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## WOMEN IN THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

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### ABSTRACT

In nineteenth-century India, the women's movement was largely driven by the efforts of Indian men who sought to modernize women's roles, focusing on issues such as sati, child marriage, widow remarriage, and female education. These men, viewing the world through their caste/class perspectives, aimed to integrate women, particularly from their own families, into the new societal framework established under colonial rule. This led to women becoming involuntary participants in this new society, with some thriving and forming their own organizations, somewhat shielded from male control though not from patriarchy. Women's organizations began advocating for rights with an ideology termed "social feminism," which linked women's rights to the broader nationalist struggle. This ideology was supported by leaders like Gandhi and Nehru and was reflected in the policies of the Congress Party. Post-independence, the Indian Constitution promised equality and participation in nation-building, but achieving actual equality remained a challenge. Nehru emphasized that rights had to be actively won rather than passively received. Despite initial satisfaction with post-independence gains, the ruling Congress Party's lip service to women's concerns led to ineffective welfare schemes. Even women in communist and socialist parties often echoed male-dominated party lines. Nonetheless, some women remained focused on the actual conditions and needs of women. The landmark report "Towards Equality" in the 1970s highlighted worsening conditions for women and spurred a new wave of feminist activism, leading to the contemporary feminist movement. The 1980s saw the emergence of new organizations addressing endemic violence against women, an issue previously manipulated to serve male political agendas. Historical patterns of violence, such as dowry murders and "accidental" kitchen burnings, were systematically ignored by male leaders preoccupied with nationalist or political struggles. Only in recent decades have these issues received sustained attention.

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### METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVE

For this paper Mixed Method and Secondary Method of research has been used. The topic, Women In The Nationalist Movement, will focus on how in the nineteenth-century India, men initiated the women's movement by addressing issues like sati, child marriage, widow remarriage, and female education, integrating women into colonial society. Post-independence, promises of equality required continued effort. The 1970s "Towards Equality" report spurred a new feminist movement, highlighting violence against women. Despite political and communal challenges, women's activism transformed their roles from passive subjects to active participants in legislation and society, continuing the pursuit of gender justice.

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### INTRODUCTION

Originating from the nineteenth century, the first historical narratives about Indian women are products of colonialism. According to these stories, women were highly esteemed in antiquity before a protracted period of fall in their standing. Europeans then entered the picture. These stories claim that the foreign rulers brought new perspectives on the roles and skills of women, which the enlightened Indians embraced. Up until recently, the narrative surrounding the women's history in India during the British has been one of a gradual yet steady ascent towards "modernity" after an extended era of decline and stagnation. Theorising about the "golden age" where centuries of corruption and treachery happened, British missionaries as well as the reformers of India who seized a chance to bring changes in their own culture advanced this theory. European values, technology, and governmental structures served as a mask of salvation. This style of writing about history was typical of European history, especially when it came to the linear progression of events through time toward a certain objective. The histories they quoted, both European-inspired and rooted in Indian traditions, believed in the special essence of women. Indian literary works idealised women as selfless, loyal, and occasionally rebellious as well as dangerous. Different pronouncements for men were found in various forms be it in a religious, political law, and educational institution according on factors such as caste, class, their religion and age.

The biological traits of women and the subservient, supportive roles they were meant to perform, on the other hand, overshadowed their distinctions. Historians' depictions of Indian women were likewise essentialist. A woman might occasionally be singled out for special attention in Indian scriptures and historical narratives, but mainly this was because of her achievements being noteworthy in the eyes of men. Many topics that were

deeply entwined with the lives of women were mostly ignored, including the domestic and the agricultural technologies, religion and its sentiments, their fertility and offsprings, furnishing of the house, jewellery, clothes, their inheritance along with property rights, divorce, etc.

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## CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN IN THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

Author Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya (1838–94) depicted rebels giving their lives in his 1882 novel *Anandamath*, which was published. India became well-known for Bankim's poignant hymn "Bande Mataram," which means "Hail to the Mother." This cry to rescue the Motherland was more of a nationalistic linkage of idealised womanhood than a call for women's involvement in political affairs. Interestingly, an 1875 publication for women declared that they were not willing to discuss the political situation and its controversies or consequences because it was not interesting enough to appeal the women of that time.

The transformation started when several Bengali ladies expressed their concerns to the Viceroy who endorsed the Ilbert bill, which permitted the judges of India for presiding over the European trials. Ten women attended the Indian National Congress's (INC) 1889 annual convention, four years after the organisation was established. Women writers Swarnakumari Ghosal and Kadambini Ganguly, who were the first female BA recipient in British India and among the first female physicians in India, participated as delegates in 1890. From this point on, women participated in every INC conference, usually as spectators but occasionally as delegates. In 1901, the song "Hindustan" was performed by a choir of girls from India. In the first session of the next year, a rendition of this song by two sisters from Gujarat performed. The world was told by these politically astute and educated girls and their moms that India was just as progressive as any Western nation in terms of how it saw women's roles in public life. The British divided the province of Bengal in the 1900s. Alongside males, women boycotted foreign products and limited their purchases to swadeshi, or things made in the Bengal province, in an effort to protest this separation.

Nirad Chaudhuri has recollected his parents' decision to replace the kids' foreign-made clothing with Indian-made items. A water pitcher made of glass which had withstood through the famous Swadeshi movement was suddenly as well as violently disliked by his mother, who gave one of her sons the task of smashing it. Some ladies made a commitment to serve the Motherland. Several more women supported the revolutionary organisations. Nanibala Devi was compelled to seek refuge with her nephew Amarendranath Chattopadhyay after being married at the age of eleven, being a widow at the age of fifteen, and obtaining some schooling at a Christian mission. His party, the Jugantar Party, was formed with the intention of overthrowing the foreign overlords by violence. After joining the group, Nanibala took on the role of housekeeper for the rebels while also spoofing as one of their wives on occasion. The act of women in political affairs were concealed from the authorities of Britain in that situation, where both public and private arrangements were tightly divided by each other's ideology and political arrangements. Their domestic responsibilities provided cover for these subversive and revolutionary deeds, as weapons were hidden by women, housed the revolutionaries, and encouraged other people. In contrast to the prominent responsibilities of women in the INC, these Bengali women who supported the Swadeshi movement engaged in totally diverse activities.

Although the delegates seemed to be on par with males there, their real importance was symbolic. Posing as rejuvenated Indian women, they sung songs glorifying Mother India. Women did not participate in the same activities as males in the Bengali anti-partition campaign. As an alternative, they covered up a variety of political actions with their conventional roles.

## MOHANDAS K. GANDHI AND WOMEN

The hero of the South African battle, Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948), returned to India in 1915. He met women who belonged to women's social reform organisations shortly after being introduced to Bombay society. He was asked to speak on the poverty of the people to one of these gatherings of middle-class women. Like the historical heroines Sita, Damayanti, and Draupadi, he told his audience, India needs women leaders who were "pure, firm, and self-controlled." As proof of her faithfulness, Sita, the protagonist of the renowned Ramayana narrative, endured a trial by fire, was kidnapped, and followed her husband into exile. Damayanti, Nala's devoted and patient wife, knew her husband no matter who he became. The Mahabharata, the second major mythology of India, tells the story of Draupadi, who lost a dice game despite being the wife of the five Pandava brothers. The god Krishna saw that she was chaste and innocent, and stepped in when her new lord ordered her to strip. These women, who were formerly victims of male aggression, managed to endure their ordeals with grace and honor. Gandhi mentioned these people as inspiration for women to wake up and acknowledge their fundamental equality with men.

Women wouldn't understand their right to independence and freedom until they recognized the strength of their ancestresses. In 1919, the government enacted the Rowlatt Acts, which forbade public protest and suspended civil liberties, in response to the end of World War I and growing calls for self-rule. Gandhi started working on a women's program at this point. He addressed a gathering of "ladies of all classes and communities" on April 6, the day set aside for a nationwide strike in India, and urged them to support the satyagraha movement in order to enable the full participation of males. The walled garden in Amritsar saw the massacre of hundreds of peaceful protestors within a week. Members of the reformed councils withdrew from them at the start of the non-cooperation movement. Boycotting the courts and educational institutions was the next move. In a special session on August 20, 1920, Congress approved this scheme. In contrast to the swadeshi vow, it promised a more active role for women and was a success for Mohandas K. Gandhi. Women interested in politics attended meetings to demonstrate their support when Congress proclaimed

April 6–13, 1921, to be Satyagraha Week. Women made the decision to start their own political group during one of Sarojini Naidu's many speeches. One independent women's organisation, Rashtriya Stree Sangha (RSS), mandated that its members join the District Congress Committee. Urmila Devi, the widowed sister of Bengali Congress leader C. R. Das, spoke to this group in August and asked women to be prepared to leave their homes and serve their country. By November, a thousand women from Bombay were protesting against the Prince of Wales's visitation to India. Things changed in Bengal in an even more dramatic way. The most influential Congressman in eastern India, C. R. Das, gave the order for volunteers to challenge the government's ban on political protests by selling khaddar, or homespun fabric, on Calcutta's streets. Among the first group of volunteers to be detained was the son of C. R. Das. Following their imprisonment, his wife, Basanti Devi, sister, Urmila Devi, and niece, Miss Suniti Devi, took to the streets. The strategy was effective when word got out about their arrest, as a sizeable group of "Marwaris, Muslims, Bhattias, Sikhs, coolies, mill-hands, and school boys" gathered until the women were freed by the police. Gandhi was creating a new standard of femininity for Indian women, one that redefined suffering and passivity as strength.

### ***WOMEN IN BOMBAY***

In response, a group of Gujarati women in Bombay organized to organize and lead the closure of stores that sold foreign clothing. The Amritsar slaughter anniversary, April 6, was selected as the official date for violating the salt rules. The first people to set fires, boil sea water, and step onto the beach were a front line group of seven, which included two women, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Avantikabai Gokhale. The day that marked their debut in a contemporary militant political campaign was still fresh in Kamaladevi's memory, and she couldn't contain her joy at being among the first and the significance of the event. In the lives of the women in her nation, it appeared to be such a magnificent time. The Chowpatty Sea Face, "thousands of Gujarati women" gathered, gathering seawater in their brass and copper jugs, according to the Bombay Chronicle. Volunteer women in the city centre picketed toddy stores, requesting that the proprietors close and that customers vacate the property. While others went door to door asking housewives to buy only swadeshi items, other women made their living by selling salt on the streets.

Sarojini Naidu was proposed as the leader of the raid on the Dharasana salt plant in May, during which time the sevikas had already begun picketing. The demonstration was organized by Sarojini, who was detained and then freed on May 1, 1930. Indian nationalists and British officials saw symbolic meaning in her presence. Her many Indian followers were worried about her safety, but she assured them that she was there as a general, not a woman. In the meantime, the local police were unsure on how to handle her and other female protestors as they knew that everyone saw her as a woman.<sup>4</sup> Leading the second group of raiders, Sarojini was apprehended once more on May 21 and was given a one-year prison sentence this time. Hundreds of women were motivated to march in the streets by her boldness and leadership. Picketing and demonstrations persisted in Bombay until 1931, when Gandhi was freed from prison. Women's efficacy in agitational politics was demonstrated throughout this period. In response to women picketing outside their stores, merchants pledged not to sell foreign clothing until a just peace had been achieved for the nation. Women joined males on the streets to raise flags and participate in protests.

### ***WOMEN IN BENGAL***

During this period, women from Bengal came up, although their actions were more radical and their protests were fewer than those of Bombay women. Women in Calcutta produced and marketed salt, conducted street demonstrations against alcohol and clothing stores, preached the virtues of khaddar, and led processions. Women's universities developed became hubs for enlisting new members as the capital city served as the epicenter of the revolutionary battle. Women participated in processions, wore khaddar, and hid from revolutionaries in district cities and villages. In this context, the influence of notable local leaders was equal to that of Gandhi. Bengali women's involvement in the freedom struggle was greatly impacted by the nationalism's longstanding valorization of violence. The first official organization to organize women for political activities was the Mahila Rashtriya Sangha (MRS), founded in 1928. This group was created by Oxford-educated teacher Latika Ghosh at Subhas Chandra Bose's request. Latika was encouraged to create a women's organization affiliated with Congress by Subhas, a highly regarded politician, who was impressed by her ability to organize a successful protest by women against the Simon Commission. The MRS aspired to attain swaraj and elevate the position of women, much as the RSS in Bombay.

These objectives, according to MRS leaders, are inextricably linked: the country cannot be free until women's life are better, and women's conditions will not improve until the nation is free. The first step towards swaraj was educating women about their dual subjugation as lesser sexes and colonial subjects. While advocating a radical worldview, MRS employed a mobilization tactic that assumed women were inherently religious. Latika Ghosh penned essays urging women to wake up and examine their nation carefully. India used to be wealthy; today, a foreign nation known for its extreme poverty and weak leadership was in charge of the country.

Subhas Bose made the decision in 1928 to allow women volunteers in uniform lead a procession alongside males to mark the beginning of the yearly Congress meetings in Calcutta. Latika Ghosh was given the rank of colonel and tasked with organizing her own group of people for the procession. Latika recruited three hundred women: teachers working for Calcutta Corporation and students from two of the most significant women's higher education institutions, Bethune College and Victoria Institution. Their attire included of red-bordered, dark green saris layered over white blouses, mirroring the colors of the Congress flag. During the training phase, some delicate topics surfaced, such as whether women would march alongside males. Should the young ladies dress in pants? At night, would they remain in the camp? Colonel Latika maintained that women should not march in the regular parade, even if she supported the other aspects of modesty such as wearing saris instead of pants and prohibiting

women from being in the camp at night. Although she acknowledged that she was not good at saluting or keeping time, she nevertheless wanted her female volunteers to be seen as equals with males in the fight for liberation. Observers said she succeeded in her purpose and that it changed their perception of women. In response to the Congress's call for women to be prepared to serve the country, women in Calcutta founded the Nari Satyagraha Samiti (NSS) in 1929. Jyotimoyee Ganguli was named vice-president, Santi Das and Bimal Protiba Devi joint secretaries, and Urmila Devi, one of the first women arrested for political activity, was named president. Thirteen to twenty women made up the nucleus of this organization, willing to picket and run the danger of being arrested. The three highest castes of Bengal, the brahmin, kayastha, and vaidya, were represented by these ladies. All of them had followed some kind of purdah, were well-educated, and came from families in the workforce. Their uniform of choice was a white khaddar sari.

### ***WOMEN IN MADRAS***

The political protests by women in Madras were not as significant as those in Bengal or Bombay. Although many women participated in processions and picketing, it was never easy to get a big enough group of them to take action. There were occasional spectacular demonstrations similar to those in Bombay and Calcutta, but there was general support for the swadeshi promise and for the spinning, wearing, and selling of khaddar. Madras women did not participate in the revolutionary movement and did not experience severe police brutality. This can be explained by the way politics are conducted in Madras and by the strategies used by the nationalist movement in this region. First, the Madras Congress had divided sharply over whether or not to recognize Gandhi as their leader. Several influential people opposed his proposal.

Congress was perceived as the party of the brahmin elite, second. Third, women particularly succeeded in other regions of the nation in imposing the embargo on clothing manufactured outside. Congressman C. Rajagopalachari, a prominent figure in Madras, was more worried about prohibition than imported clothing. He saw this as a problem that cut beyond caste and community and had the power to bring people together in a movement against the government. He was the secretary of the Prohibition League of India and a member leading the Indian National Congress's anti-drink campaign. Regretfully, one of the riskiest modes of protest in Madras was picketing liquor stores, which was also thought to be improper for women. SMT. The sole child of S was S. Ambujammal. The outstanding lawyer and Congress politician Srinivasa Iyengar. Stories of Gandhi were told to her growing up in South Africa. Since S. S. Though Gandhi's wife, Kasturbai, was not present when Ambujammal met her, Iyengar maintained conventional beliefs regarding gender segregation.

Although she started wearing khaddar and spinning, she hardly ever left the house and joined the non-cooperation movement in 1920. Personal problems rather than political goals drove Ambujammal's commitment to the independence struggle.

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### **POLICE VIOLENCE**

The 1920s and 1930s civil disobedience and non-cooperation movements, led by women, cast doubt on Britain's attempt to bring about civilization in India. Indian women's subjugation was used by British rulers, starting in the nineteenth century, as an excuse for their oppression. They saw their attempts to pass legislation protecting women, educate the public, and provide healthcare as evidence of their moral mission. The belief that the British were India's legitimate rulers was seriously contested by women's participation in the nationalist movement, which also fully supported the Congress as the party's legitimate heir to power. Widely reported reports of their violent attacks on nonviolent protestors cast doubt on the British image of themselves as moral leaders. Mistreatment of women in Britain ran counter to gender norms and gravely damaged women's self-proclaimed guardian position. Both Islamic and Hindu texts value modest, virginal women. Legends, legislation, and folklore all elevate the ideal woman as someone who is devoted to her husband and remains invisible to other men, often even going unnoticed. Men were noble who stood up for women.

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### **WOMEN IN COLONIAL ECONOMY**

British dominance led to the employment of women in urban brothels and new professional options for them. The non-agricultural, village-based economy was severely disrupted by colonial control, which also changed the conventional economic structure. Many women became unemployed as a result of the local economy's downturn and the small-scale services and industries that it brought with it. Women used to work in a wide range of small-scale industries, including the processing of food grains and oil seeds, the creation of bread, shoes, ceramics, nets, and ropes, the raising of livestock, and different repairs. Each of these pursuits waned. In Bengal, mechanized threshing machines installed in mills have supplanted the female-dominated home sector of rice husking. Men took over from women as rice-huskers when machines were introduced.

#### ***3.1. WOMEN IN PROFESSIONAL POSITION***

Women were given menial positions in the new mills, but Bengali Hindu and Muslim women were not allowed to accept these professions due to social conventions against women being alone. With the advent of colonial control came the modern sector, or the economic sphere, which gave women new job options. A few more women could now pursue careers in teaching and medical, for instance. A considerable number of women were employed in factories, mines, and plantations, but it is hard to see these jobs as positive given the tough working circumstances. In exploitative

industries, poor women frequently found work. Rather than acknowledging this fact, female leaders prioritized legal rights, education, and the franchise. They saw women who sought work from higher castes as sad victims of unfavorable circumstances. Lower-caste women's labor was undervalued. Because their husbands or dads provided support, women leaders were able to finance their forays into social work and politics. However, they were frequently unwittingly constrained to actions and attitudes that maintained their class rank and lacked the financial resources to make their own judgments. Women's organizations pushed for equal access to healthcare and education for women. Sex-segregation norms precluded women from utilizing institutions intended for men, so these services had to be provided by separate institutions.

It was demanded by women leaders that female professionals staff new institutions. Women who were educated, mobile, and at ease mingling with both sexes were the target audience for the positions that were developed. During the late 1800s, Indian women were able to pursue new employment opportunities, including medicine. Indian men had long had access to Western medical education, but it wasn't until the 1880s that Lady Dufferin, the Viceroy's wife, founded the National Association for Supplying Female Medical Aid to the Women of India.

This society helped create medical training programs for women, supported the building of hospitals and clinics, and offered financial support to women who wanted to become doctors, hospital aides, nurses, or midwives. Rich Indians, including landowners, businessmen, and maharajas, made contributions to this fund in exchange for titles and other special treatment. By 1888, women graduates were being hired by the Indian government, which was also overseeing the association's operations. One of the first female doctors in India, Kadambini Basu, was a beneficiary of this program. She attended Bethune College after receiving her degree in 1883 and then started Medical College. Kadambini married her lifelong friend and mentor, Dwarkanath Ganguly, shortly after starting medical school. Dwarkanath was a devoted follower of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj and a champion of male-female equality. Kadambini applied and was accepted when the government introduced a stipend of Rs 20 per month for female medical students. She started a successful private practice, was appointed to the Lady Dufferin Women's Hospital in 1888, and was granted the GBMC (Graduate of Bengal Medical College) degree in 1886 rather than the more renowned MB (Bachelor of Medicine) degree due to an exam failure.

### ***WOMEN AS FACTORY WORKERS***

Although precise records are only accessible after 1911, women were employed by mills that were created in the 1880s. The number of workers at Bombay's textile mills during the 1890s is estimated to have been around 100,000. Between twenty and twenty-five percent of the workforce consisted of women, of whom seventy-five worked full-time and the remaining workers were seasonal or employed when production increased. Women were employed as thread winders and cleaners of cotton, but never as weavers. In Bengal's jute mills at this period, there were roughly 14,000 women employed. They also worked in low-skilled jobs and experienced seasonal joblessness. Factory laws intended to enhance working conditions for women garnered attention from a variety of sources during the final quarter of the 1800s.

During the period when Lord Shaftesbury was highlighting the state of factories in England, Major Moore produced a report regarding the management of the Bombay Cotton Department, while Mr. J. A. Ballard, the Bombay Mint Master, documented the struggles faced by women and children working in Indian factories. Following an analysis of the circumstances, a seven-member committee constituted by the government decided, by majority decision, that legislation was not required. Upon supporting regulatory reform, two English appointees were branded as "ignorant English philanthropists and grasping English manufacturers" and charged of attempting to increase labor costs in order to reduce the competitiveness of Indian goods. Approximately 66,000 women, or 20 percent of all workers in Calcutta, were employed by the jute mills in the 1920s. While they did not operate the jute presses, women spun, carded, and completed jute sacks. Just 10% of the female jute workers were Bengali women who were Hindu or Muslim and found their ability to work was impeded by the purdah rules.

There were about eighty percent of these women who were categorized as "dependants," or part-time employees. Women who were migrant from Bihar, the Central Provinces, Madras, and the United Provinces made up ninety percent of the labor. They earned three times as much money working in the mills as Bengali women who performed piecework at home. The earnings of Bengali women who performed piecework in their homes were three times lower than those of the women who worked in the mills. As a result of growing mechanization and labor laws, there was a noticeable decrease in the number of women working in the jute mills starting in 1930. In the mills of Bombay, Ahmedabad, and Calcutta, women made the highest earnings as factory workers. During the 1920s, full-time employees in Calcutta made between Rs 9 and Rs 30 per month, whereas in Ahmedabad and Bombay, their earnings were significantly higher at Rs 12 to Rs 34. These were really good earnings. At the Women's Hospital in Chinsurah, the female physician's monthly wage was merely Rs. so. But these pay do not necessarily reflect well-being. Urban areas were infamously unsanitary, with insufficient water supplies and housing conditions. The majority of the female laborers arrived in Calcutta as unmarried individuals, and a combination of sexual harassment and inadequate pay compelled numerous them to engage in relationships with men or engage in outright prostitution.

### ***WOMEN AS SEX WORKERS AND MAID SERVANTS***

Although thousands of women had to labor to make ends meet, the dominant gender ideology portrayed women as reliant housewives. Not only did urban areas draw men looking for work, but they also attracted women without guardians. Lacking education, they were forced to work as prostitutes, maid servants, and coolies. In the modernizing urban sectors, these unregulated occupations developed. Their working conditions were

not changed or their hours of labor were restricted by law. They talked only about prostitutes. After classifying them as social problems, volunteer social workers attempted to remove them from their jobs.

One particular instance that sticks out is Godavari Gokhale's attempt to organize domestic workers. There were several domestic helpers. A figure consistent with reports from other cities, but apparently invisible, was that 39 percent of working women in Calcutta were domestic workers according to the 1911 census. Although they worked in every middle-class home, maid servants were rarely considered employees by their employers. Maybe this was because it was often hard to tell a dependant relative from a domestic servant. An exceptional instance is Godavari Gokhale's attempt to organise domestic servants.

There were a lot of domestic help. Domestic workers made for 39% of all working women in Calcutta, according to the 1911 census, a percentage that is consistent with reports from other cities but not easily evident. While maid servants were employed in every middle-class family, their employers hardly ever considered them to be employees. It could be that the line separating domestic servants from dependent relatives was frequently blurry. The literature on women who turned to prostitution to sustain themselves and their families, on the other hand, is extensive. Of the 400,000 people living in Calcutta around the middle of the 19th century, more than 12,000 were prostitutes, with over 90% of them being widows. There were perhaps fifteen thousand more women who made their living as prostitutes in the 24-Parganas district, which was nearby. About 25% of working women in Calcutta were employed in this field in 1911.

In Bombay, the number of prostitutes had increased to 30,000–40,000 during this period. Though not very accurate, these numbers become important when compared to other fields in which women labor. The new careers of teaching and medicine did not sustain as many women as prostitution did. Which women fit the definition of "prostitute"? Initially, there existed females born into castes that customarily earned their livelihood by singing and dancing. Afterwards, they taught their daughters about their craft. Individuals who were not blessed with daughters frequently bought or adopted female offspring. According to Veena Oldenburg, by selling their skills, these women—technically entertainers—were able to exercise agency and challenge the patriarchal worldview. Women belonging to the baishnava (devoted to the god Vishnu) sect were often called prostitutes. Having left their homes and families to "seek god within," they lived in groups and were labeled deviants for their unsanctioned relationships with men. In the best of circumstances, their sexual liaisons liberated them from earthly attachments; in the worst of circumstances, pimps masqueraded as holy men and treated these women like ordinary prostitutes. Beginning in the 1870s, reformers were interested in devadasis, dancers who performed for the gods in Hindu temples.

In the area that their temple served, Devadasis were regarded with reverence and granted land grants to cover their expenses. Many reformers referred to them as "temple prostitutes" by the second decade of the twentieth century, claiming that regular pimps and madams were now referring to their women as "devada-sis." Many of the devadasis fought being called prostitutes and the reformers' advances, as did performers, religious women, and courtesans. Although the Devadasis were not free agents, they may have objected to laws that sought to outlaw their way of life. They were forbidden from being married or having intercourse with men in their own community during the rite that dedicated them to the temple, but they were also made aware of their availability for a sexual connection with a temple patron. Mothers and grandmothers were granted the right of veto power by the temple authorities, who also specified who was acceptable to date—the eldest sons of wealthy landed or business families. To be sure, this was not a gloomy life, according to Amrit Srinivasan, who also notes that there were significant rewards in terms of career and money, and most significantly, there was no lack of social honor.

The seeming independence and prosperity of these women infuriated reformers. By denying devadasis their land and means of employment, these would-be rescuers tried to "normalize" them and referred to them as "prostitutes". Many of the women were traditional prostitutes, meaning they sold sexual favors for cash, and they had no affiliation with the arts or religion. There were a lot of widows among the prostitutes, according to most reports, which implies that brothels served as safe havens for women who had nowhere else to turn. Girls were also coerced into this industry by being abducted or lured from their homes. Married women who were tired of their oppressive lives and wanted to flee to another country joined the ranks of prostitutes. Some employed women resorted to prostitution in order to survive. Only a small percentage of the women who were interested in this subject could view prostitution as sex work and decide what would be the best course of action. Rather, they gave these women a different kind of sanctuary once they "rescued" them.

Under colonial control, working women's lives in India deteriorated. Men and women alike did not benefit equally from jobs in the contemporary economy, but women lost out the most as traditional sectors declined. Due to the abundance of labor, women persisted in working in the unskilled, manual labor sector, where they received little pay and had little chance of moving up to more senior roles. Education and family support were prerequisites for the new careers that were open to women: teaching, law, and medical. Unmarried women without flawless credentials and reputable families were even more susceptible to verbal and sexual harassment—even Kadambini Ganguly was referred to as a whore. Some professional women did, however, succeed in gaining respect, autonomy, and personal fulfillment. It is particularly noteworthy for the history of women in India as the majority of these newly established professional women collaborated with other women and helped establish new healthcare and educational facilities. As a result, middle-class Indian women can now enroll in universities and pursue a variety of careers. Beginning work in the controlled modern economy—factories, mines, and plantations—did not result in long-term benefits.

When benefits were being required, women were being replaced by robots or male workers, and their employment in factories was always restricted to the lowest skilled positions. A negative trend in women's employment in the industrial sector is indicated by the statistical evidence. This reflects women's employment losses in larger factories as well as the downfall of small-scale companies that employed them. Sadly, female participation in the organized labor movement never gained traction. Prostitution or commercialized agriculture in rural regions were two unregulated industries where women might easily find work.

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## POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND WOMEN

Religious identity and political power would be inextricably linked, according to the 1935 India Act. As a result, there was intense religious hostility in the run-up to the end of colonial dominance in 1947. The princely states were divided into India and Pakistan after British India was split up, and they were either absorbed into India or Pakistan. The issues of the refugees and their resettlement presented unique obstacles in Bengal and Punjab, the two provinces that suffered the effects of the partition the greatest. In less than ten years, India has witnessed two new states formed, hunger, division, and war. Radical movements propelled by Communist ideology emerged in this unstable environment, challenging long-accepted practices of exploitation. Women over twenty-one who met specific qualifications, such as property ownership or a certain degree of education, were given the right to vote by the Government of India Act of 1935. Six million Indian women could now cast ballots and run for general seats or seats exclusively for women. Previous societies representing Indian women demanded "a fair field and no favor.

"This was a utopian stance. Many of these women suddenly desired "safe" seats since they had to face the reality of funding campaigns and building relationships with influential groups. Even the two most influential proponents of women's political participation, Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, had mixed feelings about women participating in politics. Ammu Swaminathan wrote Nehru a letter regarding concerns brought up by AIWC members prior to the election. A copy of the AIC manifesto to "Candidates for the Coming Election," which was released from Vizagapatnam on July 26, 1936, was included by her. The declaration stated that women have a unique contribution to the welfare and advancement of the nation. It described the necessary educational and social reforms, including equal opportunities for women and untouchables.

Congress started to change from being an anti-imperialist organization to a political party. Consequently, it demonstrated a "clear preference for propertied men." As a dominant party, the Congress found it nearly hard to appease both Hindus and Muslims, landlords and peasants, or businesspeople and workers at the same time, despite its commitment to national and multiclass values, according to Sumit Sarkar. Both the party High Command and the Congress ministries were gradually moving to the right, often with a cloak of 'Left' rhetoric. Women's organizations belong to the list of organizations that Congress's rightward movement could not appease since it did not take special care to recruit and assist female candidates. Even the two most influential proponents of women's political participation, Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, had mixed feelings about women participating in politics. Ammu Swaminathan contacted Nehru prior to the election with concerns expressed by Coming Together members, referring to Vic Apiestito as the candidate Calydan supports.

The declaration stated that women have a unique contribution to the welfare and advancement of the nation. It listed the necessary social and educational reforms, including equal opportunities for women and untouchables, free and mandatory education, rural reconstruction, an end to child marriage, purdah, and the trafficking of women for immoral purposes, communal harmony, public health clinics and social insurance, steps to assist the unemployed, and protection of civil liberties. The AIWC requested an INC candidate list and inquired as to which candidates agreed to the manifesto's terms. They demanded that Nehru appoint a woman to the Congress Working Committee, lamenting the lack of female representation. "We want the country's premier national organization to be fully in sympathy with the viewpoint of women and all that connotes," Ammu Swaminathan stated. In response, Nehru stated that Congress intended to nominate women for reserved seats in the provincial legislatures. Congress fully supported the ideals of the All-India Parliamentary Board, which was in charge of addressing the issue of women holding general seats.

There was also the problem of the Working Committee. Old friends and allies addressed Nehru regarding the absence of a woman from this significant body before the AIWC filed a formal complaint.

"Indian women have not yet learned to demand their rights boldly," he said in response, publicly criticizing the women for their timid protest. Women should get together, make their demands known, and get ready to oppose forces that hold back. This was Nehru's advice. The private correspondence between Gandhi and Nehru over this matter illuminates their perspectives regarding the position of women inside the party. Gandhi did not take the criticism of women seriously at first. He informed Nehru that it was Nehru who had requested Sarojini Naidu be removed from the Working Committee when he discovered that certain people were blaming him. The presence of a woman on the committee was accepted by all, but Gandhi noted that some even went so far as to express their disbelief in the custom or practice of consistently having a woman and a specific number of Muslims in the cabinet. Despite facing more conventional males than himself, he yearned for more women to hold powerful positions. He gave condescending advice to women. Women, Nehru said, had a responsibility to support "men in the struggle for political freedom," but it was up to them to fight for their own emancipation.

They would have to compel men to comply with their requests. Realpolitik had obviously taken precedence over the commitments made during the civil disobedience campaign. The Congress Party backed female candidates for reserved seats, just as Nehru had promised. Though few women like the thought of running for office, seasoned women's rights activists like Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy questioned separate seats for women. A large number of women advocated for a political role outside of legislatures because they felt uneasy with election politics. There was enough to be done, and the world of petition politics was cozy. Educated women were urged by the AIWC to register women voters, enlighten women about the candidates, and compile lists of possible female candidates for the political parties. Twelve Upon realizing that nobody was paying attention or showing concern, these women came to the conclusion that they were also victims of betrayed promises. The ladies who expressed annoyance at

political parties during the campaigns expressed satisfaction with the ultimate outcome. Approximately 1,500 seats made up all of the provincial legislatures, of which 6 were now occupied by women.

Ten were nominated to provincial legislative councils, five were returned from reserved constituencies, and forty-one were from regular constituencies. Thirty-six of these women were candidates for Congress; the remaining eleven were independents; three were members of the Muslim League; and one supported unionization. To the Central Assembly, thirty more women were elected. To this Assembly, Radhabai Subbarayan was proposed. Though they were few in number, women were now at last apparent in positions of authority and power. Hansa Mehta of Bombay and Begum Shah Nawaz of Punjab were appointed parliamentary secretaries; Anasuyabai Kale of Central Provinces, Sippi Milani of Sind, and Qudsiya Aizaz Rasul of United Provinces became deputy speakers; and Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Nehru's sister, was appointed to the cabinet of the United Provinces as Minister for Local Self-Government and Public Health.

Women's groups celebrated this as a win for women's rights and called for the appointment of more women to commissions, boards, and councils. They said that only women were capable of resolving the numerous issues affecting women and children. Election politics remained predominantly masculine, but nationalist politics had become more feminine. Women had anticipated electoral dividends for their steadfast support of Congress during the civil disobedience and non-cooperation movements. Women who wanted to be in politics continued to have faith in their male colleagues even though this did not materialize. Accepting their meager triumph, they heeded the advice of Nehru and Gandhi, the two men they most trusted, and decided to put in much more effort to reach their objectives. Muslim women found this setting especially difficult. The belief that women were one despite distinctions in caste, class, and religion was supported by activists who belonged to the AIWC and other women's organizations. Even maintaining the appearance of unity proved to be challenging in the new realm of communal politics. Despite its prominent members being Congressmen, passing resolutions endorsing Gandhi's constructive agenda, and regularly praising Gandhi and Nehru for their support of women's causes, the AIWC portrayed itself as apolitical.

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## THE WOMEN OF INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY

Indian women enlisted in Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army outside of their nation. In January 1941, a disgruntled Congress leader named Subhas Chandra Bose from Calcutta, traveled to Berlin in an attempt to negotiate with Hitler. He gained command of Indian prisoners of war in Tokyo after arriving there by submarine over a year and a half later. To be converted into a liberation force, these convicts were transported to Singapore. Subhas Bose was elected president of the Indian Independence League of Singapore on July 9, 1943, with the assurance that he would have the resources and support he needed to realize his ambition. He demanded the full mobilization of 30,000,000 Indian rupees, 300,000 soldiers, and "a unit of brave Indian women." Bose addressed the League's women's division a few days later and urged them to enlist in the Rani of Jhansi brigade. Bose was now suggesting a women's regiment to fight alongside Indian men because he wanted women to be equal partners in the fight for freedom. Long before he arrived in Singapore, he had written this speech, having discussed the women's regiment with his secretary on their submarine ride to Japan. Additionally, Subhas Bose established a Department of Women's Affairs inside the League, with Dr. Lakshmi Swaminathan serving as its director. Born in Madras, Lakshmi Swaminathan (1914) received her medical training in Singapore and began practicing medicine there. When they first met, she remembered how Subhas Bose impressed her as having the purest sincerity. She also claimed that he gave her the idea that a person could trust him totally and have entire confidence in him, and that he would never make a mistake. Although the department's long-term objective was gender equality, its immediate objective was to find women for the INA. Subhas Bose expressed to Singaporean ladies and Dr. Lakshmi his desire for them to emulate the courageous actions of female independence warriors. He told them that women have shown courage via revolutionary activities and Gandhian protests.

The regiment was named for the 1857 heroine, the Rani of Jhansi, in order to carry on this heritage and connect it to India's historical struggle for freedom. Under the leadership of Subhas Bose, the inaugural Rani of Jhansi training camp opened close to Singapore. The fighting and nursing units of the regiment were placed under the command of Dr. Lakshmi Swaminathan, who is currently a captain. One of the young ladies who volunteered to become a rani, Janaki Davar, learned about the regiment via the newspaper for the first time. She went to hear Subhas Bose speak when he visited Kuala Lumpur, and he offered her jewelry in exchange for his war chest. Despite her parents' anger, she managed to convince them to extend an invitation to Captain Lakshmi for tea. Janaki turned rani at seventeen years old. The proposal of a women's regiment was mocked by Japanese military authorities, but it was welcomed as inspirational by the Japanese press and Indians. It made it abundantly evident that the INA was more than just a prisoner of war army and significantly emphasized the idea of comprehensive mobilization.

Approximately 1,000 women were swiftly recruited into the three camps located in Bangkok, Rangoon, and Singapore. The majority were trained as soldiers, whereas only a small percentage obtained training as nurses. They dressed in a uniform of caps, shirts, jodhpurs, trousers, and boots, and their preparation was virtually the same as that of men. Although some commanders had proposed wearing sari uni-forms, Subhas Bose and Captain Lakshmi felt that the ranis needed to look like soldiers in order to be taken seriously. Although Bose preferred that they have short hair, he opted to give the young women the final say; only around 9% of them got their hair trimmed. The young ranis pleaded to see action at the front now that their training was over. According to the evidence, Subhas Bose intended to use them in battle, but things happened that prevented him from doing so. In the midst of the Japanese retreat from Imphal, a group of ladies was sent to Burma. By then, it was obvious that the ranis would only engage in combat as an army in retreat.



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## TRANSITION AND CONCLUSION

Women's political activism blossomed between the 1937 parliamentary campaign and the first free India election. A few women started speaking up in political gatherings and expressing their ideas in the early 1900s. Since these were such uncommon events, it seemed like Mother India was being mentioned even more when women appeared in governmental positions. Hundreds of new people joined the independence movement in the 1920s as a result of women participating in open protests. By the 1930s, they were backed by Gandhi's leadership and strategies and were marching, protesting, picketing, and even inviting detention. By World War II, things had drastically changed. Communists were working to establish a solid foundation in the countryside, while Congress was calling for a Quit India movement. While some Congressmen worked clandestinely, others were imprisoned. In order to create an Indian National Army and use Japanese assistance to liberate India, Subhas Bose fled to Singapore. And across the nation, oppressed groups like sharecroppers, laborers, adivasis, and peasants let out their frustrations.

A new generation of educated, single, and bold young women joined these movements, ready to take on challenging and risky jobs. Their activities have ceased to be limited to "women-only" clubs. Because of their acting, these ladies frequently faced animosity from people they intended to help as well as enmity from their neighbors and families. The first links between middle-class urban women and the rural masses were being built by them. It is not unexpected that the majority of them felt their feminism was mainly unimportant in the countryside, as it is clear from their writings that the majority of them were feminists. The cruelty of forced labor and authorized rape was far worse than the concerns raised by social reformers about purdah, women's legal standing, and female education.

These women, who had received education, carried with them a set of ideological instruments that enabled them to articulate and reflect on the situations they saw. In her writings, Manikuntala Sen describes her attempts to impart Marxist knowledge to underprivileged rural women during the tebhaga movement. The women were sharing stories of their experiences with abusive and intoxicated husbands. Manikuntala Sen acknowledged that she spoke about a time when children will be well and fed, rather than addressing these issues or attempting to educate about the perils of capitalism and forms of production. Upon her initial visit to the Warli villages, Godavari Parulekar found that "impure" women were assigned to crush and pound spices, while only Warli males were capable of cooking for visitors. There was nothing she could do to make things different. Factory women worked ten-hour shifts, after which they went home to take care of the house and cook.

This was revealed to those who attempted to work with them. Sadly, women who were providing famine relief saw that malnourished women were either sacrificing themselves to feed their children or giving in to the demands of male relief workers. Activist women learned about the magnitude of women's oppression from household chores, poverty, and a patriarchal system that devalued women by listening to other women they encountered in the city and the rural. Indians endured a terrible hunger and the prospect of invasion between the Quit India movement and their country's 1947 independence. A naval rebellion, peasant unrest, and industrial strikes confused British authority. It was hard for women to stay pure in their ideologies. Some women clung to an ideal of "universal womanhood" that was unaffected by class, caste, political affiliation, or religious differences. However, the majority of women discovered that organizations with more appealing ideals than the social feminism promoted by women's organizations deserved their allegiance.

The 1940s generation of women leaders was fixated on respectability standards, which the 1940s women activists questioned. Sevikas wore orange or white saris in the 1930s as a symbol of their nationalism and purity. In order to stand out from other women, the women pursued a symbolic affiliation with Bharat Mataram, or Mother India. The 1940s demands were incompatible with this style. It was necessary to have women who could work with peasants, violent crowds, "tribals," factory workers, famine victims, and revolutionaries. Many women from the middle class witnessed firsthand the cruelty that was typically reserved for their less fortunate sisters, and the labor was hazardous and draining. However, it appears that women from many social strata were united in a shared battle for the first time. Two things occurred when women's horizons grew. Originally, they were no longer associated with the goddess and were instead labeled as "enemies" who could be instantly slain or beaten.

They have become less influential, which is another noteworthy development. People who were listened to intently were Saraladevi Chaudhurani, Sarojini Naidu, Latika Ghosh, Lilavati Munshi, Manmohini Zutshi, and Satyavati Devi. Political leaders praised them and publications covered their speeches to large crowds or assemblies. When women became more prevalent in political movements and parties, they lost their favored status. The reasons behind the exclusion of women's concerns and ideas from the various campaigns for social and economic justice or against the Raj are intriguing to think about. It was undoubtedly not because women avoided the conflicts or didn't contribute what they could. Manikuntala Sen has extensive knowledge about women's conditions and aimed to integrate the emancipation of women into the economic justice movement. Tying gender inequality to the demand for a fair share of the harvest was not something her party's bosses were interested in doing. Though they did not influence the ultimate decisions, the majority of women leaders opposed partition. However, it was the responsibility of women to manage households and keep families together. The idea that women spoke with one voice and the predominance of women's groups were challenged by the increasing activity of women and their genuine contribution, rather than just symbolic one.

The women of Telangana and the refugees following the partition had nothing to gain from social feminism. Although women have started to work with a variety of groups and organizations, none of them showed any real interest in gender justice. Unfortunately, social feminism was superseded by beliefs that did not support liberation from patriarchy among activist women.

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