CHAPTER 9

THE WORKING OF WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS & THE ROLE OF SOCIO-POLITICAL WOMEN ELITES

9.1 Introduction:

A woman has been a victim of social evils for years & years. The women's movement in India was both a necessary antecedent & a consequence of the changing social & political environment. The 14th & early 20th century saw important trends in thought & ideology because of westernisation, revivalism, reform, nationalism & modernisation, & concerned themselves with the problems of women in India. Thus the reforms, legislation & experiments with new roles for women, introduced throughout the 19th & early 20th century can be described as the women's movement.

Educational & social reforms for women formed an integral part of modernising the country & the society due to which women began to organise themselves in a variety of ways to improve situation. Most of the organisations emphasized on social reforms & education. [Agnew V., P.104]

The growth of women's organisations is a long process, which became more prominent during the decade. The women political elites, who were elected representatives to the legislative bodies, were active workers of the women wings of their parties. These
elite women have created their impact on the working of these autonomous organisations. A new class of educated & socially conscious women showed their readiness to follow these women but they were reluctant to join political parties. These women got attracted to these political elite women who led the women's movement. These organisations got momentum due to the contribution made by the women. A number of needy & helpless women rushed with their problems to these organisations. They were given moral support & help to solve their problems by these women. Thus, the consistent efforts of these organisations gave rise to a new section of women who readily joined it. It becomes necessary to study the working of these organisations. This is done by interviewing elite women from such organisations with the help of a set questionnaire.

9.2 9.3 & 9.4 review the growth of women organisations in pre-independence era, in post-independence era & during the decade.

9.2 The Growth Of Women's Organisations In Pre-Independence Era:

The rise of many organisations of women was in Bombay as Bombay was a centre of social reforms. The first step towards mass organisation of Women was the Women's Indian Association which was organised in 1917. The National Council of Women was organised in 1925, and All India Women's Conference was organised in 1927. These were non-political organisations which aimed at promoting educational opportunities for women and improving their
position by social & legal reforms.

These women organisations were extremely powerful and worked as mouthpieces of women of India. The founding members of these associations were well-known elite women like Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins, and Dorothy Jinarajudusa. 'By 1921 the Women's Indian Association had established its forty eight branches and a membership of two thousand seven hundred women. [India Year Book, 1923, pages 552 - 555]

The A.I.W.C. undertook all kinds of social reform activities. Many of its eminent members were Congress women as Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalaxmi Pandit, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay etc. Not only that but all women politicians supported the Women's movements and were involved in women's organisations. [Agnew V., P. 118 & 119]

All these women organisations thus remained active in pre-independence era. The interest of women politicians in the women's movement was important in developing initiative and limiting goals. However the primary focus of all the women's activities was limited to national struggle rather than struggling hard for women's cause. Still all these women's organisations raised their voice against social evils and tried to improve the position of women in the family and society by raising the age of marriage, encouraging women to get themselves educated, also encouraging widow remarriage etc. Their fight was simultaneously against the social
issues and not against the male counterparts. They wanted to bring slow change in the attitudes of people shaped by social set up of Indian Society.

The most important and striking feature of this movement was that women got an opportunity to counteract effectively against the injustices and oppression because of biased sex identities. While doing so they did not attack the social structure but tried to repair it within itself. The independence struggle gave them an opportunity to emerge, to unite and to organise. Their role in social and political field was widely accepted by the Indians.

The emergence of women's organisations in pre-independence era took its new shape after independence which is dealt in 9.3.

9.3 Women Organisations After Independence:

Political independence freed the nation from foreign rule. Equal political status was guaranteed to all the citizens without any sex discrimination. The political status was interlinked with the socio-economic status.

After independence a number of political developments took place. However woman's participation in the political process received a serious set back. Most of the women preferred to go back to their stereotyped traditional roles even after participating in the National Struggle. The industrialisation, urbanisation compelled women to support their families for financial purposes.
However the impact of the role played by women freedom fighters continued and a new idea that women should struggle for social and political status necessitated the elite women to organise themselves. A reference of a few women organisations which were working after independence is made.

1. National Council Of Women In India:

   This was founded in 1925 and it collaborated its objectives with AIWC. After independence it has concerned itself mainly with education, medical care and family planning.

2. All India Women's Conference:

   This was founded in 1927, and it represented and worked as a forum for voicing the problems and grievances of women.

   After independence the Conference focussed its attention primarily on the welfare and relief of women and children. This is now mainly a deliberative body which has so far undertaken various issues like enforcement of the anti-polygamy and divorce laws, development of institutional facilities for working to destitute women, liberalising abortion law, family planning and equal pay for equal work.
3. **Bhartiya Grameen Mahila Sangh:**

This was founded in 1955 for the uplift of rural women in India. It has stood for the removal of women's disabilities and to promote local leadership among rural women through constructive programmes. It also assists in planned rural development like agricultural, cottage industries, rural housing etc.

4. **National Federation Of Indian Women:**

This was founded in 1954. This aims at creating social and political awareness of women, fighting for social injustice and social transformation. It protests against all types of injustice and social evils, condemns ill treatment and exploitation of harijan women and women workers. Its leading is in the hands of women members of CPI.

5. **Stri Shakti Jagaran:**

This was launched by the Mahila Sarvodaya Sammelan in 1973. This movement mainly fought for a just place for women in society by using Gandhian ideals and techniques. It appeals to all women to abandon purdah, untouchability, caste or class distinctions and dowry. [Muzumdar V., "Towards Equality", P.299]
With the growth of increasing awareness among women by mid-seventies India witnessed the emergence of a new type of women's groups and organisations which have been taking up women's issues from a totally different perspective. Their activities were not restricted to merely passing resolutions or despatching delegations to various authorities. These groups indulged not only in militant activism to assert women's rights, but also made serious attempts to articulate their thoughts on the roots of oppression of women. Moreover they were not guided by some big political leader or parties. Young educated women took initiative to form autonomous women's groups. [Patel V., P.117]

Two prominent reasons are explicit for the growth of women's organisations in India especially from 1970. (1) Social Exploitation of women continued even though constitutionally equality in social, economic and political field was assured. (2) The political parties were involved, in independent India, in contesting elections. They could hardly pay their attention to the upliftment of women socially or politically.

In 1974 the Report of the Committee on the status & position of women in India was published. The women's organisations which were established before 1975, made use of the international women's year and decade declared by UNO for the new awakening of Indian women. The decade gave
additional weightage and strength to women's movements. The Government because of the Committee's Report, became alert of women's issues. The women began to pressurise the government to implement the government policies which were formally declared.

Thus the women organisations increased in number and in their strength during the decade. A new hope, with new awakening brought speedy changes in viewing women's problems. Next part 9.4 deals with the growth of women organisations during the decade.

The decade provided a legitimate and right ground in India. It is legitimate here to study and examine the growth of women's movements and organisations during the decade.

9.4 The Growth & Working Of The Women Organisations During The Decade 1975-85:

By the beginning of the decade, the Report on the Status & Position of Women in India was published. The Report depicted the real picture of Indian women. The declaration of the decade for women by the UNO created an awareness to raise women's issues & an appeal to solve these problems through political & non-political means. Education made the Indian women aware of their own rights & identities. The young & educated women soon realised that women's issues were sidelined all these years.
Thus a new awakening & new movements resulted into women's small organisations in several cities of India. These organisations started multiplying because they were directly involved in women's specific issues like violence against women, sexism in media, discrimination at workplace & theoretical critique of all existing socio-cultural & political formation in the country. There have been regional differences in the terms of methods of functioning and focusing of issues, campaigns and nature of participation of women, but one common thread in this new movement, is that it is 'by women, for women & of women', in its true sense of the work. They are more democratic, participatory & non-hierarchical in its nature. [Patel V., Ed.Desai N., P.42-43]

These women organisations emerged to resist against exploited women like labourers, workers, peasants & downtrodden. The new movement of women began to generate those issues which were exclusively of women from their point of view. Not only that, new terminologies such as exploitation, oppression, gender-discrimination, sex-stereotyping, patriarchal violence against women, power relations in every institution, segmentation & sex-based division of labour etc. were re-examined with a new perspective.

The feminists raised their voice against gender biased attitudes in the family & in the social life of India. However their attempts do not remain restricted to this issue only. They are also concerned with the exclusive association of political participation with the electoral process in most studies. [News Letter, RCWS,
The movement became more wide & active and hence it had to change its earlier methods as well. The prominent change was that these organisations refused to join the main stream of a political party who treated women as an 'auxiliary force'. The new methods & techniques evolved were of various types. These organisations have lobbied for making women's issue a very important component of the political agenda by providing logical arguments, detailed case studies, participatory researches & re-examining history from women's point of view. The women's struggle for non-sexist secular family laws, fundamentalism, acute water shortage, drought, pornography & blue films, international traffikking of women, sati, dowry-murder have been presented in several workshops, seminars & conferences. [Desai N. & Patel V., P.43-44]

Thus the record of women's participation in the non-party political processes was the creditable feature of the decade.

Simultaneoulsy the women's wings of the major political parties also became more active. The political parties rendered every assistance to make their women's wings more powerful. The women elites of the women wings of the parties were influenced by the new waves & new thoughts. These women began to involve themselves in women's issues & in the uplift of women.

Thus during the decade, considerations for women's issues
emerged at two different levels - (i) Women wings of the political parties, (ii) Social autonomous women's organisations, & feminist organisations. 9.5 & 9.6 highlight the working of these organisations in details.

9.5 Women Wing Of The Political Parties & Its Working :

Women's wings are established within the party organisations aiming to uplift women by focusing more attention to their problems. The prominent women members of the party are given important position on these wings. These women shoulder one additional responsibility assigned by their parties to them. The women elites, interviewed earlier, as Corporators, members of Maharashtra State Legislature & members of Parliament, are holding important positions like President, Vice President, treasurer etc. in the women wings of their parties.

To know the working of the women wings in greater details, a set questionnaire was prepared and was filled in by a few women office bearers of the women wings who were interviewed. An attempt is made here to find out the pattern, the purpose, the method of working and the work undertaken during the decade by the women wings & to see whether the decade has brought any change in the status of women or not from their point of view. In the end a comparative analysis of all such wings is made to find out some conclusions on the working of these wings.
1) **Indian National Congress (I) Mahila Front**:

Indian National Congress was established in 1885. The need to have special sub branch for women was felt & the All India Women Conference was established in 1927 & its members mainly belonged to the Congress Party. Soon after the independence, such women fronts were established all over the nation - at the national & regional level as well.

In Maharashtra, Congress Mahila Aghadi was established in 1950. The leading male leader was Shri Mukundrao Save. The active women leaders from Maharashtra like Shrimati Prema Kantak, Shrimati Padmabai Harolikar, Shrimati Radhabai Apte, took initiative in organising such a front for women. However the Aghadi, renamed as front, became active after 1952, after the first general election. In course of time the party became more active & today it functions as a major woman organisation working for the welfare of women.

At the national level, All India Congress Mahila Front is organised with Women's Central Advisory Board.

The All India Congress Committee appoints its members in consultation with the Central Organiser.

There are state level Fronts of Women. In Maharashtra women fronts are organised at state, Zilha (District) & Block levels. The work of these fronts at all these levels is done
by the women organizers.

The Mahila Front works by keeping three items before it - (A) to bring social change, (B) to arrange mass action programmes like Morchas, Dharnas, etc., (C) to provide employment opportunities to the needy women. For this purpose it has established banks for women all over Maharashtra. The banks provide loan facilities to women for Small Scale & Cottage Industries. [Gawankar, R., P.72-73]

The Mahila Front has undertaken many programmes in Bombay during the decade. To know the working, Smt. Sudha Joshi who was General Secretary of All India Women Congress Committee(I) & Smt. Vimlaben Thakker, who was the Vice-President of Bombay Pradesh Mahila Congress Committee (I), were interviewed.

During the decade they have organised civil defence classes for women in Bombay. Special nursing classes to help the job seeking girls were arranged. In the slum areas medical camps, family planning camps & Shibirs were organised on a large scale. It had also arranged study camps to create social, educational and civic awareness.

These women in their interviews had expressed that in arranging such programmes, party leaders encourage them, make suggestions & if necessary actively participate. When
asked if a definite change had taken place during the decade, they replied that now women know their rights & duties towards their family, society & nation. They are coming forward & taking active part in day-to-day, social & political affairs. [Abstracts From The Interview]

The Women Wing Of The Communist Party Of India:

The Communist Party is an ideologically committed party. The organisational pattern of the CPI is different from other political parties. The Mahila Front like Trade Union, is an integral part of the party. The Mahila Front, works, at national, regional & district level. The executive Council at the regional level selects a secretary for the Mahila Wing. The unique feature is that if the Executive Council fails to select a Competent female candidate, they select & appoint a male candidate as the Secretary of Mahila Organisation.

Being an integral & inherent part of the Communist party, its Mahila Front stands to remove social & economic barriers. The Mahila Front does not aim only at working for women alone but works for overall social uplift of the Indians. For the social cause Indian Federation of Women was established in 1954. In Bombay the Maharashtra Women's Federation works against (A) Social, Economic & Political exploitation, (B) Removal of illiteracy & spread of literacy centres. (C) To fight against, feudalism, biases, evil, social customs & traditions. (D) To educate & create social &
Political wareness:

The Mahila Front takes its organised force against rapes, increased price raising agitations, bonded labour, exploitation of Adivasis, harrassment to the Harijans etc. [Gawankar R., P.98]

For understanding the programmes during the decade Smt.Tara Reddi & Smt. Manju Gandhi were interviewed. The Wing [Vibhag] had organised study camps to propagate the thoughts of Marx & Lenin. These study camps were of three or five days duration. Efforts were made to establish Balwadi Programmes like family planning, prohibition, propagation of ideology etc. were arranged. According to these women, the Mahila Vibhag is working to remove all these injustices since its establishment. Hence during the decade the same programmes were continued with the same zeal. [Abstracts From The Interview]

The Samajwadi Mahila Sabha Of Socialist Party :

Established in 1951, the Samajwadi Mahila Sabha was a well organised sub-wing of Praja Socialist Party of India. However in the early years of its establishment the wing was not organised & well settled. In 1954 at Pune, under the guidance of Smt. Anutai Limaye, the Mahila Sabha was officially reorganised & since that day it had worked actively
till its merger with the Janata Party.

The Mahila Sabha aims at creating social & political awareness among the women, inculcating in them democratic & socialist values and conducting creches, Balwadi, co-operatives, health centres, art classes, sport grounds etc. A woman who has completed eighteen years of age can become a member of this Mahila Sabha.

The Mahila Sabha undertakes the activities like family planning centres, social work in the slum areas, rendering help to the places of famine & drought, co-operatives, health centres, etc. It made efforts for creating political awareness, voicing against price rising, exploitation of women, propagating common civil code, etc. It took equal interest in propagating Gandhian principles like Khadi, cottage & village industries, removing the practice of untouchability, ashramas for lepers, Charkha sangh etc.

In the social field the Mahila Sabha condemned dowry system, social evils, rapes and oppression of women etc. In bringing social reforms among the Muslims the Mahila Sabha was ahead if compared to its all other counterparts. One finds maximum membership of Muslim women in this Mahila Sabha. The Sabha had organised study camps for Muslim women & supported the reformist Muslim movement.
The educational field was brought under the scope of its work. The Mahila Sabha had its own centres for children in rural & slum areas. They had classes for adult education for men & women.

The Sabha had to its credit many publications related to women, laws for women, democracy, socialism, health of women etc. [Gawankar R., P. 80 to 85]

4. Jana Sangh Mahila Aghadi Of Jana Sangh :

Jana Sangh Mahila Aghadi was a part of Jana Sangh. The Mahila Aghadi was established to implement the ideology & policy of the Jana Sangh. It worked on the lines of the party recommendations. It worked at the regional & local levels more prominently. Women voluntarily became its members. A woman completing 18 years of age could become its member. By arranging various religious & cultural programmes the Aghadi brought women together under its branches.

In the social field, it worked through Bhajani Mandals, Navarata, Haldi Kumkum, programme & organised women. The Aghadi helped in economic fields by encouraging development of various arts as a side income.
The members of the party arranged weekly or monthly meetings. It was work like study camps.

The Bhartiya Jan Sangh merged with the Janata Party in 1977. In 1980 Bhartiya Janata Party was formed.

5. Mahila Aghadi Of The Janata Party:

With the establishment of the Janata Party in 1977, Mahila Aghadi was established. The women who were the active pioneers in the early years of its establishment were Smt. Mrinal Gore, Smt. Pramila Dandavate.

The Mahila Aghadi works at the national level with a President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer & other members. At the state level it has the same organisation. Like the party, the Mahila Aghadi has it ward, zilha & city branches. For coordination one representative of each branch or ward is appointed at the state level organisation.

The working of the Aghadi is within the party organisation. The purpose for which it was organised was to voice women's issues through the political platforms. The social organisations handle the social issues but Aghadi includes social & political issues also. In a democratic polity women should know her political rights. The women should not remain disinterested in Politics because politics has reached upto the kitchen. All the problems of women like kerosene, gas supply, wheat, rice, vegetables, oil are
concerned with politics. Hence women should take keen interest in the political activities.

For the purpose of getting more information Smt. Kamal Desai, Secretary women wing of the Janata Party was interviewed. To her the Aghadi works actively in the political & social spheres. At the time of election the women members work a lot like propagating the candidates, arranging meetings & public speeches, corner meetings, & influencing women voters. This definitely brings positive result at the time of voting. In case of Shahbano, the Aghadi had held a meeting at the Bombay Central, in the Muslim areas. The people threw stones on them but the meeting was successful. The muslim women have also become aware of their rights.

Every year the Aghadi organises Savitri Phule Speech Series of five days in which lectures on laws for women, pights of women by prominent persons are arranged. Women largely attend such programmes.

The other social activities undertaken by these women members of the Aghadi are fight against rising prices, dowry, dowry deaths, divorcee women's problems, oppression of women etc. These multiferous activities have brought a definite awakening among the women of Bombay. In Bombay Mahila Aghadi of the Janata Party is actively working to
create awareness among women. [Desai K., Interview]

6. The Mahila Morchas Of Bhartiya Janata Party:

Bhartiya Janata Party's Mahila Morcha is a wing established with the establishment of the Bhartiya Janata Party in 1980. The Morcha has its organisations at the national, regional & local levels.

The Mahila Morcha consists of a President, Vice Presidents, Secretaries, Deputy Secretaries, & a Treasurer. The front also invites some permanent invitees who are the elected members or the party elites.

The party took special interest in building women's organisation within the party structure. In fact Mahila Front has become an integral part of the party itself. Its members are the members of Bhartiya Janata Party. The Morcha has its annual meetings. They arrange Membership Drive Programme after every two years. Huge morchas are systematically organised to protest against social & economic issues. Mass agitation campaigns are organised against social evils like dowry, rapes etc.

For the purpose of knowing the programmes after its establishment a few women elites who were interviewed were Dr. Kshema Thatte, President of Mahila Morcha & Vice
President of Maharashtra Pradesh of the party; Smt. Shalini Kulkarni, Secretary, Maharashtra Mahila Morcha; Smt. Nishigandha Mogul an active worker of Mahila Morcha. In their interviews they have given the information of the activities undertaken by them.

Shahbano case had awakened many problems of Muslim women. The Morcha had organised a Morcha & a Dharna all over the nation & majority of women had participated. Agitation against rising prices is a common & favourite campaign of all Mahila Fronts. The Morcha had protested against the imported Irish Butter. They had arranged a Morcha to demand for its non-acceptance & given a Resolution to the Government of Maharashtra. They protested against the molestation of women in the police custody. They organised joint endeavours to attract the attention of local governments against the water supply. The ordinary women have taken the empty buckets of water & joined these women. They have raised their voice against liquor shops. In Amaravati a new liquor shop was about to start. The women went to the District Collector's office & had a 'Dharna' in front of the office. The collector, by giving due respect to their demand, disallowed the establishment of the shops.[Abstracts From The Interviews]

When these programmes were arranged the leaders, encourage, make suggestions & if required actively
participate. The Morcha helps in some family matters in bringing harmony between husband & wife, daughter-in-law & mother-in-law. They arrange haldi Kumkum & various competitions etc. They celebrate many Hindu religious festivals together. They have organised various Sanskar Kendras, Stitching classes, certificate courses, Balwadis, study circles etc. The Morcha has tried to implement the various government policies made for women. They have encouraged cottage industries, and have helped in rendering vocational guidance. In the rural & urban areas the Morcha has arranged various medical & health camps about general health, hygiene, cleanliness & family planning and cancer detection camps. The Morcha provides free legal aid to the needy when required. The widows of the soldiers are helped by these women. [Abstracts From The Interview]

According to these respondents during the decade definite change has occurred. That women have become aware of their rights was the foremost change according to them. Percentage of women is considerably increased in all the fields like education, employment and private business. [Abstracts From The Interviews]

The Samiti has demanded that half the income of husband's should be given to those women whose husbands wasted the money in wine, gambling or drugs. They are consistently demanding it through the floor of Vidhan Sabha
of Maharashtra.

6. Shivsena Mahila Aghadi Of Shivsena:

Shivsena is a powerful regional political party which was established in 1966. Shivsena Mahila Aghadi was established by the end of the decade i.e. 1985.

As the decade was almost coming to an end the Aghadi's positive contribution during the decade cannot be mentioned. However since its establishment the Aghadi has undertaken a number of women's issues. Mahila Aghadi has its own shakhas all over Maharashtra. Miss Sudha Churi an Advocate & the President of Mahila Aghadi in her interview said that more than three thousand Mahila shakhas have been established & are actively working all over Maharashtra. In Bombay city as per the Municipal wards they have shakhas of Mahila Aghadi. These shakhas have their own sub-shakhas. Thus the chain of shakhas is found at Taluka, District & City level.

The shakhas undertake a number of programmes like Sanskar Kendra, Balwadi, Hindu religious festivals, medical aid, legal aid, etc. The social evils like dowry, family harassment, adultery are also undertaken by these women with a view to minimise them. According to Sudha Churi, 'Women now prefer to come to us rather than approaching
either the police or the court. Even the police are ready to co-operate & render their help in solving women's issues.
[Churi S., Interview]

The Evaluation Of The Working Of The Women Wings:

The Mahila fronts of the political parties are active and bold. Their main struggle is against the exploitation & harassment of women. Their final aim is to give women equal position & status.

1. The first target of the women Fronts is towards uplift of women. All of them are too conscious to bring positive changes through an organisation. To them woman's position can change, if the change takes place in the family itself. As the famous proverb says, 'Charity begins at home',- the beginning of change, should take place in their houses first.

2. Their second attention for a change is towards the social set up. The biased views towards women need a change. Woman should be considered as an equal partner in the development process of socialisation. For social purpose these women make, 'Organised efforts' like morchas, dharanas, strikes & agitations etc. They know it well that social evils can be removed by an 'Organised voice'. Such agitations get a media publicity & general awareness is created against the people who practice it.
3. All Mahila fronts arrange health camps & provide free medical guidance for family planning. All respondents insist on family planning. A woman who bears more children becomes physically weak & mentally frustrated. If women are motivated to minimise the size of the family definite change would take place. Most of the women workers have to work in the slum areas of Bombay & have to propagate family planning campaigns. Related to health & hygiene issues are the issues of evils of drug addiction. A mother is first blamed if her son or daughter finds to be a drug addict. A precautionary information is provided to the mothers in Bombay by way of speech series & health camps. Such programmes are arranged by the Mahila Fronts.

4. Most of the Mahila Fronts actively work in the legal & political field. They have said that women should be made known about the laws made for women, by giving them free legal advice. Political consciousness must be created among the women. Most of the Mahila Fronts organise study camps & impart necessary information about the parties, party ideology, programmes of the parties, the policies of the government and its measures etc. These women perform important task of mobilising the women in favour of their parties at the time of election. These women propagate & try to raise their party's image in the eyes of the masses.

5. A few women workers are keenly interested in cultural
6 religious activities where women are still involved. A few respondents expressed that by arranging programmes like Haldi Kumkum, Makar Sankrant, etc., women can be brought together, can enjoy community life and can have better perspective of society.

All the respondents have expressed that the position of women has definitely changed because of the consistent efforts made by their fronts especially by the mass campaigns. During the decade the campaigns gathered maximum momentum & the end of the decade saw a definite change towards the position of women of India. Almost all the respondents have expressed that the fronts' consistent efforts & the decade have brought 'awareness & consciousness' among the Indian women. They have also opined that a woman now no more considers herself a 'weaker sex' but has become alert about her social & economic status.

All the respondents have full faith in the abilities and capacities of women. They have expressed that in male-dominated society woman was deliberately deprived of proving her capacities. A woman has to come out of exploitation on her own with the support of the fronts.

Almost all of them have unanimously said that a woman need not break her house, should try to maintain the family framework but should not tolerate injustice, oppression.
exploitation & harassment.

One of the prominent features of the decade is emergence of autonomous women's organisations and it is discussed in the next sub-part.

9.6 Autonomous Women's Organisations & Their Working:

Women members of the autonomous women's organisations adhere to various political ideologies & some of them also belong to different political parties. They are also not separatist & do not exclude men. Men do participate in the campaigns & struggles launched by autonomous women's organisations. These women organisations were organised & led by women. Their main aim is to fight oppressions, exploitation, injustice & discrimination against women. [Patel V., Ed.Desai N., P.118]

The autonomous organisations of women took momentum. From place to place, from town to town, city to city the enthusiastic women moved out with the songs of liberation.

"To the women of this country, mothers & sisters,
We must go & say,
Unite together, take up the battle,
We will smash this prison' ....."

They sang their songs against the consistent exploitation
"This Prison ....

This prison in whose walls daughters & daughter-in-laws are buried alive.

In a web of slavery woven with the webs of cruel laws, we will no longer die trapped in this Prison....

We will smash this prison!"

The women in chorus spoke out their grievances against social & religious clutches.

"This Prison

This prison on whose stones the songs of religion are written,

Dividing one from another, sowing destruction, reaping the fruits of our labour,

We must grab them by the throat, throw them on their faces,

Take back what we have lost ....

To the women of this country, mothers & sisters,

We must go & say,

Unite together, take up the battle,

We will smash this prison!

[ Omvedt G., P.108]

This was the mood that began to catch people, especially women in women's liberation. The international women's year gave a good beginning to mobilise all the women - rural & urban, working & non-working. It was right time for women to organise women's movement.
During 1975, the International women's year conference of women activists was held in Pune. During the same year, in Trivendrum also a national level seminar on women's problems was held at the initiative of the communist party of India (Marxist). Except for the representatives of CPI(M) & CPI, all women activists emphasized the necessity of autonomous women's organisations. The Mahila Sangharsh Vahini at Patna was very active in anti-dowry campaigns & protest against sexual objectification of women in the advertisements. 'Progressive organisation of women, Hyderabad' launched a massive campaign against eve-teasing & dowry during 1974-75. In Delhi, conscious women's groups started raising their voices against dowry-murders. The Shramik Mahila Sanghtan became popular in Dhule of Maharashtra though this Sanghtana is mainly working in Bombay & Pune. Shramamik Mahila Sanghtana began to work in Dhule District to resist against exploitation & oppression of tribal masses by rich peasants, money lenders & corrupt government officials.

In Bombay independent autonomous women's group came into existence. Members of these organisations were from middle class & had been enlightened by women's liberation movement abroad. The general protest of these women's organisations were related to women's issues. Now the mass media, policy makers, academicians & general population became aware of the problems of women & a new consciousness & alertness to women's issues was generated. The western women's liberation movement, its literature & the issues
raised by the feminist movement influenced many highly educated Indian women. Its main aspect was to revolt against women being treated as objects & not as individual human beings. The Women's Liberation Movement generated great stir because it called for perception of equality & 'Liberation' in a new context from women's point of view. Initially women's liberation was not taken seriously. Anyone who talked of women's liberation was labelled as antiman. These feminist women's movement has also generated feminist cultural groups who spread the message with new songs, skits & plays, audio visuals, slide shows, dance dramas & films. 

[Patel V., Ed. Desai N., P.118]

To have a detailed review of their work. Various women's organisations & their working is discussed in this topic.

A number of women organisations have definitely increased by the end of the decade i.e. 1985. The Research Centre of Women's Studies had published a Directory of Bombay Women's Organisations in 1985 which records one hundred & twenty five women's organisations working in Bombay. These women organisations have spread all over Bombay, but the number is definitely more in the heart of the city i.e. Dadar & Girgaon.[Directory of Women's Organisations For Women, R.C.W.S., P.1 to 8] Most of these organisations perform all sorts of work to bring development in socio-economic field. They are socially conscious women who spend their leisure time in such semi-social & semi-cultural activities. In their limited area their work attributes high praise. One definitely
finds through these organisations, a change in the attitudes of women towards their social commitments.

Sri Hitkarini has published a catalogue of women's organisations actively working in Bombay. Various organisations who work, in Bombay are categorised. The organisations are working to provide shelter & to take care of children. They deal with problems of the old, adoption, health, education etc. A mention of few such organisations & their working is made below.

1. **Forum Against Oppression Of Women : (FAOW)**

   In January 1980 a group of women came together to discuss the implications of a shocking court judgement in Mathura Case. The discussion led to the formation of the FAOW.

   The Forum comprised mainly of educated urban middle class women with full time jobs who utilised all their free time in organising meetings, demonstrations or dharnas, writing pamphlets, articles, skits & songs or lobbying in the state Assembly or Parliament. The commitment was spontaneous, serious, sporadic but deep rooted. The organisation works informally with collective decisions & non-hierarchical structure. The diverse interests of the Forum are investigation, education, press, publicity, cultural & the National Conference.

   From 1981 to 1984 the Forum has undergone a series of changes & then was firmly established. The Forum works with a
specific methodology. A case first is taken by two or three volunteers for investigation based on the verbal report. Forum decides to take an action. Even individual case may be launched with a campaign. It also has morchas & dharanas. It is propagated through skits, songs & popular media. In 1980 in the National Conference "Jagruti" Dance Drama was performed by the Forum. In 1981, 'Jago Sab Nari Log' was composed by the Forum & a skit called 'Chup Reho' was staged. 'The Turning Point' was written for the public meetings on the Rape Bill. A cassette of feminist songs was produced by the Forum & Stree Mukti Sanghatana.

In 1983 Forum organised a Morcha against sexual harassment of Quereshi Community. The Forum also tried to resist against personal laws. To them the common feature of all the personal laws was the disadvantage to & discrimination against women.

Thus the Forum has established itself as an autonomous woman organisation in Bombay in the last decade. [Gandhi N., Ed.Desai N., P.168]

2. JANAVADI MAHILA SANGHATANA:

It is All India Organisation which was established in 1981. The women members of the Sanghatana belong to CPI(M). The working of the organisation was narrated by Smt. Soniya Gill, a Research Officer of the Sanghatana.
The purpose of its establishment was to provide a democratic mass organisation specifically for the working women who are coming forward in the development process of equality between men & women. The other aims include democratic consciousness, equality & equal status to women.

The Sanghatana has its Anti Price Action Committee whose main function is to organise campaigns against rising prices of essential commodities. It also struggles in defence of democratic rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution to its citizens. It also deals with the problems of working women especially with lower & middle class working women. It has 'All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers'. The Sanghatana also takes current political issues & tries to highlight real democratic demands of women.

Since its establishment the Sanghatana has undertaken number of issues: (A) It has, all over the nation, unanimously condemned the Roopkanwar Sati Case, (B) It has protested against the Muslims Women's Bill which was humiliating muslim women, (C) The Sanghatana takes initiative against casteism & communalism. It has its Women Action Committee which deals with such trends of communalism & casteism, (D) The Sanghatana mainly takes economic issues & tries to solve working women's problems. For economic issues it organises rallies where thousands & thousands of women come together (E) The Sanghatana also arranges Balwadi & Adult education to women. The women members undertake constructive work which would help for uplifting women. They provide technical job
training. (F) They have supported the Struggle of college & school teachers. (G) The important activities undertaken by them are for making efforts in guaranteeing right to ownership & equal inheritance to women. (H) It also tried to give right to landless people by demanding land reforms. (I) The Sanghatana has undertaken many activities for health hygiene & family planning.

The Sanghatana is gaining faster support & the organisation is growing day by day. These women workers find a satisfactory result of their efforts & also receive satisfactory response from the people, mass media & other women organisations. Many times Sanghatana joins hands with other women organisations & jointly arrange programmes of campaigns against rising prices, and Sati custom and having a Dharana etc.

The workers do find a definite positive change because of the decade. Consciousness is created among the women themselves & even among the men & the whole society. The women's issues have become sensitive issues of all. They have caught the public eye. By arranging mass organisations & mass campaigns women are motivated to participate in their struggle in the achievement of equality.

To change women's position a real change should take place in her economic position. She should become economically self sufficient. The change is also essential in the social & family set up. Once this is done then there should be legal & political
awareness necessary to be taught to women. Education is the main instrument to bring a change. [Gill S., Interview]

3. Mahila Dakshata Samiti:

The impact of the decade was so tremendous that the women from Bombay were motivated to come together & to form organisations. One of such organisations which brought Bombay women together was Mahila Dakshata Samiti which was established in 1984.

The membership is open to all women who are politically & socially motivated. They voluntarily participate in the various activities related to women. They include anti dowry campaign, signature campaigns against a critical public issue etc. When other women organisations arrange protests or morchas the women members of Mahila Dakshata Samiti whole heartedly participate & support them. To raise public opinion to educate & to create awareness these women arrange discussions, shibir etc.

The Samiti takes 'Dakshata' i.e. precaution in protecting the interests of women who are oppressed, exploited & humiliated. It is actively working as a pressure group in the area of family pressures, tortures & dowry problems. In a few cases they provide legal help & sometimes even medical help is also rendered by them.
As the Samiti was established by the end of the decade it cannot be focussed as to what activities it has undertaken during the decade. However since its establishment the Samiti is working with a determination to change a present set up & it is marching ahead with a speed.

These women have opined that the decade has brought a definite change among the women. The women themselves have become aware of their own status. It is difficult to pinpoint the definite change but change has certainly taken place and it is felt by all. [Kulkarni S., Interview]

4. Swadhar:

The idea of an organisation to help women in a variety of situations of distress was mooted by a few professionals, students & faculty members of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Deonar & some Social-minded women and the outcome was that Swadhar - a women's organisation was born.

Swadhar is a registered organisation, registered in February, 1983 to help women in distress irrespective of class/religion/community. The main objectives of the organisation are as follows:

1. To offer protection & support to women who are physically & mentally ill-treated.
2. To offer legal & medical counselling to needy women.
3. To give support & protection to the victims of family violence.
4. To create awareness in the society about the atrocities against women.

In case of marital discord the organisation calls both the parties & tries to come to a peaceful solution. While handling the cases the workers have definite perspective towards the problem. There is a core of team of workers who offer counselling & case work services. These workers make all possible efforts to help these women to enable them to stand on their own & become self-reliant. The workers also participate in various seminars, conferences & workshops organised by other women organisations.

Since 1983 Swadhar has helped upto 1987 more than 600 persons. They are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the cause of Family Mal-adjustment</th>
<th>No.of women who asked help.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Demand of Dowry</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Family mal-adjustment due to property.</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Alcoholism of the husband.</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. External relation of husband or</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second marriages.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Husband unemployed, due to illness.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Wife bearing only female children.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Harassment &amp; beating by husband &amp; In laws</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. Murder or suicide 25
9. Rape 13
10. Death or absconded husbands. 22
11. Impotent or sexual mal-adjustment 38
12. Temperamental or personality clashes. 48

Since 1983, Swadhar is working with the help, support by conscious citizens. They have a number of more programmes, like arranging awareness programmes in Schools for girls through group discussions, lectures & film shows, starting training programmes like Balwadi, Teachers Training/Creches training & a course & hospital aids for women. In the course of time it would definitely be recognised as a prominent organisation for needy women. [Swadhar, Report From 1983 to 1987, P.1 to 5]

5. Stree Mukti Sanghatana:

Established in 1974, the Sanghatana is working actively with its one hundred & fifty members. The main aim of the Sanghatana is to remove all gender biases. For this purpose it undertakes cultural activities, arranges mass campaigns against dowry. It makes provisions for creches. It has its Stree Samasya Nivaran Kendra.

The Sanghatana raises its voice against dowry & rape case. It tries to create social awareness against the oppression of women
through cultural activities & street plays. It tries to project evils of our social system & provides alternate value system suitable to the changing times.

The feminists task is more difficult because they have to attack, the basic philosophy & the concept of Indian philosophy. In the early years of their struggle they had to face a severe criticism even by the women themselves. Hence the responses which they received for their efforts were not at all rewarding. Except the voluntary women organisations, others have criticised their radical stand. But these women are determined & are struggling to raise public opinion in favour of feminist thoughts. [Sathe S., Interview]

6. **Stree Uvach**

Another feminist organisation which was established during the decade was 'Stree Uvach' (a woman spoke). The organisation was established in 1984 & its strength is slowly increasing.

The main purpose of this organisation is however slightly different from the other feminists organisations. They try to create an awareness among the labourers & other working class women. To create this awareness they have established eight centres in Bombay city & established a dialogue among the working women. To bring family accord they established counselling centres (Samanjasya Kentra) all over Bombay.
They have to their credit a number of publications & three
annuals.

To gain their aim they have a number of cultural &
educational activities which include essay competition, non-formal
education, Area surveys, real aid & legal help, help centres etc.
They stage dramas, songs, skits and street plays. The famous stree
play 'Mulgi Zali Ho' became popular all over Maharashtra.

The responses which these women receive from the various
sections of the community are not very satisfactory. However they
will continue their struggle because to them it will take years &
years to change the issue of gender biases.

The gender biases can be minimised if women show their
skills & capacities in all the walks of life. The first step to
recognise herself is economic self-sufficiency. The priorities should
be economic first & then the family society afterwards.

The women members feel that the decade has definitely
brought awareness among women. But they regretted that awareness
cannot be measured. However to them the percentage of awareness
is very low. Hence they have to strengthen their hands, have to
unite & organise together. Maitrini is also an organisation providing
a platform for newcomers to exchange experiences & engage
themselves in discussions. [Datar C., Interview]
Such autonomous organisations also grew all over Maharashtra. In Pune, in 1982 Stree Adhar Kendra grew out of Krantikari Mahila Sanghatana. Dr. Shreemati Neelam Gorhe is an active pioneer & Secretary of the Stree Adhar Kendra. It aims to help the needy women, aims to establish its coordination with other women's organisation. It had undertaken many activities during the decade in Marathwada & Pune. [Gorhe N., 'Women & Law' Poster Exhibition by Stree Adhar Kendra', A Paper Presented in Third National Conference On Women's studies, Chandigarh, 1986]

Dr. Smt. Neelam Gorhe had played a unique role in the uplift of women especially the dalit Women. She was actively associated with the women wing of the Republican Party of India.

Muslim Satyashodak Mahila Samaj is an active Women's organisation aiming to bring awareness among Muslim women. The problems of destitute women were first put forward by this Samaj. Soon it was found that the problems of such destitute women are not found only among the Muslims but also in other religions. Many women organisations began to look after the problems of destitute women. The problem of destitute women is not a problem of a particular religion. The Stree Mukti Chalwal & Shramik Mukti Chalwal undertook the problems of such women. Many seminars & conferences of destitute women were organised all over Maharashtra.

Another Muslim organisation which was active in Bombay was 'Avaj-A-Niswan' [Voices of Women] It was an independent women's
organisation under the active leadership of Smt. Shahnaz Sheikh. This organisation opposed the Personal Laws for Muslim Women and demanded equality within the personal law for Muslims. It also aims to opine on the political issues like Babri Masjid, political participation of Muslim women etc. However due to the lack of opportunities it was difficult to remain autonomous so it was joined to National Federation of Indian Women. [Gothoskar S., Interview]

According to Smt. Sujata Gothoskar, an activist, the women's activities grew more after 1980s. Though Bombay was the centre for all these activities in Maharashtra, these activities spread elsewhere also which inspired women of Bombay. A coordinating body named as 'Stree Mukti Andolan Sampark Samity' is established at the state level. [Gothosakar S., Interview]

The feminists women's movements are not yet popularly accepted by the Indian people. The feminism in India is not its western counterpart. It is specifically Indian in origin. Still it has to catch the appeal yet. To catch the public attention these organisations make efforts to make feminism acceptable among masses through plays, skits, songs, posters, exhibitions, newsletters & magazines. A few names need to be mentioned:

Manushi: Published in English & Hindi - Delhi.
Saheli: " " " " "
Sachetana, Sabala, Ahalya, Maitreen, in Bengali - Calcutta.
Autonomous feminist organisations work as interest groups in Delhi, Bombay, Pune & Kanpur. Many feminists movements involved in the anti-dowry & anti-rape campaigns felt the necessity for a women's centre, a place where women who have problems could go for emotional, legal & medical support. [Patel V., P.124]

All these organisations are working actively in Bombay after the decade is over. A special mention of a few organisations from Bombay is made below. These organisations were largely influenced by Gandhian thoughts. Even today these organisations are working for the uplift of the women of India.

1. **Stree Shakti Jagruti**:

   Influenced by the Gandhian thought & Vinoba Bhave & Dada Dharmadhikari being its pioneers, Stree Shakti Jagruti, a women's organisation, has its distinct culture. The Stree shakti Jagruti as an organisation was established in 1972.
with an aim to wake up the inherent power of women which was suppressed all these years due to oppression & exploitation. This power of women can be roused by consistent efforts. The women who were influenced by these thoughts organised themselves & began to arrange seminars, shibirs, propagation camps all over India. In Bombay a few women devoted themselves to this work. Smt. Malti Chinchlikar, an active worker of this organisation, had worked since the establishment of this organisation. In her interview, she had expressed that the basic purpose of the Stree Shakti Jagruti organisation is to create an awareness among women against cow slaughter, prohibition, corruption, dowry & other types of injustices on women. It is not a well knit organisation, but it collaborates with the other women organisations.

Slowly its activities began to expand. Now they organise programmes on 'Gandhi Jayanti, Saptaha & Monthly programme starting from Vinoba Bhave, Jayantī to Jayprakash Narayan Jayanti. These programmes include study camps, training & mass propagation to create awareness among women. The women members also join the programmes undertaken by other women organisation.

During the decade they had conducted such programmes. In 1979, a Seminar was arranged at Pawnar Ashram, for women in which more than hundred women from India & abroad had
participated under the Presidentship of Smt. Shobhana Ranade.

These women feel that if women become bold & courageous they can bring miracles. Spiritual power would help women to uplift as enlightened human beings in the society [Chinchlikar M., Interview]

3. Gandhi Smarak Nidhi's Sub-committee For Women's Welfare Work:

Gandhi Smarak Nidhi is a trust aiming to serve the people & to impart Gandhian values among the masses. The Sub-Committee for Women's Welfare Work as a separate body in 1952 & in 1961 it became an autonomous organisation associated with the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. The basic aim of this committee is to participate & to arrange all the constructive programmes which aim at women's welfare. The committee conducts charkha & sewing classes & run seven Balwadi Centres & Sanskar kendras in the slum areas in Bombay. The women workers & supervisors who work in these kendras are trained guided & paid by the Committee.

The Committee arranges different programmes on Gandhi Jayanti & Kasturba Punyatithi (death anniversary). When other women organisations organise programmes, the members of the committee collaborate with them. Every year the committee &
The Committee is very active in helping the needy women & in creating awareness among women. Dr.(Smt.) Usha Mehta is the President of this committee. Dr. Usha Mehta is a research scholar, a politician & was an active freedom fighter. She is ranked as one of the prominent elites of Bombay. In her interview she had expressed her views that the decade has created an awareness in the social field. Many women dedicate themselves for the social cause & the decade has inspired them by recognising their work. There is a low percentage of women because the degradation of politics & male dominance never allow women to join it. The criminal elements are growing, day by day, & hence women are not coming forward to join politics. [Mehta U., Interview]

During the decade the committee had organised one Kavayitri Sammenlan in four languages on the topic, 'women's position in independent India. Many women had participated in it. They had also arranged one study camp for all the women organisations in Bombay & informed the rights of women & the policies of the Government for the uplift of women. They have also organised an exhibition, named 'Laghu Udyogini' by grouping & combining seventeen women organisations. The members of the committee also attend the programmes arranged by other women organisations. With the efforts of these
women a separate women's committee was appointed on 'Zunka Bhakar' Kendra in Bombay. They also urged for minimum one woman employee in the post office. The members are successfully managing all these activities under the able guidance of Dr. Usha Mehta. The other members got inspired and are working in various social fields. The committee in this sense is a unique women's organisation. [Ohol, P., Interview]

These two organisations stand as distinct women's organisations. A mention of an organisation which emerged in 1972 in Bombay & continued to work during the decade must be made. Thousands of women came forward under the banner of the Mahagai Pratikar Samyukta Samiti, organised in Bombay.

The Mahagai Pratikar Samyukta Mahila Samiti:

The objective of this united front of the left & the socialist women's organisations was to pressurise the government to check the price rise & ensure an adequate quota of subsidised essential commodities through the public distribution system. They used some of the most innovative & symbolic forms of protest & showed the most amazing militancy. [Gandhi Nandita, 'When the Rolling Pins Hit The Streets, A Paper Presented in The Third National Conference On Women's Studies, Chandigarh, 1986]
Under the prominent leadership of Smt. Mrinal Gore, Smt. Ahilya Rangnekar, Smt. Kamal Desai, Neela Falnikar, Sudha Varde, women were organising themselves against the rising prices. Since then they are struggling against every type of exploitation either by the government or by social system. Their primary concern has been towards the day to day problems which specially affect women.

The unique feature of the Samiti is that though it does not work under the party banner, the Samiti consists of women members of all the parties. The very basic idea behind its establishment was that wherever women are concerned, they should be brought together without any political purpose. The only political purpose was to unite & organise women of common thought & common ideology.

The Samiti works at national, regional & local levels. It is organised at the regional level under a General Secretary & other secretaries - one woman from each of a political party. In brief every party gets a position in the Samiti either as a General Secretary or a Secretary.

The Samiti works independently without any affiliation and accountability to any political party. However party's indirect support provides them moral encouragement. When the mass campaigns are arranged, separate fund is collected either by way of coupons or by asking the parties or other autonomous women organisations to provide small amount of help. [Desai K.,
While the organisations working for women became more active, they received popularity through the mass media. 6.7 deals with the publicity given by the newspapers to the activities undertaken by these organisations during the decade.

9.7 Mass Media & Women Organisations:

Mass media is an important agent of communication in the formation of public opinion. Most of the mass media like newspapers, magazines, booklets have sufficiently published women's issues during the decade. Radio & Television coverage was comparatively less. A few important events related to women's issues, news regarding working of women's organisations, news of international decade which were reported by different newspapers, publication of women organisations & Research Centre For Women's Studies, are given in brief here.

A pamphlet by Forum Against Oppression of Women (FAOW) was published on March 8, 1980, on international woman's day. It asks,

'Why is it, that on an average, once in three days a woman is either battered or burnt to death in the city of Bombay alone ?

Why are their murderers allowed to go free?'
Why do we allow our sisters & daughters to be battered, humiliated or killed?
Why do we as neighbours choose to close our eyes while a helpless woman is being harassed?
How can we stop it?
We must speak out,
We must organise with other women.
Let's come together & fight violence within the family.

[Publication By FAOW, 8th March, 1980]

In the same year FAOW prepared a short survey based on structural questionair in case of Smt. Shantidevi who was murdered in train in broad daylight while chain snatching. It organised a Dharana & Morcha at Flora Fountain to protest against police atrocities against women. The Purogami Mahila Sanghatana had organised a demostration against the large company to protest against women in employment. The Feminist Resource Centre had organised a Workshop at the Centre on the issue, violence in the family, wife beating & a discussion on 'Traffic in Women'. The FAOW held a joint Dharna, in Bombay, in case of Smt. Maya Tyagi, who was paraded raped by nine policemen & her three companions were shot dead. A National Conference on Perspective For Women's Liberation Movement in India was organised in the first week of November in Bombay.

In 1981 FAOW had arranged a Dharana & Morcha at Kolaba
against the killing of two women. A demonstration was organised against the family members of Smt. Rita Lalla, a twenty year girl who committed suicide. The Nari Atyachar Virodhi Manch had arranged a Women's Fair in which there were stalls, exhibits, games, songs, skits depicting women's problems. The Feminist Resource Centre had arranged a workshop in Bombay. In 1982, India's First International Forum of Women's Cinema was organised comprising a screenings/seminars of films dealing with women's issues. In 1983, FAOW held a demonstration at Pharmacy College, against the use of a strogen progestrone drugs. It had organised public protest against sadistic beating of two daughters. In 1984 Nari Atyachar Virodhi Mancha held a one day programme of short stories, plays, songs on, 'Injustice & Oppression of Women. Feminist Resource Centre had organised a workshop on, "Institutional Approaches to Women in Social Distress." [Abstracts From The Documentation, R.C.W.S./S.N.D.T.Holdings]

The newspapers had published news of the programmes arranged by women organisations. In the Times of India of 4th August, 1980, a news of the World Conference on Women at Copenhagen was reported. [Times of India, 4th August, 1980] Indian express of 29th October 1983 had covered the news of the demands put up by Mahila Jagruti Parishad in the form of Resolutions related to sterner legislation against rape, dowry & insisted on setting up of a National Women's Commission. [Indian Express, 29th October 1983]
The agitations against rising prices held by many organisations were published by the media. These new techniques of resistance appealed to the people & the movement reached all over India through these media.

Maharashtra Times, a daily in Marathi, had also reported a number of news related to the women organisations & its working. It had published the news of the establishment of Women's organisations, Swadhar & Mahila Dakshata Samiti. The programmes conducted by Socialist Women's Organisation, Shramjivi Mahila Sabha, Stree Mukti Sanghatana, Vile Parle Mahila Sangh, Stri Hitkarini were covered by this newspaper. Maharashtra Times of 26th April, 1983 had reported the establishment of Mahila Pradhan Kshetriya Bachat Yojna by Stri Hitkarini [Maharashtra Times, 26th April, 1983] Shri Sunil Rege in his Article in Maharashtra Times had written an Article on the Working of Vile Parle Mahila Sangh, Bombay. [Rege S., Maharashtra Times, 13th March, 1983]

The conspicuous increase in the number of books & statistical reports on issues concerning women has been accompanied by a significant increase in magazine writings on women. Eve's Weekly, Femina, Beautiful, Economic & Political Weekly, Stree, Vahini & Maher (Marathi magazines) had presented in their features simple facts & figures relating to various factors of a woman's life to informative revelations regarding exploitation of women.

When the decade was about to end, the Indian Express had
published an Article on it. It writes, 'U.N. Decade for women has helped to raise consciousness of the situation of the world's disadvantaged women but much remains to be done, according to the analysts. The decade ending next year has taught many lessons. The decade for women has proved to be what some have called, "a valuable learning experience..."[Indian Express, 23rd February, 1984]

When the decade ended, many newspapers wrote its opinions on it. Times of India of 1st April, 1984, had published a feature Article by Smt. Kamala Mankekar, in which a review of the working of the decade is summarised. 'Many goods yet to be achieved? What has been the gains of the International decade of women which concludes this year with world women's conference at Nairobi in July? One of the most significant achievements of the decade has brought the question of their progress in focus at national & international laws. Most of the governments have accepted the U.N. Resolution of women's right to equality & specific problems of them. The decade resulted in greater knowledge & action in support of peace reforms.

Women are now setting their sights on the year 2000 in an effort to achieve a just society in which dignity, opportunity & power are not the monopoly of one sex.' [Mankekar K., Times of India, 1st April 1985]

In April, 1985 a World Conference was called at New Delhi to
take stock of the achievements during the decade in developing non-aligned countries & co-ordinating their position for the World Conference in July 1985. The Nation, a daily newspaper, in its 13th April, 1985 edition, had reported the details of the conference. It was suggested that strategies would have to be evolved to create awareness among policy makers & programme implementers of multifarious activities that women are engaged in. Social supports have to be provided to women to enable them to perform dual responsibilities. The conference recommended that a ministerial level meeting of non-aligned nations be convened in 1990 & every five years thereafter to evaluate the progress of women's movement. [The Nation, 13th April, 1985]

Thus the mass media have supported the revolutionary movements that took place during the decade. A wide coverage was given by these media to the news regarding the activities of different women organisations. This has helped in creating greater awareness for the uplift of women in the society.

9.8 Conclusions & Suggestions:

Conclusions:

1. The growth of women's organisations & the awareness created among women during & after the decade is the major contribution of the decade. The decade has thus proved to be
revolutionary, because it brought a new perspective to the women's issues & problems.

2. The major political parties, knowing the need of the time, began to incorporate women's issues on the forefront. Women wings of the parties became more active during & after the decade.

3. This new section of women was educated & was alert of their rights. They establish their organisations on democratic lines & demanded their rights through legitimate means. In the beginning the emergence of these women was mainly in the urban areas and soon it spread in the rural. The techniques used by these women were not only collective efforts but also non-violent means like morchas, strikes, demonstrations, skits, street plays etc. This brought a new wave in the society.

These women refused to join the political mainstream. It was assumed so far that politics was the only option to get the things done. This presumption was proved to be wrong by these organisations. These organisations worked independently without the support of a party or mercy of the Government. It seems that these educated elite women turned their backs to politics & preferred to be autonomous in their own areas of action.
4. Women political elites like Smt. Mrinal Gore, Smt. Pramila Dandavate, Smt. Ahilya Rangnekar also actively participated in these organisations & guided the women, working in these organisations. The founding members of Swadhar, Mahila Dakshata Samiti were Smt. Mrinal Gore & Smt. Pramila Dandavate respectively.

5. Bombay has been the centre of all these activities. The activities began in Bombay & then percolated in other parts. These women organisations remained more active in urban areas like Bombay Pune, Kanpur, Delhi, Calcutta etc.

6. The media publicity given to these women organisations helped to form favourable public opinion towards women's issues in the society. It was an overall awakening in all the sections of the community.

7. The feminists organisations emerged to challenge the fundamental discrimination made between men & women. The traditional norms & values were challenged by these feminists organisation.

8. These organisations work for the uplift of women in all the walks of life. The areas of their work cover social, cultural, educational fields, health, child care centres etc. In this regard, these women organisations make efforts on their own. They spare their valuable time in these social
activities in raising funds, in organising mass programmes &
in devoting themselves for the emancipation of women.

9. These organisations became more active because a sense
of relief, security moral support, was provided by them. A
woman alone cannot fight against injustice. She was helped by
these organisations. Women's issues were exposed because a
proper channel for its exposure was given by these
organisations.

Suggestions:

Women organisations have grown rapidly in Bombay. Many
organisations were formed for this noble cause. Their aim is to
create a new society of men & women where there is equality &
justice.

1. All these women organisations who work actively should
have proper co-ordination among themselves. There should be
one centralised agency for coordination to provide a common
platform to all women organisations. Such a centralised agency
will keep a complete record of the programmes undertaken by
the organisations so that a concrete & consolidated information
would be available.

2. The activities & programmes undertaken by these
organisations should be properly made known to the society.
The mass media like Television & newspapers should become agents to focus these activities. Regular periodicals should be published by these organisations. The elite women, actively working in these organisations, should be interviewed through mass media.

3. The government should confer upon honours & appreciation certificates to the women working in such organisations and should give due recognition of their contribution in the society.

4. These women organisations have undertaken many social issues - from family problems to the social, economic, cultural & religious problems. Certain other areas like illiteracy, prostitution, devadasi, are the major problems faced by women. These organisations should resist all these evil practices also. They should form public opinion against fundamentalism, communalism, terrorism, religious fanaticism.

5. The process of reformation should reach to the rural areas. In fact, these elite women should propagate these new ideas in rural areas.

6. Women's organisations should expand their activities in course of time. It should undertake the larger matters of common interest. If these organisations have to make its impact on the masses at the national level it must shed off
its old diffidence & exclusiveness. They should speak boldly on every issue. Every issue is women's issue. These women organisations should not restrict themselves to women's rights but should interfere in every human activity.