Chapter 2 - Women's Emancipation

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Chapter 2 - Women's Emancipation

Over the centuries, women around the world have fought for their rights. There are many cultures where women still must fight for equality. Women's emancipation means giving women equal rights and opportunities with men in various areas such as politics, education, work, and society. This journey to freedom and equality has been long and challenging, marked by many important events and inspiring figures. When raising such a topic, it is necessary to explain and discuss its meaning. The word "emancipation" comes from Latin, in ancient Rome it meant the liberation of a son from his father's rule. However, in the US, at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, the term emancipation also began to be associated with the struggle for the elimination of slavery. Over time, or more precisely since the mid-19th century, emancipationists began to be called women who wanted equal rights for men and women. The struggle for women's equality was primarily concerned with three issues: politics and voting rights, education, and equal access to schools, as well as customs and equal rights in the family.

The move toward gender equality did not happen overnight. The movement for women's emancipation in Britain can be attributed to several social, political, and intellectual developments which progressively gained momentum over several centuries. The British suffragette movement began much earlier than in other European countries. In Great Britain, the first significant progress related to the women's emancipation movement began in August 1832, at which time Mary Smith of Yorkshire supported change and led discussions with MP Henry Hunt about the fact that women should have the right to vote in elections deciding the future of members of parliament. Although Mary Smith's petition did not have the desired effect, but it influenced the consciousness of many people. A huge change was caused by the creation of the organization The National Union of Women Suffrage Societies. It is an organization that existed between 1896 and 1918, bringing together groups of British suffragettes. The organization was formed from the merger of the National Central Society for Women's Suffrage and the Central Committee, National Society for Women's Suffrage. Their slogan was "Until we win! We demand the right to vote!". The head of this organization was Millicent Fawcett. She held these positions for 21 years. It mainly brought together middle- and upper-class women but had some representation from working-class women. Their activities extended through the female delegates. They conveyed information about the benefits of women's right to vote. The NUWSS became the leading women's suffrage organization in Great Britain and throughout Europe. By 1905, it had 305 associations. By 1914, it already had more than 500 branches across the country and more than 100,000 members. It was one of the few organizations that were active on such a large scale, and at the same time avoided the violent and illegal form of spreading its values. NUWSS organized public meetings, petitions, wrote letters to politicians, published newspapers, and distributed free literature. The main demand was to vote under the same conditions as men. The leaders of this organization supported Britain's involvement in World War I. They believed that supporting the British war effort and providing all possible assistance would bring women respect from men and the state, and thus help them gain equal suffrage. The NWSU organized war support for the families of soldiers and disabled veterans, the work of military nurses and the work of women in the war industry in jobs that men left to fight. At the same time, the organization continued to campaign for the right to vote during the war and used its war work to its advantage, pointing to women's contributions to their campaigns. In 1919 there was a breakthrough. The name was changed to the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, with Eleanor Rathbone leading the organization. She introduced a reform program that consisted of 6 points. (I) Equal pay for equal work, involving an open field for women in the industry and the professions. (II) An equal standard of sex morals as between men and women, involving a reform of the existing divorce law which condoned adultery by the husband, as well as reform of the laws dealing with solicitation and prostitution. (III) The introduction of legislation to provide pensions for civilian widows with dependent children. (IV) The equalization of the franchise and the return to Parliament of women candidates pledged to the equality program. (V) The legal recognition of mothers as equal guardians with fathers of their children. (VI) The opening of the legal profession and the magistracy to women. After 10 years and resilient women's efforts, there was a turning point. The year 1928 was a milestone year for women. They were given the same voting rights as men, allowing all women over the age of 21 to vote.

2.1 Powerful women: The most important figures of women's emancipation

When we talk about women's emancipation, we're exploring the journey towards fairness and equal rights for women. This journey is full of inspiring stories and driven by amazing women who stood up against big challenges. These powerful women came from different times and places, but they all shared one thing: a determination to make the world a fairer place for everyone. These women fought for the right to vote, to work, to get an education, and to live without discrimination. They used their voices, their writings, and their actions to challenge unfair systems and open doors that had been closed for too long. From pioneers like Emmeline Pankhurst, who led a more militant campaign through the Women’s Social and Political Union, to strategic activists like Millicent Fawcett, who advocated peaceful and legal methods through the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, each of these women has made a significant impact. Their stories showcase the progress achieved over the years and highlight the strength and courage required to continue advancing the cause for gender equality.

2.1.1 Millicent Fawcett - Dame of the British Empire

Millicent Fawcett was an important figure in the women's rights movement in Britain. Born on 11 June 1847, she dedicated her life to ensuring that women had the same opportunities and rights as men. In her efforts, she focused special attention on the right to vote. She was one of the founders of the first English university for women, which was Newnham College in Cambridge. From the very beginning of her activities, Millicent Garrett grew up in a supportive family that valued education. Her older sister, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, was the first female doctor in Britain, she inspired Millicent to pursue her own goals and introduced her to Emily Davies, an English suffragist. Newson Garett also supported his daughter's activities for years. Her husband, Henry Fawcett encouraged and supported her work for women, starting with her first speech on women's voting rights in 1868. This partnership helped her get involved in the political scene.

Fawcett became president of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies in 1897. Under Millicent's leadership, the NUWSS organized peaceful marches, petitions, and meetings to raise awareness about women's suffrage. They believed in convincing people through logical arguments rather than force. Millicent was known for her clear and convincing speeches, which helped gain support from both men and women. Millicent's hard work paid off when the Representation of the People Act was passed in 1918. This law allowed women over the age of 30 who met certain property requirements to vote. It was a huge step forward, but Millicent didn't stop there. She continued to fight until the law was changed in 1928 to give all women over 21 the right to vote, just like men. She resigned from that role in 1919, when the union was renamed the National Union for Equal Citizenship. Millicent’s activism was not limited to suffrage. She was also deeply involved in advocating for better education for girls. She believed that education was key to women’s independence and empowerment. She supported the establishment of women's colleges and worked to improve access to higher education for women. Millicent was also a strong advocate for labour rights, women’s property rights, and the campaign against child marriage.

She has written three books, one in co-authored with her husband. She also wrote many articles, some of them published posthumously. Her first book *Political Economy for Beginners*, it was published in 1870. The book covers fundamental economic concepts such as supply and demand, wages, and profits. It was designed to be simple enough for people with no prior knowledge of economics, making it an important educational resource at the time. It has been used in schools and by people who want to study economics. In 1912 she published the book *Women's Suffrage: A Brief History of a Great Movement*. This book offers a history of the women's suffrage movement in Britain. Written by a leading figure in the movement, this book provides valuable insights and first-hand accounts of the struggle for women's suffrage. It serves as both a historical document and a source of inspiration. There is no doubt that Millicent's writings were not only educational, but also played a crucial role in shaping public opinion. Her clear, reasoned arguments and detailed analyses provided a strong intellectual foundation for the women's rights movement. She used her pen as effectively as her voice, reaching a wide audience and influencing many to join the cause of gender equality.

Her commitment and dedication to the women's suffrage movement was properly rewarded. Millicent Garrett Fawcett was awarded the title of Dame of the Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire (GBE) in 1925. This prestigious honour was bestowed upon her by King George V, who was the reigning monarch of Great Britain at the time. The award was in recognition of her outstanding contributions to social reform and women's rights, particularly her key role in the women's suffrage movement. The GBE title is one of the highest orders of knighthood in the British honour system and is awarded to individuals who have made significant achievements in public service or other important areas. For Millicent Fawcett, this honour was a fitting recognition of her lifelong dedication to achieving gender equality and improving social conditions for women in the UK.

Dame Millicent Garrett Fawcett was a remarkable woman who played a crucial role in the fight for women's rights in Great Britain. Her commitment to peaceful and rational advocacy set her apart and made her an enduring symbol of the fight for equality. Through her leadership, determination, and strategic approach, she helped secure the foundational rights that have allowed subsequent generations of women to pursue greater freedom and opportunity.

2.1.2 Emmeline Pankhurst

2.1.3 Maud Arncliffe Sennett

2.1.4. Emily Wilding Davison

2.1.5 Christabel Pankhurst

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