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**CHANGES IN THE POSITION OF BRITISH WOMEN THROUGHOUT
THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY**
Bakalářská práce

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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

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vlastnoruční podpis

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ABBREVIATIONS

The Society	Society for Promoting the Employment of Women
NSWS	National Society for Women's Suffrage
NUWSS	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union

ABSTRACT

The main focus of this bachelor thesis are the changes in the position of British women throughout the 19th and 20th century. Individual chapters deal with the improvements of different areas of women's lives and introduce some of the most important figures of the women's movement in Britain as well as organisations supporting the cause. Additionally it also deals with the major events that contributed to the changes in women's position and comments on the impact of the two centuries on the present situation.

INTRODUCTION

A well known and acknowledged philosopher has once written: “The general opinion of men is supposed to be, that the natural vocation of a woman is that of a wife and mother” (Mill, 1869, p. 49). These are the words of John Stuart Mill taken from his essay published in 1869. Women have accomplished a lot since then yet even today we still come across similar opinions quite often. Therefore I have to ask whether the efforts of previous generations of women fighting for their rights have been vain.

In my bachelor thesis I will examine to what extent has the position of women in British society improved over the last two centuries and what was the impact of different women’s movements on the improvements of the situation. The reason why I have chosen this topic is that I, as well as many other women I believe, am not indifferent to the issues of female inequality in the society that could be even today described as male-dominated. The goal of this thesis is to explore changes in the position of women in Great Britain in order to remind the readers that the conditions British women live in nowadays did not improve themselves overnight but that it took two centuries and countless women and men fighting for the better tomorrows.

In order to better understand the situation of British women throughout the last two centuries I have decided to look into contemporary press as well as essays written on the subject. I have also discovered a book that deals with the history of the women's movement in Great Britain written by one of the actual participants of the movement. Working with such materials will allow me to see what the actual public opinion was at the time and provide me with more accurate sources.

In the first chapter of the thesis I will deal with the changes in the position of women in the nineteenth century Britain and the second chapter will focus on the improvements accomplished in the twentieth century. I will point out the most important changes concerning education, work and position of women in society in general as well as the major changes in the law. I will also introduce some of the most significant figures of the movements and organisations established during these two centuries. Finally I will comment on some of the events that played its part in the process of improving women’s position. The last chapter will present the situation in Britain as it is nowadays taking into consideration also the impact of the last two centuries.

1 19th CENTURY

Industrial revolution brought many changes into 19th century Britain. One of the major changes it brought was the growth of population which was closely connected with urbanization as people began to move into the cities because of work opportunities. Morris (1993) points out that not only men but also women were drawn to the cities to find themselves new work positions, especially as servants or in textile industry. Migration of people to the cities came hand in hand with the inevitable change of lifestyle as well as other social changes.

Soon enough some women started to realise how little power they have and started to call for improvements in their position. First-wave feminism came into existence in the second half of the nineteenth century demanding better social conditions for women and not much later also legal rights and one in particular – right to vote.

1.1 Position of women in Victorian society

The position of women in the nineteenth century society differed diametrically from what we know today. Conditions that women had to bare were quite poor and as the society was strictly male dominated, women were considered more or less men's property and they had to obey them at all times. It was not common for a middle- or upper-class woman to work or to have a career. Her place was at home with children. Women were also less educated than men and were paid much lower wages if they had to work as Taylor (2012) states. Moreover they were banned from the most of the professions.

One of the main features of Victorian society was the importance of family. Because of that women's only fate seemed to be to get married and have children. This approach set the role of women for almost the whole century. Also the Industrial revolution together with the social changes and changes in economy it brought furthermore fortified the domesticity of women. And as Abrams (2001) writes Queen Victoria herself was a role model for Victorians as she and her family became a portrait of values set in the society.

It did not take long and a new phenomenon emerged – separate spheres for men and women. According to Nead (2004) women belonged to the private sphere of their households while public sphere was seen as a vicious place and not suitable for fragile women. Morris (1993) explains that this separation basically excluded women from politics or public life in general as they were supposed to stay home and take care of the house, while men were taking care of business and family budget. Unfortunately, in reality, many women had to work to

support the family income. Most often they found purpose in low paid and inferior jobs in domestic sector or textile industry.

The relationship between man and woman was not even close to the partnership as we know it today. Man was the head of the family and woman was inferior to him. After marriage woman had to give up all of her assets on the behalf of her husband and she also had to behave as he pleased. As Thomas (2001) states, a woman's only duties were to carry her husband's children and make sure that he returns to a comfortable atmosphere of his house. It was common for men to beat their wives whenever they felt like they disobeyed them. Also it was almost impossible for a woman to get a divorce and the only legal way how she could get her wealth back was after her husband's death (123HelpMe.com, 2000a).

Women had practically no legal rights at the beginning of the nineteenth century and they were treated accordingly not only by their husbands but also by their employers and by the society in general.

Luckily more fortunate women were not blind to the social problems that came with industrialization. More and more women found their path in charity work. And with the efforts to help others, less fortunate, with their situation the realization that there is an instant need to improve women's position in society came into existence. And from this realization the first-wave feminism emerged with the call for better education, improvements in working conditions and more employment opportunities for women as well as changes in marital law. Soon women started to demand also their political rights, especially the right to vote.

1.2 First wave feminism

After 1850 first organised movement for women's rights started to be formed in Britain. Wojtczak (2012) claims that Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon belonged amongst first women to participate in such movement. She was part of a group called the Langham Place Group that campaigned for better conditions for women concerning education, employment and marriage. She also cofounded the *English Woman's Journal*. Magazine published between 1858 and 1864 which mainly promoted the Married Women's Property Act that failed to pass in 1857 (Mussell, 2008). Bodichon and ladies of Langham Place, as they were also called, became great inspiration for women involved in women's movement.

One of the first great achievements in women's rights movement was the Matrimonial Causes Act, known as well as the Divorce Act, in 1857. Thanks to the changes in the marital law

it was now easier to get a divorce as it no longer required an act of Parliament. Man had to prove that his wife was unfaithful to him to get a divorce while woman had to prove her husband's adultery as well as some other offence such as cruelty. And although the law was still unequal it was a great step. Divorced woman could now regain her property back (womenpriests.org, 2012).

1.3 Women and education

Education of women in Victorian Britain was quite poor. If a girl even got the chance to be educated, which was not very common, its aim was usually only to impress the future husband by her accomplishments. Although girls were trained in reading, writing and home crafts, the main interest was laid upon perfecting dancing, musical or reciting and language skills. *The English Woman's Journal* presented an article by Hodgson (1860, p. 76) where she writes that "woman was to be made graceful, and elegant, and delicate, and winning from her very feebleness."

According to Hodgson (1860) education of girls differed from the one of boys also because the British educational system of that time was set to prepare individuals for their future profession and, as mentioned earlier, it was not common for women in general to have a profession, therefore there was no need for a professional training.

Jordan (1999) claims that one of the main reasons why parents insisted on their daughter's education, was purely to show off their social class. They sent girls to expensive private schools or hired governesses that more or less only prepared them to attract suitable husband rather than for their role of mothers and wives. There were only few public schools for girls before the 1970s and even in them the curriculums differed from the ones in schools for boys (Jordan, 1999). According to Gillard (2011) the education of girls before the 1850s just furthermore fortified the differences between males and females.

However in 1843 a movement for better education for girls came into existence bringing the needed improvements. The Queen's college was founded in 1848 introducing the same education opportunities for women as men had at the time. In a short amount of time a number of other women's colleges were founded as well. Soon there was an opportunity for some women to gain better education.

1.4 Women and work

With the expansion of girls' schools in 1870s many women found their purpose in teaching at public schools. They often worked as art or music teachers. And as teaching was one of the few jobs that could be carried by women in the first half of the nineteenth century by the 1860s the majority of teachers were female.

One of the issues of *The English Woman's Journal* (1860) deals with a controversial topic of that time which was industrial employment of women. It introduces arguments against the general belief that marriage is the only occupation that women fit in and presents statistics against this belief. Despite the public opinion according to which women, married or not, should fill their days with domestic duties only, it was discovered that almost half of the British female population over the age of fifteen is employed outside the house. The article also disproves the argument against employing women outside the house that there is equality in the number of males and females in Britain, therefore women should concentrate on finding a husband who would take care of them, which was proven by the statistics not to be true.

While at the beginning of the nineteenth century women were able to officially occupy only positions such as teachers, dressmakers or in domestic service the second half of the century opened up new opportunities for them, as far as the career choice goes.

According to Jordan (1999), the Society for Promoting the Employment of women (henceforth the Society) had a considerable share in making this possible. This society was founded in 1859 and its leading figure was Jessie Boucherett. Jordan also (1999) believes that the way women were viewed in the first half of the century affected opinions of employers on hiring female workforce later on. Therefore the main goal of the Society was to change this opinion by demonstrating that women are capable of working in wide range of different positions which would result in the expansion of work opportunities for middle-class women that were in need of extra money to support the family income.

Since the Society started to promote women's workforce there was an apparent growth in the number of female workers. Women began to appear in positions that were earlier occupied exclusively by men. Jordan (1999) suggests that certain professions were even feminized. This included hospital dispensing, clerical work, librarianship or retail work. Employers realized the benefits of female labour as it was cheaper and started to consider employing women.

However, the economic and industrial changes in the nineteenth century Britain also played their part. In 1880s the hospital system was reformed which brought expansion in number of women workers as they suited the employer's needs the best. Also with the growth of business enterprises there was an increase in the amount of clerical work that needed to be done and by 1880s women became common part of many offices. And thanks to the fact that libraries, which for the first twenty years of their existence were purely male occupied, were no longer suitable workplace for men because of the long hours and low wages, the librarianship underwent feminization as well.

Women proved to be efficient yet cheap workforce which was appealing for the employers. Jordan (1999) explains that after the Society achieved its primary goal, even though its existence continued into the twentieth century as well, from 1880s its focus changed towards the need of improvement in the pay conditions for women.

1.5 John Stuart Mill – Father of women's suffrage movement

Another important figure of first wave feminism was a philosopher by the name of John Stuart Mill who defended women's rights in his essays and it was him who brought the issue of women's suffrage into the Parliament. Bodichon as well as other members of the Langham Place Group supported his election to the House of Commons in 1865 and later, in 1866, addressed him to present a petition concerning women's political rights in parliament (Rendall, 2001). It was the first time this topic has been taken seriously on a political level.

The first Women's suffrage committee was formed in London in 1866 in order to collect signatures for the petition that Mill was supposed to present in parliament. Amongst its members were Mill's associates as well as ladies of the Langham Place. They managed to obtain sufficient amount of signatures but as Rendall (2001) writes there was quite a few differences in the approach to the cause between these two groups so unfortunately this committee fell apart in less than a year.

Fortunately it did not take long before other committees came into existence all over the country to support women's suffrage movement, amongst them also the London National Society for Women's Suffrage, a new committee headed by Mill that however later proved to be quiet ineffective in its purpose. In 1867 the Manchester Society was founded, with Lydia Becker as its secretary.

In 1867 Mill introduced an amendment to the Conservative Reform Bill in which he demanded replacing the word “man” for “person” in the law concerning qualification of voters. Despite the fact that his proposal was defeated by 196 votes against to 73 votes for, the cause of women’s suffrage was slowly gaining supporters in parliament, mainly amongst liberal and radical Members of Parliament (Rendall, 2001). After this loss there were efforts to pass a bill granting women’s suffrage almost every year.

But still opinions on how the women’s suffrage should be presented differed amongst the groups. Especially in the matters concerning married women and whether to include them in the demands. Franchise law at the time was bound with property-ownership and according to the law, married women could not own property as it belonged to their husbands. Some women believed that a bill has a greater chance to pass if they are not included.

Holton (1996) writes that under the initiative of Manchester Society the local committees agreed to create the National Society for Women’s Suffrage (henceforth NSWS) in 1867 as the need to unite the efforts of women’s movement was more than clear. Year later Becker also took over the leading role in women’s suffrage movement from London committee because its proceedings seemed ineffective and she also terminated any relationship between her and Mill, as Rendall (2001) mentions. Moreover it was speculated that Mill was doing more harm to the movement than good.

According to Crawford (1999) in order to help to unify women’s suffrage societies even more Becker also founded *Journal of the Manchester National Society for Women’s Suffrage* in 1870. This magazine was later renamed *Women’s Suffrage Journal* to make its purpose more clear.

Mill’s essay *Subjection of Women* was published in 1869 although it was written long before that. Mill felt that the public was not ready for such publication so he waited for the right moment in order for it to have the right impact. Rendall (2001) points out that even though the effect of Mills participation in the movement was debatable, thanks to his approach to the cause, he was recognized by many for this particular essay and was even described as “the real father of the whole movement”(Rendall, 2001, p. 168). And even Becker later admitted that “his work was an essential element” in women’s suffrage movement, as Rendall (2001, p. 169) claims.

There is no doubt that Mill’s essay was, in its sense, revolutionary for its time, taking into consideration also the fact that it was written by a men, and that he had a good reason to delay its publication. In four chapters he discusses the legal rights of women in connection with his belief

that equality between men and women would contribute to the greater good. He even states himself in the beginning of his essay that "...the legal subordination of one sex to the other — is wrong itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality..."(Mill, 1869).

1.6 Municipal Franchise Act

In the same year Liberal Member of Parliament and also member of Manchester committee Jacob Bright successfully introduced an amendment to the Municipal Franchise Act of 1869 and women were now able to vote in local elections, if they fulfilled property qualifications of course. A whole new range of opportunities opened up for unmarried women that year. Year later the Education Act of 1870 established school boards and women could now vote for its members but moreover they were also able to stand for an election themselves.

It was a great achievement for women's movement and from this moment on some women had finally the opportunity to become official part of public life leaving separation between domestic and public sphere far behind them. Several women took the advantage of the fact that they were now able to become a part of local government.

According to Tabor (1862), as she writes in her article for the *English Woman's Journal*, in the second half of the nineteenth century unmarried women in Britain had similar opportunities as men limited rather by the prejudice of the society than by the actual law. Although there were some lawful limitations, such as impossibility to enter Church as profession or to vote for Members of Parliament, it was the legal rights of married women that were in need of major improvements.

1.7 Improvements in married women's position

Slowly the position of women in British society began to improve and finally the improvements started to involve married women whose position could be described almost as slave-like. Legally they had no rights as they basically were their husband's property. But that was about to change as the forthcoming years started to see the results of hard work of many women and men involved in women's movement.

In 1870 Bright brought Women's Disabilities Removal Bill to the Parliament. For the first time a bill demanded female franchise based on sexual equality. It was drafted by Richard Pankhurst and in his choice of words he omitted the word "unmarried" which brought so many

disputes before (Holton, 1996). The Bill passed its second reading but was defeated by William Ewart Gladstone's opposition.

The year 1870 also brought the first Married Women's Property Act that Bodichon extensively propagated in her *English Woman's Journal* after its failure in 1857. A married woman was now able to own the little she had earned herself.

In 1873 the Custody of Infants Act allowed mothers to obtain custody of their children up to the age of sixteen, in case that the marriage broke. It improved the 1839 Act as the importance was now laid upon the interests of children rather than their parents. Later on in 1886 the Custody reform established that after the father's death the custody automatically belonged to the mother.

Twelve years after the Married Women's Property Act passed it was upgraded and women were now owners of all of their assets gained before the marriage. And in another ten years the second Married Women's Property Act of 1893 ensured that married women had now the same rights as unmarried ones, as Jones (2012a) mentions. They were now in charge not only of the assets gained before but also during the marriage.

The following year enabled married women to vote in the local elections as well as to be elected to the local councils or school boards as the Local Government Act of 1894 came into force.

1.8 National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS)

In 1896 there was a conference of women's suffrage societies held in Brighton in order to help to unite the movement which seemed to be inefficient because of its fragmentation. The idea was to ensure more efficient cooperation amongst individual groups as well as with the Parliament. It was agreed to form the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (henceforth NUWSS) under the leadership of Millicent Fawcett. As a wife of Henry Fawcett, member of Liberal Party, she was already politically active and seemed to be the perfect fit for the position as Holton (2013) mentions.

The aim of NUWSS was to ensure votes for middle-class women who owned property. Its strategy was to bring broader public awareness to the issue of women's suffrage and gain the support of government. Members of NUWSS meant to achieve such goals by lobbying Members

of Parliament to introduce a private member women's suffrage bills, petitions or peaceful demonstrations.

Number of Liberal Party Members of Parliament was already on their side but NUWSS wished to obtain sympathy from all the parties. Its tactics seemed to be working and private member's bills in favour of women's suffrage slowly began to gain solid ground in Parliament. In 1897 one of these bills even passed second reading which was considered a great achievement. Fawcett believed that with patience, NUWSS's efforts will one day succeed.

They put high hopes in introducing private member women's suffrage bills and trusted that the election of Liberal Government will finally bring changes in the system. Unfortunately they only met with disappointment when the anti-suffragists started to gain strength in the Government, especially after Herbert Henry Asquith, who was strongly against women's suffrage, became Prime Minister (Holton, 2013).

It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that women of NUWSS realized that they need to change their strategy in order to make a difference.

2 20th CENTURY

The twentieth century was definitely time of significant changes in the position of women in Great Britain and their role in society overall. Although there were some improvements concerning this matter made already at the end of the nineteenth century, it still affected only the privileged ones. Also, according to Smith (1990), the call for the right to vote was getting stronger as many women started to be impatient. And even though things were about to change, women still had a long journey ahead towards their equality with men. The journey that will possibly never come to its end.

The First World War turned out to be an important turning-point in the struggle for women's rights. But as Trueman (2000a) claims it is still not clear whether it was the fact that women proved their ability to do men's work during the war or the suffragettes' efforts before the war that finally granted women the right to vote in national elections.

Substantial role in the process of improving women's position in society in the twentieth century had also the existence of feminism as well as the establishment of organisation of suffragettes.

2.1 Suffragettes

Suffragette is a term that describes a woman who "worked to get the right for women to vote in political elections" (Hornby, 2005, p. 1534). The term itself was invented by Daily Mail in 1906 in order to distinguish suffragettes from suffragists that is more general term describing rather peaceful members of suffrage movements as Murray (2011) explains.

Nevertheless, the suffragettes played very important role in women's right movement. Because of the slow progress of Millicent Fawcett's NUWSS, suffragists as they were called, a new organisation was founded in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel. Trueman (2000b) states that this new organisation called Women's Social and Political Union (henceforth WSPU) was more radical and not very peaceful. Its members were determined to achieve their goals and later on they were even prepared to break the law if necessary. They were called Suffragettes.

WSPU was formed in Manchester amongst women who worked in the local factory. Ray Strachey, feminist writer of that time, mentions in her book *The Cause* that its leader Mrs Pankhurst, who had already participated in several suffrage movements, was tired of the slow

progress and she hoped that she could make a change. At first, they did not intend to be a militant organisation. Women of WSPU believed that Liberal Party could help them uphold their intentions. Unfortunately that never happened and women disappointed by the approach of Liberal Party started to exploit other ways how to achieve their goals (Trueman, 2000c).

It all started when Annie Kenney and Christabel Pankhurst were arrested during the Liberal Party's meeting and refused to pay the fine afterwards letting themselves to be imprisoned instead. According to Strachey (1978) this brought great attention of many people to the problems of Women's suffrage. A number of protests followed after this incident but with not much bigger success.

Soon the Union moved its offices to London where the suffragettes hoped to see the prime minister. As he refused to hear them out they gathered in front of his house with banners (Strachey, 1978). It did not take long and Women's Suffrage became one of the most discussed problems through all of the country. Strachey (1978), who herself participated in the movement, describes that women started to pay more attention to this issue which resulted in the growing numbers of members of societies concerned with Women's suffrage.

Members of WSPU wanted to fight for their rights and their motto was 'Deeds not Words' (Lee, 2013). With time they became very radical. At first they just interrupted Liberals' meetings and protested. After some time they started to threaten people and vandalism came in hand with it. When arrested women in prisons went on hunger strikes.

To prevent suffragettes from dying in prison government came with Prisoners Discharge for Ill Health Act in 1913 also known as 'Cat and Mouse Act'. It basically allowed hunger strikes. Trueman (2000b) explains that when a woman refused to eat she was not forced to and when she could not handle it anymore she was released to recover.

One of the most extreme acts performed by suffragettes took place in 1913 on Derby Day in July. Emily Wilding Davidson did the unspeakable. She ended her life under the feet of King's horse when she threw herself in front of the racing animal, as Murray (2001) writes. Strachey (1978) points out that if nothing else this deed certainly raised doubts in people as they were shocked what are these women capable of.

However the situation changed rapidly when the First World War begun in 1914. Suffragettes ended their militant actions as the war efforts became a top priority and women's struggle for vote did not seem to be as important when facing the war.

2.2 Women and the First World War

With the arrival of war a new opportunities for women to work started to appear. And the fact was that a lot of women were keen to help their country at the time of crisis. The first field to experience the expansion of women volunteers had to be nursing services as they were closely connected with war. Strachey (1978) claims that thousands of women found their places in Army Nursing Service.

But as the war proceeded the need of women's help in other fields started to be more and more apparent. However the problem was that women were inexperienced and they did not have any training in such particular areas where they were needed. But they were able to compensate the lack of experiences by their adaptability and skills. A great number of training centres for women came into existence in order to prepare volunteers for the positions they were supposed to occupy.

However, as it became clear later on, it was not the lack of experiences that was the most challenging element in the process of integrating women into men's work positions, it was the male co-workers themselves. They saw the fact that women should occupy same positions as them as something unnatural and according to them it did not correspond with the traditions set in the society at that time. Also they were worried about the future as they felt threatened by women's possible success in purely men's business. And their answer to this was more than clear. Strachey (1978) mentions that in order to express their disagreement some men stopped working entirely in the presence of women and they made it quite obvious to them that they are not fond of their presence.

Also former public enemy Mrs Pankhurst was now acting on the behalf of the Government. Garner (1984) writes that she helped to draw the attention of women towards munitions industry as the WSPU supported by the Government organised successful procession in 1915. Thousands of determined women came to London to seek for work and nothing could stop them. Many of these women found jobs in new Ministries in Whitehall while others were employed in the wide range of different sectors (Strachey, 1978).

The popularity of women workers was slowly increasing and in no time women were praised all over the country for their efforts. But still there could not be found any women in military directly. However, in 1915 the Women's legion was established and with that women finally entered the military spheres as well, just not officially yet. Noakes (2012) describes this

organisation as strictly voluntary and also explains that when a woman entered she could help at camps at home with cooking or driving vehicles.

Soon thousands of women could finally find their places in official services. In 1917 the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and the Women's Royal Naval Service were formed followed by the creation of the Women's Royal Air Force Service in early 1918 (Strachey, 1978).

Also in the field of agriculture the contribution of women was not less significant. In 1917 the Land Army came into existence placing women upon farms all over the country. Women working on the farms were supposed to undergo some sort of training before they were placed into positions but, as Trueman (2000d) claims, the theory often did not meet the practice. Workers wore uniforms and if necessary they were accommodated in the facilities near the farms (Strachey, 1978). Women who volunteered replaced the men who left for fighting and they had to perform the hard work normally carried by males. Clarke (2011) is also convinced that on top of that they often met with the hostility of farmers who paid them.

There is no doubt that during the war-years women proved their bravery and determination and not only by the work they have done but also the willingness to help when it was needed the most. The public opinion towards women changed immediately but more importantly the women themselves started to see things differently as they experienced the world from the men's perspective. In Strachey's (1978) opinion it was almost impossible for them to go back to normal as they were expected to do.

2.3 The 1918 Representation of the People Act

The beginning of the First World War maybe made the efforts of suffragettes as well as suffragists to gain Women's Suffrage disappear for a while but it was still there. The war just brought more important issues to deal with and women were forced to put their fight for equality away. But as time went on the topic appeared again. In 1916 several members of parliament called for the new register of voters as the old one became invalid because of the situation in population caused by war. However this new register was supposed to be created according to men's efforts in war. And of course this caught the attention of women because they felt neglected since they did their bit during the war as well. Strachey (1978) mentions that a letter to prime minister was written by members of NUWSS to remind him of that fact. Finally there was a strong argument for women to build their negotiation on. And with the favour of the general public there was even great chance that suffragists could finally succeed.

In 1917 several reforms in the franchise were introduced including Women's Suffrage. Although it was heavily limited it was still a great success. The report stated that every woman over 30 who is a householder or wife of one gets the right to vote. The victory was close but there was still one last step to do. The Representation of the People Bill had to be approved by House of Commons as well as by House of Lords before it could become the law. In the House of Commons the bill was passed by majority of 385 Members of Parliament, only 55 were against. The bill could now proceed to the House of Lords where 130 Peers voted for, 71 were against and 13 members refused to vote. On the 6th February 1918 the King agreed to make The Representation of the People Bill into an Act and the battle for Women's Suffrage lasting more than fifty years was at last over. However it took another ten years to finally gain equal suffrage for women. In 1928 women over twenty-one got the right to vote (Smith, 1990).

2.4 Repression of Woman's movement

Following years showed to be a difficult time for feminism and women's movement in general, as Pugh (1990) states. So far the movement was oriented more or less on formal improvements in position of women in society, in other words it was focused mostly on legal matters and politics. And according to Pugh (1990) this was something that new generation of women could not identify with as they did not experience the full extent of inequality before the war. As a result of different approaches towards feminism amongst older and younger generation the original women's organizations started to shrink in size as the older members started to retire and younger women seemed to be indifferent to their cause.

On the other hand thanks to these differences new feminist groups came into existence trying to defend their opinions (Pugh, 1990). But instead of focusing on fighting for the better good and greater improvements in women's position, these organisations started to fight amongst each other. Unfortunately because the movement was no longer so unanimous after reaching its primary goal which was women's suffrage it slowly started to weaken its position.

Also the economic situation after the war demanded the return of women back to domestic sphere. Many factories were shut down with the end of the war and men returning home from the fronts were given back their jobs. Women's workforce was no longer needed. At least not in such extent as during the war (123HelpMe.com, 2000b). And hand in hand with loosing their pay it might seem that women lost their independence as well.

Next factor making it difficult for feminism was government itself as it was promoting the need to restore family life. After the major life losses which came with war it seemed only logical to emphasize the importance of motherhood in inter-war years. Feeling strengthened by the general mood of public the anti-feminists started to emerge once again supporting the ideal of domestic life (Pugh, 1990).

Pugh (1990) also points out the importance of influence of mass media on public opinion. Women's magazines of that time were oriented mostly on domestic sphere of woman's life. Apart from tips about housekeeping and beauty it taught woman how to be the best wife and mother she could be. When article covering some other issues appeared in such papers, for example the information about new divorce policy, it usually had only informative function, as it still appealed on the necessity of being the best housewife possible.

Kent (1990) compares the situation after the First World War to almost Victorian like setting of society. Women were supposed to take care of the household while men remained out in public sphere. Fortunately the situation was a little bit different this time. Harris (2011) writes that it was common for younger or unmarried women to be employed outside of their homes until they found a husband or had a child.

2.5 Second World War

With the beginning of the Second World War it was inevitable for women to rejoin work forces once again. Similarly as in the First World War many women found their purpose in the Women's Land Army. They were also eager to help in the army, the air force or navy. Women were also allowed to serve their country as secret agents. But as the war continued there was a lack of workforce in industrial area so women could not join the army forces anymore as they were needed in factories and other establishments at home (Trueman, 2000e).

For the second time women proved their abilities as workers and for the second time they had to leave their positions in favour of men returning home. Although a lot of women lost their jobs after the war ended, a few were still able to keep theirs as wages for women were substantially lower than men's (Harris, 2011).

According to Pugh (1990) the repressive tendencies of feminism remained the same after the Second World War ended. General public feeling was similar as before the war enhancing the importance of family and role of woman that comes with it. But not everything was yet lost. With increasing numbers of working women the call for equal pay soon came into life.

2.6 Women in the second half of the twentieth century

The second half of the twentieth century brought to life the perspective of better future for women. As Heron (1985, p. 3-4) writes “the sixties are seen as the point at which our lives became different from those of our parents, and particularly, for us girls, different from those of our mothers.” And with the slow return of feminist strength, induced by the birth of women’s liberation movement at the end of the sixties, the second half of the twentieth century truly brought improvements in many aspects of women’s lives. And although some of these improvements date back to the first half of the century it was mainly women growing up in the fifties and after that that got the chance to fully benefit them.

In Herons (1985) opinion the 1944 Education Act gave future women hope for better tomorrows as it granted more accessible education for girls. She also claims that it was helpful for adult women’s confidence when they gained a chance for higher education as it became more accessible as well. Even though women were allowed to study at college even in earlier times it was not possible for them to receive an equal degree as men until 1948 (Jones, 2012b). And as Jones (2012b) points out it took many more years until the universities dropped their limits in numbers of women allowed to study in the seventies.

Since the 1919 Sex Disqualification Act brought the option for women to choose from wider range of jobs and many of them opted for the possibility to work the question of equal pay emerged once again (Exploring 20th century London, 2013a). According to Exploring 20th century London website (2013a) the idea of women getting lower wages than men was that the household did not depend on a woman which, of course, was not true anymore. In 1975 the Equal Pay Act and Sex Discrimination Act came into force, not fully but also thanks to the efforts of supporters of women’s liberation movement as Meehan (1990) writes.

The changes did not miss out on family life and housing in general either. Tendency was for families to get smaller because women had more choices now than before, when their only purpose was to bear children and take care of family and household. They could go to work and marry later or if they chose so not to marry at all. Also getting the divorce was easier after the reforms of the law in 1920s which meant that there were more single parent families.

Next important fact was the higher awareness about birth control. Since 1921 when the first family planning clinic was opened in Britain, women could chose for the first time whether they want children or not. And women’s life was made even easier with the invention of

contraceptive pill which was available for women since 1961 (Exploring 20th century London, 2013b). Considerable success for more radical feminists of the second half of the century was also the Abortion Reform Act of 1967 (Meehan, 1990). Women had now full control over reproduction.

Second wave feminism, as the women's liberation movement is also called, came into existence for only short yet very effective period of time. It fought against sexual discrimination and one of its first demands was the equal pay for women. However this movement was different from the first wave feminism that fought for women's suffrage. It came from various frustrations of various women around Britain. There was no unanimous goal and groups of women gathered together in order to fight their own battles towards the equality. Cochrane (2010) writes about "generation finding its voice".

The first National Women's Liberation Conference in 1970 was followed by a decade of enthusiasm and intense work for the movement. But as the activists fighting for the better future slowly grew up and their preferences changed, the second wave feminism slowly faded away only to later regain its forces in the third wave of feminism that came at the turn of the century.

3 THE PRESENT

Now at the dawn of the new century it would seem that women and men are actually equal but the question is, whether it is really the case. There is no doubt that women's position in British society improved dramatically in the last two centuries and women accomplished a lot since the beginning of the Victorian era. However the facts speak more than clearly. According to UK Feminista website (2013) number of men in parliament still strongly exceeds the number of women members and women are still paid lower wages than their male co-workers in the most cases. Not to forget that issues like domestic violence and sexual abuse are still part of many women's everyday life.

Moreover it seems that a lot of young women settled with the situation in society nowadays and numbers of women fighting for the, so much desired, gender equality drops every year. This could be caused by the fact that women do not like to be linked with feminism as they see it as something that does not correspond with the idea of femininity, as Doughty (2013) explains. He also adds that with the word feminist most women imagine lesbian, man-hating and unfeminine individuals.

Many women take the way the society is set today for granted and they often do not even realize what their predecessors had to go through in order to achieve the independence and equality they enjoy now.

3.1 Feminism in the twenty first century

Luckily there are still some women that are not indifferent to the situations many females have to experience in their everyday lives, discriminated by nothing else but their gender. It became clear that there is a need for more than just political equality.

Until 1918, when women were given the right to vote, feminism was viewed more or less as a single movement, because Women's suffrage was the most important and common goal. But after the partial suffrage was gained the differences between feminists were becoming more and more visible escalating in women's liberation movement in the 1970s.

Feminists' opinions differ mostly in the questions what or who the real oppressors are. According to what they believe in three main types of feminism are distinguished today: socialist, radical and liberal each blaming something or somebody else.

But ever since the movement became so diverse numbers of women activists were reduced dramatically. Also the trend of prioritizing individual change rather than seeking the change of the whole system, from which would all the women benefit, makes women even more powerless in confronting their oppressors.

Fortunately one of the newer organizations, called UK Feminista founded in 2010 hoping to resurrect the national movement in order to make a lasting change, remains optimistic. It encourages women to join their forces as its members believe that “political, economic and social equality between women and men is possible” it just takes effort (UK Feminista website, 2013). This organization is one of the leading voices of feminism in contemporary Britain.

Another organization, helping to make the legacy of women fighting for the equality since 1866 last, is the Fawcett Society. The number one society for women’s equality and rights in Britain registered an increase in the number of members at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century (UK Feminista, 2010). Their current campaign revolves around women and power or women and the economy trying to point out some of the most important issues concerning women’s equality today (Fawcett Society website, 2013).

It is now speculated by many that the movement is regaining its strength once again. But for now British feminists can only wait and see what the future brings hoping that one day their fight for equality comes to a successful end.

3.2 Position of women in society today

It may almost look like the major improvements in women’s position introduced in the twentieth century did not bring the long anticipated changes, at least not in such extent as women expected. However there is no doubt that their position is now far from where it was in the nineteenth century. Women’s lifestyle changed in many aspects since that time.

Women are no longer strictly connected with housework and raising children as their primary purpose in life. It is now common for a woman to choose her career instead of family life. Doughty (2013) mentions that a recent survey showed that twenty percent of British women reach the age of 45 without starting a family, which was of course absolutely unthinkable in the past centuries.

Also the numbers of single women increases and in 2011 the number of unmarried women exceeded the number of married ones for the first time in modern history (Doughy,

2013). This, Doughy (2013) argues, could be caused by the fact that women nowadays live longer than men, therefore the numbers can be a little misleading, as it includes widows as well. Also the trend is to marry later, if at all, than it was before which is probably the result of wider education opportunities for women. They often choose to finish their education before getting married.

3.3 Women and work

Although it is almost 40 years since the Equal Pay Act came into force, the truth is that many women even today can only imagine getting the same wages as men. Actually Britain has one of the biggest gender pay gaps in Europe with women wages being in general seventy nine percent of men's ones (Allen, 2010). The worst situation for women concerning the difference between male and female rates can be found in Information Technology and Pharmaceutical industry as Allen (2010) mentions.

With women being the majority of British population, they occupy large proportion of paid jobs and they also do the majority of unpaid labour. With that being said they are still paid less than men and they still have smaller range of jobs to choose from, even though the Sex Discrimination Act is in force since 1975.

Paid employment is one of the forces influencing the changes in the roles of men and women in society. In the past years the traditional family model, where woman is dependent on her husband, experienced strong repression. Around seventy percent of mothers have full or part time jobs depending on the age of their children. There is an increase in the number of working mothers as more and more of them return to their jobs shortly after they gave birth.

Martin (2012) points out that single parent families are no exception in contemporary Britain, the majority of them being concentrated in large urban cities as London, Liverpool or Manchester. More than half of single mothers is unemployed, relying only on government support, that makes Britain the country with the most unemployed single mothers in Europe (Martin, 2012). Moreover even the single mothers that do have a job are usually paid too little to safely secure their families.

One of the largely discussed issues nowadays is The Parental leave that Gray (2008) describes as "the most asymmetric in Europe". The way parental leave is set in Britain is closely connected with the stereotypes previously set in society such as that woman is the one responsible for childcare. Which in the majority of cases may be right but it is wrong to apply

this assumption generally to everyone. While mother is allowed to stay at home with the newborn up to one year, father only gets two weeks as the law rules. This can cause financial problems in families where the main source of income comes from the mother that is not often but still possible.

Gray (2008) believes that if it would be possible to share parental leave more fairly between the spouses it could positively affect the chances of female applicants to get a job. Because the possibility that a woman could leave for a year makes the prospective employer to lean towards preferring a male candidate when there is an option. Gray (2008) hopes that the new family leave rights, which are expected to come into force in 2015, will increase the possibility for women to get a job they want.

3.4 Women and politics

Although, since the movement for women's suffrage, there are no major issues that would bring all the women together, the fight towards equality between men and women is not yet won. Roberts (2013) points out that there is a lack of women in more significant posts in areas such as higher management, jurisdiction, education, finance but also in media and the arts, and most importantly in the Government as well. Wilkinson (2008) also sees the threat of maternity leave as the reason why women have such a hard time climbing the imaginary career ladder all the way to the top.

In order to find the solution that would solve this, new legislation of bringing positive discrimination into the process of hiring new employees, is being discussed but Wilkinson (2008) argues whether it is really the right thing to do.

With all the legislations in favour of women it might seem that men should actually be the ones having hard time finding a job which is apparently not true. So far the major corporations are still not only owned but also run by men and the majority of parliament remains male dominated.

However there was a bright moment in 2008 when Gordon Brown served as Prime Minister. There were eight female cabinet ministers and 31 women in Government while he was in office. It was the highest women representation yet. But only two years later, after the elections in 2010, the numbers dropped dramatically. Sixty nine countries have now higher number of female parliamentarians than Britain (Dugan, 2010). There was even launched a

government campaign to increase the numbers of women in British politics at the general election in 2015.

Moreover Britain currently has only one female Supreme Court judge and only nineteen of one hundred and nine High Court judges are women. Roberts (2013) even writes that “women's representation has gone into reverse”.

It is quiet clear that Britain has a long way to go before the men and women will truly be equal. But the question is, as Wilkinson (2008) speculates, if introducing more and more new legislations in favour of women is really going to help to make that happen. Maybe British women are just too eager to see legally supported changes in their position that they do not realize that small improvements in their lives are being accomplished every day.

CONCLUSION

In my bachelor thesis I explored the position of women in British society throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century showing also the impact it had on the present situation in Britain. Even though women had been through a lot since the beginning of the nineteenth century, there unfortunately still remains more to accomplish in the future, until the British men and women will actually become equals.

In the nineteenth century women in general were considered a man's property and their only suitable occupation was to take care of the household and children if there were any. Women had almost no rights and after marriage they literally ceased to legally exist. Luckily in the second half of the century the first organized movement for women's rights came into existence fighting for the improvements of women's position in the society. By the end of the century there were already major changes in the perception of women and the movement, slowly gaining its strength, was becoming more united.

Hand in hand with the twentieth century there came even more improvements in favour of women and before its end it almost seemed like women have achieved everything there was. The two World Wars, as it turned out, played a vital role in the process of improving women's position and then there were also the, much debated, suffragettes that contributed to winning the women's suffrage, which was the only demand that ever brought the whole movement together. Not ever since was the movement so unanimous. Unfortunately that caused its repression in later years and the movement never regained its strength in such extent again.

The recent surveys have shown that not even today are British women close to their equality with men. Their position may have improved dramatically over the years but there is still a long way to go. But in order to make progress it is necessary to revive women's efforts which proved to be quite difficult task, as many women nowadays do not desire to be linked with feminism in any way.

Only the future will bring the answer to the question I asked at the beginning of this thesis. Therefore the only thing left is to wait and hope that the deeds of women who made the changes in the position of women possible would not be forgotten and that there are still women eager to fight for their equality.

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RÉSUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce je zaměřena na změny v postavení žen ve Velké Británii v průběhu 19. a 20 století. Zabývá se jak pokroky v jednotlivých oblastech každodenního života žen ale také představuje, pro průběh celého hnutí, zcela zásadní osobnosti a organizace, působící v těchto dvou stoletích. Dále se věnuje také událostem, které se významně podílely na formování postavení žen ve společnosti a v neposlední řadě potom zkoumá vlivy změn v 19. a 20. století na současnou situaci.

ANNOTATION

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Rok obhajoby:	2013

Název práce:	Vývoj postavení žen ve Velké Británii v průběhu 19. a 20.století
Název v angličtině:	Changes in the position of British women throughout the 19 th and 20 th century
Anotace práce:	Tématem práce je vývoj postavení žen ve Velké Británii v průběhu 19. a 20. století. Jednotlivé kapitoly popisují změny v Britské společnosti ve prospěch žen, na jejichž formování se podílely jak jednotliví účastníci hnutí tak i některé významné události, které se v těchto dvou stoletích odehrály. Práce se zabývá také organizacemi, které vznikly za účelem podpory ženských práv. V závěru práce je potom popsán vliv událostí 19. a 20. století na současné postavení Britských žen.
Klíčová slova:	postavení žen v 19.století, postavení žen ve 20.století, současné postavení žen, vdané ženy, feminismus, hnutí za práva žen, sufražetky, bojovníci za práva žen, volební právo žen, vzdělávání žen, pracovní možnosti žen, práva žen
Anotace v angličtině:	This thesis is focused on the changes in the position of British women throughout the 19 th and 20 th century. Individual chapters describe improvements in the position of women that happened not only because of the efforts of the actual participants of the movement but also thanks to the major events that took place during these two centuries. The thesis also deals with the organizations established in order to support the fight for the legal rights of women. In conclusion it comments on the impact of the two centuries on the present situation.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	19 th century women, 20 th century women, women today, married women, feminism, women's suffrage movement, suffragettes, suffragists, women's suffrage, education of women, work opportunities for women, women's legal rights
Přílohy vázané v práci:	
Rozsah práce:	36
Jazyk práce:	Angličtina