

Women and Nationalism

From liberal homes and conservative families, urban centres and rural districts, women – single and married, young and old – came forward and joined the struggle against the colonial rule. Though their total number were small, their involvement was extremely important. Women's participation called into question the British right to rule, legitimized the Indian nationalist movement and won for activist women, at least for a time, the approval of Indian men.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Bengali women existed in a deplorable state of ignorance, illiteracy, superstition and physical seclusion. Some socio-religious reforms however were introduced such as abolition of 'sati', legitimization of widow remarriage and introduction of women's education. The process, however, did not emerge out of a political and social vacuum. The emergence of English - educated urban middle class constituted the junior partners of the colonial rulers. The objective of the reform movement, supported by them, was not to attack the prevalent patriarchal system in any way, nor even to make women equal partners of men in the societal and economic roles outside the family. Its purpose was to improve the position of women within the patriarchal framework and to make them more capable of fulfilling their roles as wives and mothers within the family. In short, they were to be better equipped to lend the 'bhadralok' social support in the colonial world and to produce 'enlightened' son for them. That is why the paradigm of a model woman was imported from Victorian England with the 'traditional' qualities of Indian women added to it.

However, Indian Nationalism was severely challenged by the Christian Missionaries and the Utilitarians on the issues of gender relation. Because of the low status of the, the 'women question' provided a convenient tool to assert the moral superiority of the colonial rulers over the colonized. The cornered colonized elite sought to defend their culture by projecting a 'glorious' Hindu past when the position of women had been high. The medieval period, in terms of this new reconstruction, merely meant a decline from early greatness. In effect, as a result of the double pull in two opposite directions- the Western model and the Indian Ideal- Indian women were expected to combine in themselves the womanly qualities of both the modern west and the ancient East. Educated women, at the receiving end internalized these male concepts of womanhood. They declared that women should be able to read and write Bengali and preferably some English, learn household skill and aspire to become 'sumata' and 'sugrihini'.

While in the early twentieth century, British Feminists like Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins brought Indian women under the influence of Western feminist ideologies and the spread of women's education generated new ideas. But the crucial difference which brought a shift in women's image and life-situation was the freedom movement. By the end of the nineteenth century, the educated elite, who had collaborated with the Raj for their own interest and also hoped that the British rule would transform India on the pattern of Britain-had become disillusioned with their allies.

The intelligentsia in other parts of India experiencing the disillusionment gradually, but in Bengal, they were woken up with the rude jolt of the partition of Bengal in 1905. The anti-partition or Swadeshi

movement, although initiated as a protest against a political move, was motivated by the urge of the aspiring Bengali elite to break the system of British monopoly capitalism and to create new opportunities for their own participation in the commercial and industrial fields. This drive explains the widespread propaganda against the use of British goods and promotion of indigenous products. Bengali men sought women's help in the movement in order to strengthen it. In bringing women into the movement, they took care not to conjure up a foreign model of womanhood. Nationalism required sustenance from past, from the traditions, customs, and institutions of one's own country. Therefore the nationalist leaders subtly converted the socio-economic struggle against the British into a worship of the mother-land, which was in its turn transformed into a mother-goddess. The major limitation of this stance was that it infused the movement with Hindu religious colour and thus restricted Muslim participation in the case. The pre-Aryan mother goddesses of Bengal like 'chandi', 'shakti' (the primal powers), were invoked as time-honoured woman-power. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya's Anandamath (1882) portrayed revolutionaries sacrificing their lives for the Motherland. His emotional hymn 'Bande Mataram' (Hail to Mother) idealized womanhood with nationalism. The transformation of nationalism into religion made women's entry into politics easy.

Participation of women in direct politics:

A new journal for women, namely 'Banga Mahila' begun in 1875, stated clearly that politics is not a forte of women as it was not intelligible to them. The situation began to change after a number of Bengali women (Binodini, Chapala, Bhabani, Manorama, Harasundari, Thakomani) wrote to the Viceroy Lord Ripon in support of the Ilbert bill. In 1889, ten women attended the Bombay session of the Indian National congress. In 1890, a woman novelist, and Kadambini Ganguly, the first woman in the medical doctors, attended as delegates in the Calcutta session of the Congress. From this time on, women attended every meeting of the INC, sometimes as delegates, but more often as observers. Attending with their fathers and husbands, their contribution was more decorative and symbolic. A chorus of fifty-six girls from all regions of India performed the song 'Hindustan' in 1901 in Calcutta Congress. In 1905 women held their parallel session consisting of 600 women.

Of the direct participants in the movement, Saraladebi Choudhurani was the first prominent figure in the Indian national movement. She believed that the improvement of health and physique of youths was an essential first step to the success of the national movement. She, therefore, formed her 'akhra' and 'bayam samiti' which also provided links with the revolutionaries. In 1902 she introduced Birashtami Utsav which was followed by Udyaditya Utsav (named after the Hindu zaminder of Jessore). These festivals were to celebrate prowess and valour. On these occasion young Bengali male played with their lathi (stick) and sword. She also founded a secret revolutionary society in Mymensing. She was also an editor of a journal 'Bharati'. She also opened a fund in 1903, called "Laksmir Bhandar" for the sake of swadeshi activities. After marriage she went to the Punjab worked to spread the gospel of Nationalism there.

Apart from Sarala Devi There were a number of women in Calcutta as well as in mofussil towns who were drawn into the political struggle, although we are familiar with very few names. Hemantakumari Choudhury (editor of wome's journal Antahpur), Lilabati Mitra, Labanyaprabha Dutta, Snehashila

Chowdhury participated in Nationalist movement. Snehashila persuaded the women of Khulna to give up imported bangles wear 'sankha' instead.

Throughout Bengal women observed 16th October 1905 - the day of the actual partition - as a day of protest. Five hundred women gathered in Calcutta to watch the foundation of the Federation Hall. A fair number assembled at Ramendrasundar Trivedi's house at Murshidabad to listen to the patriotic composition, Bangalakshmi Bratakatha, read out to them by his daughter, Girija Debi.

The Bamabodhini Patrika reported that women as well as men were organizing meetings against the partition of Bengal were taking swadeshi vows. Many women stopped wearing foreign clothes even on festive occasions. Many took up weaving to make clothes for their families. The use of hand-spun cloth had become an important national symbol.

Women's journals, especially Suprabhat, edited by Kumudini Mitra and Antahpur gave publicity to swadeshi brands such as Bengal Chemicals, New Floral Hair Oil, and Oriental Soap manufactured by the Oriental Soap Factory. These advertisements, one must note, did not exploit feminine figure or images. The entire emphasis was on the indigenous character of the goods for example, 'manufactured entirely with Bengal's capital and Bengal's labour.'

Direct participation was not feasible for women in the revolutionary movement that broke out during the last phase of the Swadeshi movement. Women were not included in the samitis or the revolutionary associations. The prevailing ideology was too conservative and the risks too formidable to allow women to participate on an equal basis of with men. Nevertheless many women helped the revolutionaries from the background. Sarala Debi, Sister Nibedita maintained close links with the samiti members. Kumudini Mitra organized a group of dedicated Brahmin women to serve as messengers between different biplabis. Mataji Tapaswini, founder of Mahakali pathshala, allowed her school building to become the office of a secret society. In many middle-class family, women as mothers, sisters and sis-in-laws helped the cause of the revolutionaries. Women used to give shelter to absconding 'biplabis', hide or transport firearms and function as couriers. Saudamini Debi of Faridpur, Sarojini Debi, Priyabala Debi and Mrinalini Debi of Barishal are but a few names of the women who rendered much help to the revolutionaries. Nanibala Debi was married to age eleven and widowed at fifteen and was finally forced to take shelter with her nephew Amarendranath Chattopadhyay, a leader of the Jugantar Group. Nanibala joined the party and acted as their housekeeper, occasionally as the wife of one of the revolutionaries. In a society where public/private domain were strictly separated on the basis of gender, that advantage was exploited by the revolutionaries to hide the role of the women in the revolutionary activities from the eye of the British Government.

Prostitutes and public women participated in swadeshi movement. The Amritabazar Patrika, mentioned a name of a public woman in Dhaka named Rajlaxmi Bai, paid Rs. 1500 to the national school. She also gave her all property to the school by her will.

The overwhelming regard women exhibited for Kanailal Dutt who was hanged to death for killing Naren Goswami, turned as approver, inside the Alipore jail was particularly impressive. They assembled in large numbers to have a last look at his body which was carried in a procession for his funeral. They chanted,

'Blessed is Kanai, and blessed is Kanai's mother'. This kind of spontaneous demonstration by women took many of the British observers by surprise. The Daily Telegraph of London commented that women of the type of Russian nihilists and English suffragists had appeared in Bengal, and that the Bengali ladies were the most obstinate and most antagonists of the English. The colonial rulers decided that in order to curb the growth of sedition among women the recordings of swadeshi songs on gramophone discs should be proscribed and the plays performed in theatre halls, which were frequented by ladies, be censored.

The Swadeshi movement petered out and the freedom movement, led by Indian National Congress, remained somewhat dormant during the early years of the First World War. Women's interest in politics again roused during the Home Rule movement led by Annie Besant Her involvement inspired many an Indian women (e.g. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay) and in a sense smoothed the way for the immense contribution that women made under Gandhi. Annie Besant was the first woman to occupy the post of president of Indian national Congress.

Women's political activities next proceeded towards an agitation for 'vote for women.' In one sense, demand for franchise was an attempt by the women of the elite classes to find a room for them in the established power structure. The organized political move by women in this sphere was formally initiated a franchise delegation led by Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant and others met the secretary of state , Edwin Montague and demanded equal franchise for women. However, the Montague-Chelmsford plan sidetracked the issue. In Bengal, the chief women's organisation to fight for the franchise was the Bangiya Nari Samaj guided by Kumudini Bose, Kamini Roy and Jyotirmoyee Ganguly. This body attempted to mobilize the support from their male counterpart such as Surendranath Banerjee, Bipinchandra Pal, Ramananda Chatterjee and others. Despite this the resolution to to permit women to vote was defeated in the Bengal Legislative Council in 1921. However in 1923 women were allowed to cast vote in Calcutta Municipal Election and ultimately in 1926 Bengal legislature approved a limited right of female suffrage.

It is to be noted that in this phase women did not do the same things as men. Instead, they used their traditional roles to mask a range of political activities. While the public and the private continued to exist as distinct categories, usual definitions of appropriate behavior in each sphere were redefined and given political meaning. Even women did not know how to conduct themselves and when they participate into politics.

Coming of Gandhi

Gandhi's entry in Indian politics brought in women along with the masses on to the public political scene. Women participated in large numbers in pickets, demonstrations and marches, particularly in the spectacular 'salt march' conducted by Gandhi to launch the Civil Disobedience movement in 1932. To understand the changed role of women in public political domain it is necessary to analyse the different kind of philosophical attitude of Gandhi towards women.

Madhu Kishwar says, in many ways, Gandhi's views on women and their role in society are not very different from those of 19th century reformers, in some other important ways he marks a crucial break from the tradition. The most crucial difference is that he does not see women as objects of reform, as

helpless creature deserving charitable concern. Instead he sees them as active, self-conscious agents of social change. In Ashis Nandy's term, Gandhi upheld the notion that the essence of femininity is superior to that of masculinity. His concern is not limited to bringing about change in selected areas of social life such as education and marriage as a way of regenerating Indian society, as was that of most 19th century social reformers. He was primarily concerned in bringing about radical social reconstruction. The political movement for national liberation was a means, a weapon to achieve the end. And he saw women playing a major role in task of social reconstruction. He thought that in the process of reconstructing the society, they would also free themselves from the specific forms of bondage that affected them as women.

Mohandas K. Gandhi returned to India as the hero of South African struggle. Soon after his introduction to Bombay Society, he met women who belonged to women's social reform movement organizations composed of mainly middle-class women. He stated that men and women have distinct qualities whose roots are biological. Women, according to him, weak in body but strong in soul. Both of them have separate sphere in societies and specific roles in the making of the Indian nation, for they are essentially complementary to each other.

He told his audience India needed women leaders who were "pure, firm and self-controlled" like the 'ancient Indian heroines': Sita, Draupadi and Damayanti. These were heroines who had suffered at the hands of men but survived with dignity. Gandhi recalled the mythological heroines when he told women to wake up and recognize their essential equality with men. By invoking those female mythological characters Gandhi showed that women had enormous resource of power within them. Gandhi identified that spirituality, self-sacrifice, purity and firmness are those virtues women possessed. These are the virtues women should use for freedom struggle. To Gandhi marriage was only for reproduction and sex without reproduction is abnormal. By invoking the Hindu mythological heroines and spiritualism Gandhi redefined the role of the women and elevated the role of the women to a religious domain. However Tanika Sarkar thinks this is not an innovation of Gandhi; he inherited and strengthened the tradition of Bankimchandra's *Bande Mataram*, the hymn which idealized womanhood as nationalism.

Gandhi did not encourage women to leave the domestic space; rather he transformed the traditional household women into instruments of political action. To Gandhi women's participation in politics should be passive. As a homemaker, they would play the crucial role of ideal sister and mother for the regeneration of country. To him nation was an extended family and as a benevolent patriarch, he idealized women as 'sisters of mercy, mothers of entire humanity.' This reminds us of the famous binary of public/private domain as shown by Partha Chatterjee. Paradoxically he often said that women are naturally trained to withstand self-suffering hence a stronger weapon of non-violence to combat the British cowardice that inflicted pain on the nation. This was enough encouragement for women to participate in active political work crossing the domestic boundary.

Gandhi envisioned women entering politics as chaste, self-sacrificing and devoted. If these virtues were rejected, it would lead to enslavement of women and also to the enslavement of the nation. Participation was intended in a non-violent mode so that feminine image of a woman was not destroyed. This was the Gandhian normative model for women entering politics. He compared the

British rulers to the demon Ravana who abducted Sita. Under colonialism the enslaved people were losing all sense of 'Dharma' (righteousness). Restoration of the rule of Rama (Ramarajya) would come only when women, emulating the faithful and brave Sita, united with men against this immoral ruler. Appearing before Muslim audience Gandhi asked the women to spin and encourage their husbands to join the movement and renounce foreign cloth to save Islam.

Gandhi believes in equal dignity and freedom of both men and women. However he redefined the notion of freedom. To him, freedom means liberation from internal domination and that only can bring self-reliance within a human being. But his notion of equality does not involve equality of women in employment or in economic and political power. He wanted first and foremost to change the moral condition of women's lives and to do away with vile abuses of power by men but not so much to alter the basic relationship from which that power was derived. He attempted to extend the power of women as wives, mothers, and sisters within the household rather than to have women acquire political power in their own right. Madhu Kishwar says, Gandhi did not envisage a radical change in their social role even though he was in favour of removing all legal and juridical disabilities against them. However Geraldine Forbes points out his article "The Position of Women" in *Young India* (1921) where he clearly stated that law was not the factor for any kind of disadvantageous position of women in society but it was man's lust. Real change would come when both men and women began to view their relationship differently. He advocated celibacy instead of legal change.

Introduction of 'Charkha and Khadi' enabled Gandhi to raise simple, ordinary women to the status of fellow workers for a common cause. He described in his Autobiography how a plain Gujrati woman Gangabehn discovered the efficacy of spinning wheel and became the first organizer of the khadi movement in India.

However, Gandhi's ambivalence is traceable in his notion of women. Some recent studies show that Gandhi's world of women could only be mothers, sisters and wives; there has no place for the prostitutes and 'temptress' whom Gandhi attacked virulently. However, he did not deny the contribution and participation of these so called fallen women in the movement. He did not consult Kasturba before taking the vow of celibacy. Even he did not require taking consent of Manu, his granddaughter while sharing bed with her for his experiment with personal sexuality.

At the same time, Gandhi's personality was such that it inspired confidence not only in women but the family members as well. Since his moral stature was high when women came out in the political field, their family members knew that they were quite secure and protected.

Gandhi's charisma reached its zenith during the time of Rowlatt satyagraha. Women participation in this movement was spectacular. After the Jalianwallah Massacre, Gandhi first evoked the sacred legends particularly, the Ramayana where he compared the British rulers to the demon Ravana who abducted Sita. He urged for the first time also to take the vow of swadeshi and spin every day. In a meeting with Muslim women he told the Muslim women that the Muslim rule was the rule of Satan and to save Islam they have to renounce foreign clothes. However, in the non-cooperation movement he attempted to

bring the whole nation under a single umbrella. Gandhi called off the campaign but it was already clear that women had joined the fight against the British.

The non-cooperation is considered to be the first all-India movement and Congress declared April 6-13, 1921 as Satyagraha week. In different levels women organizations were formed. Rashtriya Stree Sangha (RSS), an independent women's organization required its members to join the District Congress committees. By November, 1000 Bombay women were demonstrating against the prince of Wales's visit to India. In Bengal, events took a dramatic turn. With the first batch of volunteers selling g Khaddar was arrested with C.R. Das and his son, his wife Basanti Devi and Sister Urmila Devi took to street and were arrested. When word of arrest spread, the power of the tactic was clear: A huge crowd of Marwaris, Sikhs, Muslims, coolies and school boys milled around until the women were released. One man said he felt women from his own household had been arrested.

Gandhi immediately recognized the value of having women form picket lines writing in Young India he urged women from other parts of the country to follow the brave example of Bengali women. At Allahabad, 6000 women listened to Bi Amma, mother of Ali brothers, where she urged Muslim women to enlist as Congress volunteers and, if their men folk were arrested, to join the picket lines and keep the 'flag flying'.

Gandhi's appeal went beyond 'respectable' women to women marginalized in the society. In East Godvari district, Durgabai Deshmukh, organized the Devadasis and at least 1000 devadasis met him and took off their jewellery of Rs 20,000 in the Congress fund. A "Morally indecent" Bengali woman Manada Devi tells in her autobiography 'Sikhisita Patitar Atmcharita' how she and other prostitutes joined in collecting funds for Congress in 1922 and in 1924 participates in C.R. Das's satyagraha against the lascivious and corrupt Mohant of Tarakeswar temple.

At the same time Women's organizations were petitioning the British Government for the franchise. Gandhi responded that he knew all about the disadvantages of Indian women but the problem was not with the law but man's lust. Real change would come when both men women began to view their relationship differently. He advocated celibacy instead of legal change.

The Civil Disobedience Movement

Gandhi returned to politics in 1928 and launched a civil disobedience campaign that brought a number of women into public. Women's participation in this movement of 1930-32 differed qualitatively and quantitatively from the early 1920s and own them a place in history.

Bombay women's picketing and demonstrations from 1930 to 1932 received more press attention than women's activities in any other part of the country. The women's political organization, Rashtriya Stree Sangha, remained under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu and Goshiben Naorozi. By 1930s RSS spawned a number of smaller organizations of which Desh Sevika Sangha (DSS) was most important.

Gandhi began his march in March of 1930, from Ahmedabad to Dandi to make salt in defiance of the British monopoly. He refused to include women in this march as he feared the British would call Indian

men cowards who did hide behind women. Nevertheless, women were very much involved and gathered at every stop to hear the Mahatma speak.

April 16th, the day of Amritsar massacre, was chosen for the formal breaking of the salt laws. A front line of seven people including two women was chosen to break the salt law first.

In May, with the sevikas, Sarojini Naidu was assigned to lead the raid on the Dharsana salt work. She was arrested and released on the same day. Many of her Indian supporters feared of her safety but Sarojini refused to retreat and told, "I am here not as a woman but as a General". Sarojini led the second batch of women raiders and this time was sentenced to a year in prison. Her leadership inspired hundreds of women to emulate her bravery by marching the streets.

Women of Bengal came forward at this time but their demonstrations were smaller and activities more radical than those of Bombay women. The capital city was also the heart of revolutionary struggle and women's colleges became centre for recruiting new members. Bengali nationalism had always valorized violence and this ethos profoundly influenced the participation of Bengali women in the freedom struggle.

The Mahila Rashtriya Sanghs (MRS), begun in 1928, was the first formal organization to mobilize women for political workers in Bengal. Latika Ghosh, an Oxford-educated teacher, founded this organization being inspired by Subhas Chandra Bose. Subhas, was extremely impressed with Latika's ability to successfully field a women's demonstration against the Simon Commission insisted her to form the MRS similar to that of the RSS in Bombay. MRS leaders, just like the RSS wanted to achieve swaraj and improve women's status. They argued that that these goals are inseparable: until women's lives improved the nation could never be free.

In the inaugural session of Calcutta Congress (1928) Latika marched with 300 women along with the men. Bose charged her the post of a colonel of the women volunteers. Their uniform consisted of dark green saris with red borders worn over white blouse- the colours of Congress flag. Number sensitive issues arose during the training period: would they wear trousers? Should they stay with men in night? And would women march with men? Colonel Latika compromised everywhere but she stood her ground on the issue of women marching in the regular procession.

Another organization Nari Satyagrah Samiti (NSS) led by Urmila Devi, Bimal Prastibha Dedi, Jyotirmoyee Ganguly, Santi Das were always willing to picket and risk arrest.

However most of the women came from the highly educated families of Bengal and belonged to the three highest caste of Bengal: Brahmins, Kayasthas and Vaidyas. Though radical in approach the Bengali Women's movement could hardly overcome this limitation.

Women's political demonstrations in Madras were less dramatic than those in either Bombay or Bengal. Women picketed and marched in processions but it was always difficult to mobilize large numbers of women for action. Madras women never joined revolutionary movement. Actually there had been considerable debate within Madras Congress whether or not to accept Gandhi's leadership. Moreover,

Congress was seen as a party of the Brahmin elite. Still S. Ambujammal, Krishnabai Rau responded to Gandhi's call of civil disobedience and formed women's organizations.

In North India women from Lahore, Allahabad, Lucknow, Delhi joined public demonstrations and shocked a public unused to seeing respectable women in the streets without veils. In Allahabad women Nehru family were important leaders. Swarup Rani, Jawaharlal Nehru's old and frail mother, emerged from a lifetime to the public in khaddar. Her message was simple: if you love your motherland and my son join the Gandhian movement. When Bhagat Singh and his comrades were sentenced to death, girl students in colleges of Lahore picketed in front of the college gate. It was widely successful demonstration as men students absented themselves from classes to cheer the young women.

In the North political movement engaged elite women like Swarup rani, Kamala Nehru with women from lower strata of the society. However in most cases elite women could come to the political arena with the permission of their husbands or fathers.

Conclusion: The questions that strike one are: how far were politicized women conscious of the gender asymmetry enforced by the traditional framework? Did the involvement widen their horizon and generate a new thought process?

It has often been argued that the women's political participation in Gandhian movement was merely an extension of their domestic role. Biographers of C.R. Das barely mention Basanti Devi as a leader; Bipin Chandra Pal's memoir dwells at length on his mother's and grandmother's role as sacrificing housewives; Ashalata Sen stated that she did not approve of women in paid jobs and that when she went to jail she made proper arrangements for aged father-in law to be looked after. Saraladebi acknowledged men's role in bringing women into political arena but she accused male folk that they just wanted to see them as law-breakers, not law-makers.

Nevertheless, one must not overlook the tremendous changes in women's perceptions that occurred during this period. They did step out from the cloisters of their homes into the male preserve of politics and power. Whatever be the special duty allotted by Gandhi for women, the actual process entailed the blurring of the domestic/public division and, inevitably, had immense impact lives of both the participants and the sympathizers. The age-old notion of women's total inferiority to men began to be slowly eroded.

Tanika Sarkar shows that in no-chowkidari tax movement all adult members of a family were arrested, crops burnt down, granaries and houses looted. Such a large scale risk would have been impossible to take without the full consent of family members. At Indas in Bankura hundreds of women lay down on the road for three whole days so that their property could not be taken away out of their villages.

Geraldine Forbes opines that most of the women followed Gandhi because of their men folk accepted his leadership. However Bharati Ray thinks while the political struggle was on, women leaders as well as rank and file political workers became increasingly aware of their disabilities as women and eager to be

free from them. The protest that was made against British imperialism was also directed at least partially against the unfair patriarchal structure. Pritilata Waddedar wrote in her suicide note that if the women of nation are still lag behind, it was because they were deliberately left behind.

No doubt, Gandhi made women into a subject, making her realize that she had freedom, qualities and attributes which are crucial to contemporary society. In a path breaking intervention, he made possible not only the involvement of women in politics, but made her realize that the national movement could not succeed without her involvement in the struggle.

Sujata Patel says that, however, this reconstruction of women and femininity did not make a structural analysis of the origin and nature of exploitation of women; in fact Gandhi used essentialist arguments to reaffirm her place as mother and wife in the household. He denied her sexual needs, yet emphasized her distinct social role in the family by glorifying some of her feminine qualities.

However it should not be forgotten as Patel opines, the new image of woman he creates is drawn from one particular historical and social setting and for one particular political goal: to unite the different stratas in India against imperialism. Gandhi was figure of that historical time and of that social milieu. He was also a political strategist par excellence who attempted to unite different unevenly developed stratas.

Revolutionary Movement:

Mobilization of women in nationalist movement was repeatedly in a line which identified Motherland with Mother Goddess and demanding highest sacrifice from all. The mode of appeal, as Tanika Sarkar says had a fundamental problem: it seemed to be an evocation of the latent strength, even violence, in the women's nature, which tradition strives to contain. The Gandhian movement resolved the tension beautifully by imparting to it a gentle, patient, long-suffering, sacrificial ambience for women. The political vacuum after the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement paved the way for searching for a new form of movement. However, women were already associated with the cult of individual terror since 1905. Saratchandra Chatterjee's novel Pather Dabi attracted a large section of women to the romance and heroism of terrorism.

A sharp break occurred in 1931 when two teenage girls Shanti and Suniti, assassinated the District Magistrate of Comilla. From this date women crowded into unprecedented roles and actions in quick succession. Pritilata Waddedar led the attack on the Chittagong European Club, Kalpana Dutta jumped bail and disappeared underground with Surya Sen's band of absconders, Bina Das fired on the Bengal Governor Anderson at a Calcutta University Convocation function. The woman terrorist was no longer the mother or sister sheltering the fugitive but full-fledged comrade-in arms, revolutionizing all precedents and norms for political action.

Women, who joined the revolutionary movement worked closely with men, wore disguises, traveled alone or in the company of strangers, and learned how to shoot, drive cars and make bombs. Even they

were valorized they were not regarded by all as 'respectable' women. Gandhi called them 'unsexed' and in Tagore's novel 'Char Adhyaya' it was shown that sexual allure was used by the revolutionary heroine to recruit young man to the cause.

However it should be noted that the revolutionary women have described themselves as sacrificing all the things a woman wants - marriage, children, and a home - for the country. Here the Gandhian notion of Indian womanhood and that of the revolutionary notion sounds similar.

The women got great respect for their political work both Violent and non-violent. In the years following civil disobedience movement more and more women entered the professions, some men learned to work side by side with their colleagues. The legal structure for family law was reviewed, and efforts to modify it were undertaken.