

## THE PARADOX OF THE WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN COLONIAL INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*My grandmother nostalgically describing her pre-partition Punjab days when she was a young widow shared with me how secretly her elder brother taught her how to read alphabets and she used those reading skills to read the Hindi newspaper. While she was initiated into reading, writing was forbidden for females in her age lest they start writing love letters to anyone and bring shame to the family's name! She did it secretly as girls those days were discouraged to read and write. As I delve into the subject of women's education in colonial India, her inner turmoil at doing something unusual for her age and times becomes livid. A lot had changed by 1970's but still a dismal picture emerged from the report, Towards Equality, in which the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) accused the government, the educational system, social analysts, the media, political parties, trade unions as well as women's organizations - i.e. most members of the intelligentsia of a failure to understand the implications of gender equality guaranteed by the Constitution. There is a need to critically assess the educational system for its failure to inculcate the value of equality among the youth, to counter the influence of inherited traditions and socialisation practices. The paper is an attempt to highlight the persistent 'ambivalence' among educationists and policy makers regarding women's expected or desired roles in Society. The paper attempts a historical overview of the debate on women's education within the 19th century social reform movements in India. Gender equality has been seen as the culmination of the nineteenth century social reform movements, which portrayed women's status as a major issue for debate and change.*

*A neglect of the economic roles played by the "overwhelming majority" of women among the peasantry, in most rural industries and services, and among the urban poor is prominent in policies for agricultural, industrial and infrastructural development. Post independence, Social scientists and others continued to view women as economically inactive and dependent consumers, whose basic needs were confined to "education, health and welfare" not employment (The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSW, Towards Equality, 1974). So far education has not generated a massive social change as Indian women continue to be the victims of a process of marginalisation - economic, social, political and intellectual - that further got accelerated during the post-Independence period. Social oppression of women has, in fact, been increasing among the educated classes. Whereas middle-class employment has been an area of bitter competition between cultural groups distinguished by caste, religion, language etc, in the entire period of nationalist and postcolonial politics in India, gender has rarely been an issue of public contention. Values of freedom, equality and cultural regeneration have existed along with a set of dichotomies that excluded many people from the new opportunities arising after independence as these were also appropriated by the dominant elite. Both the colonial rulers and their nationalist opponents misinterpreted the meanings of Western liberal ideas of right, freedom, equality etc. The class bias of the intelligentsia projected middle class experience as applicable to all women which needs to be highlighted.*

## INTRODUCTION

The development of women's studies in the post-1975 period, put forward the theory of 'sanskritisation'-explaining a long-established pattern of social behavior among upwardly mobile social groups- the social status of a family being linked to 'non-worker' status of women for their 'withdrawal' from the labour force, among families or groups (caste, community, class) seeking higher status within the social hierarchy. (Srinivas, M.N., 1978)

Examining the Interrelationship between the nineteenth century social reform movement, the debate on women's education, and the emergence of a new family ideology among the educated urban middle class, it was found that this 'dominant' social ideology bore considerable resemblance to the gender role ideology of the British middle class of the Victorian era. The propagators of the ideology paid little attention to not only the reality of roles played by the majority of women, but even to the 'voices from within' of women in their own homes whom they were seeking to educate and transform. (M. Karlekar, 1991)

Several critical issues and contradictions existed within the reform movements which are ignored if a linear connection between the reform movements and gender equality is drawn. (Mazumdar, V, 1990) Some of the early opposition to the opening of schools for women was backed by an appeal to tradition, which supposedly prohibited women from being introduced to bookish learning, but the real threat may have been the fact that the early schools, and home tutors were organized by Christian missionaries; thereby facilitating proselytization and the exposure of women to harmful Western influences. (M. A. Laird, 1972).

The issue of "female emancipation" disappeared from the public agenda of nationalist agitation in the late nineteenth century due to the refusal of nationalism to make the women's question an issue of political negotiation with the colonial state. While the social reformers challenged

religious orthodoxy, they did not project any view of gender equality. On the other hand, they expected education to make women better in fulfilling the traditional roles of wives and mothers. The appeal of the movements remained confined to an upper class and mainly urban sections. Women's participation in the mass movements against imperialism and the acceptance of gender equality as a basic principle of the new political system provided an impetus to women's educational opportunities. However, post-Independence educational development continued to function as a channel for social mobility, and failed to become an instrument of equality.

## THE COLONIAL CONTEXT

The "women's question" was a central issue in the most controversial debates over social reform in early and mid-nineteenth-century Bengal. Rammohan Roy's campaign against the practice of sati, Vidyasagar's efforts to legalize widow re-marriage and abolish Kulin polygamy; and the Brahmo Samaj's split twice in the 1870s over questions of marriage laws and the "age of consent." were some issues that became important. However there was a sudden disappearance of such issues from the agenda of public debate by the end of the century when the overwhelming issues became directly related to the politics of nationalism. Most of the reform movements combined some elements of revivalism, to assert or reinforce a desired or perceived cultural identity, as distinct from that of the rulers, along with radical or reformist challenges to some facets of the inherited cultural systems leading to a transformed social construction of gender. Various developments during the colonial period like the changing socioeconomic relations, the growth of urban living, new modes of communication and education, as well as the scientific, technological and political dominance of Europe unleashed several tendencies that brought about many contradictions within the reform movements.

Accepting women's status within the family as an index of their own progress and modernity, the

earlier reformers criticised inhuman practices like widow immolation (sati), marriage of child brides to much older men, ban on remarriage of widows, and sought to promote some form of education for women. Orthodox criticism of such ideas was countered by statements that such reforms would counter conversions to Christianity or the drift of oppressed widows to prostitution, and strengthen the stability of the traditional (patriarchal) family. Education of a controlled kind and positions of protected dignity within the family and the community were argued as necessary to enroll women as 'custodians of traditional cultural values', against the onslaught of Westernisation. (CSWI, p.77). The role prescriptions for the respectable women and followers of the Arya Samaj reasserted the traditional claim of higher caste groups to be the leaders within the hierarchical social systems. Similar roles were prescribed to upper class Muslim women. (Milton Israel and N.K. Wagle (eds.), 1983, pp.17-38).

Thus neither the 'modernists' nor the 'revivalists' were interested in the idea of gender equality, nor did they question patriarchal controls over women's freedom, and the hierarchical organisation of Indian society. (Mazumdar, V. and Kumud Sharma, 1990) However some exceptions like Iswarchandra Vidyasagar who took up the cause of widow remarriage, the education of women and criticized polygamy under his mother's influence. He also did not believe in women's status having been high in ancient India as projected by revivalists, or nationalist historians later. He rejected religious rituals, the caste system, and the monopoly of education by elites. He proposed educating women and men equally through a system of mass education half a century before the introduction of compulsory elementary education in Great Britain and nearly a hundred years before some nationalists began to propagate mass education in India. (Mazumdar, V., 1972)

Jyotiba Phule also analysed the inter-relationship- between women's subordination and the maintenance of the caste hierarchy. Phule and his wife, Savitri Bai's efforts for women's

emancipation acquired a radical stance. Pandita Ramabai can also be remembered for projecting women's cause. Though a high caste Hindu herself she challenged patriarchy, both through her personal life and the causes that she adopted for her struggles i.e. self reliance for women, motivating women for self-improvement, and women's participation in public including political life. Her personal independence, her marriage of her own choice to a man of a different linguistic community and caste, and her religious conversion marked her out as a rebel and a feminist. (Pushpa Joshi, 1988) She too advocated the critical necessity of educating women, but outlined the need for women teachers, inspectresses of schools and women doctors as essential to break through the prevailing oppression of 'educated men of this country.' (Kosambi, Meera, 1988)

The new opportunities that emerged as a result of the colonial administrative and legal systems (landed property, education-based jobs and professions-in law, medicine, clerical work, education, the press, publishing etc.) were utilised mostly by the members of the class to which the reformers belonged i.e. those sections of upper caste, upper class Indians who already possessed the requisite cultural skills and social roles. The rise of such elites created disparities between men and women of this class, and these, in turn, were sought to be bridged by a specific type of education for women. This emerged as a key issue in this period when new demands were being made on women. There was a need to modernize and westernize women adequately through education to enhance the image of a modern and civilised India. This could be achieved through education which from now on was to be an additional female accomplishment. (K. Chanana, (ed.), 1988)

Formal education among middle-class women in Bengal spread remarkably in the second half of the nineteenth century. From 95 girls' schools with an attendance of 2,500 in 1863, the figures went up to 2,238 schools in 1890 with a total of more than 80,000 students (Ghulam Murshid, 1983,

p.43). In the area of higher education, Chandramukhi Bose (1860-1944) and Kadambini Ganguli (1861-1923) took their B.A. degrees from the University of Calcutta in 1883, before most British universities agreed to accept women on their examination rolls. Kadambini then went on to medical college and became the first professionally schooled woman doctor.

The development of an educative literature and teaching materials in the Bengali language facilitated formal education among middle-class women. Much of the content of the modern school education was seen as important for the "new" woman, but to administer it in the English language was difficult in practical terms, irrelevant because the central place of the educated woman was still at home. The problem was resolved through the efforts of the intelligentsia, which facilitated literature suitable for the new readers.

Formal education became not only acceptable, but, in fact, a requirement for the new *bhadramahila* (respectable woman), when it was demonstrated that it was possible for a woman to acquire the cultural refinements that till now had been assigned to the European ladies. The nationalist construct of the new woman aimed at the cultural refinement through education as a personal challenge for every woman and to achieve it was to achieve freedom. (Malavika Karlekar, 1991)

The claims of cultural superiority in several different aspects were emphasised: superiority over the Western woman for whom, it was believed, education meant only the acquisition of material skills to compete with men in the outside world and hence a loss of feminine (spiritual) virtues; superiority over the preceding generation of women in their own homes who had been denied the opportunity of freedom by an oppressive and degenerate social tradition; and superiority over women of the lower classes who were culturally incapable of appreciating the virtues of freedom.

Various women writers of the nineteenth century justified the importance of the so-called "feminine virtues." Radharani Lahiri, for instance,

wrote in 1875: "Of all the subjects that women might learn, housework is the most important .... Whatever knowledge she may acquire, she cannot claim any reputation unless she is proficient in housework (Ghulam Murshid, 1983, p.60). Others spoke of the need for an educated woman to develop such womanly virtues as chastity, self-sacrifice, submission, devotion, kindness, patience, and the labors of love. The idea of "femininity" (and hence the acceptance of a new patriarchal order) was evident in the writing of Kundamala Devi, in 1870:

If you have acquired real knowledge, then give no place in your heart to memsahib-like behavior. ...See how an educated woman can do housework thoughtfully and systematically in a way unknown to an ignorant, uneducated woman. And see how if God had not appointed us to this place in the home, how unhappy a place the world would be. (Meredith Borthwick, 1984, pp 60-108)

Education was thus meant to inculcate in women the bourgeois virtues characteristic of the new social forms of "disciplining" like orderliness, thrift, cleanliness, and a personal sense of responsibility, as well as the practical skills of literacy, accounting, and hygiene and the ability to run the household according to the new physical and economic conditions set by the outside world. Keeping intact their femininity women they could go to schools, travel in public conveyances, watch public entertainment programs, and in time even take up employment outside the home. The "spiritual" signs of her femininity were reflected in her dress, her eating habits, her social demeanor, and her religiosity. The new patriarchy advocated by nationalism conferred upon women the honor of a new social responsibility and, by associating the task of female emancipation with the historical goal of sovereign nationhood, bound them to a new subordination.

## ISSUES OF CURRICULUM

The goals of education for women were limited and cautious. The educational system merely enabled women to undertake a wider range of activities

within the traditional framework and ideology. (Mazumdar, 1990 pp.53, 63). It was considered adequate for girls/women to receive basic educational skills and training that would make them better wives and mothers. The nurturing and creative aspects of women's nature were consistently stressed, reinforcing the home and family oriented stereotype. The curriculum revalidated the family as the most important social influence. Thus the promotion of women's education was undertaken not to liberate women's minds or out of esteem for women's rights but to promote the welfare of homes and families and to enhance the prospects of upwardly mobile men.

Elite and reformist families took up the cause of women's education. Private institutions for girls and women were established and zenana education encouraged. Supporters of women's education had to adapt to prevailing social norms, patterns of behavior and attitudes like prejudice, apathy and orthodoxy but within these limits some communities and regions performed better than others. Hindus generally did better than Muslims, not necessarily because purdah hindered the latter as high caste, Hindu women, too, observed seclusion, particularly in North India which lagged behind Madras and Bombay Presidencies in women's education. (Chanana, K., 1988, pp.96-128).

Muslim reformers arguing for women's education were not as successful as the Hindus but they did establish major centers of education for women in Aligarh and Lahore. Indigenous vernacular centers of learning attracted Muslim youth including girls, in Bengal, United Provinces and Bihar. (Chanana, 1988, p.113). Purdah was not as regressive a factor as it might have been in the case of women's education. In the long run, the reform movements strengthened women's 'socialisation for inequality' within the middle class as a whole, and fostered the growth of institutions like dowry and the supremacy of the patriarchal family in women's lives. (CSWI, pp.50-54, 69-77). The controls of caste, community and religious norms which already dominated most women's lives became in fact

stronger and more complex with the added dimension of class norms in the case of the educated middle class. Instead of its expected liberating influence, education became a powerful force in strengthening the sanskritisation process, which manifests the integral links and mutually supportive relationship between patriarchy and hierarchy. (V. Mazumdar and Balaji Pandey, 1988, NCERT)

Despite limitations on girls' access to equal education, access was emancipatory in the long run, contributing to the formation of consciousness and its articulation, and had far-reaching implications for women. Education opened up and widened women's intellectual horizons exposed them to new ideas and other processes of modernisation, altering their view of the world and themselves. While most reformers and British officials propagated a separate type of education for women, the newly-educated women's aspirations were developing on very different lines. Organised representations by women graduates of Calcutta to the Calcutta University Commission (1917) emphatically demanded the same curriculum for women as for men—a demand maintained by women's groups through the twentieth century, until its clear acceptance in the national education policy in 1986.

The Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) highlighted this continued ambivalence regarding the content of women's education within the educational system through the decades after independence. The mandate that the national education system as a whole had to play "a positive Interventionist role" in changing social (not merely women's) attitudes to one of acceptance of gender equality and 'empowerment' of women entered the Education Policy only on the demands of the women's movements. (Report of the First National Conference on Women's Studies, 1981, Bombay)

Participation in the anti-imperialist struggles however encouraged many middle class women to challenge and break out of these controls during the three decades before independence. Post-independence developments promoted the

economic and socio-political dominance and expansion of the middle class. Instead of playing an active role in eliminating socio-economic inequalities and hierarchic power relations that needed the subordination of women to perpetuate itself, middle class women in the post-independence period came increasingly under the influence of expanding class norms. There hardly occurred any change in power relations as patriarchy acquired new forms of ideological control. The legacies of cultural ambivalence left by the nineteenth century movements, and the disintegration of the women's movement curbed radicalism that sought to restructure Indian society on democratic lines.

## WOMEN AGENCY AND EDUCATION

Although middle class women's involvement with the outside world was limited by the ideology that limited their education, formal education led to the emergence of a group of women with a desire for organised action to improve the condition of women. (Chanana, K, 1988, pp.96-128). The early activities of elite women played a role in the identity formation of the new regional elites of all the major religious communities who were eager to provide evidence of the advancement, progress and potential of Indian women-within the colonial rule. Numerous local women's associations, organisations, clubs, societies, samitis and institutions (hostels, rescue homes, shelters, and schools) were founded in both British India and the Princely States which worked for women's upliftment, philanthropy, social work among poor and destitute women and social reform. These later developed into public activities in support of women's democratic rights and contacts with women's groups and movements outside India. The majority of members of these associations were from reformist, educated and privileged families. (Aparna Basu and Bharati Ray, 1990.)

By the turn of the century, there was little opposition to local women's associations engaged in self-help activities. In Western India, reformers from the elite of Parsi, Maharashtrian and Gujarati

Brahmins led the way in the mid-nineteenth century, by establishing girl's schools in the face of stiff opposition. Later, the Prarthana Samaj, founded in the late nineteenth century, organized the Arya Mahila Samaj, Pandita Ramabai set up a series of Mahila Samajs or women's associations, girls' schools, orphanages, and widows' homes. Ramabai Ranade did much work for women and the poor and established the Seva Sadan. In Bengal, Swarnakumari Devi's Sakhi Samiti (1886), a women's association, was concerned with traditional women's handicrafts. (Forbes, 1979).

## REVIVALISTS AND WOMEN'S EDUCATION

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, a section of the Hindu elites, spearheading the rediscovery of their past started seeking a religious foundation for reform. While spreading consciousness and pride in indigenous cultural traditions, institutions like the Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, the Prarthana Samaj etc. encouraged social service, educational and reform activities to bring about social change favoring women's uplift. Models of women's social contributions going beyond the family, available within Hindu tradition, were utilised to demonstrate that Hinduism did not degrade women. Revivalist ideology provided an alternative rationale for improving women's status. It was also stressed that women's uplift was in the interest of not only women but men. However no attempt was made, to alter either tradition or the prevailing value system. Women's role was merely sought to be widened in order to serve the community and the family. Consequently, there was less opposition than earlier.

## NATIONALISM AND WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Nationalism, considered itself superior and sovereign to the West in the spiritual domain of culture. It could not permit an encroachment by the colonial power in that domain and hence rejected proposals

for effecting social reform through the legislative enactments of the colonial state. Unlike the early reformers from Rammohan to Vidyasagar, nationalists of the late nineteenth century were in general opposed to such proposals, for such a method of reform seemed to deny the ability of the nation to act for itself even in a domain where it was sovereign. In the specific case of reforming the lives of women, consequently, the nationalist position was firmly based on the premise that this was an area where the nation was existing on its own, without the intervention of the colonial state.

The impact of the growth of nationalism in the later part of the nineteenth century on the situation of women is debatable. Ghulam Murshid places the debates on the women's issues in the early nineteenth century as 'modernising' attempts in response to the 'penetration' of Western liberal ideas. The limited success of these efforts, in his view, declined perceptibly in the later part of the nineteenth century, with the "hardening of popular attitudes" towards them. The new politics of nationalism 'glorified India's past and tended to defend everything traditional' all attempts at change being viewed as aping Western manners and values. Nationalism in this phase, in his opinion, fostered conservatism in social beliefs and practice. (Murshid, Ghulam, 1983)

Sumit Sarkar has argued that the early 'renaissance' reformers were in any case, not true liberals. Various elements of social conservatism such as caste distinctions, the patriarchal family, the sanctity of ancient scriptures and a preference for symbolic rather than substantial change in social practices were present in the reform movements of the early and mid-nineteenth century. According to Sarkar, these early attempts at reform were not so much the outcome of Western liberal or rationalist values, but more an expression of some 'acute problems of interpersonal adjustments within the family among western educated men.' The "social ostracism and isolation" that they had to face drove them to "a limited and controlled emancipation of

wives as a personal necessity for survival in a hostile social world." (Sarkar, Sumit, 1973, pp.504-534)

While accepting Sarkar's critique of the liberal content of the early reformers' ideology, Partha Chatterjee argues that "the relative unimportance of the women's question in the last decades of the nineteenth century is not to be explained by the fact that it had been censored out of the reform agenda or overtaken by the more pressing and emotive issues of political struggle." In his view, nationalism "resolved the women's question in complete accordance with its preferred goals." (Chatterjee, Partha, 1989, in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds), p.237) A question that can be raised here is what were these 'preferred goals', and how was the 'resolution' achieved? According to Chatterjee, nationalism was not simply a political struggle for power as it related the issue of independence to every aspect of the material and spiritual life of the people. Nationalists were quite sensitive about their own 'self-identity'. This dilemma was finally resolved by accepting a dichotomous framework between the 'material' and the 'spiritual' world, between the 'outer' and 'inner' life. Applied to day-to-day living, this dichotomy separated social space into the home and the world. The world is the external; the domain of the material and typically the domain of the male while the home represents our inner spiritual self, our true identity and must remain unaffected by the activities of the material world. (Chatterjee, Partha, in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.), 1989, p.237)

The material superiority of the West had to be matched by learning modern science and arts - to overthrow colonial rule. But "the inner core of the national culture, its spiritual essence" had to be preserved, protected and strengthened-allowing no encroachments into this "inner sanctum". Matching this new meaning of the home-world dichotomy with the identification of gender roles, Chatterjee discovers "the ideological framework" within which nationalism resolved the women's question. Education could be permitted. "But the 'spiritual' signs of her femininity were now clearly marked-in

her dress, her eating habits, her social demeanor, her religiosity." The new patriarchy of nationalism gave women "a new social responsibility" not to imitate men, but "to maintain the cohesiveness of family life and solidarity with the kin group to which men could not now devote much attention." In addition, by associating the task of 'female emancipation' with the goal of 'sovereign nationhood', nationalism "bound them to a new, and yet entirely legitimate subordination". Lastly, Chatterjee explains the 'disappearance' of the women's question from the political domain by the end of the nineteenth century as the result of nationalism's "refusal to make the women's question an issue of political negotiation with the colonial state." (Partha Chatterjee, 1986).

However one must not ignore how women themselves responded to the challenges of colonial rule and how they dealt with the problem of an identity-crisis. Looking at the interpretation by some Western feminist scholars of Indian women's public activities during this period an idea emerges of a rudimentary women's movement. Gail Minault suggests that the concept of the extended family in Indian culture which could expand virtually indefinitely was used to justify women's concerns beyond the kin group. The metaphor of the extended family certainly assisted middle class women's performance of some public roles through their associations. (Minault, G, 1981 pp.3-15).

Gail Minault and Geraldine Forbes argue that women adapted the institution of purdah or seclusion a custom which defined the separate worlds of men and women to form their own associations. The need to be effective required the avoidance of confrontation by not appearing to be a threat to the established order. By projecting the idea that women's needs and nature were special or different, women were able to mobilise themselves in a public sphere of their own, not open to men. Thus purdah otherwise a hindrance to women mobility, was utilised for women's advancement through women's forums in which women could voice their concerns. Despite the restrictions of purdah and without challenging patriarchal

structures, it was possible for this rudimentary women's movement to acquire a unique strength. (Minault, G., 1982, in Hanna Papanek and Gail Minault (eds; Forbes, 1982, pp.220-221, 236-238) .Mediating structures between the separate female world and the world of public affairs extended the female space. Thus social reform and the growth of nationalist consciousness developed a very complex and contradictory relationship.

## AN EXPANDING FEMALE SPACE

The politicisation of women in the newly extended female space was facilitated by the mediating role played by members of the female intelligentsia . Many became leaders in both the women's and the national movements. Pandita Ramabai was a delegate to the Indian National Congress in 1889 along with nine other eminent women. Sarojini Naidu believed that the fate of women was linked with the fate of the nation. She wielded tremendous influence on contemporary women and saw no conflict between tradition and women's participation in public affairs, in the world outside the home, as the world was an extension of the home. She appealed to women not to ignore their larger responsibility. Sarojini Naidu said: 'It is well for us to remember that the success of the whole (nationalist) movement lies centered in what is known as the woman question. It is not you but we who are the true nation builders", at a lecture delivered at the Indian Social Conference. Calcutta, December 1906. (Gail, Pearson, p. 18 1).

The partition of Bengal in 1905 transformed women's participation in the national movement. The mobilisation of women was attempted through the publication of pamphlets, public meetings held exclusively for women and new nationalist associations (in contrast to the elite associations) which emerged during the swadeshi period. (Everett, pp.54-55) .Women of different classes were involved in growing numbers in such mass struggles , armed struggle and political agitations in different parts of India, in both rural and urban areas. Some British women who made Indian nationalism their own

cause, played important roles e.g Annie Besant and Dorothy Jinarajadasa, both Theosophists, Margaret Cousins, an Irish feminist, and Sister Nivedita, the disciple of Swami Vivekananda. (Barbara Ramusack, 1981 in Minault (ed.)

Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, a revolutionary became a youth mobilizer in the nationalist cause. In 1901 Sarala Devi Chaudhurani formed the Bharat Stri Mahamandal after serious differences with the male leadership of the National Social Conference. After 1910, women having experienced working in local women's associations started taking up the leadership into their own hands and started provincial and national women's associations. This was possible through effective intra-elite, intra-regional networks and cadres. These associations, despite efforts to be national in orientation and representative of as many groups as possible, failed to be actually national in scope, lacking all-India structures, among other shortcomings. But their history is more or less identical with the history of the Indian women's movement. The associations were inevitably elite, bourgeois and urban, consisting of women from the upper crust, women with the advantages of social status, education and privilege but having an aim to serve all women. The women's movement in this phase neither represented the masses nor counted among its members lower caste, illiterate, rural, peasant and poor working women. The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of India, established in 1875 in Calcutta, was the earliest of these bodies. It became a national body in 1896. Though its membership was confined to Christians, its objectives were broad in scope. The Women's India Association (WIA) was formed in 1917 in Madras. In the same year Sarojini Naidu led a delegation of women formed by Margaret Cousins to the Constitutional Reforms (Montagu- Chelmsford) Committee, demanding universal adult franchise. The delegation's memorandum asked for women's franchise on the same basis as men and improved facilities for women's education and health care. (A.Basu, 1990, p.34).

The National Council of Women in India (NCWI) was formed in 1925, and the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) in 1927. By the mid-1930s the WIA and the AIWC claimed a membership of over 10,000 women. The NCWI developed eight provincial Councils by 1934 and had 180 affiliated societies with a membership of over 8000. (Everett, p.73). The WIA undertook to widen its scope of activities beyond fund-raising, social service and women's education and sought to influence government policy on equal rights for women in some areas, and was involved with the issues of suffrage, education and social reform. The WIA's founders included women like Margaret Cousins and Annie Besant, who were not merely suffragists, but political radicals and critics of imperialism in their own country thereby displaying the international dimension of the Indian women's movement. Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, Bhikaji Cama etc. had many supporters among Western feminists who were politically radical. The All India Women's conference, originally only discussed women's education but later on became a permanent body and succeeded in developing branches all over India. Its emphasis was on unity and women's uplift through education, and social and legal reform. It also emphasised women's contribution to national development. By 1932, however, the AIWC had become involved with women's political rights and all questions which affected women and children as well as with social problems such as untouchability. Although its major focus and priority remained the women's question and the elimination of women's backwardness, the future of India gradually became an important concern.

Many members of the WIA were also members of the AIWC and many such members were members of the Indian National Congress, and leaders in the national movement as well. This factor led to close relations between the women's and the national movements. The women's question had gradually evolved from the perspective of uplift

within the traditional framework to that of women's equality. But involvement in the struggle for freedom led the women's movement into dilemmas and contradictions. It was caught between the middle class character of its membership and the increasing radicalism within the national movement with its transformation into a mass movement from the 1920s onwards.

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