

- Two categories of movements (i) “for” women & (ii) “by” women.
- For women- Reform movements & nationalist struggle gifted by social reformers who, were mostly men
- Women participation was prominent in freedom struggle but leadership was with men leaders - still it is quoted as era of ‘beginning of freedom for women’
- In the post colonisation period women movement was concentrated on individual liberty - but foundation lays in colonial period struggle for independence
- Women discovered their identity through literature & their radical activities
- The 19th century could well be called an age for women.
- Colonisation , imperialism & industrialisation was asymmetric in terms of women.
- But women asserted their rights & potentials in Europe
- By the end of the century, feminist ideas were in the minds of the “radicals” in England, France, Germany and even Russia.
- In India such movements of ‘for’ women, ‘by’ men originated in Bengal & Maharashtra.
- The Indian bourgeois class, born out of Westernisation, sought to reform the society by initiating campaigns against caste, polytheism, idolatry, animism, purda, childmarriage, sati & the like.
- The foreign missionaries had branded these as examples of ‘ Religious barbarism’ thus creating enough grounds for the colonial powers to rule.
- Ram Mohan Roy & Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar managed to receive the required administrative and legal support because of this.
- In 1817, Pandit Mrityunjay Vidyalankar declared that sati had no “Shastric” sanction.
- In 1818 Governor William Bentinck prohibited Sati in his province of Bengal. This prohibition extended to other parts of India as the Sati Prohibition Act of 1829.
- In 1850s Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, like Pandit Mrityunjay, proved from the Shastras that the re-marriage of a widow is allowed.
- The discussion about reforms started in the vernacular (Bengali) press
- Vidyasagar submitted a petition to the Governor General in 1855.
- A Widow Remarriage Association had started in Madras in 1871, but was short lived.
- In 1878, Veeresalingam started the Rajahmundry Social Reform Association, focusing mainly on widow remarriage.
- In 1892, the Young Madras Party or the Hindu Social Reform Association was launched.
- Aryan Brotherhood Conference, of which Ranade & N.M. Joshi were members, once declared in one of its meetings, “let us no longer live in a fool’s paradise in the fond belief that because we have managed to survive so long .. under our present social arrangement, we will be able to survive forever...”
- Forty odd years since the Act was passed, there had been 500 widow remarriages only, though social reform organisations, championing the cause, had mushroomed all over India.
- The majority of them were child or virgin widows.
- Widows from the upper caste, who were not virgins, could not and did not- remarry.
- Other notables, who fought for reforms in anti-woman socio religious customs, were Jyotiba Phule, Dayanand Saraswati, D. K. Karve and women like Pandita Ramabai, Sister Nivedita and Tagore’s sister Swarnakumari Devi.
- Jyotiba Phule encouraged remarriage of widows and prevented the inhuman act of tonsuring the heads of widows and led a barbers’ strike which rose against this practice in 1889.
- He extensively wrote on exploitation of the downtrodden and women in his popular work “Gulamgiri” and worked for the spread of the message of ‘Satyashodhak Samaj’ that he launched in 1873.
- He attacked the twin concepts of *dharma* and caste & His renaissance desire for societal transformation was a break from his contemporaries
- Phule opened a string of schools from 1848-1855, including a special school for all caste girls.
- According to Gail Omvedt Phule does not use the common salutation of *manoo* (human being) but rather *stree purush* (women & men)
- Bengal had witnessed rebellious spirits like Madhusudan Datta and Henry Derozio. They both were powerful poets also.
- Madhusudan organised the prostitutes & inspired them to choose the profession of acting, instead.
- According to a report in Amrita Bazar Patrika of 1869, 90% of Calcutta’s prostitutes were widows, of whom a large number came from Kulin Brahmin families.
- The “Kulins” were the most detestable group of Brahmins whose socially sanctioned livelihood was to go on marrying & collecting dowries. (p. 110 ff.

Benoy Ghose: "Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar", 1965, Publication Division, Govt. of India.)

- Their day to day living was also totally free as they kept on visiting their wives' paternal homes as these 'married women had to continue living in their fathers' house.
- Polygamy was the reason for leaving so many women's to the prostitution.
- Swami Dayanand prescribed equal treatment to women quoting from the shastras. His Arya Samaj did not impose any duties or obligations on women.
- In his representative book, "Satyarth Prakash" Dayanand insisted that polygamy, child marriage and the seclusion of women did not exist in Aryan India.
- He called for compulsory education for boys and girls both and that there should be equal stress on tradition and modernity through the compulsory learning of Sanskrit and English.
- He raised the age of marriage for girls & boys to 16 & 25, respectively.
- But Arya Samajis like Lala Lajpat Rai & Lal Chand opposed higher education for women. They believed that if at all, 'the character of girls' education should be different.
- Apart from basic literacy, Arithmetic & some poetry, Arya Samaj religious literature, sewing, embroidery, cooking, hygienic, drawing & music were the subjects taught.
- The Brahmo Samaj started as a protest against idolatry and the backward pulling norms and rituals of Brahmanical religion.
- In 1860 an Act was passed fixing the age of consent at 10.
- Behram Malabari, himself not a Hindu, (a Parsi) started a campaign resulted into amendment in Age of consent act 1891 with increase in age of consent to 12
- The Jessore Indian Association, demanded that early marriage weakens the physical strength of a nation; it stunts its full growth and development, it affects the courage and energy of the individuals and brings forth a race of people weak in strength" and determination.
- B. G. Tilak opposed the Age of consent bill 1891 bill as he had objection in interference in social customs or ways of living.
- Rabindranath Tagore also criticised the Age of consent act of 1891
- Reform movements were so strong in the Bombay-Poona cultural belt
- G.H. Deshmukh, a socio-religious reformer was a staunch critic of Brahmanical practices - But in 1871, he succumbed to threat to outcaste him.
- As a consequence, he mellowed down.

NEW IDENTITY FOR WOMEN

- Novelists like Nirupama Devi & Anurupa Devi started getting referred to in the Bengali literary

circles and were even given memberships of literary clubs which were dominated by men.

- Tagore's novels and short stories are full of women characters who excel their husbands and other male admirers. A few examples are "Gora" and "Ghare Baire" by Tagore, "Anandamath" and "Debi Chaudhurani" by Bankim Chandra
- In Tagore's "Char Adhyay", a nationalist woman, seeking identity, is criticised and crushed by male leadership - typical of politics even today, which has largely remained a male domain.
- Almost all women & men activist were literary writers also; literature and writings were commonly used as side weapons
- Some of the noted names among women were Nagendrakala Mustafi, Mankumari Basu and Kamini Roy.
- Kashibai Kanitkar was the first woman novelist from Maharashtra.
- Others were Mary Bhowe, Godavaribai Samaskar, Parvatibai and Rukminibai.
- In South, Kamala Sathianandan, the editor of Indian Ladies Magazine, was a writer also.
- Kavya Phule (1854) and Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar (1892) were written by Savitribai Phule - reflecting expressions of a free & empowered woman
- Madame Cama had the honour of unfurling a flag at 1907 Congress of the Socialist International at Stuttgart
- In 1913, Kumudini Mitra, more known as a "revolutionary", was invited to the International Women's Suffrage Conference at Budapest, Hungary.
- Sarojini Naidu waited upon the committee, headed by Montague and Lord Chelmsford to demand a series of reforms in the condition of the Indian women.
- Sarala Devi made representations before the committee on behalf of Bharat Stree Mahamandal.
- At the sixth National Social conference in 1892, Hardevi Roshanlals, the editor of "Bharat Bhagini" insisted that this platform was 'more important' than Congress
- Anandibai Joshi was the first woman doctor.
- She & Kantibai were stoned when they dared wearing shoes and carrying umbrellas on the streets.
- In 1882, Tarabai Shinde's book, Stree Purush Tulana generated heated discussions all over.
- She insisted that the faults, commonly ascribed to women, such as superstition, suspicion, treachery and insolence, could be as much found in men.
- Mai Bhagawati, an "upadeshika" of the Arya Samaj had the confidence to speak in a large public gathering in Haryana.

- In 1881, Manorama Majumdar, educated at home by her husband, was appointed dharma pracharak by the Barisal Brahmo Samaj.
- Rabindranath Tagore's sister Swarnakumari Devi launched "Sakhi Samiti" with the aim of training widows to learn, to teach and thus become the most powerful agents of spreading education among women.
- Swarnakumari Devi's daughter, Sarala Devi, was strikingly rebellious.
- She started a gymnasium in 1902, where women were trained in the use of sword and 'lathi'.
- She can be called the architect of even revolutionary nationalism.
- Fatima Sheikh was an Indian educator and social reformer, who was a colleague of the social reformers Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule.
- She is widely considered to be India's first Muslim woman teacher.

WOMEN IN NATIONALIST STRUGGLE

- The 1905-8 Swadeshi movement in Bengal reflects the beginning of a women's participation in nationalist activities on a larger scale.
- Middle class nationalism inspired women and girls who gave away jewelry as well as money.
- Militancy became a feature of the 'samitis' in which women had active involvement that five such in East Bengal, viz Swadesh Bandhab, Brati, Dhaka Anushilan, Suhrid & Sadhana, were banned in January, 1909.
- Speaking to the Indian Social conference at Calcutta in 1906. Sarojini Naidu appealed women to take education & empower themselves with knowledge - she questioned the dominance of men at family units.
- The Tamil nationalist poet Subramania Bharati in his poem, "The Dance of Liberation" praised & celebrated the liberation of women in modern world
- A discourse on equality began to develop, in the late 1910s and 1920s, amongst women. They used nationalists' arguments to defend their demands for equal rights.
- Urmila Devi, an armed revolutionary woman, defined 'swaraj' as self-rule and 'Swadhinata' as the 'strength and power to rule over oneself'.
- Amiya Debi rightly felt that 'Swadhinata' cannot be given, it has to be taken by force.... If it is left to the "well-wishing" men, then women's adhinata (dependence) along will get strengthened.
- The nationalist leaders, who were the first to call women outside their home and household, believed in complementarity and not sameness, which the revolutionary women demanded.
- Prabhavati worked for a group in U.S.A called "Freedom for India & Ireland" and Renuka Ray was associated with the "League Against British Imperialism" in England.

- Prabhavati married M.N. Roy, the pioneer of communist movement in India, and got involved with the revolutionaries and the communists.
- She joined hands with Muzaffar Ahmad, poet Nazrul Islam and Hemanta Kumar Sarkar to organise the scavengers as a member of the Workers and Peasants Party.

GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN POLITICS

- No woman was chosen by Gandhi in his long list of 71 marchers to Dandi. Well recognised women, like Khurshid Naoroji and Margaret Cousins, protested strongly. But the leader remained firm on his decision arguing that he had allocated a "greater role to women than the mere breaking of salt laws".
- But Sarojini Naidu defied and joined the march at Dandi at the final stage and was the first woman to be arrested in that movement.
- Dandi march became the mass movement propagated by women.
- Lilavati Mitra helped Vidyasagar in 1890s to perform widow remarriages by sheltering willing grooms.
- Kamini Roy was active in the Ilbert Bill agitation, organising girls at the Bethune School to hold meetings and wear badges supporting the Bill.
- She worked with Banga Mahila Samiti in their social reform projects. Aghorekamini Nari Samiti mobilised opinions against the ill-treatment of women workers by the tea planters.
- Till 1930s Women got increasingly involved with revolutionary groups, popularly known, feared and revered as "revolutionary".
- In December, 1931, Shanti Ghosh & Suniti Chowdhury shot a district Magistrate, Mr. Stevens, who had harassed women more than the law, perhaps, permitted.
- Mina Das had attempted to shoot the Governor of Bengal, Stanley Jackson in 1922.
- Pritilata Waddadar led a raid on a club that the Europeans frequented.
- The bomb killed one and injured four.

UNITY AMONG WOMEN

- The issue of communalism was taken up by All India women's Conference (AIWC) in the 1930s
- In 1932 it organised protests against the reservation of separate seats for women in the legislatures applying communal criteria.
- The Bombay branch, got involved in riot relief and the Andhra Pradesh branch started a campaign against religious prayers in the schools.
- The organisation was, the first to raise demands for uniform civil code so that women cannot be subdued and tortured by religious dictums and caste obligations.
- By 1944 most of the Muslim women left AIWC.
- After partition and migration to Pakistan, they formed All Pakistan Women's Conference, thus belying the very purpose of this organisation.

- Communalism & casteism - reactions of the lower castes & of the religious and racial minorities has increased - mobilisation among women in protest and self-defence has also become stronger & wider
- The other modes of oppressions, related to and born out of patriarchy and the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few, have also motivated the women's movement in India.
- Bhil women were the first known to have raised their voice against the alcohol menace by breaking liquor pots in 1972.
- The Anti-Arrack Movement in Nellore in Andhra Pradesh.
- Alcoholism is understood by women & the men who fight for women's cause, as a major cause behind wife-beating and family violence.
- Unending or increasing impoverishment of a family is also mainly because of man's income being wasted on this menace.
- Progressive Organisation of women in Hyderabad was the first to organise powerful movement against dowry in 1975.
- It spread to Maharashtra, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and even to as far as Punjab and Bengal. Male participation increased in this movement
- Mahila Dakshata Samiti was the pioneer body in Delhi in this regard.
- Its scope has spread over to all other areas concerning women's oppression and subjugation.
- Sexual Abuse & Rape are the most common and frequent of crimes against women and yet, the most unreported.
- Shakti Shalini, Sasbala Mahila Sangha, Janwadi Mahila Samiti are some of the striking names in this field.
- Janwadi Mahila Samiti has been organizing women in their political battles also. The latest overriding issue has been the reservation of seats in the highest decision-making bodies.
- All forms of male domination, were based on women's economic dependence.
- The two primary structures of women's oppression were thus, the sexual division of labour & the culture and politics that rationalised it.
- Mahila Samata Sainik Dal, believed that men's base desire for sexual pleasure had led them to enslave women.

- As explained by Engels, ownership of land & the means of production controls all categories of human relationships and is, therefore, the basis of patriarchy.
- Chipko and Narmada Bachao movements are good examples in this regard. 'Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA)' is the first known organisation in India and South Asia, which united the women workers in the unorganised and the home-based sectors.
- This perhaps, is the most successful and sustained women's movement since it got closely tied up with 'Mahila Kosh' or women's co-operative bank.
- The Self-employed Women's Union of South Africa has copied the model in totality and these two, together, have been able to influence ILO to enact international laws, giving recognition and protection to the home-based workers
- The 'Grameen Bank' of Bangladesh had become another widely acknowledged model for women's economic independence.

TELANGANA MOVEMENT

- Women's participation was significant in the Telangana movement for land and related Eco-political rights.
- Though the leadership was with men, the movement could have died early if not for the strong and sustained motivation from the women.
- It started against the injustices for the British Raj (1941), and continued in Independent India

BODH GAYA MOVEMENT

- Another landmark movement for land, i.e., livelihood, or economic rights "by" women was the forceful acquisition of the 'patta' by the peasant women, who had collected from in and around Bodh Gaya (Bihar).
- The men were not putting in enough efforts or resources into the land due to drinking and other bad habits.

TRIBAL MOVEMENT

- In the North Cachar hills of Nagaland, Gudiallo, affectionately called 'Rani', became famous for her role in the civil disobedience movement.
- In 1931-32, Gudiallo led a 'no tax' campaign, having taken over the reins of leadership from her cousin brother who was hanged by the Raj.
- These villagers stopped paying the compulsory levies on portage and started refusing to work as forced labour.