

CHAPTER-4

WOMEN IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACES IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Nineteenth century can be called a century of transition, especially so far as women's history is concerned. As can be seen from previous chapters western as well as Indian social reformers brought up issues that spiraled into involving more women. The significance of the work carried out by the men has been discussed by many historians, sociologists, and experts from other disciplines. However, it was the women who were majorly responsible for all the changes. Their agency became extremely critical in inspiring more and more women to come to the forefront and define themselves. They educated themselves, and became doctors, teachers, writers and even editors. Women of the nineteenth century also discussed the social issues raised by their counterparts. Issues such as widow remarriage or female infanticide were also discussed by women. There is no denying that women were not overt about this or were protesting aggressively against these issues. However, what they did was lay the groundwork for what can be called as the active participation of a larger number of women in the public sphere.

Historically, the twentieth century in Indian history is considered to be very important as India and Indians not only challenged the might of colonial rule but also began to restructure themselves. Modern institutions and ideologies like Democracy, Capitalism and Industrialization were borrowed from the Western counterparts and were Indianized. India began to be deeply influenced by global events such as world wars and market change. Besides borrowing from the world, India also gave. It gave the world Mahatma Gandhi an apostle of peace and non-violence. Finding women in this historical time and space was not as difficult as in the nineteenth century. Work had already been done and once as they say the 'cat was out of the bag', it was difficult to put back in.

The social reform movement in the nineteenth century played an important role in creating separate spaces for women within the household for women. A few women were educated at home and many girls had begun to attend school. Unfortunately, the number of school-going girls was not large, but it was growing steadily. Early marriage (child marriage) and widow remarriage were still in issues, but a few widows were coming forward and seeking grooms and in some of the families girl's education was considered as important as their marriage. This

led to the advancement of education among women and the creation of new spaces for women where women were seen organizing themselves. It provided the women with a platform to voice their opinions no matter how mundane they were. In the twentieth century, this separated space connected women with the larger reform activities and the freedom struggle. A few women began to seriously think of pursuing a profession and make greater contributions to social development. This did not mean that all women were engaged in professional activities. But the numbers increased and by the end of the third decade of the twentieth century, they were in the position to launch an organization to do some serious thinking on ways to bring about equality amongst men and women. This was thought that was not even considered in the nineteenth century. Who were these women? Were they from royal families or upper castes? Or were they middle-class women? Did lower-class women also agitate and came out in the public spaces? The chapter intends to address these research questions.

WESTERN INDIA

In the twentieth century, there were significant political changes across India and the Western Indian region was no exception. The rise of nationalism in India had a profound impact on women both in the private as well as public spaces. Within these spaces, the charisma of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi shifted women's involvement with family to their involvement with the participation of women in the freedom struggle. However, prior to the Gandhian Era, women had already gotten involved in understanding the ideological narrative of the national movement. For instance, Sharda Mehta, as early as 1902 attended the Ahmedabad session of the Indian National Congress along with her sister Vidyagauri Nilkanth who sang *Bande Mataram*.¹ Hence, Western India also was caught in the surge of nationalism. According to Yagnik, it culminated in the form of '*four intertwined and increasingly forceful streams of nationalistic thoughts*': swadeshi movement; rise of radicals within the Congress; the assertion of Sayajirao Gaekwad; and revolutionary nationalism.² Similar changes were taking place in the southern part of Western India except the case of princely states. Many of them were still not in alignment with the nationalistic fervor that the rest of the country was witnessing. The northwestern part of Western India had similar experiences.

¹ Mehta, S. (1939).64; Yājñika, A. & Sheth, S. (2005). *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat: Plurality, Hindutva, and Beyond*. Penguin Books India.144

² Yājñika, A. & Sheth, S. (2005). 143

Women in such circumstances grabbed opportunities provided to them. They were seen more in the male-dominated public spaces than ever before. Their number was still small but the very fact that they were there and talked or wrote about gives an insight into their lives and restores them back in history.

In the early 1920s, there was a significant increase in the participation of women in the freedom struggle, centered around their role in the swadeshi (indigenous) movement alongside activism in the Gandhian movement. By the late 1920s, their numbers swelled, and many younger educated women joined the experienced women such as Sarojini Naidu. They not only gave a voice to mass movements but began to talk about emancipation. These women began to organize themselves and found common grounds globally.

This chapter deals with the transition in the space of women from private to public spaces. This transition deals particularly with the creation of new social roles for women and the extent of change in the function of those roles over a period of time. While it takes into account the changing situation of women within the household, it focuses on the role of those women who played a major role in the formation of various institutions and public organizations. As there was a phenomenal social change in the life of women as they started to come out of their homes. They started to participate in non-familial and non-caste activities where they started to meet men and women outside of their families.

SECTION-I: POLITICAL CHANGE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC SPACES

Women's participation in public spaces was not an accident. As the previous chapter has proven, women were more than ready to grab any opportunity provided to them. Young girls despite being married and with children were ready to give up their leisure time to educate themselves and possibly others. They were ready to participate in the political affairs. These young women despite being confined within societal constraints and were not willing to let go of any opportunity coming their way. Being educated empowered them and put them on the same platform as their male counterparts.

By the late nineteenth century itself, women had started attending the sessions of the Indian National Congress (INC). Although their number was limited, at least a start had been made. For instance, in 1889, ten women attended the meeting of the INC and Pandita Ramabai was

one of them.³ She made efforts to ensure that at least seven or eight women delegates were able to attend the Congress session.⁴ One has to remember that despite their presence, women had no voice. They were not allowed to speak or vote on resolutions.⁵ It was during the 1890 Congress session, where only four women delegates were present, that a woman was permitted to speak. In Kadambini Ganguly's speech, she expressed gratitude to the President for granting her the opportunity to speak, emphasizing that it elevated the status of Indian women.⁶ Women began to carve out their own public spaces and actively participated in various meetings of the Indian National Congress. While some women attended as official delegates, many more took part as keen observers. They made a concerted effort to be present at every gathering, ensuring their voices and concerns were heard. Whether officially recognized or simply as onlookers, women became a part of the discourse and direction of the Indian National Congress. Their active presence symbolized their interest in political affairs. It's just that now there was someone who recorded it. Accompanied by their fathers and husbands, women's participation in these gatherings carried both symbolic and decorative significance. As the sister of Rabindra Nath Tagore, Swarnakumari Devi was the first woman to attend the session of the Indian National Congress in 1900.⁷ A poignant example of this was witnessed in 1901 when a chorus of fifty-six girls, representing different regions of India, performed the inspiring song "*Hindustan*". The following year in 1902 at Ahmedabad, two Gujarati's sisters Vidyagauri Nilkanth and Sharda Mehta took the stage to sing a translated version of the *Vande Mataram* song during the opening session.⁸ These educated and politically aware girls, along with their mothers, boldly proclaimed to the world that India, in its vision of women's public roles, stood on par with any Western nation in terms of advancement. According to Mary Carpenter the women of Ahmedabad city were more open to change, as they started to come out for dining with their husbands, one such example was of Assistant Judge Satendranath Tagore's wife.⁹

³ Swarnakumari Devi, Kadambini Ganguly, Pandita Ramabai, Shevantibai Triambak, Sahntabai Nikambe, Kashibai Kanitkar, Manockjess Cursetjee.

⁴ Kosambi, M. (1988). Women, Emancipation and equality: Pandita Ramabai's contribution to women's cause. *Economic and political Weekly*. WS38-WS49.48

⁵ Singh, S. R. (1968). *Nationalism and Social Reform in India*. University of Michigan. 206

⁶ Singh, S. R. (1968). 206

⁷ Chopra, P. N. (1975). *Women in the Indian Freedom Struggle*. Ministry of Education & Social Welfare. New Delhi. 5

⁸ Basu, A. (2018). *Women in Satyagraha*. Publication Division, New Delhi. 12

⁹ Carpenter, M. (1868). *Six months in India* (Vol. 1). Longmans, Green. London. 57-33

1.1. WOMEN IN THE INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The Indian National Movement, spanning from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, witnessed the tireless efforts and significant contributions of women who played a pivotal role in the struggle for India's independence from British colonial rule. The involvement of women in the freedom movement challenged traditional gender roles and social norms, empowering them to actively participate in political, social, and cultural spheres. Their courage, resilience, and determination became catalysts for change, inspiring a new wave of activism and paving the way for women's rights and gender equality in post-independence India.

The Indian National Movement was characterized by a multifaceted resistance against British rule, ranging from nonviolent civil disobedience to armed uprisings. Women emerged as key agents of change, breaking societal barriers and defying patriarchal norms to actively contribute to the struggle for freedom. Their participation ranged from leading protests, organizing mass movements, distributing literature, participating in boycotts, and even engaging in armed resistance. Their contributions went beyond political activism; women also played vital roles in the cultural and intellectual realms, contributing to literature, arts, education, and social reform.

The Indian National Movement provided a platform for women to transcend these limitations and assert their agency. Influenced by the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, who emphasized nonviolence, truth, and self-reliance, women leaders and activists actively participated in various campaigns and movements initiated by the Indian National Congress and other organizations. Recognizing and celebrating the pivotal role of women in the Indian National Movement is essential for a comprehensive understanding of India's struggle for independence and the social transformations that followed. The following quote from Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's *Discovery of India* best illustrates the role of women in the struggle for Independence:

"Most of us menfolk were in prison. And then a remarkable thing happened. Our women came to the front and took charge of the struggle. Women had always been there, of course, but now there was an avalanche of them, which took not only the British government but their own menfolk by surprise. Here were these women, women of the upper or middle classes, leading sheltered lives in their homes, peasant women, working-class women, rich women, poor

women, pouring out in their tens of thousands in defiance of government order and police lathi
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However, a small number of women (the number was growing every year) were proactive much before Mahatma Gandhi became a household name in the Indian Subcontinent. The participation of women began to come to notice with their involvement in the Swadeshi Movement started with anti-partition in Bengal in 1905. Barring a few wealthy families, women, as managers of the household, in any case, used India-made products. The concept of *swadeshi* was something that women of Western India could identify with. The Swadeshi Movement gave them an opportunity to organize themselves. Women learnt and trained themselves to boycott the foreign goods. For instance, in Bombay, an intelligence report of the Government of India reported that, both Ketkar (Tilak's daughter) and A. V. Joshi, were propagating the use of *swadeshi*.¹¹

Gujarat had a great weaving tradition that involved both men and women. Even in the midst of the expanding mill industry, indigenous weaving tradition had continued. Some of the women were even manufacturers and were a part of cottage industries. This led to women identifying more with *Swadeshi*. Besides working within the industries, several women helped in starting the *Swadeshi* shops. Gangabai Yagnik, the headmistress of the Victoria Jubilee High School at Mansa (in the Mehsana district) even published an important book, '*Hunnar Mahasagar*', in 1891.¹² The first edition of the book was published in 1897 and later there were many reprints. The book became very popular, and 1000 copies were sold within a few days. The book is a collection of information on numerous trades, mostly cottage industry. For instance, soap making, papad making, herbal powders, hair oils, and even herbal colors etc. The author Gangaben Yagnik was a widow but since she was educated, she could think and plan ahead. Instead of hoping to get married to restart her life, she decided to be self-reliant. Since we don't have any biographical information, therefore it is difficult to ascertain what challenges she could have faced in her life. Nonetheless, she encouraged the idea of emancipation in other women, especially widows. She was known to have made efforts to convince the village elders to educate their young girls. Gangaben's concept of 'swadeshi' was synonymous with 'self-reliance' which was not as much for the country as much as for 'self'. The book clearly reveals

¹⁰ Nehru, J. (2008). *Discovery of India*. Penguin UK.29

¹¹ Chopra, P. N. (1975). 7

¹² Yagnik, P.G. & Shah, L.S. (1891). *Hunnar Varnan*. Vijay Pravartak Press. Ahmedabad. 1-523

the research that Gangaben must have carried out to put together such a knowledgeable and informative work.¹³

The example of Vidyagauri Nilkanth and Shardaben Mehta has been enumerated above. They were very prolific. Aside from wearing badges of being reformer women, the sisters also propagated *Swadeshi*. Sulochana Mehta also participated in the *Swadeshi* Movement. Women of Surat, Baroda, and Ahmedabad organized meetings to protest against the partition of Bengal.¹⁴

The support of women in Poona for the *Swadeshi* Movement can be seen from their participation on October 6, 1905. Approximately 120 high-caste Brahmin ladies gathered at Natu's temple in Shaniwar Peth, Poona to carry out the '*haldi kunku*' ceremony (a Marathi ritual, where married women put turmeric and red turmeric powder on each other's forehead). However, the nature of the meeting was political when women under the presidentship of Parwati Bapat carried out lengthy discussions on *Swadeshi*.¹⁵ Essays on the '*Swadeshi Question*' were read by Saraswati Bhanu and Miss Bhatkande. The assembled women resolved that they would refrain from purchasing various items of European manufacture such as glass bangles, rock-oil chintz (a type of printed fabric), children's toys, and other similar products. This decision was a form of protest against British colonial rule and aimed to promote Indian-made goods instead. The participation of women in the *Swadeshi* movement was crucial as it highlighted their active role in the fight for independence and their commitment to promoting indigenous industries. Their support added strength to the movement and helped in spreading its message across different sections of society.¹⁶

The women of present-day Maharashtra like Gujarat also started to attend the session of the Indian National Congress in 1889. They also participated in more numbers from the beginning of the *Swadeshi* Movement. Bal Gangadhar Tilak and his followers had already popularized the *Swadeshi* movement in Maharashtra. As it is, the concept of *Swadeshi* was not new to Maharashtra as it was first stated by Lokhitwadi around 1850. In 1870, due to the efforts of

¹³ Yagik G.(1904). *Hunnar Mahasagar*.

¹⁴ Mehta, S. (1981). Social Background of *Swadeshi* Movement in Gujarat, 1875–1908. *Vidya*, 14(1), 31-46.; *Prajabandhu*. 2 September 1906. 8-1; Shah, K. (2016). *Ahmedabad: A Society in Transition (1818--1914)*. Popular Prakashan. Mumbai. 242

¹⁵ Government of Bombay. (1957). *Source Material for a History of the Freedom Movement in India*. Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai. 611-12

¹⁶ Government of Bombay. (1957). 611-12

Vasudev Balawant Joshi and Justice Ranade, the movement picked up when co-operative *Swadeshi* stores in the cities of Maharashtra were opened. With the co-operative stores women joined. Gradually women's participation grew in numbers, especially after the *Swadeshi* Movement. Madam Cama, Savai Ambutai Vaidya, Yashodabai Bhat, Avantikabai Gokhale and many others played a very important role in the pre-Gandhian era of the national movement in India.¹⁷ Following is an account of some of the prominent women of the time.

Perinben Naoraji, also known as Perin Captain, was born on 12th October 1888 in Mandvi, a port town in the Kutch State. Her father held the position of doctor-in-charge at the State Civil Hospital. Perinben Naoraji was the granddaughter of Dadabhai Naoraji. At the age of seven, she commenced her education at Cathedral Girl's High School in Bombay.¹⁸ She successfully completed her matriculation from there and then attended Elphinstone College for a year. At the age of seventeen, she went to Europe to pursue further studies. During their time in Paris, Perin was closely associated with Mrs. Cama, Shyamji Krishna Varma, Sarojini Naidu, and brother Virendra Chattopadhyay. In Paris, Perin had the extraordinary opportunity to listen to the groundbreaking ideas of Madam Cama, an experience that sparked a profound transformation within her, turning her into a true revolutionary.¹⁹ Perin Naoraji was known to be an active sympathizer of the militant nationalist Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.²⁰ In December 1910, Perin, brimming with revolutionary ideas, returned to India.²¹ After this she continued to play an important role in all the mass movements including the Gandhian mass movements.

Satyabhamabai Kuvalekar from Satara was another prominent woman from the Maharashtra region who played a significant role in the nationalist movement during that era.²² Her husband held a prominent position in Satara. While specific details about her personal life are not available, it is known that she embraced the *Swadeshi* movement in her personal life. Satyabhamabai also pursued an education in homeopathy and actively contributed to the social

¹⁷ Vaidya, S. and Kothekar, S. (1985). *Maharashtratil Swatantrya Ladha (1885-1920)*. Government of Maharashtra. Bombay.79

¹⁸ Interview: Mrs G. Captain – Part 2. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-g-captain-part-2/22>

¹⁹ Vaidya, S. and Kothekar, S. (1985).176

²⁰ Joshi, V.S. (1987). *Agnipathavaril Paraganda*.(Marathi). Manorama Prakashan. Bombay. 176

²¹ Ibid.64

²² Chaudhari, K. C. (1990). *Disobedience Movement*. Vol. XI (April-September 1930), Vol. XII (October 1930-December 1941). Government of Maharashtra.Mumbai.647

and educational progress of Satara for over four decades.²³ From 1915 to 1920, Satyabhamabai demonstrated her strong leadership within the Congress organization in Satara. Her inspiring presence motivated numerous men from Satara to actively join the national cause.²⁴ Satyabhamabai, Ramabai Kuvalekar, Dwarkabai Ghaisas, Ramabai Biniwale, and Anandibai Joglekar were colleagues from Poona who actively engaged in the constructive programs of Mahatma Gandhi and showed a strong commitment to the promotion of *khadi*. In 1920, Padmavatibai Harolikar, supported by Anandibai Joglekar, founded the Poona Spinning Committee, emphasizing the significance of spinning and weaving as part of the movement for self-reliance and empowerment.²⁵

Yesubai Savarkar, popularly known as Yesuvahini in Maharashtra, was another woman whose name has disappeared from the pages of history. She was the sister-in-law of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a renowned nationalist. Inspired by her husband's work, Yesubai wholeheartedly supported and collaborated with him in his endeavors.²⁶ Babarao Savarkar used to organize the youth in Nasik and launched a revolutionary organization named '*Mitra Samaj*' which was later renamed as '*Abhinav Bharat*'.²⁷ She along with her husband Babarao founded an organization '*Atmanishtha Yuvati Sangha*', (Believer's Young Women Organization) at Nasik in 1905. The president of the organization was Laxmibai Khare. It was under the guidance and leadership of Yesubai that the organization gained stability and witnessed a significant increase in membership, reaching fifty to sixty members within a short period of time.²⁸ The organization played a significant role in promoting the Swadeshi movement and generating political awareness among the women of Nasik. The members would gather every Friday evening for their activities. One of the main activities of the organization involved reading newspapers, through which they could stay informed about the political events of the day. The organization also commemorated the birth anniversaries of national heroes such as Shivaji and Rani Laxmibai. Additionally, they celebrated religious festivals like *Makar Sankranti* and *Dasara*, where women from Nasik were invited. During these occasions, the organization took

²³ Kunte, B. G. (1979). *Swatantrya Sainik Charittrakosha* (Marathi). Part III. Government of Maharashtra. 117

²⁴ Chaudhari, K. C. (1990). 800-802

²⁵ Patil, P. A. (2003). A Pioneer woman Freedom Fighter: Dr. Indumati Naik. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 64, 946–952. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44145521>

²⁶ Gokhale, D.N. (1979). *Krantiveer Babarao Savarkar*. (Marathi). Shrividya Prakashan. Poona. 68

²⁷ Ibid. 42-46

²⁸ Ibid. 68

the opportunity to introduce the women to the new ideas of swadeshi and boycott of foreign products. Consequently, the women became familiar with these new concepts and created patriotic songs instead of lullabies for their babies. Furthermore, on the *Makar Sankranti* festival, the organization members would symbolically discard foreign sugar received during the Vermillion program (*haldi kunku*), as a gesture of supporting the Swadeshi movement.²⁹

Yesubai was fairly unknown, but she dedicated her life to the nation's cause. This included abstaining from using sugar when *Swadeshi* sugar was unavailable, and disuse of glass bangles, a symbol of a married woman, amongst other things. She not only abstained herself and inspired other women to do the same. The situation came to such a level, wherein the menfolk were forced to invest in a glass factory, so that women could wear *desi* bangles. A *Swadeshi* glass factory was established in Talegaon, in the Poona district, with the support of public funds known as the *Paisa Fund*.³⁰ Wearing bangles produced in this glass factory became a symbol of patriotism and women often preferred them. The question that often arises in the mind is when did married women find time for the nationalist activities? Yesubai and many other women utilized their leisure time, usually in the afternoon, to promote the nationalist agenda.³¹

As a revolutionary Yesubai endured a life filled with hardship. After the arrest of her husband, in 1909,³² Yesubai demonstrated immense courage and diplomacy. She took the bold step of destroying the handmade bombs that were kept by Ganesh Babarao Savarkar in the house of Bhave, located near Nasik.³³ She had to run away from her house. She could however forebear the hardships undeterred with great dignity and poise. She continued to fight for freedom and inspired other women to do so.

Similarly, Yashodabai Bhat, another unheard voice, dedicated her life to the country. She, like other women mentioned above, actively participated in various movements, from the *Swadeshi*

²⁹Gokhale, D.N. (1979).160

³⁰ The Paisa Fund Glass Factory was established in March 1908 by Sarvajanic Kaka, Dr. Hanasaheb Deshmukh, and B.G. Tilak. The concept of the Paisa Fund was initially presented by Antaji Damodar Kale at the Lucknow Congress of 1899, proposing the collection of one paisa per head from the people of India. However, his idea was initially overlooked. Subsequently, Kale met Sarvajanic Kaka and B.G. Tilak in Poona, where they discussed the matter. B.G. Tilak promoted the idea through Kesari, a prominent newspaper, and the people responded positively. Consequently, various branches of the Paisa Fund were established across Maharashtra. Donating to the Paisa Fund became a symbol of patriotism during that time; Deogirikar, T. R. (1964). *Gopal Krishna Gokhale*. Publications Division Ministry of Information & Broadcasting.362-64

³¹ Gokhale, D.N. (1979). 68

³² Ibid.72

³³ Ibid.72

Movement to the Non-Cooperation Movement, spanning from 1908 to 1930.³⁴ Despite having the opportunity to lead a luxurious life as the wife of an advocate, Yashodabai Bhat chose to dedicate her life to the nation's cause. Her political journey began in 1908 when she embraced the principle of *Swadeshi* and relinquished the use of foreign goods, such as sugar and bangles. B.G. Tilak once called for essays on *Swadeshi* to gather women's opinions, and Yashodabai's essay emerged as the best among them. Women have been known to utilize all the opportunities ever available to them and Yashodabai's example is one such classic case. Despite her limited education, Yashodabai, influenced by her education, wrote a book titled '*Arya Stree Ratne*' in the year 1917.³⁵ She has also written a biography on Jijabai in Marathi titled as '*Aitihāsik Stree Ratne*' (Women Gems in History).³⁶

Avantikabai Gokhale, another remarkable personality, was proactive in both the non-Gandhian as well as Gandhian movements both in Maharashtra as well as at a pan-India stage.³⁷ At the young age of nine, she was married to one Babanrao Gokhale, an engineer from Ratlam. When her husband left to study abroad, Avantikabai learnt to read and write in her native language i.e., Marathi. Later, she further acquired knowledge of the English language.³⁸ Due to pressure from her husband, Avantikabai also trained as a nurse. Avantikabai was amongst the few women who were not pressured into getting involved in the national movement by their husbands. Her presence in the public space was more because she traveled both abroad and nationally on her own. In 1913, she was given an opportunity to travel to England as a companion to the Queen of the princely state of Ichalkaranji near Kolhapur.³⁹ Her time in England gave her an exposure to work carried out by women in England. This inspired her to engage in social work in India. She gave her services to the educational institutions established by *Seva Sadan* in Bombay. Additionally, she actively interacted with working-class women, seeking to understand their lives and the challenges they faced. Avantikabai's interactions with

³⁴ Chaudhari, K. (1990). 253,729,752,828,859-8

³⁵ Bhat, Y. (1917). *Arya Stree Ratne*. Mumbai Vaibhav Press. Servant of Indian Society Building. Mumbai

³⁶ Deshpande, P. (2007). *Creative Pasts: historical memory and identity in Western India, 1700-1960*. Columbia University Press. 166

³⁷ Gupta, R. (2019). Gandhi and Women in the Indian Freedom Struggle. *Social Scientist*, 47(1-2) (548-549). 37-48

³⁸ Taneja, A. (2005). *Gandhi, Women, and the National Movement, 1920-47*. Har-Anand Publications. 103; *Harijan*. (1949). Ahmedabad. 17 April. 53

³⁹ Ichalkaranji was once a principality in the former state of Kolhapur. Following its integration into the Union of India, the city and other regions of the principality became part of Hatkanangale Taluk in the present-day Kolhapur district.

the working class allowed her to develop a deeper understanding of their hardships and struggles.⁴⁰

Avnatikabai was also deeply influenced by Gandhian ideas. In 1917, she and Anandibai Vishampayam were sent to Champaran to investigate the matters along with Mahatma Gandhi's team.⁴¹ During this time, she became closer to Mahatma Gandhi and Kasturba.⁴² Although Gandhiji was busy formulating plausible court cases, Avantikabai's ideas were more futuristic. She took the initiative to establish schools in Champaran and several of these schools continue to operate to this day. These schools followed a distinct approach compared to regular educational institutions, placing emphasis on cleanliness and cultivating good habits among the students. In the evenings, Avantikabai would sing Bhajans (devotional songs) for the villagers, fostering a sense of spiritual connection.⁴³ Avantikabai Gokhale, also worked towards making women stronger and independent. As a part of the '*Hind Mahila Samaj*', she focused on hygiene, nursing, and first aid, aiming to educate women in these essential areas.⁴⁴

In conclusion to this section, it can be said that women moving to public spaces became a very important component of the pre-Gandhian phase of India's freedom movement. They joined political organizations, such as the Indian National Congress (INC), and worked alongside male leaders to promote the cause of freedom. Simultaneously there was also this consciousness to awaken their own gender to start thinking about themselves. As a result, many women strove to establish organizations that would address women's issues alongside contributing to the freedom movement. As has been mentioned above, these organizations focused on promoting education, healthcare, and social reforms for women. Women recognized the importance of education and worked towards empowering themselves and others. They established schools, women's colleges, and vocational training centers, providing opportunities for education and skill development. Despite the challenges and societal barriers, they faced, women in the pre-Gandhian era of India's freedom movement demonstrated immense courage, resilience, and determination. Their contributions as leaders, organizers, writers, and reformers paved the way for greater women's participation in the subsequent stages

⁴⁰ Harijan. (1949). 53

⁴¹ Apte, P.S. (1948). *Gandhi-Darshan* (Marathi). Anath Vidyarthi Graha Prakashan, Poona. 75-76.

⁴² Gandhi, M. (1983). *Autobiography: The story of my experiments with truth*. Courier Corporation.; Desai, M. (1977). *Pragatichya Nikashavar* (Marathi).Sadhna Prakashan Poona. 49

⁴³ Desai, M. (1977). 49

⁴⁴ Kunzru, N.H.(ed).(1939).*Gopal Krishna Devadhar*. Servants of India Society. Poona. 88-93

of the freedom struggle. Their efforts laid a strong foundation for the future empowerment and progress of women in India.

1.2. WOMEN IN THE GANDHIAN MASS MOVEMENTS

Women and their connection with Mahatma Gandhi have been the subject of many studies.⁴⁵ Some of the studies have criticized Gandhi's behavior towards women and some have celebrated it. The opinions are contradictory but there is also a consensus that Mahatma Gandhi had a lot to say about women. He was influenced by his mother and to a certain extent his wife besides other women. He borrowed his basic idea of *Satyagraha* and non-violence from women. The purpose of this section is not to focus on Mahatma Gandhi's relationship with women but to discuss the benefits accrued by women from the opportunities provided by Gandhian philosophy to them to move towards public spaces and to understand how women used them. Gandhi continued to impact the lives of a multitude of women. He carried out these experiments in South Africa where he understood that women can be utilized to carry out non-violent struggle. They not only adapted to the change but also inspired others. Mahatma

⁴⁵ Bright, J. (1944). *The Woman Behind Gandhi*. Paramount Publication.; Gandhi, M. (1947). *Women and Social Injustice*. Navajivan Pub; Morton, E. (1953). *The Women in Gandhi's life*. Dodd Mead.; Gandhi, M. (1964). *The role of Women*. Bharatiya Viya Bhavan; Shridevi, S. (1969). *Gandhi and the Emancipation of Indian Women*. Hyderabad: Gandhi Sahithya Prachuranalayam; Patela.C.(1981). *Mahatama Gandhi in His Gujarati writings*. Sahitya Akademi.; Mahatma, G. (1975). *Mahatma Gandhi Views on Women*. Government of India Department of Social Science; Bakshi,S.R. (1987). *Gandhi and Status of Women*. Criterion Publications, New Delhi.; Dastur, A. J., & Mehta, U. (1991). *Gandhi's Contribution to the Emancipation of Women*. South Asia Books; Joshi.P. (2002). *Gandhi on Women*. Navajivan; Taneja, A. (2005). *Gandhi, Women, and the National Movement, 1920-47*. Har-Anand Publications.; Kumar, G. (2006). *Brahmacharya Gandhi & his Women Associates*. Vitasta Pub; Thaku.B. (2006). *Women in Gandhi's Mass movement*. Deep Publications, New Delhi; Pruthi.R., Chaturvedi.A. (2009). *Mahatma Gandhi and Women*. Common Wealth Publishers.; Kapadia.S. (2021). *The Woman Beside Gandhi: a Biography of Kasturba, Wife of the Mahatma*; Kishwar, Madhu. Gandhi on Women. *Economic and Political Weekly* 20, no. 40 (1985): 1691–1702.; Patel, S. (1988). Construction and reconstruction of woman in Gandhi. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 377-387; Patel, S. (1988). *Gandhi. Economic and Political Weekly*, 377; Thapar, S. (1993). Women as activists; women as symbols: A study of the Indian nationalist movement. *Feminist Review*, 44(1), 81-96; Norvell, L. (1997). Gandhi and the Indian women's movement. *The British Library Journal*, 23(1), 12-27; Dash, S. (2010). Role of women in India's struggle for freedom. *Orissa Review*, 74-76; Mookerjee-Leonard, D. (2010). To be pure or not to be Gandhi, women, and the Partition of India. *feminist review*, 94(1), 38-54; Kishwar, Madhu. "Gandhi on Women." *Economic and Political Weekly* 20, no. 40 (1985): 1691–1702. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4374897>; Campbell, D., & Dass, P. L. (2019). Mahatma Gandhi's Thoughts on Women Empowerment and Present Scenario. *Think India Journal*, 22(10), 7588-7597; Fox, R. G. (2013). Gandhi and feminized nationalism in India. In *Women Out of Place* (pp. 37-49). Routledge; Garai, S. (1926). Gandhi on Women Emancipation. *Young*; Basheer, R. P. (2018). Empowerment of women through education: a special reference to Mahatma Gandhi. *International J Res Anal Rev*, 5(3), 1756-1758; Radhakrishnan, S. (Ed.). (2019). *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections on his life and work*. Routledge; Bose, Anima. *Women in Gandhi's India*. *India International Centre Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (1975): 280–91; Gupta, Ruchira. Gandhi and Women in the Indian Freedom Struggle. *Social Scientist* 47, no. 1-2 (548-549) (2019): 37–48.; Chopde, V. R. (2021). Mahatma Gandhi's perspective on women's participation in freedom struggle. *International journal of economic perspectives*, 15(1), 304-308.

Gandhi's return to India proved to be critical for not only India's independence but also of women's emancipation. It became clear that women were going to be an indispensable part of Gandhian movements.⁴⁶

Mahatma Gandhi paid close attention to inspiring women to join the movement. He had understood that the will to fight had to come from within. It meant that even if the families of women were not inclined to the cause of the nation, women would sacrifice everything for what they believed in. The problem was to collate the groups of women so that they could be effectively used. After settling down in India at the *Sabarmati Ashram* in Ahmedabad in 1915, Gandhi focused his attention on bridging the gap between the urban elite women and those residing in rural areas. Recognizing the lack of contact and understanding between these two groups, Gandhi emphasized the need to address this issue. In 1917, he conveyed a message to the *Gujarat Hindu Stree Mandal*, an organization representing high-caste Hindu women. He stated that educated women often failed to welcome interactions with those less educated, and this disconnect needed to be remedied. He encouraged educated women to help their less educated compatriots and to create some kind of sisterhood. Ahmedabad and Gujarat provided a trial ground for a number of his movements, particularly the Kheda *Satyagraha*.⁴⁷ At a meeting in Ahmedabad he appealed for funds from women, during which 1500 in cash ornaments were collected on the spot.⁴⁸

Women were already working towards being self-reliant by the second decade of the nineteenth century. Mahatma Gandhi validated their efforts and encouraged them to unify and work toward the betterment of the nation. However, he rightly pointed out that the number of women connected with such activity was very small and women should join together and fight for not only their freedom but also for the freedom of the country.⁴⁹ Most of the writings ascribe the responsibility to Mahatma Gandhi for influencing the lives of women such as Ansuyaben Sarabhai, Maniben Patel, and many others. The following section is an account of the influence of Gandhian ideology on some known and some not so known women of the time.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Basu, A. (2018). 31

⁴⁷ Publication Divisions. (1965). *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Ahmedabad. Vol. XIV, October, 1917-July, 1918. 86-87

⁴⁸ Basu, A. (2018). 37

⁴⁹ Gandhi, K.M. (1942). *Women and Social Injustice*. Navajivan. Ahmedabad. 3

⁵⁰ Mehta, S. (1938). 201

Those who know Mahatma Gandhi, also know about Kasturba, his wife. She was perhaps one of the very few women who had influenced Gandhi in his formative years. Gandhi's influence on the life of Kasturba has been the center of both fiction as well as non-fiction.⁵¹ Kasturba, a simple woman who got married at the age of thirteen to Mohandas, had no ambition of her own. Both of them were of the same age and therefore somewhere there is a level of visible comfort in their relationship. If Kasturba adapted to Gandhi's public life, Gandhi too recognized her strengths and pushed her to keep broadening her horizons. It is very difficult to understand what she might have felt that there is very little that is in her handwriting that is available. However, if one were to go with Gandhi's words in his autobiography, it becomes clear that they both learnt a lot from each other. Kasturba along with Gandhi learnt to gradually break down many shackles that she had grown with. Being in the public eye was not easy but she would rather be with her husband and in the public eye rather than without him. A free-spirited Kasturba as a newly married girl was not an obedient child bride. By Gandhi's own submission, he could not control her even when he tried to, "*she was simple, independent, preserving and, with me at least, reticent*".⁵² Kasturba stayed determined in what she believed in even when she was in the public eye. She was patient and despite young Mohandas accusing her of infidelity, she stayed put and bore the mental torture with great forbearance. Along with other things that women in his life taught him, Gandhi embarked upon the concept of non-violence *Ahimsa*, and *Satyagraha*. Kasturba was an epitome of a common middle-class woman. She was brought up to think that her family and her husband were her duties and she had to do justice to them. She had to do everything in her power even if it meant changing her ideals and moving into the public sphere. Mahatma Gandhi often refers to Kasturba as illiterate or barely literate or uneducated. She surely was not a woman of letters but then women's education despite many efforts made by reformers was not really a priority for a middle-class family. It appears that Kasturba's transition into the public sphere was not organic and voluntary.

Anasuyaben Sarabhai got national recognition as one of the important personalities from Gujarat in the twenty-first century. Although she was influenced by Gandhi, she was not Gandhian. Belonging to an affluent family, young Anasuya was married off at a young age. However, unlike other girls of her time who were unhappy with their marriage, Anasuyaben

⁵¹ Gandhi, A. and Gandhi, S. (1998). *The Forgotten Woman: The Untold Story of Kastur Gandhi, Wife of Mahatma Gandhi*. Ozark Mountain Publishing; Gandhi, A. (1998). *Daughter Of Midnight-The Child Bride of Gandhi*. Kings Road Publishing.

⁵² Gandhi, M.K. and Desai, M. (1976). 32

ended her marriage by divorcing her husband. It is unclear as to what were the conditions which led to a divorce or what were the responses of her family.⁵³ However, not being married perhaps provided Anasuyaben with opportunities that she otherwise would not have had. She went to England for higher studies in 1912 where she was deeply influenced by the socialist ideas. Despite the fact that she came from the class of capitalists, Anasuyaben's entry into public space was to work for the working classes. Anasuya opened a night school for the *Harijan* children in the mill area of Ahmedabad.⁵⁴ Anasuya would visit the Gandhi ashram occasionally; she had a keen interest in the *khadi* work and she generously contributed to its cause. However, when a strike erupted in her brother's Ambala Sarabhai plant, her emotions were stirred, and she expressed her strong indignation to Gandhi. She firmly believed that the workers had legitimate grievances, whereas Ambalal Sarabhai vehemently denied any such claims. In response to this industrial and domestic conflict, Gandhi chose to employ *Satyagraha* and he started fasting on which Anasuya also joined him. Inspired by her leadership for the Ahmedabad textile mill, Gandhi embarked on a fast, not as a form of protest, but to find a higher moral and spiritual basis for a resolution.⁵⁵

Anasuya's involvement in the labor movement and her connection to Gandhi played a significant role in these events, highlighting the importance of their shared commitment to social justice and peaceful conflict resolution. Anasuya Sarabhai stood alongside Mahatma Gandhi in 1919 as he crafted a fresh *Satyagraha* pledge in opposition to the Rowlatt Act. Notably, she was among the initial three individuals to affix her signature to this powerful statement of nonviolent resistance.⁵⁶

Anasuya and Kasturba adopted the language, customs, and values that could effectively educate the rural women about the *Satyagraha* technique. For example, during a speech in Vadthal village on April 6th, 1918, Kasturba Gandhi said "*The true religion of a woman is to follow the footsteps of her husband like Sati Sita... If she also encourages her husband to stick to the sacred pledge (of non-payment of the revenue-dues), her progeny is sure to be brave and India will then win Swaraj*".⁵⁷ She encouraged women to stand by their husbands in their sacred

⁵³ Basu, A. (2020). *Anasuya Sarabhai (1885—1970)*. In *So Many Words*. Routledge India.49-64

⁵⁴ Basu, A. (2018).107

⁵⁵ Morton, E. (1954). *Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi*. Max Reinhardt, London.109

⁵⁶ Basu, A. (2018) .16

⁵⁷ Parikh, S. (1922). *Khodani Ladat*.Navajivan. Ahmedabad. 221

pledge of non-payment of revenue-dues, emphasizing that such actions would contribute to the bravery of their future generations and the ultimate achievement of Swaraj, or self-rule for India. Similarly, Ansuyaben, who had returned from England, addressed a gathering of women in Navali. She reminded them that they were the better halves of their husbands and emphasized their duty to uplift the moral courage of the Kheda peasants. These messages aimed to instill a sense of unity, purpose, and determination among the women, aligning their efforts with the broader goals of the Kheda *Satyagraha*.⁵⁸ Through their speeches and adoption of *khadi* attire, Kasturba and Ansuyaben played a crucial role in inspiring rural women to actively participate in the *Satyagraha* movement. Their relatable language and relaying of shared values helped bridge the gap between urban and rural women, fostering a sense of camaraderie and collective action in the pursuit of justice and independence.

Gandhi also encouraged women to organize *Bhajan Mandali* or singing of devotional songs. This was a success as the participation of rural women in these gatherings was particularly remarkable, leaving a strong impression on the movement. Vithalbhai Patel also took note of the determination of women and commented “*women have become real kshatriyas, they are not going to budge an inch even though their land, cattle, and household material will be confiscated by the government.*”⁵⁹ Kheda *Satyagraha* was successful in bringing the elite women leaders to mobilize the rural women for the further freedom struggle. As it can be seen the Gandhian movement that women inhabiting rural areas also abandoned seclusion and joined hands with the national leaders.

Gandhi's efforts to bridge the gap between urban and rural women, as well as his call for a broader political consciousness among women, aimed to create a more inclusive and united movement, can be seen in the other mass movements. He recognized the importance of addressing the needs and aspirations of the majority, rather than solely focusing on the educated elite. By encouraging closer connections and understanding between different segments of society, Gandhi sought to empower women across all backgrounds and inspire them to actively participate in the larger struggle for independence and social change.⁶⁰ By the onset of 1918, Gandhi had crystallized his perception of the role women should play in the freedom struggle,

⁵⁸ Parikh, S. (1922). 150

⁵⁹ Parikh, S. (1922). 277

⁶⁰ Mehta, V. (1993). *Mahatma Gandhi and his apostles*. Yale University Press. London. 51; Johnson, R. L. (Ed.). (2005). *Gandhi's experiments with truth: Essential writings by and about Mahatma Gandhi*. Lexington Books. Pennsylvania. 96

firmly believing that they were most suited for his *Satyagraha* battles against foreign rule. He recognized that the *Satyagraha* technique hinged on three essential qualities: self-sacrifice, non-violence, and sincerity, all of which he believed women possessed in abundance. Gandhi argued that these qualities were inherently associated with the traditional roles of women, making them natural carriers of these virtues.⁶¹ Women had another opportunity to prove their worth in the public spaces.

During the Non-Cooperation movement, Gandhi initiated both social and political programs to paralyze the government. Women played a significant role in these programs, which formed an important part of Gandhi's strategy. They actively participated in both the boycott movements and the constructive programs, playing an important role in shaping and implementing these initiatives. Their involvement helped mobilize communities, spread awareness, and contributed to the broader goals of the freedom struggle.⁶²

Gandhi, accompanied by Kasturba and Anasuya Sarabhai,⁶³ traveled from village to village in Gujarat, spreading his message. He called upon women to engage in spinning, wear *Khadi* (handspun and homemade cloth), boycott government schools, and eradicate untouchability. Gandhi urged women to sign pledges of non-cooperation and encouraged the formation of spinning clubs. Through the act of spinning, he aimed to empower women by instilling in them the principles of *Swadeshi* (self-sufficiency), opposition to foreign rule, and active participation in the political process. Spinning could be practiced by individuals at home or in public, regardless of education, social status, or wealth. It brought the concept of *Swadeshi* directly into the household, emphasizing the vital role of women in upholding the vow of self-reliance.⁶⁴ Gandhi believed that without the support and active involvement of women, men alone would be unable to fulfill the goals of the Swadeshi Movement. Women, both young and old, from towns and villages choose actions that were meaningful to them, such as attending meetings, abstaining from schools and colleges, persuading shopkeepers to boycott foreign cloth and liquor, contributing their jewelry to the Tilak Swaraj Fund, or making a commitment to wearing *khadi*.

⁶¹ Mehta, V. (1993). 29

⁶² Mehta, S. (1984). *Peasantry and Nationalism; A Case Study of Bardoli Satyagraha*. Manohar. New Delhi. 58

⁶³ Basu, A. (2018). 44

⁶⁴ Ibid.33

During this, Gandhi wrote about women in *Navjivan* and started begging for money at Dakor and fortunately, I made a beginning with women. Among them the sister who first gave me a piece of jewelry made a living by grinding flour for others. When she took off her earring and handed it over to me, that same moment, I was convinced that India's women had understood the holy nature of peaceful non-cooperation. The experiences which followed were marvelous indeed. Girls in Ahmedabad parted with their Bangles, Rings, and Chains. In Poona, they showered jewelry on me. There were similar scenes in Belgaum, Dharwar, and Hubli. Muslim women from behind purdah, gave jewelry, currency notes, and cash.⁶⁵ He propagated the idea of *Swaraj* and *Khadi*. He proposed the idea of swadeshi to women. To which women responded all over Western India. There have been few women who took leadership since then. Unfortunately, their names have been lost in the pages of history. These women through their sheer will were able to smoothly move into the public space. They came from all walks of life and upheld the mantle to provide support to the movement. They were influenced by Gandhi and his ideas but mostly they had the will to bring about a change in the freedom struggle.

Women like Jaiji Jehangir Petit, Avantikabai, Goshiben Captain, Periben and Kantaben Mehta, etc, provided leadership to different movements and in the process also launched institutions. In June 1920, women gathered under the leadership of Jaiji Petit to express their concerns about the atrocities in Punjab. Their voices were heard, and it sparked the declaration of the national *Satyagraha* week from April 6th to 13th in 1920. During this week, Sarojini Naidu, a prominent women leader, delivered impactful speeches at women's meetings, mobilizing them for action. On the concluding day, a meeting of 500 women took place at the *Marwari Vidyalaya* Hall, where the decision to establish the '*Rashtriya Stree Sabha*' (National Women's Association) was made. This organization aimed to guide and direct women's involvement in the Non-Cooperation Movement.⁶⁶ In November 1921, when the Prince of Wales planned to visit Bombay, women again took a stand. Under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu, around one thousand women gathered to oppose and condemn the prince's visit strongly. They called for a comprehensive boycott of all events associated with his visit, demonstrating their unwavering resistance to British rule.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Transcript of Oral History Interview with Smt. Vijyalakshmi Pandit, NMML.*

⁶⁶ Basu, A. (2018). *Women in Satyagraha*.48

⁶⁷ *Ibid*.48

From 1920-21 onwards, Avantikabai Gokhale, a prolific Gandhian, became deeply involved in the Non-Cooperation Movement. Through the use of *charkha*, she was able to inspire rural women to participate in the protest. Avantikabai also worked towards abolishing the *purdah* system, which enforced seclusion among the women of Champaran and the surrounding villages.⁶⁸ Mahatma Gandhi, while acknowledging the significant work carried out by Avantikabai, remarked, "*Thanks to the efforts of Avantikabai and the other ladies, it becomes possible to reach the village women.*"⁶⁹

Avantikabai had understood that the message of *Swadeshi* would inspire a larger number of women to the cause of national movement. She kept up with that with great discipline and made efforts to promote *khadi* during her tenure as a member of the Bombay Corporation from 1922 to 1931. She managed to successfully pass two significant resolutions regarding *Swadeshi*. The first resolution mandated that students in the corporation schools be taught spinning; while the second made it compulsory for members and employees of the Corporation to use *khadi*.⁷⁰ The government recognized her services and offered her an honorary position of *Justice of Peace*, which she declined, stating that it was a form of government service.⁷¹ Avantikabai was the only member of the Corporation who attended nearly all meetings, consistently advocating for the upliftment of backward classes. Her dedication and contributions to the Corporation were acknowledged in a general meeting when one Mr. Clayton, the Municipal Commissioner, praised her, stating that the meeting had gained prestige due to Avantikabai's presence.⁷²

Avantikabai continued to work with the Indian National Congress even during the time of the Civil Disobedience Movement. For instance, Avantikabai Gokhale was present in a meeting of the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress held on January 15, 1928.⁷³ On January 28th, a public meeting of women took place in Bombay, organized by the Bombay Provincial Home Committee and *Rashtriya Stree Sabha*, a women's organization. The meeting

⁶⁸ Chaudhary, C. P. (1986). *Gandhi and His Contemporaries*. Sterling Publishers, Pvt.Ltd. New Delhi. 2nd edition.22

⁶⁹ Gandhi., M.K., *My Experiment with Truth*; Desai, M. (1977). *Pragatichya Nikashavar*(Marathi). Sadhna Prakashan Poona. 49

⁷⁰ *Stree*. November. (1930).

⁷¹ Tivari, V. (1974). *Adarsh Hind Mahila*(Marathi).Vinus Prakashan, Bombay.64.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Maharashtra State Archive. Home Department Special. File No.143(k)-Pt.IV(a).

was chaired by Sarojini Naidu and attended by approximately seventy-five women.⁷⁴ Several speeches were delivered by prominent figures including Avantikabai Gokhale. They urged the women to contribute to the success of the *hartal* (strike) by encouraging the male members of their families to participate and by suspending their own work. Avantikabai specifically advised the women to refuse to cook food if their men insisted on going to work on that day.⁷⁵

Another important personality, Goshiben Captain, also contributed greatly to the cause of the Indian freedom struggle. Goshiben was a Parsi woman who completed her education at Oxford in 1911 and she was full-fledged involved in the national movement after returning from there. Goshiben being the granddaughter of Dadabhai Naroji⁷⁶ lacked no motivation and inspiration. Goshiben Captain, made a significant shift in her wardrobe by replacing her silk sarees with *khadi* garments. She actively engaged in the spinning and selling of *khadi* in Bombay, actively promoting the use of this locally produced fabric.⁷⁷

Goshiben joined the *Rashtriya Stree Sabha*, as its Vice Chairperson.⁷⁸ Goshiben was also associated with the women's wing of *Satyagraha* during the civil disobedience movement. She also took an active part in the All-India Village Industries board and served as the chairman in 1946 and 1954. She also took charge of *Hindustani Prachar Sabha* in 1958.⁷⁹

Similarly, one Gujarati woman Indumati Chimanlal was a student at Gujarat Vidyapeeth during the Non-cooperation Movement. She was deeply inspired by the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi and other prominent leaders such as Acharya Gidwani and Acharya Kriplani, who actively participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement in India. After leaving Gujarat Vidyapeeth in 1926, Indumati Chimanlal dedicated herself to the C N VidyaVihar Educational Institute. This institute primarily focused on providing education to rural boys in Ahmedabad. During that time, India was also witnessing the Foreign Cloth Boycott Movement, and Indumati actively

⁷⁴ Maharashtra State Archive. Home Department Special. File No.143(k)-Pt.IV(a).173

⁷⁵ Ibid.81,161

⁷⁶ Forbes, G., & Forbes, G. H. (1999). *Women in Modern India* (Vol. 2). Cambridge University Press. Cambridge 133

⁷⁷ Forbes, G. H. (2005). *Women in Colonial India: Essays on politics, medicine, and historiography*. Orient Blackswan.47

⁷⁸ Interview: Mrs. G. Captain, part I. (n.d). *The Centre of South Asian Studies*.
<https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-g-captain-part-1/6>

⁷⁹ Ibid.<https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-g-captain-part-1/1>

participated in it, advocating the use of *khadi*, a locally produced fabric.⁸⁰ In her interview Indumati Chimanlal told Mr.Shankar that the women of Ahmedabad, particularly the young women, played a pivotal role in this movement, displaying great enthusiasm and support. It is worth noting that during those days, women, especially young women, were hesitant to step out of their homes. However, through the efforts of Gandhiji and other leaders, the societal attitude towards women's participation in public life gradually shifted. Women started emerging from their homes, not only to fight for national freedom but also to challenge oppressive customs and practices prevalent in society.⁸¹

Indumati shared her personal experience of facing numerous restrictions imposed on women venturing into public spaces and engaging in political activities or even going to prison. As the only child of her widowed mother, Indumati faced resistance from her mother regarding her involvement in public activities. However, her elder sister and cousin, Anasuyaben Sarabhai a prominent social and political worker and a follower of Gandhiji, inspired and encouraged her to pursue her aspirations.⁸² For women like Indumati Chimanlal, these constructive movements became a means of attaining personal freedom. By challenging British rule, they not only sought national liberation but also emancipation from societal constraints. Their active presence in public spaces was now valued, as they stood side by side with men in the freedom struggle. It marked a significant shift in the recognition and appreciation of women's contributions to the nation-building process.

Indumati shared that a significant number of women actively participated in processions organized for the foreign cloth movement. Moreover, in rural areas, particularly along the Gujarat Sea coast, many women enthusiastically took part in the salt *Satyagraha* movement.⁸³ These courageous women not only engaged in protests but also embraced other activities such as spinning and weaving. They recognized the importance of self-reliance and self-sufficiency; promoted indigenous industries and traditional crafts. By actively participating in spinning and

⁸⁰ Interview: I Chimmnalal.(n.d).The Centre of South Asian Studies.
<https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/collection/i-chimanlal/2>

⁸¹ Interview:I CHIMANLAL. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/collection/i-chimanlal/2>

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

weaving, they demonstrated their commitment to the cause of *swadeshi* (indigenous production) and the ideals advocated by Mahatma Gandhi.⁸⁴

The involvement of women in these movements was instrumental in shaping public opinion and contributing to the overall success of the non-cooperation and *Swadeshi* movements. Their active participation symbolized their determination to challenge oppressive practices and contribute to the greater cause of freedom and self-determination.

Outside the influence of greater political leaders, women on their own began to join together and participate in the non-freedom struggles as well. A large number of women made a common cause with freedom fighters but stuck to issues that were important to them. For instance, in Maharashtra, women got themselves involved in the Mulshi dam project.⁸⁵ The participation of women in the Mulshi *Satyagraha* was not only significant but also groundbreaking. It marked a pivotal moment as, for the first time, women in Maharashtra joined together as a group to actively participate in the non-cooperation movement. This was the first time that women were sentenced to imprisonment.

Women such as Jaibai Bhoi, Janakibai Ghaisas,⁸⁶ and Sarswatibai Bhuskute who along with her young baby and mother-in-law, traveled from Poona to participate. She led a procession towards the blasting site and positioned herself near the blasting area, where she sustained injuries and was arrested. Annapurnabai Ghare also participated despite having a little baby. Other women such as Parvatibai Parchure and Vaishampayan from Chembur also actively participated in the movement.⁸⁷

During the Mulshi *Satyagraha*, a total of 425 *Satyagrahis* were arrested out of which eleven were women.⁸⁸ The women who participated in the Mulshi *Satyagraha* made a remarkable and indelible contribution to the movement. Their involvement shattered the barriers of traditional gender roles and brought about a transformative change in society. With great courage and determination, these women stepped forward, joining the Non-Cooperation movement alongside their male counterparts. They marched, picketed, and faced physical assaults,

⁸⁴ Interview: I CHIMANLAL. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/collection/i-chimanlal/3>

⁸⁵ Bhuskute, V.M. (1968). *Mulshi Satyagraha*. Pune: Dastane (in Marathi). Introduction.9,217

⁸⁶ Ibid.113

⁸⁷ Ibid.172

⁸⁸ Ibid.244-249

demonstrating their unwavering commitment to justice and freedom. During this period, however, women's organized forums like the *Mahila Parishad* gained strength and held meetings moving step by step towards movement from private to public space. The opportunity came forth in the form of Bardoli Satyagraha once again.⁸⁹

The Bardoli Satyagraha is too well known to be repeated here. On 12th February 1928, the peasants of Bardoli *taluka* rose in revolt against the government's imposition of arbitrary and unjustly high land revenue. Vallabhbhai Patel assumed leadership of the movement only after local leaders assured him that women would comprise at least fifty percent of the audience in mass meetings. This decision was influenced by the spirited involvement of women in the earlier Kheda movement. Women from various backgrounds were actively engaged in the Bardoli taluka movement, including high-caste Anavil and Patidar women, as well as oppressed tribal and Koli women. Their participation played a significant role in shaping and advancing the struggle for justice and fair treatment in Bardoli.⁹⁰

High-caste women performed the *puja* ceremony, while Kaliparaj women sang devotional songs and applied an auspicious *tilak* mark on the leader's foreheads.⁹¹ Vallabhbhai Patel played a crucial role in ensuring the campaign's success by establishing a cohesive and well-organized structure. He created power structures at three different levels and actively involved both elite women and local peasant women, ensuring their participation and representation at every level of decision-making and action.

In Bardoli there were three levels into which different leaders were divided.⁹² The Bardoli campaign employed a system of divisional or camp leaders to organize the taluka and its 137 villages effectively. In these elite women were actively involved in the movement, often accompanying their husbands or male family members. Vallabhbhai himself was joined by his daughter, Maniben, while Shardaben participated alongside her husband Sumant Mehta. Bhaktiba and Gunvantiben also joined their husbands, Darbar Gopaldas and Champaklal Ghia, respectively. Gangaben Lallubhai Patel and Chanchalben Ravjibhai Patel, representing the Kheda district, also went to Bardoli. Additionally, three Parsi ladies named Freny, Shirin, and

⁸⁹ *Anavil Sevak*. January, February 1924. Surat; *Anavil Pokar*. October 1925. Bombay Vol. 2, No. 10. 2

⁹⁰ Mehta, S. (1986). The Role of Women in the Peasant Movement of Gujarat: A Study in the Gandhian Phase, 1915—1928. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*. 47, 637–648. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44141614>

⁹¹ *Bardoli Satyagraha Patrika*. May, June, August. 1923

⁹² Mehta, S. (1984). 113

Jarben, representing the Student's Brotherhood, traveled from Bombay to lend their support to the cause. Together, these leaders, both men and women, worked towards the success of the Bardoli campaign.

The Bardoli campaign also included a crucial layer of link leaders, forming the second tier of the organizational structure. This cadre consisted of individuals from both outside the taluka and within it, and notably, several women were among their ranks. These link leaders played a pivotal role in connecting the different elements of the movement and ensuring effective communication and coordination. They acted as bridges between the divisional leaders and the grassroots level, helping to mobilize support and maintain a cohesive network throughout the campaign. Their involvement, including that of women, contributed to the overall strength and effectiveness of the Bardoli movement.

Volunteers played a crucial role in the Bardoli campaign. They were recruited from the local population and assigned various responsibilities to support the movement. Among their tasks were overseeing public meetings, distributing informational pamphlets and news bulletins, and organizing *Bhajan Mandalis* (devotional singing groups). Women from all social strata actively participated as volunteers, contributing their time, energy, and skills to the cause. Their involvement added diversity and strength to the movement, demonstrating the collective effort and determination of the community in Bardoli.

Vallabhbbhai Patel recognized the importance of women's participation in the Bardoli Satyagraha and ensured their active involvement at all levels of the movement. While the overall leadership remained in the hands of men, women were assigned significant roles and responsibilities. They accompanied their husbands on tours, addressed women's gatherings, and took charge of fundraising activities. Through their efforts, they were able to mobilize diverse groups of women and bring them into the core of the movement.⁹³

Bhaktiba, the wife of Darbar Gopaldas, a Patidar zamindar from Dhasa in Kathiawar, emerged as a prominent women leader during the Bardoli Satyagraha.⁹⁴ She had a strong influence over the Patidar women and played a crucial role in organizing them for the cause. Another influential figure, Shardaben Mehta, had already established a close connection with Gandhi prior to the Bardoli Satyagraha. Gandhi recognized her talents and dedication and

⁹³ Satishchandra, M. J. (1982). *Tapo-Murti Bhaktibano Sevayagna*. Navajivan Trust. Ahmedabad.

⁹⁴ Joshi, D. & Raval, M. (2014). *A brief Biography of Bhaktilaxmi Desai*. Navajivan Trust. Ahmedabad. 52

recommended her as the president of the Gujarat Social Reform Conference in Godhra in November 1917. Shardaben actively participated in the Bardoli Satyagraha, touring from village to village and contributing to the movement's success.⁹⁵

One of the most notable women leaders of the Bardoli Satyagraha was Mithuben Petit. Coming from the renowned industrialist Petit family in Bombay, she made Bardoli her home in 1922. Prior to the *Satyagraha*, Mithuben had established the *Stree Swaraj Sangh*, an organization that provided a strong platform for women in the Surat district. Under her compassionate guidance, a large number of women actively engaged in constructive work. Mithuben's prior experience and leadership within the *Stree Swaraj Sangh* proved invaluable during the Bardoli Satyagraha. She fearlessly addressed public meetings, organized Bhajan Mandalis (devotional singing groups), and supervised the activities of women participants. Her dedication and expertise played a crucial role in mobilizing women and ensuring their active involvement in the movement.⁹⁶

The second-tier leadership in the Bardoli Satyagraha included local women who worked closely with the outside women leaders. They held important positions as opinion leaders and functional leaders within their respective caste groups. For instance, Kunverben Patel from Orgam village in Bardoli taluka collaborated with Maniben Patel to mobilize Patidar women. Padmaben Desai and Shrimati Desai from the Anavil caste worked among Anavil women. Santokben Shah, Vidyaben Shah, and Premiben Shah led the Bania women, while Dindaben Chaudhri and Premiten Prajapat worked with tribal Kaliparaj women.⁹⁷ These local women leaders played a crucial role in achieving horizontal solidarity among their respective caste groups. Their efforts contributed to the collective ethos and progressive development of the movement, fostering a sense of unity and paving the way for effective mass action in Bardoli.

From April 1928 onwards, women began to outnumber men in the Bardoli Satyagraha, and they held separate meetings to strategize and contribute to the movement. Despite the government's attempts to create structural imbalances and disrupt the movement, these challenges only strengthened women's resolve and determination. Notably, even the Kaliparaj women, who were landless laborers, were included and actively participated in the broader

⁹⁵ Bhatt, M.P. (trans.), (2007). *Reminiscences: The Memoirs of Shardaben Mehta*. New Delhi: Zubaan. Translated from Gujarati and Introduction by Svati Joshi. 11, 210, 221

⁹⁶ Desai, I.I. (Ed). (1973). *Azadina Ghadvaiya*. Swatantriya Itihas Samiti, Surat. 229

⁹⁷ *Bardoli Satyagraha Patrika*. 17 May 1928

peasant struggle. This inclusive approach demonstrated the movement's commitment to representing and addressing the concerns of diverse sections of society.⁹⁸

In a powerful display of solidarity, the washerwomen and maidservants refused to work for the culprits, expressing their disapproval and support for the movement. The midwife also took a principled stand by refusing to attend to Harkishandas' pregnant wife. Keshavlal Sheth faced particularly dire consequences as his daughter was driven out of the house by her mother-in-law as a result of his involvement in the movement. These instances highlight the social repercussions faced by individuals and their families who actively participated in the Bardoli Satyagraha.⁹⁹

The women of Bardoli formed the third layer of the movement and actively participated as volunteers. Despite being among the worst affected by the confiscation of their property, they displayed remarkable courage and resilience. In an incident at Valod village, officers mistakenly attempted to enter the house of a potter, but his wife, Premiben, boldly confronted them and threatened legal action if they trespassed. Another woman named Ichhaben had her land taken away, leaving her with no other means of support. Undeterred, she bravely declared her reliance on the spinning wheel for her livelihood. These women exemplified the unwavering determination and willingness to face the consequences of their actions in the pursuit of justice.¹⁰⁰

Lilavati Munshi (wife of K.M. Munshi), Kumud Desai, and Gunvanti Ghia were prominent figures who made significant contributions to the Bardoli movement. Their involvement, along with many other women, played a pivotal role in shaping the course of the struggle. It is noteworthy that Bardoli marked a significant departure as it witnessed the active participation of simple, uneducated, and rural women in the freedom movement. These women, despite their lack of formal education and sophistication, courageously joined the struggle.¹⁰¹

The Bardoli movement not only paved the way for women's participation but also established a cadre of women leaders and a dedicated group of volunteers and workers. This movement became a unifying force, bridging the gap between the elite women and their common

⁹⁸ *Bardoli Satyagraha Patrika*. 17 May 1928.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 25 June 1928

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 30 July 1928

¹⁰¹ Desai, M. (1929). *The story of Bardoli*. Navajivan Press. Ahmedabad. 118

counterparts. Bardoli served as a catalyst, propelling women and their organizations to the forefront of the nationalist agitation, not only in 1930 during the Salt March but also in 1942 during the Quit India movement.

It paved the way for the formation of diverse cadres of women who actively participated in the movement. This bridging of the gap between city-based elites and rural women contributed to a more inclusive and cohesive struggle for justice and empowerment. The movement's triumph was not only evident in its immediate objectives but also in its long-lasting impact on women's leadership and solidarity across different social backgrounds.

Another prominent figure was Ushaben Mehta hailed from Surat. At a very young age of six years was influenced by Gandhi's non-violence preaching. Resistance was not something new for her. At the age of eight years Ushaben in 1928, participated in a protest march against the Simon Commission and shouted her first words of protest against the British Raj: "*Simon Go Back.*"¹⁰² As a child, she did not comprehend the significance of her actions except that she was participating in a movement to free her country under the leadership of Gandhi. She and many other children participated in morning protests against the British Raj and picketing in front of liquor shops. The children also did a little spinning. These activities inspired her to remain active in the freedom movement.

During one of the protest marches against the British Raj, the policemen charged the children, and a girl carrying the Indian flag fell. Wanting to respond to this incident, the children sought advice from their elders, who suggested that they buy *khadi* clothes in the tricolors of an Indian flag (white, green, and red). That night, the children got the shopkeepers to sell them cloth, and with the help of their elders, they stitched the uniforms. In the morning, they marched, shouting at the policemen: "*Policemen, you can wield your sticks and your batons, but you cannot bring down our flag.*"¹⁰³

In the Lahore session of 1929, the Indian National Congress embraced the objective of *Purna Swaraj*, signifying the aspiration for complete independence. Additionally, the Indian National Congress authorized the adoption of Civil Disobedience, which entailed the deliberate defiance

¹⁰² Joshi, N. (Ed.). (2017). *Freedom Fighters Remember*. Publications Division Ministry of Information & Broadcasting. 173

¹⁰³ Thakkar, U. (2021). *Congress Radio: Usha Mehta and the Underground Radio Station of 1942*. Penguin Random House India Private Limited. 230

of government laws. However, the responsibility for determining the timing and approach of this defiance was entrusted entirely to Mahatma Gandhi, acknowledging his leadership and strategic guidance in the freedom struggle. He began with the breaking of salt law by marching from Sabarmati ashram to Dandi. During this, he refused to take any women in the march.¹⁰⁴

Khurshedben Naoroji, the granddaughter of Dadabhai Naoroji, expressed her frustration and penned a letter to Gandhi questioning his decision to prevent women from breaking the Salt Law.¹⁰⁵ This was also reported by Margaret's cousins in *Stree Dharma*, "*In these stirring, critical days of India's destiny, there should be no watertight compartments of service. Women asked that no conferences, congresses, or commissions should be held without the presence of women. Similarly, women must ask that no marches, no imprisonments, no demonstrations organized for the welfare of India should prohibit women from a share in them.*"¹⁰⁶ Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya met Gandhi during his march near Jambusar and requested him to allow women in this march. As she said to him, "It is because I have been in their world which is confined to the four walls. This is their chance to emerge and realize their strength."¹⁰⁷ With this Gandhi wrote a letter as a word to let everyone join the movement.¹⁰⁸

Thus in salt *Satyagraha* Kamaladevi and Avantikabai Gokhale were the first women to break the salt law.¹⁰⁹ Kamaladevi, Lilavati Munshi, Lady Purshottamdas Thakurdas, and four other women made a remarkable impact when they entered the Bombay High Court and caused a sensation by selling packets of forbidden salt in the Bar Library and Pleader's room.¹¹⁰ Goshiben in her interview said that women were making salt long before the Dandi March. She said that the "*the Dandi March marked a significant moment in our movement. Every morning, our women would gather with their pots and collect salt water to make salt in their own chulhas (ovens). However, the outcome was minimal—a mere spoonful of salt obtained at the expense of a considerable amount of fuel.*" In the interview, she did provide justification for Gandhi not including them in the Dandi March. She said that Gandhiji's intention was to instill bravery

¹⁰⁴ Basu, A. (2018). 57

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.58

¹⁰⁶ Taneja, A. (2005). *Gandhi, women, and the National Movement, 1920-47*. Har-Anand Publications.123

¹⁰⁷ Basu, A. (2018). 61

¹⁰⁸ Chattopadhyaya, K. (2014). *Inner Recesses Outer Spaces*. Niyogi Books, New Delhi.149-151

¹⁰⁹ Basu, A. (2018). *Women in Satyagraha*.62

¹¹⁰ Basu, A. (2018).64

in women, and he believed that this method of *Satyagraha* presented an opportunity for women to exhibit greater courage in action than men. However, due to critics that might accuse men of hiding behind women, he made the decision not to include women in the Dandi March.¹¹¹

In Gujarat, where women played a significant role, dedicated classes were initiated at Sabarmati Ashram to provide training for women satyagrahis. To promote the boycott of foreign cloth, an organization called the '*Videsh Kapad Bahishkar Samiti*' was established in Ahmedabad, with Saraladevi Sarabhai serving as President and Mridula Sarabhai as Secretary. The *Samiti* organized daily processions, where women proudly wore saffron saris adorned with volunteer badges, conducted meetings, and distributed cyclostyled sheets throughout the city to raise awareness about the cause.¹¹²

During the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930 Avantikabai Gokhale emerged as a leader on the War Council. She organized a meeting at Azad Maidan in Bombay where women were subjected to police lathi charges. The government subsequently arrested them and abandoned them in the jungle of Bhandup, a suburb of Bombay. Despite facing such hardships and police brutality, Avantikabai and her colleagues persevered in their work, fearlessly organizing picketing activities, meetings, and more. On numerous occasions, she joined Hansaben Mehta in Bhendi Bazar for picketing, demonstrating their unwavering determination in the face of adversity.¹¹³

The women volunteers took active measures to promote *Swadeshi*. They collected foreign cloth and ignited bonfires, symbolically discarding them. Dedicated volunteers went door to door, collecting signatures for the *Swadeshi* pledge. Women stood outside shops that sold foreign cloth and liquor, urging customers to refrain from purchasing them. They also intercepted trucks and carts transporting liquor and foreign clothes. In one instance, upon learning that a large quantity of liquor was being brought into Ahmedabad for auction, women mobilized to prevent its distribution. Despite their valiant efforts, some of the women volunteers were arrested before they could act and were subsequently taken to jail.

Mridula Sarabhai took a strong stance against gender inequality, injustice, oppression, and discrimination experienced by women both within their families and in society. In 1934, she

¹¹¹ Interview: Mrs G. Captain – Part 1. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-g-captain-part-1/7>

¹¹² *Prajabandhu*. May 11-25, 1930

¹¹³ Government of Maharashtra. Home Department Special. File No.143(k)-Pt.IV(a)-81,161

founded '*Jyoti Sangh*,' a women's organization in Ahmedabad, with the foundation stone laid by Gandhi himself in the premises of Ambalal Sarabhai's residence, Shanti Sadan, in Mirzapur. The name '*Jyoti Sangh*' symbolized its mission of bringing light and enlightenment to women, offering them opportunities for physical and mental development, fostering self-confidence, and promoting self-reliance. Led by women and working for women, '*Jyoti Sangh*' focused on various aspects such as education, vocational training, entrepreneurship, the establishment of libraries dedicated to women, and organizing lectures by esteemed speakers. The organization published a magazine called '*Jyoti Putra*,' which featured articles addressing women's status, oppressive traditions, the need for reforms, and more. Mridula possessed the ability to train women from diverse backgrounds, and she assembled a dedicated and loyal team of workers, including Charumati Yoddha, Hemlata Hegishte, Perin Mistry, Udayprabha Mehta, Pushpaben Mehta, and Vidyaben Mehta. One of the pioneering aspects introduced by '*Jyoti Sangh*' was family counseling, which aimed to address issues within troubled families. The organization provided practical and effective solutions, often preventing the escalation of abuse against women and the disintegration of families.¹¹⁴

Mridula, known for her fearless demeanor, fearlessly seized the reins of a cart's horses, halting its progress, and was also arrested. The '*Rashtriya Stree Sabha*,' a women's organization, spearheaded an intensive campaign to propagate the ideals of *Swadeshi*.¹¹⁵ Classes were initiated for underprivileged women, focusing on teaching them the art of embroidering *khadi*. The embroidered *khadi*, along with other *khadi* goods, was then sold by the members as part of their efforts to promote *swadeshi*. In Ahmedabad, prominent leaders such as Kasturba, Sarladevi Sarabhai, Indumati Sheth, Mithuben Petit, Nanduben Kanuga, and Khurshedben Navroji played pivotal roles. To further advance their cause, a picketing association was established, with Shardaben Mehta serving as President, and Mridula Sarabhai and Indumati Sheth assuming the responsibilities of Secretaries.¹¹⁶

In January 1970, a significant initiative was initiated under the guidance of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan to establish an organization akin to the *Khudai Khidmatgars*, dedicated to fostering communal harmony. Mridula played an active role in the establishment of this organization, named "*Tansani Biradari*" or "*Human Brotherhood*." The primary objective of this

¹¹⁴ Basu, A. (2003).70-74

¹¹⁵ Times of India. April 24 - May 2,1930

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

organization was to promote a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect among all individuals in India, regardless of their religious beliefs, cultural backgrounds, or ways of life.¹¹⁷

Mridula's involvement in this endeavor reflected her dedication to bridging divides and cultivating understanding among different communities. She worked tirelessly to encourage inclusivity, acceptance, and empathy, aiming to create a society where people embraced and respected each other's diverse religious traditions, cultural practices, and lifestyles. Her contributions in promoting communal harmony and nurturing the values of tolerance and mutual respect left a lasting impact on the fabric of Indian society. Her efforts were aimed at reminding them of the principles of non-violence and the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, urging them to consider the futility and detrimental consequences of their intended actions. Mridula worked passionately to convince them that pursuing the path of violence would ultimately undermine their cause and betray the ideals they purported to support.

Women persisted in their picketing activities, undeterred by government ordinances that attempted to prohibit such actions. Young girls and children formed *Vanar senas* and organized *prabhat pheris* (morning processions) throughout the city, singing patriotic songs. Women actively participated in these activities in large numbers. While some women were from affluent families, such as wives or daughters of mill owners, the majority came from less privileged backgrounds. Take the example of Gangaben Vaidya, who became a widow at the young age of sixteen. Inspired by Gandhi's struggle in South Africa, she met him in Bombay and became a resident of Sabarmati Ashram. Leading a procession of 1200 women in Borsad, Gangaben faced a brutal lathi charge, enduring severe beatings and profuse bleeding. Despite the hardships, she remained steadfast, refusing to let go of the tricolor flag she carried. Gangaben continued her involvement in the freedom struggle, enduring multiple arrests and imprisonments until 1934. Afterward, she settled in Bocharan and dedicated herself to constructive work in rural areas.¹¹⁸

Yashodabai Bhat dedicated seven years of her life as the secretary of *Azad Hind Mahila Samaj*, an organization established by Avantikabai Gokhale in Bombay. She possessed the skill of delivering *Kirtanas*, which she utilized for social, educational, and political purposes. Through her *Kirtanas*, she collected contributions for various institutions such as the *Shraddhanand Mahila Ashram* in Bombay, the Orphanage of Pandharpur, and the *Swadeshi Sangh* Hostel of

¹¹⁷ Basu, A. (2003). 93

¹¹⁸ Basu, A. (2018). 73

the National Medical College. In 1930, she employed her Kirtan skills for the Indian National Congress. She embarked on tours to several places, including Satara, Poona, and Ichalkaranji, where she delivered Kirtanas and collected a sum of thirteen hundred rupees for the Congress. Yashodabai holds the distinction of being the first Marathi woman to serve as a member of the Executive Committee of the Indian National Congress.¹¹⁹

During a serious outbreak of non-violence in Sholapur, the Government declared Martial Law to restore order and regain control over the town. Yashodabai Bhat, despite her age, traveled to Sholapur and actively participated in the flag *Satyagraha*. Despite facing severe beatings from the police, she clung to the flag, refusing to let it go. Yashodabai was subsequently arrested and sentenced to one and a half years of imprisonment.¹²⁰ While she was ill during her time in jail, the Superintendent of the jail decided to release her. However, Yashodabai fearlessly expressed her willingness to sacrifice her life for the nation and refused to leave the confines of the jail.¹²¹

During the *Satyagraha* Movement, as Mahatma Gandhi envisioned a powerful demonstration of *Satyagraha* where women would stand alongside men. To realize this vision, Goshiben established Desh Sevika Sangh as a women-only organization. During this period, Gandhi summoned Goshiben to Navsari just before his imprisonment and conveyed an important message. He advised her to consult with male congressmen to understand their expectations from women but emphasized that she should not allow any interference. He entrusted Goshiben with the responsibility of empowering women and urged her to let them take charge of all the work.

Goshiben remained steadfast in following Gandhi's guidance until the end of the movement. One remarkable aspect was the sight of Kesariya women, dressed in saffron sarees, hailing from respectable backgrounds. They stood outside shops, holding their hands up and urging people not to make purchases or consume alcohol, as they were fighting for the country. This novel approach received a positive response from the majority of people. However, the male-dominated section of the Congress started taking notice of the *Desh Sevikas*. They viewed it as a potentially profitable venture and attempted to issue orders and instructions. Nevertheless,

¹¹⁹ *Stree*. September. 1936

¹²⁰ *Stree*. September, 1930 also refer to Apte, Radhabai. (1961). *Umatlehi Paule* (Marathi). Sadhana Prakashan. 174

¹²¹ *Stree*. September, 1930 also refer to Apte, Radhabai. (1961). 174

Goshiben firmly asserted her autonomy, stating that *Desh Sevikas* had own set of instructions to follow. During this time, Congress representatives approached them, and demanded the contribution of two *sevikas* to go to jail or fulfill other tasks, citing the honor of Congress being at stake. However, Goshiben maintained her agency and refused their demands.¹²²

In 1929, they initiated the process of mobilizing women through various means such as news dissemination, prayers, and handbills. Their objective was to establish the *Desh Sevika Sangh* as a volunteer force. Many middle-aged women who had never ventured outside their homes joined the movement. Initially, they had to assign a man to accompany these women and ensure their safe return home for the first few days. However, as time passed, these women gained tremendous courage and dedication. They actively participated in picketing activities from 8 am to 6 pm, focusing on boycotting foreign clothes and liquor. Interestingly, their approach to the liquor issue involved creating spaces where workers could gather, play games, and enjoy non-alcoholic beverages. If this model had been implemented throughout Bombay, it could have significantly mitigated the widespread problem of alcohol consumption.¹²³

Around the middle of 1930, when the Congress was declared illegal, a remarkable sight unfolded in Bombay. Led by Goshiben, a long procession of approximately 200 women, all dressed in *Kesariya* (saffron saree), walked through the streets. As they marched, flowers were thrown on us from the balconies. Despite the presence of the sergeants, they couldn't identify a specific person to apprehend as they inquired about the initiator of the procession. So, they settled for the explanation that it was started by the women of Bombay.¹²⁴

The objective of the *Sevikas* (volunteers) was to avoid any form of violence by our people. For instance, if the opposition placed boulders on the tramway tracks, it was the responsibility of the *Sevika* present there to remove them. On another occasion, when some individuals supporting violence and fostering hatred harassed two girls who were picketing outside Whiteway laid laws, a group of young and impulsive Englishmen intervened. Over hundred *Sevikas*, under Goshiben's guidance, went there to picket their picketers. As a result, nothing occurred, and everything proceeded peacefully. These women picketed the largest foreign cloth

¹²² Interview: Mrs G. Captain – Part 1. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-g-captain-part-1/7>

¹²³ Interview: Mrs G. Captain – Part 1. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-g-captain-part-1/7>

¹²⁴ Interview: Mrs G. Captain – Part 1. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-g-captain-part-1/8>

market in Bombay, perhaps even one of the biggest in India. The market was completely empty, with its gates closed, while *Sevikas* stood guard. The image of *Kesariya Sevika*, a beautiful middle-aged lady about whom Goshiben talked about in her interview was a Bhatia's lady, standing at the closed gate of Mulji Jetha Market, symbolized the triumph of nonviolence.¹²⁵

During the Civil Disobedience Movement Goshiben stayed for three months in Arthur Road Jail, over there Goshiben was placed in the same cell with low class women from the streets of Bombay. Despite their respect for us, there was a certain disconnect between them. Whenever the jail Superintendent, Mr. Laxton, would ask them why they came, these women would often proclaim, '*We came for the Congress.*'¹²⁶

Nargis, Goshiben's another sister, played an invaluable role in supporting Goshiben and Perin. Being a student at Oxford, she took charge of handling letters and correspondence on their behalf. She tirelessly worked alongside our sisters Perin and Khurshed, though she preferred to remain in the background due to her persistent health issues.¹²⁷ As the President of the B.P.C.C. in 1930 (Bombay Provincial Congress Committee), Perin displayed immense courage and dedication. The British authorities, hesitant to arrest a woman, refrained from taking action against her for three months, during which time she worked tirelessly to guide and steer the B.P.C.C. on the right path. Perin was the most active *Desh Sevika* from 1929, she gathered women who had seldom ventured outside their homes. They would rise early in the morning, joining her for long walks while singing patriotic songs and fostering a sense of unity. Gandhiji held Perin's courage and sincerity in such high regard that he once said to Goshiben that, "*I believe Perin is pure Gold.*" Her commitment and contributions to the cause of freedom were truly remarkable.¹²⁸ In 1929 or 1930 Perin was arrested and sent to Bijapur jail. She was sentenced for nearly two years, and she contracted Rhythmic Arthritis. Perin played a pivotal role in the establishment and operation of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha. While Bajan Babu served as the president and Kake Sahib provided valuable guidance and assistance, it was Perin who shouldered the majority of the work. In 1935, when the resolution was passed to merge

¹²⁵ Interview: Mrs G. Captain – Part 1. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-g-captain-part-1/9>

¹²⁶ Interview: Mrs G. Captain – Part 1. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-g-captain-part-1/14>

¹²⁷ Interview: Mrs G. Captain – Part 2. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-g-captain-part-2/22>

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Hindi and Urdu as Hindustani, as envisioned by Gandhiji, Perin recognized the importance of preserving the integrity of both languages. The British administration had encouraged Urdu to incorporate more Persian words, while Hindi leaned towards Sanskrit words, resulting in a language that was unrecognizable to speakers on both sides.

Perin's efforts bore fruit when the Bombay government recognized that individuals who passed the "*Quabil*" and "*Vidwan*" examinations conducted by the *Hindustani Prachar Sabha* were eligible for government services. This recognition provided a significant boost to the Sabha and its students, ensuring their eligibility for various government positions. Perin's commitment to promoting Hindustani as a unified language and her tireless dedication to the *Hindustani Prachar Sabha* left a lasting impact on language and cultural preservation in India.¹²⁹ But in spite of that she continued to work until her death till 1958. In the letter of condolence that Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to after Perin's death in 1958, he said that "*Perin was the most courageous person that he had met.*"¹³⁰

Similarly, Aloo Jehan Dastur in her interview said that during the *Satyagraha* movement, one of her remarkable observations was the significant participation of women in political activism. It challenged the prevailing notion that Indian women were confined primarily to their homes and kitchens. Mahatma Gandhi's influence seemed to work its magic on Indian women, inspiring them to actively engage in the movement. In Bombay, women from various social strata, including the aristocrats of Malabar Hill, the middle-class residents of Gurgaon, and even the poorest segments of society, participated wholeheartedly. They wielded small shovels and carried bags of salt, symbolizing their involvement in the cause. What was truly astonishing was that even women burdened with children bravely went to jail and, astonishingly, some even gave birth to infants while being in Bombay jail. Their commitment and sacrifice showcased the immense strength and determination of Indian women during the Salt *Satyagraha*.¹³¹

During the Civil Disobedience movement, Aloo Jehan Dastur was about to complete her Final School Leaving Examination. Coincidentally, news of Jawaharlal Nehru and other leader's arrest reached them on the day of her examination. This news naturally affected the focus of

¹²⁹ Interview: Mrs G. Captain – Part 2. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-g-captain-part-2/23>

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ *Collections » A. DASTUR*. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/collection/a-dastur/2>

the students, including A.J. Dastur, who was filled with excitement. Furthermore, A.J. Dastur had a personal reason to be motivated, as her brother, who was slightly older than her, made the courageous decision to abandon his studies and volunteer as a civil resistor with the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee.¹³²

The *Harijan Sevak Sangh* emerged at the beginning of the Civil Disobedience Movement, specifically originating from the historic Dandi March. In her interview with Mr. Shanker, Hansa Mehta explained that due to her responsibilities as a mother, she was unable to actively participate in the movement. Recognizing this constraint, Mahatma Gandhi suggested an alternative approach: engaging in the picketing of foreign shops, as such actions were not considered illegal at the time.

On the first day, they traveled by train to Bombay, where large groups of women had converged from various parts of the world. Inspired by this gathering, they collectively decided to establish the Women's *Desh Sevika Sangh*, dedicated to carrying out the task entrusted to them by Gandhiji. It was on the 1st of May 1930, that Hansa Mehta led the first group of *Desh Sevikas* in picketing shops located in the Bhuleshwar area of Bombay.¹³³

The *Desh Sevika Sangh* started with a significant number of women, around a thousand or so, who stepped forward to participate in the picketing work. Their efforts were highly successful, to the extent that the Government declared the *Desh Sevika Sangh* an illegal organization. This presented a dilemma for the women involved, as continuing the work meant engaging in illegal activities. Some women faced difficulties and had to discontinue their involvement.

However, as the Captain of the *Desh Sevika Sangh*, Hansa Mehta recognized that discontinuing the work would disrupt the progress they had made. Despite her responsibilities as a mother, she chose to persevere and continue picketing. During this time, Perin Captain, the President of the Bombay Congress Committee, invited Hansa Mehta to join the Congress, highlighting that both organizations were considered illegal bodies. Recognizing the common ground, Hansa Mehta was asked if she would accept a nomination as President of the Bombay Congress Committee once she was arrested. She took up the position and faced her first major challenge: organizing a procession on Tilak Anniversary Day, a significant Memorial Day. Hansa Mehta

¹³² *Collections » A. DASTUR*. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/collection/a-dastur/1>

¹³³ *Interview: Mrs Hansa Mehta – Part 1*. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-hansa-mehta-part-1/1>

led the procession from Chowpatty with the national flag of the Congress, marching towards Bori Bunder station, near the offices of the Municipality.¹³⁴

Upon reaching their destination, the procession encountered a large regiment of police on horseback who ordered them to disperse and not proceed further. Despite the heavy rain, the participants refused to comply and instead sat down on the spot. The courageous act attracted nearly a hundred thousand people, both men and women, who joined the procession. Throughout the night, they persevered, demonstrating their determination to uphold their cause despite the challenging circumstances.¹³⁵ Hansa Mehta's procession got the support of the All-India Working Committee of the Congress. They sat through the night, enduring rain and challenging circumstances. When the Working Committee members were arrested instead of her, Hansa Mehta took it upon herself to surrender and went to the spot.¹³⁶ Due to arrests of the working committee members Hansa Mehta gave a statement, that "*I would organize another procession*". Hansa Mehta's determination continued as they organized another procession that successfully crossed the boundary between the Fort and the city without obstruction. Her active engagement led to her nomination as a member of the All-India Working Committee of the Congress. When a meeting was scheduled in Delhi, she traveled there, accompanied by Kamala Nehru.¹³⁷ As Congress was an illegal organization so all the members were arrested and so upon her return to Bombay, Hansa Mehta was informed that there was a warrant for her arrest, which was carried out the next day. Due to not defending themselves against the legal case she was sentenced to three months of imprisonment.¹³⁸

Mahatma Gandhi's *mahima*, however, could not touch all women and there were many who were unable to resist the temptation of luxurious stress-free life. A case can be cited of Laxmiben, who was the adopted daughter of Mahatma Gandhi. She was the birth daughter of an untouchable named Mogabhai and was adopted by Mahatma Gandhi at the age of six months. This act was carried out as a part of his mission to spread awareness about the wider

¹³⁴ Interview: Mrs Hansa Mehta – Part 1. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-hansa-mehta-part-1/.1>

¹³⁵ Interview: Mrs Hansa Mehta – Part 1. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-hansa-mehta-part-1/.2>

¹³⁶ Interview: Mrs Hansa Mehta – Part 1. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-hansa-mehta-part-1/.3>

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

acceptability of the untouchables or Dalits.¹³⁹ Lakshmiben in her interview talks about her life as the daughter of Gandhi. The very fact that her name was lost from the pages of history books tells us that she did not really make a name for herself. This was not for the want of trying. She did participate in the freedom struggle during 1932, particularly during her time in jail, where she distributed leaflets, participated in processions and even was arrested and beaten by the police. Lakshmiben was taken to Jalalpur jail, known for its harsh treatment, where she was interrogated by an inspector and transferred to Surat jail. In court, they were given the option of a six-month prison sentence or a fine of ₹500. They chose imprisonment and were subsequently sent to Sabarmati jail, where they met Kasturba Gandhi. Kasturba was considered an “A” class prisoner, she would share bread and butter with them, as the jail food was terrible. After 17 days, they were transferred to Yerwada jail in Poona, despite protests from Kasturba. In Yerwada jail, they met Sarojini Naidu, who cared for them like Kasturba did. The food consisted of two *bajri rotis* per person per day, given only three days a week, which they would save to enjoy with jaggery and coconut oil during their occasional celebrations. The jail authorities deliberately made their food unappetizing by including foreign objects. They requested to cook their own food but were denied. Instead, they were given the task of stitching shirts for an English lady in the jail. Any mistake in the stitching would result in the girl having to undo all the stitches and start again. Eventually, their sentence came to an end, and they had the opportunity to meet Mahatma Gandhi, who playfully remarked on their increased size. Despite his attempts to persuade her to diet, Lakshmiben resisted, partly due to her lack of willpower. She fondly recalled her time in the *ashram*, where they would eat together, and Kasturba would encourage them to eat properly. Lakshmiben also mentioned an experiment she conducted with Gandhi, wherein she consumed raw food and grains for 15 days.¹⁴⁰ In her interview, Lakshmiben does talk about the strictness with which Gandhi treated her and even at one point in time cut her hair because she took time in reaching for the prayers. For Lakshmiben, association with Kasturba was more important than with Gandhi. She, like women of the time, was more interested in fashion and jewelry.

Other women who were not forcefully plucked from their surroundings but willingly adopted the Gandhian ideas made their respective names in the public spaces. For instance, Indumati Chimanlal expressed that Gandhi’s influence was transformative. According to her Gandhi

¹³⁹ Interview: *Lakshmiben – Part 1*. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-lakshmiben-part-1/>.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

brought about a cultural renaissance by revitalizing the realms of culture, education, and social life in Gujarat. Recognizing the importance of women's involvement in the freedom movement, Gandhi emphasized that their contribution should go beyond imprisonment and extend to the deeper realms of social life.¹⁴¹

Even in the Princely states, women showcased their passive participation. In Viramgam, Gujarat, in May 1930, a group of *satyagrahis* found themselves surrounded by the police for several hours under the scorching sun. Thirsty and in need of water, approximately 700 women formed a procession, balancing water pitchers on their heads to provide relief to the *satyagrahis*. However, the police intervened and disbanded the procession. Neil and Fletcher, two Englishmen overseeing the Kharaghoda salt works, along with Gholap, the District Magistrate, ordered mounted troops to disperse the women. As a result, the 700 women were subjected to lathi charges and caning.¹⁴² During the *Satyagrahas* in the states of Rajkot and Limbdi in 1938-39,¹⁴³ women exhibited remarkable activism.

According to Nehru, the extensive participation of women in the national struggle, in response to Gandhi's call, marked a significant social revolution. It provided women with a new purpose and instilled in them a profound sense of dedication and commitment. In *Discovery of India*, he wrote, “..A remarkable thing happened. One woman came in the front and took charge of the struggle. Here were these women, women of the upper or middle classes, leading sheltered lives in their homes-peasant women, working-class women, rich women-pouring out in their tens of thousands in defiance of government orders and police lathi..”¹⁴⁴

In 1939, with the onset of the Second World War in Europe, Gandhi held the belief that India should refrain from participating in the war unless the British Government made a definitive commitment to grant independence to India. As the British government was unwilling to make such a commitment, Gandhi decided to launch the Individual *Satyagraha*. This campaign was initiated during a challenging period when the scope for mass movements was severely restricted due to the Revolutionary Movements Ordinance enacted by the government. In response, Gandhi devised a limited campaign wherein carefully selected individuals would

¹⁴¹ Interview: I CHIMANLAL. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/collection/i-chimanlal/6>

¹⁴² Shah, M.K. (1974). *Viramgam Satyagraha*. Ahmedabad. 51-52

¹⁴³ Pathak, N.R. (1974). *Rajkot Satyagraha*, Ahmedabad ; Doshi, B. (1974). *Limbdi ni Ladhat*. Ahmedabad

¹⁴⁴ Nehru, J. (2008). *Discovery of India*. Penguin UK. 41

participate. The focus of this *Satyagraha* was more symbolic than practical, with participants delivering pre-prepared anti-war speeches adhering strictly to the prescribed guidelines. Gandhi emphasized that this movement aimed to assert the fundamental right to freedom of speech.

On 9th of August 1942 Quit India movement was started. At this time Gandhi was arrested. During this Kasturba Gandhi, who had never addressed a public meeting before, fearlessly stepped forward to take the place of Mahatma Gandhi, who was scheduled to address a mass meeting alone in Bombay. These mass meetings held at Shivaji Park were significant events at that time. Kasturba volunteered to speak because Gandhiji was under arrest.¹⁴⁵ Despite the police trying to block her path, Kasturba remained undeterred, insisting on her right to address the gathering. Her determination led to her arrest, and within a few hours, she joined her husband at the Aga Khan Palace in Poona. It was a remarkable transformation for Kasturba who had never ventured forth to speak in front of even a hundred people, was ready and willing to address tens and hundreds of thousands of them. This incident exemplified the miraculous empowerment of Indian women through political forces during the period of emancipation.¹⁴⁶

Another example can be cited of Savitri Madan, originally from Punjab, who relocated to Poona in 1936 after her marriage. Savitri Madan joined a school in Poona and eventually became the vice principal. During the Second World War, schools were asked to contribute funds, but she refused. In 1939, she participated in Gandhiji's Basic Education Movement and received six months of training at Mahila Ashram Wardha, where she had the opportunity to meet Gandhiji and learn lessons of bravery and strength.¹⁴⁷ During the Quit India Movement, she resigned from her school as she wanted to join the movement directly and actively too.¹⁴⁸ All the girls from the school came out. They wanted to know as to what they should do, and Savitri Madan replied "*Nothing, you must continue with your studies*". That day there was a full-fledged strike in the school and the girls walked quite a long way with Savitri Madan when they returned home. From that day until October 2, 1942, which marked Gandhi Jayanti week,

¹⁴⁵ *Collections » A. DASTUR*. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/collection/a-dastur/6>

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Interview: Mrs. Savitri Madan –Part1*. (n.d.-a). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-savitri-madan-part-1/9>

¹⁴⁸ *Interview: Mrs. Savitri Madan –Part2*. (n.d.-b). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-savitri-madan-part-2/13>

Savitri Madan established a small office at Dr. Datar's house in Sadashiv Peth. They held daily meetings and organized various programs. One of their tasks was delivering bulletins, and Savitri was among those assigned to this duty. They took precautions to ensure that the information they conveyed did not reach the police. Additionally, they sent information to individuals in jail, as the process of sending people to jail had commenced on 9th August. Tarabai Limaye and Lakshmibai Vaidya were helping Savitri Madan. Five girls from Agarkar High School had also left the school along with Savitri Madan to join the movement and in this, Sardar Raste's daughter Pramila Raste also joined them.¹⁴⁹

Savitri Madan took an active part in the Quit India Movement and during the movement only she had prepared herself for being sent to jail after her husband was arrested on the 15th of August. It was informed to Savitri Madan by Datar, who had been involved in Individual *Satyagraha*, that if she had to go to jail, her 15-month-old child should not be taken with her. It was explained that there would not be enough milk and the atmosphere would not be good enough.¹⁵⁰ She also sent her other three-year-old children to her sister-in-law's home. When asked about the possibility of pardon, Savitri Madan firmly stated that the question of pardon did not arise.¹⁵¹

Women considered jail as their second home. As Savitri mentions in her interview that once a woman went out and she came back again. When she asked her why she is again in she replied: "*Bai maje maher ahe*", that means the jail is my mother's house. Savitri Madan discovered that some women prisoners had a routine of coming to jail whenever they were pregnant because they received proper care, including medical attention and nourishment, which they lacked outside the prison. That woman told her that she is having her fifth child this time in jail.¹⁵²

In Jail the government initially permitted blood relations to visit each other. Savitri Madan applied to see her husband, but the request was initially denied, citing that a husband is not considered a blood relation. After persistent efforts from three women with their husbands in

¹⁴⁹ Interview: Mrs. Savitri Madan –Part2. (n.d.-b). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-savitri-madan-part-2/14>

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Interview: Mrs. Savitri Madan –Part2. (n.d.-b). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-savitri-madan-part-2/15>

¹⁵² Interview: Mrs. Savitri Madan –Part2. (n.d.-b). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-savitri-madan-part-2/17>

the same jail, the authorities allowed the visitation. However, they were instructed not to converse in Punjabi. To ensure compliance, a sentry who understood Punjabi was sent to monitor their conversations. Eventually, due to the inconvenience caused to the government, the visits and the need for Punjabi translation ceased and she was released in 1944.¹⁵³

Another example can be cited of Usha Mehta from Gujarat. Ushaben's participation in the freedom movement has been noted by many scholars. In 1942, Ushaben joined the Quit India Movement and ended her studies. In her interview, Ushaben states that, during the Quit India Movement, she and her colleagues realized the importance of having their own transmitter to support the freedom movement, as it would facilitate communication and spread the message of rebellion across the nation.¹⁵⁴ Ushaben and her colleagues recognized the significance of a transmitter for their cause and the possibility of reaching foreign countries excited them. However, they faced the challenge of acquiring funds. Some relatives offered their ornaments, but they were hesitant to accept. Eventually, they gathered their resources and approached a technician friend who agreed to build a transmitter. On August 14, 1942, they united, and their first radio broadcast started. The announcement that went on air was "*This is the Congress Radio, broadcasting on 42.3 megahertz from an undisclosed location in India.*"¹⁵⁵

However, the radio debacle could not go on for a longer period of time and on 12th November, 1942 they were arrested. Ushaben was sent to Yerwada jail and was released after four years in April 1946 when the Congress Government came to power. When she came out of jail, she was happy and proud as she had fulfilled Mahatma Gandhi's message of "*Do or Die*" and had contributed her humble efforts to the cause of freedom.¹⁵⁶

Anasuya Limaye from modern Maharashtra was a professor in a college. In 1942, she resigned from her job. Anasuya Limaye became a co-worker between the students and the Executive Committee of the Movement in Poona City. However, just ten days later, she was arrested and

¹⁵³ Interview: Mrs. Savitri Madan –Part2. (n.d.-b). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-savitri-madan-part-2/18-19>

¹⁵⁴ Interview: Dr Usha Mehta. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-dr-usha-mehta/.1>

¹⁵⁵ Interview: Dr Usha Mehta. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-dr-usha-mehta/.2>

¹⁵⁶ Interview: Dr Usha Mehta. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-dr-usha-mehta/.7-8>

her ability to contribute significantly was limited.¹⁵⁷ In jail, she encountered several challenging experiences, including overcrowding and strikes. The women's jail was packed beyond capacity, and they were locked up in a barracks with over 200 inmates. Faced with these conditions, they went on hunger strikes. During this time, women in jail engaged in collective reflection, reading books, and contemplating the future of the nation. Their thoughts revolved around their aspirations for a free and independent India. After her release from jail, she joined the *Rashtriya Seva Dal*, a youth organization that had actively participated in the freedom struggle and focused on constructive work. where she organized the women's wing. She served in the *Rashtriya Seva Dal* for nearly sixteen years.¹⁵⁸

Anasuya Limaye in her interview talked about, how it was uncommon for women from respectable families to perform on a stage. Typically, the dance performances were associated with lower-class women. However, the *Rashtriya Seva Dal* aimed to organize cultural squads that would educate people through entertainment. They aspired to involve women from respectable backgrounds, teaching through singing, dancing, and even the popular folk dance called *Tamasha*. The participation of young girls in these cultural squads required permission from their parents. The *Rashtriya Seva Dal* faced criticism for their efforts, and some performances had to be shut down due to improper behavior from the audience. However, as time passed, the cultural squads gained immense popularity, and people began requesting such programs in their own communities. The impact of these activities on village communities was significant. Women from the villages actively participated in work camps and public activities, fostering a new social outlook. These endeavors inspired them to develop a stronger national consciousness and a dedication to serving their nation and community.¹⁵⁹

Another prominent women figure, Hansa Mehta served in the Congress ministry in 1937 as the Parliamentary secretary of Education and Health Department.¹⁶⁰ Later on she joined Individual *Satyagraha*, which was started due to resentment as India was involved in the Second World War without people's consent. As part of the Individual *Satyagraha*, chosen individuals were

¹⁵⁷ A.S.Limaye. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/collection/a-s-limaye/2>

¹⁵⁸ A.S.Limaye. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/collection/a-s-limaye/4>

¹⁵⁹ A.S.Limaye. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/collection/a-s-limaye/5>

¹⁶⁰ Interview: Mrs Hansa Mehta – Part 1. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-hansa-mehta-part-1/5>

tasked with advocating against the war. Among them was Hansa Mehta, who was arrested in December 1940. She remained in jail for approximately five months until May 1941.¹⁶¹ Later with the launch of the Quit India movement all the leaders were arrested and so Hansa Mehta's husband was arrested too. During this a committee was formed Prisoner's Relief Committee in which Hansa Mehta was secretary and Thakkar Bapa was the Chairman.¹⁶² There can be cited a large number of women who in their limited capacity added volume to the movement such as Indumati Chimanlal, who was arrested during the Quit India Movement and was subsequently sent to Sabarmati jail, where she spent approximately nine to ten months. Post the Quit India movement, Indumati actively participated in the Wardha Conference, which focused on the new Basic Education Policy of Mahatma Gandhi. In 1946, she was elected as a member of the Legislative Assembly and served as a deputy minister from 1949 to 1950. Demonstrating her commitment to education, she assumed the role of Minister of Education in the Gujarat Legislative Assembly in 1962. Beyond her political and social endeavors, she dedicated herself to social welfare initiatives, working towards the betterment of society.¹⁶³

Indumati Chimanlal in her interview shared that woman in India faced not only political slavery but also societal and domestic restrictions. Female education was scarce, and it was a challenge to find girls pursuing higher education in colleges.¹⁶⁴ She believed that the national movement ignited a sense of vitality in the women's movement.¹⁶⁵

Mridula Sarabhai activism has been highlighted in various studies.¹⁶⁶ Apart from participating in the national movement, Mridula also using Gandhian methods tried to contain the communal riots in Ahmedabad. Mridula established the "*Shanti Sevak Sangh*" (Peace Workers' Association), with Mahadev Desai serving as its President. This organization aimed to bridge

¹⁶¹ *Interview: Mrs Hansa Mehta – Part 1*. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-hansa-mehta-part-1/.7>

¹⁶² *Interview: Mrs Hansa Mehta – Part 1*. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-hansa-mehta-part-1/.8>

¹⁶³ *Interview: I CHIMANLAL*. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/collection/i-chimanlal/.5>

¹⁶⁴ *Interview: I CHIMANLAL*. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/collection/i-chimanlal/.6>

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Basu, A. (1995). 91

the divide and promote understanding between communities during the challenging times of communal unrest.¹⁶⁷

Mridula Sarabhai displayed exceptional bravery in undertaking the rescue of abducted Hindu and Sikh women from Pakistan, as well as Muslim women from India, following the Partition in 1947. Her unwavering determination and courage enabled her to navigate through challenging circumstances and bring solace to those affected by the turmoil of the times.

The Indian national movement provided a transformative social and political platform where women's lives could undergo profound changes. Stepping beyond the confines of their households, actively participating in processions, attending meetings, engaging in picketing, and experiencing imprisonment, all contributed to a significant shift in their lives and broadened their perspectives. This newfound involvement ignited a desire for education, not only for themselves but also for their daughters. Engaging in these activities heightened their awareness of women's issues, instilling them with dignity, self-confidence, and a fresh sense of self-worth. The women courageously broke free from the confines of their sheltered lives and ventured into the traditionally male-dominated realm of politics. This blurred the boundaries between the public and private spheres, leaving a lasting impact not only on the women actively involved but also on those who supported and observed their efforts. The traditional notion that a woman's ultimate fulfillment lay solely in her role as a wife or mother underwent a significant transformation.

SECTION-II WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

The women's movement in India has experienced a diverse and complex journey spanning over a hundred years. It has witnessed various phases, ranging from unity and solidarity to fragmentation and dispersal. The women's movement in India has been shaped by diverse perspectives, strategies, and priorities, reflecting the dynamic nature of social change. While the movement has encountered internal differences and divergent paths, it remains resilient and adaptive. It continues to evolve in response to changing social, political, and cultural contexts. The reform movement of the late 19th century in India was primarily led by men who were influenced by liberal ideas.

Traditionally, it has been widely believed that men were the driving force behind the movements for women's emancipation. However, this thesis has shed light on the significant

¹⁶⁷ Basu, A. (1995). 93

contributions made by the wives, daughters, sisters, and followers of male leaders who were equally at the forefront of these movements. In the same way Radha Kumar¹⁶⁸ challenges the prevailing notion that women were merely passive participants or secondary figures in the pursuit of women's rights. In his book he reveals that women actively engaged in shaping and leading these movements, often working alongside their male counterparts. Their involvement was instrumental in advancing the cause of women's emancipation and challenging the existing gender norms and inequalities.

Moreover, it is believed that the reform movement was due to the British rule in India and the British played an important role in this. But if we look at the regional movement then we can trace it back from the 17th and 18th century. For instance, in Western India in the state of Baroda women were highly educated and progressive. They were even employed in various professions.

Although the efforts of social reformers to improve the conditions of high-caste women in India were commendable, it is important to acknowledge that their reforms had certain limitations. While some progress was made, women were still largely confined to their traditional roles as wives and mothers, sisters. The primary aim of education for women during this period was to make them better equipped for these roles, enabling them to be enlightened partners to their husbands. The idea of women assuming public roles and actively participating in society was not envisioned.

Sangari and Vaid, in their analysis, highlight the complex nature of tradition and modernity in India, both of which have been carriers of patriarchal ideologies. They argue that neither tradition nor modernity can be seen as value-free or unproblematic, as both are conceptualized within the context of patriarchal frameworks.¹⁶⁹ This perspective sheds light on the challenges and contradictions that women faced during this period. On one hand, there were efforts to improve their conditions and provide them with education, but these reforms were often limited to enhancing their roles as wives and mothers. On the other hand, the entry of women into the public sphere through the national movement was accompanied by expectations rooted in traditional gender norms.

¹⁶⁸ Kumar, R. (2014). *The History of Doing: An illustrated account of movements for women's rights and feminism in India, 1800-1990*. Zubaan. New Delhi

¹⁶⁹ Sangari, K. & Vaid, S. (1989). *Recasting women*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.17

While the social reformers of the time did not explicitly aim for the complete freedom of women from patriarchal norms and expectations, their limited reforms played a significant role in creating a pathway for women to find their own space in society. As women gained access to education, it naturally led to critical inquiry about their own lives and circumstances. By the year 1860, a notable shift began to occur as more women entered professions such as teaching and nursing. Through their professional endeavors, women became increasingly aware of themselves and their predicament within a patriarchal society. This heightened consciousness prompted many women to reflect on their lives and express their dissatisfaction with their lack of autonomy.

The period of the late 19th century witnessed an outpouring of number of autobiographies written by women, documenting their experiences and frustrations. These autobiographies¹⁷⁰ served as powerful expressions of their desire for greater freedom and autonomy in a society that constrained them within traditional gender roles. The act of writing these autobiographies allowed women to voice their concerns, aspirations, and challenges. It became a means for them to assert their individuality and assert their agency. These autobiographies served as powerful testimonies to the growing consciousness and quest for autonomy among women during that time.

During the twentieth century, two rationales regarding women's public appearance emerged. On one hand, women were portrayed as mothers fighting for the "mother country." This was mostly advocated by men. On the other hand, the idea of women having equal rights as men was also advocated but this was mostly carried out by women themselves. This journey of women's emancipation in India has remained a dynamic and evolving process, with significant strides made alongside persistent struggles against patriarchal norms and resistance.

During the period of 1917-1927, three significant women's organizations were established in India: the Women's India Association (WIA),¹⁷¹ the All India Women's Conference (AIWC),¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ *Rukmini Haran* by Kusum Kumari (1863), *Stri Dharma Niti* by Tarabai Shinde (1882), *Reminiscences of an Indian Official* by Cornelia Sorabji (1906), *Autobiography of an Indian Princess* by Sunity Devée (1886), *Anandibai's Story: A Woman's Struggle in India* by Anandibai Joshee (1888), *The Life and Work of Mary Carpenter* by Mary Carpenter (1879), *Baba Padmamuni: The Autobiography of a Yogi* by Baba Padmamuni (1899), *Autobiography of Mahatma Jotirao Phule* by Savitribai Phule (1885), *Jivan Vikas* by Krushnabai Udayashankar Joshi (1897), *Mari Hakikat* by Kashi Yagnik (1897), *Saubhagyavati Rukmangad* by Rukmangad Patel (1866)

¹⁷¹ Suguna, B. (2009). *Women's Movement*. Discovery Publishers, New Delhi.31

¹⁷² *Bombay Presidency Women's Council*, Fifth Report. 4; Forbes, G. (2005). *Women in Modern India*. Cambridge University Press. New Delhi.75

and the National Council of Women in India (NCWI).¹⁷³ The inaugural meeting of the AIWC witnessed an impressive attendance of 7,000 women.¹⁷⁴ These organizations played instrumental roles in advocating for women's rights and reforms. The AIWC, in particular, prepared a memorandum urging the British government to grant women the right to vote. Women's organizations and its leaders made it clear that their cause was not anti-men. They understood the importance of maintaining connections with male leaders and used these alliances to advocate for the expansion of women's space in society. By aligning themselves with male leaders, they sought to legitimize women's participation in public spaces. However, it is important to note that this access to public space was not available to all women.

The politicization of the domestic sphere and the domestication of the public sphere in India were facilitated by the belief that it was the duty of women, as "mothers," to protect the "mother country" from oppression and enslavement. This ideological framework framed women's involvement in the public space as an act of defending their nation and its values. By positioning women as guardians of the nation, the idea of women participating in public affairs was not seen as a direct violation of traditional gender roles. Instead, it was viewed as an opportunity to challenge and renegotiate the rigid societal norms that governed women's lives. The public sphere became a platform for women to assert their agency, voice their concerns, and actively contribute to social and political change.¹⁷⁵ The emergence of a new generation of women marked a significant shift, characterized by heightened articulation, political awareness, and a heightened consciousness of rights. This generation of women was more vocal in expressing their thoughts and opinions, more attuned to political issues, and more cognizant of their entitlement to rights and equality.

The emergence of a new generation of articulate, politically aware, and rights-conscious women is closely related to the origin and evolution of women's organizations. These organizations provided a platform for women to come together, share their experiences, and collectively advocate for their rights and aspirations. As women became more educated and aware of social and political issues, they sought avenues to voice their concerns and effect change. Women's organizations provided a structured framework for them to channel their

¹⁷³ Basu, A., & Ray, B. (1990). *Women's Struggle: A History of the All-India Women's Conference, 1927-1990*.

¹⁷⁴ Jha, S.U. & Pujari, P. (Ed.) (1996). *Indian Women Today-Tradition, Modernity and Challenge*. Vol-1. Kanishka Publishers. New Delhi. 125

¹⁷⁵ Thapar-Bjorkert, S. (2006). *Women in the Indian national movement: unseen faces and unheard voices, 1930-42*. Sage.

energy and activism. These organizations became spaces for women to organize, strategize, and mobilize for collective action.

Women's organizations brought women from diverse backgrounds together, facilitating the exchange of ideas and the formulation of common goals. Through them, women found solidarity, support, and opportunities to engage in public discourse. They were able to raise awareness about women's issues, challenge discriminatory practices and policies, and advocate for legal reforms that protected women's rights.

2.1. WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN WESTERN INDIA

Women first met in local associations, organized by male reformers on their behalf; later they attended the ladies' gatherings of all-Indian reform associations. An early example of this type of ladies' auxiliary was the *Bharat Mahila Parishad* in Bombay (Ladies Social Conference), inaugurated in 1904 as part of the National Social Conference begun in 1887. Newspaper reports of the meeting mentioned that the hall was packed and that this was the largest gathering of women that Bombay had ever seen. The meeting had been arranged solely by women and they had decided that no men would be allowed to enter the hall. Ramabai Ranade, urged women to work together for the regeneration of the nation.¹⁷⁶ Other speakers focused on the need for female education and discussed social issues such as lack of medical care for women, early marriage, and child welfare.¹⁷⁷ In subsequent meetings, held yearly in conjunction with the meetings of the National Social Conference, between 300 and 700 women attended. They discussed women's problems and what women could do to change the situation. Education was foremost on their list, followed by child marriage and the problems of 'widows and dowry'. They were just beginning to formulate strategies for women; most of their efforts were still directed towards understanding and formulating the issues.¹⁷⁸ As their experience grew, the women attending these meetings began to see the need for organizations of their own. It was through these women's organizations, that a demand for women's rights was articulated and tactics developed for affecting the power structure. The attempt of Maharashtrian women to form their own organization (to honor Justice Ranade) was opposed by a group of males who

¹⁷⁶ *Indian Ladies Magazine*. 1904. 259

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 1905. 220

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 1906. 230-232; 1907; 380; 1908. 227 228

preferred a joint organization. One of the women involved explained why women wanted their own organization:

*'Public spirited women are for the present in a minority and their individual efforts and eloquence would be submerged by the superior and voluminous activities of men, if a combination took place. The minority of their number and the recency of their experiences may prevent their influence from asserting itself in any movement in which they were joined by men.'*¹⁷⁹

Hence, as can be seen from the previous chapter, the early women who participated in the formation of the first women's associations primarily hailed from households associated with the reform movement. They represented the first generation of educated women, receiving their education within the confines of their homes and deeply influenced by the ideas propagated by the male members of their families. Notable among these women was Ramabai Ranade, who played an active role in assisting her husband in establishing the *Hindu Ladies Social and Literary Club*.¹⁸⁰ Additionally, individuals like Gangubai Bhandare, the first President of the club, as well as Shantabai Panandikar and Lady Laxmibai Chandavarkar, who were associated with both the *Prarthana Samaj* and *Arya Mahila Samaj*, made significant contributions to these associations.¹⁸¹

The women who became involved in these early associations were products of a new wave of female intelligentsia. They were recipients of education, albeit restricted to their homes, and were well-versed in the reformist ideas espoused by their male counterparts. Their active engagement in the establishment of women's organizations reflected their desire to further social and literary pursuits while championing the cause of women's empowerment.

The participation of these women from reformist households in the early women's associations highlighted their active engagement and desire to contribute to the social progress of women.

¹⁷⁹ *The Indian National Social Conference. The Indian Ladies Magazine*. (1906). 230-2; "Ladies Gathering at Surat," *The Indian Ladies Magazine*. 6 (1907). 380; "The Ladies Social Conference," *The Indian Ladies Magazine*. 8 (1908). 227-8.

¹⁸⁰ Its members were female members of reforming families. These included Miss Sirin Cursetjee, a Parsi, Mrs Kambalai Vaidya a Pathare Prabhu, Mrs Vithaldas Damodarclashackersey a Bhatia. *The Indian Ladies Magazine*, Vol.4, No.9, 1905,265; *The Indian Ladies Magazine*. Vol.5, No.8, 1906. 163; *The Indian Ladies Magazine*., Vol.6, No.8, 1907.294

¹⁸¹ Presidents of the Arya Mahila Samaj have been Ramabai Ranade 1889-1901, Lady Laxmibai Chandavarkar 1901-1920; Dr. Kashibai Nowrange 1924-1926; Mrs. Sundcrabai Sirur 1926-1952. Other prominent workers included Dr. Rakmabai, Mrs. Bhandarkar and Sushilabai Vaidya.

They played a crucial role in shaping the discourse around women's issues and paved the way for future generations of women to strive for equality and empowerment. *The Hindu Ladies' Social and Literary Club* comprised women from diverse communities, reflecting its inclusive nature. Among its members were Lady Laxmibai Chandavarkar, who belonged to the Saraswat Brahman community, Manekbai Kothare, a Pathare Prabhu, Lady Cowasji Jehangir, a Parsi, and Badruddin Tyabji, a Muslim. Later on, Jamnabai Sakkai and Bhavanidas Motiwalla, both Gujaratis associated with social reform families, also joined the club.¹⁸²

In 1887, in Gujarat the *Gujarati Ladies Club* emerged as the first separate women's organization. Mary Sorabjee, the woman superintendent of Mahalakshmi Training College, along with her two sisters and the wives of English officers in Ahmedabad, founded this club with the aim of fostering social interaction among women from different communities. The establishment of this club was a pioneering initiative in the Bombay Presidency.¹⁸³ Membership in the club was open to women from all communities, including European, Parsi, Jewish, and Hindu women. By 1908, the club boasted a membership of 60 women, indicating its growing popularity and significance in providing a platform for women to connect and engage.¹⁸⁴

Initially, the *Gujarat Ladies Club* held its meetings in private homes due to the absence of a dedicated space. These gatherings offered opportunities for various activities such as games, singing songs, and reading. However, in 1895, the club found a permanent residence in The Bholanath Sarabhai Literary Institute for Women, which provided a centralized location for its operations.¹⁸⁵ Vidyaben served as the club's secretary in 1902, contributing to its smooth operation. The club also organized annual celebrations like *Sharadaotsava*, where women performed traditional dances like Garba and Raas. Additionally, during times of drought and famine in Gujarat (1899-1900), the club actively engaged in relief work, demonstrating its commitment to social welfare and community support.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² *The Indian Ladies Magazine*. Vol.4, No.9, 1905.264; *The Indian Ladies Magazine*. Vol.5, No.8, 1906, p.263; *The Indian Ladies Magazine*. Vol.6, No.8, 1907.294

¹⁸³ *Stree Bodh Jubilee Celebrations*, Volume.1908.223

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ *Gujarat Shalapatra*. April 1890.90-92; Twentieth Annual Report of the National Indian Association.London.233

¹⁸⁶ Bhatt. P. M. (2000). (trans.) .36

In 1903, Shirinbai Naoroji Patuck and Miss Siren Mancokjee Cursetjee, the daughter of a Parsi social innovator, took the initiative to establish the *Stree Zarthosti Mandal*. This organization aimed to improve coordination and provide better structure for their activities, marking one of the earliest attempts at associational social welfare. The participation of Anglicized Parsis played a significant role in subsequent organizations such as the Bombay Presidency Women's Council and the Women's Indian Association. Over time, even in the predominantly male-dominated environment of the *Stree Mandal*, women gradually assumed management roles within their own association. This shift marked a significant development, empowering women to take charge of their own organization and contribute to its management.¹⁸⁷

During the period between 1910 and 1920, the establishment of seven women's associations marked significant progress in women's empowerment and social activism. These associations played a crucial role in promoting the interests and welfare of women within their respective communities.¹⁸⁸

1. The Jain Mahila Samaj was founded in 1910.¹⁸⁹

2. The Akd-e-Surayya was established in 1911 and catered to the female members of the Tyabji family.¹⁹⁰

In Gujarat, two notable institutions dedicated to the empowerment of women were '*Jyoti Sangh*' and '*Vikas Griha*' in 1937. These organizations played a crucial role in uplifting women and promoting their well-being.¹⁹¹ '*Jyoti Sangh*' was a women's organization founded by Mridula Sarabhai, which focused on providing women with educational opportunities, vocational training, and entrepreneurial support. It aimed to foster self-confidence and self-reliance among women, offering them a platform for their physical and mental development. The organization also ran libraries for women and organized enlightening lectures by distinguished speakers.

¹⁸⁷ *The Gujarati Hindu Stri Mandal*. (1936) Bombay A Short Account, Bombay. 4

¹⁸⁸ The Jain Mahila Samaj in Bombay was founded in 1910, The Akd-e-Surayya was established in Bombay in 1911 and catered to the female members of the Tyabji family, The Bene Israel Stree Mandal was founded in Bombay in 1913. The Pathare Prabhu Mahila Samaj was established in Bombay in 1915, The Saraswat Mahila Samaj was founded in Bombay in September 1917, The Hind Mahila Samaj was established in Bombay in November 1918, The Santa Cruz Stree Mandal was founded in Bombay in August 1920.

¹⁸⁹ Dadachanji, K.K. (1919). List of Hindu Charities in Bombay, Bombay: Social Service League. 8;. Chitalia, K. (1936). Directory of Women's Institutions Bombay Presidency Part 1, Servants of India Society. Bombay; I.L.M. Vol.5, No.8, 1906 .173; I.L.M. Vol.6, No.9, 1907.343; I.L.M. Vol.II, No.11, 1912.279.

¹⁹⁰ Interview of Miss Kamila Tyabji August 3, 1976.

¹⁹¹ Basu, A. (2018). *Women in Satyagraha*.93

Through their magazine, '*Jyoti Putra*,' they addressed important issues related to women's status, oppressive customs, and the need for social reforms. *Vikas Griha* was another prominent institution dedicated to women's empowerment in Gujarat. It worked towards the holistic development of women, providing them with education, skill-building, and various support services. '*Vikas Griha*' aimed to enhance women's socio-economic status by equipping them with the necessary tools and knowledge to succeed in different aspects of life. The institution focused on nurturing women's talents, fostering leadership qualities, and promoting their active participation in society. Both '*Jyoti Sangh*' and '*Vikas Griha*' played instrumental roles in creating opportunities for women, promoting gender equality, and challenging the prevailing norms that perpetuated discrimination and injustice. These institutions contributed significantly to the overall progress and empowerment of women in Gujarat, inspiring generations of women to pursue their dreams, assert their rights, and lead fulfilling lives.

In remembrance of Kasturba Gandhi, who passed away in Aga Khan Palace in Poona on February 22, 1944, the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust (KGNMT) was established on Gandhi's 75th birthday, October 2, 1944. The trust was inaugurated by Sarojini Naidu and aimed to serve the needs of women and children in rural areas. Throughout his life, Gandhi served as the chairperson of the trust, personally overseeing every aspect and considering no task too small to attend to. His vision was to focus the work in villages, as a tribute to his wife who was an uneducated woman from a rural background, different from the sophisticated city women.¹⁹²

The programs initiated by the trust encompassed various areas such as providing general education for women, teaching them crafts, training them as nurses, midwives, or teachers. Training centers were established in different states, with smaller centers set up in villages. Initially, Mridula Sarabhai held the position of Organizing Secretary for the entire country. However, due to differences with Thakkar Bapa, she resigned, and Sucheta Kripalani took over the role. Gandhi appointed Saraladevi Sarabhai as the representative (*pratinidhi*) of Gujarat. Saraladevi traveled extensively from village to village in Kutch and Saurashtra regions, actively promoting Gandhi's constructive program. She established a school in Koba, a village near Ahmedabad, to train village workers and further contribute to the trust's mission.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Basu, A. (2018). *Women in Satyagraha*. 94

¹⁹³ Basu, A. (2018). 95

The Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, under Gandhi's guidance, aimed to uplift rural communities by empowering women through education, skill development, and training. By focusing on the needs of rural areas and embracing Kasturba's simple and rural background, the trust sought to bring positive change and progress to the lives of women and children in the villages of India.

As women became increasingly involved in community associations, they embarked on a process of expanding their roles beyond the confines of the household. Women leaders made concerted efforts to bridge the gap between women in households and the wider community by integrating aspects of religious and social life into the association's activities. Traditionally, ceremonies and rituals were limited to the household, but these women leaders sought to transform them into communal celebrations. For example, the *Pathare Prabhu Mahila Samaj* organized regular sessions to study *Pathare Prabhu* customs, allowing women to learn and preserve their cultural heritage collectively. Additionally, they came together to celebrate special occasions such as Gauri Puja and learned the art of powder drawing for Diwali decorations, fostering a sense of camaraderie and cultural exchange.¹⁹⁴

Similarly, in the *Hind Mahila Samaj*, traditional *Haldi-Kumkum* parties, where women apply colored powder on each other's foreheads, were organized as social gatherings exclusively for women. These events provided opportunities for women to bond, share experiences, and reinforce social connections within the community.¹⁹⁵

By bringing traditionally household-bound practices into the realm of community associations, these women leaders created spaces for women to actively participate in cultural, religious, and social activities beyond the confines of their homes. This expansion of women's roles and engagement in communal celebrations contributed to their empowerment, fostered a sense of community among women, and provided a platform for collective engagement and expression.

The establishment of community-based associations played a significant role in expanding the segregated space for women, providing a secure and inclusive environment primarily for middle-class women. These associations created a platform for women to come together, share their experiences, and address social issues within their communities.

¹⁹⁴ *Pathare Prabhu Mahila Samaj*; Cormack, M. *The Hindu Woman* Bombay, Asia Publishing house, 1961.142.

¹⁹⁵ *Hind Mahila Samaj* 50th Anniversary Report 1918-1968.5; Ramabai Ranade, *Reminiscences*.74-140

Furthermore, the formation of social welfare organizations like the *Seva Sadan*¹⁹⁶ and the *Bhagini Samaj*,¹⁹⁷ along with the welfare initiatives of nationalist groups such as the Women's Indian Association, further expanded this space for women. These organizations embraced a broader spectrum of social groupings, transcending specific communities and encompassing a more diverse range of women. The *Seva Sadan* got support of *Hindu Stree Mandal*¹⁹⁸ and the *Bhagini Samaj* was supported by Avantikabai Gokhale,¹⁹⁹ with their focus on social welfare, provided opportunities for women to engage in philanthropic activities, upliftment programs, and community development initiatives. Through these organizations, women were able to extend their impact beyond their immediate communities and contribute to the betterment of society as a whole.

The establishment of women's associations was not the sole means through which female space expanded beyond the household. These associations addressed the changing needs of married women, while schools catered to the evolving circumstances of young girls. The increasing age at which girls could leave their natal homes to join their husband's household, resulting from the rise in the age of marriage, placed additional strain on the traditional natal household. This situation bolstered the emergence of girls' schools as a new social institution.²⁰⁰

These associations also focused on making women skilled. As sewing, first aid, needle work,²⁰¹ was introduced as a suitable occupation through which disadvantaged women could receive assistance or acquire a skill to supplement their incomes. The *Bharat Stree Mahamandal*, in its comprehensive plans, even included the establishment of sales depots to promote the work of economically disadvantaged women.²⁰² These associations brought together groups of upper-class women who actively participated in social welfare initiatives. For example, a group of Parsi ladies, including Lady Jamshedji Jijibhoy and Lady Jeejeebhoy Tata, began their involvement in 1905 by visiting the sick and undertaking a limited form of social responsibility

¹⁹⁶ Report of the Seva Sadan or Sisters of India Society for the half year ending 31st December 1908.3

¹⁹⁷ The Work of the Servants of India Society. 1917-23.26

¹⁹⁸ Lakshmibai Jagmohandas, Jamnaben Sakkai, Kalawanti Bhawanidas Motiwala, Manekbai N Kothare, Likmani, Dilshad Begum, Dr.Gulbai, Dr.Kashibai Nowrange, Ramabai Ranade; Report of the Seva Sadan or Sisters of India Society the half year ending .31of December :1908.4-14.

¹⁹⁹ Jaijee Petit, Jaishree Raijee; Interview of Jaishree Raijee. April 6, 1976

²⁰⁰ *Gujarati Hindu Stree Mandal*, Biennial report 1913-1939 (trans. Raksha Dholakia) in possession of Gujarati Hindu Stree Mandal. 1917-23.66

²⁰¹ *Hind Mahila Samaj* 50th Anniversary Souvenir 1918-1968, Bombay 1968 (trans. Sheila Murdeshwar).4

²⁰² *The Indian Ladies Magazine*. Vol.10, No.8 1911 p.246.

to improve the well-being of their less fortunate women.²⁰³ Additionally, the *Vanita Vishram* established an ashram to provide support and assistance to Gujarati women in need, enabling them to lead self-respecting lives.²⁰⁴ They were also organizing classes for various subjects such as Arithmetic, History, English, Music.²⁰⁵ Through literary endeavors, social gatherings, and religious engagements they tried to educate and create consciousness among the women.

While the Bombay Presidency Women's Council arranged lectures on topics like syphilis and child welfare, other organizations such as the *Saraswat Mahila Samaj* held regular religious discussions.²⁰⁶ Some groups, like the *Hindu Mahila Samaj*, engaged in discussions on contemporary events. Avantikabai Gokhale utilized religious allegory extensively, employing recitations of the Ramayana, *kirtan* (poetic allegory), and *pravachan* (lectures or communal gatherings with a religious theme) to convey her message.²⁰⁷

In the early days of the national movement, these organizations put forth various initiatives aimed at revitalizing women's households. The *Bharat Stree Mandal* proposed the establishment of home-based education for women,²⁰⁸ While at *Bharat Mahila Parishad*, Ramabai Ranade, who had been instrumental in founding associations for women's self-education, also spearheaded efforts among educated women to assist those less fortunate. In her presidential address to the *Bharat Mahila Parishad*, she focused on the importance of meaningful work for orphans and destitute women, advocating for regular visits to hospitals and schools to ensure adequate standards. Additionally, she emphasized the necessity of empowering more women.²⁰⁹

Within the early substantial associations, the female intelligentsia had a primary objective of cultivating "love and respect" among women. As women who had already taken on the responsibility for their own progress, it was not challenging for them to extend their efforts

²⁰³ The History of the Growth and Development of the *Stree Zarhosti Mandal* and the Sir Ratan Tata Industrial Institute, Bombay, 1953. I.L.M. Vol.6, No.3 1906 p.100; I.L.M. Vol.6, No.6 1906 p.175.

²⁰⁴ *Vanita Vishram* Golden Jubilee 1915-1965, Bombay 1965. 1915-65.3

²⁰⁵ *Gujarati Hindu Stree Mandal*, biennial report 1913-1939 (trans. Raksha Dholakia) in possession of Gujarati Hindu Stree Mandal. 8 -18

²⁰⁶ *Saraswat Mahila Samaj* Annual Report 1967, Bombay, 1967.

²⁰⁷ *Hind Mahila Samaj* 50th Anniversary Souvenir 1918-1968, Bombay 1968 (trans. Sheila Murdeshwar).4

²⁰⁸ *The Indian Ladies Magazine*. Volume 10.1911.246

²⁰⁹ *The Indian Ladies Magazine*. Volume No.7.1905.2010-211

towards advancing other women within their community. They willingly embraced the task of promoting the welfare and empowerment of their fellow women.

The shift of women's space from private to public can be seen as women being in the forefront in many places after the freedom struggle. These were the same women who had worked towards the attainment of the goal of independence of the nation. For instance, Savitri Madan aimed to develop and advance the country towards independence, aligning their work with the programs envisioned by Mahatma Gandhi. They established the Poona District *khadi* and Village Industries Sangh, a cooperative institution promoting *khadi* and village industries. During the wartime, they opened a *khadi* and Village Industries Store at Congress House, providing essential commodities like rice. The store also served as a platform for propaganda, engaging with women in queues, discussing their difficulties, and raising awareness about responsible parties. They organized a Village Industries Exhibition, showcasing various rural products, near Congress House. This initiative aimed to propagate the significance of village industries as a means to approach *Swaraj* (self-rule).²¹⁰

After Kasturba Gandhi's death, committees were established across states, including Maharashtra, to collect funds in her memory. Savitri Madan, along with Haribhau Phatak and Balasaheb Kher, who was made the chairman of the committee. Once the collection phase was completed, a committee was formed to determine the utilization of the funds, which were entrusted to a central trust under Mahatma Gandhi's supervision. Savitri Madan served as the joint secretary and later became part of the advisory committee of the trust. She worked closely with Haribhau Phatak, dedicating several hours each day to manage the trust's affairs, including correspondence and organizing training for women representatives called "*Pratinidhis*." These representatives were appointed in each state to represent the trust, following Gandhi's preference for women in these roles and Savitri Madan was made *Pratinidhi* of Maharashtra.

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Further, Goshiben in her interview talks about her experience of working in the All-India Village Industries Board during Chairmanship during 1946 to 1954 of the village Industries commission of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka. According to Goshiben, with the

²¹⁰ Interview: Mrs. Savitri Madan –Part2. (n.d.-b). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-savitri-madan-part-2/19>

²¹¹ Interview: Mrs. Savitri Madan –Part2. (n.d.-b). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-savitri-madan-part-2/20>

introduction of the charkha in the All-India Village Industries, numerous middle-class women began spinning their own yarn and making their own clothes.

In 1946, despite feeling unwell, Gandhiji insisted that Goshiben to become the chairman of the Village Industries Commission, overseeing its operations in Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Karnataka. As part of this role, Goshiben revived the *Gur* industry, utilizing a sweet juice derived from a weed similar to the date-palm. In that, they produced jaggery from it which was a delicious and nutritious product. Additionally, introduced beekeeping in certain villages, particularly in Mahabaleshwar, where the local Galis enthusiastically embraced the industry, even showing remarkable gentleness in collecting honey from the hives.²¹²

During Goshiben's tenure as chairman of the Commission, the focus was on empowering villagers to become self-reliant. She encouraged the establishment of local carpentry services to teach villagers how to mend their own tools and houses. Prioritized the construction of thatched roof houses, which offered better protection from heat, cold, and rain compared to later-introduced tin roofs. The handmade paper industry provided employment opportunities for women and required skilled craftsmanship. The use of handmade paper was promoted by both the Commission and the Government of Bombay. These village industries, including papermaking, were embraced by influential individuals seeking to uplift our people, just as *khadi* was considered the symbol of freedom.²¹³

Under the guidance of Gandhiji, the collection of neem fruit was introduced for the production of neem oil, a valuable non-edible oil used in soap making. Neem held great significance as it was a plant introduced by Gandhiji himself. He would consume neem every morning, and the practice was followed in all the ashrams. Neem trees, belonging to the palm species, grew abundantly in the wild. Although the fruit itself was inedible due to its lack of substance, the juice extracted from neem offered a delightful, sweet drink enriched with vitamin B12.

In the village center where Goshiben was chairman, she initiated an industry of drying and salting the raw mango in the jungle. The stuff became so popular that the villagers all around

²¹² Interview: Mrs G. Captain – Part 2. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-g-captain-part-2/20>

²¹³ Ibid.

came and brought it up. Instead of it being sent to the towns.²¹⁴ Due to political interference she resigned from chairmanship.

In her interview, Goshiben tells about her sister's involvement in the freedom struggle. Goshiben Eldest sister was Meher Naroji, who graduated from Edinburgh University, she was among the pioneering members of the women's medical service initiated by Lady Hardinge. Recognizing her talent and dedication, Lady Hardinge entrusted her with the task of establishing the renowned Harding Hospital in Delhi. Later on, the state of Kutch requested her services, leading her to relinquish her position in British India and settle in Kutch. After retiring from formal service, she started a modest hospital within her own home, providing care and support to women in the surrounding villages.²¹⁵

Anasuya Sridhar Limaye dedicated herself to the education and upliftment of the lower, middle class and working women, assuming various roles and responsibilities. She served as a member of the Poona Corporation School Board and later became its chairman. Additionally, she held the position of Chairman in the *Samajwadi Mahila Sabha*, the women's organization of the *Praja Socialist Party*. As Secretary of the Industrial Women's Co-operative Society, she played a crucial role in empowering women in the industrial sector. Limaye also led a group of 20 women volunteers to the Goa border during the mass *Satyagraha* movement in 1955, which aimed for the liberation of Goa.²¹⁶

Limaye actively participated in the *Praja Socialist Party* and was elected as a member of the National Executive. During Anti-Fascist Women Conference in Yugoslavia, represented the *Praja Socialist Party* of India. She also traveled to Israel as a party representative, where she observed and learned from the Kibbutz movement and Moshav movement, gaining valuable insights from these experiments. Limaye also played an active role in the Samyukta Maharashtra movement, as well as in the movement against rising prices. She faced imprisonment three times for her involvement in these struggles.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Interview: Mrs G. Captain – Part 2. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-g-captain-part-2/21>

²¹⁵ Interview: Mrs G. Captain – Part 2. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-g-captain-part-2/22>

²¹⁶ Limaye, A.S. (n.d.). *The Centre of South Asian Studies*. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/collection/a-s-limaye/.5>

²¹⁷ Ibid.

As Chairman of the *Samajwadi Mahila Sabha*, the socialist women's organization in Maharashtra. Her focus was on encompassing constructive and educational initiatives aimed at making women politically aware. They established an industrial cooperative society with the primary objective of providing employment opportunities to low and middle-income housewives, helping them augment their family finances. For creating social and political consciousness, they organized study circles for women. Furthermore, they conducted a comprehensive Housewife Training Course that covered subjects such as child psychology, childbearing, women's health, food and nutrition, as well as civic and national sciences. In Indian villages, where many housewives were deeply entrenched in superstitions and resistant to change, the *Samajwadi Mahila Sabha* recognized this challenge. To address it, they implemented a three-month Housewife Training Course that combined theoretical lessons with practical applications. This endeavor prompted women to engage in critical thinking, and some even discovered their talents, leading them to contribute to social work.

Recognizing the pressing need to educate women across India, she emphasized the importance of empowering them to be proficient housewives who could raise children scientifically. This education aimed to cultivate national and social consciousness, promote a modern scientific outlook, and enable them to become responsible and exemplary citizens in emerging New India.²¹⁸

In the same way Hansa Mehta in early 1946, became the President of the All-India Women's Conference, she was invited to provide testimony before the Cabinet Mission. During her address, she expressed the collective sentiment of women, vehemently opposing the reservation of seats and the establishment of separate electorates for women. Upon hearing this, Gandhiji was immensely pleased as he had been consistently advocating against such reservations and separate electorates.²¹⁹ Hansa Mehta was one of the elected members of the Constituent assembly and worked as member of the sub-committee of Fundamentals Rights.²²⁰

In late 1946, she was appointed as India's representative on the Sub-Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations. During the first session, she played an instrumental role in presenting the Charter on Women's Rights, which had been prepared under her presidency at

²¹⁸ Limaye, A.S. (n.d.). *The Centre of South Asian Studies*. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/collection/a-s-limaye/.5>

²¹⁹ *Interview: Mrs Hansa Mehta – Part 1*. (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-hansa-mehta-part-1/.8>

²²⁰ Ibid.

the All-India Women's Conference. The preamble of the Charter received significant attention from the Sub-Committee on the Status of Women. Later, Hansa Mehta was also selected to be a representative on the Human Rights Commission, which served as the parent body of the Sub-Commission. Working under the leadership of Roosevelt, who chaired the Commission for six years, Hansa Mehta had the opportunity to contribute to the drafting of the Declaration of Human Rights. The draft Declaration was passed by the full Commission without any changes and was later accepted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. This valuable experience coincided with her involvement in the Fundamental Rights Committee of the Constitutional Assembly in India. In 1950, she compared the Human Rights Commission to her work in the Constitutional Assembly. She retired from the Commission in 1952, marking the conclusion of her significant contributions.²²¹

Hansa Mehta played a significant role in the establishment and development of the Maharaja Sayajirao University in 1949. Initially, Dr. Radhakrishnan was chosen as the Vice-Chancellor, but due to his appointment as Ambassador in Russia, Hansa Mehta was asked at the last minute to assume the position. Her nine-year term as Vice Chancellor was marked by her determination to steer the university toward a new path, departing from the practices of its predecessor.

Under Hansa Mehta's leadership, three new faculties were established: Home Science, Social Work, and Fine Arts. Furthermore, she introduced several new departments within the existing faculties. Recognizing the need for examination system reform, Hansa Mehta appointed a committee and facilitated opportunities for teachers to study modern examination methods abroad. Numerous innovations were implemented across the university to prioritize student welfare, including the construction of well-equipped hostels, the provision of a pavilion for the students' union, and the establishment of a boat club and swimming pool, among other student-centric initiatives.²²²

Hansa Mehta introduced several innovations in the field of women's education, particularly through the establishment of the Home Science Faculty. Although Home Science as a discipline was not entirely new in the country, there were no dedicated faculties for it at that

²²¹ *Interview: Mrs Hansa Mehta – Part 2.* (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-hansa-mehta-part-2/9>

²²² *Interview: Mrs Hansa Mehta – Part 2.* (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-hansa-mehta-part-2/.11>

time. Baroda University took the lead in implementing this change and became the first university in India to have a dedicated Home Science Faculty. This initiative aimed to provide women with opportunities to pursue higher education in this field and acquire practical skills related to homemaking, nutrition, child development, and more.²²³ The introduction of the Home Science Faculty was a significant step towards empowering women and promoting their holistic development. It opened doors for women to pursue education and careers in various aspects of home management and related fields, challenging traditional gender roles and societal expectations.

Through these women's organizations, a significant shift occurred within the enclosed social sphere of women, leading to a change in awareness from being confined to the isolated household to recognizing the existence of a broader world and the importance of solidarity among women. While women within this extended social space didn't directly engage in public affairs, the female intelligentsia emerged as their representatives, progressively entering the public domain and acquiring the necessary skills to interact within the male-dominated world. Women's participation in public institutions within the Western India played a vital role in this learning process, allowing the educated women of the intelligentsia to exert influence on public decisions that affected the separate female sphere. This transformation took place in the realms of education, law, and politics, albeit in a limited capacity, as a symbolic integration of a few women for the purpose of mediation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the pre-Gandhian era of India's freedom movement witnessed a remarkable contribution of women who defied societal norms and actively participated in the nationalist agenda. Their courage, resilience, and determination laid the groundwork for greater women's participation in the subsequent stages of the freedom struggle. Through their involvement in political organizations like the Indian National Congress, they not only promoted the cause of freedom but also sought to awaken their own gender to think about their rights and aspirations. These pioneering women leaders, writers, and reformers paved the way for the empowerment and progress of women in India.

During the Gandhian movement, women played a pivotal role in bridging the gap between urban and rural women. The presence and influence of women like Kasturba and Ansuyaben

²²³ *Interview: Mrs Hansa Mehta – Part 2.* (n.d.). The Centre of South Asian Studies. <https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/item/interview-mrs-hansa-mehta-part-2/.12>

inspired rural women to actively engage in the *Satyagraha* movement. Their embodiment of self-sacrifice, non-violence, and sincerity resonated with traditional values associated with women, making them natural carriers of these virtues. The *Bardoli* movement further solidified women's participation, forming a cadre of women leaders and volunteers from diverse backgrounds. This movement not only achieved its immediate objectives but also had a lasting impact on women's leadership and solidarity across different social strata. Through women's organizations and the female intelligentsia, women began to recognize their role in the broader world and contributed to public decisions affecting their separate female sphere. Though progress was limited, it symbolized the transformation and integration of women into public affairs, setting the stage for further advancements in women's participation in India's social and political landscape.