

**POLITICAL ACTIVISM OF WOMEN
IN AMERICA, 1966—1986.**

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	
PREFACE	
CHAPTER ONE : THE AWAKENING	1
CHAPTER TWO : THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION	30
CHAPTER THREE : THE FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL	65
CHAPTER FOUR : THE LAST BASTION CRUMBLES	85
CONCLUSION	112
BIBLIOGRAPHY	121

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PREFACE

If politics is the science of "who gets what, when and how", it is time, political scientists devote their attention to study the role of women in society and government and analyse how much of the government's resources are spent on women who constitute one-half of the total population. This modest dissertation has been written with the aim of analysing the importance of women in politics today. It is a two-way analysis : how government (by this one means all the three branches of government together with the attitude of the bureaucracy) has responded to the demands of women and how effective women in America have been in putting forth their demands. The success of women in politics can be measured in numerous ways: the credibility of their demands ; public response to women's issues, effectiveness of women's lobbies & governmental action or inaction in processing these demands into legislative measures. The history of American women is a story of continuous struggle to gain legitimacy in the eyes of government and public.

In the first chapter the history of Women's first awakening to their power and position in society has been analysed.

The second chapter, deals with decline of Women's Movement in the period after 1920 and the causes for the backlash against feminism in America. The chapter also narrates the revival of feminism in the 1960s and its gradual climb to political power and prestige.

The third chapter deals with the Equal Rights amendment. This has been the most important issue of Women Activists of the 1960's. The failure of Equal Rights Amendment, was, both a failure and a success of women activists. It was a failure because despite all the efforts of women activists, the ERA failed to get the required majority of 3/4th state legislatures. It was a success because like a pheonix rising from the ashes, the women's movement regained its power and prestige. Moreover the ERA taught many important political lessons to the women activists, the most important of them being that women's issues was bi-partisan and that women activists could not rely on the support of one party alone for its success.

Lastly, in "The Last Bastion Crumbles" one has tried to show how the last bastion i.e politics has been conquered by the dedication and efforts of women activists. Politics in America is no longer a male domain. After conquering social economic and cultural prejudices women in America have been able to overcome political prejudices

also. Therein lies the most important success of the women's movement.

The study is basically descriptive and analytical. Since there is lack of primary source material in India, I have been mainly relying on secondary sources, viz : Articles, Books, and Periodicals.

CHAPTER ONE

THE AWAKENING

THE AWAKENING

Women's Movement in America was a broad-based movement embracing numerous phases of women's emancipation. It did not begin as a conscious class movement nor did it originate at any particular time of history. Rather it gained gradual momentum as the exploitation and degradation of women proceeded apace with industrialisation and urbanisation.

From the earliest days of their existence, American women have faced many social problems. Struggling for survival in the wilderness of a strange country, the women "wrestled with strange foods in a climate savage in both its heat and cold", they also toiled from sunrise to sundown converting "raw skins and meat into necessary food and clothing, and planted and tended the ground¹. Those were the days of frontier economy where shortage of manpower forced women to give a helping hand. Many a time the woman was forced to shoulder the responsibilities of home single-handed as her husband was killed while hunting, exploring or fighting with the native Red Indians. Women in America at this time played a crucial role in the building of the

1. Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle - The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States (Massachusetts; 1959) p.5.

nation. This has led some writers to believe that colonial America established a "rough egalitarianism" between men and women². Carl Degler, a critic of the feminist history opines that American history has always had a "feminist bias" because in a society that was being newly carved out of a wilderness, "women were active and important contributors to the process of settlement and civilization". Moreover as he says, "because women have been scarce in America they have been highly valued".³ Yet another writer calls this age as the "Golden Age of Women" in America⁴.

Women in colonial America were to a certain extent equal with men, but their equality was only to the extent of their being able to contribute to the building of family fortunes. In all other matters they were suppressed and subordinated. Eleanor Flexner, noted writer on the history of the woman's suffrage movement, points out that "whatever their social station, under English common law, which became increasingly predominant in the colonies and among all religious denominations, women had many duties but few

2. Ibid, p.9.

3. Carl Degler, "Revolution Without Ideology: The Changing Place of Women in America", in Robert J. Lifton ed., The Woman in America (Connecticut, 1964) p.193.

4. As cited in Mary Beth Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America", American Historical Review vol 89, No 3, June 84, p.594.

rights"⁵. Married women particularly suffered from what has been described as "Civil Death" having no right to property and no legal status or existence independent of their husbands. Married women could not sign contracts, nor testify in courts; they had no right to their own earnings or to property even when it was their own coming by way of inheritance or dower; or to their own children in case of legal separation. Nor could they sign papers as witnesses or set up any business⁶. Given these facts, it is no wonder then that Joan Hoff-Wilson another expert in this field dismisses the golden age theory as a "straw argument" and Gerda Lerner goes as far as to say that there never was a golden age for women in America⁷.

The condition of the women's lot hardly improved in the years following the end of colonial rule. The following case studies amply illustrates the point:

In 1873, a women in Massachusets slipped and fell on ice. Being a woman, she was unable to sue for damages. Her husband, however, was awarded thirteen hundred dollars by the courts as compensation for his loss of her labour- money he could spend as he pleased, without consulting his wife.

Here is another illustration to the same effect:

5. Flexner n.1, p.7.

6. William Henry Chafe, The American Women, Her Changing Social, Economic and Political Roles 1920-1970. (New York, 1972), p.5.

7. Norton, n.4, p.594

One man who failed in business was supported for years by his wife, who established a successful milliner's shop. Eventually the man died, leaving her shop and her savings legally his own, to somebody else. Had he not made this unjust will, his widow would have received only a third of the real estate as per the prevailing law; or had he died in debt,⁸ all her property would have gone to pay the creditors'.

The law, however, in such a case allowed the woman to retain a few things - her clothes, a single table, six chairs, six plates, six knives and forks, one sugar bowl and twelve spoon.

Women in the post colonial days had no political rights either. In this regard they were considered at par with the negroes and other indentured labourers who too, did not have the right to vote, or to stand for election. Legislation in those days was the prerogative of only the white, affluent, male section of the population. Even in the matter of education women were no better off than the Blacks. There was no higher education for women and no professional colleges were open to women. When the American electorate expanded to include all White males there was a demand that education too, should not be made the prerogative of the privileged few. This demand was adequately met. However education for women still remained

8. Olivia Coocledge, Women's Rights - The Suffrage Movement in America, 1948-1920, (New York, 1966) pp. 9-10.

in the backwards of American thought. It was not considered necessary for women to acquire education since her position at home and society did not justify it. Moreover it was felt that it was criminal to utilise the tax payer's income for a petty thing like women's education. It was left to private tutors to teach women⁹.

Next to civil law the most potent force responsible for women's subordinate position in American society, which was a legacy of the colonial days, was religion. As Flexner says:

The colonists might be dissenters of one kind or another against the Church of England, but they were at one with it in believing that the woman's place was determined by limitations of mind¹⁰ and body - a punishment for the original sin of Eve¹⁰.

Many women of that time realised that religion stood in the way of women's equality. Consequently the first major work by an American feminist - Sarah Grimke's Letters on the Equality of Sexes and the Conditions of Woman (1838) - was directed against those clergymen who believed God had ordained woman's inferior position¹¹. She made it

9. Flexner, n.1, p.28.

10. Ibid, p.8.

11. William O' Neill Every One was Brave - the Rise and Fall of Feminism in America (Chicago, 1969), p.11.

clear in her book that "whatsoever it is morally right for a man to do, it is morally right for a woman to do"¹². Her forceful, dignified and lucid exposition went a long way in arousing women's consciousness and, in later days, in changing the attitude of the protestant clergy towards women. Another woman who launched a virtual crusade against the church doctrines was Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who later became the first President of the National Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA). She was responsible for the anti-clerical resolutions passed by NAWSA which described women as the victim of "priest craft and superstition". She indicted the canon law as "more responsible for woman's slavery than the civil code"¹³.

Against the backdrop of such socio-religious environment, the women's movement began to take shape. Although there are many reasons for the rise of feminism in America, historians generally advance two arguments - one economic the other ideological. The economic argument was most concisely expressed by Walter Lippmann who observed that the "withdrawal of industries from the home has drawn millions of women out of the home and left millions idle within it"¹⁴. Women who were forced to work had to face

12. Ibid, p. 12.

13. Ibid, n.10, pp 3-4

14. Ibid, p. 12.

discriminatory wage practices and exploitations due to their lack of skill and weak bargaining power. Middle-class women who stayed at home had to face a different problem. The 18th century emphasis on female leisure as signs of their husband's success precluded any paid employment for these women. They were thus trapped into a kind of "feudalistic relationship" with their husbands: paid in kind rather than cash, unable to sell their labour in the open market and thus dependent on the good-will of their "lord and master". The Industrial Revolution created an upheaval in the minds of most women; it forced them "to alter their styles of life and inevitably brought them into conflict with customs and institutions based on obsolete economic factors"¹⁵.

The rise of industry and the creation of bourgeois class led to several revolutions against feudalism. the most important of these was the French Revolution, which spread the idea of equality across the world. The American Revolution was fought for independence, but it also initiated the slogan of equality that was assumed and amplified by the French Revolution. The two revolutions shook American society and changed the ideological outlook of many people. At first, the ideal of equality was applied only to white males, but it was inevitable that every

15. Ibid, P.4.

oppressed group would make this slogan its own¹⁶. the Women's Movement too responded to the libertarian ideologies fostered by these revolutions. Women began to demand rights which was denied to them by prejudices and superstitions.

However, these two possibilities do not adequately explain the rise of feminism in America. As William O' Neill says, the industrial revolution is a 'catch-all' phrase designed to explain everything that is unanswerable. To prove his point, O' Neill cites the opinion of William J. Goode, the famous sociologist, who had conclusively proved that industrialism was compatible with a variety of family systems and that it in no way disrupted the family¹⁷.
✓ William O' Neill therefore looks elsewhere to explain the rise of feminism. His assumption is that the answer to the problem lies in the conjugal family system which became popular in the nineteenth century. "In completing the transformation of the family from a loosely organized ... adjunct of Western society into a strictly defined nuclear unit at the very center of social life, the Victorians laid a burden on women which many of them could or would not bear. The Victorians had attempted, moreover, to compensate women for their increased domestic and pedagogic

16. Barbara S. Deckard, The Women's Movement: Political, Socio-economic and psychological Issues, (New York, 1975), p.25.

17. O'Neill, n.11, p.4.

responsibilities by enveloping them in a mystique which asserted their higher status while at the same time guaranteeing their actual inferiority¹⁸. Fed up with such a meaningless life, women's discontentment took the form of a movement. Willaim R. Taylor and Christopher Lasch have suggested the same theme in one of their articles:

The cult of women and the Home contained contradictions that tended to undermine the very things they were supposed to safeguard ... It was her purity, contradicted with the coarseness of men, that made woman the head of the Home [though not of the family] and the guardian of public morality. But the same purity made intercourse between men and women at last almost literally impossible and drove women to retreat almost exclusively into the society of their own sex, to abandon the very¹⁹ Home which it was their appointed mission to preserve¹⁹.

Thus one of the reasons for the rise of feminism was women's reaction to the great pressures of the newly emerging nucleus family. It was not a rebellion born of slavery but a reaction against the "forced demesticity" of women. Having become conscious of their unique sexual identity and with the spread of education and awareness, women were no longer willing to accept uncritically the role forced upon them by the "alien male" - meaning thereby that the male sex had no right to dictate to the woman as to her duties and status in society.

18. Ibid 4-5.

19. William R. Taylor and Christopher Lasch, "Two 'Kindred Spirits': Sorority and family in New England, 1839-1846", New England Quarterly, vol. XXXVI, (March 1963) p.35 as quoted in O'Neill, n.10 p.5.

Barbara Berg, a noted writer on Women's Liberation, cites another plausible explanation for the origins of feminism. She is of the opinion that the beginning of American cities from rural to the urban township led to the loss of status and identity of man which in turn brought about the oppression of women. This, spurred the women's movement in America. During the colonial era, women had limited access to the job market. In frontier settlements, as has already been pointed out, women laboured alongside men and shared in their hardships and responsibilities:

Yet as persistent urban expansion made a mockery of man's plans and hopes, he experienced a loss of identity, of control and perhaps even more important of a coherent set of values around which to understand and organize his life... Americans, particularly those living in cities, searched for a way to cling to the values of an idealized yesteryear... [This they proceeded to do] by transforming their conception of an agricultural paradise into a set of prevailing images and perceptions of womanhood... The rigid differences he postulated between male and female recompensed for the fluidity of class lines that seemed to defy his domination.²⁰

Thus according to Berg, the American women's sense of oppression, her quest for total emancipation originated and developed in American cities between 1800 and 1860²¹

20. Barbara J. Berg, The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism (New York, 1978), pp 263-264.

21. Ibid, p.7.

When women began to realize the extent of their oppression and privation, the limited social and economic opportunities available to them and the fact that their role and status in society was determined not by their own perceptions but that of man, they started an active campaign to free themselves from that stereotyped role.

Thus in many ways, the position of woman relative to man actually declined after the Revolution of 1787. However, the concern with equality was heightened because of two factors that came to dominate the American scene at this time. One was (as has already been noted) the spirit of revolution which broke the old order and ushered in a new one proclaiming liberty and equality for all. The other, was the "Negro Question". Many women felt a close spiritual affinity with the negroes and their state of bondage. Angelina Grimke Weld echoed the thoughts of many women when she said "I want to be identified with the Negroes. Until he gets his rights, we never shall have ours"²². Woman's participation in the anti-slavery movement of the 1830s further aroused women's consciousness not only to the negroes plight but also to their own.

The first American Anti-slavery Society was formed in 1833. Twenty women attended, but they were not allowed

22. Leslie B. Tanner ed., Voices from Women's Liberation (New York, 1970), p.80.

to sign the Declaration of Purposes. So the women formed their own Female Anti-slavery Society without the help of their male colleagues. This society did pioneering work among the negroes. But female abolitionists had to suffer persecution and mob violence because their activity was deemed "unnatural"²³. Further their effectiveness was hampered by another social stigma that was attached to women speaking in public. But braving the public wrath, many women went around the country giving lectures on the evils of slavery. Sarah and Angeline Grimke who were among the first women to publicly criticize slavery, were violently denounced by the Council of Congregationist Ministers of Massachusetts, for going beyond their "God-given place"²⁴. Answering this attack Sarah boldly replied, "I ask no favour for my sex... All I ask of our brethren is that they take their feet off our necks and permit us to stand upright"²⁵. In 1840 women delegates to the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, were denied seats and were forced to sit in the gallery. This treatment made women more aware of their inferior status and served as the proverbial last straw which broke the camel's back. Discussions among these women finally led to the first Women's Right Convention at Seneca

23. Deckard, n.16, p.252.

24. Ibid, p.253.

25. Flexner, n.1, p.47.

Falls, New York in 1848. One of these women was Elizabeth Cady Stanton who formed the moving spirit behind the Seneca Falls Convention.

At this convention, Elizabeth Cady Stanton read out the now-famous Declaration of Sentiments on behalf of all women. As Keith Melder succinctly says "her paraphrase of Jefferson summarized grievances that had been building up for nearly half a century, announcing a war-cry for embattled women that echoed again and again in the long suffrage struggle"²⁶ Here is the text of the Declaration:

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpation on the part of man towards woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world...

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she has no voice ...

Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides.

He has made her, if married, in the eyes of law, civilly dead.

26. Keith E. Melder, Beginnings of Sisterhood - The American Women's Rights Movements 1800-1850, (New York, 1977), p. 147.

He has taken from her all right in property even to the wages she earn... In the covenant of marriage she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming to all intents and purposes, her master - the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.

...He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration...

He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign to her a sphere of action when that belongs to her conscience and to her God...

He has endeavoured, in every way he could, to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and ^{to} make her willing to lead an abject and dependent life²⁹.

The Seneca Falls Declaration gives a clear picture of women's civil status at the time it was written. At the same time it protests against the psychological subjugation of women by men. Its programme of action was an attack on the laws and customs that denied full citizenship and equal economic opportunity to women. The Seneca Convention marked the official beginning of the Women's Right Movement.

The Women's Movement was made the target of attack by both the press and the public. Newspapers ridiculed the movement and its leaders. One such example is the attack

27. Robin Morgan, Sisterhood is Powerful : An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement, (New York 1970), pp. 15-16.

made on Lucy Stone, the well known suffragist who spoke well and argued her case as well as any lawyer; "How funny it would sound in the newspapers", wrote New York's most popular paper the New York Herald, that Lucy Stone, pleading a case, took suddenly ill ... and perhaps gave birth to a bouncing boy in court²⁸. Such nonsense was written in all papers and magazines. To answer and state their own views, women started their own newspapers: The Lily, The Una, Pittsburgh Visiter(sic), Women's Advocate etc.²⁹ There was, during this time, no national organization because women thought it would stifle individual initiative.

Therefore most women carried on their work by themselves or by joining small groups. The early days of the movement was dominated by three outstanding women: Lucy Stone, the movement's most gifted orator, Elizabeth Stanton, its best philosopher and programme writer and Susan B. Anthony, its best organizer³⁰. These women concentrated on all issues of equality - social, economic and legal-but very few women emphasized the vote. Both Lucy Stone and Stanton favoured women's suffrage though unlike Ms. Stone, Ms. Stanton did not limit herself only to the vote. Speaking

28. Eleanor Flexner, n.1 pp. 81-82.

29. Judith Hölle & Ellen Levine, "The First feminicts" in Jo freeman ed., Women: A feminist Perspective (California, 1979), aded, p.549.

30. Deckard, n.16, pp. 254-255.

through a journal entitled the Revolution, Stanton said, "The ballot touches only those interests either of men or women which take their roots in political question. But women's chief discontent is not with her political, but with her social and particularly her marital bondage"³¹.

Just when women were beginning to shape up their movement, the Civil War broke out. The Civil War had a powerful effect on the fortunes of women:

Having acquired some practical experience and some education outside the home, they were able for the first time to participate actively in a national enterprise... Thousands of them served as nurses, and daring individuals such as Clara Barton, Mary Livermore and Louisa May Alcott, not to mention the eccentric few who became spies, soldiers and the like, distinguished themselves in various capacities. On the ideological front, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony formed the National Woman's Loyal League to inspire patriotism, support the Thirteenth Amendment and secure for women an honourable role...³².

Throughout the war, women continued to work for abolition and feminism. They expected the country to reward them by enfranchising the Negroes and women. But to their shock, they found that the 13th Amendment introduced in Congress aimed at giving the vote only to all male. "This was the first time that the word male was used in the Constitution"³³. Quite justifiably women felt betrayed at

31. Chafe, n.6, pp.6-7.

32. O'Neill n.11, pp. 14-15.

33. Deckard, n.16, p.262.

the turn of such events. They had worked so hard and for so long for an entirely legitimate and justifiable end. Yet when the time came they were told that it was the "Negro's hour" and the women remained as underprivileged and deprived as ever. An enraged Ms. Stanton asked :

Are we sure that he, [Negro] once entrenched in all his inalienable rights, may not be an added power to hold us at bay? Have not "Black male citizens" been heard to say they doubted the wisdom of extending the right of suffrage to women?... We who know what absolute power the statute laws of most of the states give man, in all his civil, political and social relation, demand that in changing the status of the four millions of Africans, the women as well as the men shall be secured in all the rights, privileges, and immunities of citizen."³⁴

Many women reacted with racist slurs against putting Negroes, Africans, Chinese and "ignorant" foreigners ahead of women. This was unfortunate because the women's movement had until now been entirely non-racist. This incident also created a breach among the women activists themselves.

The suffragists disagreed among themselves as to how they ought to view the Thirteenth Amendment which inserted the word "male" into the United States Constitution. Some of them like Miss Anthony and Mrs. Stanton thought it would be better if the amendment was defeated; others like Mrs. Stone argued that if women could

34. Tanner, n.22, p.81.

not win their political freedom, it was well that Negro men could win theirs. On this and other issues the suffragists found they could not agree. In 1869 two separate organizations came into being³⁵. While Stanton and Anthony founded the radical National Women Suffrage Association (NWSA), Lucy Stone and other moderates organized the American Women Suffrage Association (AWSA). The NWSA published a paper called Revolution and campaigned not only for suffrage but against exploitation, the terrible condition of women workers and the unequal social situation of women. It utilized militant tactics to focus public opinion on the plight of women. In 1876, at a centennial celebration of United States Independence in Philadelphia - where the Emperor of Brazil was the guest of honour - Ms. Anthony suddenly got up on the stage and read a declaration of Rights for Women, which her supporters then distributed as a leaflet. The NWSA also adopted other means of protest, like making its members vote in an election in 1872. Mrs. Anthony was herself persecuted for voting illegally. The judge did not allow her to testify, since women were "incompetent" to do so. Ms. Anthony was found guilty and fined \$100³⁶.

35. Aileen S. Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920, (New York; 1965), p.3.

36. Deckard, no.16, pp 263-264.

The AWSA included men in its rank and its first President was also a man. The organization's main spokesperson Lucy Stone, brought in many middle and upper-class club women and professionals. The AWSA's newspaper, the Woman's Journal was well-financed and well-managed unlike the Revolution which went bankrupt very soon. Its style, like that of its organization, reflected its conservatism; it soft-pedled suffrage and maintained its distance from controversial issues like exploitation at work and church.

After a brief description of the organization of the Women's Movement, we now move on to the arguments the suffragists used to justify women's vote. To the women of the 20th century it may seem an anachronism and a gross injustice to deny women the right to vote in a democratic country only on the grounds of sex. But in the 18th and 19th centuries in America, there was no such concept of justice. Women were not looked upon as individuals but as part of the family. The family was the basic unit of society. Each home existed as a "state in miniature". It had only one head - the husband - and he alone represented it in the world outside³⁷. By the middle of the 19th century, the United States with the exception of the slave south, was a "nation of relative class fluidity, a nation in

37. Chafe, n.6, p.10.

which men believed themselves equal, if not in fortune, certainly in natural right.³⁸ The task of the pioneers of the Women's Movement was to prove that this equality applied to women too. Hence women suffragists had to first dispel the notion that God had created women unequal. They refuted the assumption that a woman's characteristic was physical and emotional while the higher, more civilized faculties were reserved for men. Sarah Grimke complained that nothing "has tended more to destroy the true dignity of woman than the fact that she is approached by man in the character of a female". Sarah insisted that "man has inflicted an unspeakable injury upon woman, by holding up to view her animal nature, and placing in the background her moral and intellectual being"³⁹. In the beginning, therefore, women suffragists based their demands for political equality with men on the same ground as that which their men had asked from their English rulers, two generations ago. "If all men were created equal and had the inalienable right to consent to the laws by which they were governed, women [too] were created equal to men and had the same inalienable right to political liberty"⁴⁰.

38. Kraditor, n. 35, p. 43.

39. O'Neill, n. 10, p. 50.

40. Kraditor, n. 35, p. 44.

The call for women's suffrage was received with stiff opposition from all sections of men. The people who opposed were (1) Liquor business, (2) Big city bosses, (3) Catholic Church, (4) Southern Whites and (5) Big business. The liquor industry feared women's votes for prohibition; the big-city bosses were afraid women voters would want reform legislations and would want to "clean-up" politics; the Catholic Church felt that women might oppose sexist things on "woman's place"; the Southern White politicians fear the women's vote as much as they did the Negroes; and Big business was worried that any change might disturb its power⁴¹. The anti-suffragists also used another pet argument to discourage women's vote: that women were physically incapable of undertaking the various duties concomitant with voting and that the home would suffer if women had any political rights. Aileen Kraditor says. "close to the heart of all anti-suffragist orators... was a sentimental vision of Home and Mother, equal in sanctity to God and the Constitution"⁴².

In order to meet these opposition, the suffragists moved from an argument of "justice" to that of "expediency". Instead of emphasizizing the inalienable rights of females as

41. Deckard, n.16, pp. 282-283.

42. Kraditor, n. 35, P. 15.

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individuals the feminists now tried to emphasize the utility of the ballot as an instrument for reforming society. Rather than base their appeal on the similarity of men and women as human beings, they underlined the immutable differences which distinguished the sexes and gave to each a unique role to play in politics.

The suffragists' acceptance of female distinction represented a vital break from traditional suffrage arguments. While in the initial years of the movement, feminist leaders had championed the principle that the two sexes should have similar rights to engage in all worldly activities, in the later part of the 19th century some of the new leaders of the suffrage movement argued that women deserved the vote precisely because they were different. The suffragists brilliantly exploited traditional assumption about woman's unique position. Females were primarily spiritual creatures, they claimed. Hence their participation would elevate the moral level of the Government. W.H. Chafe gives the reason behind the shift in the suffragists' line of appeal:

In large part the shift developed as a natural response to a hostile political climate. As long as feminists focussed on women's right to be free of social constraints, they invited association of their own movement with such issues as divorce and free love. In an age scarred by anarchism and social disorder, it made sense for women leaders to deemphasize those

positions which were more likely to meet public disapproval⁴³.

Whatever be the reasons for the shift, the Women's Suffrage Movement got a tremendous boost by adopting this new strategy. They not only broadened their appeal but they also effectively neutralised the opposition's charge that the suffrage movement sought to destroy homes.

With the advent of progressivism, the new strategy paid dividends. The suffragists had already defined the vote for women as a means to humanise government. In a period of generalised commitment to "reforms" women naturally were able to identify their own cause with the larger effort to extend democracy and eliminate social injustice. Progressivism also provided a vehicle by which millions of hitherto uninvolved middle class women became politicised⁴⁴.

The conservative spirit which dominated suffragists after the 1870s was, therefore, of a very special kind. "It accepted certain victorian stereotypes, rejected radical ideas about the condition of women, and gave priority to the vote"⁴⁵. The vote, the suffragists

43. Chafe, n.6, p.12.

44. Ibid, p.16.

45. O'Neill, n.10, p. 52.

argued would :

enlarge women's interests and intellect by placing upon her part of the responsibility of running the Government; "it would make her a better mother by enabling her to teach her children ⁴⁶ from first hand experience the meaning of citizenship".

The Women Suffrage Movement was part of the larger women rights movement, but it must also be seen as a reflection of a changing conception of Government. As Aileen Kraditor says:

The inference may be drawn ... that in the period when Americans were a rural people, when there had been no garbage disposal problem, no disease causing congestion of population... women had neither needed the vote nor had anything essential to contribute to Government. Although suffragists themselves never drew this inference and continued to include statements of the natural right principle in their propaganda, the expediency arguments that dominated that propaganda during the last generation of the suffrage campaign were themselves expedients,⁴⁷ tailored to fit the realities of an industrial age.

In 1890 both the NWSA and the AWSA came together under the banner of National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA) with the primary aim of gaining the vote. However till 1910 NAWSA did little and accomplished almost nothing. It had no national headquarter, and the leaders communicated by mail. Its first significant

46. Kraditor, n. 35, p. 55.

47. Ibid, pp. 71-72..

accomplishment was a petition with 4,00,000 names collected in 1908-1910. At the turn of the century the suffrage movement was completely in a rut. As Mariot Blatch, daughter of Stanton said, "it bored its adherents and repelled its opponents ... supporters in private drawing rooms and in public halls... listlessly heard the same old arguments"⁴⁸.

Inspired by the militant tactics of English suffragists, Ms. Blatch organized a new group, the Women's Political Union in 1907, in New York:

The Union set out to be more dramatic and to make contact with business and professional women... The Union also contacted interested labour unions, it introduced working women to state legislators. The women told the truth about their awful working conditions, thereby shocking the legislators. It initiated the first open-air meetings for suffrage in thirty years. Finally, it launched a set of mass parades, which met with opposition by "respectable ladies" but soon became the most successful tactic of the suffrage movement⁴⁹.

The Union decided to "teach the law makers that inaction on the women suffrage amendment would cost them votes in the full suffrage states."⁵⁰.

48. Flexner, n.1, p.250.

49. Deckard, n.16, p.275.

50. Kraditor, n.35, p.8.

The years between 1895 and 1915 marked the beginning of the middle-class growth towards self consciousness. As more and more women came out to demand their rights NAWSA started to revitalize itself and together with Women's Political Union revived flagging suffrage spirit in states across the country.

In 1910 women activists snatched a significant victory when a referendum for women's suffrage was won in the state of Washington, mostly by sending speakers to local groups, labour union and churches. In California a very important suffrage referendum was won by a narrow margin by the imaginative use of speakers and meetings, big billboard ads, plays, pageants etc. The new militant tactic was successful in California too. There was powerful opposition from business and liquor interests, and thousands of votes were stolen, but enough were protected by militant women poll watchers to win⁵¹.

Moreover working women became more outspoken as a result of their own militant union struggles. One unionist, Rose Schneiderman, answered a New York Senator who claimed that women would lose their feminine qualities if they voted:

51. Deckard, n.16, p.275.

We have women in the foundries stripped to the waist... because of the heat. Yet the senator says nothing about these women losing their charm... Women in the laundries... stand for 13 or 14 hours in the terrible steam and heat with their hands in hot starch. Surely these women won't lose any more of their beauty and charm by⁵² putting a ballot in a ballot box once a year....

In 1912, with the help of radicals, suffragists won referenda in Arizona, Kansas and Oregon. They also won in Michigan, but the election was stolen by means of false returns from some precincts. In the same years, Teddy Roosevelt's Progressive Party made women's suffrage, part of its programme. In 1913 the Progressive Party and women reformers, forced the state legislature of Illinois to approve women's suffrage⁵³.

In 1914 Montana and Nevada with strong progressive and socialist movements, voted for women's suffrage. The same year witnessed mini crisis within the NAWSA organisation when the Congressional Union for Women Suffrage (CU) broke away from the parent body. The CU later merged with the Women Political Union to form the Women's Party. Between 1914-1916 the Women's Party campaigned against all Democrats because when in power, they had not endorsed women's suffrage⁵⁴.

52. Flexner, n.1, p.259.

53. Deckard, n.16, p.276.

54. Ibid, p.278.

In 1917, the Women's Party turned to all-out militant tactics, picketing Wilson and the White House for doing nothing for women's suffrage. The Women's Party included many Quaker Pacifists and hence it did not support World War I. Jeanette Rankin, the only woman in the House in 1918 voted against the declaration of war. The Women's Party again picketed the White House with signs saying "Democracy should begin at Home"⁵⁵. The picketers were attacked by mobs and police and were illegally arrested and harassed.

NAWSA on the other hand supported the war and advocated both patriotism and women's suffrage. It strongly attacked the pickets and made several public statements against it. NAWSA also participated in a government committee to mobilise women; this committee later led to the formation of the Women's Bureau in the Department of Labour.

The activities of Women's Party and NAWSA though both diametrically opposite led to some good results. In 1917 women were granted vote by State legislatures in North Dakota, Ohio, Rhode Island, Nebraska, Michigan and Arkansas. Even New York finally relented. In 1918, South Dakota, and Oklahoma joined the suffrage ranks. In January 1918, President Wilson publicly committed himself to women's

55. Flexner, n.1, p.284.

suffrage. In 1919, 26 state legislatures petitioned the Congress to enact a federal amendment since there would be no universal women's suffrage in the United States until this was done.

In the fall of 1919, Woodrow Wilson journeyed to Capitol Hill to address the Senate. The nation was then engaged in a crusade "to make the world safe for democracy". Wilson said ;"The executive tasks of this war rest upon me... I ask that you lighten them and place in my hands instruments which I do not now have, which I sorely need". Wilson was not talking of acquiring guns or aeroplanes but of enacting legislation to acquire women's suffrage. Its enactment, the President declared, "was vital to the winning of the war and essential to implementing democracy".⁵⁶.

The Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution of America granting women the right to vote was at last passed by the House in 1920 by a vote of 304 to 90 and the Senate by 56 to 25. Nearly three-quarter of a century after the Seneca Falls, the Women Rights Movement had achieved a significant break-through which was expected to transform their lives politically and socially and establish their identity as fellow human beings in a society hitherto dominated by men. Thus came the awakening of the American Women to their rights in the free world.

56. Chafe, n.6, p.3.

CHAPTER TWO

THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION

THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION

The suffragist leaders entered the second decade of the twentieth century with great hopes of ushering in a new era. They had just won the vote and they thought that women's position would now change for the better. However, they failed to realize that legal changes alone could not alter the attitudes of people. For instance, many years after the passing of the 19th Amendment, women still voted in smaller numbers than men. It was estimated that in the 1920 election, only 43 percent of the eligible women voted. As late as 1940, 49 percent of the women, compared to 68 percent of the men voted¹. Many men and surprisingly some women too continued to believe that politics was essentially a male domain. Clearly, what was required was an attitudinal and behavioural change of both men and women towards women's issues.

After 1920, the women's movement was faced with a critical decision:

should it exert its considerable influence in active politics or should it shift to non-partisan efforts? The National American Woman's Suffrage Association decided on the second route... the move was justified

1. Barbara S. Deckard, The Women's Movement: Political Socio-Economic and Psychological Issues (New York, 1975), p 285.

by a desire to keep women united²

While NAWSA decided to stay away from active politics, the League of Women Voters (organized in 1919) directed its attention to general reforms like child labour laws, minimum wages and working hour laws, as it believed that the 19th Amendment had removed all discriminations against women.

The only women's organization which was active to a certain extent during this time, was the Women's Party, which had originated in the heyday of the Suffrage Movement. It believed that women despite the Amendment were still subordinate to men before the law, in professions, Church, industries and at home. It therefore focused its attention on obtaining legal equality for women. However, it did not try to change the Victorian image of women nor did it associate itself with other deprived groups like blacks or the working class. Partly because of its own narrowness - "its determined neutrality denied it the passionate loyalties reserved for partisan organization"³ - and partly due to the hostile socio-political climate prevailing in the 1920s, the Women's Party did not gain much popularity.

2. Naomi B. Lynn, "American Women and the Political Process" in Jo Freeman ed., A Feminist Perspective (California, 1979), 2nd.ed., p.405.

3. William O'Neill, Everyone was Brave - The Rise and Fall of Feminism in America (Chicago, 1969), p.11.

After 1920 the Women's Movement declined rapidly. One reason for this was the suffragists' single-issue programme. To the women activists of the early 20th century the vote became a symbol of everything they worked for; it was "infused with the myth that achieving the symbol would achieve the reality"⁴. As Jo Freeman writer and activist pointed out;

The whole momentum of the suffrage movement had been built upon a very flimsy alliance of widely differing women who toiled together through the years from setback to setback towards this common goal. They never faltered until the end...⁵.

When the vote was ultimately won, the Movement was left with no cause and no ideology. They failed to capitalise on their victory to institute political or economic changes through the vote. "No defeat was as devastating as victory".

This single-minded pursuit of the vote had a destructive effect on women's movement in another way. In order to meet the opposition's arguments that female suffrage would wreck home and family, the feminists took an ideological stand that political equality rather than

4. Jo Freeman, The Politics of Women's Liberation (New York, 1975), p.18.

5. *ibid*, p.18.

destroying the home would help women perform better as wives and mothers . Further, they argued that it was the moral duty of all women to contribute their skills and experience to government⁶. With the exception of a few hard-core theorists, none of the 19th century feminists seriously attacked women's existing societal role - that of only a wife and mother which was ordained not by nature, but by man. As one writer put it, "leaders of the suffrage movement never generated a broad feminine consciousness... [they] failed to attack the roots of women's inferior status in all areas of social life"⁷. The outcome of this compromise was that while Women's Rights Movement emerged victorious in 1920, the Women's Movement lost the battle.

There is a very subtle difference between Women's Rights Movement and Women's Movement as such. Although the two are similar in certain respects- both champion the cause of women - they differ in that, the Women's Rights Movement was narrower in its scope and had limited goals. At different times in the history of America, the rights for which women have struggled included, the Right to be

6. Aileen S Kraditor, The Ideas of the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920 (New York, 1965), p.66.
7. Myra M.Ferree and Beth B.Hess,Controversy and Coalition : The New Feminist Movement (Boston, 1985), p.1

Educated, the Right to Vote, the Right to better Employment, higher wages etc. Each specific request was rooted in the belief that women were an intrinsic part of the society as a whole and thus should be given co-equal rights. The women's movement on the other hand was a broad movement, demanding not any particular rights but women's total emancipation. For a woman this meant, the "freedom to decide her own destiny; freedom from sex-determined roles; freedom from society's oppressive restrictions; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them to actions"⁸. The whole premise of Women's Movement was built on the notion that women's essential worth stemmed from her common humanity which did not depend on the other relationships of her life. Thus, while the first battle of women - that of suffrage - was won, the bigger battle - that of making society accept woman as an equal citizen enjoying the same opportunities as man, was yet to be won. It took women nearly four decades to arouse the consciousness of women and to unfurl the banner of revolt. Therefore there was no viable and credible women's movement from 1920 till 1960. These years have been characterized as "Forty Years in Desert"⁹ for the American women.

8. Barbara J. Berg, The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism (New York, 1975), p.5.

9. Deckard, n.1, p.285.

The 1920s brought an enormous change in the social attitudes of women. The young women of this time, who inherited a "legacy of female independence", but without the political context in which it was born, attacked social convention rather than social problems¹⁰. The result was that this period saw women drinking, smoking and engaging in a sort of sexual revolution hitherto unseen or unheard of. This outraged the conservative sentiments of Americans who regarded the enfranchisement of women as the cause behind this new environment of social license. The views of the average American was well expressed by H.C. Menchen in 1922:

Years ago I predicted that these suffragettes, tired out by victory, would turn out to be idiots. They are now hard at proving it. Half of them devote themselves to advocating reforms, chiefly of a sexual character, so utterly preposterous that even male politicians and newspaper editors laugh at them¹¹.

This was an unjust criticism of the women's movement as most feminists were equally appalled to see this startling outcomes. They had laboured to free women from sexual bondage not to promote eroticism. However the commonly held view of the Americans was difficult to shake off.

10. Freeman, n.4, p.19.

11. O' Neill, n.3, p.265.

The twenties therefore witnessed conservative backlash against the women's movement. As one writer says, "fears of what women would do with their vote spurred it on"¹². But it was also due in no small measure to the radical acts of the women of the '20s. Whatever be the reason the women's movement declined rapidly thereafter.

It was a premature death-feminists had just obtained that long-sought tool, the vote with which they had hoped to make an equal place for women in this society-but it seemed an irreversible one. By the time the suffragists' granddaughters were old enough to vote, social mythology had firmly ensconced women in the home, and the very term "feminist" had become an insult¹³.

The decline of the early Women's Movement, the conservative socio-political environment and absence of any strong women's organization left many women confused and uncertain about their future role. Instead of consolidating their gains, women took a step backward. Many women began to seek their fulfilment at home and in domestic duties - two areas which feminists had laboured extensively to free women from. The fifties saw the development of a consumer-oriented society which glorified the "cult of domesticity".

12. Robin Rowland, ed., Women Who Do and Women Who Don't Join the Women's Movement (Boston, 1984), p.17.

13. Jo Freeman, "The Women's Liberation Movement : Its Origins, Organizations , Activity and Ideas " in Freeman ,n.2,p.557.

Widespread advertising propaganda created the impression that homemaking was a challenging and creative experience for a woman. All this turned the women of the 50's into a dumb and docile character. This does not mean that women's emancipation came to a stand-still. Indeed, women continued to join the labour force and to work outside the home. Ambitious women still used their new-found freedom to expand their opportunities in the business and professional worlds, but for most women "the psychological trend towards the home [which] had already started before the New Victorianism... solidified into the feminine mystique"¹⁴.

Women's status in job, education etc. underwent many changes after passing of the Nineteenth Amendment, though not for the better. In the 1930s, due to the changed social environment and the economic crisis, many laws were passed that prohibited women from working. Most schools forced a female teacher to give up her job when she married. Even in 1919, when the number of available jobs declined the usual attempt was made to push women out. In that year, the New York Central Federal Union stated: "The same patriotism which induced women to enter industry during the war should induce them to vacate their position after the war"¹⁵. During the 1930s employees, union and

14. Freeman, n.4, p.20.

15. Deckard, n.1, p.295.

government made the plea that women should go back to their homes in order to solve men's employment problems. Those who did not resign voluntarily were forced to do so. The attitude of the government was expressed by the Women's Bureau (a government body that was supposed to look after women's interests) which declared that "the welfare of the home and family is woman-sized job in itself" and that working women were destroying the peace of their families. Ironically, the women's Bureau had issued this statement despite the fact that during investigations, it had found out that 90 per cent of all women who worked did so out of necessity¹⁶. Working women in the years of depression, were the most discriminated class. Often they had to work either to supplement meagre family incomes or to shoulder the responsibilities of family alone, yet, the job most of the woman got was "part-time, seasonal and marginal... Women experienced special difficulty in finding work which paid a living wage"¹⁷. While in 1900 most women workers were domestic servants, farm labourers or unskilled factory workers, in 1930, women's position had hardly bettered: they had only clerical or sales job. Thus throughout the first half of the 20th century women remained segregated mainly in

16. William H. Chafe, The American Women, Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles (New York, 1972), pp.63-64.

17. Ibid, p.58.

the categories of clerical work, retail sales, domestic service, elementary school teaching or nursing.¹⁸. Even when women became educated, they were unable to make a break - through in the high paying job and other prestigious professions. For example, the percentage of female college faculty (including instructors, professors and presidents) continued to decline from the 1930 high point (Table 1). The percentage of women scientists also declined in the 1950s (Table.2). Finally, a look at the professional field shows how this highly paying field was completely monopolised by men (Table 3).

TABLE 1

Female College Faculty, 1910-1970

Year	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970
Per cent female	19%	30%	32%	27%	23%	19%	18%

Source: U.S. Department of Labour, Women's Bureau, 1969, Handbook on Women workers, Deckard, n.1 p.318.

18. Deckard, n.1, p.297.

TABLE 2
Female Scientists, 1950-1960

Science	Per cent of women to total	
	1950	1960
Biologists	29%	27%
Chemists	10	9
Mathematicians	38	26
Physicists	7	4
Geologists	6	2
All Natural Scientists	11	10

Source: U.S. Department of Labour, Women's Bureau, 1969
Handbook on Women Workers, Deckard, n.1, p.319.

TABLE . 3
Female Professionals, 1950-1960

Professions	Per cent of Women to Total	
	1950	1960
Lawyers	3.5%	3.5%
Doctors	6.1	6.8
Engineers	1.2	0.8
Dentists	2.7	2.1
Clergy	8.5	5.5

Source: U.S. Department of Labour, Women's Bureau, 1969
Handbok on Women Workers, Deckard, n.1, p.319.

EDUCATION: Education among women underwent a precipitous decline after the 1920s. In the middle of the 1920s many changes occurred in women's colleges. The high quality comprehensive training of early years was replaced by an emphasis in preparation for "woman's place" in the home. In 1924, Vassar started offering courses called "Husband and Wife" "Motherhood" and "The Family as an Economic Unit". Even co-ed colleges, such as Cornell and University of Chicago, started undergraduate and graduate programmes in Home economics. One women's college boasted, "we are not educating women to be scholars; we are educating them to be wives and mothers"¹⁹. The long term trend in women's education is shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4

Women's Education, 1890-1940

Per cent of All Degrees Awarded to Women

Year	B.A.	M.A.	Ph.D.
1890	17%	19%	1%
1900	19%	19%	6%
1910	23%	26%	10%
1920	34%	30%	15%
1930	40%	40%	15%
1940	41%	38%	13%

Source : U.S. Department of Labour ,Women's Bureau ,1969
Handbook on Women Workers , Decard, n.1, p.299.

19. Deckard, n.1, p.313.

In the number of degree awarded to women there was an incredible jump of 11 per cent from 1910 to 1920. This corresponds to the period when women's suffrage movement was at its peak and therefore it is natural to assume that it had had an effect on women's education, too. In the 1920s there was a further jump but the margin of increase had declined to 6 per cent. In the 1980s the gain is only 1 per cent. The trend in women receiving M.A. degrees is similar except that the greatest increase is a 10 per cent leap in the 1920s. Since one needs a B.A. degree to get an M.A., this was partly a lagged response to the earlier jump in B.A.'s and partly the continued increase in freedom in the 1920s. But between 1930 and 1940 there was an actual decrease of 2 per cent. Finally, it was clearly much more difficult for women to break into the highest educational sphere, the Ph.d., which is the gateway to many of the higher professions. Only in 1900 did women finally win a significant portion (although a mere 6%). And there was only one further increase in the number of Ph.Ds going to women - a 4 per cent increase between 1900-1920. In the supposedly liberating 1920s, there was no increase while in the 1930s there was in fact a decrease of 2 per cent in Ph.Ds awarded to women.

In the 1950s then, women's position was not an enviable one. Middle class women were often cocooned in the

comforts of their home; yet everywhere in jobs, education, and at home itself they were being discriminated against. It seemed as if women had forgotten their individual existence, but were living their life as others wanted it to be. This was what Betty Friedan called, the "Feminine Mystique". Popular magazine like "Life", "Ladies Home Journal" advanced the image of an "ideal" woman that was "young and frivolous almost child-like; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies and home"²⁰. The women's magazines mentioned no national and world issues-because these were thought to be beyond the understanding of women. The mass media was responsible not only for stereotyping this image of woman, but it was also guilty of exploiting her image for special consumer benefits. When Betty Friedan researched their "selling game" of the 1950s, one advertising executive told her that "properly manipulated... American women can be given the sense of identity, purpose, creativity, the self-realization, even the sexual joy they lack - by the buying of things"²¹.

Commenting on the negative impact of the mass media

20. Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York, 1963), P.30

21. Ibid, p.199.

Alice Embree says,

the mass-media molds everyone into more passive roles... But what it does to everyone, it does to women even more. The traditional societal role for women is already a passive one, already one of a consumer, already of an emotional non-intellectual who isn't supposed to think or act beyond the confines of her home. The mass media reinforces all these traits'²².

While discrimination such as these continued, the so-called "silent fifties" came to an abrupt end bringing with it, the "confrontation politics" of the sixties²³. Throughout the 1950s women were a silent but powerless majority. The discontentment of women was portrayed even in the women's magazines, hitherto the prime propagandizers of the "feminine mystique". A Gallup poll taken in 1962 found that 90% of the housewives surveyed, did not want their daughters to lead the type of barren and inconsequential life they had led.²⁴ As Gladys E. Harbeson says,

The decade following World War II...a century of growing discontent with a limited domestic role burst into open rebellion... In the immediate post-war years educated women sensed, as never before, that they had capabilities for greater than were being entirely used in the traditional feminine role"²⁵.

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22. Alice Embree, "Media Images I: Madison Avenue, Brainwashing the facts" in Robin Morgan ed., Sisterhood in Powerful: An Anthology of Writings From the Women's Liberation Movement (New York, 1970), p.181.
23. Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, Rebirth of Feminism (New York, 1971), p.109.
24. Kirsten Amundsen, The Silenced Majority (New Jersey, 1971), p.38.
25. Quoted in Freeman, n.4, p.25.

This created a contradiction. While the "feminine mystique's" promise of "fulfilment" raised the expectations of middle-class women, in reality, the social role of housewife both in the home and in the paid labour force generated severe disappointment²⁶. Women experienced identity crisis of a magnitude never felt before. This went by various names; sociologists called this "role conflict", psychologists referred it as "identity crisis". Some called it the "great reservoir of rage in women"; while Friedan labelled it as "the problem that has no name". By whatever name it was called, it was clear that something was drastically wrong.

From these conflicting situations emerged a new idea or rather the resurrection of an old idea. Nearly two centuries ago, the problem of female freedom and equality had prompted Abigail Adams, the first known feminist in American history, to protest against the unjust social and political order. Writing to her husband John in 1787 (later to become President of America) Abigail warned that "if particular care and attention is not paid to ladies we are determined to foment a rebellion" ²⁷.

26. Sara Evans, Personal Politics: The Origins of the Women Rights Movement in the New Left (New York, 1979), p.14.

27. Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle - The Women's Rights Movement in the United States (Massachusetts, 1959), p.15.

The reemergence of this spirit of defiance together with technological advance and changes in societal values and lifestyles, fostered the rise of the women's movement from near anonymity²⁸.

The 1960s was a very political decade. It was the era of Civil rights movements, the student's revolt and anti-war protest. These created a general consciousness of the political means of attacking social problems. The civil rights movement, particularly made a great impact on the mind of young men and women. The black movement taught young women the rhetoric and the organization of protest. Not surprisingly, as women became more sensitive to the black second-class status, they also became aware of their own. As Sara Evans metaphorically puts it:

twice in the history of the United States the struggle for social equality has been midwife to a feminist movement. In the abolition movement of the 1830s and 1840s and again in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, women experiencing the contradictory expectations and stresses of changing roles began to move from individual discontents to a social movement in their own behalf²⁹.

In fact the radical section of women's movement had its direct origins in the New Left Revolution.

28. Jyoce Gelb and Marion L Palley, Women and Public Policy (New Jersey, 1982), p.14.

29. Evans, n.26, p.24.

The women's movement, as it emerged in 1960s, originated from two different social and political milieu. The first so-called "moderate" branch had its origins in the formation of the National Commission on the Status of Women. The second, more 'radical' group sprung up from the Civil Rights Movement³⁰. On Dec. 14, 1961 President Kennedy signed an Executive Order establishing the President's Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW), which was later to play a large role in 'shaping the substantive efforts of the women's movement over the next seventeen years'.³¹ The Commission's mandate was to examine and recommend remedies to combat the "... prejudices and outmoded customs [that] act as barriers to the full realization of women's basic rights"³². The Commission's report, American Women was moderate in nature. It documented women's second class status. Its recommendation which included greater availability of child-care services, removal of property law restrictions, greater opportunities for women in politics, was not intended to radically change women's position. The Commission's lack of commitment to the women's problem was

30. Freeman, n.13, p.558.

31. Esther Peterson, "The Kennedy Commission" in Irene Tinker ed., Women in Washington - Advocates for Public Policy. (California, 1983), p.21.

32. Hole and Levine, n.23, p.18.

proved by its stand on questions of women's equality and opportunity. While it recommended the issue of an executive order embodying the principle of equal opportunity in employment it relied on voluntary compliance for its enforcement. This in effect negated the whole provision as without any mandatory or forced enforcement, voluntary compliance was reduced to a farce. Similarly the commission paid lip service to the concept of women's full participation in society, as it accepted the assumption that the responsibility of home and child-rearing was a woman's job. To facilitate this dual role, that of a house wife and a worker the Commission recommended greater opportunities for part-time women workers. The report also favoured the retention of protective laws for women which in the minds of women activists was highly discriminatory. It also concluded that the Fourteenth Amendment provided sufficient basis for the equality of women under the law and hence there were no need for an equal rights amendment.

Despite its obvious shortcomings the importance of the commission was that it served as an "example and a publicizer". By 1963, a number of states had followed the federal example by setting up commissions of their own. Hole and Levine opine that the commission "created the atmosphere, fashioned many of the tools and engendered the momentum that has enabled many of today's feminists to

challenge head-on those basic assumptions and popular images of women"³³. The Commission was successful in having two of its recommendations enacted. In 1962, a Presidential directive reversed an age-old law that prevented women from high level federal employment. In 1963 the Equal Pay Act was passed after pressure from women activists. This was the first federal legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex. This Act required that in the jobs covered by it, women would be paid equal salary along with men.

Another step in the direction of women's equality was taken when, under persistent pressures from congress- - women, an amendment to Title VII of the Equal Employment Opportunity section of 1964 Civil Rights Act was put to vote. The amendment brought on the floor of the House in July 1965, proposed to prohibit descrimination based on race, colour, religion, national origin or sex by private employers, employment agencies and unions. This amendment which had the legislative potential of profoundly altering the sex pattern of employment was not originally intended to cover sex discrimination at all. The word sex was inserted in the Bill by Howard Smith - who was known for his anti-feminist stands. He had deliberately inserted the sex

33. Ibid, p.19.

provision in order to weakern the bill and thereby limit its chance of success. This is symptomatic of the way Congress and executive react to women's issues: as a social pariah which was best left untouched. However, by now, women had become vocal about their rights and with their active cooperation the bill was passed.

When the law went into effect in July 1965, it became illegal to discriminate against women in recruitment and promotions. But there were difficulties in its enforcements. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), set up to enforce Title VII considered the sex provision (in the words of its Director), a "fluke... conceived out of wedlock". Most of the Commission members seemed to consider the provision at best a joke, at worst a distraction from their real work - that of racial equality. It soon became clear that little could be achieved out of EEOC unless pressure was applied. Women tried to put pressure for speedy implementation of Title VII but they were handicapped by the absence of an organization that would work in a concerted manner. This lacuna was filled by the formation of National Organization for Women (NOW), whose guiding spirit was Betty Friedan, the author of "Feminine Mystique".

In 1965-66 Betty Friedan conferred with like-minded women on the measures to combat sex discrimination. Coincidentally, it was the meetings of State commissions on women that provided the forum for the inception of NOW. These commission helped in the formation of NOW in three significant ways.

- (1) It brought together many knowledgeable, politically active women who otherwise would not have worked together around matters of direct concern to women;
- (2) The investigations of the commission unearthed ample evidence of women's unequal status, in the process convincing many previously uninterested women that something should be done ; and
- (3) the reports and activities of the commission created a climate of expectations that something should be done.³⁴.

In June 28, 1966 at a luncheon meeting of one of these conference Betty Friedan, Congress-woman Martha Griffiths and others decided to form a national organization to further women's cause. It was named the National Organization for Women. NOW's central goal, was to "take

34. Freeman, n.4, p.52.

action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society, now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men³⁵. NOW attacked "the traditional assumption that a woman has to choose between marriage and motherhood on the one hand and serious participation in industry or the professions on the other" It expressed concern over the increasing concentration of women "on the bottom of the job ladder". It dedicated itself to work for women's interests inside and outside the home; it decided to "press for enforcement of laws which prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex" and pledged to work for "true partnership in marriage"³⁶.

NOW went into full swing right from the beginning. Even before the luncheon meeting was over, the women had taken their first action : telegrams signed by 28 women were despatched to each EEOC commissioner urging that EEOC rescind its guidelines permitting sex-segregated "want-ads" in newspapers, so that in future the two columns "Help-wanted-Male" and "Help Wanted Female" would not appear In subsequent years NOW became involved in almost every area of

35. Betty Friedan It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women's Movement (New York, 1976), Revd.ed, p.87.

36. Maren L. Carden, The New Feminist Movement, (New York, 1974), p.104.

feminist activity. In December 1967, NOW organized perhaps the first contemporary feminist demonstration with a national day of picketing against the EEOC in New York, San Francisco, Pittsburg, Washington, D.C., and Chicago. It also filed a formal complaint against the New York Times, and a mandamus suit against the EEOC to force it to comply with Title VII on February 15, 1968. In this battle NOW emerged victorious as on August 14, 1968, the EEOC ruled that seperate "want-ads" was a violation of Title VII and ordered newspapers to desegregate their "want-ads".

At its second national conference, NOW main agenda was drawing up a women's Bill of Rights which included:

- (i) Constitutional Amendment for Equal Rights
- (ii) Enforcement of Laws Banning Sex Discrimination in Employment
- (iii) Maternity Leave Rights in Employment and in Social Security benefits
- (iv) Tax deduction for home and children Expenses for working parents
- (v) Child Care Centres
- (vi) Equal and Unsegregated Education

- (vii) Equal Job Training opportunities and allowance for women in poverty
- (viii) The Right of Women to control their Reproductive Lives³⁷.

The first and last items in the list were much disputed and created a crisis in the organization. The controversy over Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was one of tactics rather than of philosophy. Some dissenters felt that it was a dead issue and not worth bothering about and that pressure to reform specific legislation would on the contrary be more useful. In addition, the women employees of the United Auto Works, opposed the Amendment because their union was opposed to it. They threatened to leave NOW if the organization insisted on taking a vote. The vote was taken and the ERA was passed with a majority. The United Auto workers did not resign but their office stopped its secretarial assistance to NOW. This action threw NOW into an administrative chaos for months. This was the first crisis, in NOW, though a minor one. The second crisis was sparked off over the abortion laws. The right of women to control their reproductive lives called for the repeal of all laws that restricted access to birth control information

37. Hole and Levine, n.23, p.88.

and devices, and in particular the abortion laws. Many women, who viewed NOW as an "NAACP type organization" were of the opinion that it should shun non-economic and non legal issues. They also argued that abortion was not a national issue and hence its public discussion would subject NOW to public ridicule and derision. Despite vehement opposition, NOW supported abortion repeal, making it the first women's rights organization to convert the civil liberation argument for abortion into clear feminist terms, that is the right of a woman to control her body. This action of NOW led a conservative wing to break off a year later. This conservative wing later formed the Women's Equity Action League (WEAL) on December 1, 1968 which was led by Dr Elizabeth Boyer and her friends. WEAL concentrated only on legal and economic issues especially in the area of employment and education. It was Boyer's belief that radical feminism deterred many women from joining the women's movement hence the movement lost the service of these women³⁸.

In 1968, another split within NOW took place. Ti-Grace Atkinson, President of the New York branch (known as chapter) of NOW and some of her followers broke off from

38. Avronne S. Fraser, "Insiders and Outsiders: Women in the Political Arena", in Tinker, n.31, p.123.

NOW after losing the battle to dismantle NOW's hierarchical structure. This leftist group advocated the replacement of NOW's "elitist" structure, by common decision-making structures, chosen by all members, frequently. These splits prevented NOW from making any decisive impact on the political area for some time.

As has been said earlier, the feminist revolt of the 1960s was carried on by two branches of feminism. The moderate branch was led by NOW, while the radical Leftist Branch sprang from within the folds of the Civil Rights Movement. Women working in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s became painfully aware that even in these groups ostensibly dedicated to developing basic human rights and a class-less society, they were second-class members - useful for typing or cooking, but not in policy-making. If any woman dared to raise women's issues in their meeting it was received with cat calls and storms of ridicule and verbal abuse. At a New Left meeting in 1966, women demanding a plank on women's liberty, "were pelted with tomatoes and thrown out of the Convention"³⁹. Women in the newly-formed Draft Resistance groups faced the same experience. In the resistance movement, the male rationale for inequality was bitterly ironic for the draft was, by definition a male

39. Hole and Levine, n.23, p.112.

issue. Thus, while "men could resist the draft, women could only counsel resistance"⁴⁰.

During the spring of 1967, two Chicago women, Heather Booth and Naomi Weissstein, held a seminar on women's issues under the auspices of a Free University Programme. As a result of this meeting, a small group of women known as the Chicago Women's group was formed. This was the first known independent radical women's group. In the fall of the same year, the New Left Group hosted a seminar called the National Conference for a New Politics (NCNP). Some women from the Chicago group joined the NCNP and formed an ad hoc radical women's caucus. The caucus prepared a strong women's rights resolution to be passed by the main committee. However, the convention leadership was not prepared to discuss the resolution. When women protested, "they were told in no uncertain terms that their 'trivial' business was not going to stop the conference from dealing with the important issues of the world"⁴¹. One of them was reportedly patted on the head and told "calm down, little girl" The "little girl", Shulasmith Firestone refused to calm down. In 1967, along with Pam Allen, she organized the New York Radical Women's Group. The Group's first public

40. Freeman, n.13, p.559.

41. Hole and Levine, n.23, pp.113-114.

action took place in Jan.1968 during an anti-war demonstration, led by a coalition of women's peace group. The Radical women joined by 300 to 400 women from the Jeanette Rankin Brigade, as the coalition was called, staged "The Burial of Traditional Womanhood" in a torch, lit parade at Arlington Cemetery⁴². The Radical Women aimed at influencing public policy. It was necessary for women to overcome their own subjugation before they could influence public policy in any meaningful way. This fact, the radical women symbolically tried to put across by the Burial at Arlington. The Radical women regarded women's issues as both political as well as fundamental. "We cannot hope to move toward a better world or even a truly democratic society at home until we begin to solve our own problem"⁴³. In September 1968 the Radical Women disrupted the annual Miss America Pageant. Its purpose was to protest the image of Miss America, an image that oppresses women in every area in which it purports to represent⁴⁴.

Another group emerged in early 1969. Several members of the New York Radical Women formed a group called

42. Deckard, n.1, p.333.

43. Kathie Amatneik, "Funeral Oration for Traditional Womanhood" in Leslie Tanner, Voices from Women's Liberation (New York,1970) .p.140.

44. Morgan, n.22, p. 521.

"Red Stockings." The group was intended by its founders to be specifically feminist and militantly active and to raise the question of women's political participation. Its manifesto adopted on July 7, 1969, stated:

Because we have lived so intimately with our oppressors, and in isolation from each other, we have been kept from seeing our personal suffering as a political condition. This creates the illusion that a woman's relationship with her man is a matter of interplay between two unique personalities, and can be worked out individually. In reality, every such relationship is a class relationship, and the conflict between individual men and women are political conflicts that can only be solved collectively...Our chief task at present is to develop female class consciousness through sharing experience and publicly exposing the sexist foundation of all our institutions⁴⁵.

Despite its accent on "political" conflicts, the Redstockings group did little to make women politically active. It was however the first women's organization to develop the theory of consciousness-raising, and providing an analysis of its uses and purposes⁴⁶. This concept of consciousness-raising was later effectively put to use by other women's organization.

Although the women's Movement had split into several strands, they often got together on issues of common interest. The first example is that of November 1969, when the Congress to Unite Women brought together over five

45. Tanner, n. 43, pp. 109-110 (Emphasis added)

46. Deckard, n.1, p. 337.

hundred women, which included such groups as NOW, the Stanton-Anthony Brigade and the Redstockings group. The group managed to agree on a ten-point charter of demands which included nation-wide, free twenty-four hour child care centers, abortion law repeal, the Equal Rights Amendment, Women's Studies courses in colleges etc. It also called for an end to sex-role socialization of children and equality in education and employment⁴⁷.

The second attempt at cooperation took place on August 26, 1970 when a general strike was announced to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment. Virtually every feminist group supported the strike in some form or the other. The main activity was coordinated by NOW, but the participants included many who had not been active in the movement before. Three major demands were made - twenty-four hour child care centres, abortion on demand, and equal opportunity in education and employment. Thousands of women marched across the country, picketed and held rallies. In New York, women set up a child care center in City Hall Park. In Chicago, sit-ins at restaurants barring women's entry were held. On the west coast women were given radio time to discuss women's

47. Hole and Levine, n. 23, p. 150.

liberation movement. "It was the first time that the potential power of the movement became publicly apparent, and with this the movement came of age"⁴⁸.

Despite the success of women's organization women still did not become a force like the Blacks. Although they lobbied for the Equal Rights Amendment, their impact on Congress or the executive was minimal. Women realized that they should have a more 'politically' oriented organization in order to have an impact on the process of legislation and on public policy. In order to fill the lacunae, a new organization called the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC) was formed in July 1971. It was founded by Shirley Chisholm, a black women's activist and Bella Abzug, a committed feminist who was elected to Congress in 1970. According to Chisholm, "the function of the NWPC is not to be the cutting edge of the women's liberation movement, but the big umbrella organization which provides the weight and muscle for those issues which the majority of women in this country see as concerns"⁴⁹. With the formation of NWPC, a

48. Freeman, n.4, p. 84.

49. Shirle Chishlom, speech delivered at the National Convention of NWPC, 1973, quoted in Deckard, n.1, p.352.

new era in women's movement began - the era of committed women political activists. Many women felt that it was time for women to shift from influencing decision-making to becoming decision-makers themselves.

The NWPC was a multi-party organization whose basic goal was to "awaken, organize, and assert the vast political power represented by women." It started by organizing state and local caucuses around the country. It raised women's issues at every level of politics and advocated voting more women to power and placing women in administrative jobs. The swift growth of the caucus underlines the fact that women in the seventies had become politically aware as was not evidenced in the four decades preceding it. They were now interested in using their political power to their advantage. Women's organisation like NOW and NWPC showed them the way. One example of the effectiveness of the "new politicisation" of women in Washington, was the movement to put competent and well-qualified women into administrative position. One such case was the appointment of Alice Rivlin as head of the Congressional Budget office. Rivlin was a very qualified and competent woman yet there was chance that she would have been passed by because of her gender. Knowing that this would probably be the case women and heads of various women's

organisation made a strong case for her before the selection committee. Rivlin was finally appointed⁵⁰.

In 1972, the NWPC played an active part in that years Democratic Convention. The new delegate selection rules resulted in women constituting 40 per cent of the delegates. The NWPC had lobbied for enforcement of these new rules and anticipating its acceptance, it had also trained women delegates all over the country. In order to help women delegates become successful participants, the Caucus sponsored a meeting to inform women of the votes and Rules, Credentials and Platform Committees procedures. A "nerve centre" where women could get question answered was set up. The result of all this coaching was that women were able to pass a Women's Plank in the Democratic platform. The planks included federal funding for comprehensive child care programmes as well as support for Equal Rights Amendment.

The 1972 Presidential elections was a disappointment for committed feminists, Nixon, while occasionally paying lip service to feminist aspiration, was a major hurdle to legislative progress. His statements on abortion, his veto of the child care bill and his generally conservative stance made most women activists regard him as

50. Fraser, n. 38. p. 134.

an enemy. On some other fronts, however, the 1972 elections yielded better results. -28 per cent more women were elected to state legislatures and elections to congress also proved fruitful. Elizabeth Holtzman was able to defeat Emanuel Celler, an antifeminist and an arch enemy of ERA. In 1972, women's long-standing demand that of ERA, was passed by congress.

Thus the revolution that began in 1960s took roots and began to capture the minds of all Americans. However, women's political activism had miles to go before they could be counted as a force in politics. The revolution was not complete.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL

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The constitutions of the United States did not contain in its original text specific provisions for right to equality or to equal protection of laws for all citizens. Absence of this law meant less-than-equal status for racial minorities and for women. The fourteenth amendment to the constitution filled in the lacunae by providing that:

No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States.

Nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty or property without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws¹.

Despite this constitutional guarantee of "equal protection of the laws" for all "persons", discrimination against women were commonly found in all spheres. Instances of this discrimination can be found in the so-called "protective legislation" for working women. According to women activists in America, these laws were inherently discriminatory. Such laws were not applicable for both,

1. Encyclopaedia Americana Vol. 7, (Connecticut, 1973), p. 670.

men and women alike. While there was strict implementation of minimum working hours for women, the same was not the case for working men. The implied motive behind such a law was that a working woman was a housewife first, and therefore she should not neglect her husband and children. This by itself, was a social and cultural prejudice which had no rational basis. But more significantly it was an economic and legal discrimination against women. Economically, it prevented a woman from working longer hours and thus deprived her of extra money. Since working women mostly hailed from the lower middle-class or families in which the woman was the sole bread - winner, such laws meant economic hardships for the woman and her dependent family. It is no wonder then, that, women constitute the most economically poor class of people in America today². Protective legislation is also a form of legal discrimination. Since the constitution guarantees equality to all "persons", legislation by race or gender is automatically discriminatory.

Unfortunately for women, while the courts have declared legislation by race as unlawful, gender

2. For further details see, Marilyn Power, "Falling Through the 'Safety Net': Women, Economic Crises and Reaganomics" Feminist Studies Vol. 10, No. 1, Spring 1984, pp. 31-58.

legislations have not been classified in the same category. In 1908, the Supreme Court, took this stand during the hearings of the Oregon v Muller case which sought to overturn the Oregon law which limited women's working hours. The Court gave the opinion that a woman is "properly placed in a class by herself, and legislation designed for her protection many be sustained, even when the legislation is not necessary for men³".

Discrimination through the cover of "protective legislation" existed in another form also. Government and private employers alike, could prevent women, even if she had the requisite qualification, from entering specific professions, simply because she was a women. the courts did not consider such bars as illegal. Thus, in Fay v New York the Supreme Court rejected a challenge to the New York's jury selection system which exempted all women from entering the judicial system because of their gender. Justice Jackson justified this on the ground that:

The contention that women should be on the jury is not based on the constitution, it is based on a changing view of the rights and responsibilities of women in our public life, which has progressed in all phases of life ... but has achieved constitutional compulsion on the states in only one particular the grant of the

3. Margueritte Rawalt, "The Equal Rights Amendment" in Irene Tinker, ed., Women in Washington - Advocates for Public Policy(California, 1983), p. 50.

franchise by the Nineteenth Amendment⁴

Yet another illustration of blatant sex discrimination can be seen in employees attitudes towards pregnant working women. Till 1964, forty percent of all employers did not even provide unpaid maternity leave-pregnant women were summarily dismissed. In 1976, the Supreme Court's decision in the General Electric v Gilbert case decreed that denial of benefits for pregnancy related disability and illness is not discrimination⁵.

All these decisions by courts amply proved that the Supreme Court did not regard women as "persons" within the ambit of the 14th Amendment. Thus women could only win their rights until the constitution itself laid down in clear terms that there should be no discrimination on grounds of sex.

The Court's indifference towards sex-discriminatory laws, coupled with the existing social and

4. Ruth B. Ginsberg, "Women's Right to Full Participation in Shaping Society's Course: An Evolving Constitutional Precept" in Betty Justice and Renate Pore, eds., Toward the Second Decade-The Impact of the Women's Movement on American Institution (Connecticut, 1981), p. 172.
5. Joyce Gelb and Marion L. Palley, Women and Public Policies (New Jersey, 1982), pp. 156-157.

cultural prejudices against women, forced women activists to turn to legislative methods for bringing about equal rights for women. Women activists now felt that the constitution should be amended to provide equality to both sexes as it provides equality to all races. They believed that an Equal Rights Amendment to the constitution could provide legal equality to all women. Therefore in the late sixties a campaign for Equal Rights Amendment began to get underway. The struggle for Equal Rights Amendment did not originate in the sixties only. The move for an ERA was first made as far back as 1923 when the National Women's Party led by Alice Paul lobbied for the introduction of such a bill in congress. The NWP was far-sighted enough to realise at that stage that protective labour legislation was actually discriminatory. The NWP held on to the principle that any legislation that was limited to one sex violated the principle of equality.⁶ However in the conservative era of the 1920s the ERA could not make much headway. Besides the conservatism of American society the twenties and thirties were a period of ascending labour strength. From 1923 till 1970 organised labour bitterly opposed ERA. Men, who formed the majority of the working class, looked upon working women as a competitor who may eventually displace them. Protective labour

6. Rosalind Rosenberg, Beyond Separate Spheres, Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism (Massachusetts, 1982), p. xiii.

legislation were therefore a boon to male labour leaders who "saw the 'protection' of women as a way to limit competition"⁷. So strong was the labour opposition to an ERA that it crippled any efforts that the NWP made towards an Equal Rights Amendment. Many Presidential candidates and Congress men, aware of the strength and unity of Labour, never spoke in favour of ERA.

In the seventies however women's activism had reached a position of commanding strength. Women had already successfully battled against sex-discrimination in employment (Title VII of the Civil Rights Legislation) and in Education (Title IX). They realized that being successful in ERA would mean a success for women activists themselves. They therefore made use of all strategies at their command: lobbying inside and outside congress, educating constituencies so as to arouse their interest in ERA, defending the Amendment at various Congressional Hearings and trying to influence White House through women administrators close to the President.

The Equal Right Amendment as proposed by women activists provided that equality of rights under the law

7. Jo Freeman, "Women and Public Policy : An Overview" in Ellen Boneparth ed., Women, Power and Policy (New York, 1982) p. 49.

shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex⁸". These words were deliberately made similar to those of the 14th Amendment, but the substitution of the phrase "equality of rights" in place of "equal protection of the law" and the categorical use of the word "sex" was intended to remove any ambiguities of language. Besides the inclusion of the federal government was an added clarification.

The advantages that ERA was supposed to secure for women were:

1. To expand opportunities for the advancement of working women by eliminating the so-called "protective labour standard laws" that are applicable to female but not male workers.
2. Give a recognizable ownership right to property acquired during marriage to wives and mothers whose works as homemakers was hitherto uncompensated;
3. Right of women to serve on juries on the same basis as men and the right to domicile, that is, equal civil and political rights⁹.

8. Myra M. Ferree and Beth B. Hess, Controversy and Coalition: The New Feminist Movement (Boston, 1985), p. 127.

9. Rawalt, n.3, p. 51.

With the support of women activists, an Equal Rights Amendment was reintroduced in Congress in 1970. This time it seemed as if the ERA would succeed. There were two reasons behind this. One was that in 1970 the United Auto Works, an ardent advocate of protective discrimination, determined in its annual convention that "protective laws" was "millstone around the neck of women at work". This turned out to be a milestone in the fight for ERA in as much as labour opposition slowly began to reverse its stand on ERA and in the process came around to back the Amendment. The AFL-CIO soon followed in the footsteps of United Auto Works. Thus, a powerful adversary had changed its posture which augured well for the ERA.

In the seventies too, all the Women's Organisation, despite their mutual differences came together to fight for ERA. Simultaneously the ERAmerica, a national alliance of over two hundred organizations that supported ERA including the American Bar Association, the Girls Scouts and the National Council of Senior Citizens, was formed. Beginning from 1970 the ERA became an implicit test of the political strength of the women's movement. Moreover the advent of the Nixon administration brought in a number of significant changes. Nixon revamped the Citizens Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW) which had been created by Kennedy and

also set up the President's Task Force of Women's Rights and Responsibilities. Both the Task Force and CACSW were charged to report on discriminatory laws. Both reported that ERA was necessary and extended their support to it. The tide had definitely turned the ERA way. But there was still another hurdle to cross: opposition from within congress. In the senate, Senator Hayden was totally opposed to an ERA. He tried to weaken the ERA by appending the Hayden rider which stated that "the provision of this article shall not be construed to impair any rights, benefits or exemptions now or herein - after conferred by law upon persons of the female sex¹⁰. The rider had the effect of preserving al restriction on women's employment, civil and political rights. Understandably congress-women refused to pass the bill with such a rider. Ultimately Senator Hayden was persuaded to withdraw the rider. The bill was passed in Senate by majority of 84 to 8 votes.

In the House of Representatives, Emanuel Celler, chairman of Judiciary committee was the stumbling block. In opposition to the ERA, Celler introduced, what he called, the "status bill". This bill sought to establish a commission on the legal status of women and was designed to preserve

10. Ibid., p. 53.

the protective labour laws. In effect these "status bills" negated the effect of an ERA since it contained the following provision: "In law and the administration, no distinction on the basis of sex shall be made except such as reasonably justified by differences in physical structure, biological or social function¹¹."

Besides, Celler, made full use of his position as chairman of Judiciary Committee, to lock up the bill in one of the sub-committees. Eventually the bill seemed to be fated to die like others of its kind, in earlier years. At this moment Martha Griffiths a congress woman and a prominent women's activist decided upon a novel step to bring ERA from the committee and on to the floor. She filed a discharge petition to bring the measure for vote. It was a formidable task, but Martha Griffiths dogged determination paid off. The ERA measure was brought to the floor and passed by the House in 1971. Thus, the ERA atlast secured congressional passage.

In the final analysis it must be said to the credit of Martha Criffths that she had the courage to face the goliath in the form of the powerful chairman of Judiciary Committee and come out successful in the trial of strenght. As Anne W. Costain says.

11. Rawalt, n.3, p. 56.

Congressional Passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in the spring of 1972 was not so much the product of an organized, mass-based political campaign, as the intensive work of a relatively small group of activists and idealists under the leadership of Congress Woman Martha Griffiths¹².

The battle was not over with the passing of ERA Bill. To come into force the ERA required the ratification by at least 2/3rds of the states in two years. In 1971 Martha Griffiths had said that if passed the amendment would be ratified in less than two years. After the amendment was passed in 1972, this optimism seemed not altogether unfounded, for within three months, 19 state legislatures had ratified the ERA. To speed its passage, various women's organisations met on August 7, 1972 to set up the ERA Ratification Council. The battle for the ERA now shifted from Congress to the 31 state legislatures that had not yet ratified. Many group members of the ERA Ratification Council had chapters throughout the country. The success of ERA would depend on how effective these local chapters were in influencing their lawmakers. For a while it seemed that the pressure mounted by women's organisation was paying dividends. Before the end of 1972, 23 states had ratified the ERA. In 1973, 8 more states followed suit. In 1974,

12. Ann N. Costain, "The Struggle for a National Women's Lobby, Organizing a Diffuse Interest" Western Political Quarterly, Vol. 33, No. 5, September 1980, p.477.

and in 1975 one state passed the ERA. This brought the total to 35 states, just 3 short of the necessary 38. At this stage however, the ratification effort stalled.

When the seven year period was nearing its end and the ERA was still not ratified, women's organisation began to ask for an extension. The proposal for grant of an extension was first raised by NOW in September 1977. NOW's President, Eleanor Smeal and the its staff member at their meeting with Olga Madan, President of the Coalition of Labour Union Women, presented charts and polls state by state to support their contention that an extension of the ratification should be sought. Initially the proposal was opposed by some organisatins as the proposal amounted to an admission of defeat. However in the end it was agreed that the ratification extension should be sought. On October 20, 1977 House Joint Resolution 638 was introduced which called for an extension period. It was a crucial trial of strenght for ERA and women activists - a test of the effectiveness of the Women's Movement.

On July 9, 1978, women staged the largest ever parade in history for the cause of ERA. Thousands of banner - carrying women, dressed in the traditional white of suffragists, marched down Constitutional Avenue from the

Washington Monument towards the Capitol Hill. Their purpose was to gain support for the extension resolution. In August 15, 1978, the House passed a resolution granting an extension of a period of three and half years for ratification. The Senate followed suit on October 6, 1978.

However, despite the extension, the ERA fared no better. On June 30, 1982, the clock ran out on the Equal Rights Amendment, a decade after its passage in the House in 1971 and in the Senate in 1972.

WHY ERA FAILED?

Many things went wrong with the most important agenda for the women's movement. For decades the women's movement had made ERA its sole programme. Like the 19th Century Suffrage Movement which erred in making suffrage its sole objective, the 20th century women's movement committed the same mistake. This was most poignantly summed up by Eleanor Smeal President of New, who said of the ERA as it died, "we have no other agends".

The ERA's defeat was not caused by lack of committment or interest among the amendment proponents. Nor was public support lacking. Even in non-ratifying states,

the people since 1972 consistently favoured the amendment. Nationally both male and female backers of the ERA outnumbered their opponents sometimes by as much as three to one¹³. The ERA's defeat did not lie in lack of women's efforts in mobilization. Rather it was due at least in part to the feminist movement's incapacity to translate popular support into legislative endorsement. Although in the early years, ERA's proponents had made scattered efforts to target and defeat amendment opponents running for office, a systematic state level lobbying and pressure campaigning upon state legislators and their constituencies did not materialise until the final year¹⁴. From 1977 onward NOW had organized a rigorous economic boycott, pressuring business labour and professional groups to support ERA. This was effective as a set of tools for educating the masses, but it did not win votes from state politicians. NOW's campaign to elect pro-ERA candidates and defeat ERA opponents could have been effective but it started too late. It was a crucial and costly mistake on the part of women's organisations. On the contrary some authors allege that NOW

13. Mark R. Daniels and others, "The ERA Won - At least in the Opinion Polls", PS vol., 15, No. 4, Fall 1982, pp. 578-587.

14. Mary F. Katzenstein, "Feminism and the Meaning of the Vote" Signs : Journal of Women in Culture and Society Vol. 10, No. 1, Autumn 1984, pp.4-6.

put more emphasis on its own growth and survival than on ERA ratification.¹⁵

There were other reasons too for the failure of ERA. As Val Burris says,

Although the ERA was supported by a numerical majority of the population, this support was skewed so that the groups with considerable political influence were concentrated with the strongest opposition of the ERA. Second the support for the ERA was geographically distributed in a manner that heightened the political impact of ERA opponents. Opposition was the greatest in the less urbanised states, which is overrepresented in the amendment ratification process.¹⁶

Thirdly the apparent strenght of women's organisation raised, once again a conservative backlash. This was spurred by the Supreme Court's 1973 ruling on abortion which legalised abortion. This generated resistance from church authorities and general public who felt that the ERA, by reaffirming women's rights would remove the existing controls over women's reproductive choices. While the judgement was welcomed intellectually and emotionally by most feminist groups including NOW, it prompted an anti-ERA sentiment:

15. Janet K. Boles, "Building Support for ERA : A Case of ' Too much, Too Late'" PS vol. 15, No. 4, Fall 1982, pp. 572-577.

16. Val Burris, "Who opposed the ERA ? An Analysis of the Social Bases of Anti - Feminism", Social Science Quarterly, Vol. 64, June 1983, p. 306.

In one state legislature after another, religion and political conservatives reminded their colleagues that "You can't fool mother nature", and warned that if the amendment was passed, men could no longer control their daughters or wives.

Opposition to the ERA was mobilized around issues such as single-sex toilets, women in combat, homosexual marriages. Issues that tapped a well of anxiety about sexuality in American culture and fuelled fears regarding the changing division of labour between men and women. Although each of these changes could be accurately refuted, advocates for the ERA were at a disadvantage, as it is typically more difficult to demonstrate the advantages of change than to awaken anxiety over loss of the traditional way of life.

Among the opponents of ERA were also non-working women and housewives. A frequently mentioned hypothesis is that opposition to the ERA reflected the insecurity of married women who were economically dependent on their husbands.

As many observers have noted, the constituency for antifeminist causes lies in the economically dependent women of the lower to upper middle class. There is a backlash, not so much against feminism as against anything that might threaten the tenuous security which marriage alone seems to provide. The expectation that women should work is a threat. It makes it easier for

17. Ferree and Hess, n.8, p. 129.

a man¹⁸ to leave with a clear conscience. The ERA is a threat¹⁸.

Housewives who opposed ERA were organised under the banner of Phyllis Schlafly's STOP ERA - a single purpose association of people that aimed at the defeat of ERA. Their grounds for opposition was that the amendment would result in women losing the right to be exempt from draft and military duty. Although in the seventies draft was not an important issue, STOP ERA managed to arouse the fears of housewives.

Yet another reason for the failure of ERA was the apathetic or neutral attitude of successive Presidents. Although from 1960 onwards all presidential candidates have given written pledges of support to ERA, few have followed it up in the White House. President Eisenhower, despite his speeches gave little or no attention to ERA. President Kennedy's Commission on Women flatly denied that there was any need for ERA. President Johnson's priorities lay not in the domestic sphere but in foreign affairs. President Nixon's Task Force was the first official body to welcome ERA. However Nixon did not remain long in office to follow up ERA. President Ford's approach to adoption of ERA was sympathetic, not personally aggressive. He chose to cheer

18. Burrís, n. 16, p. 308.

wife Betty Ford from the side lines rather than get in line himself. Translated into political language this meant that Ford would be glad enough to see ERA ratified but did not wish to spend personal political capital on the project. Clearly the influence of the Presidential office was never used to further the interests of ERA.

The analysis of ratification process of ERA reveals another important feature. It was natural for the momentum to slow down. The euphoria generated after the passage of ERA in Congress, could not be sustained throughout the ratification process, which of necessity was a long and time - consuming process. The momentum of public support and interest petered out very quickly. This was due to the peculiarities arising from the date of final Congressional action. Between March 22, 1972, when the Senate passed the ERA, and December 1972, only 33 state legislatures were in session. Since ratification required the approval of 38 states, for all practical purposes this was not possible in 1972. So there was a gap of nearly a year before other state legislatures began their regular session. So as Steiner says, "without a single opposition voice necessarily being raised, the ERA's momentum was automatically slowed. There was time for organised

oppostion to form and develop."¹⁹

Another view on the non-ratification of ERA is expressed by Sandra Gill who made an indepth sociological study of the ERA movement. She says that public attitudes towards feminist issues tend to be multidimensional and diffused. People are more apt to support general rather than specific issues like the ERA. This accounts for ERA's failure while other acts like the Equal employment Opportunities or the Civil Rights Act got passed²⁰.

Although the ERA failed, there have been dfinite impact on the women's movement. One of the salutary effect is that the feminists have now turned from the "strategy of mobilisation" to the "politics of representatin". The fate of the ERA has convinced women activists that feminism should no longer remain aloof from the electoral politics nor devote its energies solely to one-issue agenda. From 1980 onwards women's movement has actively ventured into the field of politics. Earlier women activists regarded political activism as a means to other ends like granting of

19. Gilbert Y. Sleiner, Constitutional Inequality - The Political Fortune of the Equal Fights Amendment (Washington, D.C.,1985), p. 111.

20. Sandra K. Gill, "Attitudes Towards the Equal Rights Amendent: Influence of Class and Status", Sociological Perspectives, Vol. 28, No. 4, October 1985, p. 457.

franchises repeal of sex discriminatory laws, granting equal opportunity in employment, avenues for women's higher education and lastly the Equal Rights Amendment. But in recent years, women's movement has made political activism its means as well as the end, because women have realised that they have to wield political power in order to overcome centuries-old bias against women.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LAST BASTION CRUMBLES

THE LAST BASTION CRUMBLES

The political activism of women in America, which includes, both, passive as well as active participation in the political process of the country has not been a phenomenon of the twentieth century alone. It started long ago, since the days of Abigail Adams, who vehemently criticized the constitution-makers for not including women in the constitution making body¹. Since then women have been aware of the secondary status and treatment that was meted out to them by the political leaders and institutions of the time. One of the first manifestation of this awareness was the publication of the book "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman"(1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft. This book was a symbolic protest against the male-dominated society and hence marked the first milestone in the history of the women's movement.

But the first explicit political activism of women began when women joined the abolition movement of the 1830s. As writers Judith Hole and Ellen Levine opine:

1. Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States (Massachusetts, 1959), p. 15.

When women began working in earnest for the abolition of slavery, they quickly learned that they could not function as political equals with their male abolitionist' friends. Not only were they barred from membership in some organization, they had to wage an uphill² battle for the right simply to speak in public".

From a battle to speak in public, to the battle of the ballot, which women succeeded in winning in 1920, the women's movement overcame many hurdles. Some of these included agitations for opening higher education to women, abolition of sex-segregated educational institutions, wider and better employment opportunities for women, equal pay for equal work for both men and women, the right to be elected to public offices and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). All these activities can be categorised under the heading of "political activism" because directly or indirectly they were or are concerned with changing the laws and public policies of the government by prerssurising Congress and executive and by making use of the political powers of the masses through strikes, agitation, sit-ins etc. This concept of political activism has not generally been accepted because the word "political" has always been construed as a male prerogative. As one writer aptly points out:

2. Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, "The First Feminist" in Jo Freeman ed., Women: A Feminist Perspective (California, 1979), 2nd ed., p. 544. (Emphasis added).

Many of the questions about political participations do not even consider some of the political activities that many occupy a woman's time. Getting a stop sign put up in a school may involve organizing, petitioning, bargaining and various other kinds of political pressure and yet researchers may neglect to classify this as "political activity"³.

Unfortunately this is what has happened to women's political activism. By and large it has been ignored by political scientists and policy planners. One researcher notes that:

Political science has defined the political in a sex-stereotyped way and from a white masculine view-point ... Many women have been as political as many men, but political science has tended to see and rank as most important what white men of property have done and said⁴.

Echoing similar views, Audrey Wells and Eleanor Smeal who conducted a survey on urban registered voters blame the political scientists for not recognizing women's contributions to political activities. According to them:

The political science profession has done little until recently to question the widely held belief that politics is strictly a masculine affair and that woman's place is in the home. On the contrary, the profession has ignored the question by relying on cultural sex role definitions as the unifactor explanation for the status of women in politics rather

3. Naomi B. Lynn, "American Women and the Political Process" in Freeman, n.2, p. 410.

4. Diane L. Fowlkes, "Conceptions of the 'Political': White Activists in Atlanta" in Janet A Flammang ed., Political Women - Current Roles in State and Local Governments (California, 1984), p. 67.

than actually investigating that status. The lower status of women in politics was perpetuated and accepted because the culture supported the myth that politics is a man's world. If that status was not acceptable to some women, the rationale was that they had themselves to blame⁵ because women are their own worse enemies in politics.

While the contentions of these two authors hold some truth it is not right to lay the blame for women's poor showing in politics, on the door of political science alone. The discipline of political science itself has been shaped by societal norms and predilection which have always been male-oriented. Society has always believed that:

Woman's, position in society - her rights and responsibilities, opportunities and obligations - was essentially determined by her position in the family i.e. her role as a wife and mother... The fundamental basis of the marital relationship is that husbands and wives have reciprocal not equal, rights. The husband must support the wife and children, and the wife must render services as a companion, house wife and mother in return⁶.

Hence political science did not give any weightage to women's activism because the nature of society precluded women from making any decisive impact in the political arena. Maurice Duverger, the eminent sociologist observes;

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5. Audrey S. Wells and Eleanor C. Smeal, "Women's Attitudes Towards Women in Politics: A Survey of Urban Registered Voters and Party Committee Women", in Jane S. Jaquette ed., Women in Politics (New York, 1974), p. 55.
 6. Jo Freeman, "Women and Public Policy: An Overview", in Ellen Boneparth ed., Women, Power and Policy (New York, 1982), p. 47, (Emphasis added).

The small part played by women in politics merely reflects and results from the secondary place to which they are assigned by the customs and attitudes of our society and which their education and training tend to make them accept as the natural order of things⁷.

This explained why women had been given so little importance although they were active in politics since the abolition movement of the 1830s and later won a hard-fought political battle for the Right to Vote. After 1920, when the Women's movement lost some of its initial momentum one commentator remarked that "women's political clout was on the decline"⁸.

Given this background it was not surprising that the "feminist revolt" in politics came in the late sixties of this century. But even then, women's political power was heard rather than felt. The "radical" women's organization like NOW, WEAL and NWPC pledged to "confront, with concrete action the condition that now prevented women from enjoying the equality of opportunity and freedom of choice" which was "their right as individual Americans and as human beings"⁹. These organisations, however, were not

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7. Maurice Duverger, The Political Role of Women (Paris, 1975), pp. 129-130, as quoted in Freeman, n.2, p. 405.
 8. Susan Ware, Beyond Suffrage - Women in the New Deal (Massachusetts, 1981), p.6
 9. NOW's Statement of Purpose, for full details see Betty Friedan It changed my Life (New York, 1976), p. 37.

effective in the beginning. Besides their statements succeeded in giving a theoretical semblance of power, rather than any real power. Political power of women became a reality when the "gender-gap" voting phenomenon made its presence felt in the 1980 Presidential elections thereby conclusively proving that women were atlast voting as a bloc¹⁰. It is pertinent here to analyse why women, who comprised 53 percent of the total voting population, held until the late 1970s only 4 percent of all elective political positions¹¹. Mary Lou Kendrigan in her book, Political Inequality in a Democratic Society, cites some of reasons for the limited impact of women in politics. If power in politics is measured by the numbers and tenure of representatives in Congress, then Cogresswomen were at a great disadvantage as compared to men. Firstly, congresswomen often had no grass roots contact with their constituencies. This is because in the early years of this century, a majority of Congress women were widows of former representatives "Between 1968 to 1975, approximately, one

10. See Anne N. Costain, "The Struggle for a National Woman's Lobby: Organizing a Diffuse Interest", Western Political Quarterly, Vol. 33, No.3, September,1980, pp. 476-480.

11. Ronald D. Hedlund, Patricia K. Freeman, Keith E. Hamm and Robert M. Stein, "The Electability of Women Candidates: The Effects of Sex Role Stereotypes" Journal of Politics Vol. 41, 1979, p. 513.

of every four new women in the House was the widow of a congressman or congressional candidate"¹². It was only in 1980 that Paula Hawkins a Republican from Florida, became the first woman to be elected to senate without any male backing¹³. So often did women gain office by courtesy of dead husband that the term; "Widow's mandate" was coined to describe the phenomenon. Kendrigan is of the view that such women representatives were not "seen as effective, and in politics the perception of power is almost as important as the reality"¹⁴. However Diane Kincade, who has done extensive research on the phenomenon of "widow's mandate" found that in reality widows were not as ineffective as it is made out to be "In fact, only a minority of those who followed their husbands to congress were apolitical and non-participating non-entities"¹⁵. Many widows played a

12. Joan H. Thompson, "Career Convergence : Election of Women and Men to the House of Representatives, 1916-1975," Women and Politics Vol. 5, No.1, Spring 1985, p. 73.

13. Ibid, p. 69., Although the Press described Nancy Kassebum's (R) election in 1978 as the first woman to be elected in her own right, Joan Thompson dismisses this on the ground that she is the daughter of a 1936 Republican presidential nominee Alfred London.

14. Mary Lou Kendrigan, Political Inequality in a Democratic Society : Women in the United States (Connecticut, 1984), p. 26.

15. Diane D. Kincade, "Over His Dead Body : A Positive Perspective on Widows in the United States Congress". Western Political Quarterly vol. 31, March 1978, p. 103.

dominant role in Congress. Florence Kahn a Republican from California for instance, "was one of those political widows who demonstrated to other politicians, to potential widow candidates, and to voters of both sexes that women could be effective in congress". Kahn not only served her husband's term but was elected for three more terms "thus forging her own House career"¹⁶.

The second and more viable reason that Kendrigan cited was the fact that women representatives in Congress had been unable to get appointed to committee assignments and chairmanships - where the real power of congress rested. If at all women had become members of Congressional committees, they had been assigned to lesser-status committees. In the Ninety-fourth congress for instance no women were included in the House leadership as speakers, majority leader or whip. In the most prestigious and powerful committees of the House, the participation of women was even more negligible¹⁷.

Personality, situation and sex-role socialization were other factors that made women relatively ineffective in congress. Personality was an important factor in the election of any candidates. Women, it was often said, had

16. Thompson, n. 12, p. 73.

17. Kendrigan, n. 14, p. 26.

less political efficacy than men and those women who entered politics were less confident and more fearful of making mistakes than their male counterparts¹⁸. Many women expressed a negative sense of political competence. Even where women were able to overcome their negative feelings they ran into another problem. Their innate goodness and moral principles often held them back where a male politician would not hesitate to make use of the opportunities;

Women office-holders spend more time serving their constituents and less time wheeling and dealing than do their male colleagues... Similarly, in political party activity, researchers find that women activists behave quite differently from men. Men use the parties to further their careers, women selflessly consider the political party to be an extension of their family role. They give and do not consider what they might get. It is not too surprising to learn¹⁹ they get very little, except the opportunity to serve¹⁹.

Similarly the low percentage of women in public offices, it is argued, is a result of their "situation" in society - a low socio-economic status and very little free time. Both of these variables are generally associated with low level political activism²⁰.

18. Hedlund and others, n.11, p. 514.

19. Kendrigan, n.14, p. 32.

20. Hedlund, n.11, pp. 515-516.

Sex-role socialization has been also responsible for the low-level of participation of women in politics. Traditionally, while a man is supposed, in fact, expected to be, aggressive and competitive, a woman is supposed to be "non-aggressive, highly emotional, submissive, cheerful and affectionate". A woman thus is expected to take the second place in society²¹. These aspects of social structure and political socialization are important aspects of political recruitment which constrain women's entry into politics²². Ronald D. Hedlund and his colleagues conclude that:

Given the aggressiveness and dominance associated with politics, it is not at all surprising that political activity is largely regarded as inappropriate for women. While legal barriers have been abolished, cultural norms still prescribe politics as a "man's world"²³.

In a democratic society, the success of a movement depends upon its ability to use and manipulate the political system to its advantage. This can be measured by the extent of the responsiveness of the system to the demands of the movement. Otherwise, the movement is labelled as an "outsider" without any voice in the policy-making process of

21. Kirsten Amundsen A New Look at the Silenced Majority: Women and American Democracy (New Jersey, 1978), p. 102.

22. Harold G. Clarke and Allan Kornberg, "Moving up the Political Escalator: Women Party Officials in the United States and Canada" Journal of Politics, Vol. 41, 1979, p. 445.

23. Hedlund n. 11, 515.

the country²⁴. The women's movement in the 1970s fully realized the fact that women could never achieve political equality until they were ensconced in positions of power in "numbers that reflect their approximate percentage of the total population"²⁵. In order to achieve this, the women's movement undertook a two-pronged strategy. One was to change public policies wherever it was found to be discriminatory against women. This strategy was first adopted by women in the sixties itself, but it became more organized and effective in the seventies, when the movement for Equal Rights Amendment got underway. The second strategy has been to place more and more women in place of power particularly Congress so that feminist policies are guaranteed of success. This is evident from the following quote:

Since the ERA's defeat, feminists have turned from the strategy of mobilization to the politics of representation. Coming on the heels of Reagan's victory, the fate of the ERA convinced NOW, for one, that feminism could no longer afford to be casual about electoral politics. Beginning in 1982, NOW redirected much of its political pitch at voting feminists into office²⁶.

24. Myra M. Ferree and Beth B. Hess Controversy and Coaliton: The New Feminist Movement (Boston, 1985), p. 116.

25. Lynn, n.3, p. 404.

26. Mary F. Katzenstein, "Feminism and the Meaning of the Vote" Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society (Chicago) Vol. 10, No. 1, Autumn 1984, p. 5.

Impact on Public Institutions

Before we analyse the impact of women's movement on the public institutions of America it is important to realize one pertinent fact about policy making in the United States:

It is practically a truism among political scientists that most policy making in the United States is incremental. Great decisions are rarely made; in fact they; are often strenuously avoided by our legislators. Instead policy changes are made incrementally, adding a little bit here and there. ²⁷.

It is because of this incremental nature of change that at times it may seem that the women's movement has had no impact at all because they have been unable to get a particular law enacted or ratified (for example the ERA). But to consider the failure of the ERA as a failures of the women's movement itself would be a very wrong deduction. What is necessary to see is not only whether a woman's bill is passed or not, but also the other fall-outs that may occur during the process of lobbying and passage of a bill. For instance the long struggle for Equal Rights Amendment has created a new "policy system" which has involved all women's organization, lobbyists, volunteers,

27.Freeman n.6, p.52.

member of congress and their staffs and women policymakers in the administrative branch ²⁸.

The coming together of all these hitherto divergent elements to fight a common cause is itself a sign that the women's movement is making inroads into the policy-making apparatus of the country. Here are a few cases where women lobbied intensely and succeeded in radically changing the status of women in America.

WOMEN AND THE EQUAL EDUCATION ACT

This section deals with the prevalence of discrimination against women in the field of education, which went unnoticed until 1972. In that year some congresswomen and other feminist organization joined hands to put an end to this. As we have seen in Chapter 1, opening of higher education to women was one of the first demand made by women. Education is important not only because it leads to more awareness and consciousness but also because it is an institution where popular misconceptions can be altered and a change of attitude and behaviour can be brought about. Until 1972 when Title IX of the Education Amendment was passed, it was found that it was perfectly legal to discriminate against girls and women in

28. Jo Freeman, The Politics of Women's Liberation (New York, 1975), p. 217.

any educational institutions. This meant that while male professors in colleges got higher salaries, women got far less for the same job. Similarly athletic scholarships which were partial to male athletes made it possible for men to get higher education and neglected women athletes.²⁹.

The passage of Title IX owes its success in the initial stage to the able statesmanship of Congresswoman Edith Green who sponsored the bill on the floor of the House. She was helped by women activists who began intense lobbying for its passage. In addition to the main women's groups like NOW, WEAL, NWPC, traditional organizations like the American Association of University Women (AAUW), the American Council on Education (ACE) and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) were all involved in this effort. In July 1972 Congress passed the Title IX of the Education Equity Act and in 1974 the Women's Educational Equity Act (WREA). Emulating the equal protection aspects of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX states that:

"No person in the United States shall on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under

29. Fern S. Ingersoll, "Former Congress Women look back", in Irene Tinker ed, Women in Washington : Advocates for Public Policy (Beverly Hills, California, 1983), p.204.

any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance..."³⁰

The primary responsibility for drafting the regulations for the implementation of Title IX was assigned to the department of Health, Education, and Welfare and the staff of the office of Civil Rights (OCR) was given the responsibilities of enforcing the new anti-sex-discrimination clause of the Education Act³¹.

Though the Education Amendment and WEEA had a comparatively easy passage in congress, problems arose when it was sought to be implemented. These laws met with strong opposition from various quarters and particularly, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Since traditionally, sports has been considered as an area of male domination, women were regarded as mere "cheer leaders". The NCAA "lobbied to prevent what they saw as a potential erosion in their power if equal educational opportunity in athletics and organized sports in particular were provided to all students regardless of sex"³². The major opposition

30. Joyce Gelb and Marian L. Palley, "Women and Interest Group Politics: A Comparative Analysis of Federal Decision - making" Journal of Politics Vol. 41, 1979, p.380.

31. Joyce Gelb and Marian L. Palley, Women and Public Policies (New Jersey, 1982), pp.95-96.

32. Gelb and Palley, n.30, p.103.

of NCAA was aimed at the exclusion of athletics from equality of treatment (Title IX) enforcement.

However, it must be said to the credit of the Women's lobby, that it was successful in beating back all opposition. In order to speed up enforcement of Title IX and to quell all opposition, women's groups filed a suit in the U.S. District court in Washington, D.C. against the Department of Health Education and Welfare, and the Department of Labour in the Weal v Weinberger case³³. The success of the Women's Movement in obtaining equality in the field of Education, after they had successfully won in the field of politics (19th Amendment 1920) and Employment (Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, 1964) may be summed up in the following words:

Influencing regulation writing and enforcement of Title IX has clearly been a hard course for women's groups because of the intervention of personal value system of members of Congress (especially regarding sports) and the existence of organized counter pressures. However, women's groups have played by "rules of the game" and in so doing have been able to succeed where a more shrill and less organized approach might have led to a different conclusion to the legislative and regulation writing process for Title IX³⁴.

33. Ibid, p.108.

34. Gelb and Palley, n.31, p.305.

Women and Credit Discrimination

Until 1972, there was no equal credit laws between the two sexes in the United States. While men could obtain credit easily and quickly, women, even working women were deprived of this facility on the grounds of being a "credit risk". Apparently this was considered perfectly legal and justifiable. To do away with this discriminatory practice, women began lobbying for the introduction of an Equal Credits Bill in Congress. Commenting on the strategy of women's organisation one writer noted, that these groups proved to be extraordinarily effective in getting the issue on the 1973-1974 political agenda of both parties. They made highly specialised targeted and technical lobbying in Congress. These efforts were initiated in Washington with limited local involvement. Public education and the education of constituencies followed the Washington women's groups efforts. In this case, however, the limited number of actors facilitated communication and brought a rapid response to issue requiring compromise³⁵.

In January 1974 (93rd Congress) senator Bill Brock (R: Tenn), inspired by his aide, Emily Card, a committed feminist and a political scientist, introduced an Equal

35. Jane R. Champan, "Policy Centers: An Essential Resoruces", in Irène Tinker, n.29, p.180.

Credit Opportunity Bill. The Bill ran into trouble when Representative Leonar Sullivan opposed the Bill on the ground that it should cover not only sex but also race, colour and national origin. Such an omnibus bill, if introduced would have unnecessarily delayed and complicated the legislative process. This could have prompted more opposition from various quarters. Besides, there was a chance that if kept pending the 94th session of congress may not be as receptive as the 93rd was. Ultimately the efforts of women's groups paid dividends and Sullivan agreed to withdraw her objections. The bill was finally passed by Congress. The Equal Credit Opportunity Act (ECOA) had four major provisions.

- (1) to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex or marital status in credit transaction;
- (2) to provide for enforcement by thirteen federal agencies;
- (3) to prohibit recovery by a plaintiff at both state and federal levels;
- (4) to award punitive damages of up to
 - (a) \$10,000 in individual suits to
 - (b) \$100,000 or ten percent of net worth (whichever is lower) in class-action suits³⁶.

36. Ibid , pp 181-182.

The passage of ECOA was relatively easy as women's groups were able to prove congressmen at the numerous compressional hearings that is was the right of women as much as a man to have equal access to credit. The next phase of work in credit discrimination involved influencing the Federal Reserve Board (FRG) which was assigned the job of writing the regulation for the ECOA or as one writer puts it "to put the bite into the bark of the new consumer/women's rights-oriented legislation".³⁷ This was the most difficult part as the FRB had a long history of being pro-business and pro-banking, the two institutions which were expected to oppose tooth and nail, the new act. To pre-empt their opposition, women's groups started publicising the issue and whipping up public sentiments in favour of the Bill. Media coverage of the issue was extensive and helpful to the problem.

Women's groups, public interest organization and human rights commission undertook "Credit Survey" which reinforced the fact of pervasive credit discrimination everywhere. "Credit kits" were prepared by women to stimulate action. Many women became aware of the fact that the discrimination they had faced was not simply a personal experience, but, rather, represented part of a pattern of discrimination against over one-half of the American population. As a shared problem, it became an issue around which a women's interests and energies could be mobilized. Despite significant limitations on staff and financial resource, woman activists were able to initiate and sustain momentum for legislative action on equal credit opportunity³⁸.

37. Ibid, p 182

38. Gelb and Palley, n. 31, p.369.

In April 1975, the FRB released the initial draft of the guidelines required to enforce ECOA. These were decidedly pro-feminist. Business representatives reacted strongly against the draft regulation. As a result the second guideline issued by FRB in September 1975 considerably diluted its pro-feminist position. Seeing this volte-face by FRB, women activists again started applying pressure on FRB to change its stand. A telegram from Karen De Crow, President of NOW to chairman Arthur Burns of FRB and members of congress, denounced the September guidelines as a "sell out to the banking hierarchy". Representative Bella Abzug led a delegation of twelve Congressional Representatives for a meeting with Chairman Burns where she impressed upon him the need to change the guidelines³⁹. The Center for Women Policy studies (CWPS) which had given technical help in drafting the first guidelines, sent a strongly-worded letter to the FRB:

We feel you have responded to the complaints of financial institutions and businesses which were made known to you by many highly paid, experienced lobbyists and other representatives of the industry whose daily presence at Reserve Board headquarters is a known fact. Many of their complaints essentially protest the very existence of the act. Turning from the Congress to the Federal Reserve Board, the industry has tried to weaken and erode the fundamental protections legislated by Congress in the ECOA, a process which you have abetted. In sharp contrast, you have ignored the needs and advice of spokes-persons for the people whom the

39. Gelb and Palley, n. 30, p.373.

Congress intended to protect when they passed the act. Admittedly, women's organization and public interest groups are not the traditional constituency of the Federal Reserve Board, but we represent the people whose interests Congress determined to protect when it passed the Equal Credit Opportunity Act. We are outraged at the ease with which you have ignored our rights and numbers. In our attempts to represent the interests of millions of American women, we cannot boast of unlimited resources. But we will make it clear that these women are a new constituency for which you have accepted responsibility before congress and whom you have then, in our opinion, betrayed⁴⁰

The FRB was astounded at the furore that woman activists were able to create over the September regulation. They were therefore forced to modify their stand which was more acceptable to women activists.

Electoral Politics

The second strategy adopted by women activists was directly aimed at influencing electoral politics. After the defeat of ERA, women activists realized that mere lobbying was not enough and that sympathy and support of its followers can not be translated into law, simply by a show of solidarity. What is therefore required is a "means of translating popular support into legislative endorsement"⁴¹. One way of safeguarding legislative proposals aimed at women is by voting more women to power. Women in Congress

40. Chapman, n.35, p.183.

41. Katzenstein, n.26, p.5.

or state legislatures are generally more supportive of women's measures. In the 70's and 80's several important bills like Equal Rights Amendment, the Women's Equal Education Act, Women's Equal Credit Act. etc. have all been sponsored by women in congress. Moreover, the presence of women in Congress and legislatures, in large numbers is a sign of women's power. "They will be powerful in terms of being there and getting something done. their voice will be heard because they pushed that button"⁴². Secondly, NOW began a local and state wide campaign of defeating legislators who had stopped ERA from getting ratified. This was negative electoral politics, but one that was equally effective. Since women's organization like NOW and NWPC had country-wide members and a budget that ran into millions, the strategy of voting anti-feminists out of power was not an idle threat.

Thirdly and most importantly, women's political power is most visible in the form of the "gender-gap" that is differential voting by men and women. Prior to the 1980 election the gender-gap was not considered as a serious issue. But in that election and in all subsequent elections, it was observed that women were voting differently than men, and were acting as a bloc. In the

42. Kendrigan, n.14, p.98.

presidential election of 1980, only 46 percent of women voted for Reagan, while 52 percent of men vote for the Republican candidate. This was in large part due to Reagan's handling of defence, foreign affairs and domestic policies. Republicans were so alarmed at this trend that Edward J. Rollins President Reagan's chief Political Adviser conceded at a meeting that:

The gender gap is part of an enormous wave of demographic change sweeping the country that threatens to swamp the Republican Party... the political party that get the women's vote will be the majority party, while the party of men will be the minority"⁴³.

As Ann F. Lewis, Director of the Political Division at the Democratic national committee said "because of the change in the political behaviour of women, candidates are aware that they are an important part of the constituency"⁴⁴.

The phenomenon of gender-gap has proved all assumptions false made by anti-feminists about women's political attitudes⁴⁵. The first assumption was that women

43. Quoted in Bella Abzug and Mim Kelber, Gender-Gap : Bella Abzug's Guide to Political Power for American women (Boston, 1984, p.3.

44. Dom Bonafede "Women's Movements Broadens the Scope of its Role in American Politics" National Journal.vol 14, December 11, 1982, p. 2108.

45. Alice S. Rossi, "The Gender-Gap in Mainstream Politics" Lecture series, University of Massachusetts, April 21, 1983.

were only political "followers" of men. They generally did not vote and when they did vote they tended to be influenced by their male authority figure—a husband, brother or father⁴⁶.

Therefore their votes were considered as "duplication" and hence of little political importance. But the 1980 election showed that although women's votes were unable to defeat Reagan they were able to curb the extent of this victory. This prompted one writer to remark that the days when women simply were an "auxiliary contingent in male-dominated American politics are quickly fading. Results of the 1980 presidential election and the 1982 congressional races strongly suggest that gender was a vital factor in determining voter behaviour.⁴⁷.

The second assumption about women's political behaviour was that women always tended to be carried away by personal characteristics of candidates and not by the candidate's stands on issues. If this was the case, Reagan would have definitely won by a greater margin and women would have voted for him in larger numbers. Yet, this did not happen. Women did not vote for Reagan for two main

46. Manoj Joshi "Women's Politics in America Today", paper presented at a Seminar on Women, Family and Social Change (Calcutta), April 26-27, 1983.

47. Bonafede, n.44, p.408.

reason : his belligerent foreign policy and his domestic policy which aimed at cutting welfare measures, the primary beneficiaries of which were women and children.

Thirdly, it was said that women, following the lead of Phyllis Schafy were more conservative. Even this assumption had been proved wrong after 1980 election. Reagan was elected on a conservative plank, yet few women voted for him.

Women's political power could be proved by the following examples. In the close contest for New York governor, men preferred Lewis Lehrman the candidate of Reaganomics and antichoice, by 3 percent in CBS polls; but women preferred pro-choice liberal Mario Cuomo by 10 percent. According to ABC, women were 51 percent of New York voters - so Cuomo won.

In Texas, gubernatorial candidate Mark White was "more in line with women's majority views", and was also running in the Democratic column with Ann Richards, a popular feminist candidate, for the post of state treasurer. Though only 49 percent of the Texas turnout were women, ABC found that 58 percent had voted against Republican incumbent William Clements. White won⁴⁸.

48. Gloria Steinem, "Losing a Battle but Winning the War?"
MS January 1983, p.36.

Even in the conservative South, women's politics has made deep inroads as is proved by the gubernatorial election of 1982. In Michigan, for instance, pro-equality Democrat James Blanchard ran for governor against Richard Headlee, an outspokenly anti-equality Republican. He also ran with Martha Griffiths a former congress woman and an original sponsor of the ERA. Women chose the Democratic ticket by a whopping 63 percent, according to ABC, but only 50 percent of men did. Blanchard won⁴⁹. These instance showed that women were also making their presence felt at state and local elections.

In the last fifteen years, the number of women elected to state legislatures had tripled - from 301 in 1969 to 993 in 1984. In 1982, Rhode Island elected nine women to the state senate. North Dakota even had a women Speaker. There were in all, three Lieutenant Governors and many women Mayors in prominent cities, including Houston and San Francisco⁵⁰. The high water mark of women's achievement was of course the nomination of Geraldine Ferraro who broke new ground "politically and professionally" to become the first woman to contest for the post of Vice President. Although

49. *ibid*, p.36.

50. Abigail Trafford and others, "She's Come Long Way Or Has She?" U.S. News and World Reprt, Aug 6, 1984, p.45.

the Democratic party lost the election, it was an important victory for women activist⁵¹. The impact of women's electoral politics thus has been enormous.

Being voted to power in state and federal legislatures is only the first step in the process of gaining political power. The next step would be to organize this power effectively both within the House and outside so as to neutralise all anti-feminist and conservative opposition. Every time there has been an upsurge of women's power, in America, it has engendered a conservative backlash. This was first evident in 1920 soon after women had acquired the right to vote. This was repeated in 1970, when the Equal Rights Amendment was in the process of being ratified. Thus the ERA defeat came by mainly because of opposition garnered by conservatives like Phyllis Schlafly's STOP ERA forum. Today, conservatism is still alive in America and are mostly ranged against abortion and Equal Rights, two of the most cherished themes of women activists. The fundamentalist preachers who are especially strong in the south also pose a challenge to women's current position. The effectiveness of women's policy can be measured by the extent they are able to withold the conservative challenge.

51. Ferree, n.24, p.140

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

Women in all centuries and in all cultures have occupied a precarious position in society. On the one hand, woman has been put on a pedestal as the life-giving, self-sacrificing mother, on the other hand, she has been looked down upon as the incarnation of evil, who with her wily ways, can tempt man to sin. This is true of both the Oriental and Occidental cultures. Women in America experienced the same sort of duality of treatment and discrimination as was found in other countries. But the history of American women has its own unique characteristics, given its social, economic and political milieu, and is therefore different from that of women of other countries.

When women first set foot in America, some years after the first Mayflower expedition, (it is reported that the first batch of women in the original Mayflower journey did not survive for long), they were faced with the gigantic task of making a home in the wilderness of a strange and inhospitable land. The life of the early American women was a constant battle with nature and the native Indians. Paucity of labour and the enormity of work forced men and women to work side by side to eke out a living. There was

no question of discrimination against women in these early days of frontier settlement as there was no law or organized law enforcing agency. The position of women in society at that time was equal in status to that of her husband and because of the limited number of women who came over from England, women were actually revered.

The status of women underwent a dramatic change when the British colonised America. The English common law began to be applied in America. This law was highly partial to men. It did not treat women as individuals, but as the property of her husband. Married women had no civil or political rights and no legal existence apart from their husbands. Her position became similar to that of the slaves. The only difference was that while the slave was physically chained, the woman was morally and spiritually chained.

This state of affairs continued till 1848. In that year, at the Seneca Falls Convention, women, for the first time raised their voice of protest against the "history of repeated injuries and usurpation" and the establishment of "an absolute tyranny". The Declaration issued at this convention is considered as constituting the beginning of the first conscious Women's Movement. A

pertinent question that arises at this point is that why did it take women so long to realize their predicament? After going through the history of the women's movement, one can conclude that it was because women lacked education and awareness as to their true position in society. Since few women stirred out of their homes, they were unable to realise the world of discrimination that lay beyond them. Even while at home, women were not "sensitized" to the fact that their apparent "superior" status was only a mirage.

In the 19th century with the spread of education, and establishment of schools and college, some women too, desired to learn and to read and write. It was here that they first came to realize the inherently discriminatory society they lived in. While society favoured male education, they frowned upon a woman who wanted to be educated. No schools were prepared to admit women in a Boy's school and government was unwilling to open Girls' schools because it entailed "wastage" of public funds. Some courageous women prominent among them being Lucrettia Mott, Carrie Chapman and Susan Anthony braved public ridicule and wrath and won for women the right to be educated and to gain admittance to schools and colleges.

Once the right to education was won, women came up against another barrier: lack of jobs. At this time, women had already been relegated from the fields to the kitchen. A woman who worked was looked down upon. "Decent" women did not work in those days. If they were forced by pecuniary conditions, the only respectable job for them was being a governess. So, many middle-class women took up social work, to help the poor and the Blacks. Women's participation in the abolition movement gave them the realisation of their true status in society, that theoretical education had failed to do. Many women who worked for abolition, later became ardent feminists.

Groups of women then joined together to fight against the limitation placed on women in the name of God and Law. The first issue that women activists took up was political rights for women, namely the right to vote. Women realized that without the right to vote they could not influence the political apparatus of the country. From the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 where the demand for women's suffrage was first made, till the 19th Amendment in 1920 which granted women the right to vote, women activists followed a long and tortuous path of struggle, protests and agitation. Women were ridiculed, abused and imprisoned. Yet they remained steadfast in their dedication.

Unfortunately women's movement declined after 1920. It looked as if, the suffragists had tired out after their long battle and were left with no energies. While this may not be true, it was nonetheless a fact, that women activists did not have an issue that could capture the imagination of the public at large. Moreover, many suffragists had believed that the vote would revolutionize women's position and that after 1920, women were at the threshold of an exciting new era.

Four decades later women ruefully realized that the much sought-after "Golden Age" failed to materialize. In the decades after 1920, discrimination in jobs and education was still widely practised. Moreover there was a new type of discrimination: a woman was now a symbol of sexuality. Both the media and the masses believed that a woman was only good for sex and nothing else. This was discrimination at its most debasing form.

The women's revolt of the 1960s, therefore primarily attacked all types of sex- stereotypes: particularly the image of woman in all advertisements as the beautiful but homely woman: these made it seem that being a woman meant only being at home. Women activists tried to explode this myth. They demanded that a women has

as much to education and jobs as anyone else. Further, being an individual she had a right to her own person which naturally included the right to abortion.

During this struggle, women came up against a powerful adversary : the congress. It was quite clear that women's status could change only when the law changed and this change could not come about because Congress was dominated by men who believed in women staying in their "God given place".

Therefore women activists undertook a new strategy - that of changing the complexion of government by voting women into power. Since women were a majority (53 percent) of the population , their number was a powerful political weapon to wield against all anti-feminists. When the ERA fell short by just three states to win ratification, women activists vowed to "teach" all anti ERA legislators a lesson in 'November' - that is in the ensuing Congressional election. True to their word many anti-feminists were voted out of power. This strategy of feminists taught Republican and Democratic candidates one vital lesson: that women's issues were no longer a joke and the women's bloc, a figment of imagination. They were supposed to take women's issues

seriously if they were to retain their seats in congress and state legislatures.

To remain in position of power Women's activists have to take advantage of their memberships of other organized groups like Trade Unions. With the manifold increase in the number of working women it is obvious that the potential exists for women to penetrate the decision-making structures of organized interests and to move them towards support of women's issues. As the battle for ERA has shown, organised interests like AFL-CIO , American Medical Association, American Bar Association etc are powerful interest-groups which can tilt the balance in favour of women if they want to do so. It will be of lasting benefit to women's movement, if the Trade Union and other organized interests are weaned away from an anti-feminist stand to a pro-women's issues stand.

Finally women's political power should also include an awareness of the economic power of women. Women's groups in the past have been severely handicapped by the absence of funds. Since this is no longer the case, women must value the use of their economic resources to wield more political power. Moreover in the prevailing economic climate of America, where welfare policies of the

federal government are being severely cut back, women are the chief losers. This has resulted in what has been commonly called as the "feminization of poverty". So improving the financial position of women should be the first strategy of women activists in the eighties. Fortunately they can use their political power to achieve their economic ends in many ways. Firstly they have to stop further budgetary cuts and to closely monitor the budgetary process. The "politics of persuasion" must become the "politics of obstruction" if women are to maintain their new found status in society.

Finally women's activities have to focus more attention on the federal executive. Without allies in the executive, it will be difficult to implement women's policies. In the past women activists have benefitted by the presence of women administrators at the top. If placing pro-feminists in important administrative posts is not possible, the only way to counter administrative apathy or negligence would be to expose the bureaucracy to congressional oversight and the glare of publicity.

With these perspectives in mind, the Women's Movement in America has registered a great deal of strength as well as progress. If they have still not met with total

success, the reasons are not far to seek. They lie within the domain of both men and women. But man-made myths have largely dominated the societal dynamics and as a result women have not reached a stage where they ought to have.

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