

# Women Political Thinkers

**Madhulika Jain**

*Political Science, Maharshi Dayanand University Ajmer, (India)*

## ABSTRACT

*This paper makes an effort to recognise the contribution of women philosophers and thinkers in the field of political science, namely Antoinette Brown Blackwell, Mary Parker Follett, Ayn Rand and Johanna "Hannah" Arendt. It enunciates their influence on the political thoughts of the then times. This paper also highlights a few influential women of today's time in the field of politics.*

**Keywords :** *women, Blackwell, Follett, Rand, Arendt.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

"I was introduced as a student to only those exalted male figures who to this day continue with astonishing perseverance to dominate every textbook, syllabus, journal, and conference in political theory. It was simply understood that there *were* no women political philosophers .But, Feminist theorists actually existed as far back as we have records of political writings" - Penny Weiss, author of Canon Fodder. There are a number of influential female political thinkers who are seldom recognised as compared to the vast majority of the male political thinkers. Women have engaged in philosophy and political thoughts throughout the field's history. While there were women philosophers since the earliest times, and some were accepted as philosophers during their lives, almost no women philosophers have entered the philosophical western canon. The "Western canon" is a body of literature and art said to define either Western civilization or the educated person within it.

This presentation seeks to give these influential women philosophers their due recognition, who have contributed to key concepts in the history of political thought.

## II. ANTOINETTE BROWN BLACKWELL

Antoinette Brown Blackwell (May 20, 1825 – November 5, 1921) was the first woman to be ordained as a mainstream Protestant minister in the United States.

- [1] She was a well-versed public speaker on the paramount issues of her time, and distinguished herself from her contemporaries with her use of religious faith in her efforts to expand women's rights.
- [2] She spoke in 1850 at the first National Women's Right Convention, giving a speech that was well received and served as the beginning of a speaking tour in which she would address issues such as abolition, temperance, and women's rights.
- [3] She believed that the inherent differences between men and women limited men's effectiveness in representing women in politics; thus suffrage would have little positive impact for women unless it was coupled with tangible leadership opportunities.
- [4] In 1873, Blackwell founded the Association for the Advancement of Women.
- [5] In 1878, she returned to organized religion, becoming a Unitarian.



- [6] In 1893, Brown attended the Parliament of Religions during the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. There, she said, "Women are needed in the pulpit as imperatively and for the same reason that they are needed in the world—because they are women. Women have become—or when the ingrained habit of unconscious imitation has been superseded, they will become—indispensable to the religious evolution of the human race."
- [7] In 1920, at age 95, she was the only participant of the 1850 Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, Massachusetts.
- [8] In 1975, the United Church of Christ at its 10th General Synod began awarding the Antoinette Brown Awards to ordained UCC women who "exemplify the contributions that women can make through ordained ministry, have provided outstanding ministry in a parish or other church related institutions, including women in specialized ministry, and have a sensitivity concerning the challenges and possibilities of women in ministry and advocacy on behalf of all women in the church."

### **III. MARY PARKER FOLLETT**

Mary Parker Follett (September 3, 1868 – December 18, 1933) an American social worker, management consultant, philosopher, and pioneer in the fields of organisational theory and organisational behaviour.

- [1] Along with Lilian Gilbreth, Mary Parker Follett was one of two great women management gurus in the early days of classical management theory.
- [2] Follett is known to be "Mother of Modern Management".
- [3] She defined management as "the art of getting things through others."
- [4] She authored a number of books and numerous essays, articles and speeches on democracy, human relations, political philosophy, psychology, Organisational behavior and conflict Resolution. Some of her works are:
- *The Speaker of the House of Representatives*(1896)<sup>1</sup>
  - *The New State* (1918)
  - *Creative Experience* (1924)
  - *The Giving Orders* (1926)
  - *Dynamic Administration: The Collected Papers of Mary Parker Follett* (1942)

#### **In *The New State*, she ponders many of the social issues at hand today:**

*"It is a mistake to think that social progress is to depend upon anything happening to the working people: some say that they are to be given more material goods and all will be well; some think they are to be given more "education" and the world will be saved. It is equally a mistake to think that what we need is the conversion to "unselfishness" of the capitalist class."*

### **IV. AYN RAND**

- [1] Ayn Rand (1905 – March 6, 1982) has been a major inspiration for the Tea Party movement, which has swept a new generation of Republicans and self-described conservatives into power.
- [2] Anne Heller, author of *Ayn Rand and the World She Made*, has called Ayn Rand "perhaps the most important communicator of conservative ideas to the American people."



- [3] Rand's political ideology is based on objectivist philosophy and the belief in rational self-interest. She thought that every individual should have the right to liberty, freedom of speech and the pursuit of happiness.
- [4] Her philosophy, *Objectivism*, advocates reason, individualism, and personal happiness.
- [5] Politically, Objectivism is classically liberal or libertarian. It expresses a world view associated with the Enlightenment.
- [6] Objectivism was the foundation of Rand's views, including her political beliefs.
- [7] According to this doctrine, all reality is objective, existing outside the mind, and human beings gain knowledge only by perceiving the world objectively and interpreting it through reason.
- [8] Rand believed in a fully free society with minimal government. She thought that government and public officials should have no authority, except in the restricted role of enforcing objectively defined laws.

## **V. JOHANNA "HANNAH" ARENDT**

- [1] Johanna "Hannah" Arendt (14 October 1906 – 4 December 1975) German – born, American political theorist.
- [2] She wrote 18 books and numerous articles, ranging from works on totalitarianism to thinking and judging.
- [3] Arendt is widely considered one of the most important thinkers of the twentieth century.
- [4] Her works deal with the nature of power and the subjects of politics, direct democracy, authority, and totalitarianism.
- [5] The Hannah Arendt prize is named in her honour.
- [6] Her first major book was '*The Origins of Totalitarianism*'. In it Arendt argues that totalitarianism was a "novel form of government," different from other forms of tyranny in that it applied terror to subjugate mass populations rather than just political adversaries.
- [7] In her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt devotes a lengthy chapter to a critical analysis of human rights.
- [8] In her most influential work *The Human Condition*, Arendt differentiates political and social concepts, labour and work, and various forms of actions; she then explores the implications of those distinctions.
- [9] Arendt argues that, while human life always evolves within societies, the social-being part of human nature, political life, has been intentionally constructed by only a few of these societies as a space for individuals to achieve freedom through the construction of a common world.
- [10] Arendt's life and work are still part of current culture and thought.
- [11] Since the election of Donald Trump to the US Presidency, some journals are resurrecting her ideas to help make sense of the current situation.

## **VI. MOST INFLUENTIAL WOMEN FROM THE FIELD OF POLITICS, IN TODAY'S TIME**

- [1] Some of the Most influential Women from the field of politics, in today's time are :
- [2] Gertrude Himmelfarb (1922–)
- [3] An American scholar drawn to examining the roots of social progress and decay, is best known for her sympathetic portrayals of Victorian society, dealing with similar social problems to those faced today.
- [4] Germaine Greer (1939–)



- [5] an Australian scholar and journalist whose best known work is the major 1970s feminist text *The Female Eunuch* (1970), originally advocated sexual liberation but, more recently, has lauded celibacy.
- [6] Aung San Suu Kyi (1945–)
- [7] A Nobel Peace Prize laureate and scholar living under house arrest and many other restrictions imposed by her native Burma's (Myanmar's) military rulers, leads a popular political movement and party whose non-violence and civil disobedience offer hope for eventual democratic government.
- [8] Ayaan Hirsi Ali (1969–)
- [9] A Somali-born women's rights activist, writer, and politician—who fled both pre-modern Somalia and post-modern Holland and now lives in the United States— has faced numerous death threats for repudiating Islam in favor of atheism, as described in best-selling *Infidel* (2007).
- [10] Peggy Noonan (1950–)
- [11] An American political historian and journalist, is best known for her emphasis on the character of political and religious figures, rather than their glamour, as her biographies of John Paul II and Ronald Reagan attest.
- [12] Camille Paglia (1947–)
- [13] An American author, journalist, art critic, and “dissident feminist,” is best known for espousing feminist goals while reasoning her way to them independently of the formal movement, a fact that earned her both hostility and mischaracterization as a conservative.
- [14] Melanie Phillips (1951–)
- [15] A British journalist and author, has targeted the growing climate of censorship and political and social irrationality in Western countries, for which she has received both livid denunciation as a “conservative” and the Orwell Prize for political journalism (1996).
- [16] Mary Warnock (1924–)
- [17] a British philosopher and ethicist attracted to Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism, is best known for chairing the committee that produced *A Question of Life: The Warnock Report on Human Fertilisation and Embryology* (1984), which advocated research on human embryos.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

This paper is useful in bringing to light the contributions made by women in the field of political philosophy and science. It could be a waking call for our government to give the due position to women philosophers in school text books and syllabus. It will help to inspire young female minds and motivate them to achieve their dreams. This paper is an act of feminism to bring about justice to gender equality.

## **VIII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my teachers who provided their insight and expertise that greatly assisted the research. I would, especially, like to show my gratitude towards my teacher and good friend, Miss Veena Gurnani, for sharing her pearls of wisdom with me during the course of this research. If any errors they are my own and should not tarnish the reputations of these esteemed persons and institute.

## **REFERENCES**



[1] Penny Weiss, author of Canon Fodder

[2] Wikipedia

[3] Shannon Leigh O'Neil, The Political Beliefs of Ayn Rand

[4] Nicole Sanders, Myth: Ayn Rand Was a Conservative, [www.atlassociety.org](http://www.atlassociety.org)

[5] 20 most influential women, [www.superscholar.org](http://www.superscholar.org)