Many historians hold the view that women in India in the early Vedic period enjoyed a fairly high status in comparison with the later periods. Altekar observes: "Girls were educated like boys and had to pass through a period of brahmacharya. Many of them used to become distinguished poetesses and the poems of some of them have been honoured by their inclusion in the canonical literature. The marriages of girls used to take place at a fairly advanced age, the normal time being sixteen or seventeen. Educated brides of this age had normally an effective voice in the selection of their partners in life. In social and religious gatherings they occupied a prominent position. Women had an absolute equality with men in the eye of religion; they could perform sacrifices independently and were not regarded as an impediment in religious pursuits."2

Even though the Rigvedic society was patriarchal in nature, women enjoyed a relatively high status.3 In Vedic period sati custom was not in vogue and widow remarriage was allowed.4 Tara Ali Baig notes that Rigvedic society was based on monogamy.5 The main disability from which women suffered in this age, as well as in the next one, was proprietary in nature. They could not
hold or inherit property. Altekar contends that landed property could be owned only by one who had the power to defend it against actual or potential rivals and enemies. However, from the above details it can be safely assumed that women in the Vedic period enjoyed a high status.

It is believed that the position enjoyed by women in the early Vedic period changed gradually in the later periods. In the age of Later Samhitas, Brahmanas and Upanishads a decline in education and greater seclusion of women could be observed. Following the gradual decline in female education all their privileges also received a set back. Accordingly their religious rights were also curtailed. But the change was gradual. "Naturally there was no tonsure (shaving of the head) of widows, purdah was altogether unknown, but women had ceased to attend public meetings." The two main reasons put forward by Altekar for the decline of the status of women are:

(i) introduction of the non-aryan wife (who was uneducated and had no knowledge of their religious practices) into the aryan household, and

(ii) the growing complexity of the Vedic sacrifices which required long training for the students. So it became difficult for a female student to spend long years to get education and training in religious matters.

During the age of the Sutras, the Epics and the Early Samhitas women's position deteriorated considerably.
Marriageable age was lowered, widow remarriages were discouraged and the practice of sati started appearing in society during this period.

Women continued to fall lower in the social ladder till the code of Manu summed up her position: The father protects a woman in her childhood, husband during her youth, her son, in old age; a woman is never fit for independence.\(^{11}\) It was Manu’s code which became a part and parcel of Hindu Law. Though Buddhism provided women certain privileges and greater freedom, they were not regarded as equals with men. It is significant that "even in the liberated rules of Buddhism, a nun howsoever advanced in her faith, was always subordinated to the youngest novice among the brethren".\(^{12}\)

The period from the invasion of India by Mohammed of Ghor to the establishment of British authority in the second half of the eighteenth century witnessed in general the further deterioration of the position of women in India. The medieval period which synchronised with Muslim rule had brought further deterioration in their position. There were many factors directly and indirectly responsible for the continuous deterioration in the status of women in the medieval times. The then prevailing conditions in the society demanded the protection of women from the eyes of Muslim rulers and led to the system of "purdah"\(^{13}\) which blocked the way of their further progress. Early marriage became a rule to safeguard the honour and chastity of girls. In
addition to these cruel customs, the disabilities to which Indian women were subjected to were sati, polygamy, kulinism\(^{15}\) and enforced widowhood. This was the social situation when the country passed under the political domination of the British.

The introduction of English education, the activities of Christian missionaries and the impact of ideas of liberalism, democracy and equality from the West contributed to a new awakening in India in the nineteenth century. The first English educated Indian elite welcomed the introduction of English education throughout the country. They began to view many of their social practices and beliefs critically. In their urge for change, they also aspired "to bridge the increased gap between husband and wife (women were not usually given education) and to enable wives to prepare their sons for a western educated milieu".\(^{16}\) These western educated Indians were the pioneers of social reforms in India. They focused their reform activities on women and their education. Moreover, English education helped men and women of India to know and study about various movements in other countries of the world.

Christian missionaries started working in India from the early part of the nineteenth century itself. They did commendable social service by opening orphanages, widow homes and schools. They vehemently criticised Hindu values, beliefs and customs. Though their major aim was conversion of people to their faith, it aroused a new spirit and rethinking of values among Indians
and introduced improvements in Hindu society. The elevation of the status of women became one of the main planks in the consequent social reform movements.

The British authorities had initially followed a policy of strict neutrality towards indigenous socio-religious problems. But the reformist zeal of enlightened educated Indians forced a change in their stand. Pioneers among the champions of social reformers were Raja Rammohan Roy, Dhondo Keshav Karve, Mahadev Govinda Ranade, Behramji Malabari, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Swamy Dayananda Saraswati.

Rammohan Roy was the first Indian social reformer who took up the cause of women. Born in 1772 in a Kulin Brahmin family, he became a great scholar in Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit. Pained by the prevailing socio-religious maladies of the time in India, Rammohan Roy was determined to work for reforms. He viewed English education as one of the means for reforming Indian society and through his persistent effort got it introduced in India. His historic agitation, against strong opposition from orthodox Hindu leaders, to end the cruel practice of sati, resulted in the declaration of sati as illegal in 1829.

To further his reform activities, Rammohan Roy founded the Brahma Samaj or Divine Society which upheld the unity of God, decried idol worship, advocated communal harmony and championed the cause of women. The freedom and equality of women and remarriage of widows figured prominently among the goal of the Samaj.
Rammohan Roy also opposed polygamy and considered it as a blot on the fair name of Hinduism.\textsuperscript{20} One of his pamphlets ‘Modern Encroachment on the Ancient Rights of Female’ stressed the need for removing the property disabilities of women.\textsuperscript{21}

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar’s name is associated with two important reforms, namely the education of girls and widow remarriage. Born in 1820 in a Brahmin family, he became the Principal of the Sanskrit College, in Calcutta.\textsuperscript{22} Vidyasagar took an important part in the vigorous campaign in favour of widow remarriage in Bengal. His endeavors were responsible for Act 1 of 1856 legalising the remarriage of Hindu widows.\textsuperscript{23} In the five years following the enactment of the Widow Remarriage Act, twenty five widow marriages were performed through the efforts of Vidyasagar who was also liberal with monetary help.\textsuperscript{24} He used his time and energy to educate girls. He was largely responsible for helping the government to found the first girls’ school in Calcutta in 1849. He established as many as forty girls’ schools in Bengal between 1855 and 1858.\textsuperscript{25}

Swamy Dayanand Saraswati who founded Arya Samaj in 1875,\textsuperscript{26} was another staunch advocate of women’s freedom and education. He was also highly critical of the system of dowry and early marriage of girls. He recommended the study of Vedas and other holy scriptures for women and exhorted them to follow the example of Gargi\textsuperscript{27} and Maitreyi.\textsuperscript{28} In order to execute his programme, the leaders of Arya Samaj opened a large number of girls’ schools throughout northern India.\textsuperscript{29}
Kesab Chandra Sen was another great social reformer of the time in India. He was born in 1838. Sen joined the Brahma Samaj in 1857 and was a whole time missionary of the Samaj. In 1859, he staged a drama on widow remarriage which openly attacked the practice of Kulinism. Sen brought to the Brahma Samaj a dynamic force which it never possessed before. But the advanced ideas of social reforms, such as inter-caste marriage, widow remarriage and the removal of purdah for women did not find favour with the older section of the Samaj led by Devendranath Tagore. This led to an open conflict and Sen and his followers formed a new organisation called 'The Brahma Samaj of India' in 1866. In 1870 he founded the Indian Reform Association, with the welfare and emancipation of women as its major objectives. The education of women got special attention of Kesab Chandra Sen. He started an organisation for educating female members at home. Bamabodhini - a magazine for women was started. He inaugurated a prayer meeting called Brahmika Samaj, an organisation exclusively meant for women. His campaign against early marriages facilitated the Civil Marriage Act of 1872.

Mahadev Govinda Ranade was the leader of social reform and cultural renaissance in Western India. He was born in the Nasik district of Maharashtra in 1842. In 1870 he joined the Prarthana Samaj, the counterpart of the Brahma Samaj in Western India. He was an active member of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha and was connected with over twenty Association at Poona. He worked
against the social abuses and advocated women’s education. He also formed the National Social Conference (NSC) in 1887 to provide an all India forum for discussion of social reforms.\textsuperscript{33} Ranade began his work by giving education to his wife. He taught her and encouraged her to immerse herself in social reform movements. Soon Remabai Ranade became a pioneering woman social reformer.

Behramji Malabari was a journalist who did commendable work against social evils. He was very much inspired by Christianity. Malabari devoted his life in fighting against child marriage and enforced widowhood. He founded a journal, \textit{Indian Spectator}, to spread his reformist ideas. He published two notes—‘Infant Marriage’ in India and ‘Enforced Widowhood’ in 1884.\textsuperscript{34} Thus through publications and by his speeches he roused public opinion against those social evils and worked for legislative remedy. His efforts met with success when in the year 1891 the Age of Consent Bill\textsuperscript{35} was passed.

Another Great reformer was – Dhondo Kesav Karve who worked enthusiastically for the emancipation of women in India. On the death of his first wife, Karve married a widow in 1893. In the same year he founded an association in Maharashtra to which admission was restricted only to persons who had re-married or had the courage to dine openly with re-married couples. Karve signalized the launching of this association by starting a boarding house in his own home and under the supervision of
himself and his wife, for the children of re-married couples. Karve’s greatest achievement was in the field of women’s education. In 1907 he founded the Mahila Vidyalaya with the assistance of Deccan Education Society. Though the efforts met with considerable opposition, Karve’s Women’s University was formed on 20 June 1916 at Poona. In 1908 he established the Nishkam Karmamath for training a body of selfless workers. Later he was awarded Bharath Ratna for his services.

The efforts for the betterment of the status of women in India, pioneered by a group of eminent men, were soon taken up by women themselves. Their efforts to improve the condition of women in India laid the foundation of the women’s movement in India. The pioneers among women social reformers were Pandita Ramabai, Ramabai Ranade, Anandibai Joshi, Francina Sorabji, Cornalia, Dr. Annie Jagannadhan, Swarna Kumari Debi and Rukmabai.

Panditha Ramabai was born in Mysore in 1858, as the daughter of Ananth Sastri, a very learned man, who encountered persecutions for his conviction that women had the same right to higher knowledge as men themselves possessed. Ramabai imbibed this spirit from her father. In her early years she suffered many hardships because of poverty, diseases, death of her parents and hostility from the public. By overcoming all hardships she became an eminent scholar and emerged as an individual with a great mission in life. Even conservative men appreciated her scholarship. In 1878, the title of ‘Saraswati’ was conferred on
her. Later she was honoured with the title of Pandita. Her denunciations of men for keeping women down, her marriage out of her caste and the criticism of popular Hinduism roused the ire of the orthodox against her; but they admired her scholarship and eloquence. She took up women’s upliftment as her mission. And concentrated her activities on improving the condition of widows and on the education of women. For that she sought help and inspiration from abroad. Ramabai was attracted to western ideas and embraced Christianity in 1883 when she visited England. She studied the education system in America and concentrated on women’s education in India.

Ramabai started the Arya Mahila Samaj at Poona. By writing books and delivering lectures about the sad condition of child widows in India, she sought financial support from America. And she succeeded in opening her first home for widows called Sarada Sadan in Bombay in 1889. Her great enterprise of educating widows begun at Sarada Sadan in Bombay grew rapidly, particularly during the time of the Great Famine in 1896. Her dedication to the cause of widows was great. This is evident from her mission to save widows from Vrindavan. She had heard that priests were using widows for immoral traffic and the number of temple prostitutes was increasing. For fifteen days she lived in Vrindavan in the guise of a beggar and convinced seven widows to go with her to Poona. But they were locked up by the priests, and she could rescue only one against threat to her own life. She started relief work during the famine of 1897, and rescued about
sixty women from the camp. She founded many institutions for the welfare of lower castes and women. Besides schools for children, she opened a training school for teachers and an industrial school with garden, field, oil press, diary, laundry, departments for baking, sewing, weaving and embroidery. She encountered many hardships during her efforts to improve the lot of Indian women. Yet she continued her efforts with great enthusiasm and became an encouraging force for other social reformers. Pandita Ramabai was regarded as the first great woman pioneer who laid solid foundations for Indian women’s freedom and education.

Ramabai Ranade, wife of the great social reformer Justice Ranade, was another outstanding woman who devoted her life for women’s emancipation. Her major work was in the field of women’s education. In the campaign of women’s suffrage also her contribution was immense. She joined the Arya Mahila Samaj in 1881 and worked hard to organize the womenfolk. In Bombay she founded the Hindu Ladies Social and Literary Club, which conducted regular classes on subjects like religion, medicine and industry. The classes tried to spread literacy too. When the social conference met in Bombay in 1904, she presided over the session specially convened for women. In 1910 she published her ‘Reminiscences’ which was later translated into many languages. In 1913, when a severe famine affected Gujarat and Palanpur, she led a group of workers from Seva Sadan who distributed food grains, clothes and medicines to the affected
people. She presided over the meetings of Bharath Mahila Parishad on four occasions and her speeches laid great stress on the education of women.\(^5\) She protested in 1914 against the British policy towards Indians in South Africa, led an agitation in Poona in 1920 for free and compulsory education for girls, and from 1919 onwards took an active part in the suffrage movement.\(^5\)

Swarna Kumari Debi - the sister of Rabindranatha Tagore was a famous social reformer of Bengal. In 1886, she started a Ladies Association in order to promote friendly intercourse among Indian women and to provide a home for education of poor girls and to prepare them for employment. She become the president of the Theosophical Society of Bengal for 1885-86.\(^5\)

Francina Sorabji was a distinguished woman who contributed to the social reform movement of the time. She was an ardent advocate of women's education. Francina established many educational institutions for girls at Poone.

Other great women who worked for the emancipation of women included Dr. Anandibai Joshi (1865-87) - a contemporary and friend of Pandita Ramabai, Cornelia, Dr. Annie Jagannadhan and Rukmabai who rebelled against tradition in order to join a medical college. These names are however only indicative. Among the great social reformers of the time are Swami Vivekananda, Sree Ramakrishna Paramahamsar, Sasipada Banerjee, Rabindranatha Tagore and Gopalakrishna Gokhale. Mahatma Gandhi's name is the foremost while discussing the names of social reformers. His idea
of women's emancipation and his approach to their problems were novel and he was the person who talked about complete equality between men and women during that period. Gandhiji organised women on a mass scale and brought them to the forefront of the national movement.

Besides the individual reformers, several social reform organisations took up the cause of women's upliftment by organising women and propagating ideas against the evil practices concerning women and advocating education for women. Such pioneering organisations were started by early reformers like Rammohan Roy, Ranade, Swamy Dayanand Saraswati and others. Notable among these organisations were the Brahma Samaj (founded in 1828), the Prarthana Samaj (1867), the Arya Samaj (1875), Deva Samaj, the Sikh Association, Servants of India Society (1905), Social Service League, Seva Sadan, Sarada Sadan, Bombay Provincial Social Conference, Bombay Presidency Social Reforms Association,^{56} Theosophical Society (1886), Ramakrishna Mission (1898) and the Decan Education Society (1880).^{57}

Most of these organisations aimed at social and religious reforms. And so women's upliftment became one of the major objectives of many of these organisations. They led campaigns for women's emancipation and established schools for their education. Later many associations and institutions were started solely for women. Many of these organisations were either started by men or directed by men.
Many of the reform associations started during 1870’s had their women’s wing too. In 1866 Brahma Samaj split into the Brahma Samaj of India led by Kesab Chandra Sen and the Adi Brahma Samaj led by Debendranath Tagore. Under the leadership of Kesab, the Samaj opened a girls’ school, started a women’s magazine, the Ramabodhini (1863), and founded a women’s branch, the Bramika Samaj in 1865. The women attended Brahmo religious ceremonies, though they sat behind a curtain. Social opposition to this early women’s association was illustrated by the excommunication of women by their non-Brahmo relatives.58 Brahma Samaj was divided into liberal and conservative factions in 1870’s and 80’s- namely Navabidhan Brahma Samaj and Sadharan Brahma Samaj. Arya Nari Samaj and Banga Mahila Samaj were the corresponding women’s branches of the above mentioned associations.59

Soon women took up the leadership and started various women’s organisations and thus gave a powerful lead to the social reform movement, especially the women’s movement. The organisations thus started focused their activities on improving the condition of widows and giving them education.

Sarada Sadan was founded by Pandita Ramabai in 1889 in Bombay. A similar institution was founded in Poona in 1892. Sri Mahipatram Rupram Anadhasram was started by her at Ahmedabad in 1892. This was to help widows and to give shelter to illegitimate children.60 Swarna Kumari Debi in 1886 formed a Ladies
Association to provide home for the education of poor girls and to prepare them for employment. In 1909 Seva Sadan was established by Ramabai Ranade. It provided a home for women, imparted education and prepared them for social work. In 1904, leaders of National Social Conference organised a women's section which held annual conferences during the National Social Conference sessions. This with the name Bharat Mahila Parishat, organised educational and inspirational programmes in which women of distinction like Ramabai Ranade, Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, Ganguli and several Maharanis made speeches.

In Madras Presidency, an Indian Christian social reformer, Dr. Sattinadhan, encouraged his wife Kamala to start Indian Ladies Magazine in 1901. She edited the magazine for many years. Subbalakshmi Ammal founded a Brahmin Widows' home in 1913 and the Mahila Seva Samaj of Mysore in the same year. In 1909, Rameswari Nehru organised a Mahila Samiti in Allahabad. The early associations and their agitations against social evils in the community encountered bitter opposition also. Muslims, especially Muslim women were very backward in education. So Muslim Women's association were conspicuous by their absence, in the early period. All India Muslim Women's Conference was started only in 1916 by the Begum of Bhopal. In 1917, Abrubegum proposed a resolution against polygamy which provoked opposition from Muslims. Opposition also was encountered by Sheikh and Begum Abdulla when they started a girls' school in Aligarh in 1906 and by Atiya Begum and Sakhawat Hussain when they tried to be
admitted to the All India Muslim Educational Conference in 1926. Meanwhile YWCA (Young Women’s Christian Association) was active among Christians.

Hundreds of such women’s associations were formed in the early part of the twentieth century of which only some are mentioned here. Between 1910 and 1930 several National level women’s organisations were formed and they widened and strengthened the women’s movements in India.

Major women’s associations formed during the period are Bharat Stri Mahamandal (BSM) founded in 1910 by Saraladevi Choudhurani, Women’s Indian Association (WIA) founded in 1917 by Annie Besant, Dorothy Jinarajadasa and Margaret Cousins, Bombay Presidency Women’s Council (BPWC), founded in 1918 by Lady Tata and others who had been active in war work; National Council of Women in India (NCWI), founded in 1925 by Lady Aberdeen of the International Council of Women, Lady Tata and others from BPWC; and the All India Women’s Conference (AIWC) or Akhil Hind Mahila Parishad (AHMP) founded in 1927 through the efforts of Margaret Cousins and others. Among the nationwide women’s organisations started during the first and second decade of twentieth century, All India Women’s Conference become the most influential organisation of the time in terms of its performance to the cause of women.

All India Women’s Conference began functioning from 1926 with the sole objective of imparting education to women, but
later enlarged its scope to include social reform. It was primarily concerned with influencing government policy on women in matters of education, social service, law, suffrage, health and employment. From the 1930’s a notable shift in its perspectives can be seen. It got involved in making resolutions on a wide range of development issues and talked in terms of equality between the sexes as a necessary condition of social development. The net-work of branches all over India widened its realm of action. It played an important role in pressurising the government to make social legislations. It took a lead in the suffrage movement also.

By 1930’s Women’s Indian Association became a part of AIWC. Thus it became one of the most influential organisations which focused its efforts on women’s education and women’s suffrage. This organisation acted as a training ground for many women leaders who later took part actively in the National Movement and held responsible positions in the government after independence.

The political awakening in India and the participation of women in the national movement gave a new turn to the women’s movement of India. It provided a new stage for women to work side by side with men in the public arena. Such a mass participation under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi gave women a sense of equality with men. This imparted greater strength to the women’s movement.
After the beginning of the world war I, some elite women had attended political meetings. The outstanding of these women were Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu and Bi Amma, the mother of Mohammed Ali. Few women were associated with the National Congress initially. They attended the sessions of the Indian National Congress as wives and visitors. The first Indian woman who entered into active politics and lived to see India attain freedom was Sarojini Naidu. There was no woman delegate among those who entered their names in the register at the inaugural meeting of the Indian National Congress. A woman delegate participated for the first time in the fifth annual session, in 1889. She was Kadambini Ganguly, who was the first women to graduate in medical science.

When Annie Besant formed the Home Rule League in 1916, there began an accentuation of the ideal of unity in India, and women of different provinces met together to exchange views on vital national issues. The League also had established a women’s branch to meet and discuss political issues without the inhibiting presence of men. The movement against the partition of Bengal in 1905 included women also.

Women participated in the first major political satyagraha in 1919, but only in limited numbers. Small and isolated groups of women held political meetings in Bombay and Punjab. Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu addressed meetings in Bombay to educate women on the nature of satyagraha, and Kasturba Gandhi
and Kamaladevi Chathopadhyay\textsuperscript{71} sold proscribed literature in the streets. At the AICC session of 1922, of the three hundred and fifty delegates, sixteen were women.\textsuperscript{72} The first woman to be elected as president was Annie Besant in 1917. Eight years later in 1925, Sarojini Naidu became its second woman president.\textsuperscript{73}

The Khilafat and Non co-operation campaigns (1918-1922) marked the beginning of Gandhiji's leadership of the Indian nationalist movement.\textsuperscript{74} He combined the problems of women with the struggle for freedom and attacked social evils by appealing to the nationalist feelings of the people. Gandhiji was the first great pioneer who brought women out of the four walls of home and then to the forefront of the freedom struggle. At a time when no reformers spoke of women's equality with men, Gandhiji throughout his life, maintained and worked for the equality of women with men. He believed in women's ability, strength of will and character to stand her own and to work with men.\textsuperscript{75} According to him, the soul in both man and woman is the same. The two live the same life, have the same feelings.\textsuperscript{76}

Gandhiji was totally against the evil customs like dowry, child marriage and enforced widowhood, and asked the public not to rely completely on the religious texts alone but to follow one's own reason on every issue which an individual or society confronted. He said: "all that is printed in the name of scriptures need not be taken as the word of God or the inspired God".\textsuperscript{77} For him, woman is the companion of man gifted with equal
mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest detail of activities of man, and she has the same right of freedom and liberty as he.78

Gandhiji’s ideas and views had great impact on the minds of Indian people. Women’s problems were discussed by him in his newspapers. When he called upon women to join Indian National Congress and to work for the independence of the country, the response was tremendous. They joined the Congress, worked wholeheartedly and proved themselves as more compatible for non-violent struggle than men. In all the satyagraha movements launched by Gandhiji women participated in great numbers. Police violence or, rigorous imprisonments did not deter them.

The Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 elicited wide enthusiasm among women. They took part actively in it and carried illicit salt in their sarees. Under the leadership of Kasturba Gandhi, women volunteers picketed before the liquor shops.79 Sarojini Naidu assumed the leadership of the satyagraha at Darsana, the scene for the mass breaking of salt laws. Numerous women marched in processions, picketed shops selling foreign cloth and liquor. They spun and propagated Khadi, went to jails during the non-cooperation movement and participated actively in the revolutionary movement.80

Gandhiji’s constructive programme provided women with education and training in the fundamentals of organised activity and propaganda. And thus women could accept supportive as well as
leadership roles in the constructive programme without any fear of stepping outside the limits of conventional behaviour. Women were encouraged to participate in the programme of khadi, village industry, prohibition and eradication of untouchability.

At the annual AICC meetings of the Indian National Congress, women were present as members and were appointed as delegates. Gandhiji had established a convention of electing at least one woman member to the elite working committee of the Congress. Sarojini Naidu for many years filled this position. Gandhiji's leadership in the National movement provided many women an opportunity to rise in politics and to become leaders. Their mass participation in the National movement helped a general awakening, which contributed to the formation of many women's organisation and to the women's movement as a whole.

The few names of women who worked wholeheartedly side by side with men in the national movement and thus gave strength to the women's movement were Suchetha Kripalani (wife of J B Kripalani), Anasuya Sarabhai (the sister of Ambalal Sarabhai, a wealthy textile industrialist and a devoted follower of Gandhiji), Manibehn Patel (daughter of Pyarelal Nayyar), Basanti Devi (wife of C R Das), Begum Hasrat Mohani (a delegate to the AICC meetings, member of All India Muslim Conference), Kamala Nehru, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Mridula Sarabhai (daughter of Ambalal Sarabhai), Satyavati (grand daughter of Swami Sradhananda) and Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy.
Women of India not only played their role in the non-violence struggle but also engaged in the secret missions aimed at the early attainment of freedom. During the ‘Quit India Movement’ Gandhiji’s ‘Do or Die’ pledge encouraged women like Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kripalani, and Usha Mehta, who assumed the leadership of the movement in various places while staying underground.

Bina Das, Preethi Lata Waddedar, both from Bengal and Kalpana Dutt as members of secret and terrorist societies had undertaken dangerous assignments and pursued politics of violence in the National movement. Thus though the participation of women in the movement and their role in the leadership of the movement was in no way near to that of men, their presence can be seen and felt in almost all fields of activities in the national movement.

The movement for obtaining the right to vote for women in India deserves special mention. Before 1920 the women of India were not given the right to vote. During the freedom struggle women leaders organised and launched a movement to win women’s suffrage. It started when in 1917 under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu, a group of twelve members including Annie Besant, Cousins and Dorothy Jinarajadasa appeared before Lord Montague and demanded women’s franchise. Initially British authorities ignored women’s demand. But later the government left the matter to the decisions of Indian legislatures.
When in 1920 British government published The Rules for Elections to Provincial Legislative Councils, Women's Indian Association arranged a campaign. The number of women involved in this varied across the provinces. The Bombay campaign appeared to be the most vigorous, as nineteen women's associations and over 800 women including some European women, participated in it.\(^{87}\) Finally, in 1923 and 1924, some Indian State Legislatures enfranchised women.\(^{88}\) Other states also enfranchised women in the following years. After securing franchise women leaders started a second campaign for the removal of the ban on women entering legislatures. Without much effort women won that campaign also. Suffrage Movement was a great success for the women's movement in India. And it gave them an impetus to struggle for better results in other areas.

The women's movement during the post-independence period can be divided into three phases:

i) the period from 1947 to the late 60's, which is characterized by complacency and acquiescence after the attainment of formal equality and liberation under the constitution;

ii) the period from the late 60's till 1975, which is marked by growing economic crisis leading to rural revolts in which women actively participated; and

iii) the post 1975 period which is witnessed by tremendous changes within the women's movement: the observance of International Women's Year and the International Women's Decade 1975-1985; abundance of systematic study and
research on women's issues, the submission of the report on
the status of women (Towards Equality), anti-rape campaign,
the influence of western feminist groups and the emergence
and proliferation of a new type of women's organisations.

In India, women's movement engaged as part of the national
movement. The first wave of the women's movement in the country
lost its vigor and enthusiasm after the attainment of equality
before law. The absence of an inspiring goal like the quest for
freedom naturally weakened the women's movement. Equality before
law guaranteed by the Constitution of India aroused in women a
feeling that their problems were solved. Most of the women's
organisations of the time ceased to be active. Some organisations
settled down to do welfare work among women with the grant
provided by the government.

Vibhuti Patel remarks: "Once independence was achieved,
Indian women left public life. Larger issues of society no more
concerned them. Women's organisations got themselves immersed in
routine activity of cookery, sewing and embroidery classes,
fashion parades, henna competition etc."

A period of stagnation prevailed on the scene for a long
period in India. This in no way means that the problems of women
disappeared or that they were getting equal treatment in every
walk of their lives. A new awakening of women could be seen only
in 1970's after the formation of autonomous women's groups. There
were some women's organisations working in India since the early
decades of the nineteenth century, like All India Women's Conference which followed a liberal feminist ideology. The spread of autonomous women's groups in the country gave an impetus to the feminist movement in India. They took up issues concerning women and fought vehemently against oppression, exploitation, injustice and discrimination against women in society. This positively contributed to the origin of a second feminist movement in India.

During the late 1960's India witnessed militant mass movements involving industrial workers, tribals, agricultural labourers and middle class masses. In all these general struggles, women also actively participated. The economic and political events in the late 1960's and the resultant discontent among the people were the major factor behind these mass movements.

Nanditha Gandhi writes: "The Indian economy, after an initial spurt settled at stagnation level. The increase in unproductive expenditure during the China and Pakistan wars in 1962 and 1971, famine and drought, coupled with fluctuations in foreign aid forced the Indira Gandhi government to double the amount of deficit financing, prices of all commodities shot up, and black marketing took over. Essential commodities like food grains, sugar and oil saw a twenty five percent to thirty percent increase every year. Official measures to check inflation like wage freezes and credit controls only frustrated an already
disillusioned and economically battered people. The urban working class, agricultural labourers and sections of the middle class joined different political streams to voice their discontentment. Various movements emerged in different states and spread to other parts of the country. The opposition parties organised campaigns against corruption, unemployment and price rise. The movements of the period included the Anti-price rise movement of 1972, the Naxalbari movement which started in 1967, the Chipko movement of 1970’s and various other movements led by industrial workers, students and agricultural labourers.

Majority of these struggles covered Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu in the south; Maharastra, Goa, Gujarat in the west; Bihar, Rajasthan, Utter Pradesh, Delhi in the north; and West Bengal and Assam in the eastern parts of India.

The anti-price rise movement in Maharastra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh saw the most massive women’s mobilisation of the time. The economic crisis of that period affected family as a whole. The increasing debts and the consequent misery in the family brought women to the forefront of the campaign. Various women’s organisations including women’s wings of political parties led the movement and mobilised women belonging to all sections.

During this time, politically leftist parties showed much interest in mobilizing women. In 1954, National Federation of Indian Women was formed. This was organised by some women party
members who had worked in the AIWC before independence. In 1971 the CPI (M) recognised the need for a women’s organisation and set up Sramic Mahila Sanghathanna (Working Women’s Organisation) to mobilize women. The socialist party also organised a women’s wing.

All these women’s organisations joined with other women’s organisations like Samajvadi Mahila Sabha, Bharatiya Mahila Sabha and Bharatiya Mahila Federation (state branch of the CPI affiliated to NFIW) led the anti-price rise movement by organising an Anti-price rise Joint Women’s Front. The protest movements organised between 1973-75 included women from Congress and non-party middle class housewives. Their activities included mass concientisation, gheraos of ministers and industrialists, demonstrations and public meetings and marches with rotis attached to their rolling pins. The anti-price rise movement was suspended after the declaration of the State of Emergency. The Naxalbari movement which began in 1967 also had active participation of women. It first originated in West Bengal and later spread to Maharastra, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. This struggle helped to strengthen the organisation of agricultural labourers on wages and land issues.

The forest protection movement of 1970s in the North Indian hill areas is regarded as a women’s movement. This spread throughout India and is known as ‘Chipko Movement’. This movement in the Utter khand region of Himalayas was largely a tribal-women-
centered struggle where women had clung to the trees in order to protect them from the saws of the contractor's men. As the forests were increasingly felled for commercial industry, the women sought to protect their livelihood through the Gandhian method of satyagraha and non-violent resistance.

In 1974 the village women of Reni forest of Chamoli district in Utter Pradesh decided to act against a commercial enterprise intent on felling some two thousand five hundred trees. To protest against this, women joined hands and encircled the trees. To cut the trees, they would first have to cut-off their heads. Thus the Reni forest was saved.95

Movements of agricultural workers for minimum wages, land rights and against feudal servitude during 1970's in Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu also witnessed very keen participation of women agricultural labourers. Because of increasing agrarian unrest, the government had to come up with various schemes for the employment of rural poor. Rural women constitute more than half of the "beneficiaries" of the rural employment scheme. They have also participated in the struggle against corruption and sexual harassment by the contractors and government officials involved in such schemes.96

The intensive movements of different sections of people which spread all over India got a set back due to the imposition of Emergency in 1975. However this added to the climate of dissent. The objectives of the movements of the 60's were mostly
general issues. Women's specific issues did not appear prominently in these movements. However participation of women in these movements helped them to rethink their problems. They became aware of the fact that unlike men they are doubly oppressed in the society. This developed in them a wish for change. Many new women's organisations were formed during this period. Participation in general movements made women politically conscious and it helped to produce leaders among women. Thus the newly formed democratic consciousness among women contributed much to a climate favourable to feminism.

During this period the feminist movement in the West was so intense that the news about their activities and their literature reached India and influenced educated Indian women. "The issues of women's liberation movement in the West were demands for equal pay for equal jobs, absence of discrimination at work place, defiance of sexism in media, right to contraceptives and abortion, child care facilities for working mothers". Women of India by this time also started organising around specific issues which are in some way similar to those of the West. They started questioning patriarchal values and protested against the discrimination and oppression of women as a class.

"The Women's Liberation Movement in the West created a great stir during 1965 to 1975 as a result of which the United Nations declared 1975 as the International Women's year." The declaration of 1975 as International Women's Year had
tremendous impact on the feminist movement in India. The submission of the government report on women, *Towards Equality* analysing women’s position in India was another favourable development. The report submitted in 1975 says: "The review of the disabilities and constraints on women, which stem from socio-cultural institutions, indicates that the majority of women are still very far from enjoying the rights and opportunities guaranteed to them by the constitution. ..the increasing incidence of practices like dowry indicate a further lowering of the status of women. They also indicate a process of regression from some of the norms developed during the freedom movement".99

The release of this report led to serious discussions among educated women about women’s deteriorated position. The presentation of the above government report coincided with the celebration of 1975 as International Women’s Year. Later the period from 1975 to 1985 was declared as International Women’s Decade. And India was one among those countries which signed the U.N Charter on Women. As a result research on women got greater attention in academic circles. Literature on women multiplied. Conferences and seminars were organized in different parts of the country on women’s issues by political parties, academic circles, and women’s organisations.

The most remarkable feature of the period was the emergence of autonomous women’s groups in major cities of India. These organisations were qualitatively different from the earlier
women's organisations. Members of most of these groups were from middle class. Autonomous women's group provided a platform for women to discuss and take up women's specific issues such as rape, dowry, sexism in media, wife beating and prostitution. They highlighted specific problems of women in general such as problem of women workers in factory, victimisation of women during caste and communal riots, women's plight during droughts or ecological disasters. These types of women's group were first of its kind in India, and they gave full attention to women thereby activating the women's movement in India.

At first Autonomous women's groups were started in major cities like Bombay, Delhi, Pune, Hyderabad and Patna. Stree Sakti Sangathana - Hyderabad, Vimochana - Bangalore, Stree Jagruti - Mangalore, Mahila Mukti Manch - Patna, Nari Samatha Manch - Pune, Saheli - Delhi, Women's Centre - Bombay, Sakhi Kendra - Kanpur, and Pennurimai Iyyakam - Madras are some of the women's organisations which emerged during the International Women's Decade which fought militantly against women's oppression. Many other groups were formed in various other parts of the country. Describing its autonomy, Vibuti Patel writes: "Autonomous Women's Organisations are by women, of women and for women in the true sense of the term because they do not compromise on women's issues". But that does not mean that Autonomous women's organisations are against men. They sought the support of men also in their activities.
Along with these women's organisations, by this time, political parties particularly the women's wing of left parties began to take up women's issues. Also various interest groups with feminist perspective started functioning in different fields like media, law, academia and in popularising science, health etc. Besides, traditional type of women's organisations were also working among women but not challenging the existing patriarchal values and not giving attention to specific issues. Many such organisations performed certain welfare activities for women like income generating activities etc. Thus women's movements in India have such diverse aims and activities, perspectives and programmes that it is hardly possible to reduce them to certain distinct categories.

Autonomous women's groups became a strong current in the women's movement in India in the 1980's. They led many campaigns on issues related to dowry, police rape, witch hunting, alcoholism and on temple prostitutions. They engaged actively in unionising women workers, domestic servants and slum-dwellers.

One of the major campaigns led by Autonomous women's organisations was against dowry murders and police rape. In 1979 the campaign against dowry murders started. Dowry deaths were on the increase especially in Delhi and other major cities in north India during that period. Murder of young brides for their failure to bring in more and more dowry as demanded by their husbands or in-laws were often regarded as suicides by the
authorities. And many times the accused went scot-free owing to lack of evidence or to the influence of the in-laws.

"When newly formed women's groups in Bombay and Delhi reported cases of 'unnatural' deaths of newly married women to the police, the police treated these with indifference. Most of the cases of bride burning, dowry deaths and wife murders are passed off as 'accidental deaths' in police reports".104

In the anti-dowry campaign which had begun in Delhi several women's groups held street protests to draw attention to the burning of young women by their husbands and in-laws. The movement was particularly strong in Delhi and women's groups received wide support for their protests. As a result, the dowry deaths hitherto treated as suicides or accidental deaths were called murders. Radha Kumar remarks: "it was the first time that the private sphere of the family was invaded, and held to be a major site for the oppression of women, and the public-private dicotomy was broken by groups of women demonstrating outside the houses and offices of those who were responsible for dowry deaths within their families and demanding the intervention of both the state and civil society."105

During 1977-79 women's groups and democratic rights organisations took up cases of gang rape of women by police men in Punjab and Hyderabad and mass rapes in Marathwada, Aligarh, Agra and Lucknow. This violence against women and brutal torture generated a public protest. It was against this background that
the infamous Madura rape case which aroused such hue and cry from the women's organisations triggered a nation-wide anti-rape movement. Madura, a fourteen year old girl was raped in police custody in Chandrapur, Maharastra. In the case, the Sessions Court, Nagpur declared the policemen innocent but the High Court convicted them. But when it come to Supreme Court, the High Court judgment was reversed and curiously alleged Madura to be of loose morals\textsuperscript{106} (that Madura had given consent to sexual intercourse with the policemen). This anti-women judgment of the Highest Court of India aroused nation-wide anti-rape protests. The women's groups took up the issue seriously and fought militantly against the verdict.

Four professors of Delhi University wrote an open letter to the judge of the Supreme Court condemning the judgment.\textsuperscript{107} And from every part of the country, women's organisations demanded reopening of the Madura case and also demanded amendments in the rape law. Many new groups were formed in different parts of the country for this purpose. One such organisation was the Bombay based Forum against rape founded in 1980. The campaign has received a great deal of media publicity also. Many political parties especially left parties joined the campaign. Finally the campaign met with success when the government accepted the demand to reopen the case.

The success in anti-rape movement boosted the confidence of women's groups. They extended their activities to academic field
also. Women's centres were started in Bombay and certain other cities. They paid more attention to studies on women's issues, to analyse the historical reasons, and also to conscientise and mobilise women towards action. Many such women centres provide emotional, legal or medical support to victims of atrocities. Women's studies were accepted as serious subjects in Indian universities during this time. Many new feminist journals were started. The journal *Manushi* became very prominent among them because of its effective commitment to women's issues. Women's movement also spawned feminist cultural groups purporting to spread their messages through plays, songs, films and other media.

Women for once, began to register their protest against anything and everything which they considered discriminatory or oppressive. They protested against obscenity and violence in films and campaigned for a change in the way women were depicted in films, television, radio, press and in advertisements (which portrays women as sex objects). "The Ahmedabad Women's Action Group organised demonstration against obscene plays and also poured coaltar over obscene advertisements, posters and hoardings. Mahila Mukti Manch (Patna), Mahila Morcha (Kanpur), Committee on Media Image of Women (Delhi) and Pennurimai Iyyakkum (Madras) also took up similar protests."

Along with the agitation against violence and oppression, campaign for legal reforms continued. Many women from
different religious backgrounds challenged constitutional validity of personal laws which had religious sanctions. They filed petitions in courts for getting divorce, maintenance, property rights, and custody of children. In challenging the existing laws or customs they had to face ostracism from community and also from their own family. On 23 April 1985, the Supreme Court of India in a landmark judgment awarded life long maintenance to a divorced Muslim woman, 'Shah Bano'. But this evoked much hue and cry from Muslim fundamentalists and the political party -Muslim League. Rallies, demonstrations, mass petitions, signature campaigns and media wars both for and against the Muslim personal laws were held.

There was hectic political activity. The government decided to intervene. But the government framed a bill to take away the husband's liability of paying maintenance to divorced Muslim women. Women's groups joining hands with political parties and some progressive groups campaigned vigorously against the passing of such a bill. However the then government bowed before the fundamentalists and statusquo-its by passing Muslim Women Protection of Rights (on Divorce) Act 1986. The act deprived the divorced Muslim women of maintenance right sanctioned as per section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code. This was a serious set back to the women's movement in India. Perhaps no single piece of legislation in recent times has attracted as much criticism as the Muslim Protection of Rights (on Divorce) Act 1986 following the Supreme Court verdict in the Shah Bano case.
Protest movements criticising the government’s failure to prevent sati\textsuperscript{109} and for making effective measures to check that social evil was the salient feature of the women’s movement in the year 1987. The government with all its powers not only failed to prevent the girl from committing or abetting to commit sati but also it failed to prevent the communal fanatics from celebrating the so called Chunri festival to proclaim that girl as Satimata. Later due to high demand from the public including women’s organisations and political parties the Government of Rajasthan passed an anti-sati law. A month later the central government also passed a bill which sought to provide more effective prevention of sati.\textsuperscript{110}

Similarly in 1988, against the sex determination tests on foetus and the abortions to eliminate the unwanted girl, women’s organisations agitated. The long battle were fought by organising special forums\textsuperscript{111} and by conscientising the mass through seminars and meetings. And yet the efforts have not succeeded fully.

These are only some of the major issues on which Indian women led long battles. Many women’s groups organised agitation against strict rules in women’s hostels, they also attempted to free women from brothels and to rehabilitate them; took up the problems of Devadasis, exploited maid servants and tribal women and worked to improve their lot.
In general, women's movements underwent a metamorphosis. Their aims multiplied; their modus of action changed. Maithreyi Krishnaraj says: "By the early eighties, therefore, the women's movement had grown in such a way that autonomous feminist groups were only one of its several currents." Most of the women's groups developed links with far left, working class, tribal and anti-caste organisations. And women increasingly began to take part in other social movements like environmental protection and civil rights.

Unlike in the early years of their functioning the women's groups and generally the women's movement earned much confidence in their activities and received much support from the public. Though western feminist ideologies were discussed in detail in India, the feminists groups here did never go in for the extremes like bra burning or male-hating.

Women's movement in the pre-independence India was for getting legal reforms for the right to education, employment, vote, and divorce. But present day women's movement in India has advanced far. They have realised the importance of seeing every issue through woman's perspective. It has begun to fight against everything which in one way or other tries to oppress or discriminate against women. As Kamala Bhasin says: "now feminism is trying to develop a perspective on all issues, economic, political and cultural".
The women's movement in India along with the national movement helped women to secure equal rights with men. The constitution of India provided equal rights for women and also made 'special provisions' for them. A series of legislations were made to raise women's status in society. Some of the acts passed were The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, The Hindu Succession Act, 1956, The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956 and The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956.

Under the Hindu Marriage Act polygamy has been abolished and the right of divorce has been given to both males and females. Under the Hindu Succession Act the widows have been conferred full rights over their property. Besides, mother and daughter are also given equal rights on property as the sons are. Under the Minority and Guardianship Act, the custody of a minor child under the age of five shall ordinarily be with the mother instead of the father. Under the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, a woman can adopt a son in her own name. Both male and female child can be adopted and in case the wife is alive, the husband will have to take the consent of his wife in adoption. Thus in many respects the rights of women have been brought at par with men.

Many women entered various professions in government institutions. Education of women got great momentum. The political awareness and women's experience in the national movement raised them to positions of high distinction as cabinet ministers, governors of states and ambassadors.
In the first general election many women contested and some of them were elected to the Loksabha. Twenty-three women were elected to the Loksabha in 1952, while nineteen were nominated. The brilliant dancer Rukmini Arunndale was nominated to the Rajya Sabha.115

Sarojini Naidu, Suchetha Kripalani, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Lakshmi N. Menon and Padmaja Naidu were among the Indian women who occupied high political positions and served the country efficiently. Sarojini Naidu became the first woman governor of Uttar Pradesh. Later, her daughter Padmaja Naidu was appointed governor of West Bengal. Suchetha Kripalani was the first woman Chief Minister of a state. The stature of the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi needs no elaboration here. Many women became members of important delegations to world forums. Vijayalakshmi Pandit was elected president of the United Nations General Assembly. Many notable women were elected to various state legislatures; they did well not only as members but also as ministers.

In the field of social work and welfare activities women’s contribution has been immense. When the Central Social Welfare Board was constituted, Durgabai Deshmugh, an ardent social worker and an efficient administrator became its first chair person.

The Five Year Plans consistently placed special emphasis on providing minimum health facilities integrated with family welfare and nutrition for women and children, education, their large participation in the labour force and welfare services for women in distress. Various welfare and development schemes
have been introduced to improve especially the living conditions of women and to increase their access to and control over material and social resources. Special steps have been taken to remove legal, social and other constraints to enable them to make use of the rights and new opportunities becoming available to them. Meanwhile various commissions and committees were set up by the central government and state governments to analyse the prevailing condition of women in India and to suggest measures for their improvement.

In 1971 The committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) was appointed by the Government of India,

(i) to evaluate the changes that had taken place in the status of women as a result of the constitutional, legal and administrative measures adopted since independence,

(ii) to examine the impact of the complex processes of social change on various sections of Indian women, and

(iii) to suggest measures which would enable women to play their full and proper role in nation building. The committee set up six Task Forces and two Study Groups to examine the changes in the field of social life, law, economic participation, educational development, political status and women's welfare and development.116

The report of the committee on the status of women in India was presented in 1975. The report exposed once again the continuing low status women had in India.

To operationalise the recommendations of the CSWI, a 'Blue print of Action points and National Plan of Action for Women' 1976 was formulated by the then department of social welfare. In
1978 the Report of the Working Group on Employment for Women, and that on Development of Village level Organisations of rural women were published. The impact of these reports necessitated the inclusion of a separate chapter on Women and Development in the Sixth Five Year Plan. It also resulted in women being perceived as contributors to the nation's economy. The Report of the Working Group on Personnel Policies for bringing greater involvement of women in science and technology-1981 reviewed the extent of participation of women in scientific establishments and suggested measures for promoting greater involvement of women in science and technology. In the seventh Five Year Plan, the chapter on socio-economic programmes for women (1985-90) moved further away from a 'welfare approach' to a more positive 'developmental approach' to women's concerns. More recently, the Indian parliament adopted a National Policy on Education (1986) which included a chapter on Education for Women's Equality. The Government of India launched the Twenty Point Programme in 1975 pinpointing areas of special thrust which would show immediate results.

The Report of the National Expert Committee on Women's Prisoners (1987) identifies the gaps and draw backs in existing facilities and services for women offenders and recommends a more humane policy for them. The National Commission on Self Employed Women in the informal sector was appointed in January 1987 to look into the ways and means to alleviate the sufferings of the unprotected labouring women.

The National Perspective Plan for Women 1988-2000 A.D is an effort at evaluating the impact of developmental plans and programmes on Indian Women. It is linked to the national targets
determined for the end of the century in respect of certain basic indicators especially of health, education and employment. The plan sees women not as the weaker segment of the society or as passive beneficiaries of the development process but as a source of unique strength for reaching national goals.

The plan aims at:-

(i) economic development and integration of women into the main stream of the economy;

(ii) equity and social justice for all women.

These are critical goals for the all round development of women not merely as producers and providers, but also as individuals with a right to human dignity in a society where culture, class, and caste tend to discriminate against the 'weaker'gender.

Despite all the efforts made by the government of India, welfare organisations and individual members, things have not changed much for women since 1975. Society remains staunchly male dominated. It is true that the status of women is changing but only at a slow pace. Position of women in Indian society is far from satisfactory. Wide gap exists between men and women in many spheres of life. In society the women’s place has been primarily confined to home, her role limited to procreation, upbringing of children and catering for the needs of men. Many social and religious customs, taboos, and rituals hinder women’s freedom, education and work participation in productive labour.

While many problems have been solved and the International Women’s Year has ushered in an era of hope, some problems have staged a come back. Dowry deaths are on the ascendancy. Female
infanticide which got reduced considerably, is back with a scientific boom. Female foetuses get aborted, after their sex is determined by tests during pregnancy. Infanticide in its true form prevails in certain places of Tamilnadu. Reports show that in Usilampatti (Tamilnadu) almost all female children born are being killed by the parents. Women's literacy rate is very low when compared to that of men. Rural society is not at all free from bias against girls' education. In poor families girls have to take the household burdens at an early age itself. The problem of wife beating is perhaps the most common amongst Indian women's problems though people are openly fighting against rape and dowry, wife beating is discussed inside home only. It is seldom reported. Almost every single day, newspapers report incidents of dowry harassments, dowry murders and suicides of newly married girls. Rape cases are increasingly reported in the media. The reports are like tips of the ice-bergs.

There are people who even today would consider the practice of sati as part of India's glorious heritage. It was believed that the inhuman custom sati had died in the nineteenth century. But it had not. On 4 September 1987, eighteen year old girl, Roop Kanwar was burnt to death on her husband's funeral pyre in village Deorala, Sikar district, Rajasthan. Not only did the administration with all its power fail to prevent the girl from committing sati but also it failed to prevent the communal fanatics from celebrating the so called Chunri Festival to proclaim the girl as Satimata.

Devadasi system still exists in many parts of India particularly in the states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharastra. It was reported that in Karnataka every year, girls
below twelve years of age were dedicated to goddess Yellamma as *devadasis*. It is said that this system is nothing but prostitution under the banner of religion.

The amniocentesis tests—the chromosome test done on the amniotic fluid in the womb of a pregnant woman to learn the sex of the unborn foetus is usually followed by abortion if it happens to be a female one; This practice is gaining wider currency as more and more people come to know about it. In recent times dowry is becoming a serious problem in Indian society. Dowry which was earlier regarded as a symbol of love given by the girls' parents according to their ability, has now became institutionalized as a right to be demanded by the boy's parents.

All these reveal the fact that though constitutional rights including equality and equal opportunities in many spheres were guaranteed to women, many of their problems have remained unsolved.

This in no way means that women's movement was not able to make any headway in fighting injustices towards women. The movement succeeded to a great extent in checking the increasing problems. The campaigns against dowry, sex determination tests etc. create an impact on the public. Consciousness raising among women about their problems, their rights and about the laws made for them is a major contribution of the movement. Legal aid cells, counselling centres and centres for women in distress functioning in the country is providing assistance at least to a minority. Crimes against women often went unreported during the early years. But as a result of the movement more and more
women show courage to speak out their sufferings. Moreover, crimes against women are widely reported in the media. Though the movement is trying to make links with other social movements and other classes of people even now the women's movement includes mostly women of the middle classes. However with the inclusion of more and more women and also men to the movement and by making better liaison with international bodies the women's movement may able to change the awful situation of women with the passage of time.
REFERENCES


5. Baig, n.3, p.4.


7. The period between 1500 B.C and 500 B.C.


10. The period between c 500 B.C to 500 A.D.


14. Polygamy was the practice of having more than one wife at a time.

15. Kulinism was the practice by which it was socially possible for even a hundred women to be given in marriage to one Brahmin by reason of his 'Kul' (high status).


24. Because of this monitory help given, some of the marriages led to complicated situations, the bride grooms coming forward with a view to obtaining financial assistance and some times even threatening to leave their wives, if further money has not forthcoming. Natarajan, n.17, p.44.
25. Asthana, n.19, p.27.


33. Everett, n.16, p.60; Jagidar, n. 32, p.150.


35. Age of Consent Bill- 1891. By this the age of consent of marriage of girls was raised from ten to twelve.

36. Natarajan, n.17, p.32.

37. Asthana, n.19, p.32.

38. Natarajan, n.17, p.129.

40. Ibid, p.41.


42. Natarajan, n.17, p.86.


44. Baig, n.3, p.219; Ali, n.39, p.36; Asthana, n.19, p.32.


46. Sreedevi, n.43, p 41.

47. Asthana, n.19, p.47.

48. Ibid.

49. Sreedevi, n.43, p.41.


51. Asthana, n.19, p.52.

52. Natarajan, n.17, p.110.


54. Ibid, p.52.


The Theosophical Society had been established in the United States in 1875 by Madam H P Blavatsky along with colonel H S Olcott. They came to India in 1879, at Adyar, near Madras, set up the headquarters of the Society in 1886. Kali Kinker Dutta, Social History of Modern India, The Macmillan Company of India Ltd., New Delhi, 1975, Pp. 360-383.

Everett, n.16, p.52.

Ibid, p.53.


Everett, n.16, p.59.

Ibid, p.63.


Ibid, n.60, p.35.


Ali, n.39, p.70.


Annie Besant:- Born in 1847 in Ireland, she joined the Theosophical Society and was migrated to India in 1893. As an educationalist and social reformer, she give much emphasis to female education. Became the first president of Indian National Congress in 1917. It was on Annie Besant’s call that many women joined the Home Rule Movement. She stood for women’s rights and favoured for vote for women. She was one of the founders of Women’s Indian Association started in 1917.

70. Sarojini Naidu:— Born in 1879, in Hyderabad, became one of the famous poet, a great political geneous and a champion of women’s rights, a staunch follower of Gandhiji. Actively participated in Mahatma Gandhi’s non-coopertion movement. In 1925 elected as President of Indian National Congress. She worked for the emancipation of Indian Women. In 1918, at Bombay she worked for getting the resolution on women’s franchise passed. In 1919, went to England as a member of the Home Rule League deputation and took that opportunity to put forward the case for women’s franchise. She attended the second Round Table Conference at London as an official representative of women in India. After independence she became the first woman governor of a State (Uttar Pradesh).

For Details See, Tara Ali Baig, *Sarojini Naidu*. Publication Division, Government of India, New Delhi, 1974, 1980 (rpt.).

71. Kamala Devi Chathopadhyay:— Born in 1903 at Mangalore. Attended International Congress of women’s league for peace and freedom in Parague. Actively participated in Civil Disobedience Movement and Swadesi Movement. She established Congress Sevadals in different parts of the country and was in charge of that Organisation.

72. Agnew, n.60, p.55.
73. Jain, n.66, p.25.
74. Everett, n.16, p.75.
75. Sreedevi, n.43, p.75.
76. *Harijan*, 21 February 1940.
79. Jain, n.56, p.150.
80. Agnew, n.60, p.40.

82. In 1936-37, when Jawaharlal Nehru as President did not appoint a woman to the Working Committee, that incident provoked protests from Gandhiji and women’s organisations.

Agnew, n.60, p.86.

83. Muthulakshmi Reddy (1886-1968):- The first woman medical graduate of Madras. She gave up her practice to dedicate her full-time for women’s upliftment. Later became the first Indian woman legislator when nominated to the Legislative Council of Madras in 1927. She subsequently elected Deputy Speaker of the council. She resigned in 1930 in protest against the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi.


84. Agnew, n.60, p.78.

85. Margaret Cousins :- One of the most illustrious women leaders who played a mighty role in shaping the women’s movement in India. An Irish woman deeply interested in the progress of Indian women. In 1915 came to India and joined Annie Besant. The first non-Indian who is elected as member of Indian Women’s University Association of Poona in 1916. Acted as one of the joint secretaries and editor of "Stri Dharma", a magazine published by association. She was the brain in agitation ‘vote for women’. Founded All India Women’s Conference in 1926.

86. Shah, n.18, p.40.


88. Shah, n.18, p.42.


90. Ibid, p.10.


94. Gandhi, n.91, p.7.

95. Now the activities of women in the Chipko Movement in Its two decades of evolution have been extended from embracing living mountains and living waters.


96. Patel, n.89, p.12.


100. Patel, n.89, p.16.

101. The first socialist feminist organisation was formed in India in 1974 at Hyderabad. It was known as Progressive Organisation of Women (POW); *Ibid*, p.18.

103. Patel, n.89, p.16.


107. Desai, n.102, p.123.

108. Patel, n.89, p.27.


111. In October 1985 the Forum against Sex Determination and Sex Pre-selection was founded in Bombay.


114. Madan, n.13, p.115.


117. Ibid.

118. Ibid.

119. Ibid.


122. Yellamma is supposed to be the God of Yellamma temple. There is one Yellamma Temple in Belgam District of Karnataka.