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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# STRUGGLE OF WOMEN FOR THEIR POLITICAL RIGHTS

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### ABSTRACT

The right of vote and contesting elections is common practice for women in modern world, but there were many suffrage organizations involved in achieving these rights for them. Various groups and organizations and associations reflected women's concerned during the twentieth century. These organizations became the medium for the expression of women's opinion. At the same time, these organizations served as a training ground for women who later on took up the leadership roles in politics and other social institutions. Education also brought a unique change during this period as a new elite class emerged in large towns and cities and gave leadership to the society. The formation of Indian National Congress provided them a meeting place and gave them an opportunity to express and motivate towards taking action. At the beginning of the twenty-first century the journey of women to attain their political rights began when Mahila Parishads established, and they used to hold national conferences to discuss the topics of female education, abolition of evil, social customs such as dowry, neglect of widows, child marriage and others. Women's right to vote was first time demanded in 1917 and Madras was the first province where government allow the women to vote and participate in elections, and these rights were extended to Punjab in 1926.

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## INTRODUCTION

Women might gather for religious assemblies on a common platform provided by socio-religious reform movements. Because of spread of education, liberal, and rational ideas by the Arya Samaj, Women who were the mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters of Arya Samaj came out of their traditional shells and participated in the Samaj's political-religious meetings as early as the beginning of the twentieth century. Various movements and organizations expressed women's issues during the twentieth century. These organizations provided a platform for women's opinion to be heard, as well as a training ground for women who went on to lead in politics and other fields. Arya Samaj campaigners went to nearly every nook and cranny of the province, recruiting women to join their movement. As a result, many women became politicized and began to participate in nationalist politics alongside their male colleagues. The women of Punjab took a strong interest in the Swadeshi Movement under the patronage of the Arya Samaj.

They split up into small groups and held their own meetings. Despite the fact feminism was not one of their goals; they established their own Mahila Samaj and Istri Sabha. Their efforts were limited to raising funds for the Swaraj and making local products more popular. On 31 December, 1906AD, one of the first women's conference was held at Bethune College, under the direction of Dr. Mary Bethune. The purpose of this gathering was too discussed and debate on a wide range topics or issues related to the family, society, education, and life in general. The meeting was launched by the Maharani of Baroda, and Maharanis from all over the country were present, including those from Mysore, Nattore, Mayurbhanj, Cooch Behar, and Diagnapythia. Other renowned ladies were also present at the meeting. After the Maharani of Baroda read her presidential speech, Sarojini Naidu advised women to keep up with males and separate themselves.

**BHARAT STREE MAHAMANDAL:** In December, 1909AD, a resolution was passed at a women gathering in Lahore Punjab, under the auspices of the Indian National Social Conference, which was presided over by Rani Saheba of Partapgarh.

The resolution was that a permanent association of Indian ladies to be found under the name of Bharat Stree Mahamandal. (Literally means the great circle of Indian women). It was a great achievement on the part of the women of the Punjab. The Lahore branch of this organization laid stress on female education, and several women joined Bharat Stree Mahamandal to help carry out its program activities. Mrs. P.C. Chatterjee was elected to lead the Lahore branch. Mrs. Ram Saran Dass and Mrs. Shadi Lal were the vice-presidents and Miss Majumdar who was a moving spirit of this branch, served as its secretary. To give publicity to issues concerning women's rights the women organization began publishing journals, one of the first English magazine for women being the Indian ladies edited by Kamla Swami Nathas, the first women graduate and M.A. of South India. This general highlighted various aspects of women's issue and became popular throughout India. Sarla Devi Choudharani made frantic efforts to promote and spread the cause of the Bharat Stree Mahamandal. She also travelled to various places to expand the Bharat Stree Mahamandal's branches.

The Punjabi women under this organization championed the cause of female education. They started welfare program and welfare centers. At Jullundhar, the Rani of Kapurthala established a women's welfare centre. Women from Royal families came forward to organize Punjabi women for their betterment. In November, 1910, a private conference presided over by Mrs. B.N Sen and Sarla Devi Choudharani as general secretary of the Bharat Stree Mahamandal at Lahore. The objective of this organization was to bring together the women of the all castes and creeds on the basis of their common interest in the moral and material progress of Indian women. After 1910 National and provincial women's association were started by those who became experienced in local women's association. Sarla Devi Choudharani, the founder of Bharat Istri Mahamandal, was one of them. The Bharat stree Mahamandal condemned social evils prevalent in the society they regarded Purdah as a tremendous obstacle and stumbling block. As a result of the evolution of such activities, a small elite group of women have come forward to enter public life. Who, without challenging the traditional roles and family responsibilities of women worked actively to generate political awareness among their fellow sisters? For this purpose several organizations of women were formed at several places of the country. In order to link up these groups and to establish coordination among them a need was felt to establish women's organization on a country level. After the first world war, National Women's Organization sprang up among them three major organization: The Women Indian Association (WIA), the National Council Of Women In India (NCWI) and the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) emerged between 1917AD and 1927AD.

**Women's Indian Association:** In 1917AD, women Indian association (WIA) was founded by Annie Besant, Dorothy Jinarajadasa and Margaret Cousins. The Women's Indian Association (WIA) was the first attempt to organize women on an all India basis. Annie Besant was interested in Indian women's education and had attempted to educate them about their social and political rights. Margaret Cousins was the founding member of the Irish women's franchise league from 1906AD-1913AD. She was one of its prominent speakers and campaigners and she had the organizing skill and patience to initiate an association of women.

Annie Besant was an Irish lady. She was the president of the Theosophical society from 1907 until her death in 1933AD and she also served as president of the congress in 1917AD-18AD. She took keen interest on women's education since 1901AD and wrote a pamphlet on the subject. In 1904AD, she opened a girl's school associated with her central Hindu College in Benaras. She was elected president of the newly formed women's India association in 1917AD. The women's Indian association had humble beginning in this regard It is worth to mention that for the formation of this organization the lead was taken by British women with the association of many Indian women. The women who founded this organization decided to call it WIA because membership was open to both Indians and Europeans. The WIA also started a monthly journal *Istria Dharma* published in English, Hindi and Tamil, carried news of women's interest. By the end of the first year there were thirty branches, and forty three sub-branches, twenty centers and 2,300 members by the end of the fifth year. Each branch accepted the main aims of the association but each remained self governing.

**The National Council of Women in India:** The second All India women's organization to be founded was The National Council of Women in India (NCWI). By 1925AD, women from Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras attempted to unite the various organizations into a new council. The National Council of Women in India was established as a national branch of the International council of women. In 1888AD, the inaugural conference of the International Council of Women was held in Washington, DC, with the purpose of strengthening women's social, economic, and political rights. The leader of the Bombay Presidency Women's Council also sought a national forum. As a result in 1925AD, a third National women's organization was formed. The National Council of Women in India is located in Bombay. The foundation of this council was aided by a number of well-known Indian women. The council created partnerships with the BPWC, the Calcutta Women's League of Service, and provincial councils in Bihar, Orissa, and Delhi. The BPWC stands for Bombay presidency women council. It was formed by lady TATA and others in 1918AD. This council joined with National Council of Women in India.

**All India Women's Conference:** The All India Women's Conference (AIWC) was the most powerful women's organization in India. It was founded in 1927AD by Margaret Cousins. After more than six months of hard work by Margaret Cousins and other WIA members, it met for the first time in Poona in January 1927AD. Mr. Oaten, Bengal's Director of Public Instruction, urged women to decide what kind of education was appropriate for Indian girls and then advice the government with one "what they want, and keep on telling us until they get it." The organization of a conference was an answer to this challenge. Margaret Cousins sent circular letters to women leaders throughout India, urging them to hold local conferences to discuss educational challenges. Each conference would prepare a memorandum on female education for presentation at an All India Women's conferences meeting. The meeting was held at Poona. At the first meeting of the conference there were 87 members from the local reception committee, 58 delegates from local conferences and over 2000 observes (Men and Women). The Rani Sahib of Sangli delivered the inaugural address and introduced the first president, the Maharani Chimma Bai Sahab (Garkward of Baroda).

In her introductory remarks, the Rani stated that women required a special type of education, one that was not feminist in nature because that would promote conflict between men and women, but an education help them to understand their position as "Supplemental" to that of men. The Maharani of Baroda focused on social customs especially purdha and child marriage, which hampered the growth of female literacy. She said that this was a time of women's awakening, but shedid not mention women's new found interest in politics, but she did advocate for education that was consistence with women's nature. In 1928AD AIWC founded the All Indian Women's Education fund to finance a college for women, the lady Irwin College in Delhi. The beautiful city of Delhi was the scene of a unique gathering when the sound AIWC on educational reform met in 1928AD. Women delegates came from 33 constituencies. The primary purpose of the AIWC'S was educational reform, but they were also interested themselves in all aspects of a women's lives. Many congress women like Sarojini Naidu, Vijay Laxmi Pandit, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Kamla Devi Chattopadhyay were the eminent members of All Indian women conference.

**Women's demand for political rights:** The women's organization provided a common platform to the women of India to emancipate themselves in all aspects of life including their demand for political rights. In 1917AD, the British government's intention to include more Indians in the governing process was declared by secretary of state for India. The first step in the political emancipation of women was taken in 1917AD when a deputation of fourteen members led by Sarojini Naidu met Mr. Montague and requesting him to grant the right to vote to women. Only about one million women were enfranchised as a result of the 1919AD Montford amendments. At the end of 1920AD, Travancore became the first state in India to give women the right to vote in legislative elections. The Madras and Bombay Presidencies led the way in allowing women to vote in other provinces. The women's suffrage resolution was ratified by the Mysore legislative council in April 1922AD, and the unified provinces followed in 1923AD. Women were awarded suffrage in Assam by the provincial council in October of 1924AD. Punjab, the Central Provinces, and Bengal all granted women the right to vote in 1926AD, followed by Bihar and Orissa in 1929AD.

Suffrage resolution rode to victory on a wave of nationalist enthusiasm. Although the number of women who were eligible to vote was never large enough to be a matter of concern. Throughout India the numbers enfranchised were small in Madras; women were 8.46% of the total voters, 5.03% in After Independence the constitution of India grants adult suffrage to all without any discrimination. The Indian women have been granted Political equality with men. As a result of Adult Franchise and Equality with men, women are taking active part in Bombay and 3.0% in united province and Bengal and only 2.5% in the Punjab. In the Central Legislative Assembly women comprised 4.36% of the total electorate. After Independence the constitution of India grants adult suffrage to all without any discrimination. The Indian women have been granted Political equality with men. As a result of Adult Franchise and Equality with men, women are taking active politics and played a very prominent role in shaping the destiny of our country.

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