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VOICES OF REFORM: THE FEMINIST INTELLECTUALS WHO ENGINEERED THE FIGHT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS, BRITAIN 1830-1886

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DEDICATION

To the memory of my aunt, Warda. May God have mercy on you.

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of the political dimension of the feminist intellectual movement, and the part played by the feminist intellectuals in championing the feminist cause, particularly in the years from 1830 to 1886. The feminist intellectual movement was home to a number of feminist activists from diverse backgrounds such as the Proto-feminists, Owenites, Unitarians, Freethinkers, Secularists, and Quakers. Also, it makes a forceful case for challenging the supposedly historical supremacy of the women's suffrage movement, and asserts that the contributions of the feminist intellectuals to women's rights issues (education, marriage reform, sexual morality, female suffrage, and the legal protection to practice prostitution) need to be written back in history as the founding impulse of first wave feminism. This research therefore argues that the feminist intellectuals in nineteenth-century Britain were the original promoters of feminist thought. And the most important aspect is that they did enhance women's collective and political identities at a time when many of the suffrage advocates failed to do so.

Résumé

Cette thèse est une étude de la dimension politique du mouvement intellectuel féministe et le rôle joué par les intellectuelles féministes dans la défense de la cause féministe, en particulier dans les années 1830 à 1886. Le mouvement intellectuel féministe abritait un certain nombre de militantes féministes. Les proto-féministes, les owénistes, les unitariens, les libres penseurs, les laïcs et les quakers. En outre, il remet en question la prétendue suprématie historique du mouvement pour le droit de vote des femmes et affirme que les contributions des intellectuelles féministes aux questions de droits des femmes (éducation, réforme du mariage, moralité sexuelle, droit de vote des femmes et protection juridique de la pratique de la prostitution) doivent être prises en compte. Cette recherche soutient donc que les intellectuelles féministes de la Grande-Bretagne du XIXe siècle ont été les premières à promouvoir la pensée féministe. Et l'aspect le plus important est qu'ils ont effectivement renforcé l'identité collective et politique des femmes à une époque où de nombreux défenseurs du droit de vote n'y parvenaient pas.

ملخص

تتناول هذه الأطروحة دراسة للبعد السياسي للحركة الفكرية النسوية، والدور الذي لعبه المثقفون النسويون في مناصرة القضية النسوية، خاصة مابين 1830 إلى 1886. كانت الحركة الفكرية النسوية موطناً لعدد من الناشطات النسويات من خلفيات متنوعة مثل النسويات البدائيات، والأوينيين، والموحدين، والمفكرين الأحرار، والعلمانيين، والكويكرز. كما أنها تقدم حجة قوية لتحدي التفوق التاريخي المفترض لحركة حق المرأة في التصويت، وتؤكد أن مساهمات المثقفين النسويين في قضايا حقوق المرأة (التعليم، وإصلاح الزواج، والأخلاق الجنسية، وحق المرأة في التصويت، والحماية القانونية للممارسة الدعارة) بجب ان تدرج في التاريخ على انها الدافع المؤسس للموجة الأولى من الحركة النسوية. ولذلك يجادل هذا البحث بأن المثقفين النسويين في بريطانيا في القرن التاسع عشر كانوا المروجين الأصليين للفكر النسوي. والجانب الأكثر أهمية هو أنهم عززوا الهويات الجماعية والسياسية للمرأة في وقت فشل فيه العديد من المدافعين عن حق الاقتراع في القيام بذلك.

Contents

List of Abbreviations

ESC	The Endowed Schools Commission
GPDSC	The Girls' Public Day School Company
LNA	The Ladies National Association
MCEW	Manchester Committee for the Enfranchisement of Women
NAPSS	The National Association for the Promotion of Social Science
NLCS	North London Collegiate School
NUWSS	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
NVA	National Vigilance Association
RSIC	Reports of the Schools Inquiry Commission
SPA	Social Purity Activists
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

When analyzing the available historical sources documenting the political history of British feminism, it is easy to notice that historians of feminism and feminist scholars tend always to focus on the women's suffrage movement as one of the most dynamic academic fields and give less attention to the ideas and social experiments of the feminist intellectuals. In their opinion, the feminist campaigns cannot be viewed in isolation from the question of suffrage. They maintained that the women's suffrage movement made the question of women's voting rights into an important political issue in the nineteenth century.

Arguably, the women's suffrage movement was over publicised because of its direct interest in the question of female suffrage, while the untold truth is that the feminist intellectuals were practically more influential than the suffrage advocates in promoting the rights of women. These included the right of women to be educated; the right to vote; and the rejection of the cultural and historical assumptions about gender and sexuality which combined to limit working-class prostitutes' freedom and action. In spite of the fact that the legal protection to practice prostitution was not the concern of the middle classes, there was a socially radical alliance between upper middle-class feminist intellectuals and working-class prostitutes to establish a new tradition both of sexual politics and militant civil rights campaigning. Interestingly, the history of the feminist intellectual movement was highly supportive to feminist issues compared to that of the women's suffrage movement. As such, the demand for

female enfranchisement had been raised in the feminist intellectual networks long before the emergence of the women's suffrage movement in the 1860s. In addition, the feminist intellectuals were powerfully involved in a variety of reform organisations for female suffrage, for improved educational opportunities for women, and for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (C.D. Acts).

This thesis attempts to answer the following major question: What impact did the feminist intellectual movement have on the status and rights of women? A set of secondary questions are asked too. Why did the women's suffrage movement receive such an exaggerated attention from scholars of post-1850 feminist movement? To which extent the early contributions of the feminist intellectuals could be seen as a platform on which feminist demands emerged and developed? Did the question of female suffrage emerge first from the feminist intellectual circles? Last but not least, what were the political outcomes attained through the active involvement of the feminist intellectuals in women's rights campaigns?

The major objective of this thesis is to demonstrate that the suffragettes do not merit the scholarly attention they received from historians of the post-1850 feminist movement; rather, it must be attributed to the feminist intellectuals who championed the feminist cause. This thesis comprises four supportive objectives, each of which is included in its respective chapter.

The review of the literature has permitted us to notice that the contributions of the feminist intellectuals to women's rights issues have received some attention from feminist scholars. For example, Barbara Caine, the Head of the School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry, focused in her work *Victorian Feminists* on the

ideas and beliefs of four feminist intellectuals in Victorian England, analyzing their vision and focusing on the complex relationship party politics and feminist commitment; Barbara Taylor's book *Eve and New Jerusalem: Feminism and Socialism in the Early Nineteenth-Century* dealt with the history of Socialism in England between the 1830s and 1840s. Her work has been central to uncovering a longstanding connection between Owenite ideas and support for women's economic and political emancipation; Laura Schwartz's *Infidel Feminism: Secularism, Religion, and Women's Emancipation, England 1830-1904* served as a reminder of how easily the radical visions of one generation can be forgotten or sidelined by the next. Schwartz argued that Freethinking feminists of the 1830s helped to blaze a trail for generations of freethinking women to come; Kathryn Gleadle, an Expert in British political culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, asserted in her book *The Early Victorian Feminists* that the early feminist demands emerged from Freethinking and Owenite circles. She traced the connections between the radical Unitarian of the early nineteenth century and the later feminist movement by examining the writings, ideas, and the social activities of these feminists; Olive Banks, a feminist historian, contributed to a general rethinking of the roots of feminism by showing that more than 32 per cent of women who were active in the women's rights movement were Freethinkers.

Nevertheless, numerous contemporary studies have attempted to examine the contributions of British women activists to the dominant suffrage campaigns. For example, Smith Harold's book *The British Women's Suffrage Campaign, 1866-1928* traced the British women's suffrage campaign from its origins in the 1860s through

to the achievement of equal suffrage in 1928; Elizabeth Crawford, an independent researcher and author of a number of books on the women's suffrage movement, in his work *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland* examined the political developments of the women suffrage campaigns in England, Wales and Scotland; June Purvis made a collection of essays presenting recent feminist scholarship on the women's suffrage movement, illustrating its diversity and complexity; Ray Stratchey's work *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* traced carefully women's struggle for personal, legal, political and social liberties from the late eighteenth century until after the First World War. Part of his work focuses on the role that feminist activists played in the suffrage campaigns, drawing remarkable portraits of the personalities involved such as Harriet Taylor, John Stuart Mill, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, Millicent Fawcett, and Josephine Butler; Stanley Holton's book *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900–1918* focused her research on the British suffrage movement from its foundation until the winning of universal suffrage in 1928. She stressed the important role played by more than six feminist suffragists to the 'Woman Question', namely Hannah Mitchell, Alice Clark, Mary Gawthorpe, Cady Stanton, Jessie Craigen, Elizabeth Elmy; Molly Housego, a British historian, in his book *The Women's Suffrage Movement* emphasised the struggle for women to gain the vote in Great Britain and listed the women who became members of the women's suffrage movement; Sophia Van Wingerden's *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain, 1866-1928* attempted to cover all the petitions presented by the suffragists to the House of Commons, and estimated them at about 1.000, containing

over three million signatures. During a period of thirty years, she concluded, more than 1300 public meetings were held despite the fact that women attending meetings were thought to be most terrible and dangerous.

The perspective is historical and the approach is descriptive and analytical. The intent is not to contribute to the sociological theory of the development of the feminist intellectual movement. Rather, it is to explore the feminist intellectual activist struggle during a specified period of British history. The period concerned extends from 1832 to 1886. The early phase, from 1832 to 1850, reflects the feminist intellectual heritage before the emergence of the women's suffrage movement. The later one, from 1850 to 1886, revolves around the role that the feminist intellectuals played in the campaigns for female suffrage, education, and the repeal of the laws on prostitution.

This study uses a wide range of primary and secondary sources. The corpus (primary sources) is a compilation of texts of laws and other original documents like monographs, newspaper reports, speeches, diaries, personal letters, interviews, collective and individual biographical material. Most of the documents are available on many official websites, such as *New Moral World, The Pioneer, The Reasoner, The Shield, The Spectator, Votes for Women*. The secondary sources draw upon books, chapters in edited books, articles, reviews, and master and doctoral theses, and website articles, all of which pertain to cultural, political, and feminist history.

The thesis comprises four chapters. Chapter one is meant to uncover the historians' over-emphasis on the history of the women's suffrage movement in Britain. It tells of the factors that lead to the emergence of the movement. It also introduces the

relationship between "suffragism" and feminism. It then moves on to explore the dominant suffrage organisations and the use of petitions as one of the major tactics used by suffragettes to support their cause. It finally evaluates the impact that the suffragettes had on girls' education, marriage reform, and female suffrage. The second chapter explores how the radical feminists (Owenites and Freethinkers) contributed to the development of the feminist thought before the emergence of the women's suffrage movement in mid-nineteenth century England. Also, it inspects the social origins of the dominant radical feminists, their major demands, and the strategies to meet them. The moderate feminist intellectuals (Quaker women) are touched upon. Chapter three examines how the feminist intellectuals came to be the original promoters of ideas on female suffrage. It also explains how proto-feminism, Unitarianism and Owenism provided an intellectual atmosphere in which "suffragism" was able to thrive. Chapter four examines the political dimension of feminist intellectual campaigning and the impact it had on the promotion of women's rights (girls' education, female suffrage, and the reform of the laws on prostitution) in society at large.

CHAPTER ONE

The Historical Primacy of the Women's Suffrage Movement

Introduction

Throughout the nineteenth century a considerable number of women's rights movements were proliferating across the United Kingdom, including the Chartist movement, the Owenite movement, organised Freethought, and in many of these, the suffragettes played an actively prominent role. With the establishment of the women's suffrage movement in the 1860s, women from all classes of English society were encouraged to assert their individual rights as independent citizens. In spite of the fact that the efforts to secure the right to vote for women lasted some one hundred years, the vast majority of historians have stressed the need to recognise the central role that the suffrage movement played in the lives of women, particularly on the question of female suffrage (Stratchey 361). The objective of this chapter is to bring to the fore the established literature about feminist historians' over emphasis on the historical primacy of women's suffrage movement. Among their favorite arguments, feminism cannot be viewed in isolation from the question of suffrage. They fervently believed that the women's suffrage movement was one of the most organised political unions that coalesced into a coherent philosophy of a feminist movement; had its councils and political branches; and adopted petition as a powerful strategy to support votes for women. Also, they contended that the essence of the vote appears to be more utilitarian than symbolic, because it encompassed all the aspects of women's lives,

including marriage reform, suffrage, and equal access to educational opportunities to both sexes.

I. a. The Women's Suffrage Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain: An Historical Overview

There is a number of cultural factors that led to the emergence of the women's suffrage movement, one of which is the domestic ideology. The Victorians viewed women in terms of their home activity as a relaxing refuge apart from the public realm. Professor Kay Boardman proposed in his book that the patriarchal ideology of domesticity was a strict social system which denied women access to leadership roles in society (150).

Some scholars have examined the dichotomy between the public and private spheres and found that Victorian women were subjected to isolation because of the ideology of gender roles. As a result, men occupied different positions in society such as property owners, professionals, teachers, judges, and politicians, whilst their wives stayed at home. (Walby 170)

Professor K. Bhasin has connected 'patriarchy' to what he called the 'male dominance' to characterize the unequal power relations between men and women. In a clear context, the patriarchal relations structured both the private and public spheres, ensuring that men would dominate both (Abeda 2).

It could be said that women's domestic role was forced, either by economic circumstance, social standards, or marriage. In 1972 in her book *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, Martha Vicinus looked at the distinctions between

eighteenth and nineteenth-century feminine ideals from an economic standpoint, characterizing Victorian women as "the greatest enforcers of moral sexual behaviour." Vicinus saw the Victorian woman as the heart of the family, whose behaviour and mode of life was strictly regulated by laws and precedents. The evaluation of the masculine impact on feminine society was rather lacking, implying a status quo in which men were dominant and women were supposed to exist in a strictly controlled "woman's sphere." While Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have argued that the domestic seclusion of women was religiously, socially, and even sexually motivated. Their examination of the middle-class Victorian family reveals pivotal economic relations between public and private spheres, which evolved during the early part of the nineteenth century on account of industrialization and subsequent separation of spheres. They asserted that, not only were women the central figure of family life, but homelife itself was “seen as providing bedrock of morality in an unstable and dangerous world.” (Harold 7)

The exclusion of women from politics was, therefore, the inevitable result of the domestic ideology. Johnson, Frieze, Johnson, Parsons and others attempted to portray the public sphere as the male’s domain and that women could not exist independently of men’s authority.

> It is because women are viewed as apolitical and dependent that a proxy status would be believable to the public… Here, female dependence and lack of ambition and wifely obedience would combine to create the ideal proxy governor (341).

The domestic morality contributed not only to the exclusion of women from positions of power but reduced the level of women’s collective consciousness. The emergence

of ‘separate spheres’ as a social reality in the lives of the middle classes tended to limit women's sphere of interest within the domestic sphere, separate from the public realm occupied by their husbands and fathers.

A set of political aspects are also put under examination. An example of this was the exclusion of women from parliamentary politics. In the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth century, parliamentary elections in Great Britain were estimated by the properties that the individuals possessed in the borough and counties (Phillips 76-77). During this specified period, property owners were granted the voting franchise according to the old system of qualification (Lizzeri and Persico 2004). For instance, voting in some boroughs was given to persons who were in charge, or owned homes with annual value of 10£. Besides, there were property qualifications for persons who resided in rural areas. As a result, only one in seven adult males had the right to vote. According to Donald Ratcliffe, “only people who had freehold landed property sufficient to ensure that they were personally independent and had a vested interest in the welfare of the communities could vote.” (220)

In 1832, England witnessed the passage of the Great Reform Act as one of the significant political events in its political history. The Reform aimed to create the broadest base conceivable for the legitimacy of laws. The outcomes attained in the political spectrum following the passage of the Great Act was the expansion of the voting franchise to more men. In addition, the most famous old measure in the towns or boroughs the vote was given to £10 freeholders, they were in possession for at least a year and were not eligible of poor relief. In addition, those who were eligible to vote prior to the act retained the right to franchise (Williams 5). In the county seats,

however, the Act gave the vote to adult males owning freehold property of 40 shillings (£2), copyholders in possession worth £10 and anyone renting land worth £50 p.a. The effect was to extend the vote in parts of the country like London which had relatively high property prices. The Act immediately added a total of 217,000 voters to an electorate of 435,000 but due to the increasing wealth of the nation a further 400,000 voters had been added by 1867. (Woodward 88)

Nevertheless, the 1832 Reform Act formalized the exclusion of women from voting in parliamentary elections, as a legitimate elector was defined in the Act as a male person. Professor Robert Blackburn has noted that the constitutional consequences of expending the electorate to women and the working classes was "still regarded by most as a dangerous experiment and subversive to any sound system of government." (66)

Published in 2011, Shihui Yun's master dissertation offered a comprehensive assessment about the political factors that spurred the women's suffrage movement in nineteenth-century Britain. In her opinion, the absence of women from leadership roles in society and their exclusion from the franchise powerfully contributed to the emergence of the women's suffrage movement in Britain (6).

In summing up the previous arguments, one of the chief factors that contributed to the disenfranchised status of women was the structural and systemic barriers that existed in Victorian society at that time, such as deeply entrenched gender roles, which helped to create a false stereotypic image of middle-class women as subjects of political disabilities. Seeing in this light, the male dominance resulted in effects like the discrimination of the weaker sex, lack of education, and lack of social

authority that would make it difficult for the oppressed group (women) to wield effective political power.

Some historians have offered differing arguments about the beginning of the women's suffrage movement in Britain. Recently, historian Alice Paul has situated the struggle for female suffrage shortly after the passage of the Great Reform Act in 1832, when the first women's petition was presented to the House of Commons by Mary Smith (23). Scholar Patricia Hollis has pinpointed 1866 as the starting point for the modern women's suffrage movement in England, when a group of activists presented a petition to Parliament asking for the right to vote on an equal basis with men (vii). While Joyce Marlow, a British historian, located the struggle to gain women the right to vote between 1832 until 1928 (ix).

It is generally accepted, however, that the suffrage movement was founded in 1867, when Lydia Becker and some activists formed the National Society for Women's Suffrage Committee in London. It was, therefore, the first organised suffrage movement based on the single issue of suffrage. The organisation campaigned for women's right to vote through peaceful and legal means. They introduced Parliamentary petitions and addressed meetings to explain and promote their aims (Turner 589).

On the whole, the political ideology of the suffrage movement was highly supportive to the question of female suffrage. An article published in *The American Political Science Association* entitled "The Women's Suffrage Movement in England" suggested that the early suffragettes wanted to entrench a political process supportive to the claims of women for power-sharing: that women should be assigned

the right to vote on an equal basis as men; that women should take part in national and local elections; that the old term "man" used in old legal documents should denote women as well as men; and that women should play a part in the democratization process (Paul 593).

Those very demands gained momentum as John Stewart Mill published his work on *The Subjection of Women* in 1869. Mill invoked the implications of the moral and educational impact of women on their children, and argued that the exclusion of women from politics was a serious violation to human rights. Moreover, Mill asserted that any inequality represented a serious barrier to the advancement of the entire society, and he called for deeper legal and political reform to alter society's views about women.

> In the first place, the opinion in favour of the present system, which entirely subordinates the weaker sex to the stronger, rests upon theory only; for there never been trial made of any other: so that experience, in the sense in which it is vulgarly opposed to theory, cannot be pretended to have pronounced any verdict. (129)

Out of his conviction that women needed a franchise to advance their cause, Mill's essay continued to describe the social and political disabilities of women in terms of a woman's rationality and access to education (Annas 1977). What is relevant in Mill's new definition of power sharing is that he emphasised the importance of individual freedom for man and for woman.

Feminist critics have maintained that Mill's views on women were the founding text of the women's suffrage movement. For example, Evelyn L. Pugh proposed in his article that Mill's feminism could be understood as a direct call to the

establishment of a democratic spirit, and its value lies in the belief that women should be assigned a superior status in society and government (399). According to Dale E. Miller, John Stewart Mill was a true believer in the education and empowerment of women, which would help them to become active politicians (88). Although Mill had never declared that he was a suffragette, his insistence on the liberation of women from slavery and his support to the education and enfranchisement of women made him in line with the suffrage advocates of his time.

Historians of feminism and feminist scholars have paid an exaggerated attention to the women's suffrage movement, and produced a wide-range of books, articles, and even doctoral dissertations to cover its early beginnings and the impact it had on female suffrage. Scholar Elizabeth Crawford was among the very few historians who produced three volumes on the history of the women's suffrage movement in England. In 2003, Crawford published *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland: A Regional Survey*, which effectively surveyed the geographical dimension of the women's suffrage movement in ten regions of England, together with Wales, Scotland and Ireland. This book gave a unique historical fact concerning the rapid growth and spread of the women's suffrage campaigns in these countries throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Through a study of the grass roots activists, Crawford provided a richer account of the political dimension of the women's suffrage movement and focused on the politics and personalities that dominated the political spectrum both at the local and national level. Attempts to involve women of all classes at a local level were highly successful and, uniquely,

Crawford also showed the extent of male support across the provinces. Such support was fundamental to the success of the suffrage movement (2).

Interestingly, the history of the women's suffrage movement in the nineteenth century was presented through the use of biography. Many British historians of women's movements used such forms of prosopography as feminist engagement and political activism to examine what was shared among leading members of the movement. The hope is to enable researchers, scholars, local historians and students to have access to information about the women who were part of the history of the movement. One work is particularly important in this regard: David Rubinstein's *A Different World for Women: The Life of Millicent Garrett Fawcett*. Rubinstein started his book with a brief summary about Fawcett's early childhood and marriage; then moved on to explore her active engagement in the suffrage campaigns; and finally portrayed her life after the First World War. Rubinstein was of the opinion that there has been no full biography of her apart from Ray Strachey's book, published two years after her death in 1929 (xi).

Moreover, Rubinstein proclaimed that Millicent Fawcett's role in the women's suffrage movement was undeniably remarkable to the extent that her contemporaries were influenced by her shrewdness and her political activism. The author shed light on Fawcett's early connections with leading suffragettes such as John Stewart Mill, and her speaking career in the public platforms, and the most conclusive arguments she offered in favour of women's suffrage.

> Mrs. Fawcett had quickly become one of the few women to make regular appearances on the platform... It is necessary to remember that when the young Millicent

> began her speaking career not only women but the majority of men were denied the parliamentary vote. The subject and the speaker had a freshness which is now impossible to recapture (39-41).

Also, there is a number of works in which historians used the personal lives of leading suffragettes to offer a historic value to the movement. As such, Sandra Holton's recently published article which highlighted the important contributions of one of the leading American suffragists, Cady Stanton, to the women's suffrage movement; also Janet Smith's doctoral thesis "The Feminism and Political Radicalism of Helen Taylor in Victorian Britain and Ireland," which analysed the feminism and political radicalism of Helen Taylor, and the central role she played in the social and political campaigns of nineteenth-century women (Holton 1994; Smith 2014).

I. b. Writing the History of Feminism from the Suffrage Perspective

Feminism can be defined as a set of social and political reforms which aimed to challenge the more repressive views on women and defend women's essential rights. Nineteenth-century feminists were united and totally committed to grant women a number of rights such as the right to vote, education, employment, and holding a property (Mendus 291-294)

In the 1830s and 40s, the feminist movement called itself the "Women's emancipation movement." In this time, feminist circles such as the Owenites and Freethinkers were primarily concerned to secure the freedom of women and dismantle the patriarchal barriers that powerfully constrained women's participation in public and political life. Following this line of thought, historian Karen Offen has employed the expression 'feminist revolution' to encompass both a system of ideas

and a movement for socio-political change based on a refusal of male privilege. It is "a comprehensive critical response to the deliberate and systematic subordination of women as a group by men" (20).

Although terms such as ‘women's suffrage,’ ‘female voting,’ ‘ballot,’ and women's franchise' represented just one aspect of the fundamental aims of the mainstream feminist movement, there is an agreement among historians that the feminist ideology witnessed a significant development shortly after the emergence of the women’s suffrage movement, away from the arguments of classical feminism. The proponents of this view have called attention to the fact that the early feminist activists were theoretical while the suffragettes were more pragmatic. For instance, scholar Aileen Karditor pointed out how the American suffragists became successful when they regressed the use of classical arguments of feminism, which drew heavily on discussions such as the domestic ideology and male dominance. Instead, she showed how leading suffragettes became active in practical campaigning and were successful in championing women’s educational, economic, and political rights (44).

In contrast to Karditor’s view, a feminist historian Susan Kent has claimed that the leaders of the British feminist movement were engaged in a struggle with patriarchy to deliver deeper change in favour of women. Further, Kent stressed that the majority of historians who viewed the women’s rights movement as devoted solely to win the right to vote to women were meant to misunderstand its goals. Although she did not ignore the importance of the suffrage movement in her book, Kent powerfully believed that the branch of feminism reflected a history of different

struggles and that the post-1850 feminist movement was founded to put an end to sexism and to achieve full gender equality in law and in practice. (17)

The ‘suffrage’ historians made a basic assumption that the revival of the suffrage movement in the late 1890s had remarkable benefits not only on the major feminist demands but also on the enfranchisement of women. A trustee journalist and historian Brougham Villiers identified the women’s suffrage movement as one of the early flourishing phases of political progressivism, contending that it was possible to improve women’s rights through direct political action.

> Questions of education, temperance, unemployment, housing, land, poverty and finance, little regarded by the last generation, form the subject matter of politics in the present, and will do so still more in the immediate future. (Holton 18).

In this passage, Brougham Villiers appears to have argued that the women’s suffrage movement laid the foundation for successful social and political reforms. The vote could be used as a powerful tool to improve the living and conditions of all British citizens, including, as scholar Holton pointed out, “the children of the state, the weak, the sick, and the oppressed mothers and fathers” (39).

Certainly, the vote was key to bring about radical social changes in various spheres. These changes would affect the laws of education, marriage, labour, employment, and legislation. Leading suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst once claimed that the political ideology of the suffrage movement was inextricably compatible with the prospects of social reform and feminist demands. As she pointed out in the following passage: “you cannot even go to church without hearing a great deal of talk

about social reform and a demand for social legislation (which was) of vital importance to women" (Holton 42).

Feminist scholars and historians have offered a set of arguments about the 'utility' of the vote, insisting that the women's suffrage movement was highly supportive to feminist issues. In her article, "The Radicalism of the Woman Suffrage Movement: Notes toward the Reconstruction of Nineteenth-Century Feminism," Ellen DuBois, an American Professor of history and gender studies, called attention to the fact that the major feminist demands were better advocated within the suffrage movement, and looked at the way in which the suffragettes were successful in refuting the conventional perception that only men to enjoy participation in the political affairs.

> Unlike the demand that women be admitted to trades, professions, education, the demand for citizenship applied to all women and it applied to them all of the time- to the housewife as much as to the single, self-supporting women (65).

This argument powerfully demonstrates that the demand for suffrage formed one of the motives through which the feminist movement could attain a number of political outcomes, particularly in the labour market, education and marriage reform.

In 1904, leading suffragette Catt Carrie Chapman wrote a pamphlet entitled "Feminism and Suffrage," in which she offered a critique to the early wave of feminism. Chapman drew attention to the fact that the feminist movement or women's right movement had failed to attain significant political results.

> When the women movement began no one knows. Personally, I believe it has always existed as a slumbering protest in the hearts of women since their overthrow and subjection by war in the long ago. Naturally, the movement we know it today varies in different parts of

> the world, and women very logically protest against these oppressions which bear most unhappy upon them (Amidon 2007).

In the same vein, Chapman proposed that the establishment of women's suffrage movement marked a shift from classical feminism to progressive politics. Also, she had supported the view that feminism could not be viewed in isolation from the question of suffrage.

> The women's suffrage movement is one phase of the great woman movement of the world and has no other plank in its platform than votes for women. It has never been connected with 'free love'. In twenty years of suffrage work, which have acquainted me with many thousands of suffragists, I have met no "free lover" among them (Amidon 2007).

Chapman criticized the feminist advocates of "free love," or the Owenite feminists, insisting that such a brand of feminism was not respectable. While the suffrage movement could be seen as the voice of all the British women.

The Irish researcher Redmond Jennifer was interested in the petitions presented to the British Parliament by leading suffragettes, suggesting that they formed the most part of the change in the social and political contours. Redmond has traced so carefully the early beginnings of the suffrage movement, both in the USA and Great Britain, and argued that vote was needed to improve women's social and political conditions. "One of their primary vehicles of protest was the petition. This softer tactic has less immediacy than the militancy of the twentieth century, but was essential in building awareness of the need of women's suffrage" (27). Redmond has noticed that the major feminist demands were expressed in a mere theoretical manner, while petitioning had enormous potential as a political act. In effect, petitions were a

crucial site of representation between people and those in power, and they would help to voice women's protests most directly in the British Parliament.

It might be clear, as the previous arguments demonstrate, that the enfranchisement of women was more important for the suffragettes than other feminist issues. Contemporary historians of feminism have stressed that women's participation in political life would reconstruct society by infusing a democratic state with uniquely feminist values and virtues. The enfranchisement of women was a symbol of progress and equality in society through greater democracy and an increase in voting and social rights for women (Offen 1988). In addition, they emphasised that the suffragettes used the petitions to remove all the inequalities between men and women (Anderson 1995).

Female suffrage was a symbol of law and law's legitimacy in the process of democratic politics, and it served as a visual articulation of women's fundamental political equality. In a public lecture held on 24 March 1908, Mrs. Pankhurst argued, in supporting women's suffrage, the franchise would be of particular importance to the development of civil liberties.

> We may describe the vote as, first of all, a symbol of freedom, secondly, a safeguard, and thirdly an instrument. It is a symbol of freedom, symbol of citizenship, and a symbol of liberty. It is a safeguard of all those liberties which it symbolizes. (Pankhurst 1908)

This view clearly demonstrates that the majority of feminist activists supported the vote to prove that they were capable of taking responsibility in society. Expanding the vote to women on the same conditions as men was seen as the first step towards the establishment of a democratic state.

I. c. The Dominant Suffrage Organisations

Throughout the nineteenth and well into the beginning of the twentieth century, the women's suffrage movement in Britain was home to more than seven organisations reflecting considerable differences over matters of political strategy. These unions involved the London National Society for Women's Suffrage; the Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage; Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage; The Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage; The Central and Western Society for Women's Suffrage; The National Union for Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS); and the Women's Suffrage Political Union (WSPU). Of all these suffrage unions, the last ones are selected for analysis for two important reasons. The first and most important aspect is that they had received a serious attention from historians. The second one is they represented a significant milestone in the fight for gender equality and female suffrage.

One of the older political societies was the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (also known as NUWSS). This suffrage organisation was formed on 14th October 1897 by Lydia Becker, and represented the "constitutional" wing of the women's suffrage movement (Hume 1). Three years later, when Becker passed away the leadership of the movement passed to Millicent Fawcett, who became the political organizer and advocate of female suffrage within the movement (Newberry 411-425).

Millicent Fawcett and other suffragettes advocated for female suffrage by using peaceful tactics. They composed petitions and letters to government officials, organised public meetings, and distributed daily papers and free writings. In this sense, Fawcett believed that if the organisation was seen to be intelligent, polite and

law-abiding then women could show themselves accountable sufficient to take part completely in politics and could get the respect of the MPs (Vellacott 1).

Some historians have argued that the NUWSS was key to the revival of the suffrage question in the late nineteenth century. In *The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, 1897-1914*, De Leslie Hume provided a more complete understanding of the NUWSS' policies and the personalities that characterized the struggle for votes for women. In the first chapter, Hume has looked at the way in which individual suffragettes, men as well as women, contributed to the growing suffrage campaigns in its constitutional form.

> The formation of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies on October 14, 1897, and the first nine years of the NUWSS' activity were not so much the start of a new phase in the women's suffrage movement in England as they were the ending of the first phase which began in the mid-1860s (1).

Furthermore, Hume asserted that the NUWSS had played a central role in the campaign for the Conciliation Bill of 1910.

> The NUWSS was well pleased with the results of their election work: according to its own perhaps too optimistic estimate, 323 members of the new House of Commons were in favour of some form of women's suffrage…prominent politicians maintained that the issue of women's suffrage was not one which votes were won or lost, there were nonetheless significant ramifications to the NUWSS' role in the January election (27).

The majority of historians working on the women's suffrage movement argued that the NUWSS' leaders had a pragmatic vision, because they were working through peaceful methods to support votes for women.

Similarly, Harold Smith's book *The British Women's Suffrage Campaign 1866-1928* was central to examine how the women's suffrage movement, through its network of organization and its powerful and widespread campaigning, was transformed and developed into a structured political force. Part of his research focused on the campaign of the NUWSS. Smith believed that the NUWSS was a predominant factor in the success of the suffrage movement. As such, the NUWSS leaders had advocated peaceful methods to support the cause; they maintained close links with Liberal Government; and that the influence of the organisation went beyond the English territory to reach Wales and Ireland (21-30).

Published in 2008, Sandra Holton's article has attempted to capture the tactics adopted by the leaders of the NUWSS to secure votes for women. In her opinion, the NUWSS was hugely connected to a national network of branch societies in every constituency, which made it a successful suffrage union. Holton's main attribution is that the NUWSS formulated its demands for franchise on the basis that men and women should be entitled the same defining right, that she referred to as "democratic franchise." (Holton 2008).

A number of recently published research works have inspected the way in which the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) continued its struggle to secure an equal and full participation for women in Parliamentary politics, particularly in the early years of the twentieth century. For example, Lovell provided a thoroughgoing account of the two dominant suffrage movements in England, the NUWSS and the WSPU, and how they promoted and popularized the main ideas of the women's suffrage movement. The suggestion that the campaign for women

suffrage would have never achieved its objectives without the organizational structures and systems employed by both the leaders of the WSPU and NUWSS.

> These organisations were often a reinterpretation of male management methods and facilitated the administration of membership, recruitment, people, events, publicity, propaganda, marketing, executive decisions, and governed processes and procedures… the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) continued its struggle to secure an equal and full participation for women in Parliamentary politics, particularly in the early years of the twentieth century (1).

It must be said that the NUWSS represented the pacifist wing of the women's suffrage movement. On the whole, it could be viewed as a non-militant, constitutional, and that had no party affiliation.

In addition to the NUWSS, the early twentieth century witnessed the formation of the militant wing of the women's suffrage movement, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). This suffrage organisation was established in Manchester on 10 October 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst and her eldest daughter Christabel (Bartley 241).

In 1905, the leadership of the movement adopted 'militancy' as a political tactic to ensure the success of the movement. Militant tactics involved disturbing the public meetings of leading Liberal figures and securing consequent imprisonment for the demonstrators involved. The WSPU started its activity as a protest group within the ILP, initially confined to a network of socialist and trade union groups in the North West of England (Rosen 49).

Before the general election of 1906, the militant suffragettes had opposed all Liberal candidates at by-elections, maintained the public harassment of leading

Liberal spokesmen, and organised regular large-scale public demonstrations in support of the demand of votes for women (Holton 155). In 1905, during a general election campaign, Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney insulted a Liberal Minister Sir Edward Grey. As a result, the authorities arrested them and sent them to prison. Christabel's new strategy led to humiliation of several Liberal ministers, and the WSPU's reputation was on the edge ("Missive from..." 2018). In 1908, for example, Pankhurst urged the crowd to invade the House of Commons, but the police intervened. Militant tactics had a form of violence, including attacks on property and law-breaking, which resulted in imprisonment and hunger strikes (Lance 52-55).

Some historians have criticised the WSPU's policies and described 'militancy' as a terrorist activity. In 2007, scholar Bearman, C. J. published an article in The *Historical Journal* entitled "An Army without Discipline? Suffragette Militancy and the Budget Crisis of 1909," in which he described the use of violence by the WSPU's suffragettes as a terrorist tactic, particularly when the House of the Lords rejected the bills sent to them between 1906 and 1909. In his opinion, damaging the public properties was a non-conformist behaviour, and these disrespectable tactics were a "counter-prejudice mistake which cause an adverse public reaction and justified the government in the introduction of forcible feeding" (861).

In contrast to Bearman's assumption, historian Hurwitz Edith was of the belief that the use of violence was a political necessity. For her; 'militancy' was a powerful lobbying tactic, since the British government had excluded women from conducting active leadership roles in parliamentary politics. The author challenged the claim that

the WSPU was a “terrorist movement”, for the local authorities had given Mrs. Pankhurst a minimum punishment possible under the law (739).

Scholar Andrew Rosen once stated that the WSPU’s militant actions were bold steps in the right direction in the overall goal of achieving female suffrage. Rosen has offered a critical view of the political ideologies of the Victorian suffrage societies such as the Anti-Corn League, the Manchester Society for Female Suffrage, the NUWSS, and many others. Rosen observed that these suffrage groups, which organised campaigns to raise public awareness about the cause, did fail in promoting votes for women. On the other hand, Rosen emphasised that the WSPU was an organised suffrage union that had its political branches across the United Kingdom. Also, he looked at the way in which the leaders of the WSPU maintained close links with the Independent Labour Party, established strong relationships with trade unions, and gained the support of working-class women (20-27).

Sophie Jeitler has investigated the developments and changes in the militant tactics of the WSPU and how the British government reacted to them. Jeitler challenged the British historians who attempted to play down the contributions of the militant suffragettes to the cause, arguing that the women's suffrage would have never gained such a popularity without the use of civil disobedience and violent action. She called attention to the French Revolution and how it achieved typical results due to the militancy and enthusiasm of its revolutionists. Finally, Jeitler has pointed out how the militant suffragettes continued to struggle for women's right to vote in the First World War, at a time when many other suffrage organisations shifted their interest to the participation in the war effort (Jeitler 2019).

In few exceptional cases, some historians have tended to focus upon the split occurred between the constitutionalists and militant suffragettes of the WSPU over the use of violent tactics. For example, Sandra Holton has indicated that most ‘constitutional’ suffragettes did not show sympathy for the arrested members, because they showed considerable fear concerning the ‘militant proclivities’ of some of the WSPU activists. In 1905, the Executive of the London Society decided that it is necessary to dissociate the ‘militant’ activists from their movement. A few months later, some active members in the London Society suspended the Hammersmith Society from the London Society (155).

Scholar Bearman has argued that this split subsequently resulted in a mutual political cooperation between the two wings of the movement on various political issues. From 1907 until 1910, the two suffrage unions cooperated with each other to discuss or settle a number of politically feminist issues. By October 1907, the National Union and WSPU addressed a meeting to press the Labour Party to introduce a constitutional amendment in support of female suffrage. In 1908, the National Union cooperated with the WFL, which was one of the WSPU’s local branches, on a plan for a forthcoming suffrage demonstration. In addition, the WSPU leaders were invited by the National Union organisation to prepare a leaflet comparing the election policies of the two bodies, and the WSPU selected Helen Fraser, a former WSPU spokesman, to become as a National Union organiser (864).

While Researcher Pugh Martin has observed that the WSPU and the NUWSS' early initiatives concentrated upon the struggle over the tactics, but no serious action was taken on the question of ‘female suffrage’. Pugh fervently believed that the two

wings of the movement were under-construction, and the question of universal suffrage did not really occupy a major part in political agenda the early Edwardian suffrage campaigns (358).

The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) had come to dominate the political spectrum, but they underwent several challenges. For example, there was a split in the movement due to the militant policies adopted by the leadership WSPU. Also, the two wings of the suffrage movement were in a disagreement over the political party that could advance their cause.

I. d. The Use of Petitions

The use of petitions was a powerful tool to raise awareness about the disenfranchisement status of women and other issues related to gender inequality. It provided the platform for women to articulate their grievances and demand action from the government and society. From the 1860s onwards, a considerable number of petitions were introduced to the House of Commons by leading suffragettes to enfranchise women.

The first petition was drafted by suffragette Mary Smith to enfranchise women. On 3 August 1832, during a parliamentary debate on the Reform Bill, Hansard reported that Mr. Hunt had a petition to present which might be a subject of mirth to some honorable gentlemen, but which was one deserving of consideration. The petition was presented to the House of Commons and included these claims. The first

three points revolved around the maltreatment that women received from their husbands.

> 1st. Because the weaker sex in manifestly entitled to claim, at least as well as the stronger, all the protection that the effective franchise can afford. 2nd. Because, there are crimes of a nature as horrid as, when committed by married men, to drive their wives to cut their own throats…3rd. Because, admitting that such a thing as an indelible crime could be plainly defined, the men who contend that every woman deserves to be disenfranchised and thereby degraded …In answer to such vulgar trash your Petitioner prays your Honorable House to consider that the widows and other unmarried women compose a very large portion of the British population; and that of many married women the husbands so far from being protectors, are the only persons against whom their wives have occasion to sue for protection.

In the fourth claim, Smith demanded that she must be assigned the right to vote on the grounds she was paying taxes very often and was subject to the same laws as men.

> 4th and lastly. Because the men who maintain opinions of such monstrous absurdity and cruel injustice are the notorious and avowed worshippers of the bones and doctrines of Thomas Paine, of reputation nearly as infamous as their own, and are constantly peculiarly prone to those execrable pro-pensities which are cursed with a malignant hostility to the female sex, and which are of a nature of horrible that the indulgence of them, when detected, drives their wives to cut their own throats. (Crawford 41).

The conservative elements in society, including the clergymen and traditionalists, viewed the enfranchisement of women as a serious threat to the established social order, for they had a common belief that women were not able of making informed political decisions. As MP Hunt predicted, the discussion of Mary Smith's petition in the House of Commons was a joke instead of a serious debate.

> The Irish Conservative Sir Frederick Trench said, it would be rather awkward if jury half males and half females were locked up together for a night, as now often happened with juries. This might lead to rather queer predicaments. (Murdoch 1)

From a critical point of view, Mary Smith's petition was presented to the Parliament in the wrong time for three interrelated reasons. First, the idea of political reform itself was almost entirely rejected by the majority of those who dominated the House of the Lords. Second, the politicians were hesitant to support female suffrage due to fears of upsetting the existing power dynamics. Third, Mary Smith found herself alone in a struggle against the commons.

Later, the Parliament responded by rejecting Smith's petition, and, thus, formalized the exclusion of women for the second time. The commons placed the word "person" instead of "male" in the original bill. The defeat of Mary Smith's petition reflected the dominance of the 'masculine model' over the government bodies. English political rulers of that time were agreed that democracy could only be achieved if both sexes were to be guided by natural law which was key for creating a more equitable and enlightened society.

Nevertheless, some British statesmen were in favour of women's enfranchisement, and drew attention to the fact that women at times were capable of holding leadership roles on many occasions. Central to this view was Sir Robert Peel's argument and his support to Mary Smith's petition by ballot.

> The theoretical arguments in favor of woman suffrage were at least as strong as those in favor of extending the franchise to women to which it was no easy matter to find a logical answer. Other and more important duties were entrusted to women. Women were allowed to hold

> property, to vote on many occasions in right of that property; nay, a woman might inherit the throne and perform all the functions of the first office of the state. Why should they not vote for a Member of Parliament? (Cady Santon and Gage. 835)

Sir Robert Peel used the Queen as a perfect example to support female suffrage. However, Queen Victoria was a true representative of 'the angel in the house,' and she once stated that both men and women were naturally created different and that wives should submit with filial obedience to their husbands. Although she was a paradox herself, the Queen of an empire was portrayed in conventional feminine postures. In 1870, she wrote the following statement: "Let women be what God intended, a helpmate for man, but with totally different duties and vocations." (Bingham 134)

Furthermore, Mary's petition received harsh criticism from male-dominated newspapers. They have documented the weak logic behind the petition, and reported the laughter of the gentlemen in the House of Commons on its content. *The Spectator* was more sarcastic. In its opening gambit was to suggest that 'the real way to deal with such a demand, when made by persons of average sense and education, is to show that it is unreasonable'. The article mocked the content of the petition, and noted that Mary Smith failed to suggest any conclusion on the franchise:

> Mrs. Smith's petition is simply absurd: the jests of the Commons were beastly… With regard to Mrs. SMITH'S foolish petition, it is only necessary to inform persons who think with her, that political ringlets, such as voting for members, &c., are necessary evils to individuals, to guard against greater to the public; and that, when public security is obtained, no more voters are wanted (13).

In addition, the article revealed the fact that a woman's role was to be the pious, subdued, subordinate homemaker (influenced of course by very traditional religious ideas of hierarchy - with man as the head of the family, and Eve originally carved from Adam's rib). As such, the expectations upon them - enforced by wider society - made them vulnerable to criticism and chastisement in the event they stepped outside of these expectations.

> In all affairs of civil rights, women are the gainers in their being administered solely by men. No woman on her trial would prefer a female jury. When the difference of sex interposes, justice is tempered by tenderness. What good-looking rogue would not prefer a jury of matrons? (13)

The defeat of Mary's petition suggests that she lacked the political expertise to offer a useful opinion about political issues. As Mary Poovey pointed out, "the [Suffrage Movement] we most often associate with the Victorian period was both contested and under construction; because it was always in the making, it was always open to revision… and it developed unevenly." (3)

Many petitions to enfranchise women were introduced to the Parliament by leading suffragettes. Therefore, the arguments concerning female suffrage from 1832 until 1867 may be properly treated in one place together.

In 1865, the Kensington Society and the Manchester Committee for the Enfranchisement of Women did draft a petition to the Parliament to enfranchise women. They took their petition to the MPs Henry Fawcett and John Stuart Mill believed that: "…the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes — the legal subordination of one sex to the other — is wrong, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement." (1).

On 20 May 1867, John Stewart Mill and Elizabeth Garrett introduced the Second Reform Bill in order to replace the word 'man' with 'person'. But MP Edward Kent Karslake opposed the amendment, stating that he did not meet any woman who strenuously wanted the right to vote on an equal basis as man. (Justin 2012).

In response, the three ladies Lydia Becker, Helen Taylor, and Mrs. Frances Power Cobbe, collected signatures of women to prove their cause to Edward Karslake, and they gathered 129. On July 25, 1867, Karslake presented the list to the parliament; however, Mill's amendment was rejected by 196 votes to 73.

The petitions presented to Parliament by the leaders of the suffrage movement succeeded only in showing that woman's place should be in the home. The history of these efforts presented the curious problem of no advancement being achieved in Parliament, despite the fact that the matter was kept before the commons, and with some of them having heavy majorities on second reading. In summing up the defeat of the suffragettes' petitions, Norman Gash, Professor of modern history at St Andrews University, argued the idea of universal suffrage and gender equality seemed odd for most 19th-century British decision-makers who had no interest in democracy. "The Acts were passed by men who had no belief in the kind of political democracy implicit in universal suffrage and equality of electoral districts". (57)

In spite of the fact that the suffrage pioneers did fail to enfranchise women throughout the nineteenth century, historians emphasised that the use of petitions was a unique political strategy. For example, scholar Sophia Van Wingerden has analyzed the petitions presented to the House of Commons by leading suffragettes, believing that the suffrage movement paved the way to what she called 'the floors of

Parliament.' Wingerden assumed the history of the women's suffrage movement was 'a chronological whole,' from the moment when a group of women suffragists presented the first women's suffrage petition to the House of Commons to the year when women obtained a universal suffrage in 1928 (xxii). Wingerden divided her work into three main sections; starting with a brief introduction to the intellectual background of the movement; then moving to explore the petitions presented to the House of Commons by leading figures of the movement; and finally tracing the main obstacles that delayed the winning of the vote. In addition, the author suggested that the uniqueness of the women's movement clearly appears in the number of petitions presented to the House of Commons, assuming that such political initiatives were not common among other feminist movement during this period. She covered all the petitions presented by suffragists to the British Parliament, and estimated them at about 1.000, containing over three million signatures. During a period of thirty years, she concluded, more than 1300 public meetings were held despite the fact that women attending meetings were thought to be most terribly and dangerous (25).

Researcher Susan Zaeske had directed her efforts to study the American women's suffrage movement, and in 2003 she published her book *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, & Women's Political Identity: Signatures of Citizenship*. Zaeske was convinced that the petitions presented to the Parliament by leading suffragettes were a form of political activism that not only contributed to the success of the movement but also proved to be a 'watershed moment' in the emergence of the American women as political actors.

> Female involvement in the petition campaign against slavery, which built upon previous though limited experiences of women petitioning collectively, constitutes an early instance of large members of women exercising their right of petition as a group to influence national policy making (12).

Feminist historian Barbara Caine was amongst the very few feminist scholars who inspected not only the feminist campaigns to reform the legal status of married women and girls' education, but also the evolution of the suffrage campaigns. In her article "Feminism, Suffrage and the Nineteenth-Century English Women's Movement," she believed that the use of petitions had a political dimension because they laid the foundation for the establishment of equal and full voting rights and access to employment and educational opportunities to all British women. Furthermore, Caine has argued that the women's suffrage movement was 'the missing link' between early nineteenth-century feminist visions of greater sexual freedom and the more progressive discussions of women's political rights that began to emerge in the 1860s. The petition, Caine argued, was a reforming instrument directed primarily to challenge patriarchal views regarding women's role in society. While it is true that the women's suffrage movement did not produce immediate results since it was formally established in 1865, the suffragists, however, made bold attempts to reform the legal status of married women and to enhance women's direct involvement in suffrage and employment campaigns (573-544).

Although the suffragettes' initiatives evolved new conceptions of personal independence and changing social conditions that aimed to bring about the almost complete enfranchisement to all British citizens, the domination of women by men through the operation of law and custom was quite explicit in the nineteenth century,

and women were still denied from the right to vote. From a critical point of view, petitioning was a conscious strategy used to negotiate increased political rights and influence upon middle-class opinion, but also the one that failed to lead to effective political outputs.

I. e. Achievements of the Women's Suffrage Movement in Education, Marriage Reform, and Female Suffrage

Scholars and historians of feminism have generally argued that the women's suffrage movement in nineteenth century Britain represented a significant milestone in the fight for girls' education. Nevertheless, when analysing the available historical documents, it is easy to observe a scant role played by the suffragettes in the campaigns for girls' education. Although the education of girls was one of the key demands of the post-1850 feminist movement, the suffrage advocates did not contribute to policies and strategies of tangible educational reform. Jordan Ellen, a lecturer of sociology at the University of Newcastle, has analyzed the writings and speeches of almost all the nineteenth-century commentators on the education of girls. She found that among the feminist circles interested in educational change were the proto-feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft and Emily Davies; the comparative conservatives like Hannah More and Dorothea Beale; those defined by Sara Delamont as separists who wished to develop a specifically female curriculum and academic structure, and those she called uncompromising who wanted to make the girls' curriculum identical with the boys (440-442). It must be said that most prominent advocates for girls' education such as Emily Davies, Josephine Butler, and

Emily Sherriff had never associated their movement with the suffrage networks of that time.

In 1979, Margret Bryant published *The Unexpected Revolution: A Study in the History of the Education of Women and Girls in the Nineteenth Century*, a book which provided an openly critical approach to the women who contributed to the advancement of girls' education in Britain in the nineteenth century. For Bryant, the struggle for girls' education was confined mainly to the educationalists and the heroic leaders such as Emily Davies, Frances Buss and Dorothea Beale who saw the winning of secondary and higher education for young girls as the first step to eliminating all forms of sexual discrimination against women. Further, Shelia Fletcher, an outstanding and highly original historian of women's education and of women's lives, has associated the progress being made in the field of girls' education with a number of factors that she referred to as "the agents". As such, the bureaucrats, the unsung men of government, who played a central role in the campaign for secondary schooling for British girls in the 1860s and 70s. Also, the moral and religious underpinnings put forward by middle-class evangelicals and the more pious churchmen. Finally, the utilitarians and positivists who underlined the importance of education in ensuring girls' and women's ability to claim other rights and achieve status in society (Prentice 215).

It is important to stress upon the fact that the dominant women's suffrage organisations had never discussed the question of girls' education in their councils, meetings, and their various political branches. Between 1870 and 1876, for instance, the women's suffrage societies organised several meetings to discuss the question of

suffrage but nothing on education. As historian Elizabeth Crawford has argued, “the suffrage leaders were primarily interested to obtain the parliamentary franchise for widows and spinsters on the same conditions as those on which it is granted to men” (Simikin 1997).

Based on these counter-arguments, why did historians state that the women’s suffrage movement was central to girls’ educational reform? As a matter of fact, they used two central arguments to prove that the suffrage movement was at the heart of girls’ educational reform. One of which is that Emily Davies was one of the influential leaders in the women’s suffrage movement. Although Davies’ involvement in the suffrage movement did not last more than two years, between 1865 and 1867, scholar Andrew Rosen has argued that she was inspired by this experience that powerfully shaped her experience in the reforming of girls’ higher education (101).

For some of them, the passage of the Education Act of 1870 was a clear index that the suffragettes were at the heart of education reform and voting culture. This Act made it permissible for women to be candidates to serve on the School Boards. In the same year, four suffragettes, the like of Flora Stevenson, Lydia Becker, Emily Davies and Elizabeth Garrett were elected to local School Boards. Elizabeth Garrett, a popular local doctor, obtained more votes Marylebone than any other candidate in the country. John Simikin observed that this opportunity showed how feminists were capable of holding leadership roles in the public administration (Simikin 2020).

Researcher Sophia Van Wingerden has insisted that the passage of the Education Act of 1870 must be attributed to the suffragettes. Van Wingerden drew attention to

the fact that the question of vote was not forthcoming, but a major progress has been achieved by the suffragettes on the question of education.

> The 1870 Education Act further expanded women's ability to be politically active by allowing women both to vote and stand for School Boards. By 1889, some 100 women were serving on School Boards, a figure that had doubled by 1900 (38).

Thus, it appears from these two examples that the impact of the suffrage movement on education is manifested in women's political activity both in voting and standing for School Boards.

During the Victorian period, money and property were important aspects for women when choosing a partner and electing their representatives in the Parliament. After marriage, a woman's freedom would be limited, and her husband would have absolute control over her former property. That is to say, the man gained control of all the woman's possessions, even if a woman had personal property after marriage, the man automatically took control of it, and if a woman did have a job; all of her incomes went to her husband. In addition, women were not legal representatives of their children and it was only after the 1839 Custody of Infants Act that it was "possible for wives estranged from their husbands to gain custody of children less than seven years old" (Nelson 51).

Some historians claimed that the women's suffrage movement powerfully affected married women's property and legal laws in England throughout the nineteenth century. Mary Lyndon Shanley, a feminist legal scholar specializing in issues of the American family and reproductive technologies, was of the opinion that the suffrage movement paved the way to a substantial number of changes affecting the formal

constraints on married women's lives. She has pointed out, "the changing legal status of married women was the result of the extension of the franchise, employment, and other rights to women" (76).

Researcher Murray Alexandra has inspected the central role that the suffragettes played in the campaigns for married women's rights. In her opinion, the suffragists did not cast marriage aside, but they set out to reform the existing legal regulation. It was not the existence of legal regulations itself that they challenged but the unique treatment of the marriage contract (146).

In 2021, Jacquelyn Wenneker has adopted the interpretation that one of the main achievements in the nineteenth century in relation to married women rights was the passage of the pair Acts of Married Women's Property Rights in the British Parliament in 1870 and 1882, respectively. Allowing a married woman to hold a property in the late nineteenth-century England, she argued, marked a turning point in the political history of feminism. Also, she mentioned the various suffrage organisations that contributed to the passage of the Acts such as the Law Amendment Society and the Langham Place Group. In addition, Wenneker believed that these parliamentary Acts were carried out through the channels of female politics as usual. Among them were the leading figures in the women's suffrage movement such as Barbara Leigh, Caroline Cornwallis, and Frances Power Cobbee, who had contributed through their writings, speeches, and meetings to advancing the issue (Wenneker 2021).

Some British scholars have maintained that the women's suffrage movement affected the Acts passed in the Parliament to grant women the right to vote. The

history of these efforts began with the introduction of the Municipal Franchise Act in 1869. This Act made unmarried ratepayers eligible for the right to vote in local government elections (Rix 2019). While the Local Government Act of 1884 extended the right to vote to include some married women (Heater 136). By 1900, more than 1 million women were registered to vote in local government elections in England (Neil 37).

More Acts entitling women the right to vote were passed in the British Parliament, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century. Historian Brain Walker has recently stated that the Representation of the People Act of 1918 was one of the great political achievements of the women's suffrage movement in the twentieth century (35). This Act aimed to reform the electoral system both in Great Britain and Ireland. Among its political outputs, women, over the age of 30, and who had a property, were eligible to vote in the elections (Pugh 1974).

Basic ideas about gender roles changed after the war. Some women publicly embraced new access to traditionally male professions. New forms of social interaction between the sexes and across class lines became possible, and expectations about family and domestic life as the dominant sphere for women changed too.

> The old delimitation of function was nowhere sharper in the domain of war. Men must fight and women must weep: men must deface God's image and women must patch it up again: men must explode shells and women must sew shirts- such were the expected rules of the game. The [Great] war has found women tackling wider responsibilities in a more modern spirit. ('Women's Social and Political Union' pp. 1-5)

The post-war might be described as a period of dramatic change of increasingly socio-political reforms. They included much reform in equal pay, equal educational opportunities for both sexes, and the right to vote for all adult women. Scholar Ray Strachey has associated the positive changes in women's position in the post-war era with the important role that the suffragettes played at the national level.

> This historical acceleration was the direct result of women's largely acclaimed entry on an unprecedented scale into areas of employment that had previously or even exclusively male. The connection between this war work and the winning of the vote was obvious… The massive achievements of women doctors and nurses, and all feminist intellectuals in the social welfare made emancipation inevitable. (Lefebvre 3)

Between 1918 and 1925, the Parliament passed twenty laws affecting women. When in 1918, the vote was extended to women over thirty years; it was followed by a series of political reforms which did much to support the political rights of women. These reforms included the Matrimonial Cause Act of 1923 which extended the grounds on which either partner could obtain divorce. The Guardianship of Infants Act of 1925 which gave both parents equal rights over the guardianship of their offspring. These Acts came as a result of women's high pressure on the government to exercise their full rights. Eleanor Rathbone, the leader of the National Union for Equal Citizenship, argued that women in post-war years claimed adequate social and political benefits from the state.

> We can demand what we want for women, not because it is what men have got but because it is what women need to fulfill the potentialities of their own natures and to adjust themselves to the circumstances of their own lives. (Bonnie 297)

Between 1920 and 1924, some of the younger suffragists including Sophia Merivale, Mabel Grundy, Florence Quick, Anna Collier, Isabella Harrison-Hall and many others participated in local politics and some of them were elected as city and country councilors. These women were supported by the women's suffrage organisations established just after WWI. These suffrage groups attempted to capture the new female's electorate's vote and support. They organised women only groups and set up political and social clubs where they organised meetings in the city center and local ward.

The rapid growth of women's associations contributed, in the end, to the winning of universal suffrage in 1928. Some of these established women's parliamentary branches were connected with MP's wives to provide a strong political network. In 1928, the Equal Franchise Act was finally passed in the House of Commons. The Act was referred to as 'universal suffrage' because it entitled the right to vote to all women as men. A universal suffrage was the resulting potential of the efforts played by the suffragettes, who displayed a great deal of courage in expressing their ideas and feelings at a time when this was not part of acceptable feminine behavior. As Sandra Holton has pointed out:

> It served also to further the alliance between feminist and progressive politics in the years of the twentieth century by asserting that the possibility of social reforms lay only within a feminized polity. (21)

It could be said that the universal suffrage was politically significant to the extent that the British women have had the right to express their political preference regardless of the census, gender, religion, etc. The privileges of the higher classes, the more

repressive religious views toward womanhood, and the prejudices of some people regarding the female's capacities of judgment were finally removed.

Conclusion

There is a number of reasons that justify the over-exaggerated historical attention to the women's suffrage movement. One of which is that the suffrage movement was a highly politicized discourse compatible with social and political reform. Histories of the suffrage movement between 1860 and 1900 have attempted to uncover the uses of the franchise as an integral part in establishing the legitimacy of modern democracy. In *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain*, historian Ray Strachey traced carefully women's struggle for personal, legal, political and social liberties from the late eighteenth century until after the First World War. Part of his work focused on the role of feminist activists in the suffrage campaigns, drawing remarkable portraits of the personalities involved such as Harriet Taylor, John Stuart Mill, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, Millicent Fawcett, Josephine Butler, and many others. Strachey believed that the women's suffrage movement in England helped not only to spread ideas on women's suffrage, but also to provide openings for the most authentic expression of democracy and equal civil rights, particularly from the late 1860s through to the 1900s (Strachey 1969).

Also, historians have over-emphasised that the women's suffrage movement's historical primacy is manifested in the symbolic value of the vote. They asserted that many petitions were presented to the British Parliament by leading suffragettes to enfranchise women. In addition, the question of women's future role in politics was already raised within the suffrage councils and branches at a time when many of the

women's rights movements were unable to discuss. According to JoEllen Lind, “voting... afford us the theoretic ability to assert our status as full citizens, to participate in political discourse, to obtain legislation capable of changing the private relations of individuals and groups in the civil society, and to mobilize the public around issues of importance” (105).

Another aspect is that the women’s suffrage movement enhanced collective and political identities for women. Scholars Della Porta and Diani have explored the notion of 'dutiful work', and demonstrated how the suffragettes created women’s identities through their involvement in the diverse mosaic of social and political reform organisations. They argued that nineteenth-century feminist activists have often strived to defend women's rights by transforming their daily sufferings into public opinion. This action tended to increase women's consciousness and give expression to women as an independent political category united by certain social and cultural disabilities, and articulated this in opposition to men (Della Porta and Diani 2006).

CHAPTER TWO

The Role of the Owenites and Freethinkers in Developing Feminist Thought in the 1830s and 40s

Introduction

This chapter suggests that the major feminist demands were closely bound up with the feminist intellectual circles. A fuller understanding of the important role that the radical Owenites and Freethinkers played on the questions of sexual morality, marriage, free love unions, and education, enables us to identify a more continuous feminist tradition throughout the 1830s and 40s. In addition to the Owenites and Freethinkers, this chapter offers a brief summary about the dominant feminist intellectual circles in the nineteenth century. It explores their social origin, their tactics, and the major demands in their evolution. Among them were the radical feminists such as the Proto-feminists, Unitarians, and the Secularists. The moderate feminist intellectuals (Quakers) are also touched upon. The intent, of course, is to identify all the feminist intellectual circles which will feature in this thesis.

II. a. Owenite Debates on Sexual Morality, Marriage Reform, and Free Love Unions

The 1820s in England saw the emergence of Owenism; a utopian socialist philosophy that aimed for radical social reform and the reconstruction of society on the basis of science, economic independence, and mutual cooperation between the sexes. Its founder, Robert Owen, a 19th-century social reformer, urged both men and women to join the Owenite cooperative communities, including New Lanark and

New Harmony, where sexual inequalities were to be eliminated and organised religion to be replaced by free thinking, reason and rationality (Alison 34). Owen once said that 'communal living' would help to create an egalitarian atmosphere whereby men and women would be treated equally, rather than selfish living under patriarchal values dominated by sexism and social disparity (Kolmerten 31).

Theoretically speaking, Owen provided a thorough-going account of the roots of women's oppression, and he saw the question of woman's emancipation as inseparable from the struggle against religious superstitions, the institution of marriage, and private property. Owen viewed religion as part of 'the old immoral world,' and asserted that the Christian Scripture was the source of human's misery (Toth 108-112). In addition, Owen contended that Christian institution of marriage operated double standard and turned women into a male property and produced single-family interests. Finally, Owen concluded that private property transformed all human relationships into competitive contests for individual gain (Langdon 14).

Seemingly, the Owenite feminist ideology developed in opposition to sexual repression for either both sexes. The Owenites claimed that 'equality' and 'mutual cooperation' between the sexes were necessary to humanity's progress, rather than religious and social dogma (Suksang 95). Within cooperative societies, men and women would have the same rights and equal access to educational and employment opportunities. The key feature of the Owenite societies was the implementation of the cooperative principles, where profits were reinvested into the community and shared among the workers. Owen believed this would lead to social harmony and prosperity

for all. In an article published in the Owenite press in 1839, an advocate Owenite woman explained what it meant to be part of the Owenite movement.

> I perceive, now that through the circulation of truth we are progressing towards the mansion of happiness, which, when gained, will give emancipation to every human being from one end of the earth to the other. (Segal 167)

The Owenites strongly advocated the idea that only women's equality could bring in a better world that would maintain the bourgeois norm of two distinct spheres more and more tenaciously elsewhere: the need for a competitive approach soothed by the sentimental sanctuary of womanhood.

In 1835, Robert Owen published his ten lectures ‘The Marriages of the Priesthood in the Old Immoral World,' in response to the Christian marriage doctrines. As a further extension of his feminist philosophy, Owen urged all Owenite members, male and female, to form far more liberal marriages based on mutual affection and respect, rather than religious dictates. Furthermore, Owen refused the notion that the heterosexual relationships to be legitimized by the moral authority of the Established Church, based on the premise that the situation of married women hardly improved under the banner of Christianity. Nevertheless, Owen’s lectures had received harsh criticism from the clergymen with which they accused him of poisoning the British society with debauchery. In this sense, one clergyman warned: "Let no man, let no woman especially, and dare to become a Socialist without first reading these ten lectures" (Taylor 184).

As it is already stated above, Robert Owen entirely rejected religion, Christianity in particular, because it was the main source for women’s oppression. A set of

arguments are put forward to explain why Christianity was incompatible with the Owenite feminist perceptions, particularly with respect to the degraded status of married woman and her political rights.

The Owenite feminist attack on Christianity was framed as a response to one of its claims that women were created to exist in a subordinate position to men. As the dominant religion in Britain, Christianity, and in particular the state Church of England, helped to codify views of women which assisted in their oppression. Women in particular were bound by the expectations of what it meant to be a moral, socially respectable figure during the 19th century, and in the early 19th century to be religious was to be moral. A woman's role was to be the pious, subdued, subordinate homemaker, influenced of course by very traditional religious ideas of hierarchy - with man as the head of the family, and Eve originally carved from Adam's rib. The evangelicals advocated female obedience and submission to her husband and insisted that women should not have leadership roles in society. The oppression of women had its roots in the literal interpretation of the Bible and the repressive views of St. Paul, which mentioned that Eve was the source of evil and led to the Fall of Adam (Taylor 78-79). That is, Christianity could be interpreted as having a particularly restrictive view of the role of women emphasising their role in childbearing and taking care of the husband and the children.

Considering the manner in which Victorian women were separated from the world of employment, education and legal enfranchisement, it is easy to observe that married women were subject to slavery under Christianity. Very recently, scholar Lerner Gerda has adopted the interpretation that the Christian institution of marriage

was a source of ‘social control’ which allowed men to hold power in all the important institutions of society and denied women from having access to such power (239). In the same vein, Gila Stopler, an Associate Professor of law and legal history, went on to argue that the churchmen employed a more conservative understanding of traditional marriages to enforce boundaries between the Church and other institutions, by adhering to male authority and female submission in lifelong marriages. This meant, amazingly, Christianity could easily endorse societies where cultures were already oppressive to women or were simply male-dominated. Within the Christian institution of marriage, she argued, women lost their legal rights, which were transferred to their husbands and masters upon marriage (Stopler 2008).

Leadership roles in the British society were reserved to the males, for the clergymen were too hostile to the feminist movements in a variety of ways. A trustee British historian Joseph McCabe believed that the main obstacle to women's entry into the male-dominated political sphere in the nineteenth century was the religious constructions of womanhood which kept women from voting. Thus, women were denied access to a variety of employment and educational opportunities during this period. McCabe noticed that leading clergymen were drawn from the ruling class and reflected their repressive attitudes to womanhood. They used Scripture and St. Paul’s more repressive views on marriage and his opposition to women speaking in the churches to support the idea that women could not play a prominent role in politics, other than their ‘destined roles’ as subservient mothers and wives (36).

An article in *The Contemporary Review* entitled "Women's Suffrage and the Teaching of St. Paul" emphasised that Christianity was responsible for excluding

women from the spheres recently dominated by their male counterparts. It investigated the speeches of St. Paul to prove that these repressive views existed in the literal interpretation of Scripture, from which emerged all modern laws discriminating against women (Schwartz 272).

As these arguments illustrate, a woman was always expected to display religious piety, sexual purity, subordination, and satisfaction with her domestic seclusion. Further, religion has given way to an ever-increasing recognition that women were incapable of having leadership roles in society other than in their roles as mothers and housewives.

The Owenite press has also played a central role in promoting Owen's radical views on sexual morality to a broad and influential audience. Writings of the prominent Owenite figures were documented, and there appeared many letters and articles by women on the issue of sexual morality. For example, Frances Wright, who was a public speaker in the Owenite movement, founded *The Free Enquirer*, whose aim was "to open the eyes of the gentler sex to the nature of their situation in society, and to excite their attention to the discovery of some remedy for the unjust disabilities of which law and custom subjected them" (Warbasse 91). In 1826, leading Owenite William Thompson wrote an article in the London Cooperative Magazine in response to the Darwinist theory of Evolution. He claimed that the human race was often associated with masculinity everywhere, while a more equitable system existed in many other animal species. The answer, he suggested, was to be found in women's physical weakness and "the prolonged helplessness of the young of the human race",

but to this natural inferiority were then added “fictitious failings” which were “the mere results of the vicious circumstances surrounding women” (Taylor 24).

Reconstructing the heterosexual relationships on the basis of equality was one of the major demands that Robert Owen and his supporters were striking to achieve in reality. As many Owenites argued, the Christian institution of marriage was the source of human selfishness and the cause of female oppression (Gleadle 117-128). They had viewed the Christian marriage as enhancing gender inequality and sexual repression, and it placed the wives’ freedom under the authority of their husbands and fathers (Dixler 316).

Seemingly, married women suffered both subjection and discrimination in terms of law. As such, women in the presence of their husbands were invisible. That means, they had no freedom to make decisions on family issues and other political matters (Glen 28). Women were not allowed to enter contracts, own property, and take control over her children, “whose guardianship passed from her husband to his nearest male relative at his death” (Martin 115). Furthermore, middle-class women were the victims of a double standard morality which involved the imposition of a far stricter code of sexual behaviour upon them than upon men of the same class. For example, a wife who committed adultery lost all rights to maintenance and was liable to be abandoned on the basis of judicial separation. Whilst an adulterous husband suffered no penalty, could pursue a wife who left him on account of his infidelity and sue her harbourers and if he abandoned her, he could only be made to provide support on the basis of court order establishing her need (Shanley 79-80). Finally, divorce was exclusively available to those who had the thousand pounds necessary to get a Private

Member's Bill passed in the House of Commons dissolving their union; otherwise it was legally impossible; no woman had ever won a divorce in this way, although a number of men did (Kha 37).

The campaign to reform the laws of marriage started as early as 1835, and its political programme was proposed by some of the leading figures in the Owenite movement. Among them were Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, William Thompson, Eliza Sharples, Emma Martin, and James Smith. They critiqued the Christian institution of marriage, for the manner it converted women into a male property, and demanded that a married woman should have the right to legally own her properties. To guarantee women's freedom and security, they also called for 'free love unions' or stressing women's right to leave unhappy marriages (Schwartz 781). Such a belief, directly or indirectly, gave birth to the campaign for the right of married women to hold property, which Elizabeth Wolstenholme later became one of its prominent leaders.

In unfolding a vision of a free and wholly non-repressive society, the French Socialist Charles Fourier was interested in charting a connection between the decline of organised patriarchy and the rise of economic individualism (Hecht 1988). Fourier was a firm believer in women's economic independence, and he raised a basic assumption that the actual marriage code made women unable to hold control over their legal properties. To eliminate any difference on grounds of sex, Fourier saw the need to remove the arbitrary existed in the marriage laws in order to advance married women's rights.

> The fundamental cause of all social progress… Social progress and changes of the period are brought about by virtue of the progress of women towards liberty, and social retrogression occurs as a result of a diminution in the liberty of women. It was argued, however, that a system of marriage has saturated with injustices, and served not only to disable women in the subordinate role, but also to unbind the social fabric (Keith 113).

The Owenites recommended that men and women should have the right to equally hold property. That is, if men and women had relied on the communal unit for their basic material needs, male domination would have lost all economic foundation.

Encouraging the women to attend public debates was a smart strategy adopted by Robert Owen and the Owenites to weaken the authority of the Church and raise awareness about women's rights. A free public discussion involved various topics such as the critique of Scripture, marriage, divorce, female suffrage, and education. The wives and daughters of skilled factory workers or artisans were the category of women who frequently attended these debates (Taylor 12-13).

These debates were a form of political activism that the Owenite lecturers used to create a sphere of action among the working classes in general. In 1840, for example, the Owenite lecturer James Clarke debated his Christian opponent Reverend Bromley, and the central theme revolved around the inequalities resulting from Priesthood marriages. The debate took place in Macclesfield, North West of London. The number of attendees among the female audience was estimated at "about more than 600 women, was crowded to excess, and hundreds who could not gain admittance had to retire disappointed; others crowded at the windows outside, and broke them to gain a hearing, so great was the anxiety." The Christian lecturer felt uncomfortable and sometimes misplaced his notes and forgot his arguments. At one

point he quoted several passages from a free love text which he claimed was written by Robert Owen but turned out to be from Shelley's Queen Mab. A local Socialist branch secretary commented that "the women who attended the debate were ready to join the Owenite movement" (Royle 80).

These public debates posed a serious threat to the Established Church; because women would blindly trust Owen's libertarian views more than the moral lessons offered to them by the clergymen. In 1839, a "Methodist Preacher" attended a public debate organised by one of the Owenite lecturers and mentioned that "thousands of women" were extremely happy when the lecturer urged them to leave unhappy marriages and form a liberal marriage (Taylor 190). In addition, *The New Moral World*, a dominant Owenite journal, documented the following: when George Fleming lectured to his female audience on women's right to divorce in Great Yarmouth in 1840, "many women at the end "pressed forward to shake hands with the lecturer, and to wish him health and strength to spread his glorious tidings of emancipation, equality and justice to the poor, ill-used women" (Taylor 192). Undoubtedly, the Owenites posited a feminist response to Christian persecution and hypocrisy on questions of sex and marriage in an attempt to allow women to celebrate their rights as natural and independent citizens.

The Owenites advocated 'free love unions' in a deliberate position to the prevailing marriage system, based only on love and sexual attraction, which could be dissolved at will. From this perspective, if a woman was living unhappy marriage, it was possible for her to leave her husband and form a union with another man. These liberal marriages were free from the sanction of Church and State, and they included

communal living arrangements where all labour, especially domestic chores, would be divided equally between the partners (Schwartz 781-82).

Why was it necessary for the couples to form a union? In answer to this question, leading Freethinker Richard Carlile offered a set of more or less ideological assumptions: that the dominant marriage system ruled out the possibility of equality between the partners both in economic and political terms; that free love would ensure equal dignity and independence for both partners; and that the moral responsibilities of love would actually be enhanced by dispensing with the hypocrisy of marriage (McCalman 19).

The central proposal of the Owenites' sexual system was that Christian marriage be replaced by flexible free love schemes. For example, it was permissible for couples who were emotionally attracted to each other to form a union and declare their intention in one of the Owenites' Sunday assemblies. But, of course, their union should at least last about three months. After that, they would make a second public declaration which, registered in the books of their society, would announce them officially as husband and wife. Over the course of twelve months, if the couples felt unsatisfied with the union, they should return home for a sentence of six months. If they were still unhappy, they would be given an immediate divorce (Cook 44). In free love unions, unlike the traditional marriages, access to divorce was permissible for both partners, and there would be no legal restrictions to be imposed on women's burden. This is clear evidence that Owen's system was at the heart of female emancipation, security, and happiness.

Nevertheless, these liberal marriages were entirely opposed by the Victorian society, for the clergymen asserted that chastity was a very precarious virtue maintained only under the strictest surveillance. In this sense, one clergyman made the following declaration.

> It is marriage alone which makes a woman honored and honorable; and it is as a wife she alone can bring forth those true endearments and refinements that bind her near to our hearts, and make us value her as we do (Owen 38).

In reply, Robert Owen asserted that the Christian marriages enslaved both men and women. The central argument that Owen put forward is that the Priesthood marriages enhanced the individual competition for wealth and ruled out the possibility of equality between the sexes.

> Now it is much more important to the well-being and happiness of man, that the human organisation of any of the inferior animals should be thus made more perfect. The improvements of the organization of man, however, have been neglected and must be neglected, as long as the marriages devised by the priests and sanctioned by governments as a divine institution, and conducted on the principle of individual competition for individual wealth, shall remain the law of the land (Owen 38)

It must be said that not all the Owenites were in agreement with these liberal marriages, for they were concerned that accusations of debauchery, prostitution and other forms of sexual libertinage would be hurled at the Owenites by the Established Church and the State. In 1833, a female Owenite, writing to *The Crisis* under the name of “Concordia”, criticized these more liberal marriages and insisted that they should be rejected in full. She proposed that “her society must experience a great revolution in attitudes before the public opinion was ready for Owen's proposals.” In reply, Robert Owen stated that he “did not intend his views on marriage to be adopted

in the present state of society, nor did he wish that any of his followers should incur the scorn of the world" (Cook 45).

While it is true that the Owenites were unsuccessful in reforming the Christian institution of marriage, their importance, however, lay in developing a thorough critique of traditional mores concerning marriage, sex, and the family. For sure, Robert Owen and his associates helped to introduce many new ideas and created a new understanding about sexual morality. Also, they had rejected the moral authority of the Church in legitimizing the heterosexual relationships, for it created inequalities between the sexes and prevented women from enjoying their rights. In spite of the fact that Owen's ideas did not gain immediate general acceptance in Victorian society, they remained to influence later discussions of these subjects.

II. b. Freethinkers as the Original Promoters of the Education of Women

The term 'Freethinker' is used to refer to the persons or individuals who promoted anti-clerical views or convictions. The cognitive application of Freethought was formed on the basis of 'free inquiry,' 'reason', and 'science'. In the following statement, Adam Lee has defined Freethought as a "thinking which is independent of revelation, tradition, established belief, and authority that embraces a rainbow of unorthodoxy, religious dissent, scepticism, and unconventional thinking."("What is Freethought?" 2021).

On the whole, organised Freethought in Britain was dominated by a number of middle-class intellectual radicals. In the eighteenth century, Thomas Paine was the first to advocate this brand of 'agnostic' thinking, by disseminating scepticism about

Christianity to a broad and influential audience. Paine insisted that religion needs to be rejected in full, for it starved the poor people and enfeebled their minds with superstitions (Royle 29). In the nineteenth century, Freethought continued to be advocated by a number of intellectual radicals, including Richard Carlile, George Jacob Holyoke, Robert Owen, Joseph Barker, and many others. These Freethinkers had associated themselves most directly with a struggle against the authoritarian government and the Established Church (Schwartz 2012).

The numbers of women involved in organised Freethought were relatively small. They included Harriet Martineau (1802- 1876), who supported women's right to education and offered far more rational arguments in favour of the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (Walkowitz 79). Sara Hennell (1812-1899) was friends with George Jacob Holyoake, with whom she published Freethinking tracts before she encountered organised Secularism. Harriet Law (1831-1897) was probably the most prominent and important feminist figure in organised Freethought; she gained prominence as a public preacher and was well-known for disrupting churches and religious meetings and denouncing ministers in the middle of their sermons. She also edited the national newspaper The Secular Chronicle from 1876 and 1879 (Schwartz 65-6). Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy (1833-1918) was active in the British women's rights movement and contributed to the wider campaign of women's suffrage in the 19th century (Wright, 2011). Annie Besant (1847-1933) rose under the patronage of Charles Bradlaugh and became a vice president of the National Secular Society in 1875. She also achieved recognition as a public speaker and prolific journalist for the Secularist movement.

Although nineteenth-century Freethinkers were viewed as a liability due to their unorthodox views, they powerfully supported feminist claims, especially on the questions of suffrage, education, and the legal protection to practice prostitution. Recently, Olive Banks has examined the feminists who were active in the wider feminist movement and found that more than 32 per cent were Freethinkers or 'agnostics'. She suggested that Freethinkers played an axial role in the campaigns for female suffrage and education, and believed that their active contributions need to be given a serious historical attention (Gleadle and Richardson 134–152). The presence of Freethinkers in campaigns around marriage and prostitution was also noted by histories of feminist debates on sexuality (Walkowitz 101-2).

Some contemporary scholars like Laura Schwartz, Edward Royle, and Barbara Taylor have generally agreed that Freethought was built around ‘religious controversy’ and ‘contestation. While the untold truth is that the Freethinkers called for women to be educated on the basis of science, reason, and rationality, and demanded that women should have access to a qualitative education to improve their social and political conditions. From a critical point of view, Freethinkers supported a rational education that could serve to be a liberating factor in shaping women’s social experience.

During the nineteenth century, the education of women was attached to religious dogma. It included moral lessons on submission and passive obedience (Ursula 35). Yet, Freethinkers saw the education offered to women by the clergymen as a false consciousness because the underlying ideological intent of it was the subjection of women. Kate Watts observed that women generally were 'less conscious' because

they were taught to follow “blindly the traditions and convictions of their mothers and grandmothers”. In the same vein, William Stewart Ross contended that women were not educated because they received a formal education in the Churches and Sunday Schools; an education which was full of contradictions and the avowed object of it was the exclusion of women from conducting leadership roles in society (Schwartz 146).

Some examples are put forward to demonstrate how the clergymen used the Churches to inculcate submissiveness in women’s behaviours and manners. The Anglo-Catholic practice of Marian devotion at the center of Christian worship demonstrated that a woman should submit with passive obedience to Jesus Christ as well as to her father and her husband. In one of the sermons preached at St. Paul's Cathedral, Anglo-Catholic Henry Parry Liddon warned his female audience against women's rights advocates who believed they should be equal to men, and he urged them to follow blindly the path of the Virgin Mary through her passive obedience to God (Schwartz 22). In the same vein, Baptist Minister, John Angell James, asserted that women's involvement in politics was not compatible with Christian principles. He affirmed that a woman was more emotional and less logical compared to a man, and this feature placed her in a subordinate position. "Woman’s influence is a kind of a passive power, it is a power that draws, rather than drives, and commands by obeying" (Schwartz 77).

Like the Owenites, Freethinkers had battled against the religious doctrines and insisted that they should be replaced by science and critical thinking. In the 1820s, Freethinker George Combe published a series of essays and articles on this matter in

which he denounced religion and stressed the impact of phrenology on women's mental, psychological, and moral progress. He believed that phrenology would make women appear much comfortable and intelligent. For him the task of phrenology was "to make women better fitted for their nurturing role in the family… As well educated-women they would be able to bring up their children in good physical health, free from superstitions, prejudice, error, and baneful prepossession" (Tyrell 192).

The re-emergence of ideas on education was closely bound up with Richard Carlile's anti-Christian Zetetic movement in the 1820s. This Freethinking activist had devoted his professional career to the struggle for popular freedom of thought and publication. Also, Carlile was an active supporter of women's right to education and empowerment. Carlile associated a demand for education with its corresponding cultural benefits. As he pointed out, "uneducated or semi-educated women from the lower middle classes would find life more sterile and claustrophobic than in earlier times" (McCalman 12).

Richard Carlile adopted the slogan "Educate, reform yourselves" to be addressed to his female readers. Certainly, the very Freethinking principles of "free inquiry" and the "democratic dissemination of knowledge" were meant to signify the acquisition of knowledge to be used in favour of female emancipation. Carlile encouraged women to read and write; because education was key to emancipate them from the bonds of religious superstitions. In fact, the elevation of publishing and bookselling accelerated at his time. Consequently, James Tucker, Susan Wright, William Ranee, and Thomas Perry, were set up as provincial agents; William Holmes, James Watson

and James Trust were assisted in establishing their own businesses; and Richard Hassell was on the verge of publishing and editing a new periodical for him when he died (McCalman 118).

As a committed Freethinker, Carlile saw many women active in the Freethought movement such as Emma Martin, Annie Besant, and Harriet Law gaining prominence as public speakers and writers, and he believed that educated women could become agents of humanity's progress. Correspondents like Caroline of Pimlico, extolled acts of protest by women on the grounds that,

> We shall add to the increasing luster of our sex and convince lordly rulers of our land, that we are not merely to be valued for our talents in the nursery, or our graces in the ballroom; but that some of us at least, are destined to soar as high in the regions of fame, as the most distinguished patriots among them (McCalman 107).

Several feminists active in the Freethought movement continued to support the liberal education of women, considering it as a major factor of progress. Among them was a feminist activist called Eliza Sharples. As early as the 1830s, the lady of Rotunda developed a rational thinking against Christianity, arguing that it denied the development of useful knowledge and reason. Throughout her professional career as a public speaker, Eliza Sharples encouraged the rational interpretation of the Scripture and urged her female audience to read themselves into awareness (Schwartz 2012).

In addition, Sharples powerfully opposed the education offered to women by the clergymen because it was the major obstacle to women's entry into the public realm. In a letter "To The Young Women of England…" in 1834, Sharples warned her

female readers: “Books will aid you, but you must not make an authority of books, or of what is written, - you must try the scripture by the things referred to, and thus prove all things, and hold fast that which is good." (Rogers 71)

Instead, Sharples advised women to adopt a rational thinking to be more productive in society.

> I must tell you, for you should be told it, that to get knowledge you must labour. There is a labour of the mind or of the brain, as well as of the hands, and as you cannot make the needle do its office without the motion of the fingers, so cannot knowledge be obtained without the motion of the brain. It will not come by prayer, when a superstitious use is made of the word; but it is the prayer of thought, the asking, seeking, and knocking, accompanied with all the means of knowledge-getting, that can alone procure it. It steals imperceptibly on the mind as it is toiled for; it comes sweetly, as it is strenuously, and even with pain, sought (Rogers 71-72).

The idea of a woman being central to the running of the home, the continuation of the human race, and the moral uprightness of society, could also be viewed by some as empowering, which could explain some women's devotion to these ideals. At the beginning of the 19th century, Eliza Sharples made use of these very traditional ideas of women's central goodness, and importance to humanity, to advance more progressive arguments about women's rights and responsibilities. She collected the Enlightenment tradition of comparing different societies to prove that the evangelical sect within the wider Church of England played a key role in giving strength to arguments for women's suppression. Sharples pointed out to St Paul's passages on marriage and his opposition to women speaking in the churches to show how the churches were in opposition to women’s education.

> We have been worse conditioned than Asiatic slaves; for, with the name of liberty, we have been the slave of silly etiquette and custom. St. Paul forbade women to speak in the churches, and they, who have made St. Paul an authority, have worn long hair and caps, and hats and veils, and have held their tongues in churches, until their whole power of speech has been concentrated for domestic scolding…. (Bebbington 78-79).

Sharples insisted that education was key for women to rid of religious control and improve their social conditions.

> It is not the mind only, but the body, that becomes expanded, and ripens into the health of full growth. It would be medicine for nearly all the ills that affect the forlorn condition of elderly maiden ladies. (Bebbington 81)

The connections which Sharples made between mental activity and corporal health reflected the philosophical ideas of Wollstonecraft who related the degraded status of females to the lack of education.

In addition to Eliza Sharples, the Freethinking activist Harriet Martineau called for men and women to be educated equally. Martineau drew attention to the fact that the classical subjects, including languages and music, were not compatible with science and technological progress. Instead, she urged women to acquire an education which would help them become the future leaders in society.

> I must declare that on no subject is more nonsense talked, (as it seems to me) than on that of female education, when restriction is advocated. In works otherwise really good, we find it taken for granted that girls are not to learn the dead languages and mathematics, because they are not to exercise professions where these attainments are wanted; and a little further on we find it said that the chief reason for boys and young men studying these things is to improve the quality of their minds… The plea is indeed nonsense on the face of it; for the brain which will learn French will learn Greek; the brain which enjoys

> arithmetic is capable of mathematics. If it is said that women are light-minded and superficial, the obvious answer is that their minds should be the more carefully sobered by grave studies, and the acquisition of exact knowledge (Dorothy 188).

As a further extension of her views in favour of women's education, Martineau proposed a form of 'intellectual training' for women that has come to be known as "household education." This concept suggests that women should be educated in order to help their children develop their personal as well as intellectual capacities (Weiner 9).

In 1859, Martineau published an article entitled "Female Industry," in which she described specific types of training as appropriate for different types of female employment, all the while emphasising the importance of intellectual attainment. Martineau was of the opinion that better-educated women could have the possibility to become professional employees.

> Out of six millions of women above twenty years of age, in Great Britain, exclusive of Ireland, and of course of the Colonies, no less than half are industrial in their mode of life. More than a third, more than two millions, are independent in their industry, are self-supporting, like men (Sheffield 319).

Long before the feminist campaign for improved educational opportunities for women had got underway, Martineau was the first feminist to associate the education of girls and women with the labour market. By refuting the classic argument of the 'separate spheres'; private and domestic for women, public and political for men, Martineau saw the involvement of educated women in the labour market as essential for the growth of a complete, independent and self-directed identity for women.

Why did the early Freethinkers pay an increasing attention to women's education? Freethinkers maintained that the primary function of education was to rid society of false and repressive belief-systems and create a solid social system whereby both sexes would enjoy the same liberties. Following this line of thought, Frances Wright, a Freethinking feminist, believed that education was a milestone of women's empowerment, for it would enable them to respond to the very conventional views on womanhood. In her opinion, as long as a woman was educated, her intellectual and emotional capacities would recover the spirit of society.

> And if such be the mighty consequences depending on the subject, shall we lack the courage to employ the means? And what means? To open our eyes and our ears; to throw wide the gates of our understanding; to dare the exercise of our intellectual faculties, and to encourage in others, as in ourselves, a habit of accurate and dispassionate investigation (Carlile 343)

The notion of dividing societies into primitive or civilized depended on the progress being made in education. Freethinkers encouraged women to educate themselves and make use of technological progress and science, because a well-educated lady was capable of managing both her personal and professional lives.

II. c. The Dominant Feminist Intellectual Networks in England: An Exploration of their Social Origins, Tactics, and their Major Demands

Over the recent years, some historians have come increasingly to take an interest in the ideologies and writings of nineteenth-century feminist intellectuals and to evaluate their major contributions to women's rights issues. In this section, the feminist intellectuals are grouped into two categories: those feminists holding or

following strong convictions or extreme principles; of whom the historians called radical feminists, and those to be identified as less radical or moderate.

Among the radical feminist networks contributing to women's rights issues were the proto-feminists of the late eighteenth century. Particularly important in this regard was Mary Wollstonecraft. This feminist and the other pro-women in her radical circle were part of the English radical Enlightenment which celebrated the attacks on orthodox religion made by European philosophers and the French Revolutionaries. For example, Wollstonecraft's friend and fellow feminist Mary Hays (1759-1843) was powerfully impressed by French atheist Claude-Adrien Helvetius (Hays 26-8). The feminism of Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays can be linked to a longer tradition of the enlightened libertinage that drew back to seventeenth century Freethinkers such as Pierre Bayle, and which combined a critique of religion with an equally free approach to traditional sexual morality. Wollstonecraft herself notoriously entered into free unions and bore her first child out of wedlock, while William Godwin and fellow atheist Percy Shelly were vocal critics of the Christian institution of marriage (Taylor 198-201).

Mary Wollstonecraft had offered an array of progressive feminist views before the emergence of the feminist movement in the nineteenth century. Wollstonecraft challenged the more patriarchal repressive views toward womanhood, and laid the foundation for the emergence of female suffrage (Abbey 80).

Wollstonecraft published a number of valuable and fascinating works, which had become sources of enthusiasm and inspiration to a considerable number of subsequent feminists. As such, a book entitled *Thoughts on the Education of*

Daughters, published in 1787; and *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman*; published originally in 1792 and was reprinted in further editions ("Britannica" 2022).

In 2016, Sandrine Bergès and Alan Coffee published a book entitled *The Social and Political Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft*. They suggested that most of Mary's arguments surrounding the emancipation of women were attached to progressive politics (1-14). Certainly, Wollstonecraft's feminism can be best understood as a revolt against the fashioned traditions and behavior patterns of respectable girls and young ladies. Wollstonecraft left home to become a lady's companion and a schoolmistress. In London, she became acquainted with a group of people involved in areas outside accepted practices, like political radicals, Freethinkers, and Unitarian ministers (Schwartz 2013).

Unitarianism in England can be identified as an extremist religious movement of the rising middle class. That is, Unitarians believed in the Humanity of Christ and rejected the doctrine of the Trinity and adopted a rational interpretation of Scripture (Zastoupil 2002). The Unitarians' formal rejection of the Divinity of Christ set them beyond the pale of much dissenting as well as the Orthodox tolerance, and their movement was considered as a non-conformist sect (Priestley 7).

The Unitarians, and despite their denominational background, did support a number of women's rights issues, particularly in the 1820s and 30s. In 1995, Prof. Kathryn Gleadle has examined the feminist dimension of the Unitarian movement in the 1820 and 30s and found that the Unitarians generated far more progressive ideas on the question of female suffrage (3). Its founder, William J. Fox had disseminated

far more libertarian views on female suffrage, which gained popularity among the working and upper-middle classes. In 1832, Fox published an article entitled "The Representation Reform" in *The Westminster Review*, with which he discussed the issue of women's exclusion from politics and insisted that women should embrace the same political rights granted to men. The article demonstrated that, even when formally excluded from the House of Commons, women should attend debates and participate in parliamentary political culture. Moreover, Fox saw the need to eliminate the property qualification measure to meet the aim. He asked, "Shall women vote, or is sex a political exclusion? Shall inability to read and write be exclusion? Or living in a house of lower rent than 10£ a year?" (Schmidt 37).

The development of feminist thought is believed to be also attributed to leading Unitarian activist William Thompson, who had published a number of seminal works that called for women's emancipation and the establishment of equal citizenship rights between the sexes. As such a book entitled *The Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the other Half Men,* which was originally published in 1825 in collaboration with Anna Wheeler (McFadden 91). This collaborative work linked women's emancipation with general social emancipation, and a great deal of it was taken to demonstrate that women's needs were not inherently included as part of men's rights (Schmidt 36)

In 1851, George Jacob Holyoake had coined the term 'secularism' as a name for his theory. And he described what he meant in the following statement.

> Secularism is that which seeks the development of the physical, moral and intellectual nature of man to the highest possible point, as the immediate duty of life which

> inculcates the practical sufficiency of natural unmapped morality, apart from atheism, Theism or the Bible, which selects as its methods and proposes these positive agreements as the common bond of union, to all who had regulate life by reason and ennoble it by service (Cline 2019).

Broadly speaking, the Secularist movement was a melting pot that encompassed individuals from a variety of denominational backgrounds. It was home to Unbelievers, deists, monists, Utilitarians, and liberal theists, and also included two opposing groups, led by Holyoake and Charles Bradlaugh respectively (Schwartz 777). For instance, Holyoake welcomed religious believers into the Secular fold. He saw Secularism as gradually overriding both theism and atheism, from the perspective of free inquiry, scientific and moral system. In contrast to Holyoake's assertions, Bradlaugh maintained that the primary task of Secularism was to tear down theism; otherwise the latter would impede the progress of the new secular order (Rectenwald 74). In 1866, Charles Bradlaugh became the president of the National Secular Society. Meanwhile, the Freethought League and the British Secular Union were both established as rival organisations for all those who disagreed with Bradlaugh's authoritarian style of leadership (Schwartz 778). But, ultimately, it was Holyoake's vision that came to dominate the movement.

The Secularists played a central role in advancing the feminist cause, particularly in the years from the 1850s until the late 80s. Secularists were actively involved in the campaigns for female suffrage and the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. When analyzing the available historical sources documenting the history of sexuality and prostitution, it is easy to notice that some historians have never paid more than a passing mention to the active participation of the Secularists in the repeal campaign.

The Secularists opened their radical clubs and addressed public meetings and lectures to support the personal liberties of the prostitutes. In addition, *The National Reformer*, a dominant secular journal, also identified the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts as an important aspect of its general support for women's rights and announced its pages open to discussion of this dilemma (Schwartz 177).

The Secularists' contributions to the women's suffrage movement could not go unseen. They were among the first advocates to discuss the question in the radical clubs and public spaces. Furthermore, the Secularists' dominant journals of the time, particularly *National Reformer*, devoted its pages to advancing the issue. In 1866, an article published in the *National Reformer* argued that political reform was at the heart of the Secularist's branch culture (Schwartz 167). Interestingly, one of the major demands of 19th century Secularists was the right to speak out against the injustice of their own position and to contribute to social and political improvement.

In addition to these radical networks, the moderate feminist Quakers were among the advocates of women's rights in nineteenth-century Britain. The British Quaker movement was founded by George Fox in the seventeenth century (Cope 725). Quakers did come from the middle class and adopted strict religious beliefs. For example, they asserted that every individual could experience the light of faith without needing the priest, or the bible. Although they did not ignore the existence of God like the Owenites and Freethinkers, the early founders of the movement were persecuted ("History" 2017).

The Quakers have never received more than a passing mention from historians of the post-1850 feminist movement, but they made an extremely important contribution

to the women's campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts. Published in 2002, Sung-Sook Lee's doctoral research work examined the mid-Victorian women's Campaign from 1869 to 1886 to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866 and 1869. More specifically, Lee focused on the way in which Evangelicalism contributed both to the pressures for the Acts and to the movement to repeal them and of how religious and feminist networks constituted an empowering structure that united the repealers into a single, irresistible force. The author argued that the repealers' successful campaign was rooted in the very close links, both of kinship and friendship, between those feminists and religious networks, women Quakers (117-161). Interestingly, Josephine Butler, a national leader of the repeal campaign, recalled that the Quaker women provided a wide, nationally-linked support mechanism for the repeal campaign. The Quakers were, Butler argued, among the first to welcome the public action of women in this matter; and the earliest public meetings addressed by women on this question were held in Quaker meeting houses (Butler 238-239).

Although the majority of Quakers came from a catholic background and had a strong opposition to the question of equality between the sexes, recent scholarship suggested that they advanced far more progressive views, particularly on the relation of women to the State and international politics. For instance, scholar Thomas Kennedy has argued that although the majority of women Quakers remained religious rather than political, British Quakerism was central to advancing more radical arguments about women's rights and responsibilities (357).

In the same vein, scholar Brian Phillips claimed that the Quaker activists developed a kind of ‘Friendly patriotism,’ which wrestled over the question of the Society of Friends' right relationship to the State, to the Empire, to politics, and to government. Later, a prominent number of Quaker peace advocates sought to establish a new political vision within their movement through which to focus on feminist issues rather than remain attached to the conservative evangelical religious values (67).

It must be said that the Society of Friends did not support female suffrage and other political matters, because they strongly believed men and women could only meet spiritually equal. Following this line of reasoning, scholar Pam Lunn, who is interested in the history of Quakerism and women’s suffrage, maintained that the Society of Friends established a distance with the suffragettes on the basis of their strict religious convictions (31-32).

Furthermore, Pam Lunn proposed that the Society of Friends denounced the violent attacks taken by some of the suffragettes against the Liberal government. The author observed that the Quaker’s dominant journals The Friend (published weekly) and The British Friend (published monthly) did not provide much information about the events held by the suffragettes; rather they offered, as the author stated it, something of a running commentary on the attitudes amongst British Friends to the women's suffrage issue (32).

The emancipation of women was one of fundamental demands that the feminist intellectuals called for. Nineteenth-century feminist intellectuals played a crucial role in transgressing conventional femininity and identified themselves as intellectual

elites in reforming dominant patriarchal repressive views towards womanhood, particularly the religious and cultural stereotypes of gender roles. In the work of Laura Schwartz, the suggestion that nineteenth century Freethinkers and Owenites made systematic and frequently radical attacks on religion and the prevailing-patriarchal division of gender, especially the Christian institution of marriage, which automatically reinforced women's subordinate position in society.

> For these women, the rejection of theological doctrines encouraged and shaped support for women's rights… Their commitment to moral autonomy, free speech and the democratic dissemination of knowledge, their rejection of God-given notions of sexual differences and their critique of the Christian institution of marriage, provided powerful intellectual tools with which to challenge dominant and oppressive attitudes to womanhood. (3)

By the early nineteenth century, the activism of these intellectuals was regarded as transgressing socially constructed codes of conduct for women, transgressions which posed not only a serious threat to the assumed superior position of men but also to the Established Church.

In addition, the feminist intellectuals were aiming to recreate the collective lives of women in the midst of a totally repressive society. In *Practicing Feminism: Identity, Difference, Power*, Sasha Roseneil provided a practical standpoint about the function of the intellectual feminist groups as an organic power.

> If women are effective to challenge patriarchy, dominant modes of thinking and hegemonic gender identities… feminist political action is forged through the construction of new consciousness and identities at the collective level. (Nickie 86)

Last but not least, the feminist intellectuals were striving to achieve a number of rights for women. From the 1850s through to the fin de siècle, these female intellectuals, especially the Freethinkers, Secularists, and Quakers, have become socially predominant as the guardians of women's rights. They created a sphere of action into the male-dominated sphere. They supported women's right to education, vote, and the legal protection of prostitution, and insisted that women should play a central role in politics. These major demands represented a full political expression of the active role that the feminist intellectuals played in their part in the wider women's campaigns from after the 1860s.

Challenging the male-dominated patriarchy in journalism was as powerful intellectual strategy that the feminist intellectuals adopted to increase public awareness about women's rights. It could be said that journalism was one of the main professions potentially open to the feminist intellectuals during this period, since no formal training was required (Fraser et al. 13). This intellectual activity was one way that feminist writers could express diverse opinions on the social injustices women faced due to their sex. In a few exceptional cases, some feminist writers adopted male pseudonyms both to obtain more freedom and to address male readership (Armitage 2018).

The most popular topics that the feminist intellectuals addressed: religion's criticism, Scripture, Secularism, education, sexual morality, marriage reform, divorce, and female suffrage, etc. For example, the most radical essays and pamphlets of Harriet Law and Annie Besant emerged in the analysis of historical controversies regarding the Scriptural interpretation and the new biblical criticism. In George Jacob

Holyoake and Modern Atheism (1855) and Phases of Atheism (1860), Sophia Dobson Collet investigated intensively a number of philosophical and nonreligious viewpoints, and her subsequent interest in Hindu reformism led her to examine Indian Theism and its Relation to Christianity (1870). Kate Watts wrote a series of articles in *The Secular Review* on 'The Education and Position of Women', attacking the marriage code and calling for better education and employment opportunities for women (Schwartz 70-128). The writings of these feminist intellectuals contributed to legitimizing women's participation in public discussion over the dominant feminist issues and produced a public professional identity for women as social critics (Hamilton 12-13).

Also, a free public debate was a common intellectual activity within the feminist intellectual circles. They were usually organised in open-public spaces so that the people could attend and listen to the arguments of the lecturers. These intellectual activities were particularly familiar among the Owenites, Freethinkers, and Secularists. These public debates centered on different feminist topics such religion, marriage, divorce, female suffrage, and girls' education. For example, there were cases in which feminists competed publicly with male Christian opponents to challenge contradictions regarding Christian views about woman's role in society and politics. Many debates took place in the open air since women activists were "regularly denied enclosed bookings" because of their progressive ideas (Heather and Hitchcock 165-182).

Some Freethinking feminists were engaged in an 'antagonistic relationship' with the churches, thriving on their attacks and gaining publicity through their opposition.

Women like Harriet Law were not simply beneficiaries of changes in the public sphere, but rather were themselves advocates of a mode of public discussion that emphasised the authority of the speaker and the positivity of the audience. In 1876, for example, Law debated her Christian opponent Rev. J. H. Gordon, and the core issue structured around 'The Gospel according to Secularism, and Secularism according to the Gospel.' This public debate took place in Darlington, North East of England, and a large number of attendees usually harked from the upper working or lower-middle classes. The general atmosphere resembled that of a football match complete with their rival teams of supporter to cheer on their respective side, "a great crowd had gathered in the knowledge that Law was to attend this lecture… and was loudly applauded by her partisans on entering the hall, as were the lecturer and local ministers" (Schwartz 160). In the midst of the debate, Law was arguing that Scripture should be rejected in full, based on the premise that it did not satisfy her search for truth and morality. In choosing to speak on the subject of religion, Law had an explicitly activist political agenda. More to the point, she wished to stir up public opinion and to call on her audience to act to remove this monstrous anomaly of women's inequality.

However, many Christian advocates attacked Freethinking women for their usurpation of the 'masculine' public role. As a result, they set limits on the scope of their activism, and, on many occasions, prohibited them from speaking publicly in the Churches.

> The clergymen every denomination have been the most vehement and vitriolic opponents of women as public speakers; partly, of course, because of the lead given by

> Paul and partly, one cannot suspect, from a spice of jealousy themselves as by far the largest professional class of public speaker (Miller 12-13).

Some reasons are put forwards to explain the undemocratic behaviour on the part of the Broad Churchmen. The first and most important reason is that objections to women assuming the role of public speaker were based simply on a desire to exclude women from the political sphere. Second, by banning Freethinking women from speaking in the Churches, its ministers were simply seeking to ensure that their legitimacy would not be challenged.

Conclusion

Though of radical heritage, the Owenite and Freethought movements need to be written back in historiography as the landmarks that laid the foundation for the emergence and development of feminist thought. The Freethinkers and Owenites of the 1830s helped to blaze a trail for generations of feminists to come. In addition to demonstrating that women could play an active and leading role in progressive movements (and showing how important a role it was), both of these feminist intellectual networks were often direct points of reference for the feminists who came later.

In spite of the fact that Owen's views did not gain acceptance in society, he provided inspiration for many of the subsequent feminist campaigners. It is important to stress upon the fact that Owen's arguments on marriage reform were the very ones in use by the subsequent feminists in the campaigns for women's rights to hold a property and the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. Scholar Laura Schwartz has stated that Owen's feminist views influenced later discussions on the dominant

feminist issues, particularly on marriage and the legal protection to practice prostitution (2013).

Organised Freethought needs to be viewed as the platform upon which the later campaign for girls' education emerged. The Freethinkers were both political and intellectual radicals. They advanced strong opinions, not only about religious issues, but also about educational ones. They were against the education offered to women by the churches, based on the premise that they enfeebled women's minds with superstitions and reinforced their subordinate position in society. Long before the emergence of an organised feminist campaign for girls' higher education, Freethinkers had called for the education of women on the basis of 'science,' 'free inquiry' and 'reason. Some of them refused the classical curriculum which included music and languages. The claim for scientificity within the Freethinking networks had influenced later feminist discussions on this matter. For example, the campaigner for girls' higher education, Emily Davies, sought to replace the traditional subjects by the scientific ones to enable the girls achieve their potential.

CHAPTER THREE

The Feminist Intellectuals as the True Founders of the Women's Suffrage Movement

Introduction

This chapter asserts that the support for women's suffrage did actually exist among a number of feminist intellectual circles long before the emergence of the women's suffrage movement, including the proto-feminists, Unitarians, and Owenites, which had all emphasised that the enfranchisement of women was necessary for the establishment of equality between the sexes. Each of these intellectual branches provided a diverse array of arguments in favour of women's right to vote, and emphasised that women should play a central role in politics.

III. a. Mary Wollstonecraft as a 'Mother' of the Women's Suffrage Movement

Ideas on female suffrage did emerge in the late 1790s. In this particular period of time, a group of feminist intellectuals began to protest against the subordination of women and demanded that women should have a say in public and political life (Poovey 15). This discourse was one-way women became politically engaged with their culture and entered into debate directly with the male-dominated authority.

The British proto-feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft, was amongst the elite women who contributed to this discourse through her critique of the exclusion of women from the franchise. Published in 2004, Bonnie Ann Schmitd's master dissertation traced precisely the intellectual grounds of the women's suffrage movement and

made it clear that the debate for equal voting rights between the sexes began to circulate in the late eighteenth century. The scholar stated that the essays written by Mary Wollstonecraft were the best protest for women's suffrage.

> Radical Intellectual Mary Wollstonecraft, for one, became inflamed by the young republic's restrictions on women… She remains an enigmatic figure for historians and for her work often appears contradictory, misogynist and poorly written. However, during the eighteenth-century Wollstonecraft was known for the idea the liberal principles of freedom and rationality could be extended to women through [suffrage] which would release them from economic dependence on men. (16)

One of Wollstonecraft's most influential essays on modern feminist thought a book entitled *The Vindication of the Rights of a Woman*, which was originally published in 1792. This text was written in response to the exclusion of French women from franchise, but it could be best understood as a protest against the exclusion of British women from politics. The publication of this book served to disseminate basic arguments about female suffrage, and to integrate political theory with gender roles and private relations. Wollstonecraft used egalitarian and rationalist ideas to do away with the subjection of women and display its roots in the patriarchal hierarchy. In the passage bellow, Wollstonecraft argued that women were not of less intellectual capacities than men.

> Yet, and I appeal to experience, if by neglecting the understanding they as much, nay, more detached from these domestic employments, than they could be by the most serious intellectual pursuit, though it may be observed, that the mass of mankind will never vigorously pursue an intellectual object, I may be allowed to infer that reason is absolutely necessary to enable a woman to perform any duty. (Bell 212)

Although many historians have agreed that Mary Wollstonecraft's essay emphasised the fundamental cultural issues affecting women's lives such as education and marriage, recent critics were to suggest that the *Vindication of Woman's Rights*' major theme was the enfranchisement of women. For instance, researcher Anna Neill has argued that Wollstonecraft was the first feminist advocate to tackle the exclusion of British women from the franchise. Similarly, Ian Ousby assumed that Mary Wollstonecraft's work addressed the exclusion of women from politics and public life, which would be complete when women would be given the same educational and civil opportunities as men (Seddiki 66).

From a critical point of view, Mary Wollstonecraft discussed the female suffrage through a chain of interconnected feminist issues. The first thing is that she focused on the notion of women's collective consciousness awakening. As a matter of fact, Wollstonecraft was among the very few feminist writers who elaborated this technique in her writings to urge women to unite as one body. Also, she stressed that women should be educated to be eligible for political activity. Then, she moved on to criticise the structures of government and emphasised that reform was requisite to reconstruct those very corrupted political institutions.

Wollstonecraft's essay can be best understood as a call to women's consciousness awakening. In response to John Milton who described women as fragile, submissive, and dependent creatures, Wollstonecraft demanded that women should reform their manners and use their intellectual capacities to become active political doers. By urging women to recreate their collective lives, they would have the possibility to participate more fully in politics and public life.

> It is time to affect a revolution in female manners-time to restore to them their lost dignity, and make them, as part of the human species, labour by reforming themselves to reform the world... And if the dignity of the female soul be as disputable as that of animals, if their reason does not afford sufficient light to direct their conduct whilst unerring instinct is denied they are surely of all creatures the most miserable! (Seddiki 63).

Then came the role of education which was key for the enhancement of women's political identities. Wollstonecraft called for widening the scope for engagement of women's superior, spiritual qualities, so necessitating extended opportunities for women's education and employment. Besides, Wollstonecraft was against the exclusion of women from knowledge because education generated women with greater capacity for political understanding. Following this line of reasoning, girls who received no education, they would become fragile and submissive. Wollstonecraft insisted that it is essential to improve women's education, to cultivate their minds and souls in order to recreate an independent and politicized identity for women.

> Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice. And how can woman be expected to co-operate unless she knows why she ought to be virtuous? (102)

Wollstonecraft complained about the lack of solid educational opportunities open to women. In her opinion, men sought to create obstacles against women's education in order to confine their activity within the home. This is the reason why Wollstonecraft considered education a liberating factor in shaping women's political and social experience.

To allow women play an active role in politics, Wollstonecraft saw the need to reform the old laws of representation in the British Parliament. She noted that: “English constitution put almost insuperable obstacles in the way to prevent the cultivation of the female understanding… women should share the advantages and government with man” (169-310). That means, the reform of the British government structures would help to spread egalitarian and democratic principles in the British society.

Wollstonecraft maintained that ‘egalité’ was one of the key ingredients in the enfranchisement of women. But what kind of egalité she was referring to? By reforming the laws of marriage that forced women into a life of subjection and servitude, she argued, it was possible to establish equal political rights between the sexes. In this sense, egalité acted as a moral code in defying political tyranny and social enmity. Wollstonecraft mentioned some of the cultural and political factors that stopped egalitarian principles from thriving. These included the evils of the autocratic governments; hereditary privilege; and the patriarchal system. The idea of the self-determining individual, Wollstonecraft argued, should be the legitimate source of social and political authority. She asked: if the men took control over the legislative institutions in government, how would it possible for women to hold a leadership role in politics thereinafter? Wollstonecraft emphasised that "equal franchise" would legitimize the government institutions and establish a democratic state. She referred to the French Revolution and the manner in which the French minister Talleyrand excluded women from the franchise.

> Who made man the exclusive judge, if woman partake with him of the gift of reason? In this style argue tyrants of every denomination, from the weak king to the weak father of a family; they are all eager to crush reason, yet always assert that they usurp its throne only to be useful. Do you not act a similar part when you force all women, by denying them civil and political rights, to remain immured in their families groping in the dark? for surely, sir, you will not assert that a duty can be binding which is not founded on reason? (Clapham 10)

From the very beginning, Wollstonecraft associated the promotion of the political rights of women with legislation, and she identified the principle of 'egalité' to be the basis of modern citizenship.

Recently published materials revealed Wollstonecraft's importance to the advocacy project of female suffrage in her days, particularly in the years from 1791 to 1820. For example, Chantal D'Arcy asserted that Wollstonecraft's work included the major feminist claims such as female suffrage, intellectual equality, improved education, and reformed social manners. D'Arcy believed that Wollstonecraft's work helped to politicize class and family by advocating radical social re-organization as a precondition of women's emancipation and drawing attention to unequal gender relations within the family (60). Susan Ferguson, an Associate Professor of sociology at Grinnell College, believed that Wollstonecraft's feminist views were bold appeals for women's inclusion in a public life overwhelmingly dominated by men gave birth to a 'suffragist spirit' (427). In addition, Ann Brooks, a Professor at the Australian Catholic University, argued that Wollstonecraft's work was unique in suggesting that the elevation of women's status could only be affected through political reform such as the radical reform of national educational systems (vii-xvi).

Also, there is a number of published doctoral dissertations which traced back the roots of modern suffragism to Wollstonecraft's draft. Particularly important in this regard was Jane Moore's *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Cultural History of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. This research work examined the way in which Wollstonecraft provided a forum for radical debates on women prior to the emergence of the women's suffrage movement in the 1860s, and injected many new ideas into the arena of public discussion about the repression of femininity, female sexuality, women's education, and female suffrage (13).

Further, Ashley Tauchert's doctoral thesis has attempted to analyse Mary Wollstonecraft's post-1790 writings in relation to their immediate contexts, and to their reconstruction by feminist literary history. In chapter two, for example, the author claimed that Wollstonecraft's *the Vindication of Woman's Rights* was a protest of patriarchal assumptions in Edmund Burke's reflections on the French Revolution and his decision to exclude women from franchise (2).

Some feminist scholars and historians have attempted to measure the impact of the life and work of Mary Wollstonecraft on the early American suffrage movement. In 2013, Eileen Hunt Botting published an article in *History of Political Thought* entitled "Making and American Feminist Icon: Mary Wollstonecraft's Reception in US Newspapers, 1800–1869," in which she assumed that Mary Wollstonecraft's philosophical views had a great impact not only on the English suffrage movement but also on the American suffragettes. The author proposed that Wollstonecraft was an icon of the women's suffrage movement, and most of her radically feminist views were highly supportive to women's political activism.

> After the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 and the Worcester Convention of 1850, the American women's rights cause morphed into a formal movement. With this shift towards the development of organized feminism, which fully emerged as the turn of the twentieth century. Wollstonecraft was invoked not just as a general symbol of women's right to political involvement but specifically as a symbol of women's political activism on behalf of their own sex (289).

Published in 2020, Mary Ann Carter's book *Creativity and Persistence: Art that Fueled the Fight for Women's Suffrage* investigated how the arts were used to change the image of women in America and illustrate the importance of their full participation in society and politics. The author appears to have argued that the early struggle for women's suffrage was made by elite women, and the different perspectives of their roles in society and politics were displayed through literature, poetry, fashion, sculpture, illustrations, posters. Besides, Carter has stressed the visual influence of some of the British feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft on the American suffragettes. As she pointed out in the following passage.

> In 1792, British author Mary Wollstonecraft wrote A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, a seminal treatise of early feminist philosophy. Suffrage leader Susan B. Anthony, who called herself a great admirer of this earliest work or woman's right to Equality of rights," owned a copy of this book (12).

As the previous arguments show, the demand for woman suffrage was increasingly taken up by Mary Wollstonecraft. The central arguments in *the Rights of Woman* revolved around a number of essential claims such consciousness awakening, women's right to education, and the right to vote. So, it could be inferred that Wollstonecraft's views did not have a great influence only in Western Europe, but also in America.

III. b. The Writings of the Most Influential Unitarians on the Question of Female Suffrage

The Unitarian movement developed a feminist platform that included the enfranchisement of women in its political agenda. Its leader, William Fox, a middle-class radical of lowly farming stock, was involved in a series of alliances between middle- and working-class radicals in the 1830s and 1840s. This included the London Working Men's Association, Lovett's National Association, and the Anti-Corn Law movement (Garnett 1908). In the 1830s, Fox radicalised one of the leading Unitarian journals of the time, *The Repository*. This journal discussed the dominant feminist issues such as marriage and female suffrage.

In 1832, Fox published a long-standard draft entitled the "Representation Reform'' in *The Westminster Review*, an article which attacked the corrupt system of representation in the British Parliament. It mentioned that the property qualification should be eliminated in order to allow the men and women of the different classes of society to vote in elections (Schmidt 38). More importantly, Fox's draft focused in particular on the relationship between legislation and women that became the basic point for the political ideologies of many of the subsequent suffragettes.

Fox began his article with a brief introduction to fundamental questions about the functions of Representation and Representative Government.

> What is meant by Representation and Representative Government? To what extent, and in what manner, is either one or the other identified with the English Constitution? What are the evils and imperfections of that identification? How is a remedy to be sought and applied? These are questions to which considerable interest must

> always attach; but which assume, at the present time, great practical importance (115-116).

In addition, Fox recalled that the lower classes of the British society were not represented in the British Parliament, for the lords and landlords had no interest in democracy and political equality between the sexes.

> We have the prospect of a long legislative struggle, of popular agitation, perhaps of the downfall of a ministry, an appeal to the people, and the turmoil of a general election, aggravated by the urgency of what multitudes regard as the most momentous of all political questions... But personally, and so far as election is implied in representation, the sovereign is no more representative than the members of the House of the Lords (119).

Fox then moved on to criticise the exclusion of women from the franchise of the Great Reform Act of 1832. Interestingly, he categorized two classes of women: women living in a state of domestic dependence and those managing their own affairs. If the election was estimated by the property, why women who had sufficient property and already voted in the election of the parish were excluded from the franchise? Fox asked.

> Then comes a long array of classes, on whose claim's discussion may be raised. Shall women vote, or is sex a political exclusion? If so, is the exclusion complete or only those living in a state of domestic dependence incompatible with their freedom of action? Does it include those who have a substantive existence, manage their own affairs, and already vote in the election of parish vestry or of sovereign for India? (142)

Fox observed that women who possessed a sufficient property were not eligible to vote, for their properties were automatically transferred to their husbands. This is clear evidence that the property qualification was just a pretext to create barriers against women's involvement in politics.

In addition to William Fox, some Unitarian activists wrote and spoke about the disenfranchisement status of women before the emergence of the women's suffrage movement. Mary Leman Grimstone was one of such prominent women who complained about the exclusion of women from educational opportunities and political life. Grimstone's concern with women's rights began with contempt for the conventions of female education. Like the Freethinkers, Grimstone regarded education an important factor for liberation, which would release women from dependence on men. In 1834, she published an article entitled "Men and Women" in *The Monthly Repository*, in which she powerfully believed that well-educated women would have better options to secure their future and exercise the franchise (Rogers 204).

Apart from her interest in the education of women, in 1836, Grimstone made an essential claim that women should participate in parliamentary politics too. Of particular importance, she refuted the conventional view that women's 'softness' and 'gentleness' made them unsuited for politics. Grimstone was a firm believer in science, critical thinking, and rationality, all of which were the essence of women's political activism. For her, women had developed a politicized domestic identity and contributed to the welfare of their families, thereby they should be assigned the right to vote.

> Unfortunately for this country, and in fact for all countries, women are mostly conservatives, and lie like manure at the root of many a political plant which breathes pestilence upon nations, keeping institutions in a vitality which they would otherwise not retain. God grant that every woman was a rational revolutionist, which are only other words for radical reformers - then would be

> asserted the right and power which they hold in common with their copartners in life - the right of thinking, feeling, speaking, and acting in behalf of national and universal interests - mighty trunks, but intimately and indissolubly connected with the small capillaries of individual power and exertion (Armstrong 113).

Also, William Thompson and Anna Wheeler, who were revolutionary democrats, feminists and Owenites, raised a significant theoretical debate about women's right to participate more fully in parliamentary politics. In 1825, they published their 'joint property' *The Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the other Half*, in which they contended that women's inclusion in politics was necessary to protect them from discrimination and repression and promote their happiness and civil liberties.

> Women are on half the human race, and as much entitled to happiness on their own account, for their own sakes, as men. Just as necessary would it be to inquire whether the possession of political rights by men would tend to promote the happiness of women. The happiness of every individual, and of course of all classes, of the human race, ought to be promoted for the sake of such individual or individuals, and not in subservience to the happiness of any other individuals or classes whatever (119).

Like the Owenites, Thompson regarded the patriarchal construction of gender roles and individual competition as key in reinforcing social hierarchies and promoting inequality between the sexes. Hence, he advised both men and women to cooperate to equally share positions in power.

Furthermore, Thompson called for political reform which was necessary to secure women's civil rights. The reform, he believed, should affect the laws of marriage and legislation that kept women from holding a property, voting, and access to educational and employment opportunities.

> True, they say, the inequalities of marriage laws, the despotism of the stronger party" ... The exercise of political rights does confer a great deal more of the means of happiness than the mere establishment of equal civil rights; particularly an equal system of participation in parliamentary politics (168-69).

Thompson's theoretical contributions to the question of female suffrage have sparked the attention of some feminist researchers to rethink the history of English suffragism and to re-identify it within a Unitarian framework. In 2004, Cory Abbie's article "Wheeler and Thompson's 'Appeal': The Rhetorical Re-Visioning of Gender" was to suggest that Thompson's essay contributed to the promotion of far more progressive claims on female suffrage and education.

> The book champions not just political, but also civil rights for women: equitable laws, educational opportunities, reform of marriage customs, and so on. Concomitant with this advocacy, the text also recommends the abolition of the system of "individual competition" --- in other words, capitalism and its replacement with the system of "mutual cooperation". For these reasons, the Appeal has been referred to as "the first detailed statement of socialist feminism" (106).

Surprisingly, the Unitarians were active in practical campaigning long before the emergence of the suffrage movement. A trustee historian Kathryn Gleadle refuted the claim made by some historians that the Unitarians were only theoretical in discussing female suffrage. Instead, she looked at the way in which the Unitarians established organised political unions to advance the cause. In 1841, the National Association for the Promotion of the Political and Social Advancement of the People was established by William Lovett, whose aim was to attract more members of the Unitarian intelligentsia. The purpose of such an organisation was to bring together all those

radicals pursuing social and political reform for all British citizens and to train marginalised women for the proper exercise of the franchise (80).

Recent critics, feminist scholars in particular, demonstrated that the Unitarians' views regarding female suffrage developed and crossed class lines. In 1980, for example, Ruth Watts' article "The Unitarian Contribution to the Development of Female Education, 1790-1850" indicated that Unitarianism represented one of the flourishing phases of feminism in England, particularly from the late eighteenth century onwards. Watts argued that the Unitarian leaders supported the education of women to make social and political changes in society at large. In addition, the author looked at the way in which Unitarians occupied a foremost place in positing new ideas about the equal intellectual capabilities of women and men and advocating a liberal and rational education for both sexes. From this perspective, entrenched ideas about women's involvement in politics were negotiated too (273-275).

In the same vein, Kathryn Gleadle presumed that the Unitarians in the late and early nineteenth centuries were more supportive to female suffrage, in spite of the fact that the conservative wing of the movement maintained a neutral position on this matter. Gleadle demonstrated that the Unitarian movement was home to a number of activists who called for women to be educated and insisted that women should play a role in politics. Gleadle demonstrated that the truly feminist strand within the Unitarian movement, and that on which her work primarily focused, was a radical reforming coterie located on the fringes of mainstream Unitarianism, of whom she referred to as radical unitarians.

> The Unitarian gender relations lie at the heart of the relationship between Unitarianism and feminism. Indeed, a vital catalyst in the formation of a feminist awareness was that the expectations of personal fulfilment which the Unitarian movement encouraged in women were not met (27).

It is important to stress upon the fact that there was a split between the conservative and radical Unitarians over women's roles in society and politics. For example, the Unitarians, who promoted very conservative convictions, insisted that women's place in society should be within the domestic realm of the family. While the radical Unitarians pursued a thoroughgoing feminist agenda and insisted that woman's intellectual supremacy made her fit to political life. This is perhaps one of the major reasons behind their break from the mainstream Unitarian movement. In addition, they laid a strong foundation for the creation of the national women's rights campaigns of succeeding decades, both in terms of theory and personnel.

William Fox, Grimstone, Thompson and Wheeler have all criticised the legislative system and saw the advancement of women's political rights as necessary to the nation's progress. Although they did not present petitions to the House of Commons to enfranchise women, they had already called for reform of the old corrupt system of representation in order to establish a democratic state. This was one of the essential arguments that the subsequent suffrage advocates adopted to ask for the right to vote to British women.

III. c. The Practice of 'Voting' within the Owenite Cooperative Societies

Aside from their rational critique of religion, the prevailing marriage system and sexual morality, the question of vote found a great deal of support within the Owenite

movement. Recently, Dr. Laura Schwartz emphasised that the Owenites were so influential in advancing the feminist cause not only due to their vocal opposition to the conventional marriage customs but also to their active role in practical campaigning that aimed to procure the vote and to win recognition for the place of women in public and political life (170).

Barbara Taylor was one of the very few feminist historians who examined in depth the history of the Owenite Socialist movement in Britain, and most of her research works, including books and articles, revealed powerful links between socialism and the development of feminist thought, particularly in the 1830s through to the 40s. In 1979, Taylor published "The Men Are as Bad as Their Masters…': Socialism, Feminism, and Sexual Antagonism in the London Tailoring Trade in the Early 1830s," an article which examined how Robert Owen and his associates injected many new ideas into the arena of public discussion on the political rights of women, the question of female suffrage in particular.

> This commitment to the emancipation of every human being both expressed and transcended an earlier style of democratic radicalism. The feminism of the Owenite movement was part of the ideological inheritance from eighteenth century advocates of egalité who had rested their own case for women's emancipation on the abstract right of all 'reasonable' creatures to self-determination… But along with this intellectual case for female equality, the early socialists had also inherited the political struggles, in which feminist demands had been articulated, a context which had important implications for their own theories on the Woman Question (10).

As it is already stated, Owenism was a Utopian Socialist philosophy which developed in opposition to the social construction of gender, religion, sexual morality, and the very conventional marriage customs. The Owenites remained critical of women's

subordinate position in society, and insisted that women and men should be treated equally. It was from this perspective that the question of female suffrage developed within the Owenite cooperative societies.

Many of the Owenite advocates saw the struggle for gaining women a place in politics as part of their wider agenda to rid society of disparity and discrimination on the basis of sex. Among them was the leader of the movement Robert Owen, who maintained that extending the right to vote to women was key to establish an equitable and civilised nation. Like the Freethinkers and Unitarians, Owen embarked on a civilising mission that made the education of women a necessary component to usher in the public realm of politics (Strauss 22).

In addition to Robert Owen, George Jacob Holyoake, an Owenite and Freethinking activist, argued that the enfranchisement of women would lead to a perfect democratic transition, whereby men and women would share equal rights and would be subject to the same duties. Nevertheless, Holyoake blamed women for their inability to move beyond the domestic sphere, and he urged them to organise and take matters into their own hands.

> They are taxed, and therefore they claim a right to vote. But we are women's political unions- self originated and self-sustained? If they want political rights, why do they not ask for them? Let them their own affairs into their own hands. Let them have public societies and meetings of their own (Gleadle 83).

Holyoake used the classic argument of Thomas Paine of 'Taxation and Representation' to support women's right to vote. That is, if a woman had sufficient money and paid regularly her taxes, she was systematically eligible to vote.

In the same vein, Holyoake's friend Anna Wheeler, an Owenite advocate, maintained that the franchise was woman's natural right since she was subject to the same laws as man. She wrote in reply to a woman who had argued that it was impossible for sexes so inherently dissimilar to share a common system of government.

> If the difference in nature of man and woman be so widely marked… then there is some harmony in universal nature lost… Yet I believe that the obvious difference which now exists between the habits and feelings of both sexes, to arise the universal position of both (Taylor 25).

Interestingly, the early practical initiatives that went into forming the women's suffrage movement did emerge from the Owenite cooperative societies. As it has been mentioned in the second chapter, the Owenites set about to construct Utopian cooperative schemes, which emphasised that equality between the sexes could only be achieved in terms of unity and cooperation. The Owenites' various councils, meetings, and intellectual branches were home to discuss the question of female suffrage, and women were welcomed to take part in these political manifestations. Such a practice, it is argued, was relatively uncommon among other radical movements during the 1830s and 40s.

To begin with, the Owenite emphasised the joint participation of both sexes in their assemblies. The intent, of course, was to collaborate in the maintenance of equality between the sexes. In the 1830s and 1845, the sexually-integrated dining tables were introduced by the Owenite leadership to ensure that female voices were heard on these occasions (Navickas 2016). The Owenite feminist ideology was highly weighted with inherited political meanings because of its claim that the relative

superiority, inferiority, or equality of one sex to the other, could not be proved until each would have received a rational education. Owen's plans were clearly modifications of patriarchal schemes for getting the oppressed group of women to support them. In 1840, Catherine Barmby, an Owenite advocate, attended a Socialist diner at the John St. Institution in London and was so impressed by the mixed seating policy there. Afterward, she wrote a letter to the '*New Moral World'*, an Owenite journal, stating that this democratic practice would expand women's activities outside the domestic realm of the family, thereby preparing the ground for them to participate more fully in the democratisation process of public institutions and political arenas (Sanders 325).

The Owenites provided an intellectual atmosphere in which suffragism was able to thrive. A free discussion class was a common practice within the Owenite branch culture. Men and women could sit together and exchange ideas and opinions about several topics (Alison 2021). Each Owenite branch had classes of ten members and each elected their representatives for three-month terms. Accordingly, women were invited to attend daily discussion classes with which to express openly their views and feelings, doubts and confidence, concerning the Socialist Owenite system. This highly democratic system was a step towards liberty, for it encouraged active female participation (Taylor 291).

In addition to welcoming women into dining tables and discussion classes, the Owenites insisted that women should take part in the government of the movement, both at a local and national level. However, the numbers of women involved in executive councils, delegate meetings, and Owenite conferences were low. After

1835, it was reported, some Owenite branches had female ‘Presidents’ and ‘Secretaries’, and only one, the Finsbury branch in London, had a continuous history of female leadership throughout the 1830s and 40s (Taylor 292).

Some reasons are put forward to explain the relatively small numbers of women involved in the executive councils of the Owenite movement. The first and most important reason is that the representational structures of the Rational society came to replace the early cooperative societies, and the emphasis was placed upon the collective benefit rather than the personal purposes. Second, women who were previously active in organising and leading local unions found themselves excluded from these formalized structures.

Even though, the Owenite leadership continued to lend its support to female suffrage and set its face against those who sought to exclude women from an active role in their executive councils. The Social Missionary Alexander Campbell, who once campaigned for female enfranchisement during the 1832 Reform Bill agitation, paid a visit to the Cambuslong Co-Operative Society and suddenly found out that they did not allow women to vote in their councils. He wrote the following statement: “If you want to secure your success, you must take your wives and little ones along with you in the march of improvement, and give a vote to your female members when of age” (Taylor 292).

Similarly, Mary Wiley, the Secretary of the Finsbury branch for several years, was surprised to discover that no female had been elected in the annual Owenite Congress of 1843. A year later, the issue was raised in a London Socialist press by one of the

prominent Owenite advocates, demanding that women should be assigned an equal number of seats with men on all Owenite councils.

> We know many females who stand high in the estimation of their fellow Members, who have, notwithstanding, been passed over not one, I believe, has been, at least to our knowledge, ever nominated. Is it that the iron hand of Conventionalism, pressing hard on the destinies of one-half the human race, has not found, even amongst the most advanced ranks of social Reformers, one who has shaken off the shackles of civilized bondage and who dare, in the face of the day, proclaim the 'Equal Rights of All', women not excepted? (Thompson 40)

The previous arguments powerfully demonstrate that the Owenite movement was, other than its rejection of the Priesthood marriages and sexual morality, highly supportive to the enfranchisement of women. In fact, Robert Owen and his associates welcomed women into their assemblies, meetings, and discussion classes and challenged the ideal of womanhood in popular thought that claimed that women should remain aloof from the corruption of politics.

Conclusion

Ideas on female suffrage did emerge from the feminist intellectual circles (Proto-feminism, Unitarianism, and Owenism). These feminist advocates were active in radical politics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and most of their views were connected to progressive politics. For example, Mary Wollstonecraft was the first feminist to complain about the exclusion of women from suffrage. Wollstonecraft offered progressively feminist views on education, social and political reform, and suffrage, and she became a reference to the subsequent suffragettes (Frazer 603-4).

In addition, the arguments that Fox put forward in 1832 about the disenfranchised status of women were the very ones used by some leading suffragettes like Helen Taylor from after the 1860s. In 1865, Helen Taylor published “Personal Representation” in *The Westminster Review*. Taylor utilised the argument of the ancient constitutional rights for women, and her article uncovered three important points: that property should not be the basis of representation; that representation should be associated with the advance of superior civilizations; and that women should be involved in representation since they constituted a class (307-8).

But the Owenites had a far more practical vision than the proto-feminists and Unitarians in supporting female suffrage. In effect, they invited women to participate in dining-table, discussion classes, and their various political councils. In addition, they had made it permissible for women to participate in the elections of the executive councils of the Owenite movement. The Owenites’ small organisational attempts gained momentum over the following decades to become national networks campaigning on a variety of women's rights issues. As scholar Barbara Taylor has pointed out, “Non-Owenite contemporaries also testified to the strength of Owen's ideas within the movement." (7-8) In this statement, Taylor demonstrated that Owen's views were a landmark in the feminist movement, exerting a great influence upon many subsequent feminist advocates and particularly the significant group of feminist suffragettes, namely John Stewart Mill and Harriet Taylor.

It could be inferred that the practice of voting within the Owenite cooperative societies had a highly significant place in the writings of some of the subsequent suffrage leaders. In his article “John Stuart Mill: A Liberal Looks at Utopian

Socialism in the Years of Revolution 1848-9," Levin Michael stated although there was a kind of difference between liberalism and socialism, Robert Owen's views on women's rights laid the foundation for the development of the suffrage movement from after the 1860s. For example, John Stewart Mill recalled that among the social movements that had a great influence on his feminist thinking were those of the St. Simonian in France and Owenism in England (71-73).

CHAPTER FOUR

The Role of the Feminist Intellectuals in Enhancing women's Political Identities

Introduction

This chapter asserts that the axial role that the feminist intellectuals played in the campaigns for girls' education, female suffrage, and the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, provided the most authentic expression of feminist intellectuals' political action. In spite of the fact that the contributions of these feminist intellectuals (Secularists, Quakers, and the advocates of girls' education) to women's rights issues have received scant attention from historians of the post-1850 feminist movement, they enhanced collective identities for women and were the true advocates of women's political rights, particularly from the 1850s through to the 1880s.

IV. a. The Feminist Campaign to Reform Girls' Secondary and Higher Education

It is universally accepted that girls in the nineteenth-century did not receive an academic education. Instead, they were educated in "accomplishments" such as singing and dancing, and languages, essentially anything that would allow them to earn a husband and become happy wives and trustful mothers (Burgan 51). Also, the Victorians did not permit the girls to study scientific subjects such as physics, mathematics, chemistry, information, and technology, for they emphasised the education that revolved around the family life and moral influence and insured national virtue and social order. Recently, Susan F. Ridout has described the

education offered to girls in the early Victorian culture as "a certain number of burrowing thoughts and isolated facts lodged in the memory, a certain degree of dexterity in Music and Painting acquired, and then the Education of a young lady is completed." (37)

A number of recently published articles assumed that the limitation on girls' education was a reference back to a more general argument that better educated women tend to be more informed about the domestic culture. In this regard, Ellen Jordan stated that at the beginning of the nineteenth century girls were poorly educated and the main emphasis of the curriculum was on feminine accomplishments.

> A woman should, according to the current gender ideology, be a companion to her husband, a teacher of her children, and the pervasive moral influence within the home; but only an educated woman could perform these functions adequately; therefore academic education was in fact the best preparation for marriage and family life (440-442).

Likewise, Trygve R. Tholfsen's article focused on moral education in the Victorian Sunday School. The author stated that the courses offered in the Victorian Sunday School included lectures on Reformation Protestantism, together with a renewed and extreme emphasis on Original Sin and a distinctive preoccupation with the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit and the importance of a conversion expression (79).

Middle-class girls were generally taught at home by governesses. The term applied to a woman who lived in the employer's home and who taught the children and served as a companion to them (Peterson 7). Having a governess was an aristocratic heritage, but later it was duplicated among the middle-class families due to the improvement

in their financial conditions. As Peterson has pointed out, “having a governess was something very prestigious, even when the family did not treat her as an equal, they did not hide her before their wealthy companionship and displayed her as “a symbol of economic power, breeding and station.” (9)

However, governesses were generally not qualified teachers or very educated themselves. They usually focused on typical feminine subjects when teaching the girls. In Western Gloucestershire, Sarah Omerod provided the girls with general education on reading and catechism (Dowldall 5). Frances Power Cobbe once recalled that her governess instructed her on the basics of spelling, geography, and dancing but nothing on science (183-86).

Some scholars have come to assert that women's role as governesses provided them a sphere of action within the domestic trajectory only. This role enabled governesses to be within the household and be familiar with educating the girls. Historian Holcombe Lee has come to observe that governesses to some extent fulfilled the required and domestic role perfectly.

> By devoting herself to the care and education of children, even hire, a lady could fill the role for which nature had intended her; and by living at home and going out into other homes as a daily governess, or by working as a resident governess in a girls’ boarding school or in her employers’ household, she would still enjoy that sheltering abode deemed to be her proper sphere. (12)

From a critical point of view, women's role as governesses made it impossible for the girls to receive a formal education in the schools. In addition, this role made the patriarchal society (including the clergymen) assume that women were extremely content with the more conventional education they received from governesses.

Scholars have agreed that the establishment of a feminist campaign for girls' education began in the 1850s. As Laura Schwartz has once proposed in her article, the feminist campaign for girls' education called for offering of better teaching qualities and more rigorous exams for girls and women as part of a concern with improving the professional character of girls' education as well as expanding the range of career opportunities such an education would offer (670-672).

It is important to stress upon the fact that the feminist reformers of girls' education were not suffragettes; rather they came from an intellectual background. A set of arguments are put forward to defend this view. The first reason is that the relationship between suffragism and the reform of girls' education was complex, and historians have long argued over whether the campaigns for women's boarding and grammar schools and colleges can be termed as 'feminist.' The second one is that the campaign for girls' secondary and higher education had never been associated with the women's suffrage campaigns (this point is already explained in chapter one). The third is that the question of education had always been the concern of the feminist intellectuals. The last and most important reason is that the question of girls and education was first raised within the Freethinking networks in the 1830s and 40s, and that the ideologies and policies adopted by the feminist activists in the campaign to reform girls' schools and higher education were just an extension to the Freethinking feminist heritage on this matter.

The reform of girls' education in Victorian England went through different stages. First, feminist reformists asserted that educated women or governesses should receive a qualitative and formal education. Second, they sought to establish advanced

grammar and public schools for girls. Third, they saw the need to offer better teaching qualities; including modern curriculum and more rigorous exams for girls as part of a concern with improving the professional character of girls' education as well as expanding the range of career opportunities such an education would offer. Scholar Theobald fervently believed that the reform of girls' education in England presented the perfect opportunity to "restore the masculine forms of secondary and tertiary education which customary linked with an emerging feminist consciousness in the second half of the nineteenth century which fueled demands for the right to paid employment and the reform of laws relating to women." (71-72)

Improving the conditions of governesses was a 'social' necessity since this role was one of the respectable professions open to women in the nineteenth century. In 1843, the Governesses' Benevolent Society was established. The investigators found that governesses lacked the communicative skills and knowledge that would make them eligible for teaching the girls. Besides, many of them could not even spell the words correctly (Richardson 2008).

The reformists took more bold steps to improve the quality of education offered to governesses. In 1848, the Governesses' Benevolent Society established the Queen's college (Regaignon 2001). This educational establishment aimed to offer sufficient training for governess to prepare them for teaching in public schools. This initiative was supported by Queen Victoria, who later provided for a number of scholarships to governesses. As well as the Established Church of the England was concerned, some Anglican male educators from King's College in London provided the monetary support to the Queen's College in its early beginnings (Purvis 73-75).

Frederick Denison Maurice, an English Anglican Theologian, offered evening classes at Queen's College for no payment. Maurice was a true defender of 'liberal education', 'free inquiry,' and 'reason', and he used a curriculum completely different to that offered to governesses at this time. It specifically included the subjects of English Literature and Grammar, Drawing, Mechanics, Method in teaching, Geology and Arithmetic. Nevertheless, Maurice's colleagues in the Queen's College argued that Arithmetic was a dangerous subject on the grounds that young girls were not able comprehend the topic. In reply, Maurice asserted that it would help the girls grasp the ultimate nature of God's universe (Richardson 2008).

One of the feminist campaigners influenced by Maurice's radically and broad views on education was Frances Mary Buss. This feminist activist complained bitterly about the lack of educational opportunities open to women and believed that the reform of girls' education was necessary to advance the woman's cause. In her review of Annie Ridley's book "Frances Mary Buss and her Work for Education", researcher Julia Bulkley stated that Buss was primarily interested in reforming the social behaviours of her society and insisted that education should be offered equally to men and women. As she pointed out, "I want girls to be educated to match their brothers." (635)

Frances Mary Buss was against the education offered to girls by the governesses, and insisted that girls should receive a qualitative education in schools. In practice, Frances Mary Buss and her associate Dorothea Beale created the first girls' public boarding school and the girls' grammar school (Pederson 137). In 1858, Miss Beale took over the recently founded Cheltenham Ladies College and turned it into the

model of the high-quality girls' boarding school. These schools were believed to address the poor education offered to middle-class women. ("Educating Girls…" 2011)

Nevertheless, the teaching conditions of the recently established schools were very poor. In 1867, the Reports of the Schools Inquiry Commission (RSIC) were published, within which four major issues were challenging the advocates of girls' education during this time. The first problem is that the numbers of girls admitted to colleges were relatively very small compared to boys. In addition, the curriculum included classical subjects such as the Latin and Greek languages, while the scientific subjects were reserved mainly to the boys. Also, girls were not allowed to pass public exams. Finally, endowments were ill-managed. In an attempt to resolve the problem, the Commissioners recommended dividing schools into three grades. Generally speaking, girls' schools were small and lacked qualified teachers as well as being more sensitive to their social mixture than boys' schools (Taunton Report 1868). The reports also raised the question of whether girls and boys should receive the same curriculum based on their educational capacities. Based on the experts' views both in the United States and England, Commissioners concluded that both sexes had equal ability, although they needed to be educated differently according to their social roles (Nakagomi 26).

Also, the question of endowments was raised by the Reports of the Schools Inquiry Commission (RSIC). The report mentioned that endowments did go to boys, while the girls were excluded. In 1869, some educational reformists organised a national conference in an attempt to pass a parliamentary petition in the House of Commons

to settle the issue of endowments' redistribution. Consequently, the Endowed Schools Commission (ESC) was established by the Endowed Schools Act of 1869, which included several vocal opponents of RSIC who supported the reform of girls' education (Gordon 59). The Article 12 of the Endowed Schools Act of 1869 indicated that endowments should be redistributed equally between boys and girls, and the appointed Commissioners could decide if the girls were eligible to benefit from endowments. But scholar Fletcher was more critical of this judgment, stressing the negative impact of the latter was mostly felt in girls' education. (Nakagomi 27)

Between 1865 and 1875, more educational reform organisations did emerge, and the intent was to improve the education of women of all social classes. For example, the Girls' Public Day School Company (GPDSC) was set up in June 1872 as a limited liability company to raise capital for the purpose of establishing academic high schools for girls, modelled on the North London Collegiate School of Frances Mary Buss (Howarth 59-60). Mrs. Grey, one of its active leaders, had collaborated with Miss Buss in offering sufficient endowments for North London Collegiate School (NLCS) in 1871. Mrs. Grey urged other feminists and teachers to form a national organisation in the hope to integrate individual efforts for supporting girls' education. After her appeal, many educational organisations became involved. They included the Society of Arts, the North of England Council for Promoting Higher Education for Women, and the Social Science Association. The National Union for Improving the Education of Women of All Classes (National Union) was created in 1871, and Princess Louise was elected as its president. The central working committee of the recently established Union was transformed to the Executive Council of GPDSC, and

the Council served as a central authority and held the power to appoint its own committees such as Education, Finance and Sites and Buildings Committees. The royal president of the Union, Princes Louise, became Patroness of the Company, the vice presidents remained in office, and the Earl of Airlie, Lady Stanley's son-in-law, became the president (Nakagomi 28).

What were the major achievements that the feminist campaigners attained in relation to girls' education? Researcher Sayaka Nakagomi offered a set of outcomes based on the activists' contributions to girls' education. One of which is that the conditions of girls' schooling and the quality of education offered to them had been improved. Also, more girls were admitted to public examinations. Nakagomi contended that admitting girls to pass public exams had a symbolic value, for it was key to raising academic performance and deciding the fitness of girls for public employment in general. Nakagomi then moved on to argue that the reformed schools became closely associated with women's colleges, and it became a priority for new secondary schools to submit candidates for such exams. She also asserted that girls became eligible to pass the College of Preceptors exams, and after a successful campaign led by Miss Emily Davies and her allies, Cambridge Local Examinations allowed women to sit informally in 1863. Early students, such as NLCS girls, demonstrated their potential with high marks, and as a result, it was permissible for female students to take Cambridge Local Examinations officially in 1865. Oxford Local Examinations were opened to girls from 1870, and they were accepted to take Oxford and Cambridge Schools Examination Board (Joint Board) examinations from 1877 (29).

In his article “The Reform of Women’s Secondary and Higher Education: Institutional Change and Social Values in Mid and Late Victorian England,” Pedersen Senders called attention to the fact that girls' schools witnessed a remarkable institutional change. As such, the presence of a governing board which had restricted the influence of the wealthy parents on teachers. For example, in cases of conflict with students' parents, teachers could generally count upon the backing of their governors. When, for instance, in 1875, the Headmistress of the Norwich School found herself in difficulties with a defiant parent who intended to keep her daughter away from school one day without leave, contrary to the school rules, the teacher appealed to her Council for intervention. The Council resolved that the parent be informed that either a written application for a leave of absence must be presented to the headmistress or the Council itself would deal with the matter, and the parent seems to have withdrawn before this show of force (74).

Furthermore, Pederson stated that the girls’ public schools imposed new conditions for membership in their institutions. The author maintained that these schools demanded regular attendance of their pupils, and once the schools were securely established, they also sought to limit entry to students whose academic accomplishments were in keeping with their age. But private schoolmistress was obliged to adapt her arrangements to fit the convenience of their pupils' parents. Girls' public schools rather urged parents to order their home life to accommodate the schools' demands. Some public day schools, for example, instituted elaborate time-tables organising their pupils' study-time at home. The intent was to ensure that the girls were given time free from familial interruptions in which to prepare their

lessons. At Cheltenham School, in 1870, a headmistress introduced a system of cards to which to be sent to parents stating the number of hours that their daughters were expected to devote at home each day, and the parents were required to enter the exact at which the girls were to prepare their lessons (76).

In addition to the feminist campaign to reform girls' secondary education, the early movement for higher education represented one of the flourishing moments in the history of feminism in the 1860s. Its advocate, Emily Davies placed a great emphasis on higher education for girls to expand the range of occupations open to them, make them fit the public office, increase the salaries of teaching in girls' schools, and support the woman question. Davies was deeply influenced by the educational experience of other countries, especially France, Germany, and Italy, where women were accepted into universities (Burstyn 1973).

Davies introduced fundamental questions about the essence of higher education and the impact it would have on girls' professional careers. This sparked Davies to seriously think of establishing the first university for females. In practice, she sought to gain support at the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science (NAPSS) to open the university local examination for the girls:

> At the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science (NAPSS) … with women as well as men participants, women found platforms to express their ideas, share them with one another, and forge links for social action. For the first time, they had the opportunity to function as equals with a group of male professionals and educated amateurs, some of whom supported their ideas for women's education. (Burstyn 25)

In 1869, Lady Stanley, Barbara Bodichon, and Emily Davies addressed a meeting to discuss the way in which to improve the quality of education offered to girls. Davies proposed to establish the first university open only to girls. After much fundraising and lobbying, they effectively set up the first women's college at Hitchin, 36 miles away from Cambridge, in 1869. (Barbara 282)

For a number of reasons, the geographical situation of the Girton College was fertile ground to obtain qualitative and formal education. Historian Pam Hirsch pinpointed two factors that made the founders choose Girton other than well-known places. The first one is that Girton was a calm place and had a captivating and magical nature. The second is that the founders wished to offer the necessary means of comfort so that the young ladies would concentrate only on their studies (252). Later, Emily Davies recalled that the place of the Girton University was chosen carefully and deliberately in order to help girls achieve their full intellectual potential and develop their talents just as young men away at college had always been able to do so.

The founders sought to present their recently established university as respectable and of great reputation. Leading advocate Bodichon wrote a letter to Davies, stating clearly," If we do it at all, we must do it well. My whole core is in the idea" (Hirsch 247). They abolished mixed-gatherings and dining tables to free the young ladies from rumors of intrigues and free-love affairs (Barbara 209).

Nevertheless, the founders had received harsh criticism from a group of journalists of the London satirical magazine Punch. An early article by Mark Lemon stated that Punch aimed “to raise a laugh and that it would be outspoken and irreverent in

attacking the usual butts of Radicals, including Emily Davies, Lady Stanley, and Barbara Bodichon" (Geoffrey 22). Radicalism in this sense does not mean that Davies and her associates promoted anti-religious views or attacked the State, but it reflects the fact that the advocacy project of higher education for girls was viewed as ridiculous and posed a serious challenge to the patriarchal social norms.

While it is true that the feminist campaigners did face the challenge of how to gain acceptance for their views in society, they achieved, however, promising results. During the first five years of existence, for example, eighteen young girls took the entrance test in the first year of college. In addition, only five girls took up residence as the first entering class. These five girls attended a study course identical to their male counterparts in Cambridge, with Cambridge qualified teachers traveling by train to Hitchin College to give them private lessons (Shiman 21).

In addition to admitting girls to universities, they received intensive courses on Mathematics, which was one of the subjects that Emily Davies appreciated the most. The advocates of girls' higher education saw the need to add the scientific subjects such as chemistry, and physics to the university program (Ashton 2012). They insisted that it a prime priority to teach the girls scientific subjects, because they would make them intelligent and more compatible with the technological progress. As historian Claire Jones has pointed out,

> The combination of mental and physical excellence that success in the Mathematics Tripos was believed to demonstrate, plus its acknowledged connections to elite masculinity, made the discipline a target for campaigners such as Emily Davies in their strategy to demonstrate women's intellectual equality with men (16).

Furthermore, topics such as Logic, Politics, History, and Chemistry were added to the university program and girls were more willing to pick their own study courses. The girls received the same lectures from the same teachers as the male-students from Cambridge University (Gould 130). The students likewise sat for the same tests as their male partners in Cambridge; they arranged and sat for the Tripos and Little Go exams, which the greater part of them normally passed, despite the fact that it implied extreme examination hours and students noted that Miss Davies was "apt to underestimate the drawbacks arising from want of previous preparation' and any other Tripos than Mathematics and Classics was, to Miss Davies, 'a soft option" (Barbara 232). During the first years, five girls passed in Classics and two students passed in Mathematics; the remaining three passed one term later (Barbara 239). The campaign to reform girls' higher education succeeded in refuting the conventional view that claimed woman's "proper sphere" was the home, focused on childcare and housekeeping. As a result, girls were officially accepted to pass public exams.

IV. b. The Secularists' Axial Role in the Women's Suffrage Campaign

Mid-century Secularism represented an important stage for the development of the feminist political thought. In 1855, Holyoake published an article through which to encourage women to join the Secularist movement. Holyoake strenuously believed that women possessed the necessary 'self-command' and 'intellectual strength' that would enable them play an active role in the public sphere, particularly in politics. To attract more Freethinking women willing to take part in this Secular project, Holyoake referred to the recently deceased Freethinking feminist Emma Martin, describing her as a true 'propagandist,' who had played a key role in the public space

in her role as a speaker on the behalf of the oppressed women. He urged other female Freethinkers to follow Martin in becoming preachers of 'the public' (Schwartz 111).

Many of the intellectual radicals, who were recently active in the Freethought movement, became true makers of the Secularist ideology from the 1850s onwards. As Laura Schwartz has pointed out, "it was during this period that such a Freethought sentiment was organised into the Secularist movement, which argued that political, cultural and moral life should be separated entirely from religion" (777).

What was George Jacob Holyoke's intention behind inviting the Freethinking feminists to join the Secularist movement? Holyoake had grown up around and among working women who were self-sufficient and proof of women's capabilities. Entering the political sphere, and developing his own ideas, within Owenism, he was then part of a movement which viewed the emancipation of all people, including men and women, as central to their goals. This included those women mentioned above, and others, who occupied key positions as speakers, writers, and organizers within organised Freethought, as well as women like Frances Wright, Harriet Law, and Annie Besant who built on Freethinking principles in efforts to found a new community of their own. Holyoake's vision for secularism, a humanist philosophy focused on reason, equality, compassion, and making the most out of the one life we could be certain of naturally called for the inclusion of women. Secularists also recognised the key role of women in lending power to the Church, and therefore knew the importance of women being part of, and being seen to be a part of, secularism, to strengthen the movement and to weaken the hold of the Church.

It is important to note that during this period Holyoke was concerned to represent the Secularist movement as respectable. Holyoake as a young man was as radical and outspoken as Bradlaugh later became. However, as he got older his personal desire for respectability and acceptance grew. This is always a dilemma for those seeking socio-political change. Holyoke could accept that some individuals with religious opinions could be Secularists. Scholar Richard Allen Soloway once argued in his article "Royle Edward. Victorian Infidels: The Origins of the British Secularist Movement, 1791–1866", that "Holyoake and his successors in the 1850s called not for confrontation but positive cooperation, even with Christian reformers" (590).

Hence, the claim to 'respectability' marked a new stage in Secularity itself, and this was key to integrating the more radical Freethinking feminists into subsequent women's rights campaigns, particularly in the women's suffrage movement and the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts. From the 1850s through to la fin de siècle, the term 'Secularist' came to replace 'Freethinker' to demonstrate the fact that the tradition of 'unbelief' in utopian schemes of Freethought and Owenite societies of the early nineteenth century was not really abandoned, but was rather combined with a supposedly secular language of 'ideological diversity'.

The Secularist political ideology can be best understood in terms of 'moral mission.' Like the evangelical Christians, the Secularists also expressed that powerful sense of 'militant moralism' (Schwartz 2013). For example, Secularist support for a multiplicity of nineteenth-century reform movements, including electoral reform and Republican campaigns in the 1850s, 60s and 70s, was motivated by a sense of moral responsibility similar to that of the most pious evangelical philanthropist (Royle 193-

206). Therefore, the majority of Freethinkers were extremely susceptible to the militant moralism and powerful reforming enthusiasm which mostly characterized so much of the women's rights campaigns.

With the ‘rise’ of the women’s suffrage movement in the 1860s, the Secularists had provided the necessary intellectual and political support to the movement in its early beginnings. For example, leading Secularist and Freethinker Elizabeth Wolstenholme was among the first signatories of the London committee, of which Caroline Stansfeld (née Ashurst) was a member. In addition, Wolstenholme founded the Manchester Committee for the Enfranchisement of Women (MCEW) and became its secretary in 1866. She also collected over 300 of the 1,499 signatures on the petition that Mill presented to the House of Commons on 7 June 1866 (Schwartz 171). The word ‘rise’ is used instead of ‘emergence’ to demonstrate that ideas on female suffrage did actually exist among the feminist intellectual circles, and that the Secularist movement continued to provide the support to the growing suffrage campaigns in order to advance the cause.

The publication was a central propagandist instrument for Secularists’ political activism. The leading Secularist journals of the time, including *The National Reformer*, *The Reasoner*, and *The Secular Chronicle*, also identified women’s suffrage as a chief factor for the establishment of equal voting rights between the sexes and "lent its editorial support to the committees to lobby for the extension" (Schwartz 780). Two weeks later, in the midst of the wider reform agitation, The National Reformer devoted its front-page article to argue for the inclusion of women's suffrage in the Bill. Its author stated that the petition presented by Mill and the

women's suffrage committees would help to procure the vote and to win recognition for the place of women in public and political life. In 1867, the National Society for Women's Suffrage was founded by the various local committees. In 1870 it began to publish its own Women's Suffrage Journal, the first edition of which listed the Secularist lecturer Louisa Wade and a 'Mrs. Bradlaugh' as members of the London society. Over the next two decades the Secularist press regularly published reports of the suffrage societies' committee meetings and public lectures. (Schwartz 171)

Following the circulation of John Stewart Mill's first petition, the Secularists organised public lectures to rally support for the cause. The lecturers were generally a hodgepodge of Secularists and Freethinkers, who tended to be in favour of full political rights for women. In 1870, for example, Christopher Charles argued at the Birmingham Secular Club that there was absolutely no reason for "denying the largest half of the human race their rights", while Mr. Conway maintained that there "was no reason why women should not show themselves to be perfectly capable politicians" (Schwartz 173).

What distinguished the Secularists from the women's suffrage campaigners is that they advocated the 'Cause' on intellectual grounds. One of the distinctive features of mid-century Secularists is that they used the conventional enlightenment rhetoric of human rights to discuss female suffrage. They also defended reason and asserted that 'female citizenship' marked progress from tyrannical and savagery to a civilised democratic nation. In 1870, The National Reformer Journalist H. V. Mayer began his article on 'Woman Suffrage' with the assertion that "As a lover of liberty I would have woman free as well as men... Freedom is everyone's birthright." He also pointed to

the 'long axiom' of 'English liberals' that there should be "no taxation without representation."(Schwartz 174)

In her first public lecture in 1869, Annie Besant also set out to challenge those who claimed that women were naturally unfit for the proper exercise of the franchise.

> In a free country, a vote means power. When a man is a voter, his wishes must be taken into consideration; he counts as one in an election, his opinion influences the return… And this is the answer of women to those who urge on them that they should turn their attention to practical matters, and leave off this agitation about the franchise. We shall do nothing so foolish. True, certain laws press hardly on us; but we are not going now to agitate for the repeal of these laws one by one. We might agitate for a long time before we gained attention (5).

Annie Besant used Freethinking arguments while discussing the question of suffrage. That is, the franchise was women's natural right, and that the enfranchisement of women would lead to humanity's progress.

There were few exceptional cases in which some Secularists argued against the question of women's suffrage, believing that women's place was in the home and that her involvement in politics would corrupt the family life. They employed some Freethinking arguments, particularly the question of 'woman and her religion', to oppose political rights for women. For example, Mr. G. Bill argued against Christopher Charles at the Birmingham Secular Society, claiming that to grant women the vote would endanger the Secularist project. He referred to some of the weaknesses of women, especially as they had always been the tools of churchmen, and completely in their power, and had wrought much mischief to mankind as a result. Similarly, leading Secularist W. R. Ross railed against the oppression of the female

sex by Christianity, and yet he also opposed the enfranchisement of women on the grounds that they were too susceptible to the influence of the clergy and that their votes would be used to elect Christian candidates (Schwartz 172).

The Secularists were the first to discuss the question of universal suffrage at a time when the suffrage movement was still under-construction. When the National Secular Society lent its tentative support to a limited extension of the 1866 Bill proposed by William Gladstone, some Freethinkers like Harriet Law were against the proposed extension of the Bill in the hope that all British women could elect their representatives in the subsequent general election. In a speech just before the final reading of the 1866 Bill, Harriet Law advocated votes for women in the context of her broader commitment to full universal suffrage. In 1866, Law carried her message to the streets during the protests that took place in Hyde Park, when the officers targeted those protesting for the expansion of the franchise under the proposed Reform Bill (Schwartz 173).

Perhaps due to the relative success of some Freethinking feminists in rallying a militant support of the 'Cause', their contemporaries at times attempted to dissociate them from the movement. Against a backdrop of the protests in the Hyde Park, Emily Davies showed considerable fear concerning the 'militant proclivities' of some of those on the London Committee, including Elizabeth Wolstenholme and Harriet Law. She wrote to Barbara Bodichon in panic, insisting that "It will clearly not do to identify ourselves too closely with Mill" (Holton 23). One reason is put forward to justify such a hostility. The Secularist movement was perhaps larger than the 'mainstream' women's suffrage movement, thereby resulting in an endless struggle

between the most “respectable” Christian feminists and “Freethinkers” over which current of feminism would offer most to suffrage movement.

The Secularist movement made important contributions to the rising suffrage movement, but why was it entirely absent in historiography? One possible reason which could have contributed to this is that the majority of historians of feminism and feminist scholars tended to focus upon the circumstances that prompted the evolution of the suffrage movement more than their focus on the beliefs and ideas of the feminist women. The Secularist movement made Freethinking women at the forefront of Victorian women's attempts to participate in a political sphere. It provided them with the necessary enthusiasm and editorial support to justify their radical attempts as women to assume the 'masculine' role of secularist preacher in order to democratize a variety of public and political institutions.

IV. c. Politics of Gender

In the nineteenth century, the study of prostitution was one of the dynamic academic topics. The extraordinarily introduced Acts and the successful campaign to repeal them have been explored in many ways by historians. Above all, there is a need to explore the sexual, religious, and historical causes contributing to the passage of the Acts in the British Parliament. The hope is to offer a fuller understanding, and to introduce new concepts, about the repression of female sexuality and why prostitution became the major concern of the middle-class intellectuals. One of such new concepts is “sexual politics,” which examines the way in which activists strived to support the liberties of prostitutes to gain political outcomes.

The repression of female sexuality by the moral and sexual double standard was one of the major factors leading to the passage of the Contagious Diseases Acts. According to Milhausen and Herold, the sexual double standard can be defined as a standard that judges sexual behaviour differently for men and women, with men being more positively evaluated than women for showing the same sexual behaviours (362).

There is a number of scholars who have agreed that the sexual double standard was a result of the patriarchal ideology of gender roles. Professor Annette Jolin observed that patriarchy deliberately imposed the sexual double standard ideology to repress the female sex. In sexual intercourse, a woman, she argued, was expected, other than passive obedience and submission, to satisfy her husband's sexual desires (76). Also, Peeper Schwartz contended that men have always used the sexual double standard as a means to obtain loyalty from women, to keep and maintain control, assure access, and establish gender inequality. (78)

The language of Victorian sexuality was repressive upholding patriarchal notions of aggressive masculinity over passive femininity. The same sexual conduct by the sexes can be interpreted in various and opposing ways, bringing about various measures of satisfactory conduct. Regardless of separating females from manly behaviour, the sexual double standard implied that it was only the behaviour of females that should be judged. In *The Making of Victorian Sexuality*, Michael Mason, one of the authors who produced more than two volumes on Victorian sexuality, argued that the sexual double standard led to the maintenance of power differentials in intimate sexual relations, which placed the responsibility for the consequences of sexuality firmly on women's burden. He wrote: “women were unable to experience

sexual pleasure and that their hypocritical husband who consorted with prostitutes" (38-39).

Interestingly, the sexual and moral double standard between the sexes found concrete expression in marriage. The Victorians demanded chastity and purity from women, before and after marriage. As historian Lawrence Stone has pointed out, "Value was placed upon female chastity in the marriage market due the importance of the legitimacy of the heirs to property and titles in a hierarchal and propertied society." (Stone 658). It must be noted that the sexual and moral double standard was enforced on married women in order to submit them to the will of their husbands.

A set of sexually biased laws had played a major role in reinforcing the sexual double standard ideology in society at large. For instance, making sex was permissible for the men outside marriage. In addition, a husband could under the protection of the law divorce his wife if she committed adultery, but the wife could not divorce her husband for the same reason. These repressive laws were later enriched in the Matrimonial Cause Act of 1857. (Shanley 79-80)

With the rise of bourgeois rationality in Victorian society, it became a common tradition that a woman and her properties were the property of the husband. When a man and woman get married under the law, they would constitute the same entity (Pearlston 265). However, a woman should not have to deal with financial matters: so, husbands took over the property of their wives at marriage, and wives were increasingly excluded from the running of family businesses. This is clear evidence that women were bound to suffer impoverishment relative to the growing wealth around them. In *The Subjection of Women,* John Stewart Mill argued that it was due

to the sexual double standard that middle-class women became sexually repressed and were not permitted to inherit property or take a case to court unless a male guardian was in charge.

> Securing to women equality of rights in this respect: and thereby improving materiality the position… and preventing also the scandalous abuse of the marriage institution, which is perpetrated when a man entraps a girls into marrying him without a settlement, for the sole purpose of getting possession of her money. (24)

It is because of male dominance; female sexuality required the sexual double standard. Thus, women were forced to sign over everything and they were left with no type of security if their husbands decided to leave or divorce them.

It could be said that the Victorians used the double standard characteristics to create two classes of women: submissive and sexually deviant women. A submissive woman had to remain in the home, take care of her husband, and upbring her children on good religious morals. Sexually deviant women, on the other hand, operated in the brothels and were to blame for the spread of debauchery and prostitution in society. In the "subject of prostitution: interpreting the discursive, symbolic and material prostitution of sex/work in feminist theory," scholar Jane Scoular challenged the culturally entrenched notion that men were 'naturally' lustful and should therefore be forgiven for a lack of chastity, whereas allegedly immoral sexual behaviour was deemed inexcusable when displayed by women (344). In her research work *Prostitution and Male Supremacy*, historian Andrea Dworkin stressed how women were always subject to sexual exploitation within and outside the family life, regardless of their social background. Furthermore, Dworkin proposed that the patriarchs created this double standard morality to victimize women. "If it is required

that people be treated with cruelty and indignity and humiliation, and put into a condition of servitude so that men can have sex. That is exactly the essence of male dominance" (142). That means, woman's role revolved around only sexual reproduction. Seeing in this light, a wife could be seen as a slave, whose sexual services were in control of her husband.

Also, the repression of female sexuality could be traced back to the evangelicals' more repressive views and practices toward womanhood. With the rise of evangelicals within the Church of England, ideas of domestic femininity - with women as the moral center of the home - became ever more persuasive. The concept of the 'Angel in the House' was first introduced by the evangelicals, and it aimed to define the home as woman's proper and safe sphere. The evangelical community believed that sex outside marriage was perceived as both immoral and dangerous. They constructed a strict view of a repressed female sexuality and advocated chastity and prudence in both sexes, but particularly in the woman who had to be, as Nancy Scott said, a "passionless" wife and mother (221). Women in particular were bound by the expectations of what it meant to be a moral, socially respectable figure during the 19th century, and in the early 19th century to be religious was to be moral.

The evangelical communities adopted penance to redeem the society from Eve's evil. The establishment of the evangelical penitential agency aimed to repress the prostitutes. *The Quarterly Review* documented the following: the evangelicals created dozens of penitentiaries to repress the prostitutes. In London, for instance, there existed the London Female Penitentiary (1807), the Guardian Society (1812), the British Female Penitent Refuge (1829), and the London Female Mission (1836). The

oldest shelter for fallen sisters had 110 intimates, the London Female Penitentiary 100, the London Society for the Protection of Young Females 70, the Home for Penitent Females 50, the Lock Hospital Asylum 27, the Guardian Society 33, and the British Female Refuge 31 inmates. Moreover, the number of penitentiaries in the counties was similar, the Liverpool Penitentiary had a number of 56 inmates, the Liverpool Benevolent Society had a number of 21, the Birmingham Magdalen had a number of 22, the Bristol Penitentiary had a number of 17, the Leeds Guardian had a number of 11, the Newcastle Asylum 26, the Manchester and Sanford Asylum had a number of 82 inmates. During two years of imprisonment, prostitutes were not allowed to send letters, exceptionally one time per month. They were also trained to be qualified for making domestic works, especially cooking and laundry skills. (Armstrong 362)

Through a wide-ranging critical discussion of the nature of these evangelical penitentiaries, it is easy to observe the evangelicals wanted to confine women's roles, whether a good woman or prostitute, within the domestic realm of the family. An article written by Mumm Susan "Not Worse than Other Girls," looked at the way in which the evangelical penitentiaries kept the prostitutes in their position and were no longer capable of anything beyond what actions landed them in that position (527). In the same vein, Maria Isabel Romero Ruiz was of the opinion that the evangelical penitentiaries taught prostitutes submissiveness and conformity to Christian values and the family life (145).

Turning now to explore the historical cause that led to the passage of the Contagious Diseases Acts in the British Parliament. In 1857, a number of military

soldiers in the military and marine forces were put under the medical test. After visiting the doctors, these servicemen were tested positive for various venereal diseases. The report from the Select Committee on the Contagious Diseases mentioned that there was an outbreak of syphilis at the Aldershot military camp, in England, where many prostitutes frequented. This epidemic forced the British governors to immediately intervene in order to contain this epidemic. As a result, the Government made the prostitutes responsible for the spread of the contagious diseases (Hiersche 1).

Later, the British Parliament passed three Acts known as the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869. These Acts were passed without any serious and open debate in the House of Commons. They provided for the sanitary inspection of prostitutes in eighteen districts in Southern England and Ireland. Their aim was to shield non-commissioned soldiers from a range of genital diseases. The Acts were enforced by the ordinary police under the authority of the Metropolitan Police, and aimed to identify prostitutes and submit them to internal examination by designated official doctors. If a prostitute was found to be infected, she was to be detained in hospital for a certain period, and if she refused to undergo examination, she was confined on the charge of breaking the law of the state. These Acts attempted to give British police officers unlimited authority to arrest any woman or girl who was suspected of being a prostitute (Sung-Sook 94).

The British government took up strict procedures to isolate the prostitutes and contain the epidemic. As such, they had certified a number of hospitals, which were under the control of the local authorities, for medical exams. Furthermore, the doctors

would have to turn in the names of prostitutes who would come into these hospitals. These doctors had to not let the prostitutes escape through the gaps, and that they should treat them disrespectfully (Hiersche 3).

Some historians have assumed that the Contagious Diseases Acts were designed to repress the female sex. In their opinion, the Acts were applied only to the prostitutes, although the soldiers used to go to the brothels searching for sexual pleasure. For example, Judith Walkowitz observed that the Contagious Diseases Acts were the result of the sexual double standard ideology of the early Victorian times (70). Also, scholar Levine Philippa maintained that the Contagious Diseases Acts led to the stripping of women's dignity. Men would look at women as dirty, regardless of the result of the examination. It became clear that the Contagious Diseases Acts were concerned with protecting the white men in the colonies from the effects of venereal disease, rather than improving the health of prostitutes who suffered just as poorly (178).

In response, a massive public debate opened up surrounding the Contagious Diseases Acts, and the Secularists took the initiative. In the autumn of 1869, Elizabeth Wolstenholme presided over the Congress of Social Science in Bristol in response to efforts to extend the Acts (McCrone 1982). This conference was also attended by Josephine Butler and a group some leading feminist activists in the Quaker movement. Wolstenholme was encouraged by the Congress voting to oppose the Acts, but instead of heading a repeal campaign herself, she put forward her friend Josephine Butler, whose "married status and religious piety provided her with the necessary cloak of respectability to speak on a subject well beyond the pale of middle-

class womanhood" (Holton 203-5). As a result, the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (LNA) was formed and Josephine Butler became its president.

The majority of the feminist repealers came from a conservative denominational background, although very few of them were radicals. Scholar Judith Walkowitz once claimed that "the Ladies National Association (LNA) was powerfully influenced by Christian moralistic rhetoric due to the evangelical revival after the 1850s" (103-131). Unlike the Secularists who were not accustomed to religious phraseology, the LNA feminist repealers stressed the importance of a religious setting in recruiting middle-class women for its familiar and reassuring ambiance. Religious rhetoric and prayer meetings were strenuously relied on in unifying a broader, mobilized collective protest against the C.D Acts. Religious piety provided the women activists with "the cloak of respectability to discuss the forbidden subject publicly" (Schwartz 154). It was also a great way "to bring women from all social classes together, since it allowed the strict class boundaries to be surpassed" (Webster 153).

The LNA for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts became the terrain upon which the Freethinkers and Christians collaborated with each other for the same defining political cause. Surprisingly, the Freethinkers found themselves campaigning side by side with persons like Francis Close and Bishop of Carlisle, who had been the target of some Freethinkers like Robert Owen in Cheltenham, and had played a key role in prosecuting George Jacob Holyoake for writing, publishing, and selling blasphemous works. Although many Secularists were not extremely content with the overtly Christian tone of the repeal campaign, considering the fact that

Josephine Butler was an Anglican, they happily contributed to “the repealers' moralistic critiques of sensual gratification and the libertine cynicism of those who supported the Acts” (Walkowitz 102). The Secularists’ support for the repeal campaign shows that the militant moralism normally associated with evangelical Christianity was not limited to religious contexts, and that it was often combined with a supposedly ‘secular’ language of personal rights.

The British Quakers were also involved in the repeal campaign, and they provided a far more pragmatic vision based on religious insights. In his doctoral thesis, Sung-Sook Lee observed that Quaker women played an axial role in the repeal campaign. For example, he stressed how Victorian Quaker feminists’ desire to promote the abolition of the Acts was displayed by their attempt to get rid of the fundamental social and cultural rationale, the so-called the "double standard." Then, he moved on to demonstrate that British Quaker women activists were actively interested in the questions of women’s rights with which they deplored the inequality between the sexes.

> The Women's Meetings protected them, as women, from the outward power and influence of men," They helped women to keep the ideal of full equality alive. This idea has passed from generation to generation to the present, when it appears that equality can be taken for granted (121).

Quaker women's networks provided a wide, nationally-linked support mechanism for Josephine Butler's extra-parliamentary activism. They brought about a unique resistance from the prostitutes themselves, which differed from all existing feminist movements of the period. Josephine Butler herself regarded the Quaker feminists as the most important group supporting the repeal campaign.

However, in investigating the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, historians of feminism and feminist historians have rarely commented on the active participation of the Secularists in the repeal campaign, despite the fact that this participation constituted such a distinguishing feature of the Victorian feminist movement. The Secularists' writings provided a platform for a potentially flexible feminist campaign.

In her four letters on the Contagious Diseases Acts, which were re-printed from the *Daily News* by the Ladies' National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, leading Secularist Harriet Martineau provided resilient arguments based on logic and free inquiry.

In her first letter, Martineau stated that the Acts affected the lives of many British women not only the prostitutes or fallen sisters.

> The occasion is graver now, and I trust you will permit me to explain, in a brief but careful way, what the danger is in which we find our country and everybody in it involved, through the ignorance of most of my countrywomen; the ignorance and carelessness of whole classes of our countrywomen, whose duty it is to know better (2).

By emphasising "the ignorance and carelessness of whole classes of our countrywomen', Martineau attempted to cultivate a sense of solidarity towards working-class prostitutes.

In the second letter, Martineau offered far more rational arguments, which made the secularist vision at the forefront of the repeal campaign. In the reasoning, Martineau refuted the view that prostitution was a 'public necessity', and maintained that 'poverty' rather than 'sin' led women into prostitution. In her opinion, the British

Parliament authorized prostitution and made men think it was a ‘necessity, ‘but, unfortunately, the prostitutes were responsible for the consequences. Furthermore, Martineau asserted that the C.D. Acts provided men with the illusion of safety, with registered sex workers undergoing examinations to ensure the absence of venereal diseases. Thus, the demand for prostitution grew tremendously, and the supply rose to meet it. Martineau was of the opinion that the passage of the Contagious Diseases Acts would not put an immediate end to prostitution. Instead, she urged the British legislators to reconsider the laws organising the practice of prostitution (Walkowitz 79).

In her third letter, Martineau asserted that the servicemen were to blame for the spread of the infection and malady. For her, most of them were still unmarried, thereby prostitution was a good option for them.

> Bodies of men, for the most part unmarried, deprived of home, with large portions of their time unemployed professionally, and whose life is yet passed under external regulation which leaves no scope for personal interest and chosen pursuits (41).

To support her previous opinion, Martineau found that the number of servicemen admitted to the hospitals was higher than the places under the surveillance of the Acts like Newcastle, Sunderland, Darlington, and other Northern and Midland counties.

> A faithful study of the reports to the War-office, and honest inquiry into the evidence requisite to a real opinion on the subject, will be found to leave no doubt that, after a trial of the inspection system for a course of years … Some statistical returns now before me show that in some foreign stations where rigid supervision and regulation have existed for a course of years, the proportion to strength (the number of cases under the diseases) of

> admission to hospitals per thousand is, to “unprotected stations as twelve to nine (42).

Certainly, the point that Harriet Martineau was trying to refer to is that the soldiers in the naval and military establishments used to go to brothels, and, thus, they were also active sex workers. By stressing that “the number of servicemen admitted to the hospitals was higher than the places under the surveillance of the Acts,” Martineau confirmed that the statistics offered by the government were either false or probably aimed to preserve the soldiers' dignity.

In the fourth letter, Martineau offered accurate statistics to prove that the Contagious Diseases Acts should be repealed in full. Martineau used the French system of licensed prostitution as a case study to prove that it is impossible to regulate prostitution in Britain either. "The estimate of the number of prostitutes in Paris mounted up to more than threefold in comparison to London" (Martineau 1869). Based on Martineau’s views, the difficulty to regulate prostitution was due to the misleading statistics that connected the spread of prostitution to poorly working-class zones, whereas prostitution was a highly-demanded market even among the middle and upper classes. For example, Walkowitz argued that the statistics used by the LNA repealers were "sensational and misleading" and "largely propagated by the medical profession" (256).

On 1 January 1870, the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts published an article entitled: ‘The Ladies’ Appeal and Protest’ in the Daily News, signed by 124 women. Among them were some of the leading feminists in the Quaker movement such as Elizabeth Fry and Florence Nightingale, and some Freethinking feminists such as Harriet Martineau, Sara

Hennell, and Elizabeth Wolstenholme. This manifesto proposed a series of feminist claims against the Acts.

For example, the first one mentioned that the Acts were passed without any knowledge or precise statistics.

> 1st. - Because, involving as they do such a momentous change in the legal safeguards hitherto enjoyed by women in common with men, they have been passed, not only without the knowledge of the country, but unknown, in a great measure, to Parliament itself; and we hold that neither the Representatives of the People, nor the Press, fulfill the duties which are excepted of them, when they allow such legislation to take place without the fullest discussion.

In the second and third claims, the feminist repealers introduced questions to the real function of the Law, and they drew attention to the fact that it should protect the civil liberties of all citizens, both male and female, from violations or unreasonable intrusions by persons.

> 2nd. - Because, so far as women are concerned, they remove every guarantee of personal security which the law has established and held sacred, and put their reputation, their freedom, and their persons absolutely in the power of the police. 3rd. - Because the law is bound, in any country professing to give civil liberty to its subjects, to define clearly an offence which it punishes.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth claims accused the British legislators of operating double standards, because they attempted to preserve the dignity of the soldiers, while ruining the prostitutes' reputation. The soldiers went somewhere in the brothels searching for prostitutes; this meant that the problem was something inherently wrong with the attitudes of men.

> 4th. - Because it is unjust to punish the sex who are the victims of a vice, and leave unpunished the sex who are the main cause, both of the vice and its dreaded consequences; and we consider that liability to arrest, forced medical treatment, and imprisonment with hard labor, to which these Acts subject women, are punishments of the most degrading kind. 5th. - Because, by such a system, the path of evil is made more easy to our sons, and to the whole of the youth of England; inasmuch as a moral restraint is withdrawn the moment the State recognizes, and provides convenience for, the practice of a vice which it thereby declares to be necessary and venial. 6th. - Because these measures are cruel to the women who come under their action, violating the feeling of those whose sense of shame is not wholly lost, and further brutalizing even the most abandoned.

While the last two ones made it clear that it is impossible to regulate prostitution in Great Britain, for the problem was moral not physical. That is, the Victorian religious society had authorized prostitution and made of it a "social necessity" to punish the female sex and reinforce woman's subordinate position in society. Under such circumstances, it was not possible to repeal the Acts or make any advancement in human rights.

> 7th. - Because the diseases which these Acts seek to remove has never been removed by any such legislation. The advocates of the system have utterly failed to show, by statistics or otherwise, that these regulations have in any case, after several years; trial, and when applied to one sex only, diminished disease, reclaimed the fallen, or improved the general morality of the country. We have, on the other hand, the strongest evidence to show that in Paris and other Continental cities where women have long been outraged by this system, the public health and morals are worse than at home. 8th. - Because the conditions of this disease, in the first instance, are moral not physical. The moral evil through which the disease makes its way separates the case entirely from that of the plague, or other scourges, which have been placed under police control or sanitary care. We hold that we are bound, before rushing into experiments of legislations a revolting vice, to try to

> deal with the causes of the evil, and we dare to believe that with wiser teaching and more capable legislation, those causes would not be beyond control (qtd. in *The Shield* 1870).

In response, one MP in the House of Commons, commenting on the C. D. Acts' protest, expressed his fear of this increasing feminist awareness.

> Your manifesto has shaken us very badly in the House of Commons", a leading man in the House of Commons remarked, "We know how to manage any other opposition in the House or the country, but this very awkward for us. This revolt of the women is quite a new thing; what are we to do with such opposition as this? (Butler 11)

In practice, Josephine Butler had investigated the status of prostitutes in the subjected areas. She published two articles in The Shield under the title "Men, Men, only Men," and "Abuses under the Contagious Acts," in which she reported her visits to the Lock Hospital in Kent and Dover prison, where five women were imprisoned under the Acts. She then addressed a meeting in Leeds, where she delivered her first public speech on the bad treatment of prostitutes by the police officials (Bell 102). To provoke a nationwide agitation, Butler and James Stuart went to Crewe and then Leeds in order to take the testimonies of working men. This included railway workers, engine-makers, and boiler-fitters. Finally, she visited different places like Newcastle, Sunderland, Darlington, and other Northern and Midland counties. She encouraged the working men to organise their own associations for the campaign to repeal the Acts (Butler 18).

On 18 March 1871, Josephine Butler presented evidence concerning the Contagious Diseases Acts to the Royal Commission. The questions raised by the bulk of Commissioners were antagonistic and sometimes confusing. Following her

testimony to the Chairman, Josephine Butler provided a good collection of letters and resolutions from working men in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle, Leeds, Birmingham and a number of other cities. One of the Commissioners asked, "Are these bona-fide working-men?" She answered, "Yes, there is more virtue in the country than you gentlemen in high life imagine." He asked again, "If these laws were put in operation in the North, do you believe they would be forcibly resisted?" She replied, "I will" (Butler 234-235).

Josephine Butler's remarks left a profound impression on the Commissioners. For example, Ryland stated: "I cannot give you any idea of the effect produced except by saying that the influence of the Spirit of God was there?" Josephine Butler's testimony brought about a favorable result. Lord Hardwicke, moved by her evidence, and said, "If this is a specimen of the strength of conviction in the country on moral questions, we must reconsider our ways" (Butler 235-236).

The Commission had evidence from 83 witnesses, fifty in favour of the Acts and only thirty-three in favour of repealing the Acts. Lasting from December 1870 to May 1871, the Commission released its report in July 1871, recommending that first, the periodical examination of the 'public women' should be discontinued and, second, that the less strict Act of 1864 should be reintroduced, under which any prostitute should be liable to be compulsorily examined and, if necessary, detained in hospital for three months, not nine months of 1869 Act (Sung-Sook 150).

In the 1880s the LNA repealers opened up a controversial debate over the regulation of prostitution in Britain. This led to the emergence of two opposing groups: the repealers who supported the more repressive laws on prostitution and

those who were striking to maintain the preservation of prostitutes' personal liberty. In August 1885, leading Secularist figure William Thomas Stead founded The National Vigilance Association (NVA). It was one of the most influential organisations which had grown out of the Contagious Diseases Acts repeal campaign. Its major aim was the enforcement and improvement of the laws for the repression of criminal vice and public immorality (Schwartz 164-166). The association's advocates were also known as Social Purity Activists. They maintained a strict religious view on prostitution, and they valued family and the home life almost above anything else (Vicinus xiii). In practice, they engaged in relief efforts, advocated to increase the age of consent, and, in some cases, lobbied for the closing of brothels and imprisonment of their owners. Also, they supported the Criminal Law Reform Act of 1885, which provided for the compulsory closing of all brothels and the arrest of someone renting rooms to a registered prostitute.

However, some Secularist activists like George Jacob Holyoake and Elizabeth Wolstenholme rejected the provisions of the Criminal Act of 1885 and were repelled by what they saw as the repressive and authoritarian direction taken by some social purity organisations. As a consequence, they joined the Vigilance Association for the Defense of Personal Rights (PRA), which was founded on 14 March 1871. The PRA activists powerfully opposed certain clauses of the Criminal Law Reform Act of 1885, claiming that it limited the freedom of women in the same manner to the C.D. Acts (Schwartz 183).

In an article published in the (PRA) journal in 1886, Elizabeth Wolstenholme powerfully challenged the Social Purity Activists who presumed that the closure of

the brothels would be the perfect solution to put an end to prostitution. She provided two secular assumptions that reflected her fuller understanding of the crux of the problem. First, the decision to close the brothels, she argued, was not key to rid society of prostitution. For her, prostitutes lived in hard social and economic circumstances, and that prostitution was viewed as a means for living for these women. Thus, the authorities were to blame for not providing these sex workers with a paid work that would preserve their dignity. Second, these prostitutes, once in prison, would be subject to the same 'internal examinations' that the supporters of social purity, including "the Christian and Freethinking repealers, had spent more than fifteen years campaigning against" (25-26).

Nevertheless, this Freethinking vision of 'personal liberty' was strongly opposed by some Freethinking activists, who feared that this would damage the reputation of the Secularist movement. For example, older Freethinkers such as Sara Hennell and Sophia Dobson Collet both bolstered William Thomas Stead in his sentimentalist journalistic crusade against the 'white slave trade', which led to the passage of the Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1885. Besides, Collet fiscally supported Stead's family at a time when he was in jail for the obtainment of whores as a result of his undercover work (Schwartz 184). From a critical point of view, the Freethinking feminists who rejected to support the prostitutes' personal liberties were influenced by Holyoke's principle of respectability and that their early Freethinking principles were really abandoned. While the others like Annie Besant and Elizabeth Wolstenholme continued to lend their support to fallen women's liberties and were

completely hostile to those respectable feminists who claimed that repeal of the C.D Acts could only be achieved through moral influences rooted in Christianity.

In spite of the fact that the vision of a purified public and private world was strongly shaped by the Christian faith of the majority of social purity campaigners, it is impossible to ignore the role played by the Secularist supporters of individual freedoms in the repealing process. The Secularists offered more explicit arguments in favour of women's right to sexual promiscuity, with the emphasis on a commitment to the preservation of personal liberty. The central argument of the repeal campaign was that men should abide by the same ethical standards as women, and to remain chaste until they married. The Secularists, on the other hand, argued that chastity was not a solution to resolve the problem of prostitution, for it denied the inherent expression of sexuality. In this context, Annie Besant claimed that: "[the Secularist] does not despise human passion, or pretend that he has nobody; on the contrary, reverencing nature, he regards physical union as perfecting the union of the heart and mind…" (6). In addition, the Freethinkers who supported the closure of brothels, like Newman, Sophia Collet, and Sara Hennell, articulated a 'secularist' feminist rejection of male-centered sexual norms; such as the sexual double standard ideology which made the husbands enjoy the sexual services of their wives while depriving them of their rights.

The arguments of the repealers seem to have been more effective and stronger than those of the proponents of the Acts. As a result, the Parliament decided to suspend the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1883, and were finally repealed in 1886 (Pivar 257). The repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts suggests that women’s intellectual

campaigning had achieved important political results and that women became active political participants in the male-dominated sphere.

Conclusion

Feminist intellectual campaigning provided a valuable insight into evolving political identities as well as demonstrating the impact that the feminist intellectuals had on the promotion of women rights. One of its merits is that the feminist intellectuals came to dominate the political spectrum. Also, they proved that women were capable of making political change. With the failure of the women's suffrage movement to promote women's right to vote throughout the nineteenth century, the feminist intellectuals created an independent political space for female initiatives. For example, Clare Midgley looked at the way in which feminist intellectual activists in Leeds and London were extremely active in organising, fundraising and leading the women's campaigns, communicating their aims by means of printed tracts and pamphlets and thus contributing materially to the formation of public opinion on the dominant feminist matters (50).

Among the political outputs of feminist intellectual campaigning is that women's rights gained recognition by society and the state. The feminist intellectuals invested in women's rights campaigns as a sphere of action and succeeded to spread progressive views about women's involvement in the public and political sphere. Besides, they were successful in championing the feminist cause. As such, they pressed the government to bring about the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886; girls were finally admitted to public examinations and universities; and they made far more progressive demands on female suffrage. Recently, in "Political

Attitude and Personality in a Democratic Society," Marijana Markovik, a researcher at the institute for Sociological, and Judicial Research in Macedonia, proposed that the feminist activists have become the guardians of women's rights and enhanced women's political and collective identities.

> A participative political culture… is also a road to positive changes in society because individual freedom depends on such crucial changes like the emancipation of the population. The Reconstruction in society leads to individual responsibility, adaption to a new political and economic system, and a recognition of their new role in the new system. (173)

It could be said that feminist intellectual campaigning offered a magnificent occasion for the reconsideration of women's social position. Feminist activists were able to extend their activities beyond the private realm of the family and proved to be socially and politically effective in championing the feminist project.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The impact that the feminist intellectual movement had on the status and the rights of women is manifested in two important aspects: the social and political level. Although contemporary ideologies of gender effectively justified the exclusion of women from full citizenship on grounds such as lack of financial and emotional independence or inferiority of intellect, the feminist intellectuals helped to recreate social identities for women in a totally repressive society. Many feminist activists noted how they were themselves drawn to the feminist movements by reading the stories and lives of the oppressed or marginalised group of women. As a consequence, they found themselves involved in the women's rights campaigns, and they helped to spread awareness about various issues including women's civil, political and educational rights in general.

Furthermore, the feminist intellectuals helped to reform the dominant patriarchal stereotypes about conventional femininity. The feminist intellectuals such as the Owenites, Secularists, and Freethinkers challenged sexism through many means, particularly as they confronted exploitation, harassment, and objectification in numerous spheres of their lives: home, family, and public settings. Specifically, women and their allies sometimes created a pressure group that collectively challenged the structural sources of male privilege and created distinctive politics of their own. The enlargement of the whole sphere of duty that many feminists called

for, from the merely personal into the social relations, represented a new interpretation of 'the social' as a domain aligned with the others to whom the subject was bound in a relationship of obligation. Thereby, the 'social' became a fresh area of conflict and gave prominence to women traditionally excluded from parliamentary politics to become active participants in the democratisation process.

Of politics, the feminist intellectuals raised women's voices in the British Parliament at a time when many advocates of the suffrage movement failed to do so. They used journalism and other forms of speaking and writing to promote women's rights. For example, the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts was one of the major political achievements of nineteenth-century feminist movement. The different feminist intellectual networks involved in the repeal effort, such as the Secularists and Quakers, produced an effective political struggle through an alliance between middle-class feminist intellectuals and the amalgamating all kinds of different classes of women in relation to one political agenda.

Turning now to the question of why the women's suffrage movement received such an exaggerated attention from scholars. The historical accounts of the women suffrage movement are generally designed to acquaint the reader with the known facts and to connect women's emancipation with the franchise. In addition, historians maintained that the unprecedented introduction of democracy to England is attributed to the suffragettes. That means, the political ideology of the suffrage movement was progressive, and it was compatible with political and social reform, and particularly supportive to the feminist project.

It must be said that the early organisational initiatives that went into forming an organised feminist thought emerged from the feminist intellectual circles in the 1830s and 40s. The Freethinkers and Owenites provided a forum for radical debates on women and her rights. They raised bold debates about sexual morality, marriage reform, divorce, free love unions, and education. These issues continued to be debated in the feminist intellectual movement before the emergence of the women's suffrage movement in the 1860.

Although many historians tended to link the emergence of ideas on female suffrage to the suffragettes, this thesis proved something to the contrary. The proto-feminists, Unitarians, and the Owenites were the original promoters of female suffrage in Britain. Theoretically, the proto-feminists and Unitarians provided a rich body of literature about woman and her political rights. In addition, they continued to criticise the exclusion of women from the franchise, the corrupt system of representation, and the property qualification. Practically, the Owenites were the first to allow women the right to vote in their councils and various political branches.

Finally, the advocacy project of women's political rights must be attributed to the successful feminist intellectual campaigns (the campaign for girls' education, female suffrage, and the feminist campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts), particularly from the 1850s to the 1880s. In this particular period in time, basic ideas on female suffrage, girls' education, and the personal liberties of the prostitutes were largely widespread in British society. For sure, the feminist intellectuals have become the driving force both in the social and political contexts. They removed the supposedly cultural, sexual and religious stereotypes about conventional femininity,

and enhanced women's collective and political identities. In this light, we should not forget what Antonio Gramsci once said: "every feminist group creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political field" (Belkhir 3).

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