CHAPTER-6
NEEDS AND DESIRES
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There were tremendous changes in women’s perceptions that occurred during this period. They did step out from the cloisters of their homes into the male preserve of politics and power. Whatever be the rationale explaining this novelty (for example, women’s special quality of self-sacrifice emphasized by Gandhi), the actual process entailed the blurring of the domestic / public division. The ethos of house work as a women’s only work and wifehood or motherhood as the supreme fulfillment of her life underwent an alteration, since it was proclaimed that a woman also had important obligations to the country, outside the parameters of the home.\(^1\) The awareness produced by anti-colonial struggle was reflected in the world of women. Perception of need to organize emerged, and this was reflected in the creation of women’s associations.\(^2\) It may now be safely stated that anywhere in India, the need for the education of girls as much of boys was recognized as a cardinal need.\(^3\) That was seen as the key to the ending of many a social evils. The need for educating rural women was recognized as is evident from writing in Hindi


\(^2\) Ibid., p. 204.

\(^3\) Desai, A.R., Social Background of Indian Nationalism, Popular Book Depot, Bombay, 1959, p.256.
journals of the time. In an article in Chand, “Gramon mein stree shiksha”, the writer declared that it was useless to speak of women's education without providing education to rural women. The educated urban women were called upon to go to the rural areas and work in this area. Therefore, women who regarded education as the key to their salvation, launched a vigorous campaign for women's education, organize public meetings, rallies and conferences. To these gatherings, they brought passionate eloquence, yet a reasoned self-restraint, an alluring charm together with a high timber of sincerity which came not from books but their agonized hearts, endeavouring to bring enlightenment to minds lost behind the murky blinds of ignorance and hidebound custom. The need of women's education was based on some logical reasons -- (1) If girls studied, the age of consent for marriage would be raised. (2) by raising the age of consent of marriage, the number of child widow would decrease, (3) As more girls come out to study, purdah would be abolished.

Men were well educated, powerful and honest in the glorified past of our country, even women had also all these qualities. In that period, women were respected and they participated in public ceremonies. But, in the contemporary time period, western countries and Japan were far ahead in reforms. The reason of the development of these countries was that they gave the same importance to women's education as to men's education. 'If we want the development of

4 Chand, May 1937, p.63.
6 Ibid., p.15.
our country, then we should consider the importance of women’s education immediately’. The type of education for women was a controversial matter. The opinion of some people was that as the duties of men and women were different, their education-pattern should also be different. The education pattern that was not suitable even for boys, then how could it be useful for girls? Therefore, girls should be provided education according to the following education pattern – (1) They should be taught in mother-tongue because it could provide the knowledge of each subject in a simple way and mind did not have to do hard work. (2) The languages, English and Sanskrit, should be taught only for introductory knowledge (3) There should be more emphasis on Hindi language because it was considered as a language of whole country (4) girls should also provide the education of religion, politics, house-management, health, cooking, sewing, music and painting.8

This type of education would increase the health and intelligence of girls and they could be able to become a good wife or mother (Grahini–Dharma). It was also important that the work of women education should be in the hands of women and women should not expect any help from men for the development of their own society because it would create obstructions in the path of women’s education.9

8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
condition of India would become as in the time period of *Sita* or *Savitri*.\(^{10}\)

Therefore women were requested, not to leave the country’s own language, dress etc. and to get education, and do reformation in the country. The slogan, 'education for all' broke up the discriminative structure of the society. In social life, rights are achieved only when there is entry in the intellectual production in addition to physical labour. In the fields of intelligence and creativity, the rise of conception of equality takes place only after the ending of sex discriminatory conditions. So, women education was the first step towards the freedom of women from the sex discriminatory condition.\(^{11}\) In this sense, the women education was, not confined to the literacy or the image of educated wives but the part of efforts to diminish the power of exclusive rights, The concept of women’s equality could not be formed without their education, similarly their, identity and self-reliant image was not possible without education.\(^{12}\)

It was only ancient civilization of India, because of that our country was the leader of the whole universe. In the contemporary time period also, "India is shining because of her ideal principles and high morals even in this critical situation also and the other communities of the world are looking towards India

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12 Ibid., p 232.
with a view of wonder." Therefore, by avoiding this ancient civilization, how can any social reform movement be successful? There was a lot of difference in the conditions of India and western countries during the time period under review. In the western countries, the women movement was political; the population of women was more than that of men, no system of joint family. Men did not want to bear competition because of women, therefore women also tried to save their economic rights. Whereas in India, population of women was less than that of men, no existence of economic question like western nations, it was not necessary for women to earn their livelihood. Women were far behind in education and the existence of women's mind power was not useful for their practical life. According to one writer – women movement should be given shape of religious development, look of mental development and high social condition instead of economic independence or moral rights. It is clearly reflected that even some women also wanted to reduce the western influence on the Indian women movement.

The writing and speeches of Besant and Naidu presented the goals of the women’s movement in women’s uplift terms. Besant and Naidu connected women’s uplift to national development by pointing out the importance and distinctive contributions that women could make to development. They were

14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
also prescribing a public role for women. But this idea clashed with the prevailing norms among the educated elite that high caste Hindu women should be secluded and restricted to the private sphere. In actual, it was assumed that, there was widespread faith in the idea of a golden age in ancient India where women were educated and performed public roles, the relevance of ancient ideals to modern development needs was adopted by the educated elite. The pattern of women's lives and their attitudes towards societal norms and values should be significantly shaped by the models of womanly conduct inherited from the past. Although, the pativarta- the loyal, chaste, all sacrificing wife had perennial remained the dominant cultural ideal of female behaviour for Indian women but the existence of an alternative paradigm of Indian womanhood, namely, the veerangana who represents the basic quality of shaurya or heroic courage and bravery, had been also argued. It was emphasized that the veerangana ideal was adopted by political and social reform movement of the past century whereby the images and stories of women warriors came to acquire a diversity of meanings that enabled them to serve a multiplicity of causes and purposed. The tenacity and persistence of the veerangana image reflects the enormous potential of India's cultural tradition and there is a need for a creative reinterpretation of our rich heritage by

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16 Everette, J.M., Social Change in India, Heritage Publisher, Delhi, 1985, p.86.
women's movement rather than an outright rejection of the same from an elitist western viewpoint.\footnote{18}

Most women realized that in order to discover new horizons of 'becoming' and new unfolding of 'being' one has to pass over several thresholds and negotiate many crossroads. At each crossroad one had to encounter the excitement of the awakening of aspirations and struggle with multiple invitations and evocations in order to touch the depth of one's being and find the freedom to travel towards the new horizons of being and becoming.\footnote{19} Since women were the source of family continuity, they had to encounter the male identity. This encounter was legitimized and sanctified in the institution of marriage. Social customs dictated that marriage for a woman means uprooting and re-rooting. It meant an entry and acceptance into the space of others. This critical shift in the life of a woman had been romanticized, and its reality of anguish, anxiety and apprehension had been covered up. In the reality of marriage the hope of a romantic encounter remained unfulfilled, creating feelings of meaninglessness in many women.\footnote{20} The posing of the question as to whether 'marriage is an absolute necessity or not' was itself a pointer to the advance made in the conception of woman’s function in life. After the *Vedic* period, an unmarried woman could not live in the society in a respectable and socially approved way. But now women were feeling that

\footnote{18}{Ibid.}
\footnote{20}{Ibid., p. 35.}
'marriage is not the only goal in life'. In actual the effect of liberal education, the value attached to the development of personality and the urge for economic independence were some of the main causes which were responsible for generating this new outlook. At the same time, it is also true that there were many cases of girls who were forced to remain unmarried, in spite of the fact that they wish to marry, because of lack of appropriate partner or because of economic reasons.\textsuperscript{21} In this context, \textit{Sudha}, the Hindi journal reported that – “twenty girls of Amil caste threatened to do suicide or to become Muslims if their caste would not end the custom of dowry”.\textsuperscript{22} A few women could afford to live an unmarried life, so, it proved the change that had come about both in their personal attitude and the materialistic environment. Many women began such a journey but some of them got weary and came back on the prescriptive role models. Others continued along the path to live and discover the changing bio-social, socio-psychological and psycho-existential facts of life. They experienced an inner compulsion and an urgency to reach their destination—namely, dignity and freedom.\textsuperscript{23}

The destiny of women still seemed to be that of remaining captive to the universe of the cultural attainment, irrespective of their efforts. They remained within the confines of the role models prescribed by traditional society. They often venture forth in search of a togetherness with dignity but got trapped by

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\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Sudha}, September 1933, p.242.  \\
\textsuperscript{23} Parikh, I.J. & Garg, Pulin K., \textit{op. cit.}, p.37.  
\end{flushright}
romanticism and sentimentality. After passing out of the early years of marriage and motherhood had been experienced for a few years there came a moment when women wanted to re-engage with the world and with their beings. Now, they had discovered that the roles they had so far played had been inadequate and insufficient. They had lived through disillusionment and remained psychologically unrooted. Many women were suffering ill treatment from husband and their relations in law. That is why; the movement for dissolution of marriage had a specific place in the various movements which were happening in contemporary society for, the development of women and the prevention of their rights. At the time of marriage, parents did not understand it necessary to compare the behaviour, interests or standard of living, of their daughters. They became free from their duties only by submitting the daughter to unknown males. According to the norms of society, women did not have any right to know about their life partners. Many times women have to live life with husbands who, suffered from deadly diseases or were not compatible. Under such circumstances dissolution of marriage become the only rational solution. Women were slowly becoming aware of this solution. The supporters of this opinion tried to get some legal help in this context.

24 Ibid., p.69.
25 Saraswati, May 1931.
26 Ibid.
On the other hand, the orthodox people were using their power in opposing the movement for dissolution of marriage in the name of chastity (satitava). According to them, ‘the only duty of a woman is to live like a shadow of her husband for the whole life.’

In the opinion of a woman scholar, the law of dissolution of marriage would not be an obstacle in the determination of those women who had proud of their ideals and chastity. But, in India, the life pertaining to husband and wife of all people was not dependent on fidelity in a husband and all women were also not virtuous in reality.

Some women had even experienced a transient interlude and discovered the hollowness and emptiness of sexual escapades. Their search for comfort and protection only led them to exploit themselves and others. Their attempts to escape from the barrenness of their existence only provided them with a momentary illusion of togetherness. Their fear of themselves and of being alone only brought about indignity, humiliation and demands for surrender.

Women’s articles insisted on the need to retain one’s place in one’s family, on the need for respectable employment and a place to stay and on the right to keep one’s property or if ‘fallen’, to receive the same treatment as their male seducers or unlawful partners. Women writers also emphasized on preventive action and they drew attention to the existence of women’s sexuality and emotional needs, often thematizing the thin line between marriage and

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27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
prostitution, at least from a woman's point of view. According to a woman writer, Bhagavati Devi, the right to divorce was important, and widow remarriage was possible only for young and beautiful child widow, employment was the only alternative to begging and prostitution for other widows.\textsuperscript{31}

Hindi journals made public even taboo issues concerning women in order to force a re-discussion and redefinition of notions and norms, to justify preventive action (also against dowries and child-marriage) and to justify respectable alternatives. The letters and first-person narratives of womanhood, published in the contemporary journals, introduced a sense of urgency and a powerful element of personalization. In reality, in this manner the reader was forced to confront the cruelty women experienced and to reconsider the common-sense notions that underpinned such cruelty. The life stories and letters legitimized women's voices, the need for kin relationship to be instinctically affective and the women's right to suggest solutions to their own problems, thus giving them a new sense of individual worth and emotional life.\textsuperscript{32} Thus, these narratives also allowed a bold critique of social and family norms. In 'chitthi-patri' columns in \textit{Chand}, women highlighted many social evils through their letters to the editors. These letters depicted boldly sensational cases concerning women and the family while holding 'society'

\textsuperscript{32} Orsini, Francesca, op. cit., p.276.
responsible. "A woman wrote about the need to acknowledge female sexuality, still unmarried after the age of twenty because her parents could not offer enough dowry, she had been unable to 'contain her youthfulness and got married in secret a boy she fancied. After three years of this marriage she became mother of a child and she had to leave her parent's house, moved in with her lover. Her parents persuaded her to move back with them with a promise to marry them properly, but they threw out her lover and now threatened to marry her off to a forty years old."33

The changing economic order defined the contours of 'respectable' and 'disrespectable' sexuality more sharply, confining acceptable forms of female sexuality within the sphere of reproduction, namely the family. Early signs of such shifts were evident in the plea for widow remarriage, which was itself an attempt to control the potentially dangerous sexuality of the upper caste widow. The social origins of changing conceptions of male and female sexuality had to be successfully concealed and made to appear as the inevitable result of male and female biology. In other words, the acknowledgement of the inherent promiscuity of the male compared with the necessary chastity, or at least monogamous fidelity, of the woman had to be naturalized and made a part of the 'common sense' of the middle class.34 As a result a woman's sexuality was firmly linked to her responsibilities to the

33 "Chitthi -Patri", in Chand, May 1934, pp.100-101.
34 Nair, Janaki, Women and Law in Colonial India, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1996, p.148.
family and kin group i.e. reproduction, while male sexuality alone laid claim to autonomy and pleasure. Once this gender division was naturalized, arrangements had to be made for men to seek safe and assured forms of pleasure outside marriage.\(^{35}\) The custom of mismatched marriages also became the cause of the growing resentment of critical women against the discriminatory social norms of the patriarchal family system in India which subjected women to both mental agony and denied them control over their sexuality and fertility. Especially the increasingly popular practice of widowers remarrying greatly agitated their minds because it was responsible for adding to the number of child widows, for claim to autonomy and pleasure, laid by male sexuality and thus posing a grave social problem.\(^{36}\)

The custom of polyandry, which was practiced by poor people owning limited quantities of land, also became the cause of sexual exploitation of women. British administration who noted the practice since the early twentieth century recorded that even when there was only one married brother, the other brothers had free access to his wife.\(^{37}\) The arguments in its favour were that ‘it avoids fragmentation of land, checks population and binds the family together’. The sexual liberty which gave brother-in-law sexual access was sought to be justified by giving the example of the Mahabharta: the five

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35 Ibid.
Pandavas had only one Draupadi. In this context, a woman wrote a letter in ‘Chitthi-Patri’ column in Chand and raised the issue of a daughter-in-law’s insecure status even within the household. “After her marriage her elder brother-in-law had made advances which she had discarded. Both her husband and mother-in-law had tried to persuade her to give in. Her mother-in-law had said, ‘both are sons of my womb and you should consider them one and the same’.

This type of letters raised a powerful voice: they spoke of domestic cruelty and insecurity, of repressed sexuality and of the lack of alternative homes and respectable ways of survival for widows, abandoned wives, and single women. An ‘unfortunate’ Gujarati girls from a trading family, married at eleven to an uneducated and lowly family, voiced a more general critique of women’s lack of rights in a Hindu family and raised the issue of women’s definition of their own ideals. In the letter, which was published in Chand, she wrote of her husband’s beatings and general irresponsibility. She said that when her brother had come to take her back he was abused and sent away. She had no right to her family property. Hindu society and Hindu law did not help her. So, she said:

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38 Ibid. p.57.
"To serve your husband to the tradition of the Vedas is fine, but only when you have chosen him".41

The sufferings of uprooting (leaving parent’s house) and the difficulties of re-rooting (living in husband’s house) resulted in several critical orientations and attitudes. The woman found it difficult to use the resources of the husband for the development of their self only because of their status in the family. Therefore, many women, when confronted with the statement that it is legitimate to claim familial resources to develop their own being and to forge a meaningful relationship with the environment, refused to seek these resources / or even accept the legitimacy of such a demand from their side. The women, themselves were unwilling to claim the husband’s wealth and had learnt to perceive the husband’s wealth as being ‘his’ and not ‘ours’.42 In reality, they also carried resentments from the past which prevent them from accepting or claiming such resources. Further, women felt that their husband gave those resources either to humour them or because the woman had fought for them, but in neither case were they being given out of conviction. The husband’s basic attitude was: ‘You have everything, what more do you need?’43 So, the trauma of leaving natal home after marriage seemed to have been a common element of women’s experience. If a woman was insecure in her natal home

42 Parikh, I.J. & Garg, Pulin K., op. cit., p.68.
43 Ibid.
she was doubly so in her marital home (husband’s home). In fact the relationship, she had in her natal home remained in some sense stronger. In those days, the words ‘saha-dharmini’ (wife) or ‘Ardhangini’ (life partner) etc. were remained only to increase the glory of literature. The women, who had real rights of these words, were rare because there was no mutual understanding between husband and wife. The result of this tyranny was that many women stood against men by shouting for their freedom.

Women were facing a dilemma, in terms of relatedness between her status as a transient occupying a position of trust at her parent’s place and of being an outsider at her-in-law’s place. Her social location might be rooted in the system, but her psychological location remained cloudy. There was always the fear that the fact of being an outsider would be thrown in their face. All their efforts to maintain the well being of the system and its significant roles could crumble into dust and become meaningless by the smallest reference to this fact. Their sense of location was thus very fragile. Woman spoke about the need for a respectable place in family and employment. In this context, a letter of a woman from Rajputana was published in Chand.

“A woman of twenty five with children, educated up to the middle examination, had been abandoned by her husband. She

46 Parikh, I.J. & Garg, Pulin K., op. cit., p.70.
now asked for information about any institution which might
shelter her."  

There were a large number of women who wanted to know the various
jobs which could be done by them to earn livelihood. In the time period under
review, because of the influence of the western civilization, some women were
doing jobs in the field of medicine, writing, editing, law etc. Some
organizations were also helping those uneducated women, who were,
disapproved by their relatives, being not given shelter, suffering pain. Such
type of women had to either suffer pain for whole life or work hard for their
livelihood. These women because of restrictions, wanted to do small scale
business at home. This type of opportunities proved their intelligence and
abilities in areas other than the traditional field of art, dance and music. Women
seemed to experience two sets of feeling simultaneously. One set was of joy,
pride, respect and affirmation of themselves. They were full of hope and a
sense of fulfillment. They felt a sense of being part of the system in which they
attempt to carve out a role for themselves, experience equality and were able to
influence their own destiny. This brought to them a sense of dignity. However,
they were also acutely aware that 'their success and responsiveness to the
present is shrouded in a mantle of societal suspicion, contempt, sexual
insinuation and other prejudices. This generates feeling of anger, resentment

47 Chand, October 1926, p.604.
48 Madhuri, February 1924, p.108.
49 Parikh, I.J. & Garg, Pulin K., op. cit., p.72.

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and sometimes guilt and anxiety. As such, they were often on a see-saw of feelings – on the one hand, joy in the affirmation of being and becoming, and feelings of vulnerability on the other.

The letters and articles published in the Hindi journals were producing a critique of public discourse on the Hindu family. At a time when a middle-class morality was gaining currency which did not acknowledge (at least publicly and in principle) polygamy, incest and other illegitimate marriage alliances, and which placed great emphasis on the high ideal of stree-dharma. These letters and narratives revealed a more fluid and precarious reality for women as wives. Women’s letters and narratives showed the underside of stree-dharma and voiced the argument that such a demanding dharma should have certain redeeming conditions attached, namely a recognition of women as human individual and the right for them to define their own roles and dharma.50 The ideal was thus reconfirmed, but letters by women expressed the need to re-negotiate norms concerning the family and to explore and redefine women’s role and sphere of activity. The text in Hindi journals also introduced the notion of a ‘right to feel’.51 This notion defended and legitimizied individual feelings, both of men and women. Women wanted that, their custodian society should consider their critical condition leniently and, women themselves should protect their limit and dignity, to establish courage and faith in them. Nothing

50 Orsini Francesca, op. cit., p. 289.
51 Ibid.

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could be happened without cooperation therefore, until women would not consider this fact and men would not introduce their generosity, as long as, these two best specimens of creation could not do progress. According to some women, “there can be reform to a significant extent if some courageous men and women enter in the work field with courage and self-sacrifices.”

Women’s movements all over India were making rapid progress and men and women were trying to understand one another and work in cooperation to spread the various reforms for the welfare of men, women and children. The demands made by the women of India in forceful expressions would have shocked the most zealous social reformer in the beginning of the twentieth century. But revolutionary writings and speeches demanding complete sex equality had become a legitimate part of the feminist movement in India.

Growing up within a family which emphasized equality but which at critical moments, made a differential choice between a son and a daughter shattered the female child’s image of her parents, their values and integrity, and often engendered agonizing battles with her parents. The experience of feeling rejected and the compulsive need to create acceptance for herself, compelled the female child to conform to the norms and expectations laid down by the family: ‘You are a guest and must be at your best.’ Some deviations might be

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tolerated here but no deviations would be permitted in your other home. The parents rarely allowed a girl to feel that she belonged to them. The birth of a baby girl was calamity enough. She was greeted with general gloom and a heaviness of heart. Had she been a boy, there would have been festivities, singing by family women, visitation from dancing eunuchs, feasts for brahmans, congratulations from relatives and friends. When the father was asked about the baby, he might answer, if it had been a girl, that nothing was born. In Hindu tradition a son holds a very important position. It was felt that the presence of son was absolutely necessary for the proper performances of many sacraments, especially those carried out upon the death of parents and imperative to the well being of their soul. On the other hand, a daughter had negligible ritual significance except when by “gifting away” (kanyadan) their daughters in marriage the parents attained a place in heaven. Thus, during the period of freedom struggle, besides the political struggle, women were also grappling with social discrimination. This may not be directly related to imperialism but with increasing awareness, women became more sensitive to this issue.

In spite of social discrimination, women felt that they had also same responsibilities for social development as those of men. The society which

54 Parikh, I.J. & Garg, Pulin K., op. cit., p.102.
55 Dua, Shiva, S., Society and Culture in Northern India, Indian Bibliographies Bureau, Delhi, 1985, pp.137-138.
avoided the responsibilities of women could not be developed. It was considered necessary to view women's responsibilities in the construction of nation. The real advance which had been made during this period was actually in the revolution that had been brought about in the outlook with regard to the conception of the status of woman and her role in society. New woman was no longer looked upon as a child bearing machine and a helot in the home. She had acquired a new status and a new social stature. 

Women's Struggle and Broader Social Reality

The social reform movement had not only focused attention on the disabilities suffered by Hindus in different parts of India and formed public opinion but also brought together progressive minds from other communities. It had come into being because political workers wished to avoid activities that might divide opinion in the country, and it had passed through a phase of great testing. The absence of any body of opinion which did not feel that British rule had become an obstacle to progress and the wide participation of women in public life which made for more effective discussion of problems of women's status and rights, were the main features of an altered situation in the society. The women's movement in India has followed the outline of similar movements in other lands but in some vital aspects, it was different because

57 Madhuri, May 1928, p.523.

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Indian women were encouraged by men social reformers and leaders like Gandhi and Nehru. Further, the battle in India initially was not so much against male domination as against the forces of superstition, apathy and ignorance that crushed the spirit of men and women alike. The women’s movement in India therefore, has had a contribution to make, through women to the regeneration of a country which was suffering under the multiple ills of foreign domination, poverty, ignorance and an entirely outmoded social order. This has been a tremendous task especially since women themselves have been the worst victims of these ills.⁶⁰

There had been a strong movement towards the emancipation of women from legal disabilities. After the Government of India Bill of 1919, various provinces granted the franchise to women on the same terms as men, so that women in Bombay, Madras, the united Province, Bengal and the Central Province were enfranchised and had also right to become member of legislative bodies and to exercise all civic rights.⁶¹ In Asia continent, the right, to cast vote and to become member of Government Legislature was given to the women of Burma. There men and women had same rights, therefore, Burmese women of free nature could utilize this new right properly.⁶² The Women’s Indian Association (WIA) organized a London Committee in 1928 to maintain a regular contact with women’s organization in Britain to seek the support of

⁶² Madhuri, February 1923, p.201.
British opinion for reform in Indian electoral laws. Five delegates from the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) attended the International Congress of Women for suffrage and equal citizenship in Berlin in 1930. In 1933, Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Muthu Lakshmi Reddy and Begum Hamid Ali went to give evidence before the joint parliamentary committee on the franchise question.  

Gain of political rights provided momentum to the Indian women movement. Many women organizations had been established in all provinces of India during the period under review. The main aim of women's agitation was to do overall development of female society. All India Women's Conference (AIWC) provided a nation wide platform to the Indian women, to struggle for the same cause. This organization also prescribed some objectives in this context: (1) To convey the duties to the women, (2) To abolish social evils, (3) Right of vote to women on the same terms and conditions as to men, (4) Equal rights and facilities to women, (5) To form women's organizations for their own development and education, etc. The AIWC continued to hold out for comprehensive rather than piecemeal legislation as questions of monogamy, divorce and right of inheritance were all connected. The conference appointed a special committee for the legal disabilities of women. Throughout 1934, an intensive campaign was conducted to educate women and make them interested


Madhuri, July 1939, p.705.
in their rights. 24th November was declared Legal Disabilities Day. Crowded meetings were held in every constituency addressed by lawyers and prominent citizens—men and women, and thousands of signatures were collected to support the demands for reform.\(^6)^5\) The AIWC passed a resolution demanding once more that a commission be appointed to enquire into the whole question of removing the legal disabilities of women.

In actual, the struggle for the women's emancipation was embedded in the broader mobilization of women in the movement for national liberation. This mobilization emerged as part of a larger strategy of broadening the base of anti–imperialist movement, drawing more and more sections of the Indian people into the fight for independence from Britain. At the end of nineteenth century, male nationalist saw no further necessity for the reform of Indian tradition but at that time an important new force was emerging, that of women themselves, articulate, newly educated and critical of the kinds of reforms that had been initiated in their name by male reformers.\(^6)^6\) By questioning the roles that had long been prescribed for them, women made it clear that they would soon be setting an agenda of their own. The spread of women's education was accompanied by the growing self–confidence of women inspired by the national movement. Those women who were newly politicized increasingly expressed an unwillingness to discuss issues related to women under the liturgy

\(^{66}\) Nair, Janaki, op. cit., pp.123–124.
of 'social' problem. They were moving outside and breaking the circles of her limited work place. According to one woman writer, males had been neglecting women’s equal rights because of excess of their physical power. She even cited the example of many great personalities of the past, like Surdas, Tulsidas etc. who acknowledged the ignorance, agility and social incongruity of women. Indian women’s unique cultural heritage also provided a tradition of women as strong and powerful beings and with their position in the social structure which offered them the possibility of independent existence. But the past was largely fantasy whereas their present was harsh reality. There had been no retardation from demands and no time for confronting one’s real self. That is why; women felt helpless and fragile and lived through the agony of being violated.

Women organized themselves and demanded facilities for improvement in their status. The British authorities were not taking keen interest to grant franchise rights to the women of a subject nation when their own women did not enjoy, in many spheres, complete equality with men. Indian women won many rights and privileges not only because of their own courage and initiative but because the men supported and encouraged them during Gandhi era. So, women participated in 1926 elections and K.D. Chattopadhyay was the first

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Indian women to fight election. However, as the franchise was limited to taxpayers only, women’s participation as voters as also members of legislatures was limited the Indian women’s movement approached the suffrage campaign as a means of achieving social reform. The leaders believed that the enfranchisement of women would mean additional support for reform legislation. The women’s movement was very successful in influencing the British and Indian political elite, it was unsuccessful in mobilizing women to vote. After the congress adopted the policy of adult suffrage and the principle of equal rights for men and women in April 1931, nationalist - minded women leaders from three organizations the Women’s Indian Association (WIA), All India Women Conference (AIWC) and National Conference of Women of India (NCWI) – met together to formulate coordinated suffrage demands which supported Congress policy. These women were able to get their organization to agree to these demands which approached the issue of women’s representation from an equal right perspective. The 1935 political reforms extended the voting rights to literate people besides the tax—payers, wives of voters too were given franchise, seats were reserved for women in legislatures. Some sections of the feminine leadership opposed these provisions as they wanted equality with men and not special privileges or reservation of seats.

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69 Mankekar, Kamla, Women In India, Central Institute of Research & Training in Public Coorporation, New Delhi, 1975, pp.10–11.
71 Ibid., pp.118–119.
However, the position remained unchanged and in the 1936 election a fairly large number of women entered in legislatures.\textsuperscript{72}

The political struggle of women under the protection of the nationalist movement was by no means restricted only to those who were beginning to experience the sufferings of the public world of work. The most unique about the Indian case was the mobilization of entire families in the struggle for independence, including women who otherwise led very traditional and conservative lives. The mobilization was in large part enabled by recasting the role of middle class women. They could play an active role in nationalist politics without any loss of femininity due to a redefinition of the public political space as an extension of the family.\textsuperscript{73} The opponents of the political mobilization of women did not feel the contemporary conditions favourable to this new and courageous movement. According to them, this was an imitation of the west, where the main aim of political struggle of women was to get economic freedom through the process of politicization of women, but there was no question of economic dependence in India.\textsuperscript{74} Now, it is to be noted that Indian women were considered economically independent, so, no need to give political rights to them. This point of view indicates that there was not any individual / separate existence of women (economically independent means they did not have any need to earn livelihood, i.e. it was not their duty).

\textsuperscript{72} Mankekar, Kamala, op. cit., p.11.
\textsuperscript{73} Nair, Janaki, op. cit, p.125.
\textsuperscript{74} Prabha, February 1921, p.115.
In the period of renaissance, when women were moving outside the home for struggling to get rights, at the same time, they were opposed in the name of religion and protection of husbandry. This was a contradiction between the two visions, which was reflected in the contemporary journalism with other women issues.

The merging of the social reform movement in the political struggle and organization of women gave greater legitimacy to the women's struggle. Participation in public life raised women's prestige and status, and since many of them came from propertied and commercial families, the interest in women's inheritance developed with surprising speed after 1930. The wider perspective acquired by many of the women leaders, gave the women's struggle in India an identity distinguished from those in other countries, particular the West.75 The women who had encountered many roles in the diverse systems they had inhabited, exposed off layers of social processes to find in themselves and their progeny a touch of individuality. They felt that they did not have any need to look towards the West for the guidelines as Indian women were aware of their low status and were struggling to solve important women's issues. They discussed as to what laws should be passed to bring women legally at par with men. In this context, Rameshwari Nehru's

(editor of *Stree Darpan*) contribution in the 1920s and 1930s has been remarkable, she said in 1928:

"The laws cannot be made or implemented if even the educated section of our society is against laws. It is essential to first create awareness, campaign to motivate public opinion in favour of laws for women. This will be difficult because there will be one argument in favour of laws and ten against. Once the laws are made with the support of public opinion, they can then be used to change the position of women in society."\(^{76}\)

The women’s struggle carried the conviction that a woman did not have to treat herself as a mere object made up of introjects of her social space. It also provided them freedom to move from the over-defined and prescribed location of a role in the social world to the status of a person and thus redefined their meetings and life space. It was precisely the respectability that women had acquired through an extension of the space of the home to that of the nation, with it consonant notions of duties and responsibilities to the nation, that made their passage from private domestic to public political spheres easier.\(^{77}\) Appeals made in the name of nationalism and in recognition of the sacrifices women were making in their daily lives, were therefore more likely to be entertained.

\(^{76}\) Quoted in Devendra, Kiran, op. cit., p.151.
\(^{77}\) Nair, Janaki, op. cit., p.127.
by male nationalists than strident demands for women’s rights.\(^78\) One of the notable feature of the wave of women’s movement was its continual articulation of demands for women’s rights in terms of the ‘needs’ of women as nurtures and educators of future responsible citizens.\(^79\)

Women in India have continued to struggle to establish the legitimacy of their personhood through centuries. The burden of being either an object or a role has been constantly reinforced. The tragedy of this struggle was that most women accepted their commitments to the system. They did not try to find answers to question such as: ‘why are women denied the legitimacy of their person? , why must a woman be virtuous and sacrifice her being so that her husband, children and family can become wholesome beings?’\(^80\) They were perhaps no longer angry and resentful, but in their new sense of dignity and integration they still hold the tragedy of being women within them. In the period of women’s struggle, there was a danger also for educated women that remained caught between two worlds, “the call of new age in fronts of them and behind them the burden of several social perceptions”. They worried about their fate after they came out of their homes during the movements. They realized their strength, hardened themselves, and opposed male lies about women’s frailty and incapacity. Although, society admired their self sacrifice

\(^78\) Ibid.
\(^79\) Madhuri, October 1922, p.342.
\(^80\) Parikh, I.J. & Garg, Pulin K., op. cit., p.171.
but also feared their rebellious harshness.\textsuperscript{81} So, legislative reforms were not sufficient to safeguard women from early exploitations and to ensure the well being and dignity of women. The social reformers could not alter the domestic arrangements of the nation solely through the manipulation of a still substantially alien legal code. In many cases, the most vigorous opponents of the changes were women themselves who had reached a stage of life when they could exercise their powerfulness and brooked no interference in their domain. Without the support of some women themselves for the reforms so eagerly put forward on their behalf, the opposition of both orthodox men and women could not be overcome.\textsuperscript{82}

The women’s struggle for equality improved legal rights, and the possibility of seeking employment outside the family introduced an element of option in the lives of some women. Women moved into positions of leadership in politics, government and professions, and distinguished themselves by their achievements in all these fields. Most of these women came from families whose women had, in previous generations, been compelled to lead restricted lives.\textsuperscript{83} It was said that life outside home was hard and uninterested whereas domestic life was simple, soft, enjoyable then why were women interested in moving from soft to hard?, why were women choosing the life full of struggle?

\textsuperscript{81} Chand, January 1938, p. 268.
\textsuperscript{83} Mazumdar, Vina, op. cit, p 64.
as compared to simple life? For many women, the struggle to find a legitimate space in any system or family was the most penetrating aspect of their lives. In their efforts to establish a new and meaningful undertaking with the world upon reaching middle age, they often refused the resources offered by the husband and his family. They claimed that they were doing what were out of their own choice. When they needed resources these were not forthcoming so now they did not want to accept them. But, at the same time many genuine efforts to seek meaningful engagements with the environment tended to fail. Most of them made the generation of economic resources their primary struggle.

Seeing the activities of the women of India during the period under review, it could safely be said that they were going to a considerable part in the public life of the country. The period saw the development of women education from primary to collegiate stage. Women had made notable progress in higher education general as well as professional. Many women were appointed as school teachers, nurses and artists. Formerly music and dance were associated with nautch girls and prostitutes. But during the period of this study girls of good families began to take interest in the different fields of culture. Many women were successful in the arts of music, dance, drama, painting and even film.

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84 Sudha, March 1937, pp97–98.  
85 Sharma, R.K., op. cit., p. 259  
86 Chand, December 1932, p.261.
Although, the number of educated women was not satisfactory but the pace of progress of women education was satisfactory during the time period under study.87 "Miss C.K. Kaushalya got scholarship from government and went Britain to study teaching—methodology for three and half years. After coming back India, she joined Indian Educational Service".88 The AIWC had also grown from a body of women interested in educational, social and legal reform, to a premier organization of Indian women. During this time period, most of the provinces showed greater interest in spreading literacy among the women. The educated women tried to locate the cause of degeneration of the Indian society, evaluated its reactionary traditions, analyzed the values behind these reactionary traditions and social institutions, and formulated the strive to work out a programme of the reconstruction of the women society on a rational and democratic basis, suited to the condition of India. To achieve this, they carried out an extensive educational campaign to use the legislative powers to initiate social and religious reforms.

Work, job, career and profession were all an attempt to create a meaning for Indian women. Now women were struggling to create a new space beyond the home, a space to add a meaning, define a world view and a heritage which they could call their own. There was discrimination against women in the legal profession for a long time. Even in earlier times and during the middle

87 Sudha, September 1933, p.179.
88 Madhuri, February 1922, p.201.
ages, the study of law for women was not quite unknown. But, a woman in spite of being qualified in law was not allowed to practice at the Bar as a lawyer on the ground of sex. That is why; women were not coming forward in a large number to study law. The study of law by women meant an academic discipline or luxury and not professional career for them.\textsuperscript{89} In this context, irony of this time period can be observed from a news reported in Vishal Bharat:

"Kumari Taramati Patel, B.A., L.L.B. is the first Gujarati women who passed L.L.B. exam. She belongs to patidar caste which follows the custom of purdah till now".\textsuperscript{90}

Miss Cornelia Sarabji was the first Indian woman to pass the examination of Bachelor of Civil Law at Oxford in 1892. She also obtained the L.L.B. degree of the Allahabad University, but she was not allowed to practice. In 1904 she was appointed Legal Advisor to purdanashin (women using purdah) women, Court of Wards, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Assam, and consulting counsel by the Government of Bengal.\textsuperscript{91} By the legal practitioner's (women) Amendment Act of 1923, the disabilities against women legal practitioners in India were removed. In 1920, the four Inn of court in London had for the first time admitted women students, thus giving them the right to enrolled later as barristers. In 1923 the first two women were called to the Bar.

\textsuperscript{89} Sharma, R.K., op. cit., p.239.  
\textsuperscript{90} Vishal Bharat, July 1930, p17.  
\textsuperscript{91} Tata, Mithan. op. cit., p.124.
from Lincoln’s Inn, one of them was an Indian, Miss Mithan Tata. Several women were now qualifying themselves and practicing in India. Miss Carmelia Sorabji, started practice at the Calcutta High Court on 24th November, 1924 and became the first Indian lady to be enrolled as an lawyer in Calcutta.\(^9\) Shyam Kumari was practising at the Allahabad High Court\(^9\) Miss Mithan Tata and Miss Dilnawaj Bairamji, both began their practice at the Bombay High Court.\(^9\) Miss Anandibai, Smt. Sitaramdas and Kumari Taravati Patel also had passed degree in law.\(^9\) Smt. Rachal Ashkanji was appointed female lawyer in the police court of Calcutta.\(^9\) Smt. Mapwahuri was the first lady who joined the Rangoon High Court. She was also the first Burmese women, who adopted the profession of law and to be called to the Bar in Britain.\(^9\) So, the opening of the door of the legal profession for women offered a bright career for them.

Women’s struggle resulted in the emergence of women volunteers devoted to the cause of the elevation of the position of the Indian women, an event unprecedented in the history of India and it also created a womanhood which had some broader social purpose in life. The move to come out provided women an opportunity to associate with strangers, persons belonging to different communities and provinces.\(^9\) This made them broad minded and

\(^{92}\) Ibid, p 125.
\(^{93}\) Chand, November, 1937.
\(^{94}\) Ibid., November 1934.
\(^{95}\) Ibid.
\(^{96}\) Ibid.
\(^{97}\) Chand, November 1926, p.146.
\(^{98}\) Desai, Neera, op. cit., p236.
deepened their social consciousness. They accepted the role of being creators of a new heritage and not being mere inheritors, brought the process of rejuvenation into play and not blind faith. Women in such a space had to go beyond the bio-social fragmentation of male-female, man–woman, and masculine–feminine role taking and integrated in a whole some manner, the two elements in a single identity—a human identity. They did not use only rational arguments but also demanded to justice and feelings and carved out new meanings for accepted notions and women’s roles. Greater mobility and acceptance of women in public spaces, unthinkable in India only a generation earlier, were definitely an outcome of women’s struggle during the time period under study. The demands voiced by the women’s movement all over India were equality in family and the society, dignity of women’s personality, the refusal to be regarded merely as sex symbols and the opening of wider opportunities for self-development. Women’s participation in outside work implied that the social creative energies of women were not only unfolded but were also made socially useful.

Participation in public activities or acquiring self—assurance was saturated with tension. It certainly did not mean reaching equality. Women’s presence in political bodies was often a token one, in offices it was difficult for men to accept women as equal or, even worse, as seniors especially if women

100 Mazumdar, Vina, op. cit., p.60.
were junior in age, and in household, educated brides were liable to be accused of haughtiness and shamelessness.\textsuperscript{101} Although, some external and rather superficial elements of freedom had come with somewhat easier association with the other sex and older members of the family and in matters of dress, rituals and language, but their impact was not satisfactory, and those who appeared as most modern in their appearance were generally content with their traditional roles in life.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{101} Orsini, Francesca, op. cit., p.307.  
\textsuperscript{102} Mazumdar, Vina, op. cit., p.64.