Enlightenment (Late 17th-18th century)

-The Enlightenment was a time when individualism and rationality came to the forefront. The atmosphere provided a natural environment for the blossoming of the humanities and sciences.

-It is often assumed that the concern about women’s rights springs from 18th century Enlightenment.

-Women started challenging ideas and started questioning their roles in society.

-Their place in the domestic sphere slowly started to shift to the public sphere via salons and cafes

-Though they still did not have access to formal education they could discuss important issues, address problems, converse with philosophers and meet publishers who would start to publish their works (though they would most usually have to use male pen names like Georges Sand).

In the UK:

While Newton was changing the way we viewed the world and universe in the 1680s and 90s, John Locke and John Stuart Mill were outlining their liberal and proto-feminist philosophies. They would highly influence the founding fathers of America. Thomas Paine’s “The Rights of Men” (1791-2) rooted in the French Revolution was said to plant the seeds for the War of Independence in the United States.

Sir Robert Filmer wrote “Patriarcha” (1680), bringing into question the patriarchal political theory vs. Locke’s contractual political theory.

Locke had claimed that marriage was a contractual relationship and the idea that men were the superior gender was created by men.

In France:

Voltaire, Diderot, d’Alembert and their likes challenged the authority of the Church.

Rousseau wrote his “Social Contract” in 1762.

While many of these philosophers were instrumental in bringing feminist questions to the limelight, they would not be considered feminists or equal rights activists by today’s standards.

Rousseau thought men were subordinate to men. Though Thomas Paine was an advocate for equal rights for women he did not promote this idea publically.

-Though writers like Voltaire, Montesquieu and Locke addressed women’s issues and abhorrent legal positions, it was rather their preoccupation with knowledge, human psychology, the differences between the sexes and the affect of environment on women’s predicament that made them mention women’s issues.
Voltaire was one of the first crusaders of divorce. This was not necessary due to his sympathy for women’s rights but for a greater social utility.

The import of Enlightenment philosophy pertaining to gender issues was the separation of political and social worlds.

Enlightenment feminists were central in erecting the role of the “angel in the house.” Mary Astell, Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft invented and promoted new roles for (domestic) women.

Though it may not seem so today, in the 18th century this new role was revolutionary and empowering.

A historiographic shift occurred where women were studied as agents and not objects of history. (A Foucauldian reading of power).

In her Domestic Revolution Eve Tavor Bannet revises the image of the “proper lady.” She reveals that, far from being the insipid, passive, dependent and weakling creature that previous historians made her out to be, the new woman was a self-governing powerhouse of social and moral change.

**Salons**

The age of salons

The salon was a venue for women to socialize, learn and discuss enlightenment ideas.

It was also a place to advance Enlightenment ideals such as liberty, progress and tolerance.

In France most of salons were run and assembled by women. Salons became the setting for great discussions and debates. They were important in breaking class barriers as well. In salons, people from different social ranks could discuss philosophical issues. As such, women’s subordinate roles were put into question.

Religion, political and social equality, and sexuality became prominent topics.

Though women did not enjoy an equal status, they could gain access to such societies and get an alternative education.

**The French Revolution 1789**

The revolution that changed everything started with a call for Liberté, Egalité et Fraternité—that is to say, liberty, equality and brotherhood. Not sisterhood!

One should have guessed!

Lasting a decade, the revolution changed how institutions were founded along with the philosophy and ways of living changed completely after the revolution.
On July 14th, 1789 seven people broke out of the Bastille Prison (among them was Marquis de Sade) but more impressively, the fortress was dismantled entirely by hand, brick by brick. Though this is seen as the start of the revolution and celebrated as France’s national day, it was rather the march to Versailles that jumpstarted the revolution. Women’s roles were once again ignored.

As opposed to the famous 7 Bastille prisoners, about 60,000 people, most of them women, marched to Versailles, the sumptuous seat of the French throne, over the price and scarcity of bread.

Though women were the leading figures of this social unrest, égalité would not be extended to them. It wasn’t until 1945 till French women could vote!

**Prominent women figures & philosophers of the time:**

Mary Astell (1666-1731): A proto-feminist writer, her desire for and equal education for women earned her the title “the First English Feminist.” She said women were just as rational as men and just as deserving an education. She presented a plan for an all-female college.

Abigail Adams One trailblazer of the period was Abigail Adams, who addressed a letter to her husband John Adams, one the founding fathers of the US and president:

March 31, 1776.

“Remember the ladies and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.”

Catherine Macaulay: Her The Letters on Education (1790) advocated for the right of education for women.

Olympe de Gouges: playwright and political activist she was an outspoken advocate against slave trade in the French colonies. She wrote political pamphlets.

She believed the French Revolution was a failure in terms of women’s equality.

In her Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen (1791) (which may have been co-authored by US ambassador of the time, Thomas Jefferson), de Gouges challenged male-female inequalities. She questioned the practice of male authority.

-Prior to the Revolution, she wrote a letter to Marie Antoinette asking the queen to help raise women’s rights

-She believed women’s natural rights were lost and it was up to women to retrieve them.

-After the execution of Louis XVI, she became wary of Robespierre’s faction and openly criticized their violent ways and summary executions in open letter
-Arrested for a play she wrote she spent three months in jail (she claimed the play was pro-revolutionary. The judge refused her a lawyer on the grounds that she was perfectly capable of representing herself.

-Nov. 1789: though women were instrumental in the revolution, the National Assembly completely ignored the women’s petition for the extension of the concept of égalité (equality) which did not include women.

-De Gouges’ declaration opens with the famous quote: “Man, are you capable of being fair?...Tell me, what gave you the sovereign right to oppress my sex?”

-Result: The Jacobins led by Robespierre sent her to the guillotine.

She was one of the three women beheaded during the Reign of Terror. Her crime, Feuille du Salut wrote was that she had “forgotten the virtues which belonged to her sex.”

Mary Wollstonecraft: Mother of Mary Shelley, a war correspondent and writer, her Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792) is considered a cornerstone in feminism studies. It was written as a response to both de Gouges’ work and Burke’s pro-constitutional monarchy work Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790).

Mary Wollstonecraft derided tradition and custom and argues for rationality.

She underlines the fact that women are human beings and not ornaments or property to be traded. They deserve equal rights.

Unlike Gouges Wollstonecraft does not call for equality between the sexes and does not want to invert the order of things.

Madame de Stael: leading intellectual, known for her writing and her salon. She was an educated women and she had to flee to Switzerland during the 1792 bloodbaths of the revolutionaries. In 1804 she came into conflict with Napoleon and had to flee again.

**Women’s Suffrage**

-Women started to rally for economic and political equality and social reforms.

It was thanks to such women that some countries started granting them the right to vote. New Zealand was the first independent country to do so in 1893.

-World War I changed things: with men fighting in the front, women had to fill in their work positions back home. Now, how could you say they were unfit to vote when they were fit enough to do every man’s job?

-The first seeds of women’s movements were planted in the World Anti-Slavery convention in London, 1840 when women were not allowed to take a seat. Some women protested.

-Suffrage movements went hand in hand with the abolitionist movement for both were trying to do away with two different types of slavery.
-Seneca Falls (NY) was the first women’s rights convention in 1848. Among the 300 attendees was Frederic Douglass. Out of this convention came the “Declaration of Sentiments” which influenced the addition of the 19th amendment which granted women the right to vote. (The 15th amendment granted men the vote and some suffragettes even collaborated with racist white men, appealing to them to support white women’s suffrage).

-In 1851, Sojourner Truth delivered her now famous “Ain’t I a woman” speech where she asks:

“Ain’t I a woman? Look at me. Look at my arm. I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man- when I could get it- and bare the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne 13 children, and seen most all sold off to slavery and when I cried with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman…”

-Susan B. Anthony collected anti-slavery petitions at 17. In 1872 she was arrested for voting in her hometown of Rochester, NY and refused to pay the fine. Her case was taken to congress and there was a “Susan B. Anthony Amendment.” In 1869 Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton founded the Woman Suffrage Association.

-Emmeline Pankhurst was an English political activist who organized the UK suffragette movement in the UK. In 1903 she founded the Women’s Social and Political Union which used militant tactics to agitate for women’s suffrage. She was imprisoned many times. The slogan of her suffragette movement became “Deeds not words.” She died in 1928 shortly before women were given the full right to vote in the UK.

-Margaret Sanger opened the first birth control clinic in the US in 1916.

-As suffragettes started partaking in public protests, they were beaten, jailed and threatened in various ways. Some sought to get their voices heard by jumping in front of a horse at the races. Others learned and practiced jiu-jitsu to defend themselves against state brutality.

-There were men such as Emmeline Pankhurst’s husband Richard and philosopher Bertrand Russell that supported women’s suffrage.

-Of course, not all women were suffragettes. A notable example is the author Mary Ward. The “National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage” was founded in London, 1910. Proving Simone de Beauvoir’s point that along with patriarchy, women not struggling for their rights were equally to blame for their subordinate roles in society.

-1918- Right after the war, women who occupied property or married to a property owner, over 30 got the right to vote in the UK.

**Mustafa Kemal’s Women’s Rights**

In 1918 Mustafa Kemal noted in a Carlsbad diary that men should be brave enough to give women equal rights. That a nation should give primary importance to liberating and empowering its women. It would take a long time to “persuade” his fellow parliament members.
After the War of Independence he gave an interview to the İzmit Press (1923) and addressed women’s issues. When asked if Halide Edip would find herself as an MP, he replied: “Women should be given the right to vote and be voted for.

His famous Kastamonu speech underlines his outlook- a nation cannot progress unless both the sexes are equal.

-These claims are not readily accepted. For example, the member of parliament Hoca Salih Efendi passes a bill of law to enable men to have four wives. Another MP Emin bey proposes that women be subjected to physical examinations before they got married in order to do away with syphilis. When Tunah Hilmi bey suggested that women be included in the general census (for demographic purposes) he was severely protested in parliament.

Despite such protests and mentalities, Turkey grants women the right to vote in municipal elections in 1930 and they get the general vote and right of representation in 1934, way before many European countries including Spain, France, Switzerland…

Atatürk’s example shows how important political representation is for the foundation of a nation. Women’s rights need be chiseled into laws so as to ensure they are not enslaved again. It is not enough that women’s judiciary rights are passed- they need to be implemented as well. So the mentality of law enforcer’s is crucial in turning theory to practice.

Feminism now

-Despite all the groundbreaking accomplishments and the sturdy shoulders of many early feminists and activists upon which we stand today, feminism still has a caustic tinge today.

-It should not come as a surprise then that according to Amnesty International, the most googled question about feminism is “Why are feminists so angry.”

- Factors responsible for women’s empowerment include the legislation and implementation of family law. Collective protests (such as the Me Too movement which was single handedly they most populous protest in US history). And political representation and usage of quotas.