Conclusion
CONCLUSION

A distinction needs to be made between pre-independence and post-independence women's movements. The first was essentially about social reform and initiated by men who, under the influence of western liberal ideas, worked against repressive social norms like child marriage, widow remarriage, sati and purdah. Movements to eradicate illiteracy among women and bring them out of the house were largely confined to the upper castes and classes, and did not question patriarchy or the gender based division of labour.

A careful examination of the evolution of Indian society narrates that Vedic women occupied an important place by performing a prominent role, which is equal to man. Women were honoured as a central point in the domestic family as well as in the society. Except property rights, the Vedic women enjoyed all spheres of freedom in the society.

However, in course of time, it appears that their status both in the family and in the society gradually started deteriorating and more and more restrictions were imposed on them. The evil of socio-religious practices, unknown in the ancient period, such as early marriage, enforced widowhood, sati, temple prostitution, dowry system, female infanticide, polygamy etc., have crept in the society very deeply.

Perhaps the worst aspect of this social degeneration was the terrible sufferings and social failings of women and that is why the issue of emancipation of women and her education enjoyed the attention of all social reformers.
After the British Administration came into existence in India, the status of women slowly started rising due to various acts and legislation. During the medieval period many social customs crystallised that adversely affected the cause of women.

The powerful foreigners started marrying Hindu daughters forcibly by converting them to their religion. This led to the evil custom of *sati*. The women were kept in seclusion and this gave rise to the baneful *purdha* system. Education was beyond the reach of women. Many vices such as *sati*, *Purdah* system, child marriage, illiteracy, female infanticide, etc., continued to be prevalent. With the emergence of Bhakti Movement in reaction to foreigner domination and unjust practices of the orthodox Hindus, India witnessed a progressive landmark in the history of Hindu womankind during the Middle Ages i.e, thirteenth to seventeenth centuries. The Bhakti Movement brought a new message and hope for women and the downtrodden. The saints from different parts of India propagated the idea of equality between men and women.

The eminent women saints discarded *purdah*, shunned traditional rigidities, and distinguished themselves as symbols of piety, truth, devotion, etc. Women saints from all over the country were revered and the people congregated around them for enlightenment. In the pre-British period the picture of women was as being uneducated.

The dawn of British regime had brought changes in the socio-economic, educational, cultural and political scenario of Indian society including women. The English education was another boon in disguise to India. It opened the floodgates of western ideas, which almost overwhelmed Indians in the beginning. The most significant outcome of the missionary
activities was the changes in the social life relating to the treatment of women. The women “individualism” emerged and joint family bond began to disappear slowly. During this period men heralded women’s lost glory and their rightful place in the society.

During this period women’s social status was improved due to the social reform movements started by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, D.K.Karve, Mahadev Govind Rande, St.Ramalinga Adigalar, Veerasalingir Pantulu and others. Due to this movement, the British government brought laws to abolish sati, child marriage, infanticide, etc.

The reform movements laid emphasis on the improvement of women and their conditions. Because of these reasons, the position of women has considerably changed. The educated ladies also supported the removal of social evils related to women. At first the women activists and the reformers concentrated only on social reform of women rather than politico-economic elevation. Even in the social reforms they advocated only mild form of reforms because they were afraid if they have to face strong orthodox opposition. Further the feminist activists themselves belonged to Brahmin community or caste Hindus. That is why all the novels written in this period pictured the social life of caste Hindu women and their elevation.

As a great social worker, Mrs.Besant clubbed both freedom movement and social awareness movement together. As a result of it, many women from Tamil Nadu took part in it. Even the women of provincial towns like Salem (1908), Coimbatore (1909) etc., were influenced because of the branches of Theosophical Society established there. Many women were awakened and thereby a seed was laid down for the national as well as the feminist movement. It was at this stage, the educated Indians felt that they
should oppose British rule and this gradually led to the freedom struggle. At the advent of Gandhian Era (1915-1947) women participation was increased rapidly due to Gandhiji’s willingness to bring women on equal footing with men. Further his Ahimsa or Non-Violent Movement attracted more number of women to actively participate in the freedom struggle.

The growth of socio-political consciousness among Indian women gained impetus when Gandhiji organised the mass struggle for freedom. In response to his call women came out of their homes to join the freedom struggle and they even went to jails, struggling against lathis and bullets. In the wake of national movements it became easier for women to leave their homes to involve themselves in the struggle for the nation’s cause. Before Gandhiji entered the political scene, very few women took part in the social welfare and revolutionary movements.

Socio-political consciousness gained through participation in several movements was sufficient for women to shed a number of socio-religious evils from which they have long been suffering. Further the mass movement of freedom struggle invited them to take part in it enthusiastically without any fear. The spread of this movement in many small and big towns and villages created confidence in the minds of educated middle class women to come forward to the political strike against the social restriction. Since they gained experience in the public life, they actively participated in the feminist movement. All these activities helped Indian women to gain self-confidence. They learnt to rely on themselves. Such participation had a direct impact on the attitudes of women.

The awareness of females in the semi-urban centres strengthened the spirit of the urban-based women. Further the women of semi-
urban centres mostly belonged to middle and below middle class and non-
Brahmin community.

Between 1910 and 1920, a number of social organisations for 
women grew rapidly because of the extension of education in the semi-urban 
areas and the emergence of freedom fighters in provincial towns. In 1917, the 
women of Madras formed the Women’s Indian Association. The National 
Council of Women in India was formed in 1925 and the All India Women’s 
Conference in 1927 by affiliating regional associations. These have also been 
considered as some tremendous development in the field of primary education 
for girls. These women’s movements wanted not only economic independence 
but also political rights. The women’s movement in India has been growing 
because women’s contribution to the country’s freedom has been recognised.

When the feminist activists were involved in the liberation of 
women socially and economically, they learnt lesson from the freedom 
movement that they have to fight for political rights i.e. civil liberties also. So 
they fought for “voting right for women”. Since the Government was not 
ready to give equal right to women they wholeheartedly involved themselves 
in the freedom movement to get the support of political leaders. Both women 
movement and freedom movement strengthened one another.

Both the Indian National Congress and the Indian Women 
Franchise Movement joined together, because of their identical origin and 
opinions without realising the individual importance of Independence and 
Franchise. This was due to the fact that the Indian National Congress was the 
main organisation, which brought Independence and Congress was fully 
committed entirely for the cause of Freedom. The same was the case with the 
Women Franchise Movement. They struggled for Women Franchise and did
not have any programme for the cause of women “after the getting of women franchise”. In the pre-Independence period, both movements had definite objectives.

Women discarded social taboos, came out to move freely in the society and attained their target in education and politics. The National Movement after the attainment of the freedom also became a separate force. However, leaders of the women’s movement joined the National Movement and displayed their capability and capacity to struggle and achieve freedom and equality of status with men.

They had restricted their activities in pressuring the Government for social legislation, which may or may not have any practical effect. For example, they were responsible for the enactment of the law against Sati and Dowry, but in practice Dowry and Sati exists even today, often in very humiliating form. Deorala of Rajasthani sati case is a sample for the existence of sati even today.

After independence in 1947, mysterious problems had to be tackled and hardly any thought was given to women’s role in politics. In order to increase the level of representation of women in legislatures and other administrative bodies and positions of power, certain steps appear necessary as a transitionary measure. Reservation of seats for jobs is one such step till such time when more women were able to avail of educational and job opportunities on an equal footing with men.

Today, there are many educated women in Tamil Nadu, who in the name of modernity, are ready to sacrifice even the best of their culture and traditions and become a monetary resource of their family without the world
conscience. At the same time there are numerous women still living under medieval notions and superstitions. They observe seclusion, love of jewellery, and nurture blind faith. These are the main cause for Hero Worship in the elections, thereby nailing the coffin of democracy.

Due to one third of reservation, Tamil Nadu is having a lot of village Panchayat Presidents, Panchayat Union Chairwomen, Municipal Chairwomen, Corporation Mayors, etc.

Political status of women can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in shaping and sharing of power and in the value given by society to the role of women. The Indian Constitution guarantees political equality through the institution of adult Franchise and the right to equality, which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex. The national movement and the leadership of Gandhiji acted as major forces in the achievement of equal status.

The equal political status will not be realised by mere declaration in the constitution. Voting in the elections do not bestow equal status. If adequate opportunities to take part in the deliberations of the nation are not provided participation has no meaning. The socio-economic conditions are not conducive for the effective participation of the women in political affairs. That should be changed.

The introduction of adult franchise together with the removal of all discrimination on ground of sex provided under the new Constitution have been great steps towards the complete emancipation of the Indian women. Franchise granted to women not only serves them a weapon to press their own specific interests in legislatures but also enables them to influence in State
politics affecting the entire India in the political, economic and cultural fields. The granting of adult franchise implies the recognition of the right of women to participate in the decisive sphere of the national life, the sphere of politics where all important decision affecting the economic, social and cultural life of the people are taken.

The granting of franchise to women also implies admission of the fact that she is not inherently inferior to man in capacity and that if given free and adequate opportunity, she can also function in responsible post as Minister, Ambassador or Governor.

The problem of equal status and equal participation must be understood in the context of a society, for in a traditional society like India, the participation of women in public life is not encouraging. Women are keeping low profile as far as political life is concerned.

After 1947 women’s movement became ineffective. The feminist leaders used all their energy for achieving positions as a compensation and necessary reward for all their toil in the national struggle. After occupying positions of honour and responsibility, they did not bother about the unfulfilled objectives. They failed to remodel the movement in keeping with the changing circumstances.

All the activities of the feminist movement except in the field of education have come to a standstill. Even these educated women are just satisfied with seeking jobs or better placement from the maternal standpoint and do not evince any interest in politics. Ignorance still reigns supreme among the women masses. Every election finds some women worshipping the ballot boxes before casting votes. Nothing spectacular has
been done to remove superstitions, to educate them and to enable them to change with the changing times and to create in them a sense of self-confidence.

Hence, the mere acquisition of franchise is not enough. Along with this right, women must also realise their responsibilities as citizens. An extensive educational campaign among women is needed to make them conscious of their responsibilities as the citizens of a free India. The task of enlightened women of India is to make use of the political rights in a progressive manner, for social, economic and cultural advancement of the nation on fruitful and rational lines.

There is no need for reservation and the word reservation itself creates a power structure which tries to allow reservation for women as a gift, and the percentage of reservation is not a gift or bonus. It is a fundamental right to the every human being and especially for the women, since she plays a major role as a creator of the human race by the way of reproduction and automatically it becomes a matter of right and it emerges from the life itself. The right is a thing not to beg from others, but it has to be taken by the person who deserves for it and it has to be exercised as a matter of legitimacy.