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**Female Opposition to Women Parliamentary Franchise: The  
Appeal against Female Suffrage in England up to 1928.**

Dissertation Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for a Master's  
Degree in Literature and Civilization

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# Dedications

*This work is dedicated to my whole family*

## **Acknowledgements**

*Before all I thank GOD for blessing me in achieving this work.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the nineteenth century, England witnessed the emergence of the female Suffrage Movement. In 1866 these women suffragists' aim was the parliamentary enfranchisement of women. In 1899, the appearance of the Female Anti-Suffrage Movement was organized to oppose the grant of the parliamentary franchise for women. This research work tries to highlight the causes that pushed women to oppose the parliamentary vote for women. The antis had a surfeit of arguments which justified their cause, which was the resentment of the political equality between genders. The Female Anti Suffrage Campaign was defeated. In 1918 was the partial enfranchisement of women over the age of thirty in 1918. And after a decade with the Equal Enfranchisement Act (1928), all women finally achieved the same voting rights as men.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

**M.P.s** Members of Parliament

**N.L.O.W.S.:** National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage

**N.U.W.S.S:** National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies

**W.N.A.S.L:** Women's National Anti-Suffrage League

**W.S.P.U:** Women's Social and Political Union.





**General Introduction**

### General Introduction

In England, during the Victorian era (1837-1901) the country witnessed unprecedented power and wealth. This period was a time for revolutionary developments. The Industrial Revolution (1760-1840), cultural progress and scientific advancement were among the aspects of this significant change in the British society. However, this social and economic advancement was full of contradictions and inequalities and brought wretchedness and wars to the British people, especially women.

The Victorian era was characterized by gender inequality full of ample of norms and conventions that put both men and women in their specific sphere and guided them to perform their roles. Women were placed in the private sphere and excluded from the public life. They lived under the complete and total supervision of their male controllers (father, brother or husbands). They were deprived from surfeit of rights that men enjoyed. Women were supposed to be “The Angel in the house», to be ideal wives and perfect mothers.

As a matter of fact, women were marginalized and banned from several rights as the higher education, the control over their personal property after marriage and the right to vote. And by the emergence of the Industrial Revolution, the traditional role for women began to change. They started to perform paid-jobs which empowered them to react.

Nineteenth century England witnessed the emergence of the Women’s Suffrage Movement (1860-1928) which was a watershed for the women’s destiny. There were two prominent Suffrage Movements, the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies (N.U.W.S.S) that was formed in 1897 under the leadership of Millicent Garrett Fawcett (1847-1929); its members were the suffragists. They used the peaceful methods to ask their right to vote. The second movement was Women’s Social and Political Union (W.S.P.U) .It was formed in 1903by Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928). Its members were the suffragettes who believed in deeds not words, the reason that pushed them to use an ample of militant and

violent tactics such as breaking windows and firebombing public buildings to reach their goal which was the full equal voting rights for all women.

During the women's suffrage journey, suffragists encountered much opposition. The parliament rejected and denied the women enfranchisement. But, what worsened matters was the appearance of a group of women who strongly opposed the Suffrage Movement and the vote for women. Their anti-suffrage campaign was organized under the leadership of Mary Humphrey Ward (1851-1920). They used several methods to convince the government that the vote should not be granted to women.

This research work is entitled "Female Opposition to Women Parliamentary Franchise: The Appeal against Female Suffrage in England up to 1928. This work attempts to shed light on the Anti-Suffrage Movement and the reasons which pushed women to oppose the vote for their gender.

The present work intends to answer the following questions:

- What are the reasons that pushed women to oppose the vote?
- What was the outcome of the female anti-suffrage campaign?
- Did the women's suffrage win the right to vote?

To answer the above-mentioned questions, this humble work is a combination of two chapters:

The first chapter entitled: The Status of Women in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century -Victorian England (1837-1901) deals with the status of women throughout Victorian era and with their social, economic and political positions before the start of the suffrage movement. In addition, it gives a vision of women's lifestyle, the social classes they came from and the kind of education which was provided for women during the Victorian era. Moreover, it highlights the women's sphere and how they were deprived from their rights under the patriarchal society then, the inequality between men and women. Besides, it tackles the beginning of the suffrage

## General Introduction

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movement in England 1866. The chapter ends with the rising of the anti-suffrage campaign in 1889.

The second chapter entitled: Women against the Vote: Female Anti-Suffragism in Britain(1908-1928). It examines the rising of the anti-suffrage campaign in 1889 and the establishment of the first anti-suffrage organization women's national Anti-suffrage League; then the reasons behind this opposition to the vote. The chapter, in turn, tackles the reactions of women suffragists and suffragettes against the unexpected female opposition. In addition, it highlights the great role and patriotism of suffragists and suffragettes during the First World War and the impact of this latter on the destiny of the female suffrage and anti-suffrage campaign.

# Chapter One:

## The Status of Women in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Victorian England (1837-1901)

### 1.1. Introduction

### 1.2. The Position and the Role of Women in Victorian Society before the Suffrage Campaign

#### 1.2.1 Women's Social Position

#### 1.2.2 The Marriage and the Identity of Women

#### 1.2.3 Girls' Education in the Victorian Era

#### 1.2.4 Women's Work in the Victorian Era<sup>12</sup>

### 1.3. The Impact of the Industrial Revolution on the Victorian Women

### 1.4. Women's Political Status

### 1.5. The Request for Women's Change (1860)

### 1.6. General History of Women's Suffrage in Britain

#### 1.6.1. Definition of Suffrage

#### 1.6.2. The Use of Petitions and Parliamentary Response

#### 1.6.3. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies ( NUWSS)

### 1.7. Conclusion

## 1.1 Introduction

The Victorian age was characterized as an era of economic and social development. With the Industrial Revolution; England witnessed a great change from a rural agricultural to an urban and industrialized one.

Despite these total changes and advances in all aspects of society, women were marginalized and deprived of their rights. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women lived in a patriarchal society where men enjoyed all rights. However, women were placed at home and to be “Angel at Home” by cleaning the home and taking care of their husbands and their children.

In the nineteenth century, there was an inequality between men and women, women suffered from being the weak part of the family as well as the society. They wanted to change their status, to get more rights as citizens; they started to think seriously about their position and situation in society and wanted to react against the intolerant and unjust society even if this latter at that time was ruled by a woman.

The first chapter highlights the status of Victorian women in the British society focusing on its economy, political and social aspects. In addition, it tackles the emergence of Women’s Suffrage Movement in Britain.

## 1.2 The Position and the Role of Women in the Victorian Society before the Suffrage Campaign

During the nineteenth century England, the Victorian women faced several obstacles and barriers<sup>1</sup>. Their journey toward equal citizenship was complex and

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<sup>1</sup>Kathryn Hughes, *Gender role in the 19<sup>th</sup> century*, (The University of East Anglia), 6

full of failures. The right place for women was at home; the Victorian society reserved power and privilege for men. However, law and customs enforced female dependency. Moreover, women were deprived from many rights; they were put in the specific place and considered as “Domestic angels”.

### 1.2.1 Women’s Social position

In Victorian England, men were seen as superior and women were seen as inferior and were subjected to their men’s authority. The Victorian era’s ideology was “great men” who were considered as competitors in several fields and the masters of economic, politics and moral realms.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, England was ruled by Queen Victoria (1819-1901)<sup>2</sup> for about hundred years, but all women were marginalized and exploited under the brutal living conditions; therefore, they were put in the latest row of Victorian period.

Victorian era was believed to be the Era of male supremacy. Women’s status was similar to that of children. Their fathers, husbands or other male relatives were their legal representatives and they were in charge of women’s property for almost all the nineteenth century. The women were expected to be “*Angels of their houses*”, who could transform the home to heaven for their husbands and children.

The Ideology of separate spheres<sup>3</sup> dominated and governed the Victorian society, with the conception of the division of gender roles into separate spheres. The role of women and men were not the same. Men and women knew that their roles were different and accepted. This ideology put women in the domestic sphere

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<sup>2</sup>Queen Victoria was the queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland from 1837 to 1901—the second—longest reign of any British monarch. Queen Victoria Biography(1819-1901)UPDATED:AUG 29,2019.ORIGINAL:FEB 27,2018accessed on April,12,2019

<sup>3</sup>Susan Kent Kingsley, *Gender and Power in Britain 1640-1990*, (New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library), 1990. P24

to serve their husbands and their real place was the home, in most instances, the men's place was in the public sphere and they were considered the "breadwinners". Women who wanted to discover the public sphere or to interfere it were seen unnatural and unwanted.

As domestic beings, women were expected to be amiable companions; therefore, higher education was unnecessary and was not recommended for women. Women were supposed to cook, prepare the home for their husbands and take care of their children, not to be educated and with whom men would discuss business or politics. However, the Victorian Ideology always imposed the idea that women must have knowledge about art, music and language, to become ideal wives and mothers.

### **1.2.2 The Marriage and the Identity of Women**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, marriage was a necessary project and an expected duty for all Victorian women especially for middle and upper-class women. The married women had a sacred and honoured role in the society "the crowning achievement of a woman's life"<sup>4</sup>. However, unmarried women were considered offspring conspicuous as a danger to the stability of society.

Traditionally, women and men were different, the Victorian society believed that men were intellectually stronger and independent; they were the masters and their place in the outside world. Although women were seen as sensitive fragile, irrational and dutiful, yet, their suitable place was in private sphere.

The Victorian society sanctified the marriage, it was necessary to build a house with protecting roof and available food on table. Once a woman got married, she became under the direction and the mercy of her husband. Because women were

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<sup>4</sup>VL MC Beath, "Victorian Era women's rights". <http://Valmcbeath.com/Victorian-era-women-rights>. Accessed on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019.



considered as unstable and incapable of making rational decisions, some of them were beaten by their husbands, the women's life was nearly like that of slaves.

Single women or widows were allowed to own their own property and possession. Yet, once married, women lost their property and money because the Victorian law gave all the rights to men to own their wife's properties after the wedding day. Moreover, if women did have jobs, the sole beneficiary of their incomes would be their husbands. The woman was totally dependent on her husband, but if he died the woman could gain the control of her property and money.

In addition, children were also the husband's property and in the case of divorce, only the man could expect custody of his children. It was only after the 1839 Custody of Infants Act<sup>5</sup> that women were allowed the custody of children under the age of seven; however, the father remained the sole legal guardian.

Throughout the Victorian era, the divorce was considered as a societal taboo, it was extremely expensive and almost impossible for women to obtain it. Even if adultery was the only reason for divorce but it was valid only for the man who could divorce. The woman who wanted to divorce needed to prove her husband's adultery.

At that time, there existed three categories of women, the married women who were the majority; since the marriage was the primary goal for most women. Whereas, the divorced women were only a minority because it was nearly impossible for women to divorce. There was another group of unmarried women who remained single, in Victorian society they were called elderly spinsters and it was a must to highlight their status in society.

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<sup>5</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. <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationship/overview/custodyrights/>. Accessed on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019.

In the nineteenth century, the perfect role for a woman was to be an ideal wife and good mother. Yet, the marriage was supposed to be the natural purpose for a woman's life. Spinster<sup>6</sup> were older women beyond the usual age for marriage. The role of unmarried women of middle class and upper-class was to help their relatives in raising their children, they took care of their nieces and nephews and even they assisted in cooking. However, the spinsters of the lower-class worked outside their houses as servants or had job in factories.

During the Victorian England, and with the "Separate Spheres" ideology, the male's position was in the public sphere. Women became increasingly associated with private sphere where they had to take care of home and family. Yet, wives and daughters were social and economic dependent on their male relative. Although women's was home, they had some occupations and avocations. They worked as governesses and teachers at home. Moreover, the Victorian women could receive a kind of education imposed by the dominant culture.

### **1.2.3 Girls' Education in the Victorian era**

The Victorian era was believed to be the era of male supremacy in all domains. The division of sexes was clear. Men and women knew that their roles were different and accepted their unequal lives. Women were positioned as decorative trophies and spiritual guardians of men's immortal soul; they were seen as male's servants. For this reason that higher education was considered unnecessary for women. In Victorian times, girls either rich or poor could not go to school, most

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<sup>6</sup>Spinsters are women who do not get married, an unmarried woman who is around 20 years old will not be considered as spinster. The Victorian Era England facts about Queen Victoria, Society & Literature. Victorian-era. Org/spinsterhood-spinster.html. Accessed on April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019..

of them were taught by a governess at home. Victorian Ideology always imposed the idea that women must have knowledge about art, music and language.

It was until 1870, that girl's education was taken into account by the British authorities. By the Education Act (1870)<sup>7</sup>, the elementary education for both sexes became compulsory. Thanks to this act, the girls started to learn reading, writing and arithmetics. Some English families even rich parents did not allow their daughters to have the secondary education till 1880 and 1890's. This patriarchal society supported higher education for sons to preserve the superiority to men. It was only in 1848 that the state accepted to build a college for the girls who were over the age of twelve. F.D. Maurice's Queen's college was a well-known school in England at that time.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)<sup>8</sup> asserted that: "lack of education made women frivolous and socially irresponsible, unfit to be companions to their husbands, good mothers to their children or self supporting in the absence of a male provider"<sup>9</sup>. Despite the patriarchal mentality, many women in Victorian Britain started to work in order to support their families alongside their heavy domestic duties.

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<sup>7</sup>The Education Act (1870) stands as the very first of legislation to deal specifically with the provision of education in Britain. Most importantly, it demonstrated a commitment to provision on a national scale .The 1870 Education Act-UK parliament.<http://www.parliament.UK/about/livingheritage/transformationsociety/livinglearning/school/overview/1870education/>. Accessed on March 12th, 2019.

<sup>8</sup>Mary Wollstonecraft was an English writer who advocated for women's equality. Her book A Vindication of the rights of women pressed for educational reforms.Mary Wollstonecraft-beliefs, Life & Ideas-Biography.<http://www.biography.com/scholar/mary-wollstonecraft>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

### 1.2.4 Women's work in the Victorian era

In the Victorian society, women of the middle and upper-class did not work; their suitable place was at home near their children and husbands. In addition, middle-class women could not have the opportunity to get married and work at the same time, they had to make a choice either work or marriage. Historian Francis Michael Longstreet Thomson emphasized that:

all female employment outside the home, whether of married or unmarried .Whether in factories or elsewhere made women into bad housewives and mothers because it deprived them of domestic training or inclination, and hence weakened the family<sup>10</sup>

Thomson supported the Victorian ideology which put women in the domestic sphere. He argued that if women worked outside home, they could not assume their duties perfectly at home. According to him, it was impossible for the working women to make a balance between their domestic duties and their jobs. Therefore, the family would become weaker and lost.

However, lower-class women often did work outside with low paid- jobs such as domestics, maids, or employers in factories and mills. Other women started to work as governess, others as teachers. The role given to Victorian- female teachers was to teach about art, music and language not teaching the principles of physics, astronomy or social sciences.

In the nineteenth century, female teachers had more teaching roles than male roles, but in terms of salary, women's pay was lower than men's. There were two types of Victorian female teachers. The first type was a public schoolmistress, who worked in the public school while the second type was a private schoolmistress,

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<sup>10</sup><https://goodreaders.com/author/show/576059.Francis>.accessed on May 13th,2019

who worked in private school. Other Victorian females were employed in factories and mills. Whereas traditionally, women were defined physically and intellectually as the weaker sex. However, they were exposed to intense exploitations and working under harsh conditions.

Doubtless, during the Victorian era, Britain witnessed social and economic developments, especially London which has turned into the most advanced city in the world. However, in this period, Victorian women were suffering and living under the inequality and very intolerant conditions. The nineteenth century England was also marked by the Industrial Revolution which had a great impact on women.

### **1.3 The Impact of the Industrial Revolution on the Victorian women**

The nineteenth century was a turning point for the development of England. This latter experienced the Industrial Revolution<sup>11</sup>, which brought to the country technological, socioeconomic and cultural changes. With the bigger machines that could manage factories, the production in textiles, factories or mills increased bringing wealth and power to Great Britain. The term “Industrial Revolution” in fact means unprecedented technological and economic development that began during 1830 in the U.K. It replaced the animal and human power by mechanical power and transformed agriculture-based economies to manufacturing based ones.

Before the Industrial Revolution, women had traditional jobs such as making and repairing clothes or baby- sitters for raising children. With the Industrial Revolution, women started gradually to be more independent ,then the traditional role for women began to change. As a result of the impacts of the Industrial

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<sup>11</sup>Elva Card, “ Women and the Industrial Revolution”(Seminar,Social Studies department,woodson High School Fairfax,2004)accessed on April18,2019.

Revolution, an important number of women started to work in textile mills and coal mines in order to improve their lives. Though the Industrial Revolution had profound effects on society as a whole and on women in particular, women did not get the same rights as men in terms of salaries, women were often paid much less than men.

As a matter of fact, the Victorian working-women started to think about their status which was marginalized and discriminated. By the Industrialization of the English society, women started to earn their economic independence; therefore, they joined men in their public sphere. This achievement empowered women and increased their awareness of their political involvement regardless of their class.

## 1.4 Women's Political Status

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Industrial Revolution transformed the England's economy and society from agricultural to industrialized society, and there was a shift from country sides to cities, and cities became larger, then the demand for reforms was required. Despite all these changes, the Victorian women lived in gender inequality, they were regarded as weak and fragile; they had no control over their personal property or over their own money. They were supported by their families or their husbands and even by their husband's families. "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..."<sup>12</sup>

Victorian women did not have the right to vote, women were expected to be in the private sphere which was the home and far from politics and laws that were in public sphere which belonged to men, then women were not accepted to take part in politics. Women were banned from political participation especially the middle

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<sup>12</sup> Kim Stevenson, et al., *A Serious and Growing Evil Public Indecency in England 1857-1960*(Routledge:London,2015),36.

and low-class women that were deprived of their political rights. Only the upper-class women had the right to be involved in politics and “Queen Victoria” was an example of the “elite woman”; a woman who represented the challenge to the separate- sphere ideology.

Since the majority of women could not vote and they could not reach the gate of politics; this situation awakened women’s awareness; they started to think seriously about the necessity of their political participation as they began to ask for equal rights and for change.

### **1.5 The Request for Women’s Change (1860)**

In the Victorian era, women lived under the patriarchal protection; in a society where men had power, money and privilege. Women were seen as inferior to men in most areas of life. The Victorian era was believed to be the era of male supremacy in all domains; what was expected from the woman as to be a charming housewife and a good mother for her children. She was deprived from all her rights as a citizen.

In fact, with the Industrial Revolution with its diversities and with the Industrial Revolution Reforms<sup>13</sup>, women entered the work world and some opportunities to do jobs in factories and mines which were nearly impossible and unthinkable before. The Industrial Revolution had an impact on the women’s role the Victorian society and started to be somehow independent financially.

The nineteenth century, Britain with all changes in society at that time witnessed the emergency of the “new woman” thanks to the Education Act (1870) girls started to learn reading, writing and they had the opportunity to have a high education by entering college and becoming after female teachers. Although,

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<sup>13</sup>Kim Stevenson,op.cit38.

women lived under the oppression and coverture of the patriarchal social culture; nevertheless they did not carry to live under patriarchal control and rules, and under the discrimination and marginalization society. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) the first feminist who advocated the rights for women said:

I do not wish them[women] to have power over men, but over themselves ... it is the time to effect a revolution in female manners-time restore to them their lost dignity and make them, as a part of the human species, labour by reforming themselves to reform the world<sup>14</sup>

The “new woman” started to ask questions about womanhood, and the woman as a “concept”. They started to react. This group of women asked for change, to be equal with men and to get their rights as full citizens.

Politics in the early nineteenth century in the U.K was only for men. Men saw women as sensitive, fragile not able to carry the stress and tension of politics. Even men and nearly the whole of society thought that women could not participate in politics. The group of women who believed strongly in “new woman” decided to change the womanhood concept by fighting for equal rights between men and women; they did whatever they could to attract people’s attention, but no one cared and they were called “Silly Women”.

As consequence, and as a reaction to this, women became stronger and they were sticking to their beliefs and convictions. They took the challenge to create a movement to make their voice heard and their demand clear. Their aim was to improve their life and to change society, to call for equal rights and more precisely the political right. This is why women from the three classes were united and organized “Woman’s Suffrage Movement” to ask mainly about “the right to vote” They would endeavour to surge their presence in politics.

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<sup>14</sup> Mary wollstonecraftquotes.MaryWollstonecraft ,*A vindication of the rights of woman*.accessed on April13,2019.<http://www.goodreads.com/another/quotes/1853305/>



## 1.6 General History of Women's Suffrage in Britain

During the nineteenth century, women started their journey to look for an equal citizenship for women in England. Gradually, women began to react against the unjust and unfair world and society where they were struggling to survive under all the oppressions, inequality and lawlessness; Victorian women were discriminated and marginalized in society and in family as well. A married woman was deprived of rights, property and even rights on her children; in addition, married women could not have custody of their children in cases of divorce.

Throughout 64 years, women upon marriage, their legal rights were under coverture of their husbands. However, single and widows had the right to have property even business. All these conditions and circumstances pushed women to ask questions about their status in Victorian society and about their conventional roles imposed by it. Middle- class women started to organize movements in order to change their lives; it was like a challenge for these women to make their voice heard. These women believed in change and they looked for new women with new aims and ambitions.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Feminism<sup>15</sup> became an official concept, these movements' demands were equality in education, labour and electoral rights, Feminists argued that: "it would be democratic to give women the vote. Through the 19<sup>th</sup> century ,the right to vote had been given to more and more men-now was the time to include women"<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Feminism, the belief in social, economic and political equality of the sexes. Although largely originating in the west, feminism is manifested worldwide and is represented by various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women's rights and interests Feminism/Definition. History,&Examples/Britannica.com.<http://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/>. Accessed on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

<sup>16</sup>" Arguments for/against women suffrage". *Flashcards/Quizlet*.<http://www.quizlet.com/52063218/arguments-foragainst-women-suffrage-Flash-cards/>. Accessed on April26th, 2019.

Since women wanted equality and full citizenship, they organized several movements and campaigns to ask for their social, economic and political rights. In 1866, the suffrage movement or the suffrage campaign was organized for the sake of collecting signatures for a suffrage petition to be presented to the House of Commons. The campaign was led by women to ask for the right to vote and to gain the parliamentary franchise and take part in parliamentary elections on the same terms as men.

### **6.1. Definition of Suffrage**

In the early nineteenth century, very few people had the right to vote, the majority could not vote. Women were excluded from voting; gradually the question of women's voting right became an issue. Therefore, many British women's right activists gathered and formed the women's suffrage campaign to fight for the right of women to vote. To know more about the suffrage, the definition of the latter is required.

The suffrage or franchise is that people have the right to vote in public elections, to be elected or to choose their representatives. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines the word suffrage as: "the right to vote in electing public officials and adopting or rejecting the proposed legislation ...."<sup>17</sup> As another definition for the term suffrage, it is defined in Merriam-Webster Dictionary as: "the right to vote in an election"<sup>18</sup>

### **6.2. The Use of Petitions and Parliamentary Response**

Women started a long and hard journey to achieve the parliamentary franchise. The women's suffrage movement as a political campaign had a sole and unique issue that was the right to vote for women; the reason that pushed

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<sup>17</sup><https://www.britannica.com/topic/woman-suffrage>. Accessed on April 26th, 2019.

<sup>18</sup><https://www.merriam-webster-com./dictionary/suffrage>. Accessed on March 23th, 2019.

suffragists to use petitions as a strategy to ask the parliament for their right to vote. Before women gained the right to vote, the House of Commons had received more than 17.000 petitions for women's suffrage, containing over 3.3 million signatures.

In 1832, the first petition was drafted from a feminist who asked for the vote, it was presented by Henry Hunt MP(1773-1835)<sup>19</sup>, this petition was from Mary Smith<sup>20</sup> Stanmore in Yorkshire, who explained that she respected and followed the rule of law and paid taxes as well. Therefore, she did not understand why she was not allowed to vote. It was laughed out of the House of Commons. Even it seemed negative, however it empowered the women suffragists to fight for their right to vote.

In 1865, the Kensington society women from middle-class met in Kensington society, London. Their aim was to get the right to vote for women and to ask about it by drafting petitions. Barbara Bodichon, Emily Davies and Elizabeth Garrett were the leaders for women's rights campaign. In June the petition was signed by 1.499 women who were teachers, dressmakers, shopkeepers, wives of butchers and from the upper-class as well. This petition was presented to the House of Commons by the liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill(1806-1873)<sup>21</sup>, who wanted to explain that the petition was important and it was signed by women who wanted the vote. But in vain, in the Victorian era, all petitions in favour of female enfranchisement were refused.

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<sup>19</sup>Henry Hunt, British radical political reformer who gained the nickname "orator" Hunt for his ubiquitous speechmaking in which he advocated universal suffrage and annual parliaments. Henry Hunt, British politician/Britannica.com.<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-Hunt>. Accessed on May 26th, 2019.

<sup>20</sup>In 1832, she became the first woman to petition Parliament to extend the franchise to "every unmarried female, possessing the necessary pecuniary qualification". The Leeds women who changed your lives by Chris Nickson.[www.bigbookend.co.uk/the-leeds-women-who-changed-your-lives-by-chris-nickson](http://www.bigbookend.co.uk/the-leeds-women-who-changed-your-lives-by-chris-nickson).

<sup>21</sup>Women and the vote, John Stuart mill and the 1866 petition.<https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage>. Accessed on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

In 1867 The London Society for women's suffrage was formed; John Stuart Mill was its president and soon Millicent Fawcett (1847-1929)<sup>22</sup> became the leader of the group. Lydia Becker (1827-1890)<sup>23</sup> was the new secretary of the Manchester Committed for the enfranchisement of women until her death. She had an important role to fight for vote for women; in addition she encouraged and supported women to ask and discuss their right to vote publically. In March 1867 L. Becker wrote an article on female suffrage and was published in *the contemporary Review*, she said:

It surely will not be denied that woman have and ought to have opinions  
Of their own on subjects of public interest, and on it way. But if it be  
Granted that women may, without offence, hold political opinions, on  
what ground can the right be with held of giving the same expressing on  
effect to their opinions as that enjoyed by their male neighbours <sup>24</sup>

In this article, L. Becker claimed that women can have the right to participate and give their opinions on subjects of public interest and about the development of the world.

In the nineteenth century, the British government passed three reforms Bills (1832-1867 and 1884) which banned women from voting and widened the right to vote only to men though women presented their own petitions, but in vain.

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<sup>22</sup> Millicent Fawcett, was a leading suffragists and campaigner for equal rights for women. She led the biggest suffrage organization, the non-violent (N.U.W.S.S) from 1890-1919, and played a key role in gaining women the vote. Millicent Fawcett/Biography Online.<http://www.Biographyonline.net/politicians/UK/Millicent-fawcett.html> .Accessed on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Lydia Becker was the new secretary of the Manchester Committee for the enfranchisement of women (from 1867 until 1890) Lydia Becker (1827-1890): "the fight for votes for women"<http://radicalmanchester.wordpress.com/2010/03/05Lydiabecker-1827-1890-the-fight-for-votes-for-women/> Accessed on March 22<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

### **6.2.1 The Reform Bill of 1867**

The Reform Bill of 1867 was introduced by the Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) to enfranchise a large proportion of men. On May 20, 1867, John Stuart Mill proposed an amendment to the 1867 Reform Bill. Mill attempted to amend the second Reform Bill to replace the word “man” by “person” and ask for the equality between men and women. John Stuart Mill made a speech about the right to vote for women; this speech was successful and reflective. He received support from some other MPs including Henry Fawcett, husband of Millicent Garrett Fawcett but Mill’s amendment was rejected by 196 vote to 73. Mill continued to support women. In 1868 another suffrage petition gathered more than 21000 signatures.

In 1866 petitions opened the gate of organized campaigning by women for the vote. At that time several suffrage groups were formed and focusing only on the possibility of women’s inclusion in parliamentary elections. In 1887 and because of the repeated parliamentary rejection of female suffrage petitions, seventeen of several suffrage groups were gathered and formed the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies (N.U.W.S.S.)<sup>25</sup>.

### **1.6.3 The National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS)**

During the nineteenth century, women wanted to change their status in society; they were deprived from social and political rights, such as a lack of high education and the exclusion from the vote. The reason that pushed women to

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<sup>25</sup>F.Cini.Carol “From British Women’s WWI Suffrage Battle to the League of Nations Covenant: Conflicting Uses of Gender in the Politics of Millicent Garrett Fawcett” *UCLA Historical Journal* (1994):83.Vol5,n03,p21

establish several organizations to ask for their rights and especially the right to vote. They were known as Suffragists<sup>26</sup> .

Suffragist groups were active over the country and demanded women's equal rights to vote on the local level then on the national one. They started to write thousands petitions asking for women's vote but in vain , these petitions were rejected and refused by parliament , therefore female Suffragists changed their tactic by forming several organizations which were established with the sole aim : to achieve the right to vote for women and to secure the parliamentary franchise for women .

To strengthen their position and their campaign, in 1891, Suffragist groups were united to form the largest and the most important organization that would lead the Suffrage movement which was the National union of women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) .Lydia Becker was the first leader of (NUWSS), but after three years Becker died. Millicent Garrett Fawcett (1847-1929) the wife of Henry Fawcett became the new president of the organization. (NUWSS) was the biggest organization which consolidated 17 suffrage societies and supported the suffrage cause.

The Suffragists were the members of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, they used peaceful method not violent such as petitioning, bobbying and marching to ask for the right to vote for women. Moreover, they started distributing daily papers, delivery books and plays about the right to vote for women. Millicent Fawcett recommended suffragists to be intelligent and polite and to respect law in order to gain the respect of MPs .Consequently this strategy succeeded to gain sympathy from men. Several Bills in favour of women's suffrage increased significant support in parliament by 1900. Moreover, in 1908 the members of the NUWSS organized exhibitions in London to support the Women Suffrage.

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<sup>26</sup>F.Cini.Carol “.op.cit.83

Elizabeth Robins(1862-1952) a strong feminist and a member of NUWSS portrayed one of the demonstrations:

On June 21st, 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 sole aim of women suffragists was to gain the vote, but it was not easy for them to reach their goal. They did not solely encounter opposition from the parliament, but they encountered also opposition from their own gender.

## 1.7 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter focused on the life style of the Victorian women. who suffered from social, economic and political positions. Women according to Victorian laws and traditions were considered as “angels in the house”, they should take care of their husbands and children, until the late of nineteenth century, women were deprived from their rights and they were under men’s control.

Moreover, they were considered as inferior and fragile. The reason that pushed many women to think about their status, they started by organizing several campaigns to ask for their rights in general and for the right to vote particular. NUWSS was the largest organization that supported the female suffragists who wanted to get the right to vote. This organization got support and respect of the MPs, however they also encountered opposition from men and from

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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 March 10,2017.

women as well. The nineteenth century witnessed the appearance of a group of Female anti-suffragism. They strongly believed that the vote was not for women.



# Chapter Two:

## Women against the Vote: Female Anti-Suffragism in Britain (1908-1928)

### 2.1. Introduction

### 2.2. The Reasons behind the Female Oppositions to the Vote under the Forward Policy (1908 – 1914)

#### 2.2.1 Definitions of the Forward Policy (1908 – 1914)

#### 2.2.2 The Social Reasons

#### 2.2.3 The Political Reasons

### 2.3. The Nature of Women anti-Suffragists

### 2.4. The Female anti-suffrage Tactics

#### 2.4.1 The Formation of Anti-suffrage League (1908-1918)

### 2.5. The Suffragettes Militant Campaign, the Struggle to get the Vote

### 2.6. The WWI and the Suffrage Campaigns

#### 2.6.1. The N.U.W.S.S during the WWI

#### 2.6.2 The W.S.P.U during the First World War

#### 2.6.3. Women Anti-Suffragists during the First World War

### 2.7. Women and the Vote: The Parliamentary Path to Equal Franchise (1918-1928)

#### 2.7.1 The Representation of the People Acts (1918)

#### 2.7.2. The Parliament Qualification of Women Act (1918)

### 2.8. The Defeat of the Female Anti-Suffrage

### 2.9. The Equal Franchise Act (1928)

### 2. 10. Conclusion

## 2.1 Introduction

The Victorian Era witnessed several women's movements and organizations which asked and looked for women's rights and especially the right to vote. There was another category of British women from upper-class and middle-class who were connected to define the real women's role in the society. They had a different view which opposed totally the suffrage movement's view and aim.

In the twentieth century (1908 - 1914), women oppositionists were organized to establish the first anti-suffrage organization the W.N.A.S.L (1908), then this group of female oppositionists took the name of forward policy (1908 - 1914). Women antis had a surfeit of political and social reasons and arguments. All of these reasons were against the women political participation. Whereas, the women antis used tactics and methods to achieve their aim, but the suffragettes resisted and protested violently. However, these violent acts strengthened the women antis cause.

This chapter explores the reasons and the tactics of the women antis and how they respond to the suffragettes violent methods; then the defeat and its reasons of the female Anti-suffrage.

## 2.2 The Reasons behind the Female Oppositions to the Vote under the Forward Policy (1908 – 1914)

The women antis' believes were strongly against the parliamentary vote for women. They had several social and political reasons in order to convince women in the English society and the politicians in parliament that the vote was not for women. In 1908 was the first establishment of the first anti-suffrage organization which was labelled the "Forward Policy"<sup>28</sup> under the women antis' believes were

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<sup>28</sup>.Julia Bush, "British Women's Anti-Suffragism and the Forward Policy, 1908-14", *Women's History Review*, Vol.11, No.3 (2002) :438.

strongly against the parliamentary vote for women. They had several social and political reasons in order to convince women in the English society and the politicians in parliament that the vote was not for women. In 1908 there was the first establishment of the first anti-suffrage organization which was labelled the “Forward Policy” under the leadership of Mary Humphrey Ward(1851-1920)<sup>29</sup>

### **2.2.1 Definitions of the Forward Policy (1908 – 1914)**

The publication of the Appeal Against Female Suffrage in June 1889 was to deny the vote to women. The Appeal was published to confirm that the majority of women did not want to vote. In the twentieth century the female anti-suffrage used more effective tactics and their opposition was strengthened the anti-suffrage campaign and their resentment of the vote was known the forward policy and even the women anti-vote were known as “forward women.”<sup>30</sup> Mary Humphrey ward was the leader of Female anti-suffrage campaign; she was against moves to allow women to vote in the early twentieth century.

The female anti-suffragism gained more advantages from the participation of the suffragists and suffragettes in the First World War, because they devoted all their time and efforts in this war. Yet, the antis benefited from their absence. Therefore the forward policy vanished in 1914; this latter had a surfeit of reasons that pushed these Female opponents to deny the right to vote for women and

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<sup>29</sup> Mrs. Humphrey ward, born Mary Augusta Arnold. She opposed the Women’s Suffrage Movement, however, fearing in emancipation a loss of women’s moral influence. In 1908 she founded the Anti-suffrage League. Humphrey Ward/British writer/Britannica.com. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mrs-Humphrey-ward>. Accessed on April 22, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Julia Bush, “British Women’s Anti-Suffragism and the Forward Policy, 1908-14”, *Women’s, op.cit.* 438.

against the enfranchisement of their own gender. They strongly believed that women were different from men and they complemented each other. As the writer and social reformer Violet Markham (1872-1959)<sup>31</sup> said in 1912:

We believe that women and men are different –not similar-beings-, with talents That are complementary, not identical and therefore ought to have different shares In the management of the status, that they severally compose. We do not depreciate by one job or little women’s work and mission, we are concerned to find proper channels of expression of that work, we seek a fruitful diversity of political function, not a stultifying uniformity<sup>32</sup>

The female oppositionists to the parliamentary vote for women had numerous reasons; the first type of those reasons was the social reasons, according to the women’s status in particular and society in general

### 2.2.2 The Social Reasons

Despite the fact that the Victorian traditions put women in their domestic sphere and deprived them from their rights; women were considered as “Angel at home”, these Victorian’s concepts still alive even many feminists struggled and fought to change their status in society and to gain their rights, especially the right to vote.

There was a wave of Victorian women opponents of the female parliamentary franchise who they still thought that women should be in their sphere because politics was for men only (a males’ sphere). According to these female antis, if women entered and involved the male’s sphere, the society in general and the family in particular were be in danger; then, women political participations could

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<sup>31</sup>Violet Rosa Markham was a writer, social reformer, and administrator, she was interested in education and the effects of poverty and unemployment, especially regarding women. Violet Markham (1872-1959)-Dumbarton Oaks. <https://www.doaks.org/resources/bliss-tyler-correspondence/annotations/Violet-markham> accessed on may, 02, 2019

<sup>32</sup>Julia, Bush, “British women’s anti-suffragism and the forward policy, 1908, 14”, *op.cit.* 435.

affect the stability and the family order as well. The principle reason that pushed female antis to reject the vote, was that they believed that women would share their time and energy then would be busy outside their home and consequently they would neglect their major roles as house-keepers and house-managers. In addition, it would make dissension between husband and wife, consequently; conflicts and hostilities even divorce, because women would emerge as political competitors to men.

Therefore the antis believed that this situation could threaten the unity and the stability of the family. “Jennifer Sommerville, in her book, *Feminism and The Family: Politics and Society in the U.K and U.S.A (2000)*, described the suffrage movement as “anti-familial ideology” since the suffrage movement would acquaint women with a means (the vote) to destroy their families, the role and structure of the family would be brought upside down<sup>33</sup>”.

Another reason which was the reversing sex role in society, when women broke into men’s sphere and neglected their main role as mother. Sir Charles Hobhouse (1862-1941) , MP for British east and chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said: “The birth and marriage rate are already decreasing”<sup>34</sup>, and added: “can you adopt at this time a policy which might mean an immense destruction of the population of the country which it is essential should not only be retained, but increased”<sup>35</sup>. The historical author Elizabeth Grawford said: “there was a genuine concern at the time that giving women the vote would destroy families”<sup>36</sup>.According to them, the perfect women were the real mothers who were the home builders of the country, who teach their children, their sons about honesty and how to become men, then their daughters about modesty, gentleness and how to become patient therefore good women.

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<sup>33</sup>Julia.Bush,” British Women’s Anti-Suffragism and the Forward policy,1908-14”,op.cit.433.

<sup>34</sup>Amelia Butterly , “the femaleprotesters against giving women the vote”.100 women.6 february2018)www.bbc.com/News/UK-42704341.Accessed on April,12,2019.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Francesca Gillet,”Women Suffrage:10 reasons why men opposed votes for women”.BBC NEWS.https://bbc.com/news/uk-43740033.Accessed on April,13,2019

Women antis encouraged and supported girls and women to get a high education and to seize the employment opportunities, but they remained in their domestic sphere in which, women had to perform their social duties and responsibilities. Beside the social reasons, the women antis put forward a surfeit of political reasons.

### **2. 2.3The Political Reasons**

Among the women anti's arguments and beside the social one, there were numerous political reasons to convince the politicians and the English women that the political participation for women did not benefit either for men or for women, and consequently for society and the whole country. The first political reason was the 'separate sphere ideology'.

As a Victorian rule women would be good wives, good mothers then good house keepers. They could be educated and got jobs but still in their sphere which was the private sphere and they could not enter the men's sphere which was the public one and shared with them political and parliamentary decisions. According to women antis, if women were involved into the men's sphere, marriage and having children would not be their priorities, then human race would be in danger.

The historicist Kathy Autherton considered women as fragile, weak have no power, sensitive and inferior. Consequently, they were incapable to make political decisions. Therefore, they were not created for politics. Autherton said: "there would have been a general acceptance that women were intellectually inferior and emotional and women would have believed that as well as men so they didn't have the capacity to make political judgements"<sup>37</sup>.

The antis focused on the difference between men and women, then about the impossibility of female integration in politics because of "sex difference". They believed that men were physically and mentally stronger than women, who were

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

considered as limited in term of reasoning capacities. In addition, they were seen as sensitive and quickly affected by feelings instead of reason. The reason that pushed the women antis to exclude women from politics .They did not allow them to compete men, because for the women antis, politics did not fit women either physically or mentally. For women anti-suffragists, politics was established for men and by men, it was men's universe, the political participation was exclusively for men.

Another reason for the exclusion of women from political participation through the possession of the parliamentary franchise were the fears of female domination in politics, the fear of “the feminization of the British governments”.

### **2.3 The Nature of Women Anti-Suffragists**

Women anti-suffragists<sup>38</sup> allied to defend and protect “ordinary” women who were already against the parliamentary vote for women. They supported the idea of separate but complementary spheres for the two sexes. The women antis came from politics, medical, diplomatic and social fields and all of them shared the same aim which was the resistance against the involvement of women in the public affairs through possessing the parliamentary vote.

The maternal reformers were the pioneer of the women anti-suffragists and supported the forward policy. They shared the same aim as the other women antis, which was to build up and improve the social life of women in the public sphere, enhanced them to participate in local government only and excluded them from the rigours of parliamentary politics.

They were called reformers because they worked on the reforms like educational reforms and employment opportunities for women. Women maternal reformers resented the parliamentary vote based on its cramping effects on

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<sup>38</sup>Julia Bush. ,*Women Against the vote: Female Anti-Suffragism in Britain*,(oxford :Oxford University Press, 2007).p16

mothers, yet, they were conservatives, believed in British womanhood and gave a great importance to motherhood in this vein, ‘maternal reformism’<sup>39</sup> was one aspect of the opposition to the vote, they believed in gender differences then the different responsibilities of each gender. There were many women maternal reforms among them: Mary Humphrey Ward, Ethel Harrison (1851-1916).

Women antis were also called “Imperial Ladies” who had got a key jobs which strengthened them to build their empire, these Ladies believed that the parliamentary vote was not the women’s domain, it concerned men only. According to these ladies, it would be a disaster if women would participate in parliamentary vote; they work hard to avoid definitely this participation and any possibility of enfranchising women. The women antis were for the political participation for women but only on the local level and could enjoy their feminine role and citizenship.

In late Victorian and in the Edwardian Britain, women anti-suffragism got another prominent point which was “women writers”. These authors anti-suffrage beliefs had the best selling. Consequently they could easily convince their women readers with their fears of the real danger of suffragism<sup>40</sup>, and that latter could threaten gender relations, the stability of the society and the country as well, among these women writers: Charlottes Yonge, Eliza Lynn Linton and Mary Ward. These women antis used different methods and tactics to strengthen their anti-suffrage cause.

## 2.4 The Female Anti-Suffrage Tactics

The anti-suffragists did not deny that women had natural rights, but they pointed to their natural differences in order to deny equal political rights for women. Yet, the women antis under the forward policy protested against the women enfranchisement by using numerous tactics and strategies to confront the

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<sup>39</sup>Julia.Bush, *British Women’s Anti-suffragism and the forward policy*,op.cit,34

<sup>40</sup> Julia Bush, *Women Against the vote:Female Anti-Suffragism in Britain*,op.cit.36.



supporters of the female movement and to convince the parliamentarians to deprive women from the right to vote. Moreover, the women antis wanted to convince the British women to protest and not to ask about the vote.

In the twentieth century, the female anti-suffrage movement started to launch appeals and to write anti-suffrage petitions, leaflets, pamphlets, as female anti-suffrage written tactics to protest against the women enfranchisement. They used another prominent tactic which was the establishment of the Anti-Suffrage League. The formation of the Anti-Suffrage League was among the focal tactics that women antis used to defeat the suffrage movement.

#### **2.4.1 The Formation of Anti-Suffrage League (1908-1918)**

In the nineteenth century, the Victorian women anti-suffrage opposed the women enfranchisement, they protested by using several tactics to defeat the suffrage movement. The one of the focal tactics was the women's national anti-suffrage league (W.N.A.S.L). In July 1908, the women's national Anti-Suffrage League was launched with the aims of opposing pro-suffrage women's goal, and to grant the right to vote in parliamentary elections.

Among the prominent members of the league<sup>41</sup>, a significant anti-suffrage campaigner Mary Humphrey Ward, a writer who was in charge of creating and editing the league's magazine; the (W.N.A.S.L) was developed on the basis of anti-suffrage views and goals. The league started with three branches, then grew gradually to 26 branches. The female antis formed over a hundred local branches and published numerous leaflets and the monthly anti-suffrage review. They succeeded to collect more than hundred thousands of petition signatures and to gain the prime minister's sympathy<sup>42</sup>.

A second reason for the formation of (W.N.A.S.L) was that Mary Humphrey Ward was influenced by the female leader of American anti-suffrage campaign

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<sup>41</sup>Julia Bush,"British Policy anti-suffragism and Forward and Forward Policy",1908-14,op.cit.434

<sup>42</sup>Julia.Bush,women Against the vote :*Female Anti-Suffragism in Britain*,op.cit.172

Julia Ward Howe and her interactions with American anti-suffrage movement .The reason that pushed Ward to establish the league and to defend the women anti-suffrage cause.

The core aim of the (W.N.A.L.S) was the defeat of the female suffrage movement and the prevention of women from gaining the parliamentary vote and to support the women's role in local government.

In 1910, the combination between the Women's National anti-Suffrage League and the men's league formed the National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage and lasted until 1918 when women's suffrage had been granted.

The suffrage oppositions used several strategies and tactics whether written or oral against the parliamentary vote, to weaken the suffrage campaign. The reason that led to the appearance of the women suffragettes, who believed in deeds. They used violent and militant actions to fight for the right to vote.

## **2.5 The Suffragettes Militant Campaign, the Struggle to Get the Vote**

The anti-suffrage used several tactics to eliminate and erase the female suffrage movement and its demands; but these tactics empowered women suffragettes to form their militant campaign under Emmeline Pankhurst and her organization. The women's social and political union (W.S.P.U)the latter was a militant wing of the British women suffrage movement led by Emmeline Pankhurst with the aim of granting the women's franchise. The W.S.P.U's members acted like soldiers.

In 1905, the suffragettes<sup>43</sup> started to organize huge marches and outdoor demonstrations and they interrupted political meetings, they protested by using force and violence. The organization became aggressively militant then, they performed a civil disobedience. In 1908, the female militants resorted to more

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<sup>43</sup>Riddell,Fem,"Suffrage,Violence and militancy,votes for women", *British library Journal* vol/3,n03,6Feb2018 .

violent actions such as: acid in mailboxes and broke windows, one suffragette vandalized the prime minister's car.

All these chaotic attacks were specifically designed to terrorize the government and to oblige the members of parliament and the general public to change their opinions on the women's suffrage and to give them the right to vote. Emmeline Pankhurst called this struggle a 'Civil war', she said: "not by the forces of civil war can you govern the very weakest woman, you can kill that woman, but she escapes you then, you cannot govern her. No power on earth can govern a human being, however feeble, who withholds his or her consent"<sup>44</sup>.because the Pankhurst passionately believed that deeds, not words would convince the government to give them the vote. The suffragettes encouraged and empowered women to protest, they resorted to a series of arsons, bombings, stone throwing and the destruction of government buildings.

Christabel Pankhurst in 1913 wrote:

If men use explosives and bombs for their own purpose they call it war, and the throwing of bomb that destroys other people is then described as a glorious and heroic deed.Why should a woman not make use of the same weapons as men,it is only war we have declared,we are fighting for a revolution<sup>45</sup>

Hundreds of militant suffragettes activists were jailed, these inmates were often tortured and suffered from forced feedings under the prison authorities control.Consequently and as a reaction, these cruel tortures, the militant suffragettes adopted hunger strikes as other militant tactics to protest against the ruthless prison authorities and to ask them to free the female militant inmates. These strikes tactics served to release the militant suffragettes.

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

The suffragettes' violent reactions represented an occasion for the female anti-suffragism to gain the parliamentary support. The suffragettes resort to violence increased the number of supporters to anti-suffragism. The female anti-suffrage opposed the suffragette's violent protest and condemned them because the antis considered that these militant tactics were wrong things and could destabilize the political management of the country. The female anti-suffragism described the militant suffragettes as "*Wild Women*".

In 1913, a new series of militant actions returned profusely, the militant suffragettes resorted to the destruction of the public institutions like Telegraph and a series of arsons of empty houses, school and burning churches.

The militant suffragettes faced several obstacles and risks such as prison, injuries and even death in order to strengthen their campaign and to win the vote. In 1913, at the Epsom Derby, Emily Davison, a young militant suffragette was an example about fighting until death for the right to vote for women. She moved onto the racetrack in front of a racehorse owned by King George, paying with her life to make a statement about wealth and power. She was the only suffragette to die and she was made into martyr.

By the outbreak of world war, the suffragettes decided to calm down and to stop their political campaigning for the vote to contribute to war efforts.

## **2.6 The WWI and the Suffrage Campaigns**

In August 1914, war was declared in Europe. The suffrage movements decided to suspend all their political activities<sup>46</sup> and to put them on hold during the wartime, even the suffragettes and suffragists had still not achieved their aim. Both women suffragists and women suffragettes stopped their political campaigning for the vote

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<sup>46</sup>F.Cini.Carol "From British Women's WWI Suffrage Battle to the League of Nations Covenant: Conflicting Uses of Gender in the Politics of Millicent Garrett Fawcett" *UCLA Historical Journal* (1994)Vol5n03.83.

and concentrated their efforts to support their country during the war and chaos. In addition to the suffrage movements, the anti-suffrage movement ceased its political campaign and contributed to war efforts.

### 2.6.1 The N.U.W.S.S during the WWI

With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Millicent Fawcett, the leader of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, was against the British participation in the First World War, but she supported British's war effort. Millicent Fawcett proclaimed: "it was akin to treason to talk of peace"<sup>47</sup>. Although she did not agree on the British involvement in the First World War, she suspended all the suffrages' activities and provided all possible aid to support her country until the conflict over.

On August, 4, 1914, Millicent Fawcett wrote to the members of the NUWSS in their Common Journal (1909-1918), she said: "*there were millions of women who were thought that was a crime against society.*"<sup>48</sup> She spoke with the members of the N.U.W.S.S who were against the war, and they considered it as "a crime against the society"; Millicent Fawcett declared: "we have another duty now... now is the time to resolute efforts and self-sacrifice on the part of every one of us to help our country."<sup>49</sup>

When the First World War came, the suffrage campaigns did not achieve their aims. Yet, this war was an opportunity for women to improve their skills and to prove their capability and to exhibit their patriotic sentiments towards their country.

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<sup>47</sup> Katherine Connelly "Sylvia Pankhurst, the First World War and the struggle for democracy", *Revue Française de Civilisation*. 2015. Vol xx, n01p10.

<sup>48</sup> Carol F. Cini, op.cit, 83.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

During the wartime, the N.U.W.S.S engaged several activities; many women from lower classes received a medical education, and contributed to the war effort as nurses. Others replaced men and filled the empty jobs left by the male servicemen. Women worked in munitions factories as well.

In addition the N.U.W.S.S leader launched the pro-war propaganda to support the war efforts. The N.U.W.S.S was not alone to support the war efforts; the female suffragette under the Emmeline Pankhurst developed a surfeit of activities to support Britain during the wartime.

### **2.6.2 The W.S.P.U during the First World War**

At the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the women's social and political union under Emmeline Pankhurst put political activity on hold during the war and ended its violent activities to support the war effort; that went in tandem with the release of all the imprisoned suffragettes.

Although the Pankhursts supported their country, some suffragettes were unsatisfied of the W.S.P.U's involvement in the war effort, but the majority of W.S.P.U's members reclaimed their participation and help to the government. They launched slogans like "we demand the right to serve" and "men must fight and women must work"<sup>50</sup>.

The suffragettes resorted to pro-war propaganda to urge their followers to support war effort as a way to win their enfranchisement. Emmeline Pankhurst the leader of W.S.P.U believed that the suffragettes' participation in the war will strength their cause. She claimed that when the World War would be over, the female enfranchisement had to be a reality. The W.S.P.U changed its newspaper's

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<sup>50</sup> William Murphy, "Suffragettes", *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, version 1.0/Last updated 05 December 2018. <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/suffragettes>. Accessed on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019

name from “the suffragettes” to “Britannia”<sup>51</sup>; with Pankhurst’s new slogan “for king, for country, for freedom.”<sup>52</sup> She said also: “what would be the good of vote without a country to vote in!”<sup>53</sup>

During the First World War, millions of men left their country, their families especially their jobs. Consequently, at that time there was a real need for new workers and only women could replace men in employment and fill empty jobs left behind by the male servicemen.

The women’s role was immense during the war; they were able to break into jobs in several domains, improved themselves and proved their abilities and capacities in different men’s fields such as heavy industry, munitions and police work. And as an exception, few women served and fought in the battle fields even if the armed combat was exclusively men’s place.

Between 1914 and 1918, around two million women worked hard and contributed substantially in helping their country. They learned skills and independence. Christabel Pankhurst stated: “it is the women who prevent the collapse of the nation while men are fighting the enemy”<sup>54</sup>.

Since the female suffragists and suffragettes supported the war efforts, the female opponents of the vote emerged also as patriots and rallied together to support the war efforts as well.

### **2.6.3 Women Anti-Suffragists during the First World War**

The suffrage campaigners devoted themselves to help their country during the WWI. They suspended all their pacific and militant activities to support war efforts. The reason that pushed the women antis to stop their anti-suffrage political

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<sup>51</sup> William Murphy, “Suffragettes”, *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, version 1.0/Last updated 05 December 2018. <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/Suffragettes>. accessed on May, 16, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

campaign. As the suffragists and the suffragettes, the anti-suffragists supported and defended their country. They contributed to the war with surfeit voluntary and charitable activities.

The majority of the women antis were rich ;they belonged to the upper-class. They helped men, women and children .They distributed buffets for the travelling soldiers at different stations .Another charitable activity was that the Anti-Suffrage Review was devoted to the support of the war ,rather than opposing the parliamentary franchise for women.

The prominent role and the significant activities of the female suffragists and suffragettes during the WWI underwent fruitful results through the partial enfranchisement of women.

## **2.7 Women and the vote: The parliamentary Path to Equal Franchise (1918-1928)**

In the nineteenth century, women united and formed a suffrage campaign; they concentrated and focused on their major aim which was gaining the right to vote<sup>55</sup>. The participation of the suffragists and suffragettes and their support of the war effort had a key role. Women played a prominent role during the First World War which helped them improve and develop themselves then, change the perception of women's role in British society.

In 1917, women started to gain gradually the governmental support when the British politicians changed their view on suffrage campaigns. From the pacifique suffragists to the militant suffragettes, a long road to grant women the vote which finally ended by the representation of the people act (1918).

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<sup>55</sup>MaryTakayanaki,.c.Parliament and Women,c.1900-1945.PHD Thesis,King's College London,.



### 2.7.1 The Representation of the People Acts (1918)

During the First World War, women played a significant role; they replaced men in different fields. From 1914 to 1918 the number of women employment increased from 24 percent to 37 percent.

In Britain prior to 1918, 58% of the citizens were allowed to vote. The voting law stipulated that all men who resided not less a year inside the country could vote. However, the soldiers who were fighting for their country overseas during the war were not eligible to vote.

There were several causes that led many politicians change their minds about the voting law. The revolution in Russia<sup>56</sup>, the growth of the labour party<sup>57</sup> and the resistance of the suffragettes with their continued activities pushed a majority of politicians to renew the voting law to avoid a socialist revolution in Britain.

Herbert Asquith (1852-1928)<sup>58</sup> was among these politicians who changed their positions. Although he opposed the suffrage movement but after the First World War he changed his mind and supported women and confessed that they proved themselves and did great jobs in wartime.

On June 19, 1917, the representation of the People Bill was passed by the House of Commons. The House of Commons voted 385 to 55 to agree the partial enfranchisement of women. This bill was named ‘The Limited Suffrage Bill’ because it granted the vote for all men aged 21 and provided the right to vote only

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<sup>56</sup>Government and parliamentary leaders with the Russian revolution under pressure to give all women the vote. Dr John Hull 1918 suffrage celebrations: what about the men? The guardian, mon 11 jun 2018. 18:01.

<sup>57</sup> The representation of the people act 1918 compelled labour party took particular care to adjust its organization to appeal to women voters, especially working class ones. Chris Wrigley, the labour party and the impact of the 1918 reform act, parliamentary history, 14 march 1918. accessed on May, 19, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1750-0206.12338>.

<sup>58</sup> Herbert Asquith, liberal prime minister of Great Britain (1908-16) he was in favour of the right of women to vote. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "H. Asquith, 1<sup>st</sup> earl of Oxford and Asquith", Last Updated: Sep 8, 2019. accessed 10 Sep 2019. <https://Britannica.com/biography/H.H-Asquith-1st-earl-of-Oxford-and-Asquith>. Accessed on May 7th, 2019.

to women who aged 30 or above. Consequently; women under this age could not be enfranchised.

In addition to the age, another condition which required women to be house holders, the wives of house holders, occupiers of property with an annual rent of £5 on graduates British universities.

On February 6, 1918, the bill for representation the people became a law and received the royal assent, this act enfranchised 8.5 million women who aged 30 years or above, they represented 40% of the total population of women in the U.K. However, 22% of women who attained the age of thirty or above and did not own any property were excluded from voting. Even these women were from the working class and devoted themselves to help and serve Britain during the wartime.

The Representation of the People Act<sup>59</sup> enfranchised almost all men but not all women because according to the politicians, women under the age of thirty were not able and ready enough to participate in the process of decision-making.

Even though, the partial enfranchisement of women in 1918 was a great achievement and would be the first step towards female political participation. When the number of the enfranchisement women increased from 0 to 8.4 million. Millicent Fawcett described this happy event as the greatest movement of her life.

In November 1918, another act was passed as an opportunity for women over the age of 21. This act allowed women to stand as Member of Parliament in the House of Commons. They would shift from voters to Members of Parliament (MPs).

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<sup>59</sup>.Chris Wrigley, "the labour party and the impact of the 1918 reform act", *parliamentary history*, 14 march 1918..vol37n01,65.

### **2.7.2 The Parliament Qualification of Women Act (1918)**

In 1918, the parliament passed the Parliament Qualification of Women Act to strengthen the women's role as political participants alongside men. This act allowed women of the age of 21 to enter the political gate and to become for the first time Parliament Members in the House of Commons. The act stated: "a woman shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage for being elected to or sitting on voting as a member of the commons house of parliament"<sup>60</sup>.

Both of the Representation of the People Act and the Parliament Qualification of Women Act enabled women to enjoy their limited enfranchisement, political participation, and to be a part in the process of decision-making. This success weakened the female opposition. The anti-suffrage campaign lived a defeat since the limited franchise was granted to women.

## **2. 8 TheDefeat of the Female Anti-Suffrage**

The First World War was a watershed on the destiny of the female suffrage and anti-suffrage cause. During the wartime, about two million women supported their country and contributed to war effort. They did a great job which attracted the attentions of politicians to grant women the franchise.

During the war women served Britain skilfully in surfeit domains .This significant women's participation during the WWI ,pushed many male members in parliament who strongly opposed the suffrage campaign and supported the anti-

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<sup>60</sup> Mari Catherine Takayanagi,"Qualification of Women Act (1918) in Parliament and Women, c.1900-1945", (PhD Thesis., King's College London2012),6.

suffrage cause, changed their minds. Yet, their opposition transformed to the support of the female enfranchisement which signaled the failure of the female.

In 1918, the collapse of the N.L.O.W.S and the suspension of the leaflets against the women enfranchisement was a symptom of the anti-suffrage defeat<sup>61</sup>, after a hard path dating back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century women started to enjoy their success, the Representation of the People Act (1918) women reached the partial enfranchisement which was the first step towards female political participation. Then, the Parliament Qualification of Women Acts (1918) which opened to women the gate of parliament and allowed them to be Parliament Members in the House of Commons.

Though women shifted from voters to candidates to be elected in parliamentary elections, and with the increasing number of women who could vote from 0 to 8.4 millions ;however, the actual equality of men and women remained an open issue.

## **2.9 The Equal Franchise Act (1928)**

As a result of infinite efforts of the suffrage campaigns and their dramatically persistence in spite of all difficulties and oppositions, universal franchise was finally granted with the Equal Franchise Act of 1928 after more than a half of century. The act gave all women over the age of 21 the vote in election on the same terms as men.

In March 1928, a bill was presented to enfranchise all women. There were some objections in parliament but on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1928, the bill became finally a law, which offered the vote to 15 million women.

Many brilliant women succeeded to attract the government attention, and convinced it to franchise them. Unfortunately, many prominent women who

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<sup>61</sup>J.Bush, *Women Against the Vote: Female Anti-Suffragism in Britain*, op.cit., 198

bravely and with perseverance fought to gain the vote were then dead. Among these pioneers of suffrage campaigns: Barbare Bodichon, Emily Davies, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, Constance Lytton, Elizabeth Wolstenholme, Elmy and Emmeline Pankhurst.

Millicent Fawcett the leader of the N.U.W.S.S was the only one who could survive and enjoy the taste of victory. She said: "...I had extraordinary good luck in having seen the struggle from the beginning to the end."<sup>62</sup> She was very lucky when she had the chance to see the vote taking place with the full equality.

## **2. 10 Conclusion**

To conclude, it was not easy for women to reach their goal which was principally the parliamenting enfranchisement. The suffrage campaigns had several oppositions which hindered their movement from the beginning. Among these hurdles was the female anti-suffrage campaign which launched a surfeit of tactics and methods to protest against the vote for women based on several arguments among them, the vote was not a female concern.

The women suffragists and later suffragettes reacted strongly against this female opposition. They used pacific then violent tactics to fight their cause. With the outbreak of the First World War, the suffrage campaigners decided to suspend all their activities to support the war effort. The war opened for women suffrage the parliament's door by giving women the opportunity to show to British society and parliament as well their abilities and skills, they played an important role, they filled the empty jobs left by men and replaced them in several domains.

Consequently, the perception of women increasingly changed and the Members of Parliament started to change their minds about the female enfranchisement.

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<sup>62</sup> "Infinite fire," Millicent Fawcett – Suffragist & Equal Rights Champion, <http://infinitefire.org/info/millicent-fawcett-suffragist-and-champion-for-equal-rights/>, accessed on June,2,2019.

It is also concluded from this chapter that in 1918, the Representation of People Act was considered the first step towards equality. It allowed women over 30 the right to vote, and empowered them over 21 to stand as MPS. This suffrage's success weakened the anti-suffragists position then caused the failure of their cause. In 1918, England witnessed the disappearance of the organized female anti-suffrage campaign.

Finally, after several struggles conducted by women suffrage; the Equal Franchise Act 1928 came to make women's voices heard, and granted women the vote on the same terms as men.



**General Conclusion**

## General Conclusion

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The objective of this research work is to shed light on the women's status in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These women were considered as "angels in the house"; their place was at home under men's control. The Victorian women were deprived from several rights such as higher education, owning property or a profession in addition they were not allowed to vote.

In Victorian and Edwardian Britain, politics was only for men who were considered as the stronger and decisions' makers; however women were completely excluded with the reason that the perfect woman's functions should be only on housekeeping and motherhood tasks. Therefore, women started to react against their situations which were imposed to them by British society. They wanted to achieve rights as men especially the right to vote.

Women started to organize several movements in which they claimed their enfranchisement. Therefore, the Women's Suffrage Movement had been established. It opened for women the gate for political participation.

There were two main suffrage movements, The National Union of Women 'Suffrage Societies (N.U.W.S.S) and the Women's Social and Political Union (W.S.P.U) was formed in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst. Even if the women suffrage seekers encountered opposition from parliament and from their gender, but they strongly resisted and worked hard to achieve the vote.

Furthermore, the purpose of this work is to study the female opposition to the women's suffrage movement in Britain and the reasons that led women to oppose the enfranchisement for women. The female opposition had a surfeit of arguments to deny the vote for women. For the antis, politics as a public issue was not a female concern and did not fit their nature. Women antis were against the women's involvement in politics and they strongly



## General Conclusion

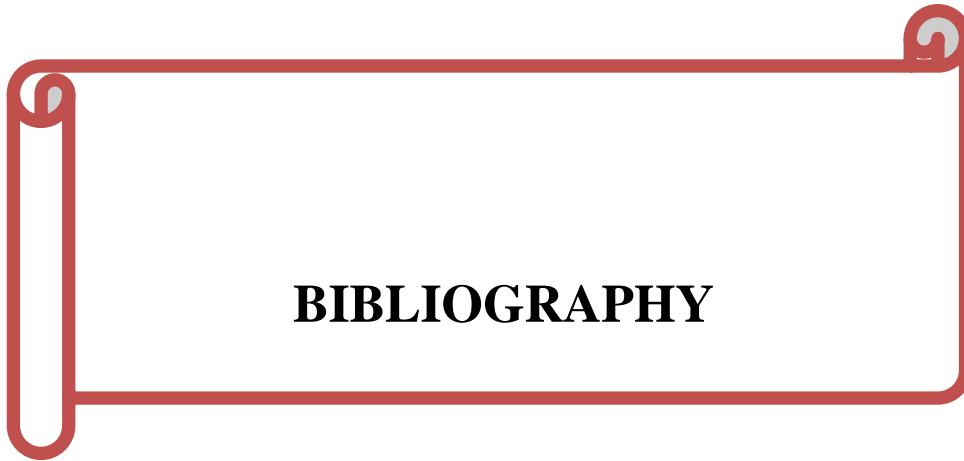
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believed that this involvement would affect women and the political management of the country. However, they supported the women's emancipation through employment and education. This defeat of the female anti-suffragists was traced back to the outbreak of the First World War.

The First World War was a watershed in the history of the female suffrage in England. The peaceful and militant suffrage campaigns were suspended even they had still not achieve their aim. Both of suffragists and suffragettes focused their efforts on helping and supporting the government in order to change their perceptions of their role in British society. The First World War opened up new opportunities to women in the world of work. During the war women replaced men and proved themselves equal to men in the workplace, consequently they succeeded to change the men's minds and a limited franchise was granted to women who aged 30 and above.

After more than sixty years of struggle and diversity the representation of the people act 1918 came to enfranchise all men and all women over the age of 30. This partial enfranchisement of women marked the defeat of women antis and the downfall of the anti-suffrage cause. With the parliament qualification of women act in 1918, which offered more political opportunities for women, this act allowed women to stand as candidates to be elected to parliament.

Finally, The Equal Franchise act 1928 came to grant full equal voting rights to women. To conclude, we can say that thanks to these brave and determinate women that woman around the world can vote. During along and hard path full of struggle and battles women won the greater political rights and realized the dream of million of women.



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