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1. Women Reform Movements in 20th century :

During 20th century the struggle against colonial rule intensified. Nationalism became the pre-eminent cause. Claiming Indian superiority became the tool of cultural revivalism resulting in an essential model of Indian womanhood similar to that of [Victorian](#) womanhood: special yet separated from public space. [Gandhi](#) legitimized and expanded Indian women's public activities by initiating them into the non-violent [civil disobedience](#) movement against the [British Raj](#). He exalted their feminine roles of caring, self-abnegation, sacrifice and tolerance; and carved a niche for those in the public arena. Peasant women played an important role in the rural satyagrahas of Borsad and Bardoli. Women-only organisations like [All India Women's Conference](#) (AIWC) and the [National Federation of Indian Women](#) (NFIW) emerged. Women were grappling with issues relating to the scope of women's political participation, [women's franchise](#), communal awards, and leadership roles in political parties.

The 1920s was a new era for Indian women and is defined as 'feminism' that was responsible for the creation of localized women's associations. These associations emphasized women's education issues, developed livelihood strategies for working-class women, and also organised national level women's associations such as the All India Women's Conference. AIWC was closely affiliated with the Indian National Congress. Under the leadership of [Mahatma Gandhi](#), it worked within the nationalist and anti-colonialist freedom movements. This made the mass mobilisation of women an integral part of Indian nationalism. Women therefore were a very important part of various nationalist and anti-colonial efforts, including the civil disobedience movements in the 1930.

After independence, the All India Women's Conference continued to operate and in 1954 the Indian Communist Party formed its own women's wing known as the National Federation of Indian Women. However, feminist agendas and movements

became less active right after India's 1947 independence, as the nationalist agendas on nation building took precedence over feminist issues.

Women's participation in the struggle for freedom developed their critical consciousness about their role and rights in [independent India](#). This resulted in the introduction of the franchise and civic rights of women in the Indian constitution. There was provision for women's upliftment through [affirmative action](#), maternal health and child care provision ([crèches](#)), equal pay for equal work etc. The state adopted a patronizing role towards women. For example, India's constitution states that women are a "weaker section" of the population, and therefore need assistance to function as equals. Thus women in India did not have to struggle for basic rights as did women in the West. The utopia ended soon when the social and cultural ideologies and structures failed to honour the newly acquired concepts of fundamental rights and democracy.

Post-1947

Post independence feminists began to redefine the extent to which women were allowed to engage in the workforce. Prior to independence, most feminists accepted the sexual divide within the labour force. However, feminists in the 1970s challenged the inequalities that had been established and fought to reverse them. These inequalities included unequal wages for women, relegation of women to 'unskilled' spheres of work, and restricting women as a reserve army for labour. In other words, the feminists' aim was to abolish the free service of women who were essentially being used as cheap capital. Feminist class-consciousness also came into focus in the 1970s, with feminists recognizing the inequalities not just between men and women but also within power structures such as caste, tribe, language, religion, region, class etc. This also posed as a challenge for feminists while shaping their overarching campaigns as there had to be a focus within efforts to ensure that fulfilling the demands of one group would not create further inequalities for another. Now, in the early twenty-first century, the focus of the Indian feminist movement has gone beyond treating women as useful members of society and a right to parity, but also having the power to decide the course of their personal lives and the right of self-determination.

In 1966 [Indira Gandhi](#) became the first female Prime Minister of India. She served as prime minister of India for three consecutive terms (1966–77) and a fourth term from 1980 until she was assassinated in 1984.

Section 53A of the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Indian law, 1973 lays down certain provisions for medical examination of the accused. Section 164A of the Code of Criminal Procedure deals with the medical examination of the victim.

[Mary Roy](#) won a lawsuit in 1986, against the inheritance legislation of her [Keralite Syrian Christian](#) community in the [Supreme Court](#). The judgement ensured equal rights for Syrian Christian women with their male siblings in regard to

their ancestral property. Until then, her Syrian Christian community followed the provisions of the Travancore Succession Act of 1916 and the Cochin Succession Act, 1921, while elsewhere in India the same community followed the Indian Succession Act of 1925.

2 : Role of women in India's freedom struggle:

The history of Indian Freedom Struggle would be incomplete without mentioning the contributions of women. The sacrifice made by the women of India will occupy the foremost place. They fought with true spirit and undaunted courage and faced various tortures, exploitations and hardships to earn us freedom.

When most of the men freedom fighters were in prison the women came forward and took charge of the struggle. The list of great women whose names have gone down in history for their dedication and undying devotion to the service of India is a long one.

Woman's participation in India's freedom struggle began as early as in 1817. Bhima Bai Holkar fought bravely against the British colonel Malcolm and defeated him in guerilla warfare. Many women including Rani Channama of Kittur, Rani Begam Hazrat Mahal of Avadh fought against British East India company in the 19th century; 30 years before the "First War of Independence 1857"

The role played by women in the War of Independence (the Great Revolt) of 1857 was creditable and invited the admiration even leaders of the Revolt. Rani of Ramgarh, Rani Jindan Kaur, Rani Tace Bai, Baiza Bai, Chauhan Rani, Tapasvini Maharani daringly led their troops into the battlefield.

Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi whose heroism and superb leadership laid an outstanding example of real patriotism. Indian women who joined the national movement belonged to educated and liberal families, as well as those from the rural areas and from all walk of life, all castes, religions and communities.

Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Vijayalakmi Pundit and Annie Bezzant in the 20th century are the names which are remembered even today for their singular contribution both in battlefield and in political field.

Let us elucidate the role of Indian women who participated in the freedom struggle against British East India Company and British Empire and made great and rich contributions in various ways.

The First War of Independence (1857-58)

The First War of Independence (1857-58) It was the first general agitation against the rule of the British East India Company. The Doctrine of Lapse, issue of cartridges greased with cow and pig fat to Indian soldiers at Meerut 'triggered the fire'. Further, the introduction of British system of education and a number of social reforms had infuriated a very wide section of the Indian people, soon became a widespread agitation and posed a grave challenge to the British rule.

As a result of this agitation the East India Company was brought under the direct rule of the British Crown. Even though the British succeeded in crushing it within a year, it was certainly a popular revolt in which the Indian rulers, the masses and the militia participated so enthusiastically that it came to be regarded as the First War of Indian Independence. Rani Lakshmi Bai was the great heroine of the First war of India Freedom. She showed the embodiment of patriotism, self-respect and heroism. She was the queen of a small state, but the empress of a limitless empire of glory.

Jalianwalabagh massacre (1919)

General Dyer's Jalianwala Bagh massacre followed the strike wave, when an unarmed crowd of 10,000 Baisakhi celebrators was mercilessly attacked with over 1600 rounds of ammunition. Yet, Gandhi continued to advocate cooperation with the British in December 1919, even as the resistance of ordinary Indians continued. The first six months of 1920 saw an even greater level of mass resistance, with no less than 200 strikes taking place involving 1.5 million workers. It was in response to this rising mass revolutionary tide that the leadership of the Congress was forced to confront its conservatism and give a somewhat more militant face to its program. The "non-violent non-cooperation" movement was thus launched under the stewardship of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Lajpat Rai and Motilal Nehru.

Non-cooperation movement launched (1920)

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in 1915 and took up the demand for self-rule and non-cooperation movement. Sarla Devi, Muthulaxmi Reddy, Susheela Nair, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sucheta Kripalani and Aruna Asaf Ali are some the women who participated in the non-violent movement. Kasturba Gandhi, the wife of Mahatma Gandhi, and the women of the Nehru family, Kamla Nehru, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and Swarup Rani, also participated in the National Movement. Lado Rani Zutshi and her daughters Manmohini, Shyama and Janak led the movement in Lahore.

Civil Disobedience the Dandi Salt March (1930)

Gandhiji inaugurated the Civil Disobedience Movement by conducting the historic Dandi Salt March, where he broke the Salt Laws imposed by the British Government. Followed by an entourage of seventy nine ashram inmates, Gandhi embarked on his march from his Sabarmati Ashram on a 200 mile trek to the remote village Dandi that is located on the shores of the Arabian Sea. On 6th April 1930, Gandhi with the accompaniment of seventy nine satyagrahis, violated the Salt Law by picking up a fistful of salt lying on the sea shore. The Civil Disobedience Movement was an important milestone in the history of Indian Independence. The aim of this movement was a complete disobedience of the orders of the British Government. During this movement it was decided that India would celebrate 26th January as Independence Day all over the country. On 26th January 1930, meetings were held all over the country and the Congress tri- colour flag was hoisted. The British Government tried to repress the movement and resorted to brutal firing, killing hundreds of people. Thousands were arrested along with Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru. But the movement spread to all the four corners of the country.

The Quit India Movement (1942)

In August 1942, the Quit India movement was launched. "I want freedom immediately, this very night before dawn if it can be had. We shall free India or die in the attempt, we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery", declared the Mahatma, as the British resorted to brutal repression against non-violent satyagrahis. The Quit India resolution, taken against British, directly addressed women "as disciplined soldiers of Indian freedom", required to sustain the flame of war.

Usha Mehta, a committed patriot set up a radio transmitter, called The "Voice of Freedom" to disseminate the "mantra" of freedom-war. News of protest and arrests, deeds of young nationalists, and Gandhi's famous "Do or Die" message for the Quit India movement were circulated amongst the masses. Usha Mehta and her brother persisted with their task of broadcasting until their arrest.

These acts proved that the British could maintain the empire only at enormous cost due to wide spread agitation.

3.Feminist movement:

Pre-Colonial and Colonial Period:

Before colonialism, these NGOs existed as socio-economic structures which were self-serving. They were touted as safety or security nets used by the people for their own selves. These have been described as 'societal' rather than 'etatist' organisations. After the coming of colonialists, they brought with them Christian Missionaries or Churches – which have been seen by many as invasive forces imposing reforms especially on the impoverished communities. Their primary objective was to ensure the spread of health and education and provide other social services. Their role has always been contested and is seen as bordering on the white saviour complex, which assumes non-white people as savages.

It was only after the Emergency, that India saw a parallel rise in the second phase of the women's movement as well as women's organization. These worked in tandem on issues of dissent, environment, censorship, human rights, gender and reproductive rights in the aftermath of the excesses committed during the Emergency period. NGOs in this period were dissenting forces which held the state accountable as well as organisations committed to social reform.

The independence struggle or the anti-colonial movement also led to the emergence of many Indian organisations that were touted as reformist groups especially in the social and religious arena. They took up issues of women and children. Reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy advocated strongly against sati, child marriage and also fought for the rights of widows to be able to remarry. Some of these organizations also invested in women's education and questioning the purdah system.

However, as Dr. BR Ambedkar said, these social reforms for women did not focus on breaking up the caste hierarchies. Often these social organizations

operated in a way to accommodate Hindu women within Brahminical, patriarchal structures instead of reforming Hinduism as a religion – which aggressively perpetuated untouchability and graded inequality, in the name of the caste system. These organisations were thus seen as an interlink between social reform and anti-colonialism because of their underlying political and activist character. The 1860 Registration of Societies Act was also passed to keep a track of them, since they operated outside the colonial state.

Post Independence and the Emergency Period:

Post independence, there was a steady surge of self-reliant organisations, based on Gandhi's model which were concerned with Khadi, agriculture, healthcare, spinning etc. They faced a decline in the 1960s. It was only after the Emergency, that India saw a parallel rise in the second phase of the women's movement as well as women's organization.

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Globalization: On Neo Liberalisation and Funding:

The 1990s saw the Indian Government pushing for policies of economic liberalization, privatization and globalization. Structural Adjustment Programs or SAPs were being introduced that brought with them the 'international donor-driven NGO boom.' Institutions like the World Bank and IMF compelled the state to withdraw from the public sectors which were essential. This gap was created so that the 'development sector' could emerge and thrive. Thus the poor and the marginalized, instead of depending on the government, were left at the mercy of the NGOs which brought along with it, its own set of problems.

Most women's organizations and NGOs are run by elite feminists who have a top-down approach. Instead of local women leaders, we will usually see policy 'buffs' or experts working here. Since these same organizations also participate in the larger women's movement, their decisions often drown out the voices of grassroots collectives who don't have a say in decision-making.

Within NGOs, there will always be a gap between feminist theory and praxis. The Foreign Contributions Regulations Act (FCRA, 1976) leaves a major chunk of the development sector to get approval for international funding from the state. As a result of competition to acquire funding, these NGOs are forced to establish a corporate and professional culture, complete with organizational hierarchies.

Naturally, upper-middle class intellectuals or women who have had the social capital to get a good education are preferred as employees over marginalized women from the community. Most women's organizations and NGOs are run by elite feminists who have a top-down approach. Instead of local women leaders, we will usually see policy 'buffs' or experts working here. Since these same organizations also participate in the larger women's movement, their decisions often drown out the voices of grassroots collectives who don't have a say in decision-making. Representation in these organizations, then becomes a huge problem – either there is none, or even if there is, it is accompanied with tokenism.

In February 2019, several accounts of bullying and harassment faced by Amnesty International employees in India emerged. The organization was accused of promoting a toxic work culture that also propagated caste discrimination and Islamophobia. This led to widespread condemnation of Amnesty International and many Dalit activists like Radhika Vemula and Chandrashekar Azad withdrew their support from it. Similarly NGOs like The Ford Foundation, Oxfam, Greenpeace have been accused of collaborating with capitalist corporations which otherwise trample on the rights and land of tribal people and migrant workers.

Conclusion:

Thus, the relationship between NGOs and the Women's Movement has led to a loss of collective feminist politics which was based on autonomy like in the 1980's. The nexus of state, CSR, corporates and NGOs has depoliticized the women's movement. This has become quite a dangerous phenomenon in the present context, especially considering how the rise of Hindutva is promoting a homogeneous identity and culture.

This phenomenon of NGOization can also be witnessed within Women's Development Cells of colleges which have become apolitical in the recent past. This is an extremely dangerous trend as it produces a generation of 'career feminists' who instead of organically engaging in the women's movement, head towards adopting a very white-washed (or pink-washed) 'brand' of feminism.

NGOization of the women's movement has led to prominent issues which the state may have a problem with, being pushed to the back burner. Sexual violence, mental health, LGBTQIA+ rights maybe addressed by the feminist movement today but they do very little to fight against systematic and institutional causes that result in these inequities and violence.

For example, while an NGO might spread awareness about sexual and reproductive health rights for unmarried women, at the same time it may charge a hefty fees to help women get safe abortions. So instead of being a watchdog and urging the public healthcare infrastructure to provide nominal sexual and reproductive healthcare services to women from all communities, it itself becomes a privatized service delivery agency where only women with some capital can access abortions.

This phenomenon of NGOization can also be witnessed within Women's Development Cells of colleges which have become apolitical in the recent past. They do not adequately address structural problems of caste and Islamophobia especially faced by women within universities, but will organize pride face painting competitions in collaboration with NGOs. This is an extremely

dangerous trend as it produces a generation of 'career feminists' who instead of organically engaging in the women's movement, head towards adopting a very white-washed (or pink-washed) 'brand' of feminism.

4 .Women's rights and indian cinstitution

The constitution of India protects rights of women and all vulnerable sections of the society and also promotes equality of Status and opportunity for all. The Fundamental rights deal extensively with the issue of [equality](#). **Article 14** states that all citizens of the Country are equal before law and will have equal protection of Law.h

Article 15 lays down that the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, sex or place of birth. It also guarantees that no citizen shall on any of the above grounds be subject to discrimination or restriction with regard to accessing public spaces. **Article 15(3)** in fact permits States to make special provisions for women and [children](#) to safeguard their rights. Considering the fact that women have been discriminated for centuries, the Article provides scope to take affirmative action to alleviate women from exclusion in politics, education, employment, etc. in an effort to bring them at par with men.

Article 16 deals with equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. It gives women the same rights as men in relation to access to jobs, conditions of [employment](#), relationships at work and opportunity for capacity building and career progression.

Article 21 deals with the right to life and personal liberty. The Apex Court has however clarified that right to life is not merely a physical right but includes in its ambit the right to live with human dignity. This has been interpreted in various judgments, as the right to basic necessities, right to lead a life of dignity, the right to be free from discrimination and violence, etc.

Article 23 and 24 of the Constitution deal with the right against exploitation. Article 23 prohibits human trafficking and forced labour, to which women are generally subjected to.

The Directive Principles of State Policy that provide guidelines for formation of laws and policies also contain beneficial provisions for women like **Article 39 (a)** which calls upon States to secure for men and women equally the right to and adequate means of livelihood; **Article 39(d)** which aims to secure equal pay for equal work for men and women and **Article 42** which states that provisions shall be made for securing just and humane conditions of work and [maternity](#) relief. **Article 243 D and T** also make it mandatory to reserve seats in Panchayats and Nagarpallikas for women.

The fundamental duties cast a duty on all citizens through Article 51A (e) to renounce all practices derogatory to women.

Various provisions have also been made with regard to offenses against women under the **Indian Penal Code and the Indian Evidence Act**. Several Laws have also been enacted to

promote women's right to equality and address the issue of discrimination and enable them to lead a life of dignity.

Thus the Constitution of India has made an attempt to not only talk of the concept of equality but has also gone a step ahead to ensure that special provisions can be made and affirmative action taken to deal with discriminatory practices.

Voting rights/Electoral law

- Not less than one-third seats shall be reserved for women. Such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.
- The office of the chairperson in the Panchayat at the village or any other level shall be reserved for SCs, STs and women in such manner as the legislature of state may, by law provide.
- Reservation of seats for women in Municipalities is provided

To uphold the Constitutional mandate, the state has enacted various legislative measures intended to ensure equal rights, to counter social discrimination and various forms of violence and atrocities and to provide support services especially to working women. Although women may be victims of any of the crimes such as 'Murder', 'Robbery', 'Cheating' etc, the crimes, which are directed specifically against women, are characterized as 'Crime against Women'. These are broadly classified under two categories.