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WOMEN IN THE ENLIGHTENMENT:
POLITICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY
DISCOURSE ON THE FEMALE CONDITION
IN REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE

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The French Enlightenment is marked by a paradox of sorts: on one hand, the movement made significant progress in the realm of human rights, and has had a lasting impact that is felt even today, most notably through the publication of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*. Yet, on the other hand, women's rights and freedoms remained limited during this period, even after the Revolution, in jarring contrast to the Enlightenment ideals of progress and equality. This discrepancy inspired passionate debate over the role of women in the polity and in society at large, and many proto-feminist arguments that emerged from these debates paved the way for contemporary feminist movements. Drawing on political philosophy, sociocultural theory, and literary analysis, this cross-disciplinary project examines, in three parts, the origins, contents, and impacts of these debates surrounding women's rights in Revolutionary France. The first chapter explores the socio-political changes that led the public to consider the status of oppressed groups, including women. The second chapter follows the debates incited by these changes concerning the rightful place of women in society. In particular, the chapter analyses how defenders of women's rights responded to the rhetoric of natural law and the rights of man to make their arguments for expanding women's rights. Finally, the third chapter studies the literary exploration of these ideas in the works of Germaine de Staël, particularly her novel *Delphine*, in order to present her progressive vision for women in society.