

FEMALE EMANCIPATION

Since ancient times, women have always been considered inferior and weaker than men, and also a danger, in some cases. With the advent of Christianity, a new idea of women was born, the Virgin. So, the role in the marriage was once again designed only to procreate, meanwhile the role in social life remained the same, and their inferiority was recognized even by the law.

During the Renaissance period women's condition did not improve. But, in the higher social classes, there have been women that managed to reach high levels of instruction and became important in many fields, from literature to art, politics and business. Although, they always remained exceptions, because the equality between men and women was very far, still.

In the Enlightenment period the situation stayed the same. The change began later: the first kind of feminism appeared around the period of the French Revolution, and took its form from the ideals of fraternity, equality and freedom. Women started to publicly claim their rights, most of all we remember Olympe de Gouges, author of the first Declaration of Women Rights. She affirmed: "if women have the right to go to the gallows, women have the right to go to the stands, too." Unfortunately she was executed in 1793.

She was not the only feminist in France, though. We remember Etta Palm D'Aelders and Théroigne de Méricourt, who invited women to fight and demonstrate to men that they were absolutely not inferior and weak.

With the French constitution in 1791, women began not to be discriminated against in inheritance and could also choose their own husband and ask for divorce. Even though they reached equality in the couple, they were still excluded by political rights.

That is why, later, female clubs were founded. One of the most famous was the "Club des Amis de la Loi" guided by Théroigne de Méricourt herself. Anyways, revolutionary men did not accept the protest and denied the right to vote and even the right to associate, so the clubs were immediately dissociated.

Despite the failure in France, movements of female emancipation continued to rise in other countries. In England, around 1792, a book about women rights was written and it became so popular that it started to be considered as the "Bible of Women Rights". But women had to wait until the Industrial Revolution to demonstrate how important is their role in society. The spread of democratic and socialist ideals improved the condition of women in the world of work: in fact, some laws about the number of daily hours performed by women at work and also about maternity permits were sanctioned. However, women were still considered inferior to men both in social and family life. They were, obviously, paid less than men, they could not even attend university and did not have the right to vote.

For this, in the second half of the 19th Century, the first movements of the Suffragettes were born, because they wanted to claim universal suffrage.

The official birth of the feminist movement was in 1848, year of the famous Congress in New York, kept by the two famous activists Elisabeth Cady Stanton and Susan Anthony, about women rights, in which was asked the citizenship for black people and women.

In Italy, the first steps towards rights began later, and moved slower. The first women to challenge society were Anna Maria Mozzoni, Teresa Labriola and Anna Kuliscioff. Overall, Anna Maria Mozzoni was a journalist and was the first to expose the contradictions that society reserved to women. She advanced one hundred and ninety eight requests, among which were the right to vote, access to learning and separation of the goods. She had, anyways, just one success: the annulment of marital authorization, that prevented women

from starting their own activity without the husband's consent. It was an important step for women's economic independence.

The admission of women in schools and universities happened in 1874, and the women who graduated (from 1877 to 1900) were two hundred and twenty four. Meanwhile, the awareness of female exploitation started to spread, and was highlighted by the first strikes, the access to public offices and the first female commercial activities, around the 1880's. Even if these successes were finally achieved, the right to vote remained a far aspiration and met a lot of rejections throughout the years: in 1863, 1875, 1877, 1888, 1898, 1906 and in 1912, even after the liberal Giolitti introduced the male universal suffrage, it was believed that it would have been useless to allow women to vote.

During the Fascism years, women rights moved another step back. Female teachers were excluded from teaching Italian and Philosophy, and the school taxes for female students doubled very quickly. Some jobs were now established as "right for women" as the secretary, the cashier and so on.

The revenge was taken during World War II, when women were called to substitute the men that were busy in war. Even if later than many other countries, such as Switzerland, England and New Zealand, Italian women finally had the right to vote in 1945. The first time that they voted was in 1946, during the referendum between monarchy and republic. The equality between men and women in front of the law became official thanks to the Constitution of 1948, putting an end to the discriminations. Other important achievements are, of course, laws about divorce, abortion and the abolition of the reduced sentence for the "honour killings".

Today the society has become different, but despite this, the equality is not fully reached yet. We are talking not about a battle that sees men against women, instead a battle that sees everyone fighting together for a common cause, and only if everyone sticks together we can win.