

POL SC HELP  
UG NEP Series

# **Women's Movements** **(Colonial India)**

**Colonialism and nationalism in  
India( CNI)**

**NEP BA HONS. POLITICAL SCIENCE**



# Structure of the Video Lecture

- Social movement – meaning and definitions ✓
- Two streams of women movement in colonial India- Liberal and revivalist
- Prominent organisations raising and improving women's condition ✓
- Women's contribution in India's freedom movement
- Notable women's organisation during India's freedom movement



# Social Movement- Meaning and Definitions

- A social movement is a collective effort by a group of people who are trying to bring about or resist social, political, or economic change
- a form of collective action aimed at challenging or changing established societal norms, values, or institutions
- an organized, enduring, and purposeful effort to achieve social change
- A social movement is a cultural and ideological shift led by a group of people who share a common worldview and are committed to transforming the dominant culture or societal framework.
- Women's movement is an important variant of social movement in the sense that it aims to bring changes in the institutional arrangements, values, customs and beliefs in the society that have subjugated women over the year



# Two Components of Women's Movement

- **Reform Movements and Women's Issues in Colonial India**

- Socio-religious reforms to improve women's condition
- Activating State's power to enact laws to improve women's condition
- Efforts of visionary individuals and Institutions in improving women's condition

- **Women's Participation and contributions in the Freedom Movement**

- Women's participation in the Swadeshi Movement, Non cooperation movement, civil disobedience movement, and quit India movement
- **Institutionalisation of women's movement:** Women's Indian Association (1917) and The National Council of Women in India (1920s). All India Women's Conference (1926-27)



# Reform Movements and Women's Issues in Colonial India- Two streams: Liberal and Revivalist

- **Liberal Stream**

- Inspired by European Enlightenment and Western Liberal thoughts, utilitarianism
- Liberal Feminism- equal worth and equal rights to women, positive laws to stop social practices against Women, such as, 'Sati', ban on Widow remarriage, child marriage, 'Parda Pratha', etc.
- Individual agency: Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, MG Ranade, DK Karve, Kandukuri Veeresalingam Panthulu, Pandita Ramabai
- Organisations: Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Sharda Sadan, Arya Mahila Samaj
- **Outcomes:**
  - Sati (Prevention) Act, 1829
  - The Widow Remarriage Act, 1856
  - The Age of Consent Act, 1891- Minimum age of girls marriage 12 years( from 10 yrs)
  - The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 (Sarda Act) : Minimum age of marriage Girls- 14 years Boys—18 years



# Reform Movements and Women's Issues in Colonial India- The revivalist Stream

- Key Features:
  - Inspired by ancient Indian civilization, values, customs, practices
  - attempt to bring back the glory of Vedic civilization in modern India
  - The Role of Women: Good Mother("Mother India" ideology), Wife, carrier & protector of Indian culture/civilization, active role in national movement
- Aimed at bringing about social changes for Improving the women's conditions consistent with India's cultural and religious traditions
- Individual Agency:
  - Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay
- Organisations:
  - Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, Theosophical Society



# Important organisations

**Worked for improving women's condition**





# Brahmo Samaj

- Founded in 1828
- **Founder:** Raja Ram Mohan Roy
- Other Prominent Leaders: Debendranath Tagore, Keshab Chunder Sen, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar
- Key Contributions:
  - **Abolition of Sati** (Self-immolation of widows)- Laws enacted in 1929 ✓
  - **Promotion of Widow Remarriage:** Supported widow remarriage, which was revolutionary at the time.
  - **Women's Education:** Advocated and supported for the education of women, believing it was essential for the progress of society
  - **Social Equality:** Worked against caste discrimination and polygamy



# Prarthana Samaj

- Founded in: 1867 in Bombay( Now Mumbai)
- Founder: Atmaram Pandurang, influenced by social reformers like Jyotirao Phule
- Provided a platform for like-minded reformers to push for Improving the conditions of Women
- Objective:
  - Improve the status of women through social and religious reforms.
  - Work against the oppressive practices prevalent in society.
- Key Contributions
  - Promoted Women's Education
  - Supported widow remarriage
  - Condemnation of Child Marriage



# The Arya Samaj

- **Founded** in 1875 in Bombay( Now Mumbai)
- **Founder:** Swami Dayananda Saraswati
- **Other Prominent Leaders** : Lala Lajpat Rai , Swami Shraddhanand, Madan Mohan Malaviya
- **Objective**
  - Promote Vedic teachings and reform Hindu society
  - Advocate for women's rights and social equality, based on Vedic Principles
- **Key Contributions:**
  - Women's Education: Opened schools, colleges for women's education
  - Widow Remarriage: Strongly supported widow remarriage
  - discouraged the practice of child marriage
  - Condemnation of Sati and Dowry
- **Impact:**
  - The Arya Samaj helped ignite the reformist spirit in Indian society and influenced many social changes, particularly in the fields of education and women's rights



# The Theosophical Society of India

- Founded in 1875 in Adyar, near Madras( Chennai)
- **Founders:** Annie Besant, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott( in USA)
- Objective
  - Promote the study of religions, spiritual philosophy, and the pursuit of truth
  - Empower women by providing educational opportunities and uplifting their social status
- Key Contributions
  - **Women's Leadership:** Annie Besant, a prominent leader of the Theosophical Society, advocated for women's rights and their inclusion in spiritual and intellectual pursuits
  - **Women's Education:** Established schools and institutions for women's education
  - **Social Reform:** Supported the cause of women's rights, especially in terms of marriage, child welfare, and suffrage



# Critical appraisal of the social reform movements on women's issue

- All these movements had a very limited perspective of improving the position of women within the family without challenging the social structure – Patriarchy and Caste System
- Their appeal was limited to the urban middle class
- Leadership of these movements were not in the hands of Women
- The gender bias of the reform movement was most pronounced in the argument that education would improve women's efficiency as housewives and mothers
- Revivalist Stream limited itself to Hindu Women; they were also very critical and dismissive of the radical feminism, such as of Pandita Ramabai



# Women's Participation and contributions in the Freedom Movement



# Women in Early Struggles (Pre-Gandhi Era)

- Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi: Led a rebellion against British forces during the 1857 Revolt.
- Begum Hazrat Mahal: Led the uprising in Lucknow during the First War of Independence.
- Kittur Rani Chennamma: Fought British colonialists in Karnataka.
- Bhikaiji Cama: Revolutionary woman leader working from Europe



# Women's Participation in the Swadeshi movement 1905

- The women workers of Brahmo Samaj in Bengal and Arya Samaj in Punjab actively participated in the Swadeshi Movement
- Prominent woman leaders: Sarala Devi, Begum Roquiah Sakhawat Hossain, Sarojini Naidu
- Women actively participated in boycotting British goods, particularly textiles.
- They encouraged family members and communities to use Indian-made products like khadi
- Women actively promoted the use of indigenous products by organizing khadi spinning & weaving centers, and encouraging the consumption of Indian goods
- Women contributed significantly to the Swadeshi movement by raising funds for national causes. Women contributed their bangles, nose rings and bracelets to the national fund ; They organized bazaars, collected donations, and participated in various fundraising activities.
- In villages, women started putting away a handful of grain daily for such purpose






# Women's Participation in Civil disobedience movement 1930

- women from all class and walks of life joined enthusiastically the salt Movement
- Prominent women leaders, such as Sarojini Naidu and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Sucheta Kriplani played significant roles in organizing and leading women during the Salt Satyagraha
- The act of making salt became a powerful symbol of resistance, particularly resonating with women who traditionally managed household needs
- women across India engaged in similar acts of defiance against salt laws, organizing local protests, and participating in picketing
- This marked one of the first large-scale participations of women in the Indian independence movement, contributing to their empowerment and visibility in public life.



# Women's Participation in Quit India Movement 1942

- All prominent men leaders were arrested in the first round up and in their absence, women carried on the movement
- The women not only led processions and held demonstrations but also organised camps for training on civil duties, first aid and democracy
- Women organised political prisoners' relief fund while some women went underground and directed the movement secretly
- Leadership Roles:
  - **Sarojini Naidu:** Known as the "Nightingale of India," **she** was one of the most prominent women leaders playing an active role in the Quit India Movement
  - **Aruna Asaf Ali:** A significant leader in the Quit India Movement, **Aruna Asaf Ali** became a prominent symbol of resistance when she hoisted the Indian flag at the **Gowalia Tank** in Mumbai in 1942
  - **Kamala Nehru:** She took part in street protests and campaigns, encouraging women to rise up against British rule
  - **Usha Mehta:** organized the Secret Congress Radio, an underground radio station during the Movement
  - **Mrityu Bahini** (Force of Death) in Assam, actively engaging in resistance activities during the Movement
- Impact: The involvement of women in the Quit India Movement symbolized their emerging role in the nationalist struggle. They challenged traditional gender roles and demonstrated their commitment to India's independence 

# Women in Revolutionary Movements

- **Rani Lakshmi bai** of Jhansi: A symbol of resistance during the 1857 Revolt
- **Women in the Azad Hind Fauj:**
  - The Rani of Jhansi Regiment Led by Captain Lakshmi Sahgal, who played a crucial role in organizing and training the women volunteers
- **Durgawati Devi** was a prominent figure in the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA)
  - She helped Bhagat Singh escape British intelligence networks
- **Bhikaji Cama:**
  - A prominent revolutionary freedom fighter who was exiled in Europe, known for raising the first flag of independent India in 1907
  - She was especially active in France and Germany, where she interacted with revolutionaries like Lala Lajpat Rai, Sardar Ajit Singh, and Shyamji Krishna Varma



# Woman's organisations for mobilising women in the national movement

- Women's Indian Association (1917)
- The National Council of Women in India (1920)
- All India Women's Conference (1926) — 26 ✓



# Women's Indian Association (WIA)

- Established in 1917 in Madras (Chennai) by prominent leaders like Begum Roquiah Sakhawat Hossain, Annie Besant, and Sarojini Naidu
- Objectives
  - To promote women's education, social reforms, and improve women's participation in politics.
- Contributions:
  - Advocated for the right of women to vote and to hold public office
  - Played a significant role in the formation of policies for women's welfare
  - Worked towards the inclusion of women in political movements like the **Non-Cooperation Movement**.



# The National Council of Women in India (NCWI)

- Established in 1923 by Lady Meherbai Tata and others
  - *Note: There is a bit of confusion in the exact year of its establishment many sources mention 1925*
- Objectives
  - Advocate for women's rights, legal reforms, and education.
- Activities & Contributions:
  - provide a platform for women's organizations and social workers
  - involved in community development projects, such as providing education and healthcare services to women and children
  - Contributed towards enactments of laws for women's welfare, such as the Child Marriage Restraint Act and Hindu Women's Right to Property Act
  - NCWI is still operational and works for women's rights, gender equality, legal reforms, and social justice



# All India Women's Conference (AIWC)

- Established in 1927 by Margaret Cousins with Kamini Roy and Sarojini Naidu; Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was its first organising secretary
- Objective:
  - providing a forum for women's social and political issues
- Activities & Contributions:
  - Focused on issues such as child marriage, widowhood, dowry, and women's education
  - Pushed for laws promoting gender equality and reforming marriage laws
  - Advocated for better health and hygiene for women, especially in rural areas
  - Supported various protests and movements led by Gandhi, including the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930) and the Quit India Movement (1942)



# Sum Up

- One of the focus of all the socio-religious reform movements during the colonial India was to improve upon the conditions of women
- Two streams of social reform movements— liberal and revivalist
- Brahmo Samaj and Prarthna Samaj of the liberal stream and Arya samaj and Theosophical Society of the revivalist stream --prominent organisations working for improvement of women's condition
- Woman participated and contributed significantly in the Swadeshi, Civil Disobedience, Quit India and revolutionary movements
- Women's Indian Association, The National Council of Women in India, All India Women's Conference- Woman's organisations for mobilising women in the national movement





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