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SHATTERING THE SILENCE: WOMEN'S CLUBS AND THE FIGHT FOR EQUALITY IN COLONIAL INDIA

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Abstract: This study tries to find out the gender inequalities within the spaces of Colonial Clubs historically dominated by European men and the formation of Lady's Clubs as a counter-movement. This study examines the patriarchal norms which systematically restricted the socio, political and economic freedom of women. And the intersectional aspects like race, gender and class. I have used records like Rules and Laws of Princes of Wales Ladies Club, Bhopal, Rules and Bylaws of Nilgiri Ladies Club, Ootacamund, Malabar European Club by law, Cochin saga an autobiography of Robert Bristow chief engineer of Cochin port, a biography of Sarojini Naidu and the records of Cochin Club, Munnar high range club, Archival documents and Malayalam literature for this study. Through an extensive survey of these documents, this research investigates how British and native men utilized exclusive clubs as a retreat space in Colonial India. This paper aims to shed light on the experiences of wives and other women impacted by this escapism. Club records and Malayalam literature frequently highlight a recurring issue: husbands spend evenings and weekends at clubs, engaging in social activities, while their wives and children feel abandoned and neglected. Many have questioned why husbands fail to include their wives in their social circles, even as a club member. This continued exclusion and the formation of many other women's associations and social reform movements created a background for the emergence of Lady's Clubs. The second half of the 19th century saw the rise of ladies' clubs across India (e.g., the Princes of Wales Club and the Nilgiri Ladies Club). The analysis focuses on how these clubs empowered women through activities, decision-making opportunities, and fostering social connections. The private and public worlds merger continued in clubs of the postcolonial era. Women have gained greater access to these spaces, though challenges to gender equality may persist in some clubs.

Keyword: women's history, colonial India, men's clubs, gender roles, women empowerment, social history

Introduction

Throughout history, women's expressions, voices and freedom have been restricted in many ways. In her essay From A Space of Her Own, Hema Sundaram depicts how a simple act of laughter is framed as a dangerous act linked to the downfall of mythic figures like Draupathy and Seetha. In the colonial period, there was a notion that women should restrict their space within the limits of the household to look after their family. The majority of women didn't get any chance to socialize. Social reform movements and the gradual expansion of education began to address these inequalities. In this background, early 20th century India witnessed the formation of Ladies Clubs. Only the women from the elite classes engaged in intellectual discourses shared experiences and developed skills. Even though these clubs had a social impact, these ladies' clubs remained marginalized in mainstream historical narratives and educational curricula. While scholars focused on Eurocentric studies, they neglected parallel club movements in Africa, America and other parts of the globe.

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The exclusive focus on elite women was the major limitation of the Club. They couldn't incorporate women from lower strata of society, and many of these clubs failed to breach the nationalist agenda of constraining women to domestic space.

Review of Literature

The emergence and evolution of ladies' clubs in India form a significant chapter in the broader narrative of women's social and political awakening. Initially modelled after British social clubs, these clubs gradually evolved into spaces for Indian women to foster community engagement, intellectual exchange, and sociopolitical participation. Scholars from history, sociology, gender studies, and postcolonial studies have explored the multifaceted roles played by these institutions.

The inception of ladies' clubs in India can be traced to the late 19th and early 20th centuries during the British colonial period. As Padma Anagol (2005) and Geraldine Forbes (1996) note, the exposure to Western ideals and reformist agendas gave rise to a new public sphere for Indian women, particularly in urban centres. These clubs, often initiated by elite and educated women, served as a bridge between domesticity and the public world, offering a "respectable" avenue for civic participation.

Sanjay Joshi (2001) and Mrinalini Sinha (1995) further elaborate on how these spaces were influenced by colonial modernity, where elite Indian women, through their involvement in clubs and social associations, negotiated their identities between tradition and modernity. They became sites of cultural reproduction, where femininity norms were reinforced and subtly challenged.

Research by Meera Kosambi (1994) highlights the role of ladies' clubs as platforms for social reform and community welfare. In Maharashtra, for instance, clubs like the Seva Sadan were essential in women's education, health awareness, and charitable work. These activities were often framed within the language of maternalism, allowing women to expand their social role without directly confronting patriarchal norms.

Similarly, scholars such as Tanika Sarkar and Uma Chakravarti point out that these organizations often worked within the frameworks of acceptable femininity. Yet, they subverted gender roles by allowing women to manage funds, lead discussions, and publish newsletters—tasks that cultivated leadership and intellectual agency.

Ladies' clubs evolved to incorporate more overtly political agendas in the post-independence period. As documented by Radha Kumar (1993) and Nivedita Menon (2004), women's organizations increasingly addressed issues such as legal rights, domestic violence, and employment. While some clubs remained elite and recreational, others aligned with grassroots movements and feminist networks.

Regional studies, such as those on Kerala by J. Devika (2006), show how women's clubs played a dual role: maintaining middle-class respectability while offering women a platform to articulate modern identities. Devika argues that such clubs were not merely passive institutions but dynamic arenas of negotiation and resistance, especially in socially conservative regions.

Despite their contributions, critics have pointed out the class exclusivity of many ladies' clubs. Studies by Patricia Uberoi (1990) and Charu Gupta (2001) note that these clubs often catered to upper-caste, English-educated women, marginalizing lower-class and rural voices. The emphasis on etiquette, fashion, and social networking sometimes overshadowed more radical agendas, leading to critiques of elitism and depoliticization.

However, this critique is counterbalanced by recent feminist scholarship that reinterprets the cultural practices of club life—not as apolitical leisure but as subtle forms of self-assertion and solidarity. As per scholars like Sharmila Rege, The act of occupying public space and forming female-centric institutions can be seen as a political act in patriarchal contexts.

Ladies clubs in contemporary India continue to exist in various forms—from traditional Mahila Samitis to modern professional networks like FICCI Ladies Organisation (FLO). They now engage with digital platforms, environmental activism, legal literacy, and entrepreneurship. Scholars have begun exploring how these clubs intersect with neoliberal values, consumer culture, and transnational feminist currents.

For instance, Nandini Gooptu (2011) examines how urban middle-class women's groups negotiate identity and empowerment in globalizing India, often blending traditional roles with modern aspirations. Contemporary research also indicates increasing inclusivity, with newer clubs consciously working towards intersectional representation and grassroots engagement.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative historical methodology. It uses a combination of archival club records and literary sources.

What is a Club?

Oxford Dictionary defines a club as an organization for people who share an interest, sport, or activity. In India, the history of clubs can be traced back to the colonial era, with many historians noting their evolution from coffee houses. These early spaces, initially centers for literary pursuits, gradually transformed into social and entertainment venues. This shift is evident in scholarly works such as The Clubs of Augustan London. (1933), which examines the literary influence of clubs in Swift's time rather than their social aspects, and Ophelia Field's The Kit Cat Club, which explores how the initiatives of a group of men shaped new literary and political viewpoints during the reigns of Queen Anne and George I. A.W. Chaster's Wertheimer's Law Relating to Clubs, first published in 1885, describes clubs as political meeting houses, including club companies and working men's clubs registered under Friendly Societies Acts (Davis, 1933). Alexander F. Baillie's work on The Oriental Club and Hanover Square Noted it was established by returning officers from India and the East for gentlemen associated with the administration or who had travelled this empire (Baillie, 1932). The emergence of a distinct 'Clubland' culture in 19th-century Britain, consisting of private gentlemen's clubs, resulted from the recreation of urban elites and the social and economic changes of the time. This culture centred on St. James's Street and Pall Mall in London. St. James's Street clubs, with roots in the 18th century, primarily served the aristocracy, while the 19th-century Pall Mall clubs catered mainly to the bourgeoisie. Perhaps the oldest Club in British India, the Bengal Club, was established in 1827, modelled after the London Oriental Club."

Mrinalini Sinha Argued that these clubs functioned as "oases of European culture." Within the colonies. They served to replicate the comfort and familiarity of home for Europeans living in a foreign environment (Sinha, 2001). Leonard Woolf Identified these clubs as the "centre and symbol of British Imperialism." Emphasized their "cult of exclusivity, superiority, and isolation." George Orwell, in his Burmese Days, Described the European Club as the "spiritual citadel" and "real seat of British power" in Indian towns. Noted that it represented a "nirvana" that native officials and millionaires desired but could not attain. H.R. Pankridge Suggested that the club concept held particular appeal for men "compelled by circumstances to be separated from their wives and families for longer or shorter periods."

Thomas Metcalf, in Ideologies of the Raj, argues that the late 19th century represented the peak of British social withdrawal into club culture (Metcalf, 1995). Cohen's assertion presents an idealized view that doesn't fully reflect the reality of club membership in colonial and postcolonial India. "While B.B. Cohen argues that women's clubs in colonial and postcolonial India facilitated inter-communal interaction and challenged existing power structures along class, race, and gender lines, these clubs, in practice, often reinforced existing inequalities. Initially, they excluded women and were primarily accessible to Europeans, later becoming exclusive spaces for the upper classes, admitted based on economic and social status, contradicting the notion of widespread social levelling" (Cohen, 2007).

Formation of Women's Clubs in India

As the number of British women in India increased in the late nineteenth century, they pressured male-dominated British clubs to grant them guest access, though without voting rights. This, combined with the rise of Indian women's movements and their growing presence in the public sphere, spurred the creation of distinct women's clubs (Kosambi, 1997). While a comprehensive list is unavailable, it's estimated that hundreds of these clubs likely existed across the subcontinent by the interwar period, reflecting a surge in female associational activity. During the first three-quarters of the 19th century, economic and social regulations kept most middle-class women in a family home, either that of their birth, that of a relative, or that of their marriage. For those without such support or the wealth to maintain their own household, the alternative was a life spent in rented rooms. Such lodgings controlled a woman's social life as strictly as any family. Under this regime, there was little opportunity for women whose interests did not coincide with those of their families to contact one another. What was required were places where women could relax in the company yet be beyond society's reproach. These clubs built upon earlier forms of female association, which emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century, often mirroring male organizations but addressing unique needs, particularly in political and religious spheres. In Bengal, the Brahmika Samaj (1865) focused on spiritual matters, while the Banga Mahila Samaj (1879) fostered organizational skills through structured meetings and governance, similar to later clubs. In Maharashtra, women creatively adapted cultural practices like halad kunku and kirtans to bridge private and public spheres. The Striyancha Sabha (1880s) facilitated discussions on current issues, and the Arya Mahila Samaj, inspired by Pandita Ramabai, provided another platform for female association. Though less structured, groups like Ramabai Ranade's Hindu Ladies' Social Club also contributed to this burgeoning female associational landscape. The interwar period saw a significant expansion of these associations, with the formation of national organizations such as the Women's

Indian Association (WIA, 1915), the National Council of Women in India (NCWI, 1925), and the All-India Women's Conference (AIWC, 1927). These national bodies often absorbed or affiliated with regional clubs, and individuals frequently participated in local and national organizations. For example, K. Radhabai Subbarayan was involved in the Nilgiri Ladies' Club, the WIA, and the AIWC. Notable women's clubs included the Princess of Wales Ladies' Club (Bhopal, 1909), the Ladies' Recreation Club (Madras, 1911), the Nilgiri Ladies' Club (Ootacamund), and the Purdah Club (Simla, likely 1920s-1930s). In Kerala, Lotus Club was formed by Lady Gertrude Bristow, and in Tellichery, Kannur C K Damayanthi Amma Formed a Ladies Club and Mobile Library. Janaki Ammal was another important figure in the area; she was actively engaged in club activities. These clubs emerged in the same key centres of Indo-British activity as their male counterparts: presidency capitals, hill stations, and princely state capitals. Factors Contributed to the Emergence of Women's Clubs

- Women as a Source of Social Control and Justification for Exclusion: Historians asserted the reason for British exclusiveness in Clubs as an "Alleged protection of white women from the unprovoked attention of Indian men". This highlights how the perceived vulnerability of white women was used as a pretext to exclude Indians from club membership. It wasn't necessarily about genuine concern for women's safety, but rather a tool to maintain racial hierarchy and reinforce "untouchability." It depicts a patronizing and racist view of Indian men, portraying them as a constant threat, and of white women, describing them as needing constant protection. W O Hornne feared white women, if left on their own in India, would lower the prestige of the ruling race and let down the side". This statement exposes the anxiety surrounding white women's behaviour and its potential impact on colonial power. Women were seen as symbols of racial purity and prestige, and their actions were believed to reflect on the entire British community. This shows that women are not treated as independent people but as tools to hold up the prestige of the ruling class (Sinha, 1995).

- Women's Limited Role and Stereotyping within Clubs: "They go to marriages not to bless a couple but to see what other women have come wearing.", This is from a book titled The Middle Class in Colonial Malabar: A Social History of Sreejith K. This statement reinforces a stereotypical view of women as preoccupied with superficial matters like fashion and social gossip. It trivializes their presence and suggests they were not taken seriously as intellectual or social equals (Sreejith, 2022). It shows that when women were allowed into the club environment, they were still limited to particular and shallow topics. "They are generalized as they talk about dress, marriage and party". This shows that the men of the clubs did not think highly of the women. They were generalized to be only interested in fundamental things.

- The Club as a Symbol of Social Hierarchy and Exclusion: According to General Reginald Savory, "If you didn't belong to the club, you were an outcast.". This emphasizes the Club's role as a powerful social status and belonging symbol. Exclusion from the Club meant social Organization, reinforcing the rigid social hierarchy of colonial India (Savory, 1971). The Club was a tool to keep people in line with the social norms of the ruling class. "Rebels as the missionaries, single women and Independent mind Individuals". This shows that anyone who did not fit the norm or did not follow the rules of the ruling class was seen as a rebel. It shows how the ruling class wanted to control the population. These statements illustrate The intersection of race, gender, and class in shaping social interactions within colonial India—the

use of women as pawns in maintaining racial and social hierarchies. The prevalence of sexist stereotypes limited women's roles and influence and the use of the Club as a tool to preserve the social status of the ruling class. British /Native women were initially excluded from membership in men's clubs. Even when allowed as guests, they often faced limitations and were relegated to segregated spaces like "Moorghi ghana". Restricted access and limited participation in decision-making were common. There were many incidents frequently addressed in the regional literature. Husbands spend evenings and weekends at clubs, engaging in social activities, while their wives and children feel abandoned and neglected. Many have questioned why husbands fail to include their wives in their social circles, even as club members.

A wall hanging from Munnar's high-range Club exemplifies the prevailing misogyny. They mocked women by comparing their bodies with a ship. That's why they titled it as '*why a ship is called she*'. This depicts the great deal of expense to maintain a boat as a woman.

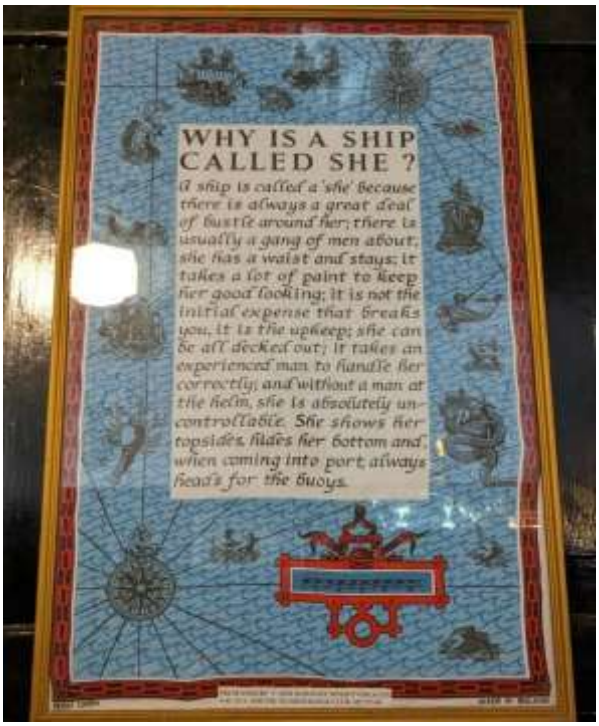

Figure 1: Wall hanging from Munnar High Range Club

This implies that a ship, like a woman in traditional gender roles, requires constant attention and labour from men. "Waist" refers to the narrow midsection of a boat, but it's also a direct comparison to a woman's figure. "Stays" are supporting ropes, but the word also implies a sense of stability or domesticity, as in "staying put." It equates ship maintenance with female vanity, suggesting that a ship, like a woman, needs constant cosmetic upkeep to maintain its appearance. A common trope applies to relationships with women, implying that the ongoing costs of maintaining the relationship are more

burdensome than the initial investment. "…she: can be all decked out…" This refers to the ship's decorative features, but it also suggests that a boat, like a woman, can be adorned and made attractive. "…it takes an experienced man to handle her correctly, and without a man at the helm, she is uncontrollable…" This is the most overtly sexist part. It reinforces the idea that women (or ships) are inherently irrational and need male control. It suggests that women lack the capacity for independent decision-making. "…she shows her topsides, hides her bottom…" "Topsides" refer to the visible sides of the ship above the waterline, while the "bottom" is the hull below. This could be interpreted as a playful reference to revealing and concealing, but it also has sexual undertones. "…when coming into port, always head for the buoys." Buoys are navigational markers. This could be interpreted as a ship (or woman) being drawn to specific points of interest or needing guidance. It could also have sexual undertones.

The statement uses a series of analogies to equate a ship with a stereotypical, dependent, and sometimes capricious woman. The fact that this is a "wall hanging from the Munnar High Range Club" is essential. These clubs, often with a history rooted in colonial times, sometimes perpetuate traditional and outdated social norms. The statement is intended to be humorous, but its humour relies on outdated gender stereotypes. These clubs remind women they don't belong in the space by excluding them from critical arenas.

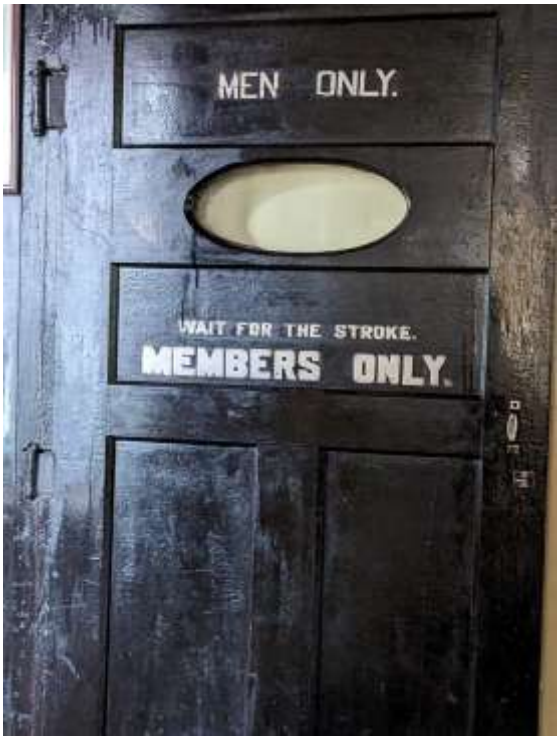

Figure 2: A door from Munnar High Range Club shows gender exclusion

Afro – American Influence

Historians examining women's clubs have often adopted a Eurocentric perspective, tracing their origins to British gentlemen's clubs while overlooking contemporaneous parallel movements in Africa and the Americas. Notably, the 1890s saw the rise of a significant club movement among Black women, with

organizations emerging globally, including in Australia, Azerbaijan, Costa Rica, Cuba, England, and Greece (Giddings, 1984). The 1896 founding of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) exemplifies this trend; the NACW raised over $5 million for war bonds during World War I, and individual clubs, like the Women's Club of Norfolk, provided crucial support to segregated Black military units (Terborg, 1998). Similar activities were observed in Indian women's clubs, highlighting a closer affinity to the African-American model than to exclusive European counterparts" (Knupfer, 1996)

Important Women's Clubs in India

The Nilgiri Ladies' Club, is a south Indian club located in the hill station of Ootacamund during the Madras presidency, later in Tamil Nadu. The Club began in 1930 as the brainchild of Lady Stokes and K. Radhabai Subbarayan (Cohen, 2015). Their joint efforts to establish the Club represent a bridge across a colonial/colonized divide and between wives of men who held power in very different ways. The Nilgiri Ladies' Club rules and bylaws clearly explain its objective: to promote social intercourse between Indian and European Women. The Club defined a 'lady' as a female over 12 years of age, the Marital age of consent since 1891, thus allowing the admission of Younger members who might find themselves on holiday in the cooler climes of Ootacamund. According to their 'lady' status, the Club provided young, educated women a safe place to socialize and be socialized outside of home and school. Since the members of this Club And others similar to it came from middle- or upper-class backgrounds, They could afford both the membership dues and the luxury of leisure Time to participate in club activities. The Club had a distinguished list of life members from South India's aristocracy. The Club hosted several meetings, parties arranged around themes (badminton, deck tennis, ping-pong, and bridge), and Several 'at homes' arranged by more senior members.

K. Radhabai Subbarayan (1891–1960). Subbarayan was a founding member of the Nilgiri Ladies' Club (1930), a member of the Women's India Association (WIA), and the All-India Women's Conference (AIWC). In addition, the government of India appointed Her to the Second Round Table Conference in 1930–31 in London along With Begum Shah Nawaz to represent India's women. When invited to attend the Round Table Conference (a series of meetings in London Organized by the British government to discuss constitutional reforms In India), K. Radhabai Subbarayan resigned from the managing committee (Forbes, 1996). Still, she would return the next year and remained an influential and Outspoken member of the Club. Subbarayan argued that clubs were part of public life and prepared members to perform public and political duties. Clubs are a building block of India's associational life and civil society (Belliappa, 2013). Subbarayan understood that Clubs, like churches, societies, political parties, and a range of associational forms, equip their members at the personal level with valuable Skills and contribute to civil society and the making of democracy. The Princess of Wales Ladies' Club took on a similar mission. The Club and other associational forms helped Muslim women gain experience in political organizations. This included exposure to voting and Forms of associational governance, public speaking, organizing for a Particular event or cause, and other activities that benefitted political Organization and mobilization (Minult, 1981).

In Kerala, C.K. Damayanthi Amma, the first female social worker from Thalasseri, Kannur, Set up a Ladies' Club and started a mobile library for its Members. Lotus Club was not Considered a ladies' Club, but its first secretary was a lady (Shakkeela, 1977). At that time, Cochin Club was a renowned elite Club. Robert Bristow (a representative of the British Government entrusted with developing a modern port at Cochin, a job he completed admirably) and his wife visited the Club for membership. Still, the Bristow were denied admission to the Cochin Club because Lady Gertrude was not English-born. This exclusiveness led to Lady Gertrude Bristow's formation of the Lotus Club. With the cooperation of some prominent families of Cochin, she had a suitable piece of land assigned by the Maharaja of Cochin and started the Lotus Club. From first to last, however, the Club filled a growing need and maintained a tradition of friendly informality; it played its games and had its set debates and more humorous and spontaneous arguments. Robert Bristow explained the formation of a girl guide by his wife in his autobiography My wife was invited to take over from two friends the formation of a corps of Malabar Girl Guides, and this, socially, was an even greater and more daring innovation than the Lotus Club (Bristo, 1959).

Ladies Clubs and Nation-Building

How Ladies Clubs Helped National Building During the wars, women's clubs transformed from forums where Private and domestic issues were discussed into a focus of increasingly public and political actions. At Bhopal, the begum encouraged Members of the Princess of Wales Ladies' Club to contribute to the war Effort. The Club Subsequently collected Rs. 4,000 for the Imperial Relief Fund; members also sent sheets, shirts, and socks to the St. John Ambulance Corps and contributed Rs. 5,010 to a fund established for educating Children of Indian soldiers killed in the war (Minult, 1981). They collected money for the War Fund and helped with Red Cross work by sewing, knitting, crocheting, and rolling bandages. The merger of private and public worlds continued in clubs of the Postcolonial era. Created in 1956 with an initial membership of some 200 women, the British Women's Club of Calcutta had grown to nearly 500 by 1963. Women's clubs offered Indian women a space to meet and Hone skills to take into the public sphere. This combination produced Vibrant members of the nationalist movement and citizens of the new Indian nation. Women's clubs supplied their members with valuable, Transferable skills that helped women move from the private world of clubland to the public world of politics and nation-building.

Significance of ladies' clubs

In a society that often denied women the right to leisure and recreation, Ladies' Clubs offered a valuable outlet for social and cultural expression. These spaces allowed women to engage in activities that were often deemed frivolous or inappropriate for women, such as playing games, attending social events, and participating in cultural programs. By embracing leisure and recreation, women could assert their agency and challenge the prevailing notions of female propriety. Clubs provided them with first-hand experience of skills needed to bridge their Private and public spheres where their (progressive) male counterparts Wanted them to participate.

In the Club, women discussed home, children, servants, food, and Other issues mainly relating to the domestic sphere. The Princess of Wales Ladies' Club sponsored lectures on specific domestic issues Such as hygiene and sanitation. The Club also taught embroidery and Needlework, two skills Muslim women could practice at home And use to earn an income. Over time, the focus of this Club and others

shifted From domestic to more service-oriented programs, offering women New skills that would enable them to participate in broader social and Political circles. To this day, clubs continue to serve as an informal Social centre for domestic information, where one can find a babysitter, Purchase a baby stroller, or acquire hard-to-find cooking. Women formed clubs around specific activities or goals, such as knitting, reading, literacy, etc. This kind of Club offered women with Similar interests a common meeting place and helped structure their Activities.

Postcolonial continuity

Clubs survived the postcolonial period and transformed into centres where social and economic programs could be grown. At the same time, as British women found themselves- Selves in an Indian metropolis, they sought an organizational umbrella to meet both fellow Britons and important Indian counterparts. This marks the rise of the postcolonial integrated diasporic Club. Membership in women's and mixed clubs continues to Be a popular social badge worn by Indian women today. The Ladies Recreation Club at Egmore and the Nilgiri Ladies' Club at Ootacamund Exist. Then and now, clubs provide an identity adaptable to broader social participation while also Offering community in the local setting."Further Scope" Section:

While this study primarily focuses on the formation and impact of ladies' clubs in colonial India, particularly in women's fight for equality, there remains substantial scope for further research. Future studies could undertake a comparative analysis of women's clubs across different regions of India to understand regional variations in their objectives, memberships, and effectiveness.

Additionally, the role of caste, religion, and linguistic identity within these clubs deserves deeper investigation, especially in understanding how inclusive or exclusive these spaces were. Another significant area for future research lies in tracing the post-independence legacy of these clubs—how they evolved, sustained themselves, or declined in the modern era.

Interdisciplinary approaches combining history with gender studies, cultural studies, and oral history methods could also enrich understanding these spaces. Moreover, examining how these colonial-era clubs influenced contemporary women's associations and movements could help draw links between past and present struggles for gender equality.

Scope of Further Study

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Conclusion

Access to these women's clubs was primarily limited to those from the upper echelons of society, effectively excluding women from lower castes who faced systemic neglect and continued to struggle against social injustices like untouchability. This exclusivity meant that only the privileged segments of Indian society enjoyed the freedom of association and leisure these clubs offered. Furthermore, while providing a space for women to socialize and enjoy some freedoms, these clubs often inadvertently reinforced nationalist ideologies that emphasized women's domestic roles. Like men's clubs, they functioned as social havens, yet the discussions frequently centred on domestic concerns such as home, children, household staff, and food. While beneficial, initiatives like lectures on hygiene and sanitation remained within the traditional understanding of women's responsibilities. Consequently, despite the opportunities for female companionship and discussion, these clubs struggled to transcend the prevailing nationalist ideology that prioritized women's domestic duties, even implicitly promoting this through their activities.

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