"Strijdom, you have struck the women, you have struck a rock", was the slogan with which twenty thousand South African women marched to the Union Buildings, Pretoria on August 9, 1956 protesting against the passes. The South African Government has now declared this day a public holiday naming it "National Women's Day" by acknowledging the contribution of women in the struggle. The present study deals with the role of South African women in the struggle against apartheid in the context of women issues and gender inequalities in South Africa.

Apartheid was the official policy of South Africa from 1948 to 1990. The country's political, legal, social and economic systems were based on the principle of racial segregation. The White minority regime used its military, political, economic and legislative powers to dominate and suppress the Black majority. This domination was achieved through control of the state by Whites, enforcement of racial separation and discrimination, the exclusion of Blacks from political participation and suppression of political opposition. The Black majority were deprived of their fundamental right of citizenship of their own country.

Though both men and women suffered under the system of apartheid its impact was more on women as they were oppressed both on the basis of race and gender. Women were particularly affected by migrant labour system, forced removal and life in Bantustans. But women joined the menfolk in the struggle against apartheid.

The study deals with the contribution of women in the struggle. The first chapter deals with the problems faced by women under the laws of apartheid in South Africa. Different views and arguments for and against apartheid are put forward.
Such an analysis is necessary to understand the impact of apartheid on women. The general apartheid laws affecting both men and women are mentioned followed by detailed discussion on those which particularly affect women. An attempt is being made to bring about the uniqueness of the South African case.

Chapter II aims at an objective analysis of the social and economic conditions of women under apartheid. Various factors like migration, urbanisation, unemployment, wage disparities, fertility rates, marriage, education, illiteracy, health, infant mortality rates, population control, family planning, teenage pregnancy and abortion are analysed with the help of statistical data. Black women are studied in relation to Black men as well as women of other races. Attempt is made to break certain myths regarding the social and economic position of Black women under apartheid.

The next chapter elaborates on women's resistance to apartheid which is studied under the anti-pass laws movement, political campaigns and the trade union movement. It gives special reference to sex abuses and torture in prison. Chapter IV assesses the character of women's leadership and organisation in the struggle. It deals with the objectives, structure and functioning of a few important women's political and social organisations in South Africa. Important leaders are identified and their contribution mentioned. It also emphasises women's role during the time of negotiations followed by their representation in the national and regional governments. The concluding chapter reflects upon the important findings of the study.

The study is based on both primary and secondary source materials including extensive field research. Seventy women belonging to different races and backgrounds were elaborately interviewed. These interviews express South African
women's feelings, attitudes and concerns on the themes identified in this study. This apart, valuable primary data was obtained by attending public hearing of victims under apartheid at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission held at the University of Western Cape in Cape Town during August 5-7, 1996.

Admittedly, there are certain limitations in my study in terms of availability of material on women and the time spent in the field. Discussion on certain aspects are missing like women protests in Squatter Camps, role of Indian women in the political struggle and contribution of organisations like United Democratic Front (UDF), Black Women's Federation (BWF) and non-government organisations of women.