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**Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain:**  
**The Long Road toward Women's Rights (1850/1928)**

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fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in  
Literature and Civilisation*

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## DEDICATION

*I dedicate this modest work:*

*To my lovely mother Chafia. And to the best man on earth in my  
eyes my father Mokhtar*

*There is no doubt in my mind that without them I would never go  
further in my life, and I say to them:*

*“Thank you for your affection, prayers and your selfless sacrifices.”*

*To my shining beloved sister Hanane*

*To the best copy of mine Amira*

*To my lovely brothers Walid and Haythem*

*To all my family, especially Zahra, Hadjer, Sara, Meriem*

*To my friend who shared this work with me: Chahinaz*

*To all my best friends*

*Houda*

## DEDICATION

*I dedicate this humble work:*

*To my wonderful deeply missed mother, I will always keep you in my thoughts and prayers.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Until the nineteenth century women in Britain were persecuted by a society that considered women's place at home and viewed women as servants to men. In most instances, by marriage, the husband and wife became one person and that person was the husband. Therefore, British women suffered in order to get equal rights that men had always enjoy, which led to the emergence of Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain in 1860. This research paper tends to highlight the status of women in the Victorian Era (1837-1901), in addition to the long road toward women's rights, focusing on the circumstances that prompted the evolution of the Suffrage Movement. Moreover, the main objective of this research is to show that this movement was the voice that pushed women to become independent, and that created a world where men and women share not only children and home but duties and rights as well.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>M.P.s</b>	Members of Parliament
<b>N.U.S.E.C</b>	The National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship
<b>N.U.W.S.S</b>	The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
<b>V.A.D</b>	The Voluntary Aid Detachment
<b>W.A.A.C</b>	Women's Army Auxiliary Corps
<b>W.I.L.P.F</b>	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
<b>W.R.A.F</b>	The Women's Royal Air Force
<b>W.R.N.S</b>	The Women's Royal Naval Service
<b>W.S.P.U</b>	The Women's Social and Political Union



## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Victorian era was a time of tremendous advancement in almost every aspect of society. These Changes affected the British society, its economy and social standards. Although it may have been considered as a period of development, it was likewise a time of inconvenience and anxiety because of the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840) in which England turn into the first modern country. Thus, the Industrial Revolution brought benefits as well as wretchedness to the British people, especially to women.

Women in the Victorian era lived in an age characterized by gender inequality. At the beginning of the century, women relished few of the legal, social, and political rights, as they could not vote, or had control over their personal property after marriage. In addition, they could not have custody of their children in cases of divorce, and they were banned from having equal share of higher education as men had. In fact, women were expected to remain servants to their male counterparts. Middle-and upper-class women generally stayed at home to take care for their children and husbands. And lower-class women often did work outside the home with low paid employments, such as domestic maids or employers in factories and mills.

In addition to the industrial and social changes, the era saw the emergence of the Women's Suffrage Movement or women's right to vote which took place between 1860 and 1928, and this was a significant event in the British history. The British women's suffrage movement generated several organizations which reflected considerable differences on the matters of political strategy. The NUWSS was formed in 1897. The suffragists supported law-abiding methods of protest and peaceful tactics. On the other hand, the WSPU was formed in 1903. The "militancy" of the WSPU began with minor acts of civil disobedience, but was eventually extended to violence and savagery, such as firebombing public buildings, and slashing works of art.

Based on the background of the study described above, this research work intends to answer the following question:

- What are the circumstances that led the British women to pursue their voting rights?
- How did the British women campaign for the suffrage demand?
- Did the campaign for women's suffrage succeed in achieving its cause?

In an attempt to answer the former questions, this humble work is a combination of three chapters:

The first chapter entitled: The Profile of Women in the British Society during the Nineteenth Century, is connected with the social history of women at that time, in addition to their status, rights, and the social classes they came from. It provides a description of the kind of education that the Victorian girls have received. Moreover, it gives a vision of married women and their rights, and the issues of divorce and spinsters as well.

The second chapter entitled: The Long Road for Women's Suffrage, begins with the feminist's arguments about women that warmed the demand for the women's suffrage in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early twentieth century. It analyses in detail the propaganda material used by the suffrage movement and examines the interaction between the way the suffrage organisations viewed and related to the political system, and the way political leaders and parties viewed and acted in response to suffrage activities. It highlights also, the anti- suffrage movements and the activities that had been done by suffragists during the outbreak of WWI.

The third chapter entitled: Women's get the Equality at Last, examines very briefly the Representation of the People act in 1918 and to the Equal Franchise Act of 1928. It examines also the process that gets the women a seat in both houses the Commons and Lords.

# **Chapter one: The Profile of Women in the British Society during the Nineteenth Century.**

## **1-Introduction**

## **2-The Position of Women in Society**

### **2.1-The Social Life**

#### **2.1.1- Women and Marriage**

### **2.2-The Economic Life**

### **2.3-The Political Life**

## **3- The Request for Women's Change (1860)**

## **4-Conclusion**

## 1-Introduction

For many people, the nineteenth century was an era of political and social unrest in Britain. In fact, some could deny that the age to which Queen Victoria<sup>1</sup> gave her name was an age of monumental changes and advances in all aspects of society. There was, for instance, the urbanization of the country which swept as a result of the Industrial Revolution<sup>2</sup>; also, there were great advances in engineering, railways, education, and medicine; in addition to some attempts to tackle poverty and squalor which blighted the land.

This chapter will, hence, explore the image of women in the British society during the nineteenth century concentrating on its economy, politics, and social aspects.

## 2- The Position of Women in Society (1800 ~ 1870)

Nineteenth century Britain was known as an age of advancements and reforms, these reforms had great impacts on the position of women in society: social, economic, and political life.

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<sup>1</sup>- Queen Victoria (1819–1901) was queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland from 1837 to 1901; it was the second longest reign of any other British monarch in history.

- "The Biography.com website," Queen Victoria Biography, last Updated November 21, 2016, <http://www.biography.com/people/queen-victoria-9518355>, accessed February 24, 2017.

<sup>2</sup>-The process of change from an agrarian and handicraft economy to one dominated by industry and machine manufacturing. This process began in Britain in the 18th century and from there spread to other parts of the world. The term was first popularized by the English economic historian Arnold Toynbee (1852–83) to describe Britain's economic development from 1760 to 1840.

- "Encyclopaedia Britannica," Industrial Revolution, last updated September 3, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Industrial-Revolution>, accessed February 25, 2016.

## 2.1- The Social Life

Throughout the nineteenth century, women's participation in society was constrained and in many ways unimportant. In addition to that, there had been gender disparity that was represented in religion, tradition, and law, which frequently led to men's abuse, oppression, and exploitation of women.

During the Victorian period, women were considered to be “domestic angels” and servants to their husbands, in most instances, men were the “breadwinners” and women were expected to stay at home to do household duties and to create an ideal atmosphere for their husbands. In fact, women's education was reflected in the domestic duties that they used to handle for their lifetime.

“A woman without the ability to handle a little music, a little drawing, and lots of needlework was considered lacking, as was a woman who was socially *gauche*”.<sup>3</sup> This standpoint made it clear, that women did not need much of an education to fulfil their role in society.

As domestic beings, most women were denied education because it was considered unnecessary. “It was believed that the purpose of educating women was to prepare them for marriage by inculcating the practical skills and moral values which would enable them to be good and dutiful wives”.<sup>4</sup>

Although this was the main reason for women to not letting them have an equal share of education, or an opportunity to attend university as men did. Moreover, when Oxford and Cambridge opened their doors to women in 1883, many families refused to let their daughters attend for fear that they would make themselves unmarriageable<sup>5</sup>. In

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<sup>3</sup> - Jenni Calder, *The Victorian Home* (London: Batsford, 1977), 117.

<sup>4</sup> Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500–1760* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994), 165.

<sup>5</sup> Kathryn Hughes, “Gender roles in the 19th century”, the University of East Anglia (MARCH 31, 2013): 8.

fact, in the early beginning of that era, only the middle-class and upper-class women were lucky enough to learn at home, whereas the working-class girls lacked this opportunity.

More interestingly, the status of women in society and their rights and duties cannot be generalized since they varied according to the social class a woman came from. In fact, each class had its particular way of living from dressing, behaving, educating and even working. In that era, the society was divided into three classes: The upper-class, the middle-class, and the lower-class.

The Upper-Class Also known as the elite class, is the utmost social class in the Victorian stratification. The women of this category did not work manually; in fact, they spent money freely and did not believe in hard work, their daily life was between visiting friends, reading letters, or going out to evening parties.

On the other hand another social class of the Victorian era was called the middle class. “This class got larger in size and value during the Victorian period. It was a category which sited between the working class and the elite class, and emerged about fifteen percent of the population; it also covered effective industrialists and moneyed bankers”.<sup>6</sup> The aim of middle-class women was to get a rich husband in other to get respect from the upper-class.

The Lower- Class women, however, were not treated very fairly, they were extremely poor, and they supported their families with low wages jobs, such as working in farms, factories, and mines in usually very bad conditions which caused them illnesses and diseases.

### **2.1.1-Women and Marriage**

During the Victorian period, marriage was sacred, and it was the goal of every woman to get married and have children. Women were expected to be good wives and great mothers, “The woman who was neither wife nor mother, through choice or

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<sup>6</sup> Juliet Mitchell, *Women and Equality, The Rights and Wrongs of Women* (London: Penguin, 1976), 379.

through misfortune, was seen as less feminine than her domesticated counterpart”.<sup>7</sup> For them love was defined as a capitulation. A woman empowered her spouse by accepting his authority, and by trusting him. Therefore, marriage was considered as a form of servitude and a source of abuse, and represented an excuse for the lacking of rights for ladies.

In spite of the fact that women could not gain control of their own or their husbands’ wealth, money and real property were important aspects when choosing the future partner, in addition to the social class that he came from, but “the arranged marriage in which parents carried out all the negotiations and the bride and groom had never seen each other before their wedding day had no place in any level of British society”.<sup>8</sup>

As a matter of fact, married women lost their freedom after the marriage. That is to say that 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; As a British lawyer pointed out: “the husband and wife are one, and that one is the husband”<sup>9</sup>. In fact, women could gain the control of their property only after their husbands’ death. “Once widowed, women were entitled to a dower, which was usually equivalent to one third of the husband’s estate”.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>- Jenni Calder, op.cit, 128.

<sup>8</sup>- F.M.L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900* (London: Fontana, 1988), 110.

<sup>9</sup>- “brainy quote,” William Blackstone Quotes, May 24, 2009, <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/w/williambla381937.html>, accessed December 3, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> -“Hiam Brinjikji,” Property Rights of Women in Nineteenth-Century England”, May 24, 2009, 2017, <http://www.umd.umich.edu/casl/hum/eng/classes/434/geweb/property.htm>., accessed January 5.

In addition, women were not legal representatives of their children and it was only after the 1839 Custody of Infants Act<sup>11</sup> that it was “possible for wives estranged from their husbands to gain custody of children less than seven years old”.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, divorce was not a common practice at that time, and it was considered as societal taboo. In fact, the only reason of divorce which was acceptable in the Victorian era was adultery; however, adultery was only valid for men.

At that time, divorced women were only a minority whereas married women created the majority; however, there was a large group of women who never got married. As a remarkable number of women remained single it was a must to talk about their status in society.

In addition to divorce there was another flashing aspect, which was the alimony<sup>13</sup>. It was not the idea of alimony itself that was surprising, but its very low amount. Besides, alimony existed in the British law as an annual batch and it could likewise be managed as a lump sum amount. Therefore, it was constantly separate from child support under a defence that it was the spouse's part to bolster and sustain wife with a bit of his property. However, the greatest astonishing issue concerning alimony was that if a woman got something like a dowry into her marriage she could regain that sum back with the alimony.

On the other hand, as daughters did not have the right to inherent their fathers' property, spinsters were often forced to live with their brothers and be dependent on them. “The unmarried aunt, sister or daughter could be expected to pay willingly for

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<sup>11</sup>- An Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom, which permitted a mother to petition the courts for custody of her children up to the age of seven, and for access in respect of older children in case of divorce.

- “parliament.uk,” Custody rights and domestic violence, <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/privatelives/relationships/overview/custodyrights/>, accessed January 20, 2017.

<sup>12</sup>- Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian Britain* (London: University of London Press, 2009), 51.

<sup>13</sup>- A regular amount of money support that a law court orders a person to pay to his partner after a divorce.

-“Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary & Thesaurus,” alimony,

<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/alimony>, accessed March 13, 2017.



the security of a home in terms of the service she could give”.<sup>14</sup> This fact increased the women’s work in order to support themselves. With the Victorian beliefs concerning the position of women as “angels in the house” and the act of marrying from the same social class, the issue of spinsterhood continued to represent a problem, one that could not be easily solved by law. Generally, marriage during the nineteenth century was based on wealth and classes more than love.

Doubtless, the Victorian era was possibly one of the periods which saw the most numerous and dramatic changes in society. However, coinciding with the Industrial Revolution, the nineteenth century in England was also marked by several changes in the economy which had a great impact on women.

## **2.2- The Economic Life**

Victoria became the queen of Britain at the beginning of the prosperous phase of the first Industrial Revolution. Industrialisation opened with it new markets and remarkable developments for most of the propertied classes. Victorian engineers developed bigger, speedier and stronger machines that could manage the whole factories. This increased the number of factories (particularly in textile factories or mills); that is to say, production increased tremendously, bringing wealth and power to Great Britain throughout the nineteenth century. However, the Industrial Revolution was more than a revolution in industry and manufacturing; it had profound effects on society as a whole and on women in particular. The term “Industrial Revolution” in fact means, increase developments in technology and economics; it started in England with a series of innovations to make labour more efficient and productive.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> - Jenni Calder, op.cit, 143.

<sup>15</sup> - Leif van Neuss, *Why did the Industrial Revolution Start in Britain?* (Liege: University of Liege, 2015), 10.

The Industrial Revolution brought with it benefits to the working-class ladies and at the same time expose them to perilous situations. Generally, women who worked during the Industrial Revolution were obliged to work in order to help support their families. They worked long hours in unpleasant, unhygienic, and often gruesome conditions, as there were an overabundance of machines with unsafe equipments that caused many accidents. In fact, women workers had only a break for lunch and dinner.<sup>16</sup>

Most working-class women in Victorian England worked in domestic services such as being maids or cooks, or labourers in factories, mines, textile mills, and other arms of industry. This was in addition to their household work which included cooking, cleaning, and child caring.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout most of this period, women were not treated equally; they were earned less than their male working partners, which created great financial difficulties for working women.

With the introduction of the female into the workplace, many political changes were required to be put in place. Women began to fight for their roles in society, causing uprisings and movements which would result in political unrest and eventual change.

### **2.3- The Political Life**

In the early nineteenth century, England saw tremendous changes in society. Because of the industrial revolution there was a shift from country sides to cities. And due to this urbanization, cities became larger and larger; which led to the demand for

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<sup>16</sup>- Elva Card, "Women and the Industrial Revolution" (Seminar, Social Studies department, Woodson High School Fairfax, 2004).

<sup>17</sup>- S. Anitha, and R. Pearson, "Women and work in the 19th century," *Feminist Review*, 1 August 2014, 61, <http://www.striking-women.org/module/women-and-work/19th-and-early-20th-century>,

reforms. The industrialized cities, which included the urban middle class, were then represented in the parliament. Despite all these changes in the early nineteenth century, women were still not accepted to take part in politics. Only men with money and property had the right to vote.

Woman has no call to the ballot-box, but she has a sphere of her own, of amazing responsibility and importance. She is the divinely appointed guardian of the home...She should more fully realize that her position as wife and mother, and angel of the home, is the holiest, most responsible, and queen like assigned to mortals; and dismiss all ambition for anything higher, as there is nothing else here so high for mortals.<sup>18</sup>

This stand point made it clear that men and women were expected to fill separated spheres of society; it means that women belonged to the private sphere which was home (housekeeping, childrearing), and men to the public sphere which was business, politics, and law.

The separation of spheres kept women out of the political field, which seemed to confirm the idea that women could not vote in parliamentary elections or stand as MPs. The only woman who stood out during that era was Queen Victoria.

In the mid of the nineteenth century, women's acceptance of the traditional roles began to dissipate, as they started to ask for equal rights, and to call for change.

### **3-The Request for Women's Change (1860)**

In the Victorian era, women were abused from many perspectives. Socially, they were considered inferior to men and their work was limited to cooking, cleaning, and child caring. In fact, with the coming of the Industrial Revolution, women had some

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<sup>18</sup>- Kim Stevenson et al., *A Serious and Growing Evil Public Indecency in England 1857-1960* (Routledge: London, 2015), 36.

opportunities to do jobs that were unthinkable before. However, they had very small amounts of salary and they worked in unpleasant conditions.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century in Britain reflected the changes taking part in society at that time and one of the major changes was the emergence of the “new woman”. Women were starting to realize and appreciate their roles in society and started to break and rebel against the constraints of society set for them. Women’s efforts were effective in challenging the status of women in society, as they were searching for more educational opportunities that might change the traditional views of women’s role.

Politics in the early nineteenth century in the United Kingdom were for men only. Men thought that women could not resist the stress that came with politics, and that they could not stand as members of Parliament simply because they were affectionate, and sensitive.

As men thought that way, few women stood up for themselves, and they came together to speak to the public and media. These women wanted to fight for equal rights between men and women, and they did everything they could to attract people’s attention. However, they were called “silly women”, and no one would listen to them.

As a reaction, women started to rebel against those norms that control their present as well as their future. They took the challenge to create a movement that would improve their chances and open new professions to them, and that would call for equal rights and more precisely the political right “the right to vote”, under the name of “women’s Suffrage Movement”. This movement was driven by women from the three classes; who were dissatisfied by the lack of education, the brutal conditions at work and the mistreatments at home. It gave birth to the new woman concept in that era and was the reason for major reforms in favour of women.

## **4-Conclusion**

To conclude, this chapter was concerned with the characteristics of Victorian women. Women at that time were considered as “angels in the house”; however, there were some ladies who did not stay at home, rather, they worked and their individual days varied according to the social classes they came from, for example, upper,

middle, and lower-class. Moreover, women turned into a wide range of the manufacturing businesses represented by the Industrial Revolution in order to help support their husbands and families; and that was a stepping stone for the women's freedom. Besides, Ladies entrance to the work constrains caused in several societal changes that influenced many individuals in society, and led to the emergence of women's Suffrage Movement. Thus, ladies started to collect together in order to campaign for equal rights as men, both in the working environment and at home; which eventually caused political adjustments to many laws and controls.

# Chapter Two: the Long Road for Women's Suffrage

1-Introduction

2- The Impact of Literature on the Evolution of the Suffrage Movement

3- The Use of Petitions

4- The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies

4.1-Achievements in Working Conditions

4.2- Achievements in Domestic Legislation

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5 - Women's Social and Political Union

6- 1906 Liberal Government

7- Female Militancy

8- Women's Suffrage Pilgrimage

9- Anti-suffragists

9.1-Male Anti-Suffragists

9.2-Female Anti-Suffragists

10- Women Participation in the First World War (1914/1918)

10.1-The NUWSS and the War

10.2-The WSPU and the War

11-Conclusion

## **1-Introduction**

Two hundred years ago, women in the British society were considered as weak and inferior to men, as they had little chances to better their status in society. In fact, their future was defined when they get married and had large number of children.

At that time, women had no participation in political matters. In fact, they could not own property or sign contracts and they could not vote. Moreover, women had no legal way to end a marriage and no access to their children after divorce.

This chapter is to show the transformation of the profile of women in society from 1870 to 1918, and the emergence of Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain which succeeded in transforming the social, legal, and political status of women.

## **2-The Impact of Literature on the Evolution of the Suffrage Movement**

One of the literary messages in the historical backdrop of women's thought was the *Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792 by the British author Mary Wollstonecraft. In which she called for the change in the position of women in society at that time. Wollstonecraft reacted against the educational and political systems of the eighteenth century that did not accept the idea of women's education, confirming on the importance of education in the lives of women as it improve their position in society. Besides, she insisted on the idea that women should get equal rights and opportunities as men, rather than being treated as second-class citizens.

Mary Wollstonecraft's masterpiece spread awareness among women at that time and created a new way of thinking, which led them to make several attempts to achieve their goals. However, political goals were never far from the surface. That is why women began to form political groups in order to ask for their rights.

On the other hand, the British philosopher John Stuart Mill published his feminist masterpiece *The Subjection of women* in 1869, which tackled the issue of equality between men and women. Mill's thinking on women's rights was influenced by his wife, Harriet Taylor Mill. Like Mary Wollstonecraft, he insisted that women should have equal chances in education and work as men, focusing on the importance of their independence for their future success. He also assaulted the marriage laws in Britain at that time.

In addition to that, several other feminists started to write in order to create a sense of awareness concerning the rights of women. By 1851, Harriet Taylor who became later Marry John Stuart Mill published an article in *The Westminster Review* newspaper in favour of the enfranchisement of women in which she assaulted the concept of "separated spheres" that limited women's participation in society, arguing that: "There is no inherent reason or necessity that all women should voluntarily choose to devote their lives to one animal function and its consequences"<sup>19</sup>, she stated that the concept of the "proper sphere" for women was no more than another way of saying "that every other career should be forbidden them in order that maternity maybe their only resource"<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, Harriet Taylor attacked also "the modern reformers of the education of women". In her own words:

Those who would weakly attempt to combine nominal equality between men and women, with enforced distinctions in their privileges and functions. What is wanted for women is equal rights, equal admission to all social privileges; not a position apart, a sort of sentimental priesthood ... The strength of the cause lies in the support of those who are influenced by reason and principle; and to attempt to recommend it by sentimentalities, absurd in reason, and inconsistent with the principle on which the movement is founded, is to place a good cause on a level with a bad one.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>- *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England*, ed. Carolyn Christensen Nelson (England: broadview press, 2004), 10.

<sup>20</sup>- Harriet Taylor Mill, "Enfranchisement of Women," *Westminster Review*, July 1851, 295, <http://womhist.alexanderstreet.com/awrm/doc15.htm>. Issue= 19108629.

<sup>21</sup>- Harriet Taylor Mill, *op.cit*, 296.



Nineteenth-century Feminist discussed and portrayed the status of women in society. Their works spread awareness among ladies to start asking for their rights, especially the right to vote. To achieve their goals women used several strategies and tactics such as the use of petitions.

### **3-The Use of Petitions**

The use of petitions was a strategy utilised by women in order to support their cause. A significant number of these petitions were introduced to Parliament.

Mary Smith from Stanmore in Yorkshire drafted the first petition to Parliament asking for women's vote. The petition was presented to the House of Commons by Henry Chase MP on August 3, 1832. In which he expressed that she paid taxes and followed the same rules of the law as men; therefore she did not understand why she was not allowed to vote. But it was laughed out of the House of Commons.

By 1865, a group of educated women formed the Kensington Society under the leadership of Alice Westlake, she stated that: "the object of the Society is chiefly to serve as a sort of link, though a slight one, between persons, above the average of thoughtfulness and intelligence who are interested in common subjects, but who had not many opportunities of mutual intercourse"<sup>22</sup>. The members of the Kensington Society were attempting to pursue a career in education or medicine.

On the other hand, the Manchester Committee for the Enfranchisement of Women was established by Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy in October 1865, in order to draft petitions about women's right to vote and present it to the House of Commons.

In this sense, the Kensington Society and the Manchester Committee for the Enfranchisement of Women taught that their union will help in supporting the women suffrage and in voicing their cause to the public and to the parliament. Therefore, they decided to work together and they drafted a petition to the Parliament to call for the right to vote. To do so, they took their petition to the two MPs Henry Fawcett and John Stuart Mill, Mill believed that: "...the principle which regulates the existing

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<sup>22</sup>- Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928* (London: London university college, 1999), 322.

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.”<sup>23</sup>

On 7 June 1866, the first ladies' petition was presented to the House of Commons by John Stuart Mill, Emily Davies and Elizabeth Garrett two members of the Kensington Society wanted to avoid attention while bringing the petition to Parliament; so, they hid it under the stall of an apple seller where Mill found it. And, on 20 May 1867 Mill attempted to amend the Second Reform bill to replace the word ‘man’ with ‘person’, and to request for the equality between the two sexes. However, Edward Kent Karlake, an MP, opposed Mill’s amendment, arguing that he did not meet any woman who wanted the right to vote. As a reaction the three ladies Lydia Becker, Helen Taylor and Mr. Frances Power Cobbe, collected signatures of women to prove their cause to Karlake, and they gathered 129. On July 25, 1867, Karlake presented the list to the parliament; however, Mill’s amendment was rejected by 196 votes to 73. In fact, the vote was giving to working class males only. On the other hand, Mill was pleased by the level of support, which came from both sides of the House; as a result, bills in support of women and the vote were presented on a practically yearly basis to Parliament from 1870 onwards. After this, the campaign gained momentum.

After this rejection members of the Kensington Society decided to form the London Society for Women's Suffrage in 1867. John Stuart Mill became president of the movement along with other members. And Millicent Fawcett a moderate public speaker, and an organizer, soon joined and became the leader of the group.

In 1867 Lydia Becker became the new secretary of the Manchester Committee for the Enfranchisement of women which later modified its name to the Manchester Society for Women's Suffrage. She started to consolidate the relationship with the London Society for Women's Suffrage to get a financial support.

Several meetings were held every year by The London Society for Women's Suffrage in order to discuss the cause of voting. And Elizabeth Crawford, the author

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<sup>23</sup>- John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, And Dyer, 1869), 1.

of *The Suffragette Movement* newspaper stated that: "In the year 1875-76 the London National Society appears to have held three public meetings, four at working men's clubs, and 13 drawing-room meetings."<sup>24</sup> Adding that "the object of the society is to obtain the parliamentary franchise for widows and spinsters on the same conditions as those on which it is granted to men."<sup>25</sup>

The issue of women's vote was common among several other suffrage groups at that time, and in 1887 seventeen of these groups joined together and decided to form the NUWSS.

#### **4- The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies**

The late of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of several groups of women, who were against the factors that limited their social and political rights, such as a lack of higher education and the exclusion from the vote. Therefore, organizations of ladies joined collectively and asked for their rights especially the right to vote, they were known as suffragists. Suffragist groups existed all over the country and under many different names but their aim was the same: to achieve the right to vote for women through constitutional, peaceful means. On 14th October 1897, these groups consolidated to form the NUWSS under the leadership of Lydia Becker. Three years later, when Becker died, Millicent Fawcett (1847-1929) a frequent public speaker on women's rights became the new president of the organisation.

Millicent Garrett Fawcett, the wife of Henry Fawcett an MP "became well known as a speaker and lecturer—on political and academic subjects as well as women's issues—in the 1870s, when women rarely ventured onto public platforms",<sup>26</sup> and often sat within the ladies' Gallery of the House of Commons to watch the debates. She had great impact on the evolution of ladies' campaign, due to her effective

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<sup>24</sup>- "Spartacus-educational," London Society for Women's Suffrage, last updated February 20, 2015, <http://spartacus-educational.com/WlondonNS.htm>, accessed March 03, 2017.

<sup>25</sup>- Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>- "biographyonline," Biography Millicent Fawcett, last Updated February 7, 2017, <http://www.biographyonline.net/politicians/uk/millicent-fawcett.html>, accessed March 05, 2017.

management of the NUWSS. She believed that the NUWSS should campaign for a wide assortment of causes. This included helping Josephine Steward in her campaign against the white slave movement, likewise offering support to Clementina Dark and her endeavours to induce the government to help ensure low paid ladies workers.

The NUWSS wanted the vote for women, using peaceful tactics, non-violent demonstrations, and the lobbying of MPs; in addition to composing petitions and letters to government officials, holding public meetings, distributing daily papers and circulating free writings. They had also delivered books and plays on the issue of votes for women. 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. As a result, Several Bills in favour of women's suffrage increased significant support in Parliament by 1900; however, it was insufficient to pass.

Moreover, the members of the NUWSS arranged huge exhibitions in London in 1908, in order to support the Women's Suffrage. Elizabeth Robins a strong feminist and a member of NUWSS portrayed one of the demonstrations:

On June 21<sup>st</sup>, the NUWSS marched through crowded streets from Embankment to the Albert Hall. Under the chairmanship of Mrs. Fawcett, a mass meeting was held of such size and enthusiasm as had seldom being equalled. The Daily Chronicle said: 'Never has so vast a throng gathered in London to witness an outlay of political force.'<sup>27</sup>

The suffragists' tactics succeeded in gaining considerable sympathy from men, including a growing number of MP's, in addition to improvements in different aspects of society.

#### **4.1-Achievements in Working Conditions**

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<sup>27</sup>- "The Movement for Women's Suffrage 1850's – 1928," Cults Academy History Department, last Updated January 7, 2017, [www.edubuzz.org/plhs-socsubs/wp...dir/.../votes-for-women](http://www.edubuzz.org/plhs-socsubs/wp...dir/.../votes-for-women), accessed March10, 2017.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women were totally eliminated from the Trade Union Movement<sup>28</sup>; in fact, women workers were facing awful treatments and insufferable conditions. And men were against the participation of women in the trade unions as they saw them as a menace to their employments and incomes. As a result, The Female Trade Union began to extend among textile workers in the huge factories of the north-east in 1870.

In 1874, the Women's Trade Union League was formed to create a sense of awareness of the bad conditions that many female workers had faced. Despite the fact of the attendance of the first female delegate in the annual Trade Union Congress in 1875, women were still unacknowledged in the male trade unions.

The Women's Trade Union League organised treasuries to bolster women strikers during the Match Girl's Strike in 1888<sup>29</sup>, this was a main step forward for the women's movement and for nearer connects with the men's Trade Unions.

In 1909, Trade councils were put up to manage wages and guarantee payments for male and female workers. In addition, the emergence of new technology such as the typewriter and the telephone offered new occupations for ladies with better conditions.

#### **4.2-Achievements in Domestic Legislation**

In the Victorian period, Marriage was considered as an end of any sort of independent lifestyle for women, as they were expected to be submissive to their husbands and their riches and profits go to the spouse after marriage. This led the Suffragists to rebel against those unreasonable domestic laws.

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<sup>28</sup>- An organization that represents the people who work in a particular industry to protect their rights, and discusses their pay and working conditions with employers.

-“Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus,” Definition of trade union, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/trade-union>, accessed March 15, 2017.

<sup>29</sup>- A strike of the women and teenage girls working at the Bryant and May Factory in Bow, London. The strike was caused by the poor working conditions in the match factory, including fourteen-hour work days, poor pay, excessive fines and the severe health complications of working with white phosphorus.

- “Spartacus-educational,” Match Girls Strike of 1888, last updated February 20, 2015, <http://spartacus-educational.com/WlondonNS.htm>, accessed March 03, 2017.

By the enactment of the Matrimonial Causes Acts of 1857 and 1873<sup>30</sup>, women gained some extra rights such as the ability to access to their children and to keep some of their profits after divorce. However, as Millicent Fawcett indicated that:

In 1857 the Divorce Act was passed, and, as is well known, set up by law a different moral standard for men and women. Under this Act, which is still in force, a man can obtain the dissolution of the marriage if he can prove one act of infidelity on the part of his wife; but a woman cannot get her marriage dissolved unless she can prove that her husband has been guilty both of infidelity and cruelty.<sup>31</sup>

In fact only after the Married Women's Property Act in 1870<sup>32</sup> that women were permitted to keep their incomes up to a maximum of £200 per year. And In 1882, an amendment to the Act allowed women to keep all their earnings and properties without any limit. However, things had changed completely after the WWI, as women increased their lawful rights, and gained the ability to sue for separation on the grounds of cruelty or carelessness and to claim maintenance of up to £2 every week.

### 4.3-Improvements in Education & Medicine

Before 1870, women were eliminated from having a professional career, including law and medicine. However, in 1848 the Queens College in London was established to train female teachers, and this was considered as an initial step for women's education; however, the higher education was a closed door for most women. In addition to that,

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<sup>30</sup>- Were Acts of Parliament of the United Kingdom that reformed the law of divorce and consolidated certain enactments relating to matrimonial proceedings, maintenance agreements, declarations of legitimacy, and the validity of marriage.

- "Revolvy," Matrimonial Causes Act 1857 and 1873,

[https://www.revolvy.com/main/index.php?s=Matrimonial%20Causes%20Act%201857&item\\_type=to\\_pic](https://www.revolvy.com/main/index.php?s=Matrimonial%20Causes%20Act%201857&item_type=to_pic), accessed March 06, 2017.

<sup>31</sup>- "Spartacus-educational," Millicent Garrett Fawcett, last updated February 20, 2015, <http://spartacus-educational.com/WlondonNS.htm>, accessed March 06, 2017.

<sup>32</sup>- An act of parliament which declares that women could keep some of their incomes after marriage. "parliament.uk," Relationships: Key dates, <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/keydates/>, accessed April 06, 2017.

the Education Act of 1870 played an important role in changing as education became obligatory for all children over the age of 12. As a result of the Act, several Suffragists like Emily Davies and Elizabeth Garrett-Anderson attended the school' boards.

Emily Davis rejected the old view about girls' education that was considered as an arrangement of being good wives and ideal mothers, because she was deprived from university education which her three brothers had enjoyed. This inspired her to write a book about her experience called 'The Higher Education of Women'<sup>33</sup>. Moreover, she established the Girton College, Cambridge in 1874. Her aim was to provide young ladies with the opportunity to achieve higher education and professions. Bit by bit, most universities started to open the doors for a small number of women. However, Cambridge University did not accept female graduates until 1948.

In addition, there was still considerable opposition to the idea of female doctors and universities which was attached to medical Schools, refused to accept women. Besides, when Elizabeth Garrett-Anderson attempted to join Aberdeen for medicine in 1863, she received the following answer:

I must decline to give you instruction in anatomy... I have a strong conviction that the entrance of ladies into operating theatres is undesirable in every respect, and highly unbecoming. Ladies would make bad doctors at the best, and they do so many things excellently that I for one should be sorry to see them trying to do this one.<sup>34</sup>

After many refusals, Elizabeth passed an examination in the University of Paris; however, her degree was rejected by The British Medical Register. And in 1872 she joined Sophia Jex-Blake, a graduate of Queens College, to build up the London Medical School for Women.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>- Emily Davies, *The Higher Education of Women* (London: Alexander Strahan, 1866), 97.

<sup>34</sup>- "Spartacus-educational," Careers and Women, last updated February 20, 2015, <http://spartacus-educational.com/WlondonNS.htm>, accessed March 06, 2017.

<sup>35</sup>- "Genealogy Home," Information about Elizabeth Garrett, <http://www.genealogy.com/ftm/a/n/d/David-B-Anderson/WEBSITE-0001/UHP-0071.html>, accessed March 12, 2017.

When Edinburgh University permitted Jex-Blake and two other female students to attend medical lectures, they got unfriendly reception: "On the afternoon of Friday 18th November 1870, we walked to the surgeon's hall, where the anatomy examination was to be held. We walked up to the gates, which remained open until we came within a yard of them, when they were slammed in our faces by a number of young men."<sup>36</sup>

Despite her success in the exam, Jex-Blake did not get a diploma. This led to the compassion of MP's, and to the changing of the law in 1876 that finally permitted women to graduate as doctors. Jex-Blake got a diploma in the following year.

The remarkable changes that had occurred in female education had increased the demands for women to be given the vote. Suffragists contended that if women were capable of getting their degrees and becoming doctors, definitely they were also capable of practicing the right to vote.

Despite the fact that the Suffragists succeeded in such aspects, they did not achieve their cause. That is why many members got disappointed and formed WSPU.

## **5-Women's Social and Political Union**

Emmeline Pankhurst an active member of the Manchester Society for Women's Suffrage was disappointed because with all the efforts of the NUWSS, the issue of voting was still elusive. She decided to withdraw and establish a new party with her three daughters, Christabel, Sylvia, and Adela Pankhurst, called the WSPU. Their primary goal was to gain the vote for women on the same basis as men. The WSPU was unwilling to confine itself to the peaceful techniques supported by the NUWSS.<sup>37</sup>

Unlike the other movements, the WSPU refused to join the NUWSS. Dora Montefiore, an early member of the WSPU indicated that: "The work of the Women's Social and Political Union was begun by Mrs. Pankhurst in Manchester, and by a

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<sup>36</sup>- "THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH," Sophia Jex-Blake (1840 – 1912), last updated May 24, 2015, <http://www.ed.ac.uk/alumni/services/notable-alumni/alumni-in-history/sophia-jex-blake>, accessed March06, 2017.

<sup>37</sup>- Spartacus-educational," Women's Social and Political Union, last updated June, 2015, <http://spartacus-educational.com/WlondonNS.htm>, accessed March15, 2017.



group of women in London who had revolted against the inertia and conventionalism which seemed to have fastened upon... the NUWSS."<sup>38</sup>

Then, The National Convention for the Civil Rights of Women was arranged by Elizabeth Wolstenholme-Elmy, a member of WSPU, on 16th and 17th October 1903; which included Two hundred delegates from several organizations such as the NUWSS, the British Women's Temperance Association, and the Women's Liberal Federation.

During the discussion, Isabella Ford, a member of the NUWSS contended: "We want mass meetings in all the great towns of the U.K. - and as the local workers will seldom be rich enough personally to defray the costs, grants should be made towards the cost of these and of the many smaller meetings required to work them up."<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, Elizabeth Crawford, the author of *The Suffragette Movement* (1999), said: "The NUWSS was instructed to form committees in every borough and country in order to press the question of women's suffrage, irrespective of party, upon every MP and candidate before the next general election and the local party associations should be pressured to select only candidates in favour of women's suffrage."<sup>40</sup>

Sir Edward Grey, a minister of the British government, held a meeting in London On 13th October 1905, where two ladies of the WSPU Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney went to listen to him. During his speech, the two ladies continually shouted out to know if the Liberal Government will give votes to women. When they refused to stop shouting the police tried to expel them from the meeting. However, a policeman claimed that the two women kicked and spat at him. As a result Pankhurst and Kenney were arrested on charges of violence, and they were fined five shillings each. When they refused to pay, the two ladies were sent to prison.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>- Spartacus-educational," Women's Social and Political Union, last updated June, 2015, <http://spartacus-educational.com/WlondonNS.htm>, accessed March15, 2017.

<sup>39</sup>- Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>- Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>- David Allen, *Torturing Women in Prison: Vote against the Government* (London: London University press, 2003), 105.

As a reaction to their violence in the meeting, *The Daily Mail* newspaper named them as "suffragettes" to differentiate them from the suffragists. And it stated that: "The WSPU embraced it, despite the disparaging diminutive their motto was "Deeds not Words", and they were dismissive of the missionary methods of the established societies and of the constitutional movement generally."<sup>42</sup>

The suffragette used several strategies to achieve their goals, from burning public buildings, to slashing works of art, In addition to putting acid into pillar boxes and using arson attacks in golf-clubs. The Manchester Guardian reported that:

At the National Gallery yesterday morning, a painting worth £45,000 was seriously damaged by a militant connected with the Women's Social and Political Union. The woman, producing a meat chopper from her cloak, smashed the glass of the picture, and made seven cuts in the canvas. The reason for this outrage was the re-arrest of Mrs. Pankhurst on Monday.<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, the members of the NUWSS including Millicent Fawcett were feared that the militant actions of WSPU would lead to lose their supporters. However, Fawcett and other leaders of the NUWSS respected and encouraged the suffragettes simply because their case was the same, despite of their distinct ways of reaching it.

## **6- 1906 Liberal Government**

The Liberal Party gained the Elections of 1906 and formed a new government. Moreover, the Prime Minister, Henry Campbell-Bannerman held a meeting with Emily Davies a delegate from the NUWSS On 19th May to discuss the issue of women's vote. During the discussion, Campbell-Bannerman expressed his empathy to their cause; however, he could not guarantee that he would present it to parliament.

In a huge manifestation outside the House of Commons on October 1906 Anne Cobden-Sanderson, a previous driving figure in the NUWSS, was arrested, alongside members of the WSPU, Charlotte Despard, Mary Gawthorpe, and Emmeline Pankhurst. George Bernard Shaw- a friend of Anne- describe The Incident saying:

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<sup>42</sup>- David Allen, op.cit, 106.

<sup>43</sup>- Ibid, 107.

"one of nicest women in England suffering from the coarsest indignity of being in Prison."<sup>44</sup>

In the court, Anne Cobden Sanderson stated that: "We have talked so much for the Cause now let us suffer for it... I am a law breaker because I want to be a law maker."<sup>45</sup> Therefore, she was jailed for two months. Millicent Fawcett recorded to *The Times* newspaper on 27th October 1906 to express her support to Anne: "I have known Mrs. Cobden Sanderson for 30 years. I was not in the police-court on Wednesday when she was before the magistrate, but I find it absolutely impossible to believe that she bit, or scratched, or screamed, or behaved otherwise than like the refined lady she is."<sup>46</sup> After leaving Mrs. Cobden Sanderson from prison, the NUWSS organized a feast at the Savoy Hotel on 11th December.

On the other hand, and after the Liberal Party's victory in 1906, The NUWSS confirmed that women had to fight more for equality. However, Millicent Fawcett became totally agitated when the party hesitated to support the women's vote; and because she was a Liberal she was expecting more than that. Although that some leaders of the Labour Party, such as Philip Snowden and Keir Hardie, supported women's vote, others like Ernest Belfort Bax and Henry M. Hyndman were against, arguing that women's place was home and her vote was meaningless.

In addition, on 9th February 1907, The NUWSS organized its first wide-ranging manifestation, which included over 3,000 women. They gathered at Hyde Park to hear the speech of two ladies Millicent Fawcett and Frances Balfour.

On the other hand, Catherine Marshall and her mother joined the NUWSS and established a section in Keswick In May 1908; Catherine described the section:

A committee was formed, rules were drawn up, and active propaganda work started at once. It was unanimously decided that our object should be the vote for women on the same terms as for men and that the Association should be a strictly non-party organization; we also pledged ourselves to peaceful and constitutional methods only. Our work was to

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<sup>45</sup> George Bernard Shaw, "Free Mrs. Cobden-Sanderson," *The London Times*," 15 November 1906, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Holroyd, "George Bernard Shaw: Women and the Body Politic" *Chicago journal* (autumn, 1979): 20.

<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Crawford, op.cit, 616.

consist of spreading the principles of Women's Suffrage by means of meetings, of letters to the press, of distributing literature on the subject.... The audience at these meetings averaged between 50 and 100 in numbers; in every instance a resolution in favour of votes for women on the same terms as for men was enthusiastically carried.<sup>47</sup>

Margaret Ashton, one of the main supporters of the NUWSS, had financed *The Common Cause* newspaper which published its first edition on 15th April 1909, because she considered it as the organ of the women's movement for reform. Besides Elizabeth Crawford- the official writer of The Suffragette Movement said that: the newspaper "enabled the local societies to keep in touch weekly with both the activities of the executive committee and with each other."<sup>48</sup>

## **7-Female Militancy**

Due to the arbitrary leadership imposed by Mrs. Pankhurst and to the Suffragettes' militant tactics, such as tying themselves to walls outside parliament, breaking the windows of government buildings, and attacking politicians physically; many members from the WSPU had split and moved to the Women's Freedom League in 1907. And After two years many other members including Sylvia Pankhurst decided to withdraw from the WSPU. In addition, the militant tactics had expanded to include imprisoned suffragettes as they began to wave of hunger strikes. As a result, the WSPU were marked as 'irresponsible'.

On 30th June 1908, twenty-seven suffragettes were arrested and sent to Prison on charges of breaking the windows of the Prime Minister's house. On the 13th October of the same year, a huge manifestation was organized by the members of WSPU in London. During the manifestation the suffragettes attempted to enter the House of

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<sup>47</sup>- Jo Vellacott, *From Liberal to Labour with Women's Suffrage: The Story of Catherine Marshall* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 38.

<sup>48</sup>- Elizabeth Crawford, op.cit, 438.

Commons, but they clashed with the police when tried to stop them. As a result, 24 other women were arrested and sent to prison.

Moreover, Marion Wallace-Dunlop a member of WSPU damaged the stonework of St. Stephen's Hall in the House of Commons On 25th June 1909; she was arrested on charges of vandalism. As she refused to pay the mulct, she was jailed for a month. When she was in prison Dunlop adopted a hunger strike for many days. The government was afraid that she might die and become a martyr, and after 91 hours of fasting, they decided to release her. After that, a group of suffragettes in Holloway Prison, who had been condemned of breaking windows, adopted the same tactic, and after six days they were also released.<sup>49</sup>

Christabel Pankhurst describe the incident in her book *Unshackled* by saying: "Miss Wallace Dunlop, taking counsel with no one and acting entirely on her own initiative, sent to the Home Secretary, Mr. Gladstone, as soon as she entered Holloway Prison, an application to be placed in the first division as befitted one charged with a political offence. She announced that she would eat no food until this right was conceded."<sup>50</sup>

On 22nd September 1909, the four ladies Rona Robinson, Laura Ainsworth, Charlotte Marsh and Mary Leigh were taken to the prison because they interrupting a public meeting being held by the prime minister Herbert Asquith. Michelle Myall has claimed: "The police attempted to move the two women by, among other methods, turning a hosepipe on them and throwing stones. However, Charlotte Marsh and Mary Leigh proved to be formidable opponents and were only brought down from the roof when three policemen dragged them down."<sup>51</sup>The four ladies were all jailed for two weeks. They promptly chose to go on hunger-strike, like the former imprisoned

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<sup>49</sup>- Elizabeth Crawford, op.cit, 440.

<sup>50</sup>- Christabel Pankhurst, *Unshackled: The Story of how We Won the Vote* (Century Hutchinson: University of Michigan, 1987), 133.

<sup>51</sup>- "Democraticunderground.com," Women's Rights Movement they were Arrested, People threw Rocks & Bottles, last updated December 01, 2011, [https://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view\\_all&address=439x2413389](https://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view_all&address=439x2413389). Accessed February 20, 2017.

suffragettes. Unexpectedly, instead of releasing women from jail, the governor of Winson Green Prison imposed a policy of force-feeding on them.

During the 1910 General Election, the NUWSS succeed in gaining 280,000 signatures from 290 constituencies, and they presented it to the House of Commons. With the support of some MPs, the bill was debated in Parliament. Furthermore, on 23<sup>rd</sup> July the WSPU decided to stop all their aggressor activities and to unit with the NUWSS, in order to organize a huge gathering in London. When the new suffrage bill was rejected on 18 November, the WSPU broke their armistice, and conflicted with the police in the Parliament Square. This became known as the Black Friday.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, another suffragette Mary Clarke was being force fed in Holloway prison when she was captured on charges of breaking windows. On 22nd December 1910, the government released her; but, she soon died of a burst blood vessel on the brain. The suffragettes contended that her death was a result of being forced fed in prison.<sup>53</sup>

Adela was afraid about the organisation's retreat and that is why she said to Helen Fraser: "I knew all too well that after 1910 we were rapidly losing ground. I even tried to tell Christabel this was the case, but unfortunately, she took it amiss."<sup>54</sup> And she decided to leave the WSPU in October 1911. As a response to Adela's action, Christabel Pankhurst said: "I would not care if you were multiplied by a hundred, but one of Adela is too many."<sup>55</sup>

In 1912 the government declared that over 5,000 letters had been harmed by the members of the WSPU as they destroyed the contents of pillar-boxes. This campaign was led by May Billinghurst who was jailed for nine months. Billinghurst adopted a hunger strike and she faced the force feeding operation as well. Afraid of her dying in a heart attack, she was released on 18th January 1913.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>- David Allen, op.cit, 130.

<sup>53</sup>- Ibid, 135.

<sup>54</sup>- Mitchell David J, *Queen Christabel: A Biography of christabel Pankhurst* (Virginia: University of Virginia, 1977), 189.

<sup>55</sup>- Ibid, 190.

After this, the government passed the Prisoner's Temporary Discharge of Ill Health Act in 1913. This act was to release suffragettes' prisoners when their health got deteriorated and return them back when they got recovered. The act became later known as the Cat and Mouse Act.<sup>57</sup>

The year of 1913 witnessed also the funeral of the suffragette Emily Davison as she had thrown herself at a Derby in front of King George V's horse. The horse stubbed Emily and broke her skull, and she died immediately. She became a martyr in the eyes of the WSPU members. Her funeral was turned into a huge suffragette manifestation and such action was convicted in the newspapers. In which the Suffragettes were criticized for their aggressive actions. And as Churchill asserted: "their cause had marched backwards."<sup>58</sup>

## 8-Women's Suffrage Pilgrimage

In 1913, the NUWSS held a Woman's Suffrage Pilgrimage, in which women journeyed from Edinburgh to London peacefully. The pilgrimage had a spectacle to demonstrate that women were also law-abiding and to express to the Parliament the strong desire in obtaining the vote. Elizabeth Crawford, the author of *The Suffragette Movement* newspaper (1999) wrote about the pilgrimage and described it as the following:

Pilgrims were urged to wear a uniform...It was suggested that pilgrims should wear white, grey, black, or navy blue coats and skirts or dresses. Blouses were either to match the skirt or to be white. Hats were to be simple...Also available were red, white and green shoulder sashes...and umbrellas in green or white, or red cotton cover to co-ordinate civilian umbrellas.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>- Spartacus-educational," Women's Social and Political Union, last updated June, 2015, <http://spartacus-educational.com/WlondonNS.htm>, accessed March15, 2017.

<sup>57</sup>- "parliament.uk," Relationships: Key dates, <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/keydates/>, accessed April 06, 2017.

<sup>58</sup>- "BBC Higher Bitesize," Why women got the vote, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/higher/history/britsuff/vote/revision/1/>, accessed April02, 2017.

Lisa Tickner also indicated that: "Most women travelled on foot, though some rode horses or bicycles, and wealthy sympathisers lent cars, carriages, or pony traps for the luggage. The intention was not that each individual should cover the whole route but that the federations would do so collectively."<sup>60</sup> In addition, one of the pilgrims, Margory Lees, claimed that the pilgrimage succeeded in gaining a monumental support by "visiting the people of this country in their own homes and villages, to explain to them the real meaning of the movement."<sup>61</sup> The pilgrims were carried their baggage in a truck that accompanied them throughout the march. And Margaret Ashton brought her car to help who were very tired and incapable to continue.

After the success of the pilgrimage, the suffragists gained wide support from the media. *The Common Cause* newspaper reported that: "the result was nothing less than a revelation, to those who doubted it, of the almost universal sympathy given to the Non-militant Suffrage Cause once it is understood."<sup>62</sup> In addition, *The Daily News* pointed out that: "never was so peaceful, so pleasant a raid of London - and rarely one more picturesque or more inspiring."<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, on the 26<sup>th</sup> July the pilgrimage came to an end; and *The Times* newspaper commented that the march was a peaceful way to ask for the vote, and that it was against the violent methods being used by the WSPU:

On Saturday the pilgrimage of the law abiding advocates of votes for women ended in a great gathering in Hyde Park attended by some 50,000 persons. The proceedings were quite orderly and devoid of any untoward incident. The proceedings, indeed, were as much a demonstration against militancy as one in favour of women's suffrage. Many bitter things were said of the militant women.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>- Elizabeth Crawford, op.cit, 550.

<sup>60</sup>- Lisa Ticker, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-14* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 143.

<sup>61</sup>- Ibid, 144.

<sup>62</sup>-Ibid, 145.

<sup>63</sup>- Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>- "Inspiring Women," The Women's Suffrage Campaign, <https://www.kent.ac.uk/sspsr/womenshistorykent/themes/suffrage/>, accessed April05, 2017.



On July 1913, Millicent Fawcett sends a letter to Herbert Asquith "on behalf of the immense meetings which assembled in Hyde Park on Saturday and voted with practical unanimity in favour of a Government measure."<sup>65</sup> Asquith wrote back that the demonstration had "a special claim" on his consideration and added: "upon another footing from similar demands proceeding from other quarters where a different method and spirit is predominant."<sup>66</sup>

## **9-Anti-suffragists**

It is clear that a number of men were against Women's Suffrage, but what was not expected was the women who were against the emancipation of their own gender. They even collaborated with men and formed organizations in order to fight against women's suffrage.

### **9.1-Male Anti-Suffragists**

Unsurprisingly, many men were Anti-suffragists because they believed that women were not wise in their thinking and often overcome their feelings on their decisions. Furthermore, one of the big opponents of Women Suffrage was William Ewart Gladstone.

William Ewart Gladstone a member of the liberal party and great opponent of women's vote was forced by his party to introduce the cause in parliament. After reading the book of Adele Crepaz *The Emancipation of Women and Its Probable Consequences*, which had been published in Leipzig, Germany in 1892 and was a strong assault on those calling for change; Gladstone urged Crepaz to publish it in English by sending her a letter in which he said: "it seems to me by far the most

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<sup>65</sup>- "Spartacus-educational," Millicent Garrett Fawcett, last updated June, 2015, <http://spartacus-educational.com/WfawcettM.htm>, accessed April 12, 2017.

<sup>66</sup>- Elizabeth Crawford, op.cit, 216.

comprehensive, luminous, and penetrating work on this question that I have yet met with."<sup>67</sup> In addition, Susan K. Harris an anti-suffragists indicated that:

If women take the jobs, Crepaz argues, men won't be able to support wives and families. Hence marriage rates will decrease. And if marriage rates decrease, culture will fail. Additionally, women who work won't be able to serve their husbands as they should, with the consequence that woman's nature will be prevented. Even women doctors ultimately undermine women's sacred role. Rather than trying to serve in more than one capacity, women should remember that the greatest civic role is to bring up their children well, and that the highest moral role is to serve their husbands.<sup>68</sup>

After this, the book was translated and published in London in 1893, and it contains the letter of Mr. Gladstone also. Therefore, Gladstone sent copies of the book to female members of the Liberal Party who encouraged the suffrage movement. After reading the book Margaret Cowell Stepney sent her point of view on the book to the prime-minister:

I feel fearfully presumptuous in venturing, in any way, to criticize a book which you have commended - but as you were good enough to tell me to say what I thought, I must answer truly.... I cannot believe, that there is more danger in mothers making their daughters self-supporting, than in mothers who look upon marriage as the only aim of existence - and, there seems to me to be possibly some weak point in the suggestion that when the husband dies, the widow who cannot work, may always look for help, with confidence, from relations, friends, and charitable institutions - surely in their cases at least - widows - girls who cannot marry - or who can only marry, as a means of livelihood - there may be reason for wishing that women should have independence of a profession?<sup>69</sup>

Likewise, on December 1908, male anti-suffragists launched a Committee to oppose female suffrage. However, it failed to gain popular support. The committee was dominated by Lord Cromer and Lord Curzon; and by a collection of major public

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<sup>67</sup>- "Spartacus-educational," William Ewart Gladstone, last updated June, 2015, <http://spartacus-educational.com/PRgladstone.htm>, accessed April 15, 2017.

<sup>68</sup>-Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>-Ibid.

figures including Rudyard Kipling, and A. V. Dicey, in addition to newspaper editors such as Charles Moberly Bell, from *The Times* and John St Loe Strachey, from *The Spectator*.

### 9.2-Female Anti-Suffragists

Many women opposed the Suffrage Movement by joining the Anti-Suffrage League, a society aimed at bringing down the Suffragettes. The Anti-Suffrage League was formed in 1908, and the novelist Mrs. Mary Humphry Ward was elected as a president. On 8th July 1908 the organisation announced its statement as the following:

It is time that the women who are opposed to the concession of the parliamentary franchise to women should make themselves fully and widely heard. The matter is urgent. Unless those who hold that the success of the women's suffrage movement would bring disaster upon England are prepared to take immediate and effective action, judgement may go by default and our country drifts towards a momentous revolution, both social and political, before it has realised the dangers involved.<sup>70</sup>

Mary Humphry Ward attended to discuss the issue of women's suffrage at debates at Newnham College and Girton College; then, the students react violently with her when she said that the "emancipating process has now reached the limits fixed by the physical constitution of women"<sup>71</sup>. She blamed the administrators because according to her they were the responsible of the student's hostility.

However, the League gathered signatures against women's vote and at a conference on 26th March 1909; Mary Humphry Ward declared that over 250,000 people had signed the petition. On June she stated that "the organization had 15,000

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<sup>70</sup>- "Spartacus-educational," Mary Humphry Ward, last updated June, 2015, <http://spartacus-educational.com/Wward.htm>, accessed April 15, 2017.

<sup>71</sup>- Ibid.

members and almost 110 branches. And the signatures for the petition had reached 320,000.”<sup>72</sup>

Moreover, The Anti-suffrage newspaper that was edited by Mary Humphry Ward had published several articles on the subject of voting. In addition to this, large number of Mary's novels criticized the Women's Suffrage Movements; as she contended that the majority of the British women were not interested in the issue of vote. And by 1910 the organisation had over 100 branches, 16,000 members and 400,000 signatures on petitions.

On the other hand, Gertrude Bell, one of the most important writers at that time, opposed the suffrage movement. She justified her rejection to the idea of women's vote as that the majority of British women were uneducated; and unqualified to take the right choices concerning politics.<sup>73</sup>

Another female that reject the idea of the women's vote was the social reformer Violet Markham. Markham spoke to the public at the Albert Hall, and said:

We believe that men and women are different – not similar – beings, with talents that are complementary, not identical, and that they therefore ought to have different shares in the management of the State, that they severally compose. We do not depreciate by one jot or tittle women's work and mission. We are concerned to find proper channels of expression for that work. We seek a fruitful diversity of political function, not a stultifying uniformity.<sup>74</sup>

Male and female anti- suffragists' societies did everything to push away the cause of women's vote. They practiced the lobbying on MPs and distributed literature; in addition to, writing petitions and holding public meetings.

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<sup>72</sup>- Spartacus-educational,” Mary Humphry Ward, last updated June, 2015, <http://spartacus-educational.com/Wward.htm>, accessed April 15, 2017.

<sup>73</sup>- “Thesuffragettes,” Anti-suffrage, <http://www.thesuffragettes.org/history/anti-suffrage/>. accessed April 16, 2017.

<sup>74</sup>- “Historyanswers,” Anti-Suffrage: the British women who didn't want the vote, <https://www.historyanswers.co.uk/people-politics/the-gruesome-origin-of-sweet-fanny-adams>, accessed April 16, 2017.

## 10-Women's Participation in the First World War (1914/1918)

During the war time, members of the NUWSS and the WSPU played an important role to help their country to achieve victory; and to prove that they were capable to do jobs that were always occupied by men.

### 10.1- The NUWSS and the WWI

As Britain declared war on Germany in 1914, the NUWSS were against the idea of the British involvement in the WWI. However, Millicent Fawcett, the leader of the NUWSS, announced that she would stop all the actions of the movement until the end of the war.

The members of the NUWSS were unsatisfied with this decision, however, Fawcett remained adamant. Her biographer, Ray Strachey, contended that: "She stood like a rock in their path, opposing herself with all the great weight of her personal popularity and prestige to their use of the machinery and name of the union."<sup>75</sup> During the meeting that was held by the NUWSS in February 1915, Fawcett contended that until the German armed forces had been driven out from France and Belgium: "I believe it is akin to treason to talk of peace."<sup>76</sup>

In April 1915, suffrage members all over the world were invited to a universal Congress of Women in The Hague by Aletta Jacobs, a suffragist in Holland. Some of the women who attended the congress were Mary Sheepshanks, Jane Addams, Alice Hamilton, Grace Abbott, and Emily Bach. These women formed the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

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<sup>75</sup>- Ray Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (J.Murray: Michigan University, 1931), 291.

<sup>76</sup>- *Ibid*, 296.

## 10.2-The WSPU and the WWI

After the outbreak of the WWI in August 1914, all the imprisoned suffragettes were released. Consequently, the WSPU ended its aggressor actions in order to help the war effort, such as enlisting men into the armed force and urging ladies to fill the occupations left empty by men. However, some suffragettes were unsatisfied and they saw the participation with the government as an infidelity of the movement. Christabel Pankhurst, however, reacted to this by saying:

As Suffragettes we could not be pacifists at any price. Mother and I declared support of our country. We declared an armistice with the Government and suspended militancy for the duration of the war. We called upon all members to do likewise... As Mother said, 'What would be the good of a vote without a country to vote in!' <sup>77</sup>

As men left jobs to battle overseas, they were replaced by women. Ladies filled many employments brought into existence by wartime needs. As a result, the proportion of ladies in business rose to nearly 5 million by 1918. Industries that had already prohibited ladies from working were then invited them. About 200,000 ladies were employed in government offices. A large portion of ladies became noticeably clerical workers in private workplaces. And some of them became farm workers; they also occupied other employments such as engineering transport, and the postal services.<sup>78</sup>

As a Women's Police Service was established in 1915 to keep discipline in the weapons production lines, about 1 million female labourers were occupied in making shells for the war effort. This was an extremely dangerous employment. An article in Punch magazine (1916) mirrored the participation of women in war-time:

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<sup>77</sup>- "Spartacus-educational," Women and the First World War, last updated August, 2014, <http://spartacus-educational.com/Wfirst.htm>, accessed March 13, 2017.

<sup>78</sup>- "Spartacus-educational," Women's Social and Political Union, last updated June, 2015, <http://spartacus-educational.com/WlondonNS.htm>, accessed March 15, 2017.

It is quite impossible to keep pace with all the new incarnations of women in war-time - 'bus-conductress, ticket-collector, post-woman, bank clerk, motor-driver, farm-labourer, munitions' maker. Whenever he sees one of these new citizens, or hears fresh stories of their ability, Mr. Punch is proud and delighted. But he never for a moment supposed they would be anything but ready and keen when the hour of need struck.<sup>79</sup>

During the war time several organisations were formed in order to bolster the war efforts, Such as: the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD). 38,000 of the VADs functioned as medical attendants to give therapeutic help behind the lines, and as ambulance drivers, and cooks. Other services such as the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), the Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF) and the Women's Royal Naval Service WRNS (WRNS) gave also valuable support to the arm forces.

Due to their participation during the war-time women had proved themselves and gained the respect and regard of the public and the parliament, as well as of Asquith, one of the main rivals of women's votes. He conceded that the war couldn't have been won without them. Yet, Evelyn Sharp, a suffragist essayist, stated that the war played a major role in giving women the vote: "Personally, I regret that any justification was given to the view that the victory of the suffrage cause in 1918 was thanks to women's war service. This assumption is true only in so far as gratitude to women offered an excuse to the government to climb down with some dignity from a position that had become untenable before the war."<sup>80</sup>

## 11-Conclusion

In the early years of the twentieth century, women were abused in different ways, and the domination of men was the main reason for their suffering. Women had hoped that gaining the right to vote would change their lives totally, in this sense, two major social movements had developed to face the prevailing situation of women at that

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<sup>79</sup>- *Women and War: A Historical Encyclopedia from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. A Cook Bernard (England: Oxford University, 2003), 238.

<sup>80</sup>- *Women and War: A Historical Encyclopedia from Antiquity to the Present*, op.cit, 259.

time: the NUWSS and the WSPU. These societies dominated the suffrage movements between 1890 and 1914. The suffrage movement, however, was long, complex, and fluid, but one cannot deny that women's suffrage would not succeed without the participation of women in the WW1, which had formed the modern agenda for ladies today.



## **Chapter three: Women's get the Equality at Last**

**1-Introduction**

**2-The Representation of the People Act (1918)**

**3-The Equal Franchise Act (1928)**

**4- Women and the House of Lords Commons**

**5- Women and the House of Lords**

**6- Conclusion**

## **1-Introduction**

With the beginning of the WWI, women played a prominent role in the British society. After the recruitment of all men to the war; there was none other than women to fill the gaps. And this was an opportunity for women to improve their abilities in all fields. Thus, in 1917, the proportion of women working in Britain was raised and changed the general view of women's capacities dramatically. From peaceful tactics to militant activities, the battle to grant women the vote had finally ended by the Representation of the People Act (1918).

The purpose of this chapter is to show the effect of the WWI on the cause of female voting, and to highlight the reforms that changed the voting law through amendments. In addition to the participation of women in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and how it affected their entering into the political world.

## **2-The Representation of the People Act (1918)**

It should be noted that before 1918, only 58 % of the population in Britain had the right to vote. The British voting law stipulated that the vote was available only to men who had been inhabitants of the country for a year, therefore all the soldiers who participated in WWI, were deprived of voting.

With the emergence of several factors such as the communist revolution in Russia and the development of the Labour Party in Britain, in addition to the renewal of the suffragettes to their activities, the politicians emphasized that the voting law must be changed in order to avoid a socialist revolution in Britain.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>- "The gazette," This month in history: Women get the vote, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/all-notices/content/149>, accessed April 20, 2017.

In 1917, the parliament began to take the cause of women's vote more seriously; therefore Long debates were held to discuss the issue of women's vote. Herbert Asquith, one of the big opponents of the suffrage movement, had changed his mind immediately after the WWI, and he showed a complete support for the ladies, asserting that they deserved to get the vote as they did a great work during the war.

In March 28, 1917, the House of Common drafted an act under the name of "the Representation of the People Act" that provided the right to vote for all men aged 21, and for women over the age of 30 in condition that they must be householders, the wives of householders, occupiers of property with an annual rent of £5 or graduates of British universities;<sup>82</sup> however, those conditions allowed only 40 % of British women to vote, which meant that the majority of female suffragists were excluded from voting. As Lilian Lenton, a suffragist, claimed: "Personally, I didn't vote for a long time, because I hadn't either a husband or furniture, although I was over 30."<sup>83</sup> In addition, this constitutional amendment gave the right to vote for all soldiers over 19 years old.

The Representation of the People Act received a great support from the MPs, and it was passed by 341 to 62 votes for the active role of women during the WWI. In fact, before the war, people were horrified by the militant activities of the suffragettes. But during the war, Britain had experienced a catastrophic crisis in the labour shortage and this was only solved by the work done by women in factories and coals mine, in addition to their vital work on farms to secure food stocks. They also occupied all fields that had been left empty in the wartime.

In 1918, the lord Curzon was the president of the anti-suffrage league. It was expected that he would rule a campaign in the House of Lords to reject the Representation of the People Act. Unexpectedly, Curzon avoided the clash with the commons and declared that he would not act on the bill, which affected the decisions

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<sup>82</sup>-“spartacus-educational,” 1918 Qualification of Women Act, <http://spartacus-educational.com/W1918.htm> #, accessed April 21, 2017.

<sup>83</sup>- Ibid.

of the Lord's members. The vote immediately was passed by 134 votes for to 71 against.<sup>84</sup>

When the Representation of People Act was passed in the House of Lords and the House of Commons, It was only needed the Royal approval from George V. In fact, the king was afraid that if he did not agree on the act, that would lead Britain to a constitutional crisis. As a result, he gave his consent on 6 February 1918.

By the enactment of the Representation of the People Act in 1918, the number of voters rose to 21 million. 8.5% of them were women which meant that 40% of the British women got the right to vote. Due to strict conditions for women's vote, 22% of women aged 30 years and older were excluded from voting, because they did not have any property, and most of them were from the working class.<sup>85</sup>

With this great achievement, suffragist societies held a meeting to celebrate this victory; and Millicent Fawcett described the event as the greatest moment of her long-running life. By the increasing number of women who could vote from 0 to 8.4 million, it was considered as a great victory in the history of women's rights. Even with the fact that it wasn't for all women, but it was considered as the first step toward equality. However, some women considered it as an arbitrary bill, since it still classifies them as citizens of the second class. Although with the Representation of the People Act, the actual equality of men and women remained an open issue.

### **3-The Equal Franchise Act (1928)**

Finally, and after a long wait, women took their first chance to vote in December 1918. On the other hand, many members of the suffrage campaign had nominated themselves to take a seat in the Parliament , Constance Markiewicz a member of Sinn

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<sup>84</sup>-“The historylearningsite,” The 1918 Representation of the People Act, last updated Aug 16, 2016. <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/the-role-of-british-women-in-the-twentieth-century/the-1918-representation-of-the-people-act/> , accessed April 21, 2017.

<sup>85</sup>- “The gazette,” This month in history: Women get the vote, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/all-notices/content/149>, accessed April 22, 2017.

Fein,<sup>86</sup> was the only woman who gained the election, but she refused to take her seat like all the members of Sinn Fein, because their cause was the Irish independence rather than women's vote. And they decided to establish their own independent parliament in Dublin. After this, Nancy Astor was elected to be the first woman in England who became an Mp; Astor served until 1945 and played a prominent role on many social issues. Moreover, the number of women elected as MPs had increased, most of them were suffragists as Susan Lawrence, Katharine Stewart-Murray, Mabel Philipson, Margaret Wintringham, Vera Terrington and Margaret Bondfield, Dorothy Jewson.<sup>87</sup>

By 1919, another act was passed by parliament named the "Sex Disqualification Removal Act"; this act gave women the right to work in any field without sexual discrimination, which allowed them to be doctors, magistrates, and Lawyers.<sup>88</sup> And in March of the same year, the NUWSS changed her name to the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC) under the leadership of Millicent Fawcett. It was created to call for full equality between men and women in voting, divorcing, working, and even for equal payment. The NUSEC developed a closer relationship with the labour party; and Ramsay McDonald, one of the big supporters was very disappointed when the bill of equality between man and woman could not pass in 1924. However, he appointed Margaret Bondfield as parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Labour.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>- A political party that was organised in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, it strives to end to the political partition of the islands of Ireland. The party has been led by Gerry Adams since 1983.

-“Encyclopaedia Britannica,” Sinn Fein, last updated MARCH 07, 2017.

[HTTPS://WWW.BRITANNICA.COM/TOPIIC/SINN-FEIN](https://www.britannica.com/topic/sinn-fein), accessed April 23, 2017.

<sup>87</sup>- “spartacus-educational.” 1928 Equal Franchise Act, last updated August, 2014, <http://spartacus-educational.com/W1928.htm#>, accessed April 24, 2017.

<sup>88</sup>- Bob Roshier and Harvey Teff, *Law and Society in England* (London: classics from the Tavistock press, 2003), 173.

<sup>89</sup>- Chris Wrigley, *A Companion to Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Blackwell publishing company, 2003), 123.

In 1928, the Equal Franchise Act was introduced to the Parliament to give the right to vote to all women as men. The Act faced some objections at the beginning, but eventually it was passed and became a formal law on July 2, 1928. At last, all women over the age of 21 could now vote in elections. Unfortunately, Many women who guide the struggle for women's right to vote were now dead including, Barbara Bodichon, Emily Davies, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, Constance Lytton, Elizabeth Wolstenholme-Elmy and Emmeline Pankhurst. The only one who was still alive was the leader of the NUWSS Millicent Fawcett; who attended the parliament to see the vote take place, without conditions and with the full equality as she always dreamed of. And that night she wrote about it in her diary: "It is almost exactly 61 years ago since I heard John Stuart Mill introduce his suffrage amendment to the Reform Bill of 1867. I have had extraordinary good luck in having seen the struggle from the beginning to the end."<sup>90</sup>

#### **4-Women and the House of Commons**

In 1918, the Government Minister, lord Robert Cecil had presented the bill of the Representation of the People Act to the parliament that could allowed women to stand as a candidate in the parliamentary election. And with the Royal approval on November, women took their first chance to participate in the General Election.

After the Representation of the People Act, the expectations concerning women's participation in the 1919 General Election were raised, but only 17 women had nominated themselves, and most of them were already members of the Suffrage Movement Societies or political activists like Christabel Pankhurst, the daughter of Emmeline Pankhurst. In fact, Christabel had pinned high hope on gaining a seat, but her hope was defeated by 775 votes, despite that she received the highest score in the

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<sup>90</sup>-“Infinite fire,” Millicent Fawcett – Suffragist & Equal Rights Champion, <http://infinitefire.org/info/millicent-fawcett-suffragist-and-champion-for-equal-rights/>, accessed April 24, 2017.

voting of all female candidates. But unexpectedly, the first female who gains a seat in the House of Commons had totally no relation with the issue of women's right.<sup>91</sup>

Countess Constance Markievicz a member of Sinn Fein was the first women who won the elections, but she did not take her seat. The countess was in jail during the election on charges of conspiring with Germany during the WWI. And she was released later under an amnesty from a life sentence for her participation in the Irish Easter Rising. As the other member of Sinn Fein, she rejected the seat, and they established their own independent parliament in Dublin.<sup>92</sup>

On the other hand, Nancy Astor was elected for the Sutton division of Plymouth on November 15, 1919, by the support of her husband Viscount Astor, a peerage of the United Kingdom. After gaining the election, Nancy Astor focused her view on the suffering of women and children, especially with the problem of alcoholism. She defended her cause by saying: "I do not want you to look on your lady Member as a fanatic or lunatic. I am simply trying to speak for hundreds of women and children throughout the country who cannot speak for themselves."<sup>93</sup> And in 1923 her bill of 'the Intoxicating Liquor (Sale to Persons under Eighteen) Act' was passed to become the first Act that had introduced by a female MP.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, the first woman member

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<sup>91</sup>- Cheryl Law, *Suffrage and Power: The Women's Movement 1918-1928* (London: IB Publishers, 1997), 151.

<sup>92</sup>- "Askaboutireland," Constance elected to Government, <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/learning-zone/primary-students/5th--6th-class/history/people-in-history-countes/constance-elected-to-gove/>, accessed April 24, 2017.

<sup>93</sup>- Elizabeth Coles Langhorne, *Nancy Astor and her Friends* (Michigan: Michigan University, 1974), 92.

<sup>94</sup>- An act that stated that it was Illegal for persons under 18 yrs old to buy or serve alcoholic drinks on licensed premises, 'but allowed the sale of beer and cider with a meal to a person over sixteen years.' (Monckton, *Ale*, p.184).  
- "parliament.uk," Intoxicating Liquor (Sale to persons under 18) Act, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/livingheritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/parliamentary-collections/nancy-astor/intoxicating-liquors-act/>, accessed April 23, 2017.

who joined to the House of Commons officially in 1921 was Lady Astor from the conservative party.

Margaret Wintringham was the Liberal Party's first female MP. In fact the reason behind her nomination was her husband death. He was elected as Liberal MP for Louth (Lincolnshire) but his sudden death in 1921 led Margaret Wintringham to take his seat in order to realize his dream. After her consent, Margaret stipulated that she was exempted from all public discourse because she was still in the mourning period of her husband's death. And she proposed that there would be some alternatives in order to give speeches instead of her, including her two sisters. Nancy Astor had argued that including an extra woman in the parliament was very important. And when Wintringham won the election in Wintringham, she became a closer friend to Nancy Astor.<sup>95</sup>

After Lady Astor and Mrs. Margaret Wintringham, the third female member in the house of common was Mrs. Philipson, she was known as Mabel Russell, and she had been a well-known musical comedy actress. She was elected by the conservative party, defeating her liberal and labour candidates by a majority of over 6,000 votes. She was succeeded rather than her husband who was elected and disqualified due to his illegal practices of his agent.<sup>96</sup>

In addition, Arabella Susan Lawrence was the first labour woman to be elected in the House of Commons on December 7, 1923.<sup>97</sup> After that, Dorothy Jewson, also a member of the labour party won the election of 1923 to be the first labour women took a seat in the House of Commons. In her first speech, Jewson called for giving the right to vote to women at the age of 21. Unfortunately, in the following election she could not succeed, and then she was appointed to the post of National Council of

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<sup>95</sup>- "The History of Parliament," Nancy Astor: The first female MP in the House of Commons, last updated May 2, 2014. <https://thehistoryofparliament.wordpress.com/2014/05/02/nancy-astor-the-first-female-mp-in-the-house-of-commons/>, accessed April 18, 2017.

<sup>96</sup>-Krista Cowman, *Women in British Politics, C.1689-1979* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 120.

<sup>97</sup>- "Labourlist," Susan Lawrence: The monocled maverick, last updated December 20, 2010. <http://labourlist.org/2010/12/susan-lawrence-the-monocled-maverick/>, accessed April 24, 2017.



the Independent Labour Party.<sup>98</sup>The last labour woman who won the election of 1923 was Margaret Bondfield, she was elected as a reward for her support to women and her defence for their rights, although the right to vote for all adult women took times to be real. However, the victory came after when she became the first woman ever to hold ministerial office as a government minister.<sup>99</sup>

## 5-Women and the House of Lords

With the approval of the Representation of the People Act in 1918 that allowed the majority of women over the age of 30 to vote, women were also allowed to stand for election in the House of Commons. One year later, the Sex Disqualification Removal Act came to delete all the lines that prevented women from being a senior civil servants, and magistrates. However, none of these amendments had tackled the issue of women's in the House of Lords. In fact, the original version of The Sex Disqualification Removal Bill had stated that a woman could inherit a seat in Parliament as well as her father's peerage, but this was deleted. In fact, the rule of hereditary peerages<sup>100</sup> in the House of Lords at that time provided that the hereditary must be masculine; it means that only a male relative could inherit a seat in the House of Lords. Woman could inherit a seat under one title which is a barony by writ, or to be given by the crown as a 'special remainder', or to a widow to honour the memory of her husband. And the females who inherit such a title in the upper house were named as "hereditary Peers".<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>- "Norfolk Women in History," Dorothy Jewson 1884–1964, <https://norfolkwomeninhistory.com/1851-1899/dorothy-jewson/>, accessed April 24, 2017.

<sup>99</sup>- "Historic UK," Margaret Bondfield, <http://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/margaret-bondfield/>, accessed April 26, 2017.

<sup>100</sup>- People who have inherited their title, they pass on from father to son, or to another heir. -"Chinet," Hereditary Peerages, <https://www.chinet.com/~laura/html/titles03.html>, accessed April 04, 2017.

After that, many efforts have been made to change the things, and amendments were presented to authorized female hereditary Peers in the House of Lords, but the results were always negative.

Duncan Sutherland, a British author, stated that the issue of women in the House of Lords was totally deleted from the suffrage movement's demands: "the admission of hereditary Peeresses did not stir the same popular enthusiasm as the cry of votes for women". And he pointed out that: "most upper class women opposed suffrage"<sup>102</sup>. Then, he got a reply from Mari Takayanagi, a British senior archivist, when she argued that they were some aristocratic women who were already members in the WSPU and they supported the suffrage campaign with "legitimacy and authority"<sup>103</sup>.

David Alfred Thomas, a member of the House of Lords, decided to inherit his title to his daughter Viscountess Rhondda as he did not have a son to title him after his death. However, the parliament did not allow her to take his seat in the House of Lords.<sup>104</sup>

In 1921, Viscountess Rhondda presented her case to the House of Lords Committee for Privileges; this committee is the responsible of peerage claims and related matters. She supported her case by the Sex Disqualification Removal Act 1919, which stated that a woman shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage from any public function, saying that this act should permit her to take her father's seat. In the beginning the committee accepted her demand and the vote was in her favour. Later, some lords including: Lord Chancellor, Lord Birkenhead (F. E. Smith) and many other Peers,

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<sup>101</sup>- "Revolvy," Privilege of peerage, [https://www.revolvy.com/topic/Privilege%20of%20peerage&item\\_type=topic](https://www.revolvy.com/topic/Privilege%20of%20peerage&item_type=topic), accessed April 14, 2017.

<sup>102</sup>- Ibid.

<sup>103</sup>- Mari Takayanagi, *A Changing House: The Life Peerages Act 1958*, ( London: Parliamentary History Press, 2008), 383.

<sup>104</sup>- "Parliament.uk," Women and the House of Lords, <http://www.parliament.uk/about/livingheritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/overview/womenthelords/>, accessed April 15, 2017.

voted against the case. And the House of Lords referred the case back to the committee for Privileges, and this later refused her demand.<sup>105</sup>

After this rejection, Viscountess Rhondda did not give up, instead, she asked her lawyer to draft a bill concerning her membership in the House of Lords. The bill was introduced by Viscount Astor, The husband of Nancy Astor, the first woman who took a place in the House of Commons. In 1913, Astor talked again to the Lords about the presence of women in the House of Lords, contending that it was obligatory to make some reforms. And between 1924 and 1928, Astor presented an annual bill concerning the issue of women in the House of Lords, but the Lords were voting against each time.<sup>106</sup>

After the WWII, a new committee was formed under the leadership of Edward Iwi. This later had organized a petition on the matter, which collected 50,000 signatures. However this petition was never presented to Parliament.

Eventually, the House of Lords voted to admit female hereditary Peers in the House of Lords in 1949. However, there was no formal legislation, because the labour government was afraid of the spread of the hereditary principle in the House of Lords. Duncan Sutherland had suggested that, the matter of including women in the House of Lords became “entangled” with reforms that were made by the upper house.<sup>107</sup>

By the passing of the Life Peerages Act 1958, women were finally allowed to attend the House of Lords as life peers. Viscountess Rhondda was still alive and saw the passage of the Life Peerages Act, but unfortunately, she died on 20 July 1958, before seeing the first woman taken a seat as life peers in the House of Lords.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>- “Parliament.uk,” Margaret Haig Thomas (1883-1958), <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/parliament-and-the-first-world-war/parliamentarians-and-staff-in-the-war/written-portraits-of-parliamentarians-during-the-first-world-war/margaret-haig-thomas-2nd-viscountess-rhondda/>, accessed April 16, 2017.

<sup>106</sup>- Ibid.

<sup>107</sup>- “Library Note,” Women in the House of Lords, <https://www.bibliotheque.assnat.qc.ca/...v2/AffichageFichier.aspx> , accessed April 26, 2017.

<sup>108</sup>- “Parliament.uk,” Women and the House of Lords, <http://www.parliament.uk/about/livingheritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/overview/womenthelords/>, accessed April 20, 2017.

However, it was impossible for women to inherit the title of hereditary Peers until the Peerage Act in 1963, which officially gave ladies the right to sit in the House of Lords. Since 1958, women had taken 266 peerages out of 1458. And by 1963, 25 female hereditary Peers took a seat in the House of Lords.<sup>109</sup>

## 6- Conclusion

By the 1918, the Representation of People Act had finally allowed women over 30 to vote, which was considered as a victory in the women's right. Although vote was not available for all women, but the act was considered as a major step toward the equality. There was no doubt that the act was as a "reward" for the hard work that was done by the ladies during WWI. Moreover, women started to involve themselves in the political world, and they nominated themselves to take a seat in the Parliament. In 1919, the parliament agreed on the Sex Disqualification Removal Act that gave women the opportunity to enter any field they want without sexual discrimination. In July 1928, At last, by passing The Equal Franchise Act all women over the age of 21 could vote in elections.

After this stand point, women had changed their direction from the right to vote to participation in the House of Commons and the House of Lords. With the arrival of General Election the law was clear and women were already being chosen as parliamentary candidates. But the thing with the House of Lords was a bit harder. Before 1958, Women were totally excluded from the House of Lords because only the male hereditary Peers were allowed to seat in the House; in fact, only after this date, that women were eventually given the right to take a seat in the House of Lords.

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<sup>109</sup>- "BBCHome," Lords to admit first women peers, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/30/newsid\\_3116000/3116144.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/30/newsid_3116000/3116144.stm), accessed April 27, 2017.

## **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

The objective of this research work is to reveal the insight into the status of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain, in which women had very limited rights in society as they did not have the right to have higher education or a profession, and they were unable to vote. In fact, many people thought that politics was beyond women's understanding and capacity and that the ideal woman should focus only on housekeeping and motherhood tasks. Therefore, women were unsatisfied with their situations, and they started to rebel and campaign in order to achieve rights that men had long enjoyed, especially the right to vote. These campaigns had changed the concept of women immensely at that time.

Furthermore, the purpose of this paper is to study Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and the circumstances that led women to rebel for their rights. And one of the most important aspects of women's suffrage in Britain was the sheer number of organisations that had been established and the diversity in the suffragists' activities between pacifist and Militant.

The Suffragists and the Suffragettes are two different movements. The suffragists were the members of the NUWSS that was formed in 1897, and that was led by Millicent Garrett Fawcett. NUWSS aimed to achieve enfranchisement for women by peaceful and legal means, such as bringing petitions and Bills to parliament, and holding public meetings for their Cause. The suffragettes were the members of the WSPU that was formed in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst. They utilised militant, violent, and illegal tactics, and their motto was 'Deeds not Words'.

Moreover, it is also important to note that women's suffrage Movement in Britain had great impacts in transforming the position of women in society, such as the improvements in education, medicine, and working conditions. Along these lines, and for our investigation, we have found that the involvement of women in the First World War efforts did much to change the perceptions of the role of women in the British society, and to get women the right to vote.

The outbreak of the WWI in 1914 led to a suspension of all politics, including the militant suffragette campaigns. And the lobbying of MPs did take place quietly. During the war years, women undertook jobs normally carried out by men and proved that they were capable of handling jobs beyond those in traditionally 'female' roles, such as domestic services. In addition to that, they got the respect they deserved from men.

Therefore in concluding this study, we have felt it important to look, very briefly, beyond the passage of the Representation of the People Act 1918 that enfranchised all men, as well as all women over the age of 30 with some conditions. And to the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act 1928 that gave the vote to all women over the age of 21 on equal terms with men. After many years of struggle and adversity, women finally gained suffrage and it was a turning point in the British history.

Consequently, the conclusion offers an interpretation of women as members in the House of Commons and House of Lords. The first woman to be elected to the Commons was Constance Markievicz, in the general election of 1918. However, as a member of Sinn Fein, she did not take her seat. In fact, the first woman to take her seat was Nancy Astor (Viscountess Astor) in December 1919. She was elected as a Conservative for the Plymouth Sutton constituency after her husband, Waldorf Astor, the former MP, was elevated to the peerage. On the other hand, and after several obstacles and difficulties women were eventually allowed to take a seat in the House of Lords.

To conclude, we can say that the early Women's Suffrage Movement had achieved important results and women were less restricted by the ideology of femininity found in the Victorian Period. However, the newfound freedom of women became a threat to men and there were still challenges to overcome.

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