CHAPTER IV

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND ORGANISATION
Among the political organisations in South Africa, the ones to be chiefly discussed in this chapter are the ANC women's League (ANCWL), the Women's Brigade of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and women in the Communist Party South Africa (CPSA). Among social organisations, those linked with the Church and the Black Sash will be dealt with followed by a discussion on gender related organisations like the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) and the National Women's Coalition (NWC).

**POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS**

**ANC Women's League**

When the ANC was formed in 1912, it did not accept women as its members. It was only in 1931 that the Bantu Women's League (BWL) was recognised as the women's branch of the ANC. BWL's first President was Charlotte Maxeke who achieved political prominence by involving herself in anti-pass law demonstrations. She supported the formation of National Trade Union movement for Africans, worked for many African newspapers and visited women's prisons in South Africa.1

Within the ANC she is considered as a pioneer and inspiration for women in the liberation struggle. "Her very participation in congress activities... and in the general struggle of the African people symbolised the determination and willingness of the ANC to involve women and crystallise the belief in our movement in the equality of both sexes."2 But being a woman, Maxeke, did not enjoy an equal status with her male colleagues in ANC. For instance, she did not have the vote.3 In 1941, at the annual conference of the ANC the resolution that was passed recommended to the parent body "the necessity of reviving the women's section of the Congress in terms of the provision of the Constitution. Further, that women be accorded the same status as men in the classification of membership."4 In 1943 at the annual

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4 Ibid, p.89.
conference women were granted full membership status within the ANC with the right to vote and participate in Congress affairs at all levels.

In 1948 ANCWL was set up and Madie-Hall Xuma,5 was elected its first President. The role of ANCWL then was:

(1) to arouse the interest of African women in the struggle for freedom and equality and assist the widespread organisation of women;
(2) to take up special problems and issues affecting women, and
(3) to carry on propaganda against apartheid and discriminatory laws among African women.6

It is clear that the national struggle took precedence over women's issues. Although Madie-Hall Xuma played an important role in getting the ANCWL established, she was a "conservative woman who was not politically motivated".7 She was interested in starting self-help societies for women which focused on sewing and social or charitable activities. Under her leadership, middle-class women dominated and despite its enhanced status, the league's work was limited to fund-raising and to catering. Thus the ANCWL lacked political commitment and involvement. By late 1940 Congress Youth League (CYL) became active within the ANC. Under its influence in 1949, Madie-Hall Xuma was replaced by Ida Mtwana of CYL.8

The election of Mtwana as ANCWL's President initiated a new era in the history of the organisation. The League was structured along the lines of the parent body. The establishment of provincial leagues put ANCWL in closer touch with the township women in the country. This opened ways for a leadership with a broader mass base. Important leaders who emerged were Dorothy Nyembe, Lilian Masediba

5 She was an American from Georgia whom the then ANC national president Dr. Xuma had met and married while on a visit to the USA in 1937-38.
6 Walker, n.3, p. 89.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid, p. 92
Ngoyi, Annie Silinga, Mary Moodley, Rahima Moosa, Helen Joseph and Ray Alexander. Dorothy Nyembe was elected vice-chairperson of the Durban branch of the ANC Women's League and set up its branches throughout Natal. The issues of Bantu education, passes and beer halls dominated the activities of women in the 1950s. Key activities were Defiance Campaign (1952), Congress of People (1955) and the anti-passlaw demonstration (1956). According to Cherryl Walker "the single most important stimulus for the growth of the ANCWL came from a familiar source that directly touched African women - the threat of passes." The protests against passes not only politicised African women but also gave ANCWL a clear focus of activity.

The impact of women's activities led the male leadership to recognise the potential of women in the struggle. Women's organisations were slowly integrated into ANC structures. In 1956, ANCWL President, Lilian Ngoyi was elected the first woman to join the ANC National Executive Committee (NEC). The banning of ANC and ANCWL in 1960 disrupted this process of integrations. However, ANC President Oliver Tambo realised the necessity of including women and extended his support. In 1987, the Commission on the Emancipation of women headed by Oliver Tambo was formed within ANC. Its task was to ensure the participation of women. ANC further developed the following policy guidelines regarding women -

1. Commitment to a "non-sexist" society.

2. Inclusion of a section on "human rights for women" within the Bill of Rights and

3. Special provisions to be developed in the fields of local governance, social welfare, housing, education, health, human resource development, labour relations policy, land issues, economic issues and media policy.

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9 Personal interview, Dorothy Nyembe, Cape Town, August 14, 1996.
10 Ibid.
11 Walker, n.3, p.92.
According to the ANC Constitution the ANC Women's League shall be open to women who are members of the ANC and shall have the same basic structure, namely, national, provincial and branch. Its objectives will be to defend and advance the rights of women, both inside and outside the ANC, against all forms of national, social and gender oppression and to ensure that women play a full role in the life of the organisation, in the people's struggle and in national life. The Women's League will function as an autonomous body within the overall structure of the ANC, of which it will be an integral part, with its own Constitution, rules and regulations, provided that these shall not be in conflict with the Constitution and policies of the ANC.\(^\text{13}\)...

The ANC provides it with an annual budget and supplementary grants for specific projects. The important aims of the Women's League are -

1. to mobilise and organise South African women in the struggle for liberation and against discrimination,
2. to create political awareness among women,
3. to formulate democratic policy concepts,
4. to popularise ANC especially among women,
5. to promote women's emancipation within the ANC and the society, and
6. to improve the lot of women in both rural and urban areas.\(^\text{14}\)

Here, a shift in emphasis from national liberation to the women's emancipation is noticed.

Structure of ANCWL

The discussion on this aspect is based on the documents provided by ANCWL's office at Johannesburg.\(^\text{15}\) The structure of ANCWL can be divided into the


\(^{14}\) ANCWL, n.12, p.6.

\(^{15}\) ANCWL, n.12.
decision-making political structure where women are elected to positions and work on a voluntary basis and administrative structure where women are employed and earn a salary for their work.\footnote{16} It is the function of the administration to implement the policies and decisions of the political bodies. The administrative structures are closely connected to the political decision-making bodies. As a principle each administrative section or department must include an NEC member to ensure that the work is guided by the policy decisions of the ANCWL.\footnote{17}

*The Political Structure*:

- National Conference/National Executive Committee (NEC)
  - Regional Conference/Regional Executive Committee (REC)
    - Zone
    - Branch

The branches are registered. Each has a minimum of twenty members. A branch meets at least once in a month. The members of the branch executive committee are elected annually. The branch carries out the ANCWL policies and reports to REC. A minimum of three branches makes up a zone. The branch executive committee elects the zonal committee. This too meets at least once in a month and reports to REC. The ANCWL has fourteen regions. The annual conference elects the REC. This body is responsible for policy formulation under the guidance of the NEC and for implementation of decisions at national level. The National Conference directs the ANCWL and takes major policy decisions. It consists of delegates of the regions. The NEC implements the decisions of the National Conference and monitors the regions' activities in this regard. The National Officials are President, Deputy President General, National Secretary, Deputy Secretary General and Treasurer.

\footnote{16}{Ibid, p.10.}
\footnote{17}{Ibid.}
**Administrative Structure**

The following figure illustrates the ANCWL administrative structure:

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1. **President's Office (PO):** It is responsible for political guidance. The PO finalises decisions, formulates statements and supervises the activities in the regions. It addresses areas of special concern to the ANCWL. In 1993, these were the Constitution and elections. International Desk is the sub-structure of PO. International affairs are dealt with in co-operation with this desk. For instance, the preparations for the world conference on women in Beijing, 1995 was its task. The desk is also responsible for external and internal networking.

2. **Secretary General's Office (SGO):** SGO's main fields of work are administration and political co-ordination. The administrative tasks are staff management, linking to the regions, pooling of the records of the activities of all departments and structures of the ANCWL, keeping a central filing system and conference preparation and reports. The tasks regarding political co-ordination include negotiating at top as well as grassroots level, co-ordinating the structures of ANCWL, representing ANCWL in policy matters and conveying the implementation of the NEC decisions in the
regions. SGO is assisted by Policy Division (PD), Organising Division (OD) which is further assisted by Election and Media Sections.

3. Treasurer's Office: This is responsible for administration of funds and resources, authorisation of expenditure, contacts with donors and potential donors and representing ANCWL at all events which involve potential donors. It is assisted by Development Section (DS) which has development centres like Transkei Rural Women's Development Centre near Umtata and national development network where twenty-two development workers are working in all regions. The following are its fields of work -
   
a. Training Programmes: These include pre-school teacher training courses; project planning and management courses, book keeping and accounting, literacy training and women's health education programme.

b. Projects: These are sewing, poultry farming, vegetables, crop production, orchards, Malibonqwe children's centre, tie-and-dye projects, diary projects and bakeries.

c. Research: Research on gender and development is also undertaken.

4. The Fourteen Regions: These regions are responsible for implementing the national policies of the League but focus on "their" regional issues. The administrative structures in the regions consist of two regional organisers and one regional administrator. They work with the elected staff - the regional chairperson and the regional treasurer. The regions are Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Northern Free State, Southern Free State, Northern Transvaal, Western Transvaal, Eastern Transvaal, Border, Transkei, Northern Natal, Southern Natal, Natal Midlands and PWV.
The ANCWL was banned in 1960 and stayed so till 1990. During this period the women's section was set up. This had no Constitution. Elaborating on the structure of women's section, Mavivi Manzini, a member, said that minimum of five women could form a unit and elect a secretary and a chairman and follow women's section programme. The highest body was a conference which met every five years. The conference elected the National Women's Secretariat. The Secretariat consisted of nine people each in charge of a "desk" like logistics, politics, international relations, education and finance. There are sub-committees to deal with each desk. All women who belonged to ANC-in-exile automatically belonged to the women's section.

In the ANC women's conference in 1987 the following tasks were assigned to

1. Women's Section
   (i) Shall implement the decisions of the NEC.
   (ii) Shall mobilise masses of women inside South Africa into the struggle.
   (iii) Shall organise ANC women abroad into units of women's section.
   (iv) Shall ensure the care and well being of all ANC children.
   (v) Shall mobilise material, moral and diplomatic support from international sources.
   (vi) Shall issue propaganda material for both internal and external use.
   (vii) Shall report regularly to the office of the Secretary-General.

2. National Women's Council
   (i) Shall review national and international developments.
   (ii) Shall report on the implementation of the Programme of Action.
   (iii) Shall evaluate the work accomplished and problems encountered.
   (iv) Shall formulate and adopt the next Programme of Action.

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19 Second ANC Women's Conference - September 1987, National Preparatory Committee Papers, Paper No.12, p.2.
3. **National Women's Secretariat**

   (i) Shall co-ordinate, supervise and direct the work in between sessions.

   (ii) Shall form subcommittees of the Secretariat.

   (iii) Shall receive and consider reports from all organs and representatives of women's section.

   (iv) Shall report to the Council on the state of organisation within women's section, and

   (v) Shall recommend new initiatives including the composition of the National Women's Secretariat and Council.

When the ban on ANCWL was lifted in 1990, formal structures had to be re-established: Women at the regional level helped set-up such structures. Shirley Chaplog, the first elected woman chairperson of ANC at Belhar, said that she started ANCWL's branches both in Belhar, Cape Town and Eldorado Park, Johannesburg. Regarding the work at these branches she explained that "apart from signing people for ANC membership, we run workshops on what democracy is, how elections take place, how the ANC functions etc." She further said that women were organised both for political and gender related purposes. The Belhar Women's group was started by her which dealt with issues like wife-battering and literacy classes for domestic workers. When asked if she confronted any problems being a woman leader she explained "Even if you are in a progressive organisation like ANC a woman has to work twice as hard to prove herself both within and outside the organisation. Infact women do not accept women as leaders. On the otherhand men give due credit to women in the struggle but not in their personal lives. They want to dominate women as husbands and fathers. As a woman I had to work harder to be recognised."
It is important to question why ANC chose to have a separate body for women? Was there no equality between male and female members of ANC? Did ANC consider its women members as inferior who needed separate treatment? Cherryl Walker pointed out that "by establishing a separate Women's League, the ANC recognised that women occupied a distinct and inferior position to men in society which posed particular organisational problems and required special attention. ANC perpetuated the existing sexual divisions and reinforced stereotypes about 'women's role' and 'women's work'."\(^2\) This statement is debatable. However, this dilemma is not unique to ANCWl but to any women's group or organisation. While "sexism" within ANC should be condemned, the need for separate women's organisations cannot be ruled out given the existing inequalities between sexes in the society. But, to what extent women should be treated separately is a matter of debate.

**The Women's Brigade of Inkatha Freedom Party**

IFP has been predominant in Kwazulu Natal where 80 percent of population speak zulu language.\(^2\) The women's brigade of IFP is therefore a Zulu based organisation. It was formed in 1976. Its President, Mangosuthu Buthelezi explained the context and importance of the Brigade in his opening address at the Inaugural Congress in May 1977 - "I call on the women to understand the gravity of the political situation in South Africa and to realise that they are needed now.... The people cannot be mobilised and organised and put to work building a better South Africa if the women do not rally their menfolk and their children, if they do not organise themselves into a disciplined workforce for justice."\(^2\)

Like ANCWl, the Brigade is not autonomous as it falls under the control of the Central Committee of the IFP. The Women's Brigade's involvement in politics

\(^2\) Walker, n.3, p.90.
\(^2\) M.G.Buthelezi, Opening Address, Inaugural Congress of Women's Brigade, Inanda Seminary, May 27, 1977.
either within Inkatha or outside is defined for them. The Brigade is a means to mobilise and organise women to further the aims of Inkatha, particularly controlling the youth.

The Women's Brigade is responsible for keeping the youth in check at both ideological and the political levels. Inkatha sees women, especially mothers as the bearers of culture and as the medium through which 'correct' attitudes will be transmitted to the youth. Therefore women's role within the family is stressed. Women's subordinate role in the family is considered natural. Buthelezi remarked - "In our Constitution we placed the Youth Brigade under the care of the Women's Brigade. That is a function which God has given you." Therefore, women's role as care-takers within the family is not only reinforced but extended to include the political sphere.

The first way in which Inkatha hopes to establish control of the youth is through promoting and reinforcing Zulu patriarchal family system. The second way is by mobilising the Brigade to intervene actively in controlling the youth. The role of mothers is emphasised. Inkatha organises women only secondarily as women. Women are organised primarily as mothers, wives, daughters and mothers-to-be. In 1985 Buthelezi said to women - "You as the mothers of the nation, you the women of Inkatha, have a sacred duty to discharge. Be strong for the sake of your children, your fathers, your mothers and your husbands. Be strong for the sake of the nation. Be strong for South Africa." That the women should be strong for themselves is evidently missing.

Inkatha's broad aims are liberation and development. The central committee scores liberation while the Women's Brigade and the Youth Brigade help the Committee in

25 M.G. Buthelezi, Presidential Address, Seventh Annual Conference, Women's Brigade, Ulundi, October 8, 1983.  
26 M.G. Buthelezi, Presidential Address, Annual General Conference of Women's Brigade, Ulundi, October 19, 1985.  

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combating ‘poverty, ignorance and disease’. The Brigades have set up many self-help programmes - particularly in the rural areas. These programmes have attracted the rural women for a variety of reasons and have increased Inkatha's membership significantly. Since women are responsible for managing household, self-help projects and development schemes appeal to them. The Brigade has set up self-help agricultural projects in the rural areas, community gardens in the townships as well as bulk-buying schemes, co-operatives and credit unions where strong branches exist. The provision of uncontaminated water is regarded as an important priority in the fight against disease. Women have been involved in digging trenches, laying pipes and building water storage tanks. These activities have given the Women's Brigade the image of doers. This makes it attractive for women who find it difficult to make ends meet. Ruth Buthelezi's study of informal helping networks in Kwa Zulu rural areas confirm that women's primary reason for joining is economic rather than political.

Ruth Buthelezi found that in the groups organised by Inkatha, structures are loose. The membership is fluid and the attachment of participants to the group is often peripheral. Commitments are not enduring and the activities are mass based. It is clear that while women are being organised in different groups, the organisation does not lead to women's involvement in Inkatha politics. It must be pointed out that the Women's Brigade has been able to reach the rural women who are difficult to organise. Its success in organising these women is due to its ability to provide services through the structures of the Kwa-Zulu government. Women's groups do not serve only an economic function. They enable women who are not employed in wage labour to escape from the household. They create space for women outside the household to involve themselves in activities which do not lead to conflict with

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28 Ibid, p.10.
29 Ibid.
their husbands. Women's involvement in sewing, knitting, pottery and the like is seen by their husbands as legitimate activity which does not threaten power or gender relations within the household. At the same time, it gives women a 'sense of independence' from their menfolk.

For women with political aspirations, the women's group can serve as a stepping-stone to public or political positions. This is evident from the case of many of the women in leadership positions in Inkatha. Chairperson of the Women's Brigade from 1977-1980, Mrs. Ella Nxasana was involved in women's welfare organisations before she joined Inkatha. Involvement in women's groups help women develop skills necessary for public positions such as public speaking, taking minutes of meetings, writing reports, etc. which they would not develop otherwise.

The Women's Brigade has not publicly challenged the terms on which they have been organised by the Central Committee. Instead, the leadership has accepted the definition of women's role within the family as natural. The leadership sees the revival and reconstitution of Zulu traditions and customs as positive as it gives women back the status and respect that was destroyed. The women themselves accept their position in the family as natural and unchangeable - "Women have the added burden of home-management and child-care irrespective of whether they are full-time housewives or full-time employees. These two roles cannot be shirked by women no matter how much we cry for equality with men. There are special virtues God gave us as women in order to be effective home-managers and mothers i.e., patience, tenderness of heart and insight. Projects we get involved in as the Women's Brigade are meant to make our roles easier." What this implies is that women's political activity is narrowly defined and confined to the twin roles of child care and household or community management.

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30 Ibid, p.11.
Women in the Communist Party of South Africa

The emancipation of women and their participation in all spheres of public life is a feature of communist doctrine. Communism argues that capitalism oppresses women. Women therefore have a common interest with men in fighting for the establishment of a Socialist State. According to Lenin "it is the chief task of the working women's movement to fight for economic and social equality, and not just formal equality for women. The chief thing is to get women to take part in socially productive labour, to liberate them from 'domestic slavery', to free them from their stupefying and humiliating subjugation to the eternal drudgery of the kitchen and the nursery. This struggle will be a long one and it demands a radical reconstruction both of social technique and of morals. But it will end in the complete triumph of communism."\(^{32}\)

The CPSA applied these communist principles to the specific conditions of struggle in South Africa. It closely linked the cause of women with the revolution of national as well as working class liberation. The Party saw national liberation as a condition for any change in the status of women. CPSA believed that Black women who are most oppressed and exploited are the 'slaves of slaves'.\(^{33}\) Lenin said that women are subjected to dual oppression both as members of the working class and as women. But in South Africa, the communist party identified 'triple oppression' of Black women as they are oppressed by race as well.\(^{34}\) It is important to note that these three kinds of oppression are linked and therefore reinforce one another.

Thus in February 1931, CPSA founded a Women's Department to organise women as women. During this period the Party called for a women's National Conference aiming "to unify and consolidate the sectional struggle of women... and in order to


\(^{34}\) Ibid.
bring into existence a permanent organisation of struggle for the working women of South Africa."35 In this context it appealed to women: "Toiling Native women, White working women, realise your interests, wake up to fight for better conditions side by side with your husbands, fathers and brothers. Only by a United Front can you get rid of all the exploitation which you suffer under capitalism and where you as women are the greatest sufferers."36 Thus CPSA cut across the factor of race. An interesting observation here is that it was only CPSA that addressed the issue of White working class women. CPSA identified capitalism as the problem and encouraged the partnership of men and women in fighting it. Women are not isolated from men even while dealing with women's emancipation. Thus CPSA brought new perspectives to the national liberation movement.

CPSA produced important women leaders. During the 1920s Rebecca Bunting, Fanny Kleenerman and Mary Wolten participated actively in party work. They were all wives of leading men in the party, and therefore their role was supportive.37 On the other hand, there were leaders like Ray Alexander and Josie Palmer who rose to prominence by their hard work and commitment. Josie Palmer got involved in CPSA's struggle against residence permits in Potchefstroom location as discussed in the last chapter. The permit question in Potchefstroom was of concern to women. By fighting for such issues, the CPSA popularised itself among the Black women. Josie Palmer singled out the concern for basic domestic issues by CPSA as a major reason why she chose to join their organisation rather than the ANC.38 Ray Alexander who initiated trade unionism among women, encouraged CPSA in 1931 to take part in a broad-based 'consumer vigilance council' in Cape Town.39 The council was formed to protest against the prosecution of a local baker who was charged for selling bread below the official price. From the start, it aimed at

35 Walker, n.3, p.51.
36 Rosita, n.33, p.88.
37 Ibid.
38 Walker, n.3, p.49.
39 Ibid.
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campaining against rising food costs. This issue had broad appeal, particularly among the working class women. In 1950 CPSA was declared unlawful. Nevertheless, in 1953 CPSA organised working women into trade unions. This period saw the inflow of African women in industry especially manufacturing industry. (For details see Trade Union Movement in Chapter III).

During the 1950s CPSA was involved in political organisation of women. Yet women's rights were not an issue of central importance in the party programme. Sex discrimination was seen as a minor problem in the South African context. CPSA emphasised the contribution women could make to the general struggle as workers and as Blacks and was inclined to overlook women's issues. Separate figures for male and female members are not available but according to Cryerl Walker one can assume that the majority of the 2000 members belonging to CPSA in 1950 were men. Regarding the structure of Women's Department, it was a branch of CPSA and was under its direction and control. It was not autonomous. Moreover, it was concerned with the liberation struggle more than women's problems.

Thus, the main concern of the CPSA in organising women whether against passes, rising food costs or discriminatory legislation, was to mobilise them for a common struggle with men against the apartheid State. While Communists might debate about the precedence of Black nationalist struggle over worker's struggle, they were clear that women's struggle for emancipation was subordinate to the other two struggles. In this regard, they shared the same perspective as the ANC. Nevertheless, it was within the CPSA that the idea of organising women at the political level was successful. Individual women played a far more prominent part in it than in any other political body and several important female political leaders

40 Ibid, p.97.
41 Ibid.
emerged. In 1938 for instance Ray Alexander and Cissy Gool were elected to the 'Political Bureau' of CPSA established in Cape Town. In 1945 two out of fifteen members elected to the central committee were women - Ray Alexander and Hilda Watts and in 1946, Ray Alexander was re-elected along with Betty Sacks. CPSA encouraged new ways of thinking about the position of women especially by focusing attention on working women and trying to establish contact between women of different races.

SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS

Church

Religious and welfare organisations did play a role in mobilising women in South Africa. Church assumes importance in this context. According to Margaret Nash who worked for the South African Council of Churches (SACC), "the more the Black and political organisations were banned, the more Church became the vehicle of protest and resistance." The role of Church in organising women and the importance of women's welfare associations will be briefly dealt with followed by a detailed discussion on the organisation called Black Sash (BS) which played a significant role in resisting the system of apartheid.

Religion, particularly Christianity, is an important factor in bringing women together in South Africa. According to Courtney Sampson, a parish priest, women constitute a significant proportion of those who regularly attend the services and are the majority of participants in Church programmes. Keeping the South African situation in mind, Sampson further says that religion has a very important social function in communities where there is "very little or no access to expensive or

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42 Ibid, p.55.
43 Ibid, p.98.
44 Personal Interview, Margaret Nash, Cape Town, August 10, 1996.
sophisticated forms of social activity." Religion, therefore, is not just a spiritual need but a social outlet for women. In South Africa Church went a step ahead to fight against the government apart from helping women morally and materially. The Christian Women's Movement formed in 1982 under SACC was overtly anti-apartheid. It stated that "our vision and our dream is to work for the realisation of a new community of women and men in the Church and for the total liberation of all people in South Africa. We have made a commitment to work for the eradication of apartheid and all structural inequalities in the Church and the society... our struggle for equality therefore cannot be separated from the political liberation of all people." 

One of the important African women's organisations that the Church set up were Manyanos. These organisations were meant for township African women belonging to different tribes who faced economic hardships. The Manyano serves as a welfare pool. It organises saving clubs, rotating among members the benefit of the money accumulated each month to help with emergencies like school or university fees and demands from creditors. According to Fatima Meer "non-political on the face of it, the Manyano has a potential for quick politicisation inherent in a non-tribal, Christian, but intrinsically African grouping as it funnels grievances which are rooted in racism." Manyanos did act as protest groups against apartheid. They defended women's right to brew beer in the 1940s, resisted the extension of passes to women in 1913 and in the 1950s, agitated against the expropriation of African-owned property and forced removals in 1954 as well as against statutory inferiorisation of African education in 1955.
The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) is the other side of the coin of African Church women. Whereas the Manyano represents the uneducated and domestic workers, the YWCA represents the relatively educated and economically better-off African Church women. Initially it was all-Whites but it started incorporating Black women. By 1940s African component was the largest. The Young Women's Catholic Association provides education and welfare services in the townships. It is a national body with regional and local committees throughout the country. Church thus both organised and helped women.

The non-Church linked women's bodies, which are White-dominated, are the National Council of Women, the Housewives League, the Business and Professional women, the Women's institute and the Toast Mistress. Except National Council of Women, all other organisations excluded Blacks from membership for a long time. Their interests are centred around improving the competence of members in housewifery, gardening, crafts and public speaking. Wendy Sequerius who worked with Women's Institute explained that they took up water conservation in rural areas, introduced cost-effective toilet system for better sanitation and started literacy classes including nutrition education. The National Council of Women established in 1913 is an affiliate of the International Council of Women. It adopted a clear stance against apartheid. Its 47th Conference in 1981 affirmed that "South Africa is one country and one people and rejected racial discrimination as morally unsound and a dangerous obstacle to the peaceful development of the country." In 1936, African women founded their own National Council of African Women. By 1953 it had four branches on the Reef and one each in Pietermaritzburg and Durban. This emulated White women and saw African problems as due to ignorance and illiteracy.

50 Personal Interview, Wendy Segerius, Durban, August 23, 1996.
51 Meer, n.47, p.23.
In Johannesburg, Black women with better social and economic conditions spearheaded such organisations, often with assistance from liberal Whites. They aimed to improve their own family life as well as give relief to the needy like orphans, crippled and aged. These groups were not political and did not advocate changes in government policies. Individual achievement and emulating Western culture formed their basis. Mable Ngakane started the first such welfare organisation called the Orlando Mothers Welfare Association in 1937. Members raised money to build a crèche for young children, got the Child Welfare Society of Johannesburg to make contributions towards the care of African children, advised women with their problems and influenced the authorities to provide Orlando with a bus service. The group demanded one shilling a month as membership fee. While women philanthropists sought outlets in African women's improvement organisations. Margaret Ballinger, a Native Representative in Parliament, initiated the Association of European and African women in 1936 based on the ideal of African and White co-operation to promote better living conditions for Africans. Club meetings deteriorated into complaint sessions for the Black Women who saw no reason to work for their own welfare when their white colleagues could easily lend financial assistance. However, the Association succeeded in establishing the Bantu Children's Holiday Fund and Margaret Ballinger Home for convalescent children. In 1948, when all-white management committees took over the running of these programmes, Black participation ended altogether.

**Black Sash**

The Black Sash, a women's protest organisation was founded in 1955 when the Senate Bill which removed Coloured people from the common voters' roll was introduced in the parliament. This was seen as a violation of the legal provisions of

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53 Ibid, p.96.
the Constitution and as the breaking of a solemn pledge to the Coloured people whose franchise rights had been entrenched in the South Africa Act of 1910.\textsuperscript{54} There was widespread protest by the 'Women's Defence of the Constitution League' as it was called originally.\textsuperscript{55} The protest, though well supported, failed in its object and the Coloureds were removed from the common roll in 1956. However, the Black Sash continued to exist.

According to the National Constitution of the Black Sash, the organisation was non-political which by peaceful means would pursue the following objects:\textsuperscript{56}

1. to promote justice and the principles of parliamentary democracy in South Africa;
2. to seek constitutional recognition and protection by law of human rights and liberties for all;
3. to further the political education and enlightenment of South African citizens and others;
4. to address in all its work how each area of such work affects women;
5. to undertake whatever other activities may further the objects of the organisation.

The membership was open to all women of 18 years and over, resident in South Africa who subscribed to the aims and objectives of the organisation. But according to Mary Burton who was its national president "though the membership was open to all it was predominantly a white organisation."\textsuperscript{57} The structure as mentioned in its Constitution is as follows:\textsuperscript{56} The organisation consisted of branches or groups which were grouped in regions. The National conference divides South Africa into different

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Personal interview, Mary Burton, Cape Town, August 5, 1996.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
regions. Any six members might apply to a Regional Council for permission to form a branch and could function according to the policy laid down by the National Conference. The BS was divided into seven regions each of which elects its own office bearers. Regular National Conferences were held where policy, plans and activities were discussed. One region was chosen to act as headquarters and a National President and two vice-presidents were elected. The other National office bearers were a secretary, a treasurer, an advice office co-ordinator and a magazine editor. The members paid an annual subscription and extra money was raised by donations, book sales, cake sales, fetes and functions. The management and control of the organisation was vested in the National Conference.

During the 1950s and 1960s, BS held a number of `vigils' and haunts to protest against various measures introduced by the apartheid regime. A `vigil' was a group of women in Black Sashes with bowed heads standing outside public buildings or places and a `haunt' consisted of a group of women in black sashes with heads up, who tried to embarrass government ministers by catching their eyes.59 The organisation adopted as its emblem a black rose and its members wore Black sashes in public demonstrations to `mourn' the abrogation of the South African Constitution (1910), by the Nationalist regime.60 In its early days BS adopted a rather exclusivist stance and stood aloof from mass struggles. It declined an invitation to participate in the mass women's march at the Union Buildings in Pretoria in 1956 to protest against passes. Later it participated in the multi-racial consultative committees consisting of Congress members and Church people formed in 1959 to exchange ideas. But the major part of the Sash work was behind the scenes and consisted of informing the public by means of handouts, pamphlets,

60 Ibid.
memos, letters, articles, statements to the press and of delegations to government ministers in defence of the principles of social justice.

In the 1960s as it became clear that the Nationalist regime would not respond to protest demonstrations, 'haunts' were abandoned and 'vigils' became less frequent. Instead, BS embarked on a programme of 'political education' both of its own members and the public. An important aspect of this was setting up of Advice Offices which operated in various parts of the country. This was an attempt on the part of members to mitigate the effects of discriminatory legislation and to help Black people with Pass Law prosecutions and to enlighten them about a few rights to which they were entitled. Other problems handled by these offices included employer/employee problems, workmen's compensation, unemployment insurance and pensions.

Diane Bishop explained her experiences regarding Black Sash's involvement with Pass Law Courts.\footnote{Russell, n.18, pp.216-17.} As a member, she went to Langa Pass Law Court in Cape Town on a regular basis. The Black Sash monitored these courts so as to create an available presence of BS members for any kind of consultation. The very presence of Whites in these courts demonstrated their concern for and solidarity with Black people. Moreover the magistrates were more careful and "when we were unable to be there, they would see that the whole procedure was more hasty, the remarks that were made in the court were more indiscreet and the sentences were harsher."\footnote{Ibid, p.217.}

Over the years, its contact with the masses through these centres radicalised the organisation. It produced a number of authoritative studies on the effects of the pass laws and became critics of the whole system of passes. Because of its activities the State forced a number of its Advice Centres to close on the grounds that they were involved "in attempting to 'bend the rules' so as to permit 'illegal'
Africans to enter or remain in urban areas.” In October 1981 it passed a resolution declaring that “the only viable alternative to the present exploitative and repressive system is one based on the principles of the ‘Freedom Charter’ and resolving not to rest until we have established a democratic South Africa based on the Freedom Charter.”

After the first democratic elections of 1994, the Black Sash changed its structure from a protest organisation to a professional organisation still upholding the same principles. It is now concerned with submissions to government and other bodies with a view to shaping legislation and advising on welfare. The advice offices, financed by the Advice Office Trust and staffed by several paid workers and volunteers, continue to offer free advice and support to people who come for help in their daily lives.

Thus, BS though not an aggressive organisation resisted apartheid in its own way. According to one of its national presidents’ Margarent Nash “the fact that the White women were educated was crucial in terms of their contribution like writing, advising, questioning and supporting the Blacks who were often uneducated and unaware.” Moreover the police when confronted with White women had problems in dealing with them. The BS women though silent protesters, were always there showing their concern and solidarity. According to Isobel Doughlas “they were a constant nuisance to the police.” Moreover, BS aimed at fighting apartheid rather than women’s problems. In this context, one of its national president Mary Burton elaborated that “we never thought it as a women’s organisation. It was an organisation of women rather than for women. Only in the second half of 1980s, the feminist consciousness came into the movement due to the influx of young...

63 Davies, n.59, p.385.
64 Ibid.
65 Personal interview, Margaret Nash, Cape Town, August 10, 1996.
66 Personal interview, Isobel Doughlas, Port Elizabeth, August 20, 1996.
members with different outlook. And a women's group was started within BS. She further concluded that "The strength of the organisation was not to strive for power or authority but contribute to the struggle".

Federation of South African Women

Under the system of apartheid both Black men and women were discriminated and oppressed. While sexual discrimination existed, it was offset by the fact that the Black women identified 'apartheid regime' and not 'men' as the main cause of their problems. Women's organisations in South Africa must be viewed in terms of this dichotomy. In this context there is less scope for women to form organisations based on feminist ideas. However, a few organisations were formed in South Africa to deal with women's political mobilisation and related issues. Under this theme the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) and the National Women's Coalition (NWC) will be discussed.

FSAW was formed at the "First National Conference of Women" held in the Trades Hall, Johannesburg on 17 April 1954. The conference was the result of the growing need that women felt for a different type of woman's organisation which would:

1. embrace all women, irrespective of race.
2. help to strengthen, build and bring together in joint activity the various women's sections in the liberatory movements and other women's organisations,
3. participate in the struggles of the working and oppressed peoples for the removal of class and race discrimination and for full and equal citizen rights,
4. express the needs and aspirations of the housewives, wage-earners, peasants and professional women of South Africa, and

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67 Personal interview, Mary Burton, Cape Town, August 5, 1996.
68 Ibid.
69 FSAW papers (AD 1137), Historical and Literary Papers, William Cullen Library, University of WITS, Johannesburg - FSAW Inaugural Conference 1954 Reports.
bring about the emancipation of women from the special disabilities suffered by them under laws, customs and conventions and strive for a genuine South African democracy based on complete equality and friendship between men and women and between different sections.

The conference received messages of greeting from organisations representing 140 million women in 66 countries all over the world. More than 150 delegates were present representing over 230,000 women from all the main centres in the country. They were drawn from the Congress Alliance made up of ANC, SAIC, South African Congress of Democrats, South African Coloured Peoples Organisation and trade unions which left the Trade Union Congress of South Africa and formed the South African Congress of Trade Unions in 1955. The leading women who took initiative were Lilian Ngoyi, Florence Mkhize, Ray Alexander, Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa, Elizabeth Mafekeng, Frances Baard and Ida Mntwana. The FSAW was established because its founders identified the need for a mass women's organisations which would both struggle against forms of exploitation and oppression which particularly affected women and mobilise women to participate more actively in the broader liberation struggle. In addition, a specific women's organisation was seen to be necessary to fight sexism within other organisations of popular struggle. As a FSAW document of the 1950s put it: "Many men who are politically active and progressive in outlook still follow the tradition that women should take no part in politics and a great resentment exists towards women who seek independent activities or even express independent opinions." Ida Mntwana who became FSAW's first president commented on the position of women in South Africa: "Gone are the days when the place of women was in the kitchen and looking after the children. Today, they are marching side by side with men in the road to freedom.

71 FSAW Papers, n.69.
72 Davies, n.59, p.367.
We have come together, women of all races to co-ordinate our efforts into one army capable of shaping the future destiny of our children and to consolidate the efforts of members of various national groups. As women we have many problems which hold us back from taking part fully in the struggle and it is for precisely that purpose that we have come to breakdown these problems.  

The establishment of the FSAW represented the first attempt to set up a broad-based organisation to take up women's struggles in South Africa. Previous organisations that had mobilised women in struggle had either been temporary bodies linked to specific campaigns, or else, like the women's League of ANC, based exclusively on the membership of other organisations. The aims of the Federation were:

1. to bring the women of South Africa together, to secure full equality of opportunity for all women, regardless of race, to remove social, legal and economic disabilities and to work for the protection of the women and children.

2. The Federation shall stand for: (i) the removal of legal disabilities and the changing of laws and customs that deny women equal rights as women over their children. (ii) Equal pay for equal work and equal opportunities for employment. (iii) Better living conditions, including proper homes, compulsory and free education, nursery school, clinics, maternity services and hospitals, confinement allowances for all working women. (iv) Democratic rights for women like the right to vote, and be elected in all council and government bodies, and (v) Co-operation with other organisations with similar aims in South Africa and throughout the world.

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73 FSAW Papers, n.69.
74 Ibid (Draft Constitution).
*Structure and Functioning*

According to its draft Constitution, the highest body of the organisation is National Conference (NC) consisting of delegates from local and regional branches of the organisation and from affiliated bodies. NC is represented by two delegates for every group. NC is held annually. National Executive Committee consists of a President, six vice-presidents, treasurer, General Secretary and 20 other members who are elected at the National Conference. The NEC meets not less than twice a year. The NEC has the power to establish regional and branch committees and delegate functions to sub-committees.

Thus, developing the structure of the organisation both at national and regional levels was an achievement of FSAW. The concrete achievement was the adoption of the 'Women's Charter' (see appendix-I). The Charter was a two and a half page document which formed a manifesto of the ideas that had gone into the calling of the inaugural conference. The influence of Ray Alexander and Hilda Walts of CPSA was visible in the provisions of the Charter. However, the call for women's rights was tempered by the recognition that the national liberation movement took first priority in the struggle for equality. The Charter began by affirming the community of interests that women shared with men. "We women do not form a society and it is made up of both women and men. As women we share the problems and anxieties of our men and join hands with them to remove social evils and obstacles to progress." At the same time it recognised that women were discriminated against on the basis of their sex and committed the new organisation to working for the removal of all "the laws and practices that discriminate against women".

The Charter thus identified the women's movement completely with the national liberation movement as represented by the Congress Alliance in its struggle to
overthrow the apartheid government. As a majority of South African women were Black, it regarded the removal of political, economic and social inequalities suffered by Blacks as of great concern for any women's political movement. It was also explicit on the need for change in the position of women within society. It is important to note that the Women's Charter was the first comprehensive statement of principles by the new women's movement and therefore should be regarded as an important document. The Charter drew together the experience of women within the national liberation movement. Its commitment to the emancipation of women was of particular significance. According to Cherryl Walker, "the Charter was a remarkably progressive document, far in advance of popular thinking about women and their place in society at that time. It stated a claim for full equality between the sexes and began the search for answers to the questions about how best that could be achieved in a society where gross racial discrimination obscured all other forms of oppression and exploitation."

FSAW, right from its first conference took up issues affecting women. Protesting the pass system was taken up. As we have seen in the previous chapter, there were innumerable protests and demonstrations against the extension of passes to African women. This began in 1952 and went on till 1963. It was FSAW, which realised that the resistance had to be co-ordinated and successfully worked towards it. Further, it realised that it was important to develop women's understanding of what the pass system meant in terms of oppression. In October 1955, the Transvaal branch of FSAW together with ANCWL led a demonstration of 2000 women to the Union Buildings, Pretoria. FSAW planned the national march to Pretoria that took place on August 9, 1956. The period following saw a number of campaigns over the pass laws involving both men and women. Thus the struggle against the pass system dominated its activities. However, after the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, though FSAW was not formally banned like other organisations

78 Davies, n.59, p.367.
many of its leaders and members were jailed, restricted or forced into exile. The organisation was prevented from holding meetings or carrying on its activities.

**National Women's Coalition**

This organisation was set up during the period of negotiations between the Black political leaders and the Nationalist Party for the transfer of power to the people. During this period of transition women of South Africa expressed their ideas through NWC. Before dealing with NWC, the context in which it emerged should be briefly dealt with.

The adoption of the Interim Constitution of Republic of South Africa in 1993 and Charter of Fundamental Rights created a new context for the gender equality of South African women. Before the constitutional negotiations began in December 1991, the gender struggle in South Africa was conducted in difficult circumstances. The fight against sexism was always subordinated to struggle against apartheid. The unbanning of the liberation movements in 1990 and the revocation of race as a constitutional and legal measure created space for the gender struggle to be waged as an autonomous aspect of the struggle for democracy in South Africa. At the same time the anticipation of a new order based on human rights principles - with women's rights as part and parcel of human rights - created a new context for that struggle. It was during this time that ANC committed itself to gender equality and the development of a policy for the advancement of women. This allowed men and women within the ANC to address gender equality during the process of negotiating and writing a new Constitution.

During this period of constitutional negotiations ANC women initiated the idea of the Women's Charter and women from all political and other organisations were drawn together to form the NWC. The NWC was thus launched in April 1992 with the aim of drawing up a Women's Charter and ensuring that women's rights were
entrenched in the new Constitution. By mid-1994 there were 79 organisations affiliated to this national body, about 13 regional coalitions which united between seven and 50 local organisations each. Membership was open both to women's and to mixed-sex organisations. The affiliated organisations covered a wide range of those concerned with advocacy, human rights and promotion of non-racialism, political parties and groups, occupational and professional organisations, religious groups, community organisations and associations and service and special interest groups. The NWVC organised many internal conferences, meetings and workshops. Besides these conferences, there were been other gatherings focusing on specific interest areas such as health, race, education and law.

In 1994 the coalition produced the Women's Charter for Effective Equality to convey to the new government the concerns of women. The Charter was a holistic, comprehensive document consisting of twelve articles covering every aspect of women's lives. It demanded equality in areas of legislation, economy, education and training, social services, political and civic life, health care and family life (see appendix II). Its intention was to give substance to a future bill of rights and the equality clause of the Constitution. This Charter was drawn up after widespread consultation and research. After ANC was voted to power NWVC resolved to continue to campaign for the implementation of equality.

It is relevant to briefly deal with the representation of women in National Government after the April 1994 elections. The 1993 Constitution established a two-house parliament. The National Assembly is elected according to a system of proportional representation and the Senate consists of regional delegates nominated in accordance with the same principle.

Fig. 4.1: Gender Composition of the National Government


Fig. 4.2: Participation in Parliamentary assemblies

Fig. 4.3: Gender Composition of Executive Council

Fig. 4.4: Gender Composition of Provincial Legislatures

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Fig. 4.1 illustrates the gender composition of the National Government. Fig. 4.2 indicates the participation of women in the parliamentary assemblies. It is clear from the graphs that 106 out of 407 members of National Assembly are women. South Africa was thus placed among the top seven countries in the world with regard to the female representation in the Parliament. As ANC is committed to include 33.3 percent quota for women, it has maximum number of women. However, there are only 16 women in Senate comprising of 90 members. Currently there are two women cabinet ministers (Health and Public Enterprises) and three deputy ministers (Arts and Culture, Science and Technology and Welfare and Agriculture) from ANC. This shows that women are under-represented at the higher levels of political sphere. The Constitution also established nine regional governments. Figs. 4.3 and 4.4 show the gender composition of the Executive Council and the Provincial Legislatures. Once again it is noticed that women are under-represented. Though they are less represented compared to their men, it must be noted that their representation in the national and Regional Governments is much higher than majority of the Nations of the world. Similarly, their organisations are far advanced with respect to their structure, organisation and functioning.

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