Tire Extended Family: Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan (Delhi, Chanakya Publications, 1981) Chapter Author(s): Rachana Chakraborty. Chapter Title: 'Women's Education and Empowerment in Colonial Bengal'. Book Title: Responding to the West
40. Malley L.s.s.o Modern India and The West. 1941
41. Manraj Singh {Research Scholar Panjab University Chandigarh}” Role of Women in India's Struggle for Freedom” -International Journal of Research (IJR), Vol-1, Issue-2, March, 2014
42. Sarkar, Tanika; Butalia, Urvashi 'Women and right-wing movements: Indian experiences' 1996
43. 'Awakened Womanhood of India', BC, 23 Jul. 1930; Booklet from Gandhi Seva Sangh
44. Shantha Krishnaswamy 'The woman in Indian fiction in English, 1950-80
45. Verinder Grover and Ranjana Arora: Indira Gandhi' Great Women of Modern India' vol. VII 1993

46. Mary E. John -' The Emergency in India: some reflections on the legibility of the political' Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, Volume 15, 2014 - Issue 4 Published online: 12 Dec 2014.
47. Chapter Author(s): Nivedita Menon' MARXISM, FEMINISM AND CASTE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA' Book Title: Racism After Apartheid
48. Anu Malik, The LNM Institute of Information Technology Jaipur 'Is Reservation Enough for Political Inclusion of Women and Dalits in Panchayat Raj Institutions in India?' Academia Letters, November 2021
49. Dr. Arun Kumar Sharma, Mr. Praveen Singh' WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION –PAST TO PRESENT' International Research Journal of Management Sociology & Humanity (IRJMSH). Vol 5 Issue 9 [Year 2014]
50. 'All you need to know about the Women's Reservation Bill'
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcNK4eZfc24>
51. India: 25 years on, Women's Reservation Bill still not a reality
<https://www.aljazeera.com/>
52. Gaur, Albertine " Women in India" 1980
53. Visram, Rozina " Women in India and Pakistan: the struggle for independence from British rule" pub:1992 pg.12
54. Shakeel Ahmad Wani, Sayed Aaqib Qadri" Perspectives on the Status of Muslim Women in India: Prospects and Challenges" An International Multidisciplinary Double-Blind Peer-reviewed Research Journal Special Issue, Volume II Issue VI November 2020
55. Patricia Jeffery, Kaveri Qureshi" Muslim Woman/Muslim women: lived experiences beyond religion and gender in South Asia and its diasporas." pg.1-15 published online,27 Feb 2022