Being, belonging and becoming: a study of gender in the making of post-colonial citizenship in India 1946-1961

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Abstract

Concentrating on the time frame between the establishment of India's Constituent Assembly in 1946, and the passing of the Dowry Prevention Act in 1961, this thesis attempts to write an alternative history of India's transition to Independence, by applying the tools of feminist historiography to this crucial period of citizenship making, as a way of offering new perspectives on the nature, meaning and boundaries of citizenship in post-colonial India. It focuses on a cohort of nationalists and feminists who were leading members of two prominent women's organisations, the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) and the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), documenting and analysing the voices and positions of this cohort in some of the key debates around nation building in Nehruvian India. It also traces and analyses the range of activities and struggles engaged in by these two women's organisations - as articulations and expressions of citizenship in practice. The intention in so doing is to address three key questions or areas of exploration. Firstly to analyse and document how gender relations and contemporary understandings of gender difference, both acted upon and were shaped by the emerging identity of the Indian as postcolonial citizen, and how this dynamic interaction was situated within a broader matrix of struggles and competing identities including those of minority rights. Secondly to analyse how the framework of postcolonial Indian citizenship has both created new possibilities for empowerment, but simultaneously set new limitations on how the Indian women's movement was able to imagine itself as a political constituency and the feminist agenda it was able to articulate and pursue. Thirdly to explore how applying a feminist historiography to the story of the construction of postcolonial Indian citizenship calls for the ability to think about the meaning and possibilities of citizenship in new and different ways, to challenge the very conceptual frameworks that define the term.

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List of Abbreviations

AIIMS - All India Institute of Medicine

AISF - All India Students Federation

AIWC - All India Women's Conference

CA - Constituent Assembly

CHR - the Commission on Human Rights

CPI - Communist Party of India

CSWB - Central Social Welfare Board

CSW - Committee on the Status of Women

ECOSOC - The Economic and Social Council

FPAI - Family Planning Association of India

ICCW - Indian Council of Child Welfare

INC - Indian National Congress

LGBT- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

MARS - Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti

MCH - Maternal and Child Health

MNML - Madras Neo-Malthusian League

NAACP - National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People

NCCW - National Council of Child Welfare

NPC - National Planning Committee

NWFP - North West Frontier Province

PC - Planning Commission

SEWA - Self Employed Women's Association

UDHR - Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UNICEF - United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

WHO - World Health Organisation

WIDF - Women's International Democratic Federation

Chapter One:

Introduction

Introduction

'Does man make the age, or the age make the man?' asks well known nationalist, socialist, and feminist, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay at the start of her autobiography.[1] Born into a Brahmin family in Mangalore at the turn of the twentieth century, she came of age at a crucial moment in India's anti-colonial struggle. By 1920 Mahatma Gandhi had emerged at the helm of the Indian National Congress (INC), transforming nationalist politics through Satyagraha, a form of peaceful civil disobedience intended to expose the moral bankruptcy of colonial rule. Chattopadhyay began her political career in the early 1920s as a volunteer in the INC's *Seva Dal* and later as a member of the Congress youth movement, from where she launched into nationalist politics. Seeking an ideological language with which to critique the nature of colonial oppression and imagine an equitable future, she then turned towards Socialism, becoming a leading figure in the formation of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in 1934. When political avenues were closed to her after independence, she found an alternative means of giving expression to her socialist ideology, by encouraging the development of a craft co-operative movement, emphasising the value of labour and livelihoods in the production of traditional Indian arts and crafts. Throughout her life she remained an outspoken advocate for women's equality.

Chattopadhyay uses the term 'man' in a universal sense to reflect on her own life and career as part of a generation of nationalists and social activists who steered India from late colonial rule to independence. This was a pivotal era of transition, marking the shift from colonial subjecthood to citizenship in the nation state, defined by multiple and competing imaginings of this new state. There was considerable debate over the boundaries and possibilities of such citizenship, with Chattopadhyay and her colleagues participating energetically in this process. When Chattopadhyay contemplates the question 'Does man make the age, or the age make the man?' she could just as easily be asking 'Does

[1] K. Chattopadhyay, *Inner Recesses Outer Spaces*: *memoirs* (New Delhi, 1986), p. 1.

the woman make the age, or the age make the woman?', to which her autobiography itself was to answer, that they make each other. Chattopadyay's politics, and that of her contemporaries, illustrates the complex ways in which the age and the individual were mutually constituted.

Uniquely positioned at this moment as both nationalists and feminists; and institutionally entrenched in Nehru's government with an unprecedented opportunity to participate and experiment in the nation building project, the politics and careers of this cohort of women provide a new framework from which to analyse and understand this transition. In so doing, they enable the scholar to address a relevant yet largely neglected set of themes, defined by questions such as; how as women and as advocates of a gendered agenda did this cohort negotiate their way in the complex and competing politics of nation building, and what scope did this give them to speak politically as women? How did their participation in this project bring various strands of their identity into conflict and how were these resolved? As part of a particular political milieu, caught up in a turbulent moment of history dominated by identity politics, to what extent were they able to imagine citizenship beyond the boundaries of the nation state, and the barriers of religious identity, class and ideological affiliation? How did they grapple with the inheritance of colonial nationalism, endeavouring to give weight to this transition through the development of legislation, policy, institutions and social movements in the post independence era?

Through exploring these specific themes the scholar is able to broach a broader set of questions concerned with the way in which gender relations and contemporary understandings of gender difference, together with struggles to reform and reconstitute these, both acted upon and were shaped by the emerging identity of the Indian as post-colonial citizen, and how this dynamic interaction was situated within a broader matrix of struggles and competing identities including those of minority rights.

Rather than employing the idea 'of women as something to be *framed* by context', the theoretical approach adopted during the course of this research, has taken inspiration from the work of feminist historians such as Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, in an attempt to 'rethink historiography as a

whole', by analysing gender difference as both structuring and structured by a wide set of social relations.[2] To return to Chattopadhyay's opening question, 'Does man make the age, or the age make the man?, the objective of this research has been to explore how the age and the 'man', or rather, 'woman', are mutually constituted. It is *how* they make each other, which is of central interest. Drawing on Vaid and Sangari, gender is employed as an analytical tool or heuristic device, not as 'the end point of analysis, but rather as an entry point into complex systems of meaning and power'.[3] By applying such a feminist historiography to this particular period of Indian citizenship making, the scholar is able to expose some of the underlying power dynamics that have shaped its construction. But if this is not a contributory history, what is the justification for focusing on women? Is this not making the fatal mistake of equating subject matter with theoretical approach? The relevance of this cohort is not based on the fact that they were women, but rather that they were both nationalists and feminists, who brought their agenda of women's equality into the nation building process. The intention of this research is to use the careers and voices of this cohort as an entry point into these larger sets of debates concerned with nation building and citizenship making, as well as the power dynamics and politics surrounding these.

Gender and nation in India: engaging with existing literature and theoretical perspectives

Much of the theorisation on gender and nation in India has come to be informed by Partha Chatterjee's (1989) analysis of the 'Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question.[4] This analysis seeks to understand how gender is implicated in relations of political power, and consequently how women are brought into the imagination and construction of the nation state. Chatterjee argues that a set of developments towards the end of the nineteenth century, in particular the conceptual separation of public and private, enabled the construction of a political identity for the modern male Indian nationalist through a particular reworking of gender relationships and identities.[5]

[2] 'Introduction', in K. Sangari and S. Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History* (United States, 1990), pp. 2-3.
[3] K. Visweswaran, 'Histories of Feminist Ethnography', in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 26 (1997), p. 616.
[4] S. Rege, ''Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position' in *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, 33: 44 (31 October to 6 November 1998), p. WS-39.
[5] I refer to the public and private spheres, not as innate and preconceived categories but rather as constructed concepts that have become influential in the analysis of other scholars such as Chatterjee. The construction of

Reading back into earlier phases of the colonial encounter, subsequent scholarship has taken as its starting point this close connection between the reworking of gender relationships and identities, and the development of new collective political identities. Lata Mani's analysis of the debate around sati in nineteenth century colonial India[6], illustrates the way in which colonial discourse functioned to construct a particular archetype of 'Indian woman' and the 'Indian man', and to define the dynamics of the relationship between the two, in order to claim legitimacy for colonial rule through its civilizing agenda.[7] Building on this, Mrinalini Sinha's work exposes the way in which constructions of masculinity and femininity were drawn into colonial administration and politics, to delineate difference and power amongst indigenous communities in India. The emergence of the stereotype of the 'effeminate babu' provided a way of checking the growing influence of a western educated Indian middle class, who were clamouring for a greater stake in the governance of the Empire.[8]

But this was not an exclusively colonial strategy. By the beginning of the nineteenth century this very class of educated Indian elites was challenging British authority through their own reworking of gender identities and relationships, in order to articulate an alternative, and affirmative, identity for themselves within the context of the Indian social reform movement. Reformers concerned themselves with the promotion of women's education and the reform of social laws that determined women's status within the family. They inverted colonial discourse arguing that their progressive treatment of women reflected their capacity for self governance. Traditionalists challenged colonial domination by developing a strong and affirmative cultural, intellectual and spiritual identity for themselves as Indians.

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public and private, and their separation, must to be historicised, as for example Carole Pateman has attempted in her seminal work *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge, 1988.)

[6] See, for example, L. Mani, 'Contentious Traditions: the debate on Sati in colonial India' in Sangari and Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women*, pp. 88-126.

[7] The British justified colonial rule by arguing that the 'barbaric' treatment of women within Indian society, expressed in cultural practices such as sati and child marriage was evidence of the 'uncivilized' nature of this society and therefore legitimised the civilizing mission of colonial rule. Using this discourse Britain was able to claim a 'moral responsibility' as the 'protector' of Indian women and claim the right to intervene in the private sphere of family and religion. Gayatri Spivak refers to this as 'white men', 'saving brown women from brown men'. See for example Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in P. Williams and L Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory: a reader* (New York, 1994), pp. 66-111; R. Sturman, *The Government of Social Life in Colonial India: Liberalism, Religious Law, and Women's Rights* (New York, 2012), p, 2.

[8] M. Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: the 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in the late nineteenth century* (Manchester, 1995), pp.1-5.

As Indian political identities began to coalesce around the framework of an imagined nation state, this reworking of gender relationships and identities became increasingly focused around the articulation and construction of the political identity of citizenship. The importance of the 'Indian woman', as the discursive site of this identity construction, continued in this period and began to take on new significance. Late nineteenth-century Indian nationalist politics, according to Chatterjee, claimed the 'Indian woman' as homemaker, mother and wife - symbolising culture and religion within the family - as the site for the construction of a revived cultural national citizenship, while as the 'empowered', 'new woman' of the late nineteenth century, she was claimed by social reformers as the site upon which a new refashioned identity of the Indian male as progressive and legitimate citizen, was crafted, and also became a powerful signifier of this new progressive identity.[9]

According to Chatterjee, because culture and spirituality are traditionally associated with the private sphere, Indian women as the keepers of the home came to embody this Indian identity and its cultural and spiritual values. By the end of the nineteenth century, the separation of the public and the private, and the positioning of Indian women firmly within the sphere of the home, enabled nationalists to engage with the British on their own terms in the public realm of politics, but still maintain a superior and unique identity untouched by western values within the private sphere of the home.[10]

Uma Chakravarti argues in 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasi*?' that social reformers, such as the Arya Samaj who promoted women's education and the reform of social laws were simply producing a new kind of restructured patriarchy, but one which reflected and responded to the changing context, agendas and objectives of nineteenth-century nationalism, which allowed them to represent themselves as progressive, but at the same time, did this by continuing to anchor women firmly in the sphere of the domestic. Eleanor Newbigin, focusing on the Hindu Code Bill in the 1950s, reaches a similar conclusion, emphasising that male politicians supported reforms to women's legal rights not so much out of a true conviction of gender equality, but rather because they wanted to present themselves as being a modern and progressive nation, grounded on particular notions of secularism,

[9] See P. Chatterjee, 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', in G. Caste (ed.), *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology* (Oxford, 2001.), pp. 151-166.
[10] Ibid.

democracy and political economy, and because such reforms in fact often advanced their own middle class male interests within the family.[11]

Lata Mani, in her analysis of the debate around the abolition of sati in early nineteenth- century India, coined an evocative and enduring phrase for describing the place and function of women in this dynamic, as 'neither subjects nor objects, but rather the ground of the discourse'.[12] In their analysis Chatterjee, Chakravarti and Newbigin identify the continuation of such a dynamic into the latter nineteenth and twentieth century.

Although Chatterjee's analysis of the Resolution of the Women's Question has encouraged the production of scholarship and research which has highlighted the important connections between the reworking of gender relationships and identities, and the development of new collective political identities, it leaves many questions unresolved, and encourages new points of criticism arising from its representation of the 'Indian woman' as the 'ground of the discourse' for the reworking of political identity. One of the problems with framing colonial interaction and the subsequent development of nationalist identities in such terms is that it leaves little room for thinking about women as agents and active participants in such historical forces.

For Leela Kasturi and Vina Mazumdar the major weakness of Chatterjee's analysis is the fact that it completely ignores the way women themselves responded to the challenges of colonial rule. Surely, they argue, 'the problem of an identity crisis is not the monopoly only of men'.[13] Women were not only acted upon in the private sphere, they were active participants in this process of reworking; engaging and responding to the dynamics of Indian nationalism, colonial domination, maternal imperialism and other indigenous movements, in attempts to redefine themselves, so that they could access new avenues of power and identity. The 'private sphere' was a site of the negotiation, disruption and challenging of traditional relations of gendered power, in as much as it was a space for

[11] See, for example, E. Newbigin, *The Hindu family and the emergence of modern India: law, citizenship and community* (New York, 2013); E. Newbigin, 'The codification of personal law and secular citizenship: Revisiting the history of law reform in late colonial India', in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review,* 46:1 (January – March 2009), p. 84.
[12] Mani, 'Contentious Traditions', p. 117.
[13] L. Kasturi and V. Mazumdar, 'Women and Nationalism', Occasional Paper, Centre for Women's Development Studies (1995), p. 13.

reinventing and consequently reinforcing these. As Tanika Sarkar illustrates in her insightful study on Rashsundari Debi, a housewife from an upper caste landed Hindu family in East Bengal, who produced the first known published autobiography by an Indian woman in 1876, women could use the private sphere and the tropes of domesticity and religious devotion to critique and challenge their reinvention as 'the grounds of the discourse'.[14]

The work of Durba Ghosh on colonial interracial conjugality, like that of Tanika Sarkar, challenges Chatterjee's myth of the 'hermetically sealed' domestic 'spiritual space'.[15] In her case studies of various interracial sexual relationships between European men and indigenous women in India, Ghosh shows how the family, as much as the public sphere, was a crucial and constitutive part of early colonial state formation and governance in British India.[16]

Furthermore, for middle class and elite Indian women, the remaking of a political identity through the fashioning of the 'new Indian woman' created opportunities for them to move from the responsibilities of the home into the public sphere, through the professions of teaching and social work. In the case of Pandita Ramabai, one of the admired role models of Chattopadhyay's generation, access to the language and mandate of social reform, allowed her to build a career for herself as a social reformer, to travel the world, and ultimately to choose a new religion, that of Christianity, which she believed was able to offer greater personal and intellectual freedom.

Women were defying imposed gender identities and prescribed gender relationships in the sphere of the domestic, in a number of different ways before they began to do so in the public sphere. Not only this, but by engaging in this process of the reworking of their domesticity, they were able to forge new bridges into the public sphere, contesting Chatterjee's neat separation of the home and the outside world.

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[14] See, for example, T. Sarkar, *Hindu wife, Hindu nation: community, religion, and cultural nationalism*, (Bloomington, 2001.)

[15] D. Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: the Making of Empire* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 250.

[16] Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India*, p. 2. Ghosh shows how indigenous women in relationships with European men used the colonial encounter to engage with the institutions of colonial governance, in order to benefit and empower themselves; negotiating company pensions, gaining legal privileges, and expressing their cultural and religious affiliations. See Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India*, pp.147-148, 252.

Sharmila Rege's research shows how efforts to re-inscribe dalit women's participation and voices in the nationalist struggle have posed a further challenge to Chatterjee's analysis.[17] Chatterjee's resolution of the Women's Question mirrored colonial attempts to reclaim and reinvent a respectable domesticity, by removing various categories of indigenous women, including indigenous colonial companions, who were considered non desirable within the imperialist nationalist project in their imagining of the nation.[18] The subject of the 'new Indian woman' was class and caste specific, being generally middle or upper class, and higher caste, and also excluded other classes and castes of women, such as Dalits, peasants, and workers, who were at this time reworking the women's question in alternate arenas of struggle, including those in the public sphere. The period Chatterjee identifies with the 'resolution of the women's question' is the same era in which women's participation in the Ambedkarite movement reached its peak, Rege emphasises.[19]

The women's question re-merges, half a century later, with history writing on the transition from late colonial rule to independence. In this instance, however, the question and its resolution, come to be framed through reading a particular interpretation into the relationship between nationalism and feminism. Historians such as Jayawardeni Kumari, Geraldine Forbes and Gail Minault[20] might interpret the nuanced interaction of nationalism and feminism differently, but there tends to be a consensus amongst such scholars that in the playing out of this relationship, nationalist concerns of unity and political freedom ultimately triumphed over the priorities of a more directly feminist agenda. The resolution of this relationship in favour of nationalist priorities is often read forward into the early period of independence, the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, where it is used to explain the nation state's failure to translate its commitment to constitutional equality into substantive socio-

[17] Rege, 'Dalit Women Talk Differently', p. WS-39.
[18] Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India*, p. 250.
[19] Rege, 'Dalit Women Talk Differently', p. WS-41.
[20] See for example J. Kumari, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London, 1994) and G. Forbes, 'The politics of Respectability: Indian Women and the Indian National Congress' in D. Low (eds.), *The Indian National Congress: centenary highlights* (Delhi, 1988), pp. 54-91.

economic equality, a failing first brought to public attention by the findings of the 1974 Committee on the Status of Women India report. [21]

In the historiography of this period, the granting of constitutional equality is seen to lead to an era of complacency amongst women activists. Prominent individuals from the women's, and nationalist movement entered parliamentary politics, becoming part of the structures of power. Women's organisations, such as the AIWC, were understood to have been co-opted into the institutions of the state, and consequently integrated into the welfarist machinery that reproduced and extended the paternalistic relationship of the family and community at a national level.

For many activists, particularly those on the political left who came of age with the resurgence of women's activism in the late 1970s, even if the playing out of this relationship had been very different, with feminist concerns holding their ground, gaining recognition, and eventually transforming the political agenda of nationalist liberation itself, the end result would have remained unchanged. In this interpretation, it is in fact the consensus between feminism and nationalism that becomes the central problematic. By the mid to late 1940s, communist women such as Renu Chakravartty felt that they were losing the battle in their attempts to transform the leading women's organisations of their day, such as the AIWC, into mass based organisations able to represent the genuine interests of working class and peasant women.[22] In their understanding, the middle class, urban and welfarist orientation of the feminism promoted by the women's movement shared the same class interests of the Congress led nationalist movement, which meant that it was bound to fail before it even began, because of its inability to acknowledge the structural changes required for the true economic and social empowerment of women. Class loyalty and identification are seen to win out over gender loyalty in this interpretation.

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[21] The Committee on the Status of Women in India Report offered the first comprehensive quantitative and qualitative assessment of the limited socio-economic and political progress made by women in India since independence, and brought into renewed focus the gap between laws and social context. See, for example, Committee on the Status of Women in India, 'Towards equality: report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India', Department of Social Welfare, Government of India, (New Delhi, 1975.)

[22] Renu Chakravartty provides a detailed account of her experiences working with the AIWC in the 1940s. See R. Chakravartty, *Communists in the Indian Women's Movement*, (New Delhi, 1980.)

Such conceptual understandings of the resolution of the women's question, are weakened by the critiques discussed above, but they do remain valuable in that they draw attention to the close connection between the reworking of gender relationships and identities, and the development of new collective political identities. Rather than thinking about the 'Indian woman' as the 'fixed' discursive site of political identity construction, or her relegation to second class citizen, due to triumphing of nationalism over feminism, this thesis takes as its starting premise the idea that these positionings, like identities, are neither fixed nor resolved, but equally unstable, shifting and constantly requiring definition and re-articulation.[23] This instability, and the necessity for constant re-articulation, enabled the discourse of social reform and nationalist envisioning produced by this reworking of gender identities and relationships, to take on a life of its own, to be endowed with new meanings, and to be reclaimed and reinvented, creating an opening for a new kind of gender politics in Indian society. It gave activists committed to a transformed society, access to a new set of discursive tools with which to talk about inequality between individuals and collective groups, and to lobby for change within social institutions and relations. This, in turn, enabled the development of new kinds of individual and collective identities for women, and made new kinds of communication and mobilization amongst women possible and socially acceptable. This in turn allowed for a collective identity - a political identity - structured around a shared agenda, concerned with challenging and transforming the dynamics, flows and reserves of power in colonial society. And it sought to challenge and reroute these flows of power precisely by engaging in this process of the reworking of gender relations and identities, as well as by engaging in the reworking of the relationship and dynamics between these, and political identities.

This was a process which continued into the era of Indian independence, and indeed continues today. It is this dynamism that made it possible for activists and organisations of Chattopadhyay's generation to claim and use the debate over the boundaries, meanings and possibilities of post-colonial

[23]Sinha emphasises that gender needs to be understood as one of 'multiple axes along which power was exercised in colonial India' operating to produce colonial identities which were themselves unstable, shifting and constantly requiring definition and re-articulation. See Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p. 1.

citizenship, and the evolving idea of an imagined Indian nationhood, as their own set of 'grounds' for the reworking of a empowering political identity for 'Indian woman' with the transition to democracy.

Introducing this generation

Coming of age in the era of Gandhian nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s, and forging self-made careers in the Nehruvian India of the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s this generation of women left an indelible mark on the nation state. Both Gandhian and Nehruvian politics and developmental thinking provided a foundation for their gender politics and developmental praxis, in addition to a range of other ideologies and philosophies, including; social feminism, western feminism, socialism, marxism and various movements of international solidarity.

What held Chattopadhyay and her colleagues together as a cohesive group was also the fact that they saw themselves as agents of change. They believed they had a contribution to make to the nation building project, and were committed to building the principles and practices of gender equality into this project. The Nehruvian era opened up an unprecedented set of opportunities to participate in the construction of a new political and social order in India, a set of opportunities that had been unavailable to any generation previously. With access to both state and philanthropic resources and political will, they were able to innovate and experiment with different developmental models. Constructive and social work during the latter phase of the nationalist movement had given them an invaluable 'hands on experience' of local problems and social inequalities, while an involvement at a leadership level in nationalist politics, and the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) had provided them with opportunities to travel widely in India and internationally. The capacity to move from the local, to the national and international, enabled Chattopadhyay and her colleagues to contextualise struggles locally, as well as to see how they fitted within a national, regional and global picture.

One of the features this generation shared with Jawaharlal Nehru, as a fellow architect of the independent India, was a belief that the modern state must play a leading role in dismantling the structures of oppression in Indian society, through economic development, legislation and education. There were, however, significant differences amongst this cohort with regard to the particular

character they felt the state should assume, and the specific roles they envisioned for themselves within this picture. Like Chattopadhyay herself, some of her colleagues, such Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, sought to combine Gandhian values but adapt these to a contemporary context. Others like Rama Rau, founder of the Family Planning Association of India (FPAI), placed greater faith in the technology and skills of the west to deliver socio-economic development. Communist women such as Renu Chakravartty and Sarla Sharma looked to the Soviet Union and Communist China for developmental models, arguing that the Indian state must play a more proactive role in land redistribution and labour rights. There were those such as Sarojini Varadappan and Durgabai Deshmukh, founder of the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB), who chose social service as an alternative to a political career, while others such Renuka Ray sought to combine politics and constructive work.

Renuka Ray (1904-1997) combined a successful career as a Congress MP, maintaining her autonomy, respect and influence in the Party, and a continued involvement in social work activities, through her role as Minister of Relief and Rehabilitation in West Bengal, and as a governmental advisor on welfare subjects and policy. After committing herself passionately to the nationalist struggle as a teenager, Ray was sent by her father to study economics at the London School of Economics in the early 1920s. This was followed by her marriage to Satyen Ray, a civil servant whose job postings in rural India brought her into contact with village life and its problems. In the 1930s, she was able to apply this experience to the nationalist cause when Gandhi asked her to volunteer in his village reconstruction programme, after which her career in social and constructive work took off.[24] For Ray working within party politics as a Congress MP and Cabinet Minister was a means to harness the resources and political will necessary for rehabilitation and constructive work in post independence India.[25]

A number of Ray's colleagues in the AIWC, such as Sarojini Varadappan and Durgabai Deshmukh, chose social service as an alternative to politics. Sarojini Varadappan (born 1921) is an AIWC

[24] A. Devenish, 'Performing the Political Self: a study of identity making and self representation in the autobiographies of India's first generation of parliamentary women' in *Women's History Review*, 22:2 (2013), p. 281.
[25] For a detailed account of the life and public career of Renuka Ray, see R. Ray, *My Reminiscences: social development during the Gandhian Era and after,* (New Delhi, 1982.)

stalwart based in Chennai who was interviewed for this research in December 2011. Although her father had been an influential Congress politician and Chief Minister of Madras, and her niece a Cabinet Minister, Varadappan stressed that unlike these family members, her real interest had always lain in social service. In 1939, at the age of 18, she took up public work as a volunteer for Gandhi's visit to Madras.[26] Two years later in 1941 she joined the Women's Indian Association (WIA), the Madras affiliate of the AIWC, and has been a member ever since.[27] Throughout her career she has been involved in a wide range of social welfare and developmental initiatives for women and children, in the areas of education, employment and healthcare. She was also chairman of both the Madras State Social Welfare Board and the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB), where she worked widely with other community and voluntary organisations .[28]

Sarojini Varadappan recalls the significant role played in her life by Muthulakshmi Reddi (1886-1968), a fellow Madras based AIWC activist and nationalist, who was a role model and mentor. Reddi was born in 1886 in Pudukottah State, and grew up to become a pioneer legislator and the first woman member of the Indian legislature in 1926. In this role she used her skills to encourage the development of progressive social welfare legislation. As an activist she was also involved in a number of social reform activities, including campaigning for the abolition of the *devadasi* system in Hindu temples and for the enactment of laws to prevent trafficking of women and children.[29] In 1937 she resigned from the Legislative Council in protest against Gandhi's imprisonment, and joined the national movement.[30] Reddi's career brought together two professions, that of social welfare worker and activist, and that of trained doctor, enabling her to combine her skills strategically, by establishing the first children's hospital in India in 1927, and later, the Cancer Research Institute in Madras.[31]

Rameshwari Nehru (1886-1966), like Muthulakshmi Reddi, belongs on the cusp of an earlier generation of women activists. She was an enthusiastic social worker and campaigner against

[26] 'Bio Data of Smt Sarojini Varadappan', unpublished booklet, (undated), p. 1.
[27] Varadappan also served a term as national president of the AIWC between 1980 and1985.
[28] 'Bio Data of Smt Sarojini Varadappan', p. 1; Interview with S. Varadappan, 28 December 2011, Madras.
[29] 'Forward' in A. Basu (ed.), *The Pathfinder*: *Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi* (Pune, 1986), p. 8.
[30] A. Basu and B. Ray, *Women's Struggle: A History of the All India Women's Conference 1927-2002* (New Delhi, 2003), p. 224.
[31] 'Forward' in Basu (ed.), *The Pathfinder: Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi*, p. 8.

untouchability, and an active founder and organiser of the Delhi Women's League, another affiliate of the AIWC. She was involved in the campaign for women's franchise, and a representative of women's interests as a committee member at the Round Table Conference.[32] Her work, post independence, focused mainly on refugee relief and rehabilitation.[33] Nehru also had a deep interest and sense of solidarity with women's struggles in Asia and Africa, and helped to foster links between these struggles and the Indian women's movement back at home.

<u>Mridula Sarabhai (1911-1974</u>) worked together with Rameshwari Nehru in the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, as coordinator for the rescue and recovery of women, who had been abducted during India's Partition in August 1947. She grew up in Ahmedabad, and, like her contemporaries, was an outspoken feminist and a nationalist who participated in the Civil Disobedience Campaign (1930-1934) and the Quit India Movement of 1942.[34] Sarabhai was a close associate of Jawaharlal Nehru but lost her political influence due to her insistent support for Sheikh Abdullah, Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir state, in the face of Indian opposition.[35] Mridula's strengths; her conviction, outspokenness and her stubbornness, which had made her such a successful activist, ultimately also proved to be her greatest weaknesses, by preventing her from being able to adapt to the geopolitics of Indian independence.

<u>Vijayalakshmi Pandit (1900-1990)</u>, like Sarojini Varadappan and Durgabai Deshmukh, chose to forge a post independence career beyond Congress politics in the sphere of international diplomacy. Between 1946 and 1962, she became an established figure on the international stage serving as Indian ambassador to Soviet Russia, the United States and Mexico, England, Ireland and Spain. She headed several Indian delegations to the UN in the 1950s and in 1953 was elected President of the United Nations General Assembly.[36] Once her diplomatic career ended in 1962 she returned to India as Governor of Maharashtra and a Member of Parliament, however later came to support the opposition

[32] Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p. 225.
[33] Nehru was appointed Honorary Director of the women's wing of the Union Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation.
[34] Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p. 224.
[35] See A. Basu, *Mridula Sarabhai: Rebel with a Cause* (Delhi, 1996), p. 144.
[36] Pandit had built a name for herself in the pre-independence era as a municipal councillor and leader in both the nationalist movement and the All India Women's Conference.

movement against Indira Gandhi's prime ministership in the late 1970s.[37]

Hansa Mehta (1897-1995), a colleague of Vijayalakshmi Pandit, also earned an international reputation as an outspoken Indian representative at the United Nation's Commission on Human Rights. Mehta entered public life in the mid 1920s when she joined the Bombay branch of the AIWC, later moving up into the Organisation's leadership and becoming its president in the mid 1940s, where she pioneered the AIWC's Woman's Charter of Rights and Duties. She played a leadership role in the INC and became a member of the Constituent Assembly, helping to draft the new Constitution, whilst representing India at the United Nations. After which she moved on to play a role in the development of tertiary education, as vice Chancellor of Baroda University (1949-1958).[38]

Durgabai Deshmukh (1909-1981) was born in Andhra in 1909. Like many of her contemporaries she became involved in nationalist activities at a young age, when as a child she became a translator for Gandhi on his journeys to the South. An early interest in promoting literacy encouraged her to set up the Balika Hindi Pathasala Kakinada, at the age of thirteen, to provide literacy training to girls and women.[39] Durgabai was an active nationalist, who participated in the Salt Satyagraha in 1930 and was imprisoned several times. As an adult she campaigned around various social welfare issues affecting women, including the status of devadasis; and worked for the uplift of Muslim women and widows. She established the Andhra Mahila Sabha, a well known welfare institute based in Chennai and Hyderabad, and also helped to establish the Blind Relief Association in New Delhi and the Council for Social Development.[40]

Durgabai's post independence career could have branched out in several different directions. She had already established herself as a successful lawyer in the High Court of Madras, when she joined the Constituent Assembly in 1946, and intended to return to this job once her work in the CA was complete. Nehru, however, had another position in mind and persuaded her to join the Planning

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[37] Devenish, 'Performing the Political Self', p. 281.
[38] Between 1946 and 1948 Mehta was also vice chancellor of Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University (SNDT). See Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p. 220.
[39] 'Durgabai Deshmukh: A brief life-sketch' in D. Jain, *What is Wrong with Economics? Can the Aam Aurat Redefine Economic Reasoning,* Durgabai Deshmukh Memorial Lecture, 15 July 2011, Council for Social Development, New Delhi.
[40] 'Durgabai Deshmukh: A brief life-sketch'

Committee, after which she took on the chairmanship of the Central Social Welfare Board.[41] Durgabai's legal training and background, combined with her experience and commitment to welfare, made for an interesting combination. As chair of the CSWB she sought to systematise and regulate social work activities, and to enhance their impact through improved implementation of existing welfare legislation.

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur (1889-1964) was India's first Minister of Health between 1947 and 1957 and India's representative at the World Health Organisation (WHO) in the 1950s. She came from an affluent aristocratic family, and experienced a cosmopolitan upbringing, including an English schooling. This lifestyle was to change drastically when Kaur became politically conscious in the 1930s, and joined the nationalist movement.[42] She went to live with Gandhi at his Wardha Ashram, and became one of his personal secretaries, as well as close friend and confidant. She continued on to become a leading figure within Congress, and the All India Women's Conference, becoming a fellow drafter of the AIWC's Woman's Charter of Rights and Duties, and also a member of the Constituent Assembly, guiding the birth of India's new constitution. After independence, in her role as Minister of Health she worked to develop primary health care in India, and to build infrastructure for medical research and training.

Although Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Lady Dhanvanthi Rama Rau were colleagues within the AIWC, and both committed to 'equal rights and opportunities' for Indian women, they found themselves in disagreement over the question of a state sponsored family planning programme. Lady Dhanvanthi Rama Rau (1893-1987), together with her colleague Avabai Wadia, were the founders of the Family Planning Association of India (FPAI), which played a leading, though controversial role in family planning policy and institutions in independent India. Rama Rau was drawn to the women's rights activism of the AIWC when she was in her early twenties, participating in campaign for the franchise

[41] For a detailed account of Durgabai's life see Durgabai Deshmukh, Interview Transcript 16: Session I, recorded 5 January 1967, Oral History Project, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

[42] Kaur was born in 1889 into the princely family of the Kapurthala State of Punjab. Her family lost the right to the throne when her father converted to Christianity, although they maintained their social status. See K. Kumar, 'Rajkumari Amrit Kaur: Her Life, Work and Ideology', and R. Ray, 'India's First Woman Cabinet Minister' in *Rajkumari Amrit Kaur*, Eminent parliamentarians monograph series: 15, (New Delhi, 1992), pp . 44,71.

and for education.[43] Together with Avabai Wadia, a fellow colleague in the Bombay AIWC, she set up a number of local birth control and family planning initiatives, which ultimately led to the founding of the FPAI in 1952.[44]

Avabai Wadia (1913-2005) exemplified the multiple hats, worn by many of this generation, during the course of their careers. She was a social worker, barrister-at-law and international family planning activist who co-founded the Family Planning Association of India together with Rama Rau, and played an influential role in shaping family planning policy in India during the 1960s and 1970s .[45]

Renu Chakravartty, Sarla Sharma and Vidya Munshi were all women activists who chose to pursue a professional interest in women's empowerment, together with a political career in the Communist Party of India. Renu Chakravartty (1917-1994) was born in 1917 into a well off Brahmo family in Calcutta. She was very active in student politics as a member of All India Student Federation (AISF) before leaving to study at Cambridge University, which brought her into contact with Marxism in Britain. On her return she played a leading role in building up the Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti (MARS) one of the parent organisations of the National Federation of Indian Woman (NFIW), and coordinated famine relief campaigns in the wake of the Bengal Famine of 1943.[46] In 1952 she was elected to the Lok Sabha as a representative of the Indian Communist Party becoming Deputy Leader of the CPI group in the House.[47] She combined her parliamentary work with building and leading the newly established NFIW, becoming as its first General Secretary.[48]

Sarla Sharma (born 1927) was born into a progressive Delhi family, involved in girls' education in 1927, and became a student activist for the nationalist cause as a teenager. Exposure to Marxism through her peers, led her to join the Communist affiliated All India Student's Federation (AISF) in 1936, and the CPI three years later in 1939. Sharma was a member of the AIWC in Delhi, but she

[43] Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p. 219.
[44] Rama Rau was also President of the International Planned Parent Federation between 1963 and 1971.
[45] Basu and Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p. 219.
[46] Renu Chakravartty was also was a member of the Executive Committee of the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) before joining the NFIW.
[47] Interview with G. Chakravartty, NFIW leader and academic, 4 November 2011, New Delhi.
[48] For biographical details of the life and work of Renu Chakravartty see Chakravartty, *Communists in the Indian women's movement1940-1950* (New Delhi, 1980.)

found herself frustrated in the 1940s by what she perceived as a neglect of working women's needs and struggles within the Organisation. This frustration drew her to the National Federation of Indian Women, as founding member and leader, through an association which she has maintained throughout her life. Sarla combined her leadership role in the NFIW with work as a local councillor for the CPI in Delhi.

Vidya Munshi (1919-2014) was a Calcutta based contemporary of Sharla Sharma. She was born in the mid 1920s and grew up in a Congress minded family in Bombay. It was her mother's involvement in a women's organisation called, 'Community of Sisters',[49] which first sparked her interest in the cause of women. At the age of 19 she went to England to study medicine, where she became a member of a left wing book club, and began avidly reading the books that were banned at home. This experience brought her into contact with Marxist literature, and led her to reach the conclusion that as an Indian, she would be able to do more to help her people as a communist than a doctor.

Munshi spent the war years in Newcastle upon Tyne, speaking to the local community about India, on behalf of the India League Workers Association. With her attention diverted from her studies she failed medical college, but decided to stay on after the war working for the All India Students Federation, and was fortunate to have the opportunity represent India at a number of international student conferences, and to attend the first congress of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) in Paris, the international parent organisation, to which the NFIW affiliated when it was formed in 1954. When she returned to India she was invited to cover the establishment of the NFIW as a journalist, joining the Federation shortly after.[50]

[49] 'Community of Sisters' was a Bombay based women's organisation which provided working women's hostels, indoor games and a moving library for the local community. Interview with Munshi, 2 December 2011.
[50] Ibid.

From social reform to Satyagraha, and from Satyagraha to 'equal rights and opportunities': The roots and evolution of the women's movement in colonial India

Contemporary activists working in the field of women's rights and gender studies, tend to agree that India does not have a 'women's movement', as such, today.[51] The December 2012 Delhi rape case certainly galvanised women's rights activists into action, sparking discussion that the resulting public protest marked the beginnings of a third wave movement, but this remains speculative, and even if so, will take a number of years to develop. In India, issues that affect women, or 'gender related' issues are often addressed within other types of organisations and forums, such as human rights organisations, those that work in the informal economy such as the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) collectives; organisations which have not necessarily been structured around 'women', as a specific collective identity.

Equally significant is the observation that collective identity does not necessarily precede mobilisation and action, in fact, spontaneous action over local and immediate socio-economic needs has the potential to facilitate collective identity, rather than the other way around.[52] The potential of harnessing women's collective action to pursue a feminist agenda, has also been problematised by the fact that women's rights have been claimed by other political communities, such as the Hindu right, for alternate agendas, which have often worked to undermine women's rights.[53] As Samita Sen stresses, it is crucial for the scholar to keep in mind the fact that gender does not imply or offer an inherent set of common interests binding women together as a collective; however women can be brought together as a constituency, through particular forms of political mobilisation.[54]

Coinciding with the rise of Gandhian nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s, a new set of all India women's organisations such as the Women's Indian Association (WIA) and the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) began to emerge, enabling such forms of mobilisation and consciousness

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[51] I refer specifically to individuals interviewed during the course of this research, such as Anni Raja of the NFIW, economist and women's movement veteran, Devaki Jain and Gargi Chakravartty.

[52] Here I would like to acknowledge and thank Devaki Jain for bringing this important point to my attention.

[53] For a detailed analysis of this issue see T. Sarkar and U. Butalia (eds.), *Women and the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays*, (New Delhi, 1995.)

[54] S. Sen, 'Towards a Feminist Politics? The Indian Woman's Movement in Historical Perspective' in K. Kapadia (ed.), *The Violence of Development: The Politics of Identity, Gender and Social Inequalities in India* (London, 2002), p. 511.

amongst women to develop. This new all India identity was closely woven into the larger political movement for independence, but it represented a significant evolution from the way in which women first became visible within earlier forms of nationalism. In the nineteenth century women belonged to the imagined nation state through nationalists' project of social reform. In the first half of this century, gender relationships and identities came to the fore through two central concerns; firstly, the problematic role of culture and tradition in determining the position of women within the family, through perpetuating practices such as widowhood, sati, and child marriage, and the question of how tradition and culture could be reformed, either through modernisation or purification. Secondly, through a dramatic change in attitudes towards education for girls and women, and the value and appropriateness of such education. Through the engagement of social reformers and nationalists with such concerns, Indian women became sites of social reform, symbols and canvases for the making of bourgeois nationalist modernity, but as Tanika Sarkar has shown with her study of Rashsundari Debi, women were also claiming and subverting discourses of reform for more emancipatory agendas. In the first half of the nineteenth century social reformers were largely men working for the upliftment and enlightenment of their womenfolk, however by the second half the century, the practices of social reform and the new opportunities for women's education that such practices opened up, enabled pioneer women as Pandita Ramabai, Anandibai Karve and Parvatibai Athavale to enter the public sphere, and to build professional careers for themselves as practitioners of social reform and women's education.

Together with the emergence of pioneering women social reformers, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the appearance of a flourishing culture of regional women's presses in places such as Maharashtra, while the late nineteenth century saw the establishment of the first independent women's magazine, Arya Mahila Samaj initiated by Pandita Ramabai.[55] These created a forum for literate women to communicate with each other, to share information, viewpoints and opinions, and to develop a collective voice. Women's writings of the nineteenth and twentieth century, broadened the women's question as it had been posed by social reform, giving it a new feminist possibilities and

[55] P. Anagol, *The Emergence of Feminism in India 1850-1920* (Ashgate, 2005), pp. 72-80, 61-62.

potential.[56]

This was followed by the development of local and regionally based women's societies at the end of the nineteenth century, such as the 'Community of Sisters' in Bombay, the organisation that Vidya Munshi's mother had been a member of, and the *Striyancha Sabha* in Maharashtra, while female led study groups too began to emergence, including Pandita Ranade's Hindu Ladies Social club by the 1870s.[57] Although many of these societies focused on women's position within the family and home, together with access to education, Padma Anagol argues that in places such as Maharashtra some of these societies reflected the growth of an early collective feminist consciousness predating Gandhian nationalism.[58]

In the early twentieth century these trends continued, until the First (1917) and Second (1927) Franchise campaigns, which represented an important step in the evolution of the women's question from the perspective of uplift within a traditional framework, to that of women's equality, by expanding the demands of women beyond the home into the public sphere through a claim to civic rights.[59] This shift was accompanied by the development of the first national Indian women's organisations.

Women's Indian Association (WIA)

The Women's Indian Association (WIA) was established in Madras in 1917, by Annie Besant and several Indian women activists and reformers.[60] Combining nationalist and feminist agendas the WIA was recognised as one of the first all India women's organisation to bring Indian women together as a political community.[61] Its initial activities were focused on support for Besant's Home Rule

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[56] J, Nair, 'On the Question of Agency in Indian Feminist Historiography', *Gender and History,* 6:1 (April 1994), p. 89.
[57] Anagol, *The Emergence of Feminism in India*, p. 64.
[58] Ibid. pp. 60-68, 10.
[59] See Kasturi and Mazumdar, 'Women and Nationalism'.
[60] Including Dorothy Jinarajadasa, Malati Patwardhan, Ammu Swaminathan, Mrs Dadabhoy and Mrs Ambujammal. See R. Kumar, *A History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India 1800-1990* (London, New York, 1993), p. 54.
[61] Ibid.

movement, together with an emphasis on the self development and education of members.[62] In 1921 the WIA campaigned for Dr. Gour's Civil Marriage Bill, and took an interest in the co-operative movement. The Association was also the first all India women's association to take up the demands of women workers, through unionising and lobbying the government for the introduction of maternity leave and benefits for women workers.[63] The WIA continues to function today as an affiliate of the AIWC.

The All India Women's Conference (AIWC)

The All India Women's Conference (AIWC), the second all India women's organisation to pioneer this new politics of collective belonging, was established in Poona in 1927 as an organisation devoted to the promotion and expansion of education for girls and women. The Conference quickly realised that this could not be achieved until the social, cultural and political constraints that women faced, which prevented them from being able to take up new educational opportunities, were addressed. In a short period of time the organisation began to expand its activities. The AIWC understood women's oppression to be multifaceted and rooted in an interconnected web of culture (or society), economics and politics. In accordance with nineteenth-century nationalists and social reformers they saw the corruption of Hindu culture as perpetuating traditions and practices which were harmful to women and which reinforced their oppression. Such a cultural environment created a context where women lived in ignorance, lacking education, and consequently even awareness of their own oppression. But the AIWC understood that there was an economic and political component to Indian women's oppression as well. This economic component was articulated in *The Women's Role in the Planned Economy Report* (1939), drafted in close consultation with the AIWC leadership at the time, which drew attention to the double burden of women's work in the home and in the field or factory.

Because many AIWC members were also involved in nationalist politics and sympathetic to the nationalist cause they identified with their male colleagues in the INC and Socialist Congress as fellow oppressed colonial subjects, and articulated a discourse which saw women's emancipation and

[62] This was encouraged through the reading of particular texts and discussion of subjects such as domestic economy, physiology and religion. See Kumar, *A History of Doing*, pp. 54, 67.
[63] Ibid.

political freedom as interconnected. Veteran activists and nationalists such as Renuka Ray, Hansa Mehta, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, argued that the true empowerment of women was not possible in a context of political oppression. Political freedom was in fact a pre-requisite for women's emancipation.

The solution for the AIWC lay in access to civic and constitutional citizenship, the right to vote, and to equality in terms of legislation, as well as social empowerment through welfare services which would conscientize women to exercise their new constitutional rights, and to access the health, education and welfare services offered by the democratic government. At a national level the AIWC concerned itself with lobbying for the female franchise and campaigns for the reform of social laws relating to women's status in the family. At regional and local levels its branches were involved in education and in creating public opinion and interest around social reform issues such as polygamy, purdah, the trafficking of women, the position of *devadasis*, drinking and gambling, untouchability, the universal demand for free and compulsory education and the propagation of 'scientific birth control.[64] Branches were involved in the running of various welfare activities including; the provision of medical relief, maternity and child welfare facilities, the training of indigenous midwives or *dias*, the establishment of crèches, sanitation education, rescue homes for women and campaigning for the rights of women and child labourers.[65]

One of the strengths of the AIWC, particularly in the pre-independence era, was its flexible structure which accommodated a spectrum of existing structures, and a range of attitudes amongst women concerning gender roles and expectations. This was crucial in enabling the organisation to develop an all India character. In addition to developing new branches from scratch, local groups of women who were already established could affiliate to the Conference. The WIA based in Madras was one such affiliate, and continued to maintain its identity as the WIA together with its AIWC affiliation. The Delhi Women's League, founded by Rameshwari Nehru, was another such affiliate. In addition to national campaigns initiated by the head office, the Conference was able to accommodate a diversity

[64] AIWC, 6th Annual Conference Report, 28 December 1931 to 1 January 1932, pp. 30, 110.
[65] Ibid.

of activities and interests, which were locally or regionally grounded and relevant. The representative structure of the AIWC also meant that the voices of local branches were heard in its decision making forums. For every 50 or 100 members, a branch was entitled to send a representative to the annual National Conference to represent the views and interests of their colleagues back at home. This was the forum where the agenda of the Conference was decided, and where policy was finalised by voting on resolutions.

Although the official policy of the AIWC was non-affiliation with party politics, many of its members also belonged to the Indian National Congress, the Congress Socialist Party or the Communist Party of India, and were actively involved in nationalist politics. In practice this policy was not adhered to, as the AIWC participated in a number of nationalist activities, which were generally Congress led. The principle of inclusivity, underpinning the policy did achieve a degree of success in the 1920s and 1930s, with the AIWC using its claim to impartiality to bring a together communities of women, across religious, class and caste lines. By the late 1930s however, cracks were beginning to emerge within the Organisation. Communities of socialist and communist women were becoming increasingly frustrated with what they saw as the elitist and middle class orientation of the AIWC and its welfare focus which they argued did not address the economic and political causes of gender and class oppression.[66] Simultaneously rising communal tensions in nationalist politics were beginning to be felt within the organisation, and were leading to the alienation of some of its Muslim members.[67]

As Geraldine Forbes observes, the 1940s marked a turbulent decade in the fight for women's rights in India, with growing communal and class divisions undermining the claim of the AIWC to speak as the legitimate voice and representative of 'Indian women'. These tensions were exacerbated by emerging struggles, highlighting class and ideological differences within the nationalist movement, and exposing a range of competing economic and political pathways towards emancipation. By the mid

[66] Many of these women went on to establish the National Federation of Indian Women in 1954 as an autonomous women's organisation, but with a strong membership of communist women. See Chakravartty, *Communists in the Indian Women's Movement*.
[67] See G. Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 196-203.

1940s, the AIWC had lost its hegemony as a representative of women's interests.[68]

Independence in August 1947 with its immense and exciting nation building project, offered the Conference new possibilities for reclaiming this hegemony, as the representatives of women's interests, and as the inscribers and defenders of women's equality and rights. With the coming of independence the AIWC embarked on a dual strategy of pursuing citizenship through the *theory* of rights and the *practice* of service. Chapters two and three trace the evolution of the AIWC's advocacy of rights and its claim to political citizenship, while chapter four, *Citizenship through Service,* explores how, through its engagement with social welfare and development policy and institutions, the AIWC used the broad platform of service through social welfare to claim a right to speak on behalf of the interests and concerns of Indian women in independent India.

Independence also brought with it the possibility of other forms of collective being and belonging. The newly established National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), equally concerned with questions of inclusivity and legitimate representativeness, took an alternative route to the AIWC, attempting to claim this hegemony by building an identity for itself and for the working class and peasant Indian woman, through constructing and articulating a conceptualisation of citizenship defined through the claim to socio-economic rights and a presence within civil society. Chapter six, *Citizenship through Struggle,* traces the emergence of this new umbrella organisation in the 1950s, documenting the role that a range of distinct but interconnected NFIW-led struggles played in reworking the meaning and possibilities of gendered citizenship and collective voice for various communities of Indian women.

National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW)

Drawing considerable leadership from Communist women and a mandate from an emerging international women's movement, the National Federation of Indian Women was launched in Calcutta in 1954 as an affiliate to the Women's International Democratic Federation. Banners decorating the University Institute Hall, where this first congress was held, proclaimed the vision of the Federation in

[68] Forbes, *Women in Modern India,* pp. 189-191.

short succinct sound bites; 'We want a prosperous and free India in a peaceful world,' and 'Equal economic, social and political rights for women'.[69] This vision was more fully elaborated, in the congress's printed Report, which stated that the Federation stood 'for a sovereign, democratic and prosperous India, a peaceful world where freedom is guaranteed to all nations and there is an end to all discrimination on the basis of colour, sex, religion and political belief'.[70] This was to be achieved through a commitment to the Federation's aims and objectives: the winning of equal rights, ensuring the welfare and protection of children, and securing peace on the international stage as well as with Pakistan.[71]

Developments both within India and internationally facilitated the establishment of this new Federation. A common agenda of peace brought Indian women activists into increasing contact with an emerging international women's movement. The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) was one of the key players within this community. In 1953 the WIDF invited Indian women activists to form a nationwide federation affiliated to the WIDF. This invitation came at a moment when women activists were increasingly feeling the need for a new platform through which to represent their interests and a new way to come together on a national scale.

The Federation's programme of action included a combination of agitational activities (both intra and extra parliamentary) together with day to day welfare to uplift women, and to 'build' the new Organisation.[72] The NFIW saw itself as playing a crucial role in bringing women's voices together to lobby for equality in law, but also to act as enablers and watchdogs to ensure the required transformation of social attitudes and institutional structures. 'Laws must, of course, be enacted by the government, but creating necessary conditions for their application...is our job'[73] reminded Smt. Urmila Devi to federation delegates during her inaugural address in 1957.

[69] NFIW, 'Indian Women Meet in Conference': The Report of the National Congress of Women, June 1954, New Delhi, p. 2.
[70] Ibid, p. 60.
[71] Interview with Chakravartty, 4 November 2011.
[72] NFIW, Report of the Second National Conference, June 1957, Vijayawada, p. 29.
[73] Ibid, p. 20.

The Marxist influence meant that the NFIW leadership positioned women's oppression within larger systems of economic exploitation and saw the struggle for women's equality as intricately interconnected to these larger struggles. Part of the NFIW's strategic programme included collaboration with unions around workers rights, organising women workers for strikes and agitations, organising protests with working class and middle class housewives around food security, and working with peasant women in their struggles for livelihoods and land rights.[74]

Welfare activities conducted by the Federation's affiliated organisations in the early years included the provision of milk schemes, the running of adult literacy programmes for women, schools, libraries and crèches, as well as the creation of employment and livelihood opportunities for women through various kinds of vocational training, the establishment of industrial and handicraft centres and the running of co-operatives.[75]

A total of 17 resolutions were passed during the course of the first Congress in 1954 revealing the broad range of concerns and interests of its members and leaders.[76] These included a resolution on working women demanding equal wage for equal work, and the removal of all discrimination in terms of employment, a maternity home for every 10, 000 women, one on social rights with special reference to the marriage laws before Parliament, as well as a Bill for the Abolition of Dowry.[77] There were also resolutions on the right to education, the improved working conditions for nurses, the rights of Muslim women, and the introduction of a ban on the Hydrogen Bomb and an end to the Pak-US Military Pact[78].

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[74] NFIW, Third National Conference: Report and Resolutions, 4 to 7 October 1959, Banares, pp. 20-21.
[75] Ibid, pp. 23-24.
[76] Many of these overlapped with resolutions passed at the AIWC's Annual Conference of the previous year. See for example AIWC, 23rd Annual Conference Report (Silver Jubilee Session), 2 to 5 May 1953, Poona, pp. 46-48. These included resolutions on the Hindu Code Bill and ensuring equal inheritance and custody rights for women, the provision of family planning services, universal education, the creation of jobs to tackle unemployment, support for cottage industries, relief for famine victims, ensuring co-ordination between the government and voluntary organisations in the implementation of welfare work, health outreach to the rural areas, and objections to the representation of Indian women in film and advertising.
[77] S. Munsi, 'National Conference of Women in Calcutta', *New Age,* 13 June 1954, copy located in CPI offices, Ajoy Bhavan.
[78] NFIW, 'Indian Women Meet in Conference', June 1954, p. 6.

Like the AIWC, the NFIW aspired to build an identity for itself grounded on inclusiveness and plurality. This reflected the political milieu of the time where partition and communal violence called for a sensitive and encompassing approach to nation building. The narrative of the birth and early years of the Federation cultivated such an identity. A *New Age* article reporting on the first Congress session describes delegates travelling from every corner of India to attend, 'from Manipur and Tripura in the East to Rajasthan in the West, from Kashmir in the North to Travancore-Cochin in the South'.[79] Not only was this inaugural gathering representative of the geographical diversity of India but encompassing of its socio-economic spectrum too. The Congress Report informs us that amongst the representatives from Bengal hailed 'Every cross section of toiling, struggling women-women in professions, refugee women. Workers, peasants, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis were present including tribal women and Harijans'.[80] In this Report emphasis was placed on the consultative and democratic nature of the Federation's formation; 'The Constitution, which united various organisations in a broad federation, is discussed till the long hours of the night before it is finally adopted', it states.[81] This stress on inclusivity and diversity, at the heart of the Federation, was again reinforced in the Second Congress Report, which described 'the galaxy of languages being spoken in the delegates' camp',[82] and, in the Third Congress Report, which informed readers that the opening speech of Aruna Asaf Ali, the Federation's President had to be translated into six languages.[83]

The NFIW adopted a broad federal structure, which meant that, as with the AIWC, existing organisations could affiliate rather than be initiated and grown from scratch. Provision was made in the Constitution for individual members to join as well. At the time of the founding Calcutta conference, the NFIW claimed a membership of a hundred and twenty thousand through affiliation from 13 provinces.[84] It drew its strongest support from West Bengal, Tripura, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab

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[79] 'Over 1,000 Delegates Will Attend the Women's Congress', *New Age,* 6 June 1954, copy located in CPI offices, Ajoy Bhavan.
[80] NFIW, *For Equality: For a Just Social Order* (New Delhi, 1984), p. 18.
[81] NFIW, 'Indian Women Meet in Conference', June 1954, p. 6.
[82] NFIW, Report of the Second National Conference, June 1957, pp. i, iv.
[83] Ibid, p. 5.
[84] Ibid, p. 28.

and Tamil Nadu.[85] Any women or organisation who agreed with the aims and objectives of the Federation could join. The Federation initially claimed that the bulk of this membership consisted of 'peasant women in rural areas'.[86] By 1957, it acknowledged however that its regional leadership had in effect lost touch with some of these groups. Manikuntala Sen one of the founding members of Federation describes the majority of founding members, certainly in West Bengal, as teachers.[87] Sen's description of the profile of founding members makes more sense, particularly as we know that the early *leadership* of the Federation[88] were mainly teachers, lecturers and principals.[89]

So what did it mean to be an Indian feminist? The gender politics of social feminism

This generation of women nationalists and gender activists did not consider their ideology and organisational activities as feminism, in the western sense of the term, however, they practiced what Geraldine Forbes defines as a form of social feminism, an ideology which acknowledged that women were physically and psychologically different from men, but argued that it was because of the value and significance of their special qualities that they should be able to contribute equally to society.[90] Social feminism was based on the principle of recognising women's equality, and hence their inclusion in the body politic, through an identity of difference, through acknowledging the unique and valuable contribution their gendered roles were able to make to the nationalist struggle and the envisioning of a new nation state. It was however a broad and multifaceted ideology with the

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[85] At the time of its founding 40,000 members came from organisations in Bengal, 35, 000 from Tripura and 16,000 from Andhra Pradesh See NFIW, Report of the Second National Conference, p. 28.The Lok Istri Sabha of Punjab, the Golden Rocks Madar Sangam based in Tamil Nadu and MARS in West Bengal (which had by this stage been renamed as the PBMS) were all founding members of the National Co-ordinating Committee, the body responsible for laying the way for the establishment of the NFIW, and consequently became part of the Federation immediately. Other founding organisations present at the 1954 Congress came from Assam and Uttar Pradesh. Groups of individual delegates from Delhi, Bombay, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan attended as well. The Bhopal Mahila Samiti, the Assam Mahila Sangh and the Delhi Women's League, together with various organisations which had previously been branches of the All India Women's Conference also responded immediately to join the Federation. See *For Equality: For a Just Social Order*, pp, 13, 18 and 14. Between 1954 and its second conference three years later in June 1957 the organisation reported that it's affiliated organisations working with refugee colonies in Bengal had 'grown and stabilised', While organisations in Bombay, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and 'certain other Provinces' (including the Madhyamgram Samiti, the Mangalore Stree Mandal, the Pondicherry Mahila Sangham, the Hyderabad Democratic Women's Organisation, the Mahila Mangal Parishad Delhi) had affiliated. See NFIW, Report of the Second National Conference p. 28.

[86] NFIW, Report of the Second National Conference, June 1957, p. 28.

[87] M. Sen, *In Search of Freedom: an unfinished journey* (Calcutta, 2001), p. 227.

[88] By leadership I am referring to the National Co-ordinating Committee which was established in 1953.

[89] Sen, *In Search of Freedom,* p. 227; NFIW, 'Indian Women Meet in Conference', June 1954, p. 25.

[90] Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (2009), pp. 90-91.

capacity to encompass a range of interpretations, positionings and constructions of gendered identities, depending on the context and the group articulating it. One strand of social feminism articulated an identity and role that could be defined as paternalistic and protectionist. Emerging out of the nineteenth-century Indian social reform movement, and the practices and discourses of maternal imperialism, this strand sought the inclusion of women within the state through a policy of protectionism and guardianship. But there were other strands of social feminism which were grounded on notions of women's moral and spiritual power, as well as the power of sacrifice, as for example, women revolutionaries invoking the destructive power of goddesses such as Durga and Kali.

Social feminism fulfilled a strategic function by providing an ideological base that was broad enough to encompass women from a range of political and social views, from the more conservative, through to those with a more liberal politics such as Vijayalakshmi Pandit, those with a Gandhian worldview such as Rajkumari Amrit Kaur as well as Socialist and Communist women such as Renu Chakravartty. It also functioned strategically, enabling Indian women to carve out an independent identity as the advocates of women's equality, as distinct from that of their western sisters, and to walk the tightrope between feminism and nationalism. It allowed Indian women activists to pursue a commitment to the empowerment and equality in a way that was less overtly challenging to the social structures of Indian society, and hence more accommodating to many of their male colleagues in the movement.

Conclusion

The first three decades of the twentieth century saw important developments in terms of a collective gender politics for Indian women, culminating in the 1920s and 1930s with the formation of the first all India Women's Organisations and the entry of women into Indian nationalism. The second half of the nineteenth century had paved the way for these developments, by opening up the professional sphere of social work, and enabling access to education, which facilitated new forms of communication and the founding of local women's organisations. By the time of the drafting of the Karachi Resolution in 1931, to which we turn next, Chattopadhyay's generation were able to bring a

coherent and determined call for equal rights, and equal treatment under the law, to the negotiating table.

Chapter Two:

Rewriting the social contract: the emergence of the Indian woman as political citizen

Introduction

The struggle for an egalitarian politics in India is a complex story with deep historical roots. It's a narrative that continues to unfold against the contemporary political landscape, as fierce parliamentary debate rages over the potential of caste and gender reservations to fulfil the constitutional promise of inclusive citizenship. This chapter first returns to an earlier phase in this struggle, analysing the participation of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and her generation in the making of three documents which were to set the parameters for the drafting of India's democratic Constitution; the Karachi Resolution of 1931, the 1939 Report on *Women's Role in Planned Economy* and the 1945 AIWC's Woman's Charter of Rights and Duties.

In their efforts to construct a constitutional identity for women, as citizens, in a future democratic nation state, these documents sought to rework the social contract. The Karachi Resolution marked a key moment in the emergence of a political identity for the Indian as citizen, divorced from social citizenship or social identity. The 1939 *Women's Role in Planned Economy* Report created space for the articulation of economic citizenship within this political identity, while the AIWC's Indian Woman's Charter of Rights and Duties, reconciled tensions between liberal conceptions of the abstract political citizen, with social belonging and being, through a duality of rights and duties.

With all three of these documents the analysis is concerned not only with the text itself, but equally with the context out of which this text emerges, and the interaction between text and context, which exposes the multiplicity and instability of the subject positions from which this generation of women activists 'spoke', in their efforts to remake the social contract. In opening up new spaces for conceptualising and defining the boundaries, meanings and implications of citizenship and equality,

the embeddedness of these documents in the worldview and politics of their drafters, however, simultaneously foreclosed alternate spaces and forms of collective being and belonging.

The Social Contract

This chapter draws on the work of political theorists such as Carole Pateman and Christine Keating, whose analysis seeks to interrogate and make visible the gendered dynamics in the making of the social contract.[1] Carole Pateman argues that the development of liberal constitutional democracy, the framework out of which the concept modern citizenship emerges, is itself inherently patriarchal and gendered, because it is grounded on a subordinate relationship between men and women, and on an abstract understanding of the individual who is by definition masculine.

Social contract theory explains how and why individuals allow themselves to be grouped together and for their freedoms to be curtailed in exchange for order and security. It is premised on the idea that in a state of nature humans are free; however, life is unsustainable and insecure.[2] In the words of Thomas Hobbes, as quoted in his famous treatise, *Leviathan*, the life of humanity in a state of nature 'without a common Power to keep them in awe' is 'solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short'.[3] In an attempt to seek security for both their bodies and their property, people consensually join together in political communities.[4] In moving from a state of nature into such political communities, humans agree to live together under a mutual contract, which counter balances security and freedom. Grouping together within civil society requires the introduction of 'a variety of civil arrangements necessary for regulating peaceable interactions between people, which culminate in some form of authority-typically the state'[5]. Individual freedoms are therefore managed and curtailed within the 'domain of permissible interventions by the identified authority'.[6]

Pateman is concerned with the transition from the more traditional form of authority, that of monarchy, to that of parliamentary governance, which forms the foundation of the modern state today.

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[1] See, for example, Carole Pateman's seminal work *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge, 1988.) and Christine Keating's text *Decolonising Democracy: transforming the social contract in India* (Pennsylvania, 2011.)
[2] S. Welch, *A Theory of Freedom* (New York, 2012), p. 3.
[3] T. Hobbs, *Leviathan* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 88-89.
[4] A.C. Grayling, *Ideas that Matter: A Personal Guide for the 21st Century* (London, 2009), p. 381.
[5] Welch, *A Theory of Freedom*, p. 3.
[6] Ibid, p. 4.

In her book *The Sexual Contract* she explains how the social contract is inherently patriarchal because it is underpinned by a sexual contract - an agreement in which the paternalism of the old system (articulated through a father's control over the son) was replaced by fraternalism (equality between men as individuals, which is based on their authority as heads of the household). The social contract replaced the patriarchal right of the father with that of civil government, in the transition from monarchy to parliamentary democracy.[7] This created a new kind of equality, a fraternity of men, but was itself dependent on the exclusion of other communities, such as women, and slaves in the United States. In fact, Pateman argues, men's loss of power in the public sphere was compensated for, by granting them authority in the private sphere, as the male head of household. One of the central reasons why men, who were ostensibly equals as political brothers, agreed to be governed, was so as to preserve and enhance their power over women. To resolve the contradiction between democracy's ethos of equality and assertions of masculine power, western political theorists separated the public and private spheres.[8]

In her recent analysis of the making the social contract in post-colonial India, Christine Keating argues that the Constituent Assembly (CA), the body responsible for writing India's new constitution, operated as a site for the reworking of both the racial and the sexual contracts, that had underpinned India's colonial domination, ushering in a new kind of 'inclusive democracy'.[9] This chapter is premised on an understanding of the drafting of the Indian Constitution as a point of culmination, rather than a starting marker in this process. The Indian women's movement began engaging in efforts to rework the social contract prior to independence, with the first franchise campaign for women in 1917, and continued in its efforts with the entry of Chattopadhyay and her peers into the Indian nationalist movement in the 1920s and 1930s. This chapter returns to three earlier documents which set the terms of the debate around citizenship and equality in the Indian Constituent Assembly; the Karachi Resolution of 1931, the 1939 Report on *Women's Role in Planned Economy* and the 1945 AIWC's Woman's Charter of Rights and Duties. Shared alike by nationalists and Indian feminists,

[7] Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, p. 33.
[8] Ibid, pp. 32-36.
[9] Keating, *Decolonising* Democracy, pp. 64-69 and 91.

these documents reveal the efforts of Chattopadhyay's generation to rework the social contract, and in so doing to renegotiate the gendered dynamics of power in the construction of the nation state.

The Karachi Resolution 1931

By the time of the India National Congress's (INC) Karachi Congress in 1931, the question of the constitutional future of India had become one of central concern within Congress, and between nationalist leaders and the British Raj. The Karachi Congress envisioned an independent and democratic India, and sought to position Indians as citizens within such a future. In 1931 when the Karachi Resolution was drafted, it represented a definitive break with the compromise of colonial power sharing with an Indian elite.

In 1927 the British government appointed the Simon Commission to discuss the constitutional future of the country, but failed to include any Indian representation on this Commission, which alienated the leaders of all parties and communities in India. In response the Congress urged parties to boycott the commission, and decided to form its own all Indian committee to draft a constitution[10]. The result was the Nehru Report of 1928, the first Congress document to lay out a broad constitutional framework for a future independent India, advocating dominion status.[11] Many leaders within Congress, including Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose however advocated a more radical break with Britain. At its 1929 Lahore Session, Congress agreed that its goal was to be *Purna Swaraj*, complete independence, and that this was to be achieved through civil disobedience rather than discussion and collaboration with the British Raj.[12] In alignment with this, Congress embarked at the beginning of 1930 on the first phase of its 1930-1934 Civil Disobedience Campaign. This Campaign was to launch with a Salt Satyagraha, a protest against the British imposition of tax on Indian manufactured salt. The Satyagraha commenced with Gandhi's famous Salt March through Gujarat to the coastal village of Dandi in March and April 1930, and was followed by groups of volunteers across the country breaking the salt laws, picketing legislatures and boycotting alcohol and imported

[10] S. Tejani, *Indian Secularism: A Social and Intellectual History 1890-1950* (New Delhi, 2007), pp. 185-186.
[11] D. A. Low*, Congress and the Raj: facets of the Indian Struggle*, *1917-1947* (New Delhi, Oxford, 2006), p. 139.
[12] J. Brown, *Modern India: the origins of an Asian democracy* (Oxford, 1994), p. 272.

cloth.[13] Clashes between those offering Satyagraha and authorities led to extensive arrests, including Congress leaders, such as Nehru and Gandhi.

While all of this was unfolding, other nationalist leaders, including the Muslim League, agreed to participate in discussions with Britain through a series of Round Table talks in London. Congress, leading its campaign back at home, did not participate. However, the Viceroy Lord Irwin's release of Gandhi and the Congress Working Committee in January 1931 prompted the Mahatma to meet with the Viceroy in a reconciliatory gesture, at the close of this first series of talks. Both men discovered that they had an accord, and this initial meeting resulted in a series of informal talks between the two, culminating in the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact at the end of March 1931. Through this Pact, the INC agreed to a range of conditions, including the cessation of civil disobedience, while the colonial government agreed to lift repressionary measures against the Congress. Congress was divided over whether to endorse the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Many leaders were highly critical, including Nehru and Patel, and the Karachi Congress held between March and April 1931 was, according to Low, dominated by this question, rather than that of the Resolution on Fundamental Rights which was drafted at this session.[14]

Scholars today recognise the 'Resolution of the Karachi Congress on Fundamental Rights and Economic changes' as a landmark document in the development of Indian nationalist ideology. For its time it provided the most concrete and specific policy brief on economic and political transformation. The mid to late 1920s had been troubled years for the Congress Party, with internal divisions and disorganisation marring the development of a clear vision.[15] The return of Gandhi to Congress politics in 1928 played a positive role in pulling the organisation together. But, as Judith Brown observes, it was only two years later under Gandhi's leadership of The Civil Disobedience Campaign that Congress began to make the transition to an all India movement.[16] The Karachi Resolution as a document reflected this important transition.

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[13] Kumar, *The History of Doing*, p. 74.
[14] Low, *Congress and the Raj*, p. 139.
[15] Brown, *Modern India*, p. 267.
[16] Ibid.

The Karachi Resolution reflects the co-existence of a Gandhian worldview together with the rational and modernist approach of Congress leaders like Nehru. The 'Resolution of the Karachi Congress on Fundamental Rights and Economic Changes' included twenty clauses. Clause one, with sub-clauses (a) to (i), covered Fundamental Rights. Clauses two to four advocated religious neutrality on the part of the state, universal adult suffrage and free primary education. Clauses five to nine focused on the rights and protections of workers, while Clauses 10 to 12 covered the terms of agricultural tenure, taxation and ownership, as well as inheritance tax. Clause 13 detailed terms for military expenditure, Clause 14 set terms for civil department expenditure. Clauses 15 to 20 revealed a clear Gandhian agenda including the protection of indigenous cloth, prohibition of alcohol, a ban on the placement of duty on Indian manufactured salt, control over exchange and currency policy, control over usury, and state control over key industries and mineral resources.[17]

The Fundamental Rights section of the document was most significant for the Indian women's movement, in particular sub-clauses:

> e) 'All citizens are equal before the law, irrespective of religion, caste, creed or sex'

and

> f) 'no disability to attach to any citizen by reason of his or her religion, caste or creed or sex in regard to public employment, office of power or honour, and in the exercise of any trade or calling'

Not only was the Karachi Resolution of 1931 recognised as a landmark in the development of a clear egalitarian nationalist ideology, but it was also recognised retrospectively as an important moment in the struggle for gender equality in colonial India, because it is the first nationalist document to offer a clear definition and commitment to equality between the sexes, as a foundational principle of Congress policy. The Karachi Resolution was significant furthermore, because it signalled a distinct break with the rhetoric of social feminism in preference for a liberal conceptualisation of belonging to the nation state.

[17] Copy of the Original Resolution of the Karachi Congress on Fundamental Rights and Economic Changes with suggestions received from various organisations and individuals, 17 April 1931, File G75/1931, AICC Papers (hereafter AICC) Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (hereafter NMML).

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay participated in the Salt Satyagraha, which launched the first phase of the Civil Disobedience Campaign, defiantly auctioning salt in the markets, and even the local court house, in violation of the British monopoly on this essential basic commodity. In her autobiography she describes the mass participation of women in the Campaign and the sense of agency, solidarity and collective identity that this experience fostered in her consciousness 'The whole air became so surcharged, every nerve in the body tingled. I felt elated as part of one of the most spectacular dramas in India's political history'. In setting the scene, she writes that although India had a long 'illustrious tradition of women warriors', the Salt Satyagraha marked 'their first appearance in any modern militant political campaign' She goes on to recall that while signing her name on the campaign pledge, 'It seemed such a stupendous moment in my life, in the life of the women of my country. I felt I was tracing not the letters of my name but recording a historic event'.[18] The first phase (1930-1931) of Congress's Civil Disobedience Campaign, witnessed the unprecedented participation of Indian women in protests and boycotts. Four thousand women were arrested, and went to jail for the nationalist cause during this phase[19].

The research of historians such as Suruchi Thapar-Björkert indicates that it was not only elite and educated middle class women who were involved, but that the call to action drew in new groups from Indian society, including working class and peasant women. The Campaign was also strengthened by the informal participation of many women involved in Indian women's organisations, such as the Women's Indian Association and the All India Women's Conference. The Karachi Resolution, framed against the backdrop of the first phase of Civil Disobedience, therefore marked an important moment in the recognition of women as active participants in the nationalist struggle. The Report containing the Karachi Resolution, in fact, begins with the Congress congratulating 'all those who underwent great sufferings during the late civil disobedience campaign...especially...the women of India who rose in their thousands and assisted the nation in its struggle for freedom and respectfully

[18] Chattopadhyay, *Inner Recesses, Outer Spaces*, pp. 152-157.
[19] See S. Thapar-Björkert, *Women in the Indian national movement: unseen faces and unheard voices* (New Delhi, London, 2006); Brown, *Modern India*; Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, p. 129. Forbes emphasises that women's participation in this later campaign was quantitatively and qualitatively different from their participation in the campaigns of the 1920s.

assures them that no constitution will be acceptable to the Congress that discriminates against the [their] sex in the matter of franchise'.[20]

The narrative of the Salt Satyagraha might well have been different however had it not been for the persistence of energetic young activists such as Chattopadhyay, as Gandhi's initial vision of the Satyagraha did not include a direct role for women. Gandhian nationalism is presented as a movement which facilitated the entry of Indian women en masse into nationalist politics. Chattopadhyay's recollection of events leading up to the Salt Satyagraha, suggests that the new opportunities created by their participation in the struggle for independence, were not simply facilitated by the strategy and approach of Gandhian nationalism, but that they were equally the product of individual efforts to push, challenge and expand the openings that Gandhian nationalism created. In her autobiography Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay described her excitement on hearing about the Salt Satyagraha, followed by her disappointment on being told that she could not participate: 'As batches for the first Satyagraha were to be selected I asked that women be included. I was told that Gandhiji did not want them as he had other programmes reserved for them. I was flabbergasted'.[21]

She decided to travel to Surat specifically to visit Gandhi and to persuade him to change his mind. When she confronted Gandhi over his exclusion of women in the Satyagraha, he reassured her that his decision was not based on discrimination, but rather due to the fact that he had reserved specific and alternative activities for them, including the promotion of *swadeshi*, the picketing of foreign goods and the elimination of liquor, which he felt were more appropriate for their nature. 'The tasks reserved for them are a tribute to the high qualities they possess', he explained patiently to her. 'The call for them was not for slogan shouting or marches, but utter dedication, which was a natural quality of women'.[22]

Chattopadhyay did not challenge Gandhi's logic that women were endowed with specific feminine qualities; in fact she very cleverly made a counter argument using this logic, but turning it back on

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[20] 'Resolutions recommended by the Subject Committee', Draft programme of the 45th Session of the INC at Karachi, 29 March 1931, File 25/1931, AICC Papers, NMML.
[21] Chattopadhyay, *Inner Recesses, Outer Spaces*, p. 149.
[22] Ibid pp. 149-151.

itself. She argued that it was the unique nature of Satyagraha as a form of moral protest that enabled it to accommodate women as the weaker sex. 'The significance of a non-violent struggle is that the weakest can take an equal part with the strongest and share in the triumph as you have yourself said'.[23] This exchange was indicative of the way in which women activists often had to negotiate between a set of abstract ideals, and a set of socially acceptable norms, within the nationalist movement.

In this argument Chattopadhyay had used the language of social feminism to argue her case for her fellow female activists' right to participate on equal terms in the Salt Satyagraha. This was the language employed by Congress itself and many of her colleagues. However when it came to debating the terms of belonging in the Karachi Resolution, the representatives of the women's movement resisted such a claim to belonging, indicating that the terms of inclusion were shifting.

The first draft of the Karachi Resolution was produced at the Indian National Congress's annual Conference over March and April 1931. At this Conference the Working Committee of Congress appointed another Committee, the Fundamental Rights and Economic Programme Committee, 'to invite opinions and suggestions from Provincial Congress Committees and other bodies and persons' on the terms of the Resolution and suggest changes and revisions.[24] The Women's Indian Association was one of the organisations that engaged in this process of discussion and revision, submitting a series of suggested amendments. Whereas with social feminism difference formed one of the bases for inclusion within the imagined future nation state, points (e) and (f) in Clause 1 of the Resolution implied an understanding which viewed difference on the basis of sex or other social identities, such as religion and caste, as barriers to inclusion and equality. This implied the claiming of political rights, and inclusion in the nation state as the 'sexless' citizen.

The WIA's engagement in the crafting of the Karachi Resolution clearly shows an emphasis towards this particular identity through the removal or rephrasing of any clauses intended to 'include' women in the realm of state protection and jurisdiction, and through any reference to their social identity, in

[23] Ibid.
[24] Congress Secretary to Prakasa, informing him that he has been made convenor of this committee and explaining the duties required, 2nd April 1931, Camp Karachi, File G75/1931, AICC Papers, NMML.

particular their specific needs as a predefined social category. For example, responding to clauses five to nine, all of which dealt with issues around labour regulation and the protection of workers' rights and worker unions, the WIA argued that 'the phrase 'Protection for women workers' should not be used', because 'Placing women in a condition of 'protection' is writing down women publically as in a state of weakness which is not desirable for our whole sex'.[25]

Within the political language of Chattopadhyay's generation, a strand of rhetoric was gaining ground that was increasingly resistant to women being seen and identified as a specific socially defined category, in the sphere of party and parliamentary politics, although this was not the case in other spheres, like social welfare and constructive work. The reasoning behind this rejection was based on an understanding that it encouraged paternalism, which denied women equality and inclusion on the basis of an identified weakness and consequent need for protection. Social identity operated in this context as the basis for exclusion on the grounds of discrimination. Chapter three illustrates the logic which led this generation to reject this particular framing of social identity, not only as marker of weakness and discrimination, but in the case of reservations, on the basis of its use to grant special privilege and advantage. This rejection under both pretexts of discrimination and privilege, required making social identity irrelevant or invisible in the eyes of the state, and points (e) and (f) of the Karachi Resolution were embraced by the Indian women's movement precisely for this reason, because they were interpreted as facilitating such an invisibility or indistinguishability.

This invisibility could however become a two edged sword. The issue around labour legislation is an example of how in certain contexts it became necessary to make women invisible, in order to claim a particular conception of equality, while in other contexts, as the example below demonstrates, it became imperative to name them as a specific community, to ensure that they were not excluded because of this invisibility. So for example, in reference to Clause three, on Adult Suffrage the WIA recommended that, in this, 'adult suffrage should be expressed explicitly as meaning the right of every

[25] 'Original Resolution of the Karachi Congress on Fundamental Rights and Economic Changes with suggestions received from various organisations and individuals', undated, File G75/1931, AICC Papers, NMML.

man and woman of the age of 21 and above to vote'.[26] In being made visible or invisible the principle or intention was the same, to ensure inclusion in the body politic.

Together with the identity of the Indian woman as sexless citizen, more traditional ideologies of gender politics can be identified vying for recognition in the debate around the framing of citizenship in the Resolution. Bans Gopal of Fatehpur recommended that to Clause 1 (c) be added 'No conversion of minors or women without their guardian's consent'[27] reinforcing a conception of the legal status of women, defined by their familial relations, and trapping them as perpetual minors in law. This recommended change positioned the authority and identity of the family, over the authority of the individual. In this context, it operated as a means to deny power and the ability of a woman as a citizen to act as an independent agent. In other suggested inclusions and changes to the Resolution, social difference was emphasised. However, in these instances, it was not done to deny agency, but rather to facilitate women's agency and to enable them to participate in the nation state, as for example, Shah Ozair's request that in Clause three on suffrage, 'with special arrangement of Pardah' be added, to ensure that women were able to exercise their right to vote without any violation of their privacy.[28]

The claim to citizenship through social feminism, as articulated in Chattopadhyay's passionate argument for women's participation in the Salt Satyagraha, versus the political feminism of the sexless citizen, expressed in the WIA's amendments to the original Karachi Resolution, should not necessarily be seen as inherently opposite or contradictory. They both co-existed simultaneously as two streams of ideology within gender politics over the period from the 1930s to the 1960s, and produced various sub streams, at times reinforcing each other, and on other occasions in tension with each other, in the Report of *Woman's Role in Planned Economy* and the Indian Woman's Charter of Rights and Duties.

Some of the recommendations made by the WIA reveal a drive towards pushing the jurisdiction of citizenship, based on equality before the law, beyond the public into the private sphere of the home

[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

and family. For example, the WIA recommended that 'Equal Rights for both men and women in laws relating to marriage, to guardianship of children, inheritance rights and nationality rights' be inserted at the end of clause (e), in the section on Fundamental Rights.[29] By this stage, the reform of social laws, in particular Hindu Law had become a pivotal concern for the Indian Women's Movement. It was therefore expected that this would have been suggested for inclusion within the Resolution. What is significant, however, is the WIA's insistence that this be positioned within the section on Fundamental Rights. In so doing, the intention was to build equality before the law into the foundational principles of an imagined future nation state. Such efforts indicate, furthermore, an attempt to rewrite of the social contract by destabilising the accepted legal boundaries between civil law and private law.

The Karachi Resolution provided a strategic tool which this generation of activists used to hold the Congress, and later the independent Indian government, to account in their struggles and arguments for inclusion within the body politic. In 1938 when Polygamy and Divorce Bills were introduced into Parliament, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur wrote to the Congress President Subhas Chandra Bose, referencing the Karachi Resolution, to remind Congress of the necessity of its undivided support for these Bills: 'You will understand', she wrote, 'how much we rejoice at the Congress declaration of Fundamental Rights at Karachi in which this organisation proclaimed themselves in favour of the equality of the sexes in every department of life'. Continuing, she referred to the 1937 Congress Election Manifesto, quoting the exact section '(page 4, para. 4)' of 'A Call to the Nation' where the organisation declared that it stood ' "for the removal of all sex discrimination whether legal or social or in any sphere of public activity" '.[30]

She explained that her letter had been prompted by the AIWC's experience that despite 'these declarations, we are grieved to find that remedial legislation, which strives to remove the social disabilities under which women suffer, does not receive the united support of the Congress Party either in Provincial or the Central Assemblies'. Kaur then, requested Bose to reassure the AIWC of

[29] Ibid.
[30] Kaur to S. C. Bose, 2 August 1938, File 42, AIWC Papers, NMML.

the Congress's support for 'the ideal of monogamy', 'divorce, and of the reform of social laws 'in order to give their just rights to women' and 'Whether the Congress Working Committee through their Parliamentary Board will be willing to direct Congress Parties in the various Provinces and Legislatures to support adequate measures relating to the above as well as all social legislation'.[31]

The AIWC's support for, and use of, the political language of the Karachi Resolution, which presented an identity for woman as the sexless citizen stemmed from an understanding that equality depended on the capacity of the state to see people first and foremost as political citizens, rather than as social beings. This was grounded on experience that being identified as a woman in the political sphere, in other words being defined in terms of one's gender, often resulted in exclusion, marginalisation or the imposition of double standards which hindered incorporation and full participation in a political fraternity. The Karachi Resolution of 1931 drew on the modern democratic, liberal conception of citizenship concerned with regulating the relationship between the individual and the state to ensure equal treatment for all by blinding the State to social difference. It was also deeply rooted in the notion of the individual as the unit for engagement with the state. The statement that 'All citizens are equal before the law, irrespective of religion, caste, creed or sex' was not intended to discard the womanliness of this generation, but rather to prevent this social identity from being used as a barrier to 'promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion'.[32] It sought to make this social identity invisible in terms of the individual's interaction with the state. But did this imply a need for the invisibility of all other social and collective identities? And did a call for the sexless citizen equally demand the religion-less and caste-less citizen too?

Politics in India has shown the scholar that collective or social identity can be a source of strength and solidarity, and that the claim to such collective identities can be crucial in struggles for state recognition and rights. Women have often chosen to mobilise under other categories of identity, not specifically as women, but for example, as part of anti-caste movements. For dalit women,

[31] Ibid.
[32] Document 1, Charter of the United Nations, signed 26 June 1945 (extract) in United Nations, *The United Nations and the Advancement of Women 1945-1995*, Blue Book Series, Vol. VI (New York, 1996), p. 93.

understanding and challenging their position of subordination was dependent on being seen and recognised by the state as subjects, burdened by the social and collective identity of caste as well as gender. Such group identity provided a source of strength and leverage in such struggles, however, the inflexibility of the political identity articulated by the Karachi Resolution did not always allow for such conflations and malleability in the construction of identity as a channel into power.

Sharmila Rege's research on the agency and participation of dalit women in the anti-caste movements, illustrates how both the particular needs and struggles of dalit women, and their contributions to various struggles for justice, have been overlooked in the historiography of mainstream Indian feminism, because these struggles and contributions did not fit the framework of the 'sexless citizen'.[33] Just as Pateman argues that the social contract reconfigured the political identity as masculine, Rege argues that the Karachi Resolution reconfigured the sexless citizen as inherently Brahmin and middle class. The Karachi Resolution of the Indian National Congress consequently functioned to silence other 'contentious non-brahmin images' and identities for women, marginalising the articulation of other ways of being and other forms of collective belonging.[34]

The situated-ness and subjectivity of the particular 'sexless' and 'religion-less' citizen articulated in the Karachi Resolution, was brought into renewed focus by the experience of Muslim women as well. In her work on the emergence of feminism among Indian Muslim women, Azra Asghar Ali emphasises that Muslim women often felt that they had greater recourse to justice and to equal treatment within the legal systems of Islam, in comparison to other personal codes of law.[35] A claim to a communal identity for Muslim women in this context operated as a means of empowerment, whereas for Hindu women activists it was interpreted as a tool of oppression. Using the Karachi Resolution to hold Congress to account in terms of its commitment to equal treatment, and as a benchmark for what such treatment entailed in practice, as Rajkumari Amrit Kaur did when lobbying Congress in support of the 1937 Monogamy Bill, she in fact exposed the underlying modern middle

[33] See, for example, Rege, 'Dalit Women Talk Differently'; S. Rege, *Writing caste/writing gender: narrating dalit women's testimonies* (New Delhi, 2006.)
[34] Rege, 'Dalit Women Talk Differently', p. WS-42.
[35] See A. Ali, *The emergence of feminism among Indian Muslim women 1920-1947* (Oxford, 2000.)

class Hindu or Christian family identity underpinning the supposed neutrality of the Fundamental Principles equality clause.

The Karachi Resolution addressed the issue of political equality, but what about economic equality? Communist and socialist women activists together with their male colleagues, also found themselves critical of what they perceived as the 'bourgeois vision' of the new nation state, and of citizenship, put forward by the Karachi Resolution on Fundamental Rights. The Karachi Resolution implied a belief in a neutral state, and a belief in such a state's capacity to administer justice by engaging with its subjects as 'sexless', 'casteless' and abstract citizens. For Communists, however the root cause of inequality lay not in the relationship between the state and individual, but rather between individuals and between classes. In a capitalist society, based on the ownership of private property, inequality was created due to the exploitative nature of relationships between workers and employers, and between the working class who sold their labour, and those who owned the means of production. In order to rectify such a dynamic, it was these relationships that needed to be reformed, rather than the interaction between citizen and state. Treating all citizens equally in the law, would merely perpetuate inequality between them, because it would not address the underlying economic structures of property ownership that facilitated such inequality in the first place. With the Karachi Resolution, however the 'political contestations between competing political visions of how various national subjects would be related to each other were thus levelled out'.[36]

Report on Women's Role in Planned Economy 1939-1940

There was greater scope for communist and socialist women activists to address economic inequalities within the Report of the Sub-Committee on *Women's Role in Planned Economy* (WRPE), the second document to be analysed in this chapter. While the Karachi Resolution, which had provided the terms of reference for the 1939 Report, was concerned with opening up political citizenship to women, *The Report on Women's Role in Planned Economy* concerned itself with what it would mean to translate the possibilities of political freedom, equality and empowerment into the economic sphere.

[36] Rege, 'Dalit Women Talk Differently', p. WS-42.

The Report was researched and written between 1939 and 1940[37] as one of a series of twenty nine reports commissioned by the National Planning Committee (NPC) to provide recommendations for the social, political and economic strategy required to achieve the removal of 'all obstacles or handicaps in the way of realising an equal status and opportunity for women'.[38] The scope of the research was comprehensive, covering agriculture, industrial development, cottage industries, population, health and education, with all twenty-nine reports then informing the compilation of an overall document which was to provide a broad blueprint for 'a planned economy on which the future structure can be built'.[39]

The NPC, established in October 1938 under the chairmanship of Jawaharlal Nehru, reflected both the influence of a Soviet style macro-economic planning model as the mechanism for achieving 'the comprehensive economic development of the new nation'[40] and the presence of industrialists and businessmen within the Congress Party, who saw centralised planning as essential for harnessing the technical expertise and investment necessary for industrial development.[41] From its emergence, National Planning was expected to satisfy various interests and agendas.

On the 16 June 1939, the NPC appointed the Sub-Committee on Women's Role in the Planned Economy, to guide the development of WRPE report. This committee consisted of prominent women in public life and Indian nationalism, including; freedom fighters from various political parties, social workers, the office bearers of women's organisations, such as the AIWC and the WIA, and lawyers.[42] Rani Laxmibai Rajwade, the founding president of the AIWC headed the Sub-Committee as

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[37] A 1940 draft version of the Report was produced however, the finalised report was only printed after World War Two in 1949.
[38] K. T. Shah (ed.), '*Women's Role in Planned Economy: Report of the Sub-Committee*', National Planning Committee (Bombay, 1949), p. 29 quoted in L. Kasturi, 'Development, Patriarchy and Politics: Indian Women in the Political Process 1947-1992', Occasional Paper 25 (1995), Centre for Women's Development Studies, p. 13.
[39] K. T. Shah (ed.), 'Being an abstract of the Proceedings and other particulars resulting to the National Planning Committee No. 1 Bombay, National Planning Committee Series, undated, p. 82.
[40] Kasturi, 'Development, Patriarchy and Politics', p. 12.
[41] A number of earlier meetings and agreements had laid the groundwork for the NPC. These included the Karachi Resolution of 1931, the Resolution on an Agrarian Programme, at passed at Lucknow/Faizpur in 1936, and the Conference of Ministers of Industries held in Delhi in 1938 which laid emphasis on the importance of industrialisation for economic development. See INC, National Planning Committee, 'Being an abstract of the Proceedings and other particulars resulting to the National Planning Committee', No. 1, pp. 9-14.
[42] Kasturi, 'Development, Patriarchy and Politics', p. 13.

chairperson, while Mridula Sarabhai was assigned the role of secretary. The Sub-Committee was tasked with producing a comprehensive framework for 'envisaging the part women should be enabled to play in the planned society of the future',[43] taking into consideration 'her social, economic and legal status, her right to hold property, and carry on any trade, profession or occupation'.[44]

National Planning was premised on the belief that social justice was achievable through the 'the organisation of economic life'. The 'wellbeing of the community' and a 'decent standard of living secured' through 'intensifying the economic development of the community concerned on an all-round basis, in an ordered systematic manner'.[45] Data collection was an important process in this national planning exercise. Planning recommendations were to be grounded on an accurate socio-economic picture of the country, which called for extensive surveying of available statistics and opinion.[46] Much of the data, and many of the opinions presented in the WRPE Report were gathered through the membership networks of the All India Women's Conference. Each of the 27 members of the Report Sub-Committee was responsible for organising a research working group in their home state or province. These working groups collected whatever statistical information they could find and circulated an extraordinarily detailed questionnaire to gather information and opinions.[47] Close to two thousand of these questionnaires were translated into Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi, Urdu as well as English and sent out to individuals and institutions, including Central and provincial government departments, district Mahila Sanghs, welfare organisations and trade unions. The information gathered through this process was then consolidated into the Report.[48]

The experience of collecting this information revealed some of the frustrations and shortcomings encountered with attempts to collect qualitative and quantitative data on gender discrimination and the

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[43] K. Khandwalla, 'Smt Khandwalla's Note on The Report of the Sub-Committee on Women's Role in Planned Economy', undated, File G-23/1940, Vol. II, AICC Papers, NMML.
[44] Kasturi, 'Development, Patriarchy and Politics', p. 13.
[45] Shah (ed.), 'Being an abstract of the Proceedings and other particulars resulting to the National Planning Committee', p. 15.
[46] Ibid, pp. 7-8.
[47] The research methods employed showed the beginnings of an effort towards evidence-based social policy, a methodology that the AIWC and the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) were to promote as the basis for policy making in independent India.
[48] Appendix IV: Method of Work, The Report of the Sub-Committee on *Women's Role in Planned Economy* (1940 Draft), undated, File G-23/1940, Vol. II, AICC Papers, NMML.

lived reality of women within Indian society, in addition to exposing some of the inherent class biases of those gathering this material. In Gujarat, the working group complained that 'Investigation was mostly amongst middle classes. There was 'no information from the poorer classes in towns and villages. Response from organisations of labour etc., was not satisfactory'.[49] The working group from Assam concurred, stressing that they had experienced 'difficulty in gathering information' with 'the number of educated women being few' and those that did exist being 'all in Government service'.[50] In the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) those administering the questionnaire complained that 'Owing to few educated women and Purdah little interest taken by ladies. Men have their own point of view about the questionnaire'.[51] Taking into account these specific biases, the Report remains a valuable reflection of the opinions of educated, organised and literate women across India at this time, and as such provides a rich historical source.

The time, effort and detail taken by this network of AIWC members and other related women, to gather the research for the WRPE Report, appears to have made a considerable impression on the Planning Commission.[52] Nehru, observing a meeting of the Sub-Committee in Bombay was impressed with the 'earnestness and ability of members' in tackling the research problems of the Report.[53] Later he wrote to the Organisation in his capacity as Chairman of the NPC to thank the membership for their assistance in gathering the necessary material. 'I feel that of all the sub-committees of the National Planning Committee, the sub-committee which has done the most work, and built up almost a movement for the purpose has been the women's sub-committee' he wrote.[54]

After a preface and introduction by K. T. Shah, editor for the Report series, the Report was divided into three sections. Section One focused on the individual status of women and included four chapters on Civic Rights, Economic Rights, Property Rights and Education. Section Two addressed the social status of women in the family through two Chapters entitled 'Marriage and its problems' and 'Family

[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] The Sub-Committee in fact requested an extension of time to work through all the material in these questionnaires, in order to get their interim report into the NPC. See J. Nehru to Begum Hamid Ali, 25 March 1940, in *Selected works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 11 (New Delhi, 1973-1982), p. 283.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

Life'. The Third Section included a chapter covering what was described as miscellaneous issues, including caste, widows, widow remarriage, widows' homes, unmarried mothers, abortion, illegitimate children, prostitution and the trafficking of women and children. The Report concluded with a summary statement of policy and a summary of recommendations.[55] The *WRPE* Report envisaged a 'new social order', whereby '[w]hatever be the form of society as emerges out of the plan, woman shall have an equal status and equal opportunities with man'.[56] It identified the obstacles that were inhibiting women's full participation as economic citizens, and their social equality, and gave recommendations for the required reforms in realms of legislation, workplace conditions and familial relations, with a strong emphasis on recognition of the equal value of women's paid and unpaid labour. The need for propaganda to break down social customs, and education to modify backward social attitudes was also stressed, 'Propaganda...has to destroy and eradicate all superstitions and customs that hamper the advance of woman, break the old traditions that train boys to authority and girls to dependence'.[57]

Significant emphasis was placed on women as workers; as industrial workers, home-makers or peasant cultivators, although as Leeli Kasturi has emphasised, the lack of detail around the context and conditions of rural women meant that their experiences and voices remained largely neglected.[58] Work was articulated as a right, and citizenship conceptualised not as something endowed, but rather as something earned through economic participation. Citizenship was to be claimed through the identity of the Indian woman as a productive worker. In this respect, the Report sought to rework gender identities and roles in the economic sphere, by calling for the kinds of social and economic changes that would allow women to enter this sphere as equals and for the value of their work to be recognised on the same basis. Equal wages for equal work were demanded, as were provisions for adequate maternity benefits, crèche facilities and childcare, to enable women to combine work and family responsibilities. For women working in the family business, the Report recommended making

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[55] M. Chaudhuri, 'Citizens, workers and emblems of culture: An analysis of the First Plan document on women' in P. Uberoi (ed.), *Social reform, sexuality and the state* (New Delhi, London, 1996), p. 214.
[56] 'Report of the Sub-Committee, Women's Role in Planned Economy, National Planning Committee Series (1947)' in M. Chaudhuri (ed.) *Feminism in India* (New Delhi, 2004), p.139.
[57] Shah (ed.), *Women's Role in Planned Economy*, p. 194.
[58] See Kasturi, 'Development, Patriarchy, and Politics'.

women workers co-sharers in the collective income of the family. While financial security, in case of illness or maternity, was to be covered through the provision of a scheme of social insurance intended to cover housewives, as well as for those going out into the workplace.[59]

Although the Report has been validly criticised by both Leela Kasturi and others for its internal inconsistencies and contradictions in terms of the framing of women as citizens, it is nevertheless acknowledged as being a pioneering and progressive document for its time, firstly, for its acknowledgement of the economic value of women's unpaid domestic labour, and secondly, because of its call for a common moral code for both men and women in society.[60] The Report was potentially revolutionary in its acknowledgement of domestic work in the private sphere of the household or agricultural labour in the field, as an equal form of economic participation.[61] This destabilised the traditional boundaries between the public and private by extending the rights and protections of economic citizenship into the home. These boundaries were further destabilised by the Report's stress on transforming social and cultural attitudes towards the responsibility of housework. In households where both men and woman worked, the Report recommended that husband and wife should share the domestic workload equally. While in households where women were principal homemakers, the equal value of their domestic labour was to be recognised:

> A great many women will confine their activities to the home, and in any event, a great part of their work will be done in the home. This home work, though not recognized in terms of money value, is an essential contribution to the social wealth of the State and should be recognized as such. The aggregate of social wealth under [a] planned economy will include all kinds of work, whether rewarded in money value or not[62].
>
> We feel that this work, which at present receives no recognition either from the State or society, should be recognized as having an economic value and that work in the home

[59] Shah (ed.), *Women's Role in Planned Economy*, p. 198.
[60] The second area where the Report is identified as being particularly progressive was in its call for an equal moral code for Indian men and women: 'Society ostracizes woman for the same moral lapse for which the man goes free. An identical standard of morality should be insisted upon for both man and woman', proclaims the Report. Emphasising that such a standard required the harmonising of 'social welfare with individual freedom should be accepted for both man and woman, and should guide legislation and social convention. See Extract from 'Women's Role in Planned Economy', p. 227 quoted in Chaudhuri (ed.) *Feminism in India* (New Delhi, 2004), p. 139; N. Banerjee, 'Whatever Happened to the Dreams of Modernity? The Nehruvian Era and Woman's Position', in *EPW*, 33:17 (25 April to 1 May 1998), pp. WS2-WS7; Kasturi, 'Development, Patriarchy, and Politics'.
[61] Shah (ed.), *Women's Role in Planned Economy*, pp. 102-105.
[62] *Women's Role in Planned Economy*, pp.199-201 quoted in Chaudhuri (ed), *Feminism in India*, p. 145.

> should not be considered in any way inferior to the other type of work done outside the home[63].

Because of its focus on embedded forms of labour practice as the cause of inequality, the *WRPE* indirectly begins to address the intersection between social inequality and economic inequality. The Report was groundbreaking in its efforts to expose how the creation of hierarchies of labour, and the delegation of different levels of value to different forms of labour, was used to maintain woman's social subordination. In so doing, it pre-empted more contemporary research which has exposed the relationship between the feminization of certain forms of work, by their devaluing (as in the case of unequal wages paid to women factory workers), or the removal of women's work from the economic sphere entirely (as with housework) but it failed to make this same connection between labour and caste. The Sub-Committee drafting the Report therefore missed the opportunity opened up through the Report's analysis, to address the economic basis underpinning caste. Instead, caste is relegated mainly to Section Three, revealingly entitled 'Miscellaneous', where it is approached as a cultural and social issue, rather than as having an economic basis.

Although the Report made regular reference to the individual, as 'the unit in national planning'[64] advocating the freeing of women from their social identities as wives and mothers, and their recognition as 'a separate and independent unit in the economic structure with equal rights and equal status'[65], the Report also made repeated reference to the specific and unique function that women played in the home through the creation of a 'cultural environment... for the proper nurture of children'[66]. This reflected a tension between a version of Marxist feminism and social feminism in the *WRPE*, with both ideological perspectives vying to rewrite the social contract according to their particular vision of this new 'social order'.

The critique of Kapila Khandwalla, one of the Sub-Committee's members, brought these tensions to the fore. Inserted into both the 1940 draft version and the final published version in 1949, is a note by

[63] Ibid.
[64] Shah (ed.), *Women's Role in Planned Economy*, p. 198.
[65] '*Women's Role in Planned Economy*', pp.199-201, quoted in Chaudhuri (ed.), *Feminism in India*, p. 145.
[66] Shah (ed.), *Women's Role in Planned Economy*, p. 104.

Khandwalla criticising the authors for producing a document which she argued fundamentally departed from the agreed upon fundamental issues and principles of a Socialist Planned Society.[67] One of the areas of divergence between Khandwalla and the rest of the Sub-Committee arose over the role and place of the family in planning for, and building the new 'social order'.

For Khandwalla, the authors had not taken the principles underpinning a Socialist Planned Society to their logical conclusion, which was the complete dissolution of the family as a unit of policy and planning. In her note of dissent Khandwalla described her vision of this 'new social order' in which 'all the various rights the Sub-Committee has laid down in the list of fundamental rights of citizenship, as affecting women, shall be completely divorced from any taint of relationship of any kind'[68]. Rights were to be conferred, and the status of citizenship to be granted, on the basis of the identity of the abstract 'sexless citizen' or rather the 'sexless' worker. The road to empowerment and equality for women was to be achieved by inclusion of these groups in a democratic fraternity of workers. Khandwalla's claim here pushes an identity for women as the 'sexless citizen' further than that of woman as independent economic agent articulated by the other authors of the Sub-Committee. 'The only social status to be recognised in [a] planned society will be that of the individual worker...The social status, therefore, which today presents the most serious question of social reform, will not, I take it, matter at all in planned society'.[69] Khandwalla articulated a materialist approach, emphasising that the transformation of the economic structure of society would automatically lead to the positive transformation of social inequalities. 'If the right to work is guaranteed in the manner mentioned above, the disabilities now resting upon woman in her civic or social position would be comparatively negligible'.[70] 'Neither motherhood, nor wifehood, and a fortiori widowhood matter at all. Every requirement of all these and similar positions will be provided for in consideration or in virtue of the individual concerned being a citizen and worker'.[71]

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[67] Khandwalla, 'Note on The Report of the Sub-Committee', (Women's Role in Planned Economy), File G-23/1940, Vol. II, AICC Papers, NMML.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.

Although the *WRPE* Report repeatedly drew on the rhetoric of the individual as the unit for economic planning,[72] many of its policy recommendations were actually based on the modern nuclear family as the basic unit. Reference to the specific and unique function that women played in the home through the creation of a 'cultural environment... for the proper nurture of children'[73] sat uneasily together in the Report with the emphasis on the importance of freeing women from their social identities, as wives and mothers, and the importance of planning through the individual. Rather than discarding the family completely, which is what Khandwalla demanded, the framers of the Report sought to reinvent the family by applying the principles of egalitarianism committed to in the nationalist movement into the sphere of the home. The traditional extended Indian family was targeted as holding women back by preventing them from going out into the world as workers, and by exploiting their productive and reproductive labour in the home. The proposed solution was a reworking of gender relationships and identities so as to reinvent the family and to transform it into a modern nuclear family.

In discussion around the drafting of the *WRPE* Report, Khandwalla's was not the only voice of criticism. Muslim women members of the Sub-Committee were also negative in their assessment of the nature of the debate surrounding the Report and its final recommendations.[74] Begum Hamid Ali one of the few Muslim Sub-Committee members and an active leader in the AIWC felt that the Sub-Committee did not make an effort to fully investigate and understand women's rights within marriage and family relations in Islamic systems of law, and that as a consequence, these were largely overlooked or misrepresented in terms of the Report's recommendations. Her dissatisfaction led her to withhold her name from the interim Report produced by the Sub-Committee in 1940, and it was only with the specific intervention of Nehru that she was prepared to reconsider.[75]

The Report on WRPE stressed the identity of the 'sexless' and 'religion-less' citizen, claimed in the Karachi Resolution, through implementation of a uniform civil code. This was to be introduced incrementally and was to be optional at first. In the interim, certain 'immediate changes' were to be

[72] Shah (ed.), *Women's Role in Planned Economy*, p. 198.
[73] Ibid, p. 104.
[74] Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, p. 199.
[75] Ibid.

made, granting daughters the same rights to succession or inheritance and the acquiring property as sons, separation of properties of husband and wife upon marriage, and to ensure joint ownership of income acquired during coveture.[76] But as Azra Asghar Ali's research on the emergence of feminism among Muslim women has suggested, the demand for a uniform civil code inadvertently undermined the strategy pursued by some Muslim women activists of seeking reform and gender equality within systems of personal law. From this perspective it is possible to understand the alienation experienced by Begum Hamid Ali and her Muslim colleagues over this issue.

Despite the effort and resources involved in its production, the ideas and recommendations put forward in the Report on WRPE were largely overlooked in the development planning documents of early independence.[77] The first Five-Year Plan adopted a clear welfarist approach to women's needs and concerns, mentioning them in the sections concerned with services such as education and health, but ignoring them in the sections on agricultural and industrial development. Where they were acknowledged, they tended to be positioned largely as dependants, and as the beneficiaries of state services and state protection, not as workers, producers and consumers.[78] The Report on *Women's Role in Planned Economy* was very progressive for its day, and for this reason, perhaps too idealistic and impractical for a Congress led government, accommodating a wide coalition of interests, from socialists to conservatives, Gandhian social workers, businessmen and industrialists. A 'welfarist' approach in this context is likely to have offered greater consensus. The rhetoric of gender equality was easily accepted as abstract theory and principle in the nationalist movement, translating it into practice however was to prove far more challenging and controversial.

[76] '*Women's Role in Planned Economy*', p. 201, quoted in Chaudhuri (ed.), *Feminism in India*, pp. 150-151.
[77] N. Buch, 'State Welfare Policy and Women, 1950-1975' in *EPW,* 33:17 (April 25 – May 1998), p. WS-19.
[78] For example, Chapter 34 on Labour includes a discussion on wage differentials in general but does not make any mention of the differences in wages between men and women's work. Nor is there any discussion of how the absence of childcare facilities hinders women's ability to participate with a greater degree of equality in the economy.

The Women's Charter of Rights and Duties 1945

> During the past 18 years of its existence the AIWC has adopted many resolutions with the object of improving the status of the Indian woman and helping her to attain her rightful place in society which is by the side of man. The object of this charter is to crystallise these resolutions with a view that they may form a basis for future legislation and also give a clear picture of what we stand for and wish to realise.[79]

With these ambitious words, the AIWC's Woman's Charter of Rights and Duties, the third and final document to be discussed in this chapter, begins. The Charter and its accompanying twin, a Memorandum on Planning for national welfare, were introduced at the eighteenth annual session of the AIWC, held in Hyderabad in 1945, where they were voted upon, and were published a year later in the June 1946 issue of the AIWC's journal Roshini.[80] Conceptualised and drafted by the organisation's executive leadership; Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Hansa Mehta, Lakshmi Menon, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Renuka Ray, Kitty Shiva Rao and Hannah Sen, these documents were an expression of the organisational ideology and gender politics of the AIWC at this particular moment.[81] Written in the format of a Constitution or social contract, the Charter used the terms 'we think' and 'we believe' setting itself up as a legitimate 'voice of the people'. It built on the principles of the Karachi Resolution of 1931 and the Report of the Sub-Committee on *Women's Role in Planned Economy*,[82] combining these with the AIWC's mandate for 'equal rights and opportunities'.

The Charter's frequent reference to 'rights' revealed the growing influence of a rights based discourse within the AIWC at this moment, a discourse where the claim to rights provided the basis for the Indian woman as citizen to engage with the emerging new nation state. Drafted at the close of World War Two, the Charter also sought to situate itself within an emerging international arena defined by the United Nations and the terminology of human rights, which it adopted and used. The Charter

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[79] 'Draft of the Indian Women's Charter of Rights and Duties' in *Roshni: Journal of the All India Women's Conference*, 1:5 (June 1946), p. 12.

[80] Foreword to the Women's Charter of Rights and Duties (Draft version), undated, File. 7, Hansa Mehta Papers, NMML.

[81] Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Hansa Mehta and Lakshmi Menon signed their names under the Charter in the *Roshni* version, while Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Renuka Ray, Kitty Shiva Rao and Hannah Sen appear as the authors of the Memorandum.

[82] The Charter Preamble was followed by a section on Fundamental Rights which reiterated sub-clauses e and f from the Karachi Resolution. Next was a section on Civic Rights. This was followed by an extensive segment on Education, then Health, one on Women and Work, Woman as Homemaker, Woman and Property Rights, Woman and Marriage, Woman's Place in the family, and finally one on the Duties of Woman. The Charter also contained a section on an equal moral code drawn from the Report of the Sub-Committee on *Women's Role in Planned Economy*.

claims the term of 'human being' as an inclusive category, and with it, the concept of equality and inclusion based on the shared claim to 'human rights':

> Whereas we believe that freedom and equality are essential to human developments and whereas woman is as much a human being as man and, therefore, entitled to share with him[83]
>
> Whereas in a democratic society, no citizen can be denied the fundamental rights which are founded on the basis of human equality[84]

In addition to being expressions of organisational ideology and gender politics, the Charter and Memorandum were also working documents drafted as part of the AIWC's strategy to secure the inclusion of its mandate of 'equal rights and opportunities' in the new Indian Constitution and the development of national economic and social policies.

These documents indicated awareness amongst AIWC leadership, of the necessity of translating the agenda and accumulated efforts of the Organisation into an appropriate format, so that these could be effectively channelled into the building of a new state and society. An awareness that abstract principles would require a clear spelling out of the meaning and implications of 'equality' and called for active lobbying on the part of the women's movement in order to translate these into substantive equality. '[T]ake up the Charter and educate women with regards to their rights and duties'[85] urged Hansa Mehta in her President's circular to standing Committee Branch leaders. 'Now that the Indian states are introducing some constitutional changes, women should see that they get the same rights as men. They must bring it to the notice of the conference where political rights are denied to women', she continued.[86] Once these documents had been ratified at the annual AIWC Conference, they were sent to the interim Indian government and the provincial governments at the end of 1946.[87] They were also translated in Marathi and Gujarati, and circulated to AIWC branches and members by April 1947,

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[83] 'Draft of the Indian Women's Charter of Rights and Duties', *Roshni*, pp. 12-13.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Hansa Mehta, AIWC President's circular to the Standing Committee, September 1946, File 58, Hansa Mehta Papers, NMML.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.

with the instruction that they were to 'be studied and explained to women' and 'given as much publicity as possible'.[88]

While the Charter was a statement of principles and values intended to guide the development of the new independent nation state, the Memorandum laid out the Conference's economic and social policy recommendations for the future government of independent India. This was an ambitious set of recommendations combining Gandhian principles, in terms of its emphasis on the development of rural industry, holistic education, public health, and service as human capital, with a Nehruvian model of development, through its emphasis on the central coordinating role of the state in policy implementation and service delivery. 'Because the problems in India are many and onerous, a national government alone can successfully and effectively rally the people to the swift and organised action that the Indian situation demands' its preamble states, but this government must simultaneously enjoy 'the fullest co-operation and confidence of the people'.[89]

The Memorandum commenced by reiterating the Fundamental Rights of citizens, moving on next to tackle economic policy in a section entitled 'Economic Security'. Here the influence of socialist principles was evident in the Memorandum's call for a system 'governed entirely by the principle of social justice', and the adoption of a 'policy of levelling incomes' through the development of industry, co-operatives, the maximization of employment and the rebuilding of the rural economy. Under education, universal, free and compulsory basic education, with progressively free nursery and higher education were demanded, together with free adult education. The Memorandum's health policy placed emphasis on universal primary health care, and the development of medical infrastructure, calling for every citizen to be entitled to medical care, including outreach rural healthcare.[90]

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[88] Ibid; Vimal Ranadive (Secretary, AIWC Bombay) to Mehta, September 1946, File 58, AIWC Papers, NMML(See Mehta's handwritten notes on this letter); Mehta, Circular to AIWC Branch Representatives and Standing Committee, undated, File 58, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[89] Draft Memorandum, *Roshni*, 1: 5 (June 1946), p. 26.
[90] Draft Memorandum, *Roshini*, p. 32. Drawing from the *Women's Role in Planned Economy* the Memorandum called for the provision of special childcare for women having to go into hospital and social insurance for the elderly and sick.

The Charter and Memorandum reveal an accommodation between the liberal feminism of the abstract 'sexless' citizen, claimed in the Karachi Resolution, with social feminism underpinning Chattopadhyay's argument for women's participation in the Salt Satyagraha. Within both Charter and Memorandum, rights, which ensure equality, are counterbalanced against duties and obligations, which allow for a particular gendered and social identity for women as mothers, home makers, social and community workers and citizens, and which reveal the clear influence of Gandhian thinking on the drafters of these documents. The Memorandum offers several examples of how women could fulfil their duties and obligations. Firstly, as voluntary workers, assisting in the running of local welfare services, secondly, in the section on 'Woman as Homemaker' through their unique contribution as mothers and homemakers. Thirdly, the Charter also stressed that educated women could fulfil their duties by educating their sisters, about their civic and personal duties 'Today our country-women are entirely oblivious of their duties as citizens. Woman as an individual and as a citizen has duties to perform not only to herself and her family, but to society of which she is a member'.[91]

It was through performing these duties in the form of service, work, family and civic participation and education that women were seen to be able to claim their 'rightful place in society', 'by the side of man', and to contribute their 'legitimate share to the general reconstruction of the life of this country'.[92]

This accommodation between the social identity of woman and her civic identity as sexless citizen did not however accommodate a co-existence with other forms of social identity. One of the weaknesses of the 'sexless citizen', as it was interpreted by in these documents, lay in the fact that its notion of equality was dependant on a particular type of uniformity.

With regards to the long standing demand for the reform of personal laws for Indian women, the 1945 Charter called for 'legal equality [and] no half measures'[93] and the Memorandum emphasised that,

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[91] Women's Charter of Rights and Duties, *Roshini,* p.12.
[92] Ibid, p.13.
[93] Ibid, pp. 19-25.

'[e]very effort should be made' to make such legislation 'applicable to all parts of India'.[94] This uniformity while claiming neutrality grounded on 'universal' rights and civic identity, in fact alienated Muslim women through its positioning of Hindu Law reform as the norm, revealing a continuation of the trends identified in the Karachi Resolution and the *WRPE:*

> Whereas we believe that woman should have the same rights as man to hold, acquire, inherit and dispose of property; and whereas some of those rights are denied to women or if given are given on an unequal basis; the All-India Women's Conference demand that:
> (a) The sex disqualification by which Hindu women in general have hitherto been precluded from inheriting in various parts of India be removed;
> (b) Woman shall inherit in her absolute right and the Hindu Woman's limited estate be abolished...[95]

This reflected legal developments and debates within the emerging nation at this moment. Earlier demands articulated in terms of a uniform civil code had now been narrowed down to a more specific focus on certain reforms to Hindu law, as they related to women's position in the family. In this way the AIWC through the demands in its Charter, became complicit in a process that reinforced the middle class Hindu woman as focus and target of legislative and social change, while in advertently marginalising other communities of women and their needs in this process.

Conclusion

The Karachi Resolution of 1931, the 1939 Report of the Sub-Committee on *Women's Role in Planned Economy* and the 1945 AIWC's Woman's Charter of Rights and Duties, represented an attempt on the part of Chattopadhyay's generation to rewrite the social contract for a democratic and independent India. By endeavouring to give Indian women a political identity, grounded on a claim to equal rights and equal opportunities, and by offering a set of recommendations to facilitate the removal of all socio-economic and legal barriers that prevented their participation in the public sphere on equal terms, these documents demanded entry for Indian women into the male dominated body politic of the new Republic. But the most revolutionary contribution of these documents lay in their efforts to challenge the theoretically constructed division between public and private, by introducing the

[94] Draft Memorandum, *Roshni*, p. 35.
[95] Ibid, p. 22.

standards and egalitarian principles that had been committed to in the public sphere of nationalist politics, into the space of the home economy, and into the sphere of relationships between the sexes, challenging the 'sexual contract' underpinning social contract of liberal democracy.

These texts signal the emergence of a rights based discourse as a tool in the struggle for an egalitarian politics, revealing the idealistic and ambitious vision of Chattopadhyay's generation, but they are equally a reflection of some of the theoretical and practical difficulties this generation encountered in their efforts to speak on behalf of the interests of all Indian women, and to develop a working concept of citizenship, that was able to accommodate the particular needs and struggles of diverse communities. They expose the problematic relationship between rights and identity, particularly the 'fixing' of rights to notions of identity grounded on the individual, and the difficulty of reconciling 'difference' with equality, particularly in the Indian context where collective identity has continued to remain a dominant feature of politics, and 'where attempts at homogeneity have often been made in the absence of a social consensus between many heterogeneous groups which live here'.[96] Although there were significant points of agreement, the debate surrounding the these documents, in particular the Report of *Women's Role in Planned Economy* revealed the multiple visions of a new social order held by this generation, and the multiplicity and instability of the subject positions from which they 'spoke', in their efforts to remake the social contract. How could this generation lay a claim to citizenship, and articulate a conception of citizenship able to accommodate multiple layers of identity both individual and collective? As the following chapters reveal this was a challenge that Chattopadhyay's generation continued to grapple with in the drafting of the Indian Constitution, and in the crafting of policy and institutions for the new nation state.

[96] Kumar, *The History of Doing*, p. 5.

Chapter Three:

Constitution writing and the definition of the Indian woman as political citizen

Introduction

When the Indian Constituent Assembly (CA) gathered for their first session on the 9th of December 1946, Hansa Mehta and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, two of the principal architects of the AIWC Women's Charter of Rights and Duties, were amongst the 210 nationalists, community leaders, businessmen, constructive workers and professionals gathered in the parliamentary buildings of New Delhi.[1] This group of individuals faced the exhilarating, yet formidable task of translating the hopes and values of the nationalist movement into concrete principles, through drafting a new Constitution. Over the course of three years and several drafts, this nascent social contract was given form by the Assembly, who also acted as the provisional national government.[2]

This body of representatives included fifteen women.[3] Twelve of these fifteen were official representatives for the Congress, the remaining three, Shah Nawaz, Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah and Aziz Rasul represented the Muslim League.[4] Austin Granville emphasises that although the Constituent Assembly was chosen by the INC, and was therefore essentially a 'one party assembly', the Congress made an effort to ensure the CA was representative of India.[5] The Assembly incorporated the voices of 30 Scheduled Caste Representatives, five Sikh representatives, six Indian Christians, five representatives of the Backward Tribes, three Anglo Indians, three Parsis and four

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[1] At this initial meeting 210 of the 296 invited members were present. See Constituent Assembly (CA) Debates of India (Procedural), Vol. II, Monday the 20th January 1947, accessed 14 September 2010, available online: http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol2p1.htm

[2] The CA operated as the provisional national governed of India between August 1947 and January 1950, See A. Granville, *The Indian Constitution: cornerstone of a nation* (Bombay, 1972), p. xii.

[3] For a list of these women representatives and the regions of India they came from, see B. Shiva Rao et al, *The Framing of India's Constitution Select Documents* Vol. I (IV), (New Delhi, 1966-68), pp. 296-297. According to an account by Renuka Ray there were 14 women in the Constituent Assembly. See Renuka Ray, 'India's First Cabinet Minister' in *Rajkumari Amrit Kaur*, Eminent parliamentarians monograph series: 15 (New Delhi, 1992), p. 45. It is not clear how many of them were present out of the 210 at the initial meeting on the 9th of December.

[4] Shiva Rao et al, *The Framing of India's Constitution Select Documents* Vol. I (IV), pp. 296-297.

[5] Granville, *The Indian Constitution*, p. 2.

Muslims.[6] Hansa Mehta was the official representative of the AIWC in the CA. Her name and her affiliation is listed under the sub heading 'Party Leaders', and 'Important Personalities Elected by the Constituent Assembly', suggesting that the AIWC was by this stage being seen as an organisation prepared to engage and participate 'officially' within a party political sphere. Other prominent AIWC members included Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Sarojini Naidu, Renuka Ray and Begum Shah Nawaz. There were also several women who were to make a mark on these discussions but who were not members of the AIWC, including Sucheta Kripalani who was to lead one of the earliest opposition parties, the Praja Socialist Party.[7]

Although Metha, Kaur and their AIWC colleagues constituted only a small percentage of the representatives in the CA, they collaborated closely and consciously together, drawing on the Karachi Resolution, the *WRPE* Report, and the principles laid out in the AIWC's Woman's Charter of Rights and Duties to ensure their voices as advocates for equality were heard. This was not an easy task, nor one that could be taken for granted. As Renuka Ray recalled, 'During those days, the fourteen women who were members of the Constituent Assembly met very often together' and under the guidance of Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, 'put up a united and concrete stand in regard to women's rights'.[8] They did however have a number of powerful allies supporting them in their cause, including Congress leader Jawaharlal Nehru and B. R. Ambedkar, Law Minister and chair of the Constitutional Advisory Committee. For Nehru, who was deeply invested in a modernising agenda for India, the principle of gender equality was a necessary precondition for enabling socio-economic progress, while for Ambedkar the struggle for women's equality formed an important component of the struggle for equality between the castes and the empowerment of untouchables.

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[6] CA Debates (Legislative), Vol. II, no. 1, Monday 20th January 1947, p. 251. In total 80 representatives of the Muslim League had been selected. However due to the fact that the League boycotted the Assembly the actual representation of this group was much lower.

[7] See for instance S. Kripalani, *Sucheta: an unfinished biography* (Ahmedabad, 1978) which offers insight into the life story and political career of Sucheta Kripalani. Sucheta Kripalani initiated the Congress Women's Wing. She was not a member of any specific Indian women's organisation however her political engagement reveals an awareness of the importance of the gendered needs of Indian citizens. For example, she plays a leading role in a number of price rise and food security campaigns. As Chief Minister of the UP she established the first factory in India manufacturing intra-uterine contraceptive devises, See Kripalani, *Sucheta*, p. 243.

[8] Ray, 'India's First Cabinet Minister', in *Rajkumari Amrit Kaur*, p. 45.

The end of British rule and the creation of the Republic was a pivotal moment for Indians, marking the shift from colonial subjecthood to citizenship in the nation state. The early years of independence were defined by considerable discourse and debate over the boundaries, meanings and possibilities of postcolonial citizenship, with various political constituencies, including women's organisations participating energetically in this process. This chapter focuses on the participation of these women and their allies in these debates, exploring how the Indian woman as political citizen, who first emerged through the crafting of earlier nationalist documents, such as the Karachi Resolution, the Report of the Sub-Committee on *Women's Role in Planned Economy* and the AIWC's Charter, was developed and embedded in the reworked 'social contract' of the new constitution, and how her political identity was shaped and constrained by the particular national context of the moment.

Rejecting Reservations for women: the logic of the sexless citizen

Although seventy-five percent of the new Constitution was drawn from the 1935 Government of India Act, its focus and intention differed completely. Whereas this Act was primarily concerned with maintaining the old colonial order through a measure of power sharing with the Indian elite and middle classes, the new Constitution was tasked with Social Revolution.[9] This, however, had to be balanced with the need for unity and stability at a time of delicate transition when many interest groups were competing for alternate 'visions' of the nation state[10]. A democratic federal government with a strong centre was eventually agreed upon as the most viable structure for achieving this.

[9] Granville, *The Indian Constitution*, p. xi.

[10] Members of the CA were in agreement on the need for radical change in the old colonial order. This desire for change was a point of commonality shared amongst CA members, and articulated as a desire for a 'Social Revolution'. A working definition of Social Revolution and how exactly it was to be put into practice, however, remained contested. Congress itself composed a wide coalition of groups and interests which had to be brought together, and the Constitution sought to advance multiple agendas, which came into tension with each other. For example, social and land reform versus treatment in law and right to property. Furthermore, a significant gap existed between legal and constitutional arrangements, and social practices and norms. See S. Saberwal, 'Introduction' in Z. Hasan (ed.) *India's Living Constitution*, *ideas, practices, controversies* (London, 2005), p. 10. Many important debates over the Indian constitution dealt with the conflict between using legal powers of state to bring about change in social institutions and practices, while simultaneously constraining political authorities to act within the law. P. Chatterjee, *State and Politics in India* (Delhi, 1998), p. 90. For a detailed analysis of the articulation, debate and meanings of social transformation in the Constituent Assembly see Z. Hasan, E. Sridharan and R. Sudarshan (eds.) *India's Living Constitution*: *ideas, practices, controversies* (London, 2005); P. Chatterjee, *State and Politics in India* (Delhi, 1998), and S. Sarkar, 'Indian democracy: the historical inheritance' in A. Kohli (ed.) *The Success of India's Democracy* (Cambridge, 2001).

The Karachi Resolution of 1931 provided the heart of this new Constitution. The particular conceptualisation of equality articulated in the Resolution, and Congress's commitment to social justice, were prominently positioned in the Fundamental Rights section of this Constitution in Article 15, which stated that 'The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste or sex, place of birth or any of them'.[11] Economic citizenship was also acknowledged in Article 39 (a), where the Constitution proclaimed that 'The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing [t]hat all citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood', and (d) which demanded 'equal pay for equal work for both men and women'.[12]

Along with the principles of equality articulated in the Karachi Resolution, the AIWC brought the particular concept of the 'sexless' citizen developed in the Karachi Resolution, into the CA, as the model for political identity. This in turn, was to have implications for the way in which this cohort responded to the idea of reservations for women as a political constituency.

Chapter two illustrated how this generation of women experienced and perceived particular kinds of social identities as barriers to equality and inclusion in the body politic. It was not social identities in themselves that were problematic, but rather how they operated to create differences and divisions amongst the political or nationalist community, and how they were employed as the basis for justifying discriminatory treatment. The appeal of the 'sexless' citizen lay not in denying social identity, but in making India a place where 'caste, creed or sex' would not be recognised as barriers to 'progress'[13] and where 'there should be no longer be any sex consciousness or sex separation in the service of the country'.[14]

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[11] The Constitution of India, 1st Edition (Delhi, 1950), with a detailed commentary by O. P. Aggarawala and S. K. Aiyer, accessed 15 July 2013, available online at https://archive.org/stream/constitutionofin029189mbp#page/n3/mode/2up, p. 28
[12] Ibid, pp. 61-62.
[13] V.L. Pandit, Speech delivered at the United Nations, 25 October 1946, File 4: Speeches and Writings, Vijayalakshmi Pandit Papers (hereafter V.L. Pandit Papers), 1st Instalment, NMML.
[14] CA Debates (Procedural), Vol. IV, Tuesday 22nd July 1947, accessed 15 June 2012, available online: http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol4p7.htm

The question of whether or not to grant reservations for various minority communities was one of the subjects over which there was extensive debate in the Constituent Assembly, as it required not only agreement on this matter itself, but also consensus on how such minority communities were to be defined and constituted in the first place. In January 1947 the CA appointed an Advisory Committee on Minorities under the Chairmanship of Vallabhai Patel to gather opinion on the position and rights of minorities, and consider options for their positioning in the Constitution. The Committee presented its findings in an interim Report on Minority Rights, submitted to the CA on the 8th of August 1947.[15] This Report recommended the abolition of separate electorates but supported reservations of seats for various minorities in the legislatures on the basis of their population.[16] The interim Report on Minority Rights had not, however, considered the implications of granting minority rights, in the context of the violence and upheaval, unfolding in the Punjab and in West Bengal in the build up to and following Partition. Towards the end of 1947 the Advisory Committee appointed a sub-committee to study what was happening in these areas.[17] The communal tensions between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs that such violence reflected and instigated, and the consequent need for cohesion and national unity in the face of these disturbances, led the Advisory Committee to reconsider its position on minority rights for religious communities.

With religion considered a source of extensive division within the nation, the Advisory Committee decided to withdraw its recommendation for reservations for religious minorities.[18] Initially the Advisory Committee had recommended the removal of reservations for all minority groups. However representatives of the Scheduled castes and Sikhs advocated for their continuance.[19] Some minorities such as the Christian community voluntarily relinquished their special rights in the name of national

[15] J. Kananaikil, *Scheduled Castes in the Constituent Assembly: Rebirth in a New Nation* (New Delhi, 1982), p. 14.
[16] Ibid. See, for example, the agreement reached by the Minority Committee which was presented in the Report on Minority Rights, CA Debates (Legislative) Vol. V, No. 8, Wednesday 27th August 1947, p. 213.
[17] Kananaikil, *Scheduled Castes in the Constituent Assembly*, p. 16.
[18] R. Bajpai, 'Recognising minorities: A study of some aspects of the Constituent Assembly debates 1946-1949', MPhil Thesis, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Oxford, 1997, p. 26. Bajpai has subsequently expanded her thesis into a book on this subject matter. See R. Bajpai *Debating Difference: group rights and liberal democracy in India* (New Delhi, 2011). For further analysis of the development of minority rights as category in the CA, their conceptual boundaries, and how these shift over the course of the CA debates also see section III: Secularism in S. Tejani, *Indian Secularism: A Social and Intellectual History 1890-1950* (Bloomington Indiana, 2008.), pp. 199-297.
[19] Kananaikil, *Scheduled Castes in the Constituent Assembly*, pp. 17-19.

unity, and were applauded for what was considered to be a sacrifice; an act of faith and trust in the capacity of the state to facilitate a genuine democracy. But the CA also recognised the insecurity and vulnerability of minorities, and was prepared to concede in certain cases, by reframing such reservations as safeguards and protections. As Rochana Bajpai argues, this was because the ultimate goal was integration through trust and an environment of safety (as was the case with the initial support of reservations for religious minorities) or integration through assisted development (in the case of untouchables, backward and other scheduled castes and tribals).[20] Reservations conceptualised as 'special privileges' or as markers of communal identity were rejected because they were seen to reinforce difference and disunity.

Although growing awareness of the communal violence that had accompanied Partition led to a re-evaluation of the implications of reservations for national unity, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Hansa Mehta and the other female CA members remained constant in their strident opposition to reservations for women throughout the course of Constitutional negotiating, on the grounds that these undermined the principles of equity and fair play.[21] Hansa Mehta reminded Assembly members that:

> ...we have never asked for privileges. The women's organisation to which I have the honour to belong has never asked for reserved seats, for quotas, or for separate electorates. What we have asked for is social justice, economic justice, and political justice.[22]

Mehta's claim that the 'women's organisation to which I have the honour to belong has never asked for reserved seats, for quotas, or for separate electorates' was not entirely accurate. There was no clear consensus amongst women within the AIWC, with regard to the issue of reservations and separate electorates, as Forbes shows.[23] The WIA and the AIWC had changed their position on this issue, moving from initial support for reservations in the first phase of the First Round Table discussions - as an interim measure to enable more women to access political power - to opposition, due to the broader context of the nationalist movement. What led them to alter their position was not a change of mind,

[20] Bajpai, 'Recognising minorities', pp. 27-36.
[21] Ibid.
[22] CA Debates (Procedural), Vol. I, Thursday 19th December 1946, accessed 9 September 2010, available online: http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol1p9.htm
[23] Forbes provides an account of the Second Campaign for Female Franchise in *Women in Modern India*, pp.107-112.

but rather a reorientation of priorities.[24] The question of whether to accept or reject reservations for women was linked to the broader strategy deemed to be most effective in the struggle for equality. Was incremental change and political expediency to be favoured over broader long term ideological vision and solidarity? What was best for women's interests? And who was to define these interests in the first place?

As Wendy Singer explains, separate electorates in the context of the 1937 elections defined women as a constituency, linking them to support within urban areas and to 'specific' women's concerns such as welfare and health. It led to a definition of 'women's interests' as minority interests.[25] In rejecting reservations, this cohort sought to resist the categorisation of women as a minority, and the separation of their interests from the broader body politic, although they were certainly striving to make women a coherent political constituency. What then happened to groups of women who were minorities themselves? The condemnation of reservations in the CA by AIWC leaders such as Mehta further contributed to the alienation of Muslim members such as Begum Shah Nawaz. The rejection of reservations sought to dismiss the application of paternal citizenship to women as political actors, and sought to articulate a sense of political belonging and equality based on the idea of the individual, and of merit and fair play. In this respect, the rejection of reservations offered a way for these women to define a particular kind of equality and inclusion in the new nation state, one which sought 'invisibility' on the basis of sex difference, in order to claim visibility and recognition on the basis of political agency and participation. However, criticism by subsequent scholars such as Sharmila Rege and Geraldine Forbes has highlighted how this inability to see the potential benefits of reservations as a channel into power for marginalised groups, such as Muslim women and untouchables, reflected the blinkered vision of this collective of women even though they claimed to speak on behalf of all.

[24] Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, pp. 107-112.
[25] W. Singer, '*A Constituency Suitable for Ladies': and other social histories of the Indian Elections* (New Delhi, 2007), p. 56.

Claiming the language of rights

Building on the Women's Charter of Rights and Duties, an emphasis on, and claim to rights was one of the identifiable features defining the emergence of the Indian woman as a political citizen in these debates. In their participation Mehta, Kaur and their colleagues in the AIWC drew extensively on the language of rights, and their inheritance of such rights through citizenship, in order to claim *belonging* to the new political fraternity. It was often in the negative that this language of rights was put into use within their discourse. Women's inequality and disempowerment were understood as a denial of rights, as Hansa Mehta explains in her response to the Resolution on Fundamental Rights moved by Jawaharlal Nehru during discussion of the Aims and Objectives of the Constitution:

> The average woman in this country has suffered now for centuries from inequalities heaped upon her by laws, customs and practices...There are thousands of women today who are denied the ordinary human rights. They are put behind the purdah, secluded within the four walls of their homes, unable to move freely.[26]

The use of the term 'human rights' was significant here, as the term operated to facilitate inclusivity, to ensure that women's rights and equality were taken as part of a collective package of rights and statuses that were indivisible.

This rights discourse percolated outwards from the AIWC's Charter, into the Constituent Assembly debates, and then back into the organisation's Constitution during the early years of independence, influencing the AIWC's subsequent articulation of its role and responsibility in relation to the nation building project. Over the same period of the Constituent Assembly, the AIWC appointed a reorganising committee to consider updating its mandate, strategy and organisational functioning. In response to the recommendations of this Committee, the Conference redrafted its Constitution.[27] The aims and objectives of the original Constitution had remained unchanged from the time of the Conference's establishment in 1927 through to 1951, the year in which this revised Constitution first appears in print in the annual Conference report.

The original set of organisational aims and objectives of the Conference were expressed as follows:

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[26] CA Debates (Procedural), Vol. I, Thursday 19th December 1946.

[27] For a detailed discussion concerning the restructuring of the AIWC post independence see File 159, AIWC Papers, NMML.

(i) To work actively for the general welfare and progress of women and children.
(ii) To inculcate in women and children the ideals of true citizenship.
(iii) To promote education along right lines.
(iv) To work and press for social reform.
(v) To strive to establish equal rights and opportunities for all.
(vi) To work for a united India.
(vii) To set and demand a high moral standard in all departments of life.
(viii) To stand for international goodwill and peace.[28]

These were then reformulated and rephrased under the recommendations of the reorganisation committee as follows:

(i) To work for a society based on the principles of social justice, personal integrity and equal rights and opportunities for all
(ii) To secure recognition of the inherent right of every human being to work and to the essentials of life, such as food, clothing, housing, education, social amenities and security, in the belief that these should not be determined by accident of birth or sex but planned by social distribution.
(iii) To support the claim of every citizen to the right to enjoy basic civil liberties
(iv) To stand against all separatist tendencies and to promote greater national integration and unity.
(v) To work actively for the general progress and welfare of women and children and to help women to utilise to the fullest the fundamental Rights conferred on them by the Constitution of the Indian Union.
(vi) To co-operate with peoples and organisations of the world for the implementation of these principles which alone can assure permanent international amity and world peace[29]

In the set of reformulated aims and objectives the terms of 'welfare' and 'social reform' are replaced with the concepts of 'equal rights', 'inherent rights' and 'fundamental rights'. Whereas the first priority of the Conference had been 'To work actively for the general welfare and progress of women and children' and 'to inculcate in women and children the ideals of true citizenship'[30] in this revised Constitution the organisation's foremost mandate is 'To work for a society based on the principles of social justice, personal integrity and equal rights and opportunities for all', and 'to secure recognition of the inherent right of every human being to work and to the essentials of life, such as food, clothing, housing, education, social amenities and security, in the belief that these should not be determined by accident of birth or sex but planned by social distribution.[31]

[28] AIWC, 17th Annual Conference Report, 7 -10 April 1944, Bombay, p. 125.
[29] AIWC, 22nd Annual Conference Report, 28-31st January 1951, Bangalore, p. 93.
[30] AIWC, 17th Annual Conference Report, p. 125.
[31] AIWC, 22nd Annual Conference Report, p. 93.

In addition to ensuring equality and the removal of untouchability; committing the state to the achievement of socio-economic justice through universal education and the right to work; offering protection from various forms of exploitation, as well as guaranteeing freedom of the press and practice of religion, the new constitution granted universal adult franchise, which opened up an important avenue for Indian women to speak and act as political citizens. Participation in elections as both voters and candidates was quickly grasped by this generation of women nationalists and feminists as a means of articulating active citizenship. Women's Organisations such as the AIWC and WIA had been demanding the franchise on the same terms as their male colleagues and partners since the first Franchise Campaign of 1917. It could not however be taken for granted that Indian women would be able to harness this new tool without education and support.

The Indian woman as voter

The AIWC's 1945 Charter of Rights and Duties had been specifically designed as pedagogical text by the AIWC for this very purpose. Educating women about the importance of claiming and exercising their rights and fulfilling their duties, as citizens, formed part of a broader programme of civic education and participation, promoted by the AIWC during the period of political transition from the mid 1940s onwards, which took on added significance in the face of mounting opposition to the passing of the Hindu Code Bill in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

AIWC circulars and correspondence with branches and amongst the Executive in the late 1940s and 1950s reveal ongoing efforts by the organisation to encourage civic awareness and participation. 'Our association has long been trying to create in us a consciousness of our rights and has at the present juncture a special duty to see that now that independence is in sight and political rights are within grasp, our case may not go by default'[32] wrote Mrs Asoka Gupta[33] chairperson of the AIWC's newly established Civics Committee in a circular to branches in August 1948, outlining the purpose of the AIWC's civic education programme.

[32] Asoka Gupta, Civics Committee Circular, August 1948, File 116, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[33] Gupta was an AIWC leader based in Calcutta. She was a Gandhian who accompanied the Mahatma on his peace missions through violence ravished Noakali in 1946.

At the 1951 Annual Conference of the AIWC, the same year the new Constitution was first printed, the following Resolution, laying out a strategy for achieving this agenda, was put forward and approved:

> This Conference, recognising the enormity of the task of educating millions of women newly enfranchised under the Adult Suffrage Scheme calls upon its members to make a special effort to organise an effective campaign for this purpose before the general elections, so as to impress upon women voters exercising their vote judiciously. The Conference directs its branches to initiate suitable propaganda and frame comprehensive questionnaires, incorporating the principles for which it has always stood, to be used by the electorate to determine which of the candidates is most deserving of support. It also urges that political parties include a fair proportion of women as candidates in the list.[34]

As part of this agenda the AIWC worked to educate its members and women of the general public of the importance of voting. Women voters were encouraged to use their vote strategically, by voting for candidates with progressive views who support the government's commitment to equality between men and women. 'It is of the utmost importance for women voters to understand for whom she exercises her vote', as an AIWC circular from the period tells us.[35] Branches were asked to contact women voters in their areas and advise them to support candidates 'who accept the principles for which the AIWC has always stood', 'irrespective of their party affiliations'.[36]

In addition to educating women to use their vote strategically, the AIWC sought to garner support for their agenda by reminding political parties of the power that women could weld if they withheld their vote. The AIWC lobbied the various political parties in existence to select only men and women candidates 'who possess [...] integrity as candidates to the various state legislatures and the House of the People and who are of progressive views and will support those measures which are in conformity with the fundamental rights as defined in our new Constitution, (such as the Hindu Code Bill) and such other laws'.[37] 'The vote of women is a big factor in this election, and I hope you all select such candidates as can inspire voters to exercise their vote in favour of these candidates' reminded the AIWC acting President in a letter dated 1st November 1951 addressed to the leaders of the Congress

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[34] AIWC, 22nd Annual Conference Report, p. 22.
[35] Presidential circular (draft version), undated, File 159, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[36] Hannah Sen, President's Circular Letter No. 6 to the Standing Committee, 22 September 1951, File 159, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[37] Standing Committee Circular (handwritten), undated, File 159, AIWC Papers, NMML.

Party, Socialist Party, Communist Party, Bhartiaya Tara Sangh, Kishan, Mazdur Kishan Party, Scheduled Caste Federation, Workers and Peasants Party, and the Hindu Mahasabha Party. 'Your party should promise to plan out such a sound social structure, where the individual is the unit and is assured of his or her fundamental rights'. In this letter a copy of the 'demands which women voters will expect the candidates to support' was also included.[38] An additional prong of this programme was as to motivate women themselves to get involved in politics by standing as candidates in local, provincial and national elections and by encouraging AIWC members to support other women in their campaigns. This position was endorsed in 1951 at an AIWC Standing Committee meeting where presiding president, Hannah Sen, announced that any suitable woman candidate who wished to stand in the elections would receive AIWC support.[39]

Mobilising women voters to use their right to vote strategically, for the benefit of themselves as a political community, was an expression of active citizenship, indicating that AIWC leaders were no longer prepared to view themselves simply as subjects of the state, but that they actively sought to engage as participants and builders in its creation of this new state. According to Maxine Molyneux, active citizenship refers to an understanding of the term not only as something that confers formal rights on passive subjects, but rather as a relationship that promotes participation and agency.[40] Active citizenship could take different forms, from social activism, to party politics and social service. One of its characteristics was the conscious engagement of the individual with the state to build and shape the nature of government and society.

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[38] Hannah Sen to leaders of the Indian political parties, 1 November 1951, File 159, AIWC Papers, NMML. Also see the resolution passed at Sholapur, June 1957, File 322, AIWC Papers, NMML. This resolution, while congratulating women who had been appointed Ministers and Deputy Ministers in the Union and State Ministries, commented on the continued under representation of women as legislators and the tendency for women in the Union Cabinet and State Cabinets to be restricted to specific portfolios, such as education and health, 'thus denying their talents full opportunity'. The resolution concludes that 'on going Public opinion is yet to be educated to think that, women should be treated as citizens cable of holding positions of responsibility'.

[39] Mukerjee to Sen, 22 October 1951; Sen to Chairman of the Central Parliamentary Election Board, 1 November 1951; Action Committee of the Hindu Code Bill (meeting report), 4 October 1951; 'Vote of Women is a big factor in your Election' (handwritten memorandum), undated, all documents located in File 159, AIWC Papers, NMML.

[40] M. Mukhopadhyay, 'Introduction' in M. Mukhopadhyay and N. Singh (eds.) *Gender Justice, Citizenship and Development* (New Delhi, 2007), p.6.

For much of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, a protectionist discourse dominated the relationship between the Indian woman as individual and the colonial state. This discourse is epitomised in a diagram which Muthulakshmi Reddi used as part of her 1933 presidential address at the Seventh Annual Andhra Provincial Women's Conference. Her topic was on the importance of government intervention to ensure the implementation of social reform legislation, to uplift and to protect the populace of India, in particular its women. Set against the Mother India controversy, where Indian nationalists and feminists had turned the critical gaze back on the colonial government,[41] Reddi argued that this colonial government had an important responsibility to protect and uplift the Indian populace, which it had wilfully neglected. To illustrate her talk she used a diagram of 'the functions of the government and how the governmental policy affects the mother in her home and through her the home, the society and the nation', originally published as a chart in the *Labour Women's Magazine* in England. At the centre of this diagram in small circle is the 'mother in the home'. Radiating outwards from the mother, like the spokes of a wheel, are various pieces of legislation, covering the areas of education, employment, civil rights, health and housing. These provide a protective moat separating the 'mother in the home' from the harmful and destructive social, economic and environmental forces of 'Disorder, Disease, Ignorance and Starvation'. This diagram is illustrative of the nineteenth and early twentieth century perspective of legal reform, where legislation operated upon and protected the vulnerable and passive subject.[42] As voters, and later as social workers administering service and protestors demanding services and rehabilitation, the articulation of rights and duties was intended to enable the 'mother in the home' to engage and interact with the state as well as civil society. The emergence of the Indian woman as political citizen and the close association between citizenship and

[41] In 1927 an American journalist called Katherine Mayo drew international attention when she published a book, entitled *Mother India* on the social conditions of India's women. Evoking dramatic images of widow immolation and trembling child brides she pointed a finger at 'Hindu culture' as the key perpetrator. *Mother India* created a dilemma for Indian women activists who were both nationalists and feminists, because it tore their loyalty between support for the cause of women's upliftment, which led them to agree with a number of criticisms of Indian society made by the book – although not necessarily the way these were presented - and their loyalty to the nationalist movement, which required the complete rejection of the text as illegitimate. One of the ways in which this generation of women activists sought to negotiate this dilemma, as Mrinalini Sinha argues, was to turn the critical gaze back on the colonial government, arguing that the injustices women faced were as much due to the ineptitude of Britain as colonial government, as being due to Indian society itself. See M. Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham, London, 2006.)

[42] M. Reddi, Presidential address, 4-5 November 1933, File 4, AIWC Papers, NMML.

rights, as well as citizenship and duty, provided a way of using legislation as a tool for the individual to engage with these outer spheres rather than to be acted upon by them.

The shifting terminology of backwardness: An intersection between gender and caste?

The Constituent Assembly debates are striking because of the marked absence of the 'women's question' within them. At a rhetorical level, this absence could be explained by the fact that equality between the sexes, and the persona of the Indian woman as political citizen, had already been accepted as an abstract principle, and was absent, therefore, because it had been taken as a given. The rejection of separate electorates or reservations for women as political constituency further contributed to this invisibility.

Although the women's question remained largely absent in the CA this did not mean that women as symbolic markers of identity were invisible. India's relationship with Pakistan, dominated by the narrative of Partition violence, the rape and abduction of Hindu and Sikh women, and the urgency of their recovery through the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Bill was one of the areas where women became visible in CA debates, but where they were spoken for as victims. Here they assumed a long established identity as the markers of communal identity and the symbols of family honour. In these discussions, paternal citizenship dominated conceptualisations of gender relationships within the community, and between the individual and the state. The visibility of women in this context, therefore, did not guarantee them an independent voice or sense of agency. The Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Bill was a subject of debate where Indian women were highly visible, but their voices remained muted. This was merely a symbolic visibility, which accorded no real voice to communities of women and their needs, or lived experience. Such a visibility could be counterproductive, or even destructive, to the agenda of securing substantive equality, by reinforcing paternal citizenship for Indian women which did not have an emancipatory objective. From this angle it is possible to understand the logic underpinning identification, as the 'sexless citizen'.

The invisibility of the women's question in the Constituent Assembly debates both reflected and facilitated a shift away from the Indian woman and towards caste as a site of state paternalism and as a site for the construction of the progressive and democratic Indian nation state. It is identifiable by tracing how the terminology of backwardness and disability, came to be applied to the position of untouchables, and backward and scheduled castes in these debates. The fact that the label 'backward castes' became a term in its own right, used to define one of the 'legitimate' categories of minorities, is itself significant. This language is evident in the presentation of, and consequent justification for, the Report on Minority Rights and its set of recommendations: This report envisioned the 'creation of a Statutory Commission...to investigate and see what are the real things that are keeping these people *backward* in all the social, economic and educational spheres...It is up to the majority community to see that justice is done so that these minorities may rise...'.[43]

The terminology of backwardness brought with it a set of metaphors about depression and elevation, unconsciousness and awakening that were evoked in these debates to describe the position of untouchables and other socio-economically backward castes. For example, V. I Muniswami Pillai, speaking on the occasion of the presentation of the Minority Rights report, offered a history of untouchability in India, where he described how:

> ...it was given to Mahatma Gandhi as great Avathar to find the disabilities of a section of the Hindus, namely, depressed classes known by various names, to come to their rescue...It was that Poona Pact to which you yourself have been signatory along with me and Dr. Ambedkar, that produced a great awakening in this country[44].

Backwardness was a term which had its origins in the nineteenth century and had been claimed and used by Indian nationalists and British colonialists, as well as Indian women reformers and rights campaigners, and their European and American sisters in the name of maternal imperialism.[45] In the 1920s and 1930s the terminology of disability and backwardness was commonly evoked to describe the position of Indian women in society. For example, Mrs P.K Ray speaking during the Presidential Address of the Sixth AIWC Conference in 1931 made regular reference to both the 'social

[43] CA Debates (Legislative), Report on Minority Rights, Vol. V, No. 8, Wednesday 27th August 1947, p. 218.
[44] Ibid, p. 217.
[45] See Mayo, *Mother India* (1927).

disabilities' and the legal 'disabilities' that Indian women faced, and the importance of the 'uplift work' that the AIWC was called to undertake, with the Conference being ' more or less in agreement on the point that we women suffer from many social disabilities and these have to be changed and reformed, if we wish to maintain our proper position in the world as Indian women'.[46]

Debates around the reform of personal laws, in particular, made reference to the language of disability and backwardness. In the late 1930s a number of Bills concerned with the reform of women's legal status in the family were introduced in the Central Assembly, while in the provincial parliaments anti-dowry bills, marriage laws and legislation to enable women to inherit property were introduced. When G. V. Deshmukh introduced the Hindu Women's Right to Property Bill in the Central Assembly he advocated for the Bill on the basis that it would remove 'the existing disabilities from which Hindu women suffer'.[47] In fact the very name of the committee, established as a result of this flurry of Bills, the 'Committee on the legal disabilities of women'[48] included the term in its very title. A decade later, in renewed discussion on the necessity of such a Committee, reference to this language was once again invoked by Begum Hamid Ali in AIWC, emphasising that women were 'asking for nothing more than just and humane treatment and to be liberated from their disabilities'.[49]

Although the Indian woman as economic citizen had emerged clearly by the time of the publication of The Report on *Women's Role in Planned Economy*, this report too makes reference to the language of women's 'social backwardness' which continued to keep them enslaved through the 'ignorance and superstition' of 'evil customs'. The language of citizenship and equal rights, evident in this Report sits

[46] By this stage the language of social disability and backwardness sat side by side with the newer language of rights and citizenship that was becoming increasingly prominent in the discourse of the AIWC. So while Mrs P. K. Ray emphasised the social and political *disabilities* of Indian women in this speech, she also spoke about Indian women as future *citizens* and the preparation that would be required in order to enable them to be proactive citizens, reminding her audience that besides education 'There are great many other points we have to think of. There is "the rights and duties of citizenship" of which our boys and girls have no idea, the franchise side of the question from the educational point of view, the political side...' See Presidential Address of Mrs P. K Ray, AIWC, 6th Annual Conference Report, 28 December 1931 to 1 January 1932, Madras, pp. 20, 29.
[47] 'The Hindu Women's Right to Property Act, 1937', File.28/25/38, Judicial 1938, Home Department, quoted in Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, pp. 113-114.
[48] Forbes, *Women in Modern India,* p. 115.
[49] AIWC, 14th Annual Conference Report, 26 -29 January 1949, Gwalior, quoted in Forbes, *Women in Modern India,* p.116.

together with the terminology social 'backwardness' and 'evil customs' as parallel discourses for envisioning the cause of, and escape from, women's state of oppression.[50]

In contrast, there is surprisingly little evocation in the Constituent Assembly debates of the term 'backwardness' or the conceptualisation of women's status in the home and society as a state of 'disability', as there had been in these other contemporary documents. We see disability being replaced with the term 'discrimination', and consequently an increasing conceptualisation of inequality and oppression framed in terms of rights rather than in terms of disabilities.[51] This shift from disability to discrimination, accompanied by the claim to equal rights, is significant, because it signals a change in the conceptualisation of women and their relationship to state and society, and reveals the emergence of a more active concept of citizenship defined by a rejection of paternal notions of belonging within the civic community.

Conclusion

The priority of crafting a constitution that embodied an egalitarian relationship between the sexes, through equal rights and opportunities, was partly eclipsed in the Constituent Assembly debates by a range of other national concerns of the moment, in particular the need to reconcile minority and majority communities in a cohesive unity. Identity, and the claim to citizenship that was seen to arise from it, were approached largely in a siloed and segmented way in the drafting of the Indian Constitution. This inhibited the development of a notion of citizenship able to accommodate a layered and complex identity. This was a conceptual blindness that Kaur, Mehta and their AIWC colleagues too, were susceptible to, in their contribution to these debates. Although they collaborated and worked hard to ensure that they represented and voiced the needs, struggles and ambitions of Indian women, they overlooked a potential opportunity to give voice to neglected communities through an acknowledgement of the importance and value of difference.

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[50] Shah (ed.), *Women's Role in Planned Economy*', pp. 20, 110.

[51] This does not lead to the end of the use of the term backwardness in discussion on the position of women. Women's welfare and rights organisations and activists in fact reclaim the concept of backwardness in the post independence era, precisely because, as an expression of caste inequality, it gave added weight and leverage to the injustice of gender inequality. 'Backwardness', legal and social disability, continued to be used to describe the position of Indian women and to advocate for reform in these spheres. The point that I wish to make in the above observation, is that this terminology is largely absent in relation to women's position, within CA debates.

Visibility by itself however, was not necessarily a guarantee of voice and agency. Particular kinds of symbolic visibility could be counterproductive to the agenda of securing substantive equality, by perpetuating and reinforcing paternal citizenship for Indian women. But neither was invisibility able to guarantee equal treatment for women by rendering social identity indistinguishable in the eyes of the state, as this chapter suggests. The AIWC's civics education campaign indicates that the Organisation was making a conscious effort to create a critical mass through a targeted voice, as an alternative to both symbolic visibility, and democratic indistinguishability.

Chapter Four:

Citizenship through Service: the AIWC and India's Community Development Projects

Introduction

> The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity. The ambition of the greatest man of our generation has been to wipe every tear from every eye. That may be beyond us, but as long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over and so we have to labour and to work, and work hard, to give reality to our dreams...[1]

Nehru's midnight hour speech on the eve of Independence captured the imagination of Indians across the subcontinent. For AIWC members it held particular significance. To 'labour' meant to serve in the making of the new nation. Service was a labour of love, and an act of sacrifice, but it was equally an expression of citizenship. 'Labouring' through the act of social service was an important mandate for the AIWC in Nehruvian India. It provided a way of mobilizing the human capital of Indian women as citizens through voluntary action, and enabled the Organisation to fashion for itself a specific role in the development of a welfare infrastructure and ethos.

Drawing from the Gandhian legacy of constructive work and the rich history of social reform in India, the act of social service offered a way of fulfilling the responsibilities and duties ascribed to Indian woman in the AIWC's Charter of Rights and Duties. Furthermore, the Organisation was able to use a claim to the labour and expertise of service to expand and engender the meaning of citizenship in various ways. Its leadership actively embarked on remoulding service through welfare, to construct a particular identity and role for middle class Indian woman as citizens, and their rural sisters, as well as

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[1] Exert from Jawaharlal Nehru's Speech on the Granting of Independence, 14th August 1947 in B. McArthur (ed.), *Penguin Book of Twentieth Century Speeches* (London, 1992), pp. 234-237. Quoted in *Modern History Sourcebook*, accessed on the 23 February 2014 at http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1947nehru1.html [ebook]

a particular institutional role for women's organisations as the providers of welfare services, and as the producers and guardians of knowledge and expertise in this field.

A history of service in India

But what exactly did it mean to serve? And what did such service entail? The roots of service can be traced back to the Social Reform movement of the nineteenth century, which created a demand for the provision of particular welfare institutions, and for social reform activists and workers to administer these services. Social reform was the product of the complex and multifaceted engagement between an emerging Indian nationalism and the British colonial authority on the subcontinent. The colonial economy facilitated new agrarian and industrial relations, together with a growing bureaucratic structure, which brought dominant groups together and began to forge them into an Indian bourgeois class. Developing under Western domination this new Indian bourgeois sought to reform itself through initiating campaigns against the practice of caste inequality, such as untouchability, polytheism, idolatry, animism, as well as Purdah, child marriage and sati.[2] This Indian Social Reform movement was pioneered by the emergence of new societies, such as Brahmo Samaj initiated by Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal.[3] Central to the Movement was also the promotion of education for girls and women. There were many facets to the Social Reform Movement in India. In this Chapter, I wish to briefly emphasize two aspects that are relevant to the development of service as it comes to be practiced by latter generations of Gandhian nationalists and social workers. The first is that such work brought social reformers out into communities to conduct activities that today would be classified as grassroots welfare; for example, the rescue of potential victims of sati, child brides, and widows, the establishment of homes for widows, efforts to facilitate their remarriage, propaganda work and education with families and local communities against the practices of Purdah and child marriage, and the creation and maintenance of schools for girls. In so doing they began to establish an indigenous welfare infrastructure in India, and imbue the practice of service through welfare activities with

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[2] Kumar, *The History of Doing,* pp. 7-8,

[3] C. Watt, *Serving the Nation: Cultures of Service, Association and Citizenship* (New Delhi; Oxford, 2005), p. 4, accessed 18 July 2014, at http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2058/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195668025.001.0001/acprof-9780195668025 [ebook]

particular kinds of meaning and value, which in turn, facilitated a reconstitution of political and cultural identity for themselves.

Secondly, the discourse of social reform, just as its counterpart the civilizing mission of colonial authority, targeted certain categories of women as sites for intervention and reform. Drawing on Lata Mani's analysis of the debate around sati in nineteenth-century colonial India[4] we can see how colonial discourse functioned to construct a particular archetype of the 'Indian woman' and the 'Indian man', and to define the dynamics of the relationship between the two in order to claim legitimacy for colonial rule through its moral civilizing agenda.[5] The emerging Indian bourgeois class, in turn, challenged this authority through their own reworking of gender identities and relationships, in order to articulate an alternative, and affirmative, identity for themselves within the context of the Indian Social Reform Movement. They inverted this colonial discourse arguing that their progressive treatment of women reflected their capacity for self governance. Feminist scholars such as Tanika Sarkar and Lata Mani argue that women were positioned as objects, rather than subjects within this discourse.[6] As Uma Chakravarti argues in 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasi*?', this reflected a new kind of restructured patriarchy, one which responded to the changing context, agendas and objectives of nineteenth-century nationalism, which allowed them to represent themselves as progressive, but at the same time, did this by continuing to anchor women firmly within the space of the home and the domestic context.

Social reform might not have had women's empowerment as its primary objective, but this did not preclude the possibility of women taking advantage of the new opportunities opened to them by social reform for their own development as individuals. Although the movement was initiated by male

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[4] See, for example, Mani, 'Contentious Traditions', pp. 88-126.
[5] The British justified colonial rule by arguing that the 'barbaric' treatment of women in India, expressed in practices such as sati and child marriage, was evidence of the 'uncivilized' nature of this society and therefore legitimised the civilizing mission of colonial rule. Using this discourse Britain was able to claim a 'moral responsibility' as the 'protector' of Indian women. Gayatri Spivak refers to this as 'white men saving brown women from brown men'[5]. See Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', pp.66-111.
[6] See, for example, Mani, 'Contentious Traditions; U. Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasi*? Orientalism, nationalism, and a script for the past, in K. Sangari and S. Vaid (eds.) *Recasting Women: essays in colonial history* (New Jersey, 1999); P. Chatterjee, 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', in G. Caste (ed.) *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 151-166 and T. Sarkar, *Hindu wife, Hindu Nation: community, religion and cultural nationalism* (London, 2001.)

reformers, by the second half of the century pioneering women such as Pandita Ramabai, Anandibai Karve and Parvatibai Athavale, had also taken up this cause, becoming outspoken advocates for women's education and social reform. These women pioneered a new professional career for middle class and elite women in social service, and played an important role in shaping social service as a voluntary vocation, based on the idea of selfless service and imbued with a particular set of values. They in turn became role models for the later generation of AIWC women who claimed a new mandate of service in the nation building project.

The close interlinking of the Social Reform Movement in India with nineteenth-century Indian nationalism meant that the practice and discourse of social service and welfare became highly political in many ways, and could become a powerful expression of political resistance. This interlinking of nationalist and welfare agendas continued to evolve with the proliferation of new range of service and self help associations in the first two decades of the twentieth century in northern India, dedicated to education, social service and self help. These included the Servants of India, founded by Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and the Theosophical Society, enabling a rich associational culture to develop in parallel with the growth of various caste associations. The emergence of Gandhian nationalism in the 1920s built on this existing culture[7].

At the core of Gandhi's political philosophy of *Hind Swaraj* was the belief that political independence would be meaningless without the social, economic and moral transformation of society. There were two prongs to Gandhi's campaign for *Hind Swaraj.* The first was the strategic use of the technique of Satyagraha. The second was the implementation of his constructive programme, which sought to improve the living standards of India's rural population and enable them to become economically self sufficient. This called for social upliftment through the integration of dalits in village communities, improved sanitation, preventative health care, as well as education, and village economic development through activities such as spinning, the manufacture of Khadi and local craft production, calling

[7] Watt provides further details of the development of this associational culture in the chapter entitled 'Nation-building' in his book *Serving the Nation: Cultures of Service, Association and Citizenship* (2005).

nationalist workers to be constructive workers too, by initiating and participating in such rural development programmes.[8]

Constructive work was reliant on outreach into the rural villages of India and the urban slums. For this generation of AIWC activists, it allowed for interaction across class and caste lines, and gave them valuable exposure to contexts of poverty and inequality, that were to shape their developmental praxis later on. Furthermore, the delivery of such constructive work, through the act of service, was to continue to command enduring respect. Delivery of social uplift, like Satyagraha, was an act of service. It was something that one offered, rather than an action performed, making its voluntary nature essential, and as an action it was as much about transformation of the self as it was about the reform of society. 'Woman is the embodiment of sacrifice and suffering, and her advent to public life should, therefore, result in purifying it'[9] Gandhi believed. It was these qualities that made Indian women ideal nationalist and constructive workers in his world view. Social service was essential in facilitating the entry of Indian women into nationalist politics, and gave them new roles and opportunities, but simultaneously reinforced a highly gendered and class-based understanding of their role as wives and mothers that defined and restricted the nature and scope of their participation.[10]

When the AIWC developed its social service programmes and ethos in the post independence era, the Organisation drew on this rich tradition of service to claim a unique role for itself in the nation building project. Channelling the impact of service through social work had helped to win political freedom, now its potential could be tapped in pursuit of the second freedom, that of social and economic emancipation. At the time of independence the majority of India's population still resided in villages in rural areas, with rural women constituting over 50% of India's five hundred thousand villages in 1955.[11] This was the 'real' India, according to Mahatma Gandhi. 'Where better can you find yourselves than by being true to the highest traditions of Indian women, by serving your unhappy

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[9] 'Position of Women', from *Young India*, 17th October 1929, in M. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XLII (October 1929-February 1930), p. 5.
[10] See, for example, Forbes, *Women in Modern* India (1996); J. Kumari, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London, 1994) and G. Minault (ed.) *The Extended Family: women and political participation in India* (Delhi, 1981.)
[11] K. Nimbkar, 'Rural Women & Development Work in the Second Plan', 18 July 1955, File 218, AIWC Papers, NMML.

sisters today'[12] argued Gandhi when he instructed women to work for rural village reconstruction and development in the nationalist struggle. Now that India had won her independence, this remained an urgent and valid calling, and it was through service, in particular the provision of welfare, health and educational facilities, that the AIWC saw itself being able to reach and uplift the rural Indian woman. This concern with reaching and uplifting the rural Indian woman through service, is exemplified by the AIWC's Skippo project, which worked to deliver primary health care facilities to remote villages in the form of a mobile van, equipped with medicines and staffed with a nurse or doctor. The initiative was started in 1946 by Lady Rama Rau of the Bombay AIWC, after Mrs Hilda Seligman of England, a supporter of the Conference, offered 'to present a mobile health van if the All India Women's Conference would undertake the responsibility of maintaining and operating it'.[13] The Project was officially launched as the 'Asoka Akbar Van' but it quickly became known by the name of its mascot, 'Skippo', a 'frisky mountain goat', and the character in Mrs Seligman's children's book of the same name, the profits of which she had used for the purchase of the Van.[14] As a mountain goat, Skippo was able to climb rugged and inaccessible mountain landscapes, and this was exactly what the Bombay branch hoped to achieve through running this new project, as its motto suggests:

Social service aiming to spread
Knowledge of hygiene, children welfare,
animal husbandry & rural economy
amongst the
Isolated villages in many lands
And with the
Password:
Prevention rather than cure,
help to
Overcome the evils arising.

From
Under-
Nourishment, ignorance
and
Dearth[15]

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[12] M. Kishwar, *Gandhi and Women* (Delhi, 1986), p. 34.
[13] Skippo Van Committee, 'Some details of the working of the Mobile Health Vans, undated, File 167, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[14] Ibid.
[15] AIWC Skippo Van Committee to H. Seligman (see in particular the Skippo Fund letterhead), 15 September 1951, File 182, AIWC Papers, NMML.

The motto of the Skippo project, outlining its aims and objectives shows how the activity of service through the act of welfare, incorporated both a more old fashioned and paternalistic conception of welfare, as an act of charity and kindness, targeted at vulnerable groups in society for the alleviation of suffering, 'From Under Nourishment, ignorance and Dearth', but, it also reveals a more developmental component to the objective of service through welfare, through the possibility of transforming the lives of beneficiaries through knowledge, skills and awareness. The Skippo project epitomised the principle of social service, as an act of reaching out, like a wily little goat climbing a rugged and inaccessible mountain landscape, to reach the vulnerable and needy. The Bombay branch chose the village of Talasari, a jungle area inhabited by Adivasi people along Gujarat coast, 75 miles from Bombay, as the site for the Project. The Van was based here, but completed a circuit twice weekly to surrounding villages where health services and education were delivered. Malaria, eye and skin diseases, and illnesses due to malnutrition and poor hygiene, were treated, and minor operations were performed on the spot. 'On average 5000 to 6000 patients' were treated on an annual basis over the first three years, records the 1959 Project Annual Report. The success of the Project led to the construction of a small hospital in Talasari village to expand health facilities, then the introduction of a Second van in Gujarat, followed by one in Delhi, Maharashtra and Phaltan in the Deccan.[16] By 1955 eight centres with Skippo vans had been established across Bombay, Delhi, Gujarat, Phaltan, Kodaikanal, Malabar, Karnataka and Hyderabad.[17] These centres expanded their activities to include sanitation and hygiene education, the management of epidemics, and referral in the case of diagnosis of more serious conditions such as TB and Cancer. By end of the decade, Skippo operations in Bombay were reaching 14,366 patients per annum.[18]

[16] 'Some details of the working of the Mobile Health Vans', File 167, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[17] Honorary General Secretary, 'Six monthly Report January to July 1955', undated, File 206, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[18] 14,366 patients were treated between December 1958 and November 1959. See Central Skippo Committee, 'Annual Report, December 1958 to November 1959', 22 January 1960, File 402, AIWC Papers, NMML.

Reaching the rural village: India's Community Development Projects and the Central Social Welfare Board

Constructive engagement with the populace of India's rural villages was a concern that the AIWC shared with the new Indian government. In fact, reaching and transforming the life of the villager was positioned as the ultimate success of the modernizing vision of the Nehruvian state. For example, the Bhore Report, commissioned in 1946 to provide a blueprint for health care policy after independence, directs the development of health services 'designed to reach the rural areas specially' with the 'villager' as the 'chief beneficiary'.[19] Winning the support of 'the villager' for agricultural development is also a reoccurring theme in India's First Five-Year Plan.[20]

A commitment to social transformation was built into India's new Constitution (1950) which promised poverty elimination, the removal of various forms of social inequality and the raising of living standards.[21] For Nehru, social inequality and the various forms of oppression that it facilitated was rooted in material and economic conditions. Economic empowerment was positioned as the route towards freedom. Poverty, unequal distribution of resources, and unemployment had to be tackled through employment generation and income expansion.[22] Democratic governance together with Nehruvian socialism, defined by a mixed economy and a system of centralised development planning, was the model embarked upon for achieving this ambitious agenda.

In order to transform the social and economic life of villagers the Nehruvian government adopted a programme of Community Development, as a 'focal point' for the First Five-Year Plan. An Indo-US Technical Cooperation agreement, together with assistance from the Ford Foundation[23] enabled the

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[19] These statistics were quoted in an AIWC summary of the Bhore report. See Reports in A Nutshell No. 3, 'Report of the Health Survey and Development Committee', 1946, File 56, AIWC Papers, NMML.

[20] 'Chapter 15: Community Development and Rural Extension', First Five-Year Plan 1951-1956, Government of India, p.15, accessed 15 July 2012 at http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/welcome.html

[21] Kasturi, 'Development, Patriarchy, and Politics', p. 6.

[22] A. Sengupta, 'Fifty Years of Development Policy in India', in H. Karlekar (ed.), *Independent India the First Fifty Years*, (Delhi, 1998), p. 134.

[23] C. Watt, 'Philanthropy and Civilising Missions in India 1836-1960: States, NGOs and Development' in Watt, C., and Mann, (eds.) *Civilising Missions in Colonial and Postcolonial Asia: From Improvement to Development*, (London, New York, 2011), accessed 28 June 2014, at http://site.ebrary.com/lib/bodleian/docDetail.action?docID=10523546, p. 299.

Indian government to embark on this 'rural extension' or 'rural community projects' work as it was known.[24]

The primary aim of this programme was economic and technical; to increase production through improving land use and agricultural practices and to raise the standard of living. It functioned by grouping villages within a particular geographical area in a cluster, known as a National Extension Service (NES) Block, which then became the focal point of government technical interventions and primary government services such as health.[25] The Community Development Programme was initiated in October 1952 and underwent rapid expansion.[26] During the period of the First Five-Year Plan (1951-1956), the foundations of 500 National Extension Blocks and 622 Community Development Blocks covering a population of 80 million people were established.[27]

Although the Community Development Programme developed by the Planning Committee included a social welfare component, the draft of the First Five-Year Plan, despite the 'grand ideology about the protection of the weaker sections, equal opportunities, equality before the law' made no concrete budgetary provision for supporting or developing social welfare activities for vulnerable groups in Indian society,[28] suggesting a clear gap between the priorities of developmental rhetoric and those of tangible economics. Durgabai Deshmukh, one of the members of the Planning Commission; a lawyer in the High Court of Madras, with a long standing career in social welfare and women's literacy and a member of the small but vocal group of women in India's Constituent Assembly, was outspoken in her criticism of this oversight. Deshmukh joined the PC in June 1952, on the invitation of Nehru, as the member in charge of Social Service.[29]

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[24] President's Circular Letter No. 11, 2 May 1952, File 159, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[25] 'Annual Report of the Directorate General of Health Services 1958', Department of Health, Government of India (New Delhi, 1959), pp. 70-72.
[26] 'A Brief Review of the Working of the Community Projects and National Extension Service' (Seminar on Voluntary Agencies and Rural Development), 20-22 April 1956, File 246, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Durgabai Deshmukh, Interview Transcript 16 (Session I), 5 January 1967, pp. 15-18. In her interview Deshmukh explains that by vulnerable groups she was not referring to those identifiable as particular pressure groups such as Backward Classes and Tribes who had constitutional safeguards but she was referring to the disabled, the old and infirm, children, destitute and the delinquent.
[29] Social service was a broad category including housing, labour, education, health and public co-operation and social welfare.

Durgabai had played a leading role in the establishment of the Andhra Mahila Sabha, a social welfare organisation, which she had helped to found in Madras in 1937, and which provided welfare services to women and children, promoted adult education literary, offered training for auxiliary nurses and midwives, and provided free legal aid. She was therefore well attuned to the difficulties facing many voluntary organisations like her own to fundraise and to maintain their outreach activities at the moment of independence.

India has a history of established voluntary organisations playing a leading role in the delivery of welfare services. Although the British colonial government claimed the right to rule based on their welfare responsibilities, these generally did not find expression beyond the limited public utility charity work of the Company state and crown[30] and the introduction of various pieces of legislative reform such as the Sati Prevention Act of 1829 and the Child Marriage Restraint Act (Sarda Act) of 1929. The colonial government left the responsibility of welfare work to Christian missionary societies, Indian social reform organisations such as the Arya Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj, elite Indian women's organisations, and philanthropic societies run by the wives of colonial officials such as the Countess Dufferin Fund.[31] The focus of these organisations tended to be on education, the establishment of the first schools for girls, the provision of primary healthcare, maternity hospitals, the training of lady doctors and the launching of hospices and sanatoriums. Christian missionaries played an important role in expanding such facilities to rural areas.[32.]. The promotion of welfare in colonial India was consequently shaped and driven by the emergence of citizens' institutions, rather than the state, resulting in the implementation of The Societies Registration Act of 1860 to regulate NGO activity.[33]

Political freedom for India, however, had brought with it a new ethos and set of values. A commitment to social transformation was built into the new Constitution (1950) which promised

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[30] Watt, 'Philanthropy and Civilising Missions in India', pp. 276-278.
[31] The Countess Dufferin Fund was established by Lady Dufferin to supply medical aid to Indian women. See S. Hodges, 'Towards a History of Reproduction in Modern India' in S. Hodges (ed.) *Reproductive Health in India: History, Politics, Controversies* (Hyderabad, 2006), p. 6.
[32] See A. Chatterjee, 'NGOs an Alternative Democracy', in H. Karlekar (ed.) *Independent India the First Fifty Years* (Delhi, 1998), p. 282.
[33] Ibid. This trend continues in the early twentieth century.

poverty elimination, the removal of various forms of social inequality and the raising of living standards.[34] This commitment was to be put into action by the development of a welfare state. The First Five-Year Plan stated that the main objective of such a welfare state was to bring about a 'socialist pattern of society' in which all citizens would have the fullest opportunity for a rich and diverse life for the development of their full potentialities'.[35] In chapter 36 on Welfare in the first Five-Year Plan, the influence of the Gandhian principle of self help was evident in the way in which welfare, as the basis of social justice, was framed in the plan as the joint responsibility of communities and government working together. This was expressed in terms of devolution of power and the promotion of the idea of people's participation in the development process.[36] Nehru envisioned an important role for volunteerism and service in India's development through economic planning model, in practice, however, he wanted this volunteerism to be state driven and directed, and was reluctant to accept existing Indian philanthropic and social organisations as suitable for this task, marginalising them in terms of funding and representation on planning initiatives.[37] Durgabai challenged this position, arguing with Nehru and the Finance Minister that the rhetoric of partnership in the Plan would carry little weight if there was no financial assistance from government to support the work of existing and established welfare organisations, and if they were left to struggle on their own to fulfil what was in fact a constitutional commitment.

To rectify this planning failure she suggested that the government, instead of struggling to build state welfare institutions from scratch, channel state resources into the voluntary sector for this purpose. This would assist the state to fulfil its commitment to the development of a welfare state, in a context of limited infrastructure and human capital, and provide much needed financial support to such voluntary organisations. Projects could be screened and assessed first, to assess their suitability and impact, and as the system developed state grants could then be used to regulate and improve the quality welfare services and to professionalise and expand them. Durgabai brought her case before the

[34] Kasturi, 'Development, Patriarchy, and Politics', p. 6.
[35] Sengupta, 'Fifty Years of Development Policy in India', p. 134.
[36] Buch, 'State Welfare Policy and Women', p. WS-18.
[37] See Watt, 'Philanthropy and Civilising Missions in India', pp. 293-296.

Finance Minister. At that stage the financial allocation had already been ‘all fixed up’, but she argued determinedly, and was able to secure four crores for the reminder of the first Five-Year Plan.[38]

Durgabai recommended an autonomous and non statutory board, which became known as the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB), as the mechanism for channelling this funding from the state to voluntary bodies. She insisted that the body be made up of non-officials, individuals with experience from the voluntary sector, who would be chosen on the basis of merit and past experience, to ensure efficient delivery, unencumbered by the red tape of bureaucratic procedures and politics.[39] The Central Social Welfare Board began functioning on the 13th of August 1953 ‘with a view to directing and promoting welfare programmes throughout the country on a sound and scientific basis, specifically for aiding voluntary welfare organisations to improve, expand their activities and for starting new organisations in places where there are none’.[40] Deshmukh resigned her position on the Planning Commission to take up the Board’s Chairmanship. State wide boards, to assist the Central Board with its work, were also established.

The CSWB demarcated areas known as Welfare Extension Projects, within some of the National Extension Blocks of the Government’s Community Development Programme, and then encouraged voluntary organisations to set up new projects, or to expand existing projects within these demarcated areas.[41] The Board also designated areas for urban Welfare Extension Projects, encouraging voluntary organisations to follow suit.

On its formation, ‘wide publicity’ was given through the press, inviting social welfare organisations to send in applications for assistance from the Board.[42] Over the course of the First Five-Year Plan, AIWC branches from across the country applied for and received grants from the CSWB to assist them with such initiatives. ‘The branches have started taking keen interest in the activities of the

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[38] Deshmukh, Interview Transcript 16 (Session I), 5 January 1967, pp. 17-18.
[39] Ibid, pp. 19-20.
[40] ‘Item 3 Consideration of the report of the work done by the Board since the last meeting’, undated, Account no. 87 (Correspondence), Durgabai Deshmukh papers, NMML.
[41] ‘Central Social Welfare Board Progress Report 1955-1956’, Department of Education, Government of India (New Delhi, 1957), p. 10.
[42] ‘Item 3 Consideration of the report of the work done by the Board since the last meeting’, undated, Account no. 87, Deshmukh papers, NMML.

Social Welfare Projects undertaken by the Government'[43] states the AIWC Annual Conference Report in February 1955. By July 1955, the bi-annual Report of the Honorary General Secretary of the AIWC records that a number of branches were receiving aid from the CSWB for the running of various projects including Youth Camps within the National Extension Blocks and reception homes for vulnerable women[44]. In fact, in an attempt to minimise the administrative work of the various State Welfare Boards, the CSWB tried unsuccessfully to persuade the AIWC Central Office to take on part of the initial screening of projects of local AIWC branches for suitability for welfare grants.[45]

During the course of the second Five-Year plan (1956-1961) the amount of funding available expanded to Rs, 15 crores, followed later by Rs, 28 crores, and an additional three, specifically for child welfare.[46] The AIWC's Annual Conference Report of 1960 gives an indication of the types of projects receiving grants from the CSWB by the end of the decade. An Urban Welfare Extension Project was being run by branches in Gujarat with CSWB funding, as were sewing classes, a cooperative store, play centre, dispensary and Family Planning Centre. The Calcutta Branch received a small grant to assist with their Skippo Van, a primary school and with sewing classes. In West Bengal and Maharashtra branches were also running Urban Welfare Projects with CSWB grants, while in Uttar Pradesh Adult Education, Family Planning and women and children's health, and a Children's home, were activities supported by the CSWB.[47]

A symbiotic partnership: the role of the AIWC in the implementation of Community development initiatives

In the early 1950s the AIWC aspired to expand its membership base and sustain its public profile in a rapidly changing environment. Although the Organisation had maintained a non partisan stance towards party politics, many of its activities had revolved around nationalist activities in the late

[43] AIWC, 24th Annual Conference Report, 2 to 4 February 1955, Phaltan, p. 54.
[44] K. C. Shah to President of the Bombay State Social Welfare Board, 8 August 1957, File 318, AIWC Papers, NMML; Honorary General Secretary, 'Six Monthly Report of Activities, January-July 1955', File 206, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[45] CSWB to AIWC head office, undated, File 206, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[46] The source in which these figures are quoted does not specify when the Rs 28 crores and additional Rs three crores for child welfare were given to the Board for distribution, however it is most likely that these were provided during the course of the Third Five Year Plan (1961-1966) as this would fit the time period being discussed in the source. See Deshmukh, Interview Transcript 16: Session I, 5 January 1967, p. 22.
[47] AIWC, 13th Annual Conference Report, December 1960, Surat, pp. 57-69.

colonial era. Now with the nation building project underway, a re-orientation of its programme of work and objectives was called for. Its leadership was eager to bring new communities of women into its fold, but did not have a concrete strategy for achieving this. Furthermore older sources of funding which had helped it launch and build its pre-independence projects were drying up.[48] In this context working in partnership with the government offered an alternative revenue stream for growth.

The CSWB was not an exclusive source of funding for the AIWC, but it was one of a number of streams that bound the Organisation and the government together in a co-operative and symbiotic relationship. AIWC branches also received grants from the Department of Health, for initiatives such as the Skippo Vans, the Department of Education for literary and education projects, the Ministry of Welfare and the Department of Relief and Rehabilitation for their projects with Partition refugees.

The extent of government dependency on voluntary organisations, such as the AIWC's Skippo vans project, for the implementation of its mandate of social justice is evident by looking at the Budget of the Department of Health. For the years 1956-57 and 1957-58, as the table below shows, the Union Health Department sanctioned more funding for voluntary organisations, as compared to the State Governments, from its Departmental budget. Although this table gives only a partial picture, with a number of figures missing, if we take the two States of Bombay and Madras, we can see that in both cases, and over both fiscal years, the amounts sanctioned to voluntary organisations and local bodies, came to more than that budgeted for State spending on health. Furthermore, in seven out of the eleven States where there are complete figures for the fiscal year 1957-58, the amount budgeted for voluntary organisations, together with local bodies, exceeded the amount given to States, including those of West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh.

[48] There is considerable correspondence between AIWC branches and leadership during the 1950s discussing the importance of expanding and diversifying the membership of the organisation as a means for revitalising the Conference and securing its mandate as a voice for women's interests. See, for example, Assamese Provincial Mahila Samiti Resolutions to the AIWC; which call for the Conference to be revised on a more 'broad based and democratic basis' and for local Mahila Samitis become the primary units of the organisation, 1951, File 47, AIWC Papers, NMML.

Table 1:				
	Amount sanctioned during 1956-57		Amount sanctioned during 1957-58	
States/Union Territories	State Govt	Local Bodies & Voluntary Organisations	State Govt	Local Bodies and Voluntary Organisations
Andhra Pradesh		8761	90621	11630
Assam			91500	25696
Bihar			38442	9760
Bombay	11500	511186	71240	839963
Jammu & Kashmir				
Kerala		3000		46386
Madhya Pradesh			7000	17000
Madras	14363	15713	36840	38613
Mysore		22000	52908	25228
Orissa	17000			
Punjab		15000	71367	87513
Rajasthan			155180	13089
Uttar Pradesh		9515	600	148127
West Bengal		19484	70597	198119
Delhi	15000	2000		140892
Himachal Pradesh				
Manipur				7750
Tripura				
Total	**57863**	**606659**	**686295**	**1609766**

Table 1: Indian National Health Department budget allocation comparing amounts given to State governments versus local bodies and voluntary organisations for the years 1956-1957 and 1957-1958. Taken from the *Annual Report of the Directorate General of Health Services* 1957 (New Delhi), p. 224.

The Welfare Extension projects therefore became sites of interaction between the state and voluntary organisations including the AIWC, facilitating a collaborative relationship between the AIWC and the Indian government, which came to be managed through the Central Social Welfare Board. One of the consequences of this development was the blurring of boundaries between civil society and the State. Over the course of 1955 and 1956 the AIWC Delhi branch of the AIWC began ‘supervising the work of the Delhi State Welfare Board’s Welfare Extension Project work’ in 20 villages in Shahdara

district,[49] while in 1959, three hundred Welfare Projects, which had been run under the auspices of the CSWB were taken over by the AIWC.[50]

Such a dynamic initiative could also work in the opposite direction, with the AIWC providing innovative and best practice models which the State was prepared to assume responsibility for, expand and replicate elsewhere, once they had been piloted by local AIWC branches. Mrs. Dhage, a member of the Hyderabad Branch of the AIWC explained in an informal meeting between her branch and the Standing Committee of the AIWC in 1952 how 'she had started a small clinic for polio-stricken patients, and that the Government, having been suitably impressed by the need of proper treatment of these patients had agreed to take over the clinic and run it on a larger scale. It was now running satisfactorily'.[51]

In return for their support in the provision of welfare services, the CSWB provided an opportunity for women's organisations such as the AIWC to enter the structures and institutions of the state, at a local level, as agents of development. The CSWB gave only partial grants for new or expanded projects, which had to be matched by the fundraising efforts of local voluntary organisations. There were complaints about the limited size of these grants and their administration from local and regional AIWC offices, nevertheless, this partnership gave the Organisation prestige and visibility, and consequently a degree of leverage and influence within government. The AIWC used its status in the Welfare Extension Projects and its relationship with the CSWB to push for more formal recognition and influence in the planning process. After the launch of the First Five-Year Plan, the President of the AIWC wrote to the chair of the Planning Commission requesting that, as 'the premier women's organisation in India, with some 300 branches and sub-branches scattered throughout the country' the Organisation be given the opportunity to collaborate with the Planning Commission 'in framing and implementing schemes for the welfare of women and children'.[52] Although the AIWC did have some consultation on the Planning Commission's Panel of Social Welfare, there was general consensus that

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[49] AIWC, 26th Annual Conference Report, 24-28 December 1956, Indore, p. 29.
[50] 'Annual Report of the Directorate General of Health Services 1958', p. 236.
[51] 'Report of the Informal Discussion Held on the 7th February 1952', Hyderabad, File 159, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[52] Ibid.

women's organisations and representatives had not been adequately consulted in the preparation of First Five-Year Plan.[53] Three years later, with a number of Welfare Extension Projects underway, the AIWC was able to approach the government once more with greater confidence on this matter:

> The women's organisations in India now feel that the time has come for a more accurate assessment of Women's participation and co-operation in such National activities as are intended to be developed through the various extension services and Community Projects. Moreover, there is a definite feeling that participation of Women's Organisations would endow these policies with a realistic approach as they are constantly engaged in field work[54].

In this memorandum the AIWC requested the formation of, and representation on, a government appointed consultative panel of women who would advise on 'the formulation of policy with regard to the problems of training of workers, co-ordination of various women's activities and allied matters'.[55] Recommending, in addition, that the Second Five Year Plan 'lay greater emphasis on the representatives of women and allocation of responsibilities to them in all villages, Panchayats and other local developmental agencies'.[56] By the time of the drafting of the Third Plan at the close of the 1950s, the AIWC was demanding, not only a greater role in shaping welfare policy, but also greater authority in terms of implementation. 'For voluntary workers public work is no longer a hobby. They are no longer content with a merely advisory function. They want to share in the responsibility for planning as also for execution of a plan'.[57] In its correspondence with the government and the Planning Commission the AIWC also drew on its expertise and contribution in the field, to request state recognition as an official provider of training to those conducting social welfare activities,[58] including fellow social workers and village level workers, laying claim to a particular institutional

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[53] Nimbkar, 'Rural Women & Development Work in the Second Plan', 18 July 1955, File 159, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[54] AIWC to the Chairman of the Planning Commission, 'Memorandum on ways to secure full and effective co-operation with the Planning Commission, 7 March 1955, File 215, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[55] 'Welfare Extension Projects under Second Five Year Plan', undated, File 215, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[56] Ibid.
[57] 'Draft third Year Plan for Social Welfare', 24 March 1955, File 192, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[58] D. Deshmukh to V. T. Krishnamachari (Deputy Chairman Planning Commission, 'Welfare Extension Projects under Second Five Year Plan', AIWC Papers, File 215. In this memorandum the AIWC requests that the government 'recognise the AIWC as being accredited to provide training in social service. See also 'Draft third Year Plan for Social Welfare', File 192, AIWC Papers, NMML.

role as the producers and guardians of knowledge and expertise in this field.[59]

Welfare created an important sense of agency for middle class women, endowing them with a purpose and unique role. Service through social work or social welfare accommodated the gendered citizen in a capacity that the formal political sphere did not. In the role of political or constitutional being, the emphasis was on achieving equality through equal treatment and equal opportunity, signalling the rise of the Indian woman as the 'sexless citizen'. In the area of social service, however, duty accommodated and celebrated gendered difference. 'Where better can you find yourselves than by being true to the highest traditions of Indian women, by serving your unhappy sisters today' as Gandhi had urged when he instructed women to work for rural village reconstruction and development in the nationalist struggle.[60]

Social service allowed AIWC activists to exercise and articulate a new kind of citizenship for themselves, while reaching and remaking the identity of the 'rural Indian woman'. 'Social education' formed a key component within these Welfare Projects. The Central Social Welfare Board progress report for the years 1955 – 1957 lays down a pilot model for carrying out such education through teaching and demonstration centres, where village women would be educated in domestic science, basic child development and nutrition. These were to draw inspiration from traditional Gram Sevika structures, and were to be staffed by 'voluntary women' of the 'highest standards of public service and public morality'. A lower rung of paid women workers would be employed in addition, but only 'under the guidance and supervision' of these 'honorary non official women'.

Not only was such a system of 'social education' dependent on reproducing traditional gender and class roles which defined women primarily as mothers, wives, carers and home makers, and rural and working class Indian women as the beneficiaries of various services, but it also suggested an element

[59] The AIWC also sought to use the networks of the Central Social Welfare Board, its State Boards, and Welfare Extension Projects, to expand its own membership. See, for example, correspondence between R. Saran (AIWC President) and AIWC Standing Committee Members, in which she suggests that the Organisation 'establish branches 'where our welfare extension projects are already functioning', 10 March 1959, File 192, AIWC Papers, NMML; correspondence between R. Kaur, A. Chand (Chairman of the State Social Advisory Board in Himachal Pradesh) and I. Maydeo (Hon General Secretary of the AIWC) discussing the AIWC Executive Committee's request to establish a branch in Himachal Pradesh, 9 January 1955 and 20 January 1955, File 323, AIWC Papers, NMML.

[60] Kishwar, *Gandhi and Women*, p. 34.

of class bias through its moral or social policing.[61] Evident in this particular model is the way in which the provision of welfare services became a means of grooming and teaching Indian women how to be good citizens through the pursuit of particular kinds of domesticity and consumerism.

The practice and philosophy of social work, promoted by the AIWC was dependant on the availability of a vast network of middle class Indian women who would give their time on a voluntary basis to serve poor and lower middle income women and their families, and therefore had an inherent class and caste element built into it. Such an approach excluded and ignored the potential contribution of women who worked full time outside of the home, whether they were professional or working class. It also reinforced the undervaluing of 'caring' or traditionally female labour, through its assumption that women should be willing to contribute this labour on a voluntary basis, without compensation to the nation building project. In this respect this was a policy which went against the recommendations of the Report on *Women's Role in Planned Economy*.

As Carey Watt's work has emphasised, social service was not inherently progressive or liberating for the beneficiaries or the actors involved, despite its close associations with Indian nationalism. Educated elite and middle-class social service associations could reinforce brahminical values and hierarchies through their practices, while through their focus on the upliftment of the 'depressed classes' they could impose upper caste notions of civility, propriety and hierarchy on these classes, while trying to 'uplift' them.[62] Was agency for this class of women therefore being created by the denial of agency for various categories of peasant and working class women, reproducing on a national scale the earlier dynamics of maternal imperialism? This was the criticism expressed by the Communist Party against the Community Development Programme and the AIWC's collaboration in the welfare component of the Programme. The Communist Party of India, equally eager to reach the 'toiling masses', argued that the American development aid being used to implement the Community Development Programme, was driving its real agenda, which was not rural development, but rather to placate the peasantry without real agrarian transformation, particularly in the wake of the Tebhaga and

[61] 'Central Social Welfare Board Progress Report 1955-1956', pp. 10-14.
[62] Watt, *Serving the Nation*, pp. 10, 14.

Telengana struggles and recent worker strikes and unrest.[63] According to CPI documents, Community Projects focused on technology, improved seeds, fertilizers, irrigation and roads, as well as community 'welfare', but did not include any agrarian land reforms to rectify existing inequalities that were the root cause of poverty and social backwardness.[64] Welfare was viewed as a means to appease and placate, to maintain the status quo rather than to empower. The true beneficiaries of such rural agricultural development, the Party claimed, were the land owners and not landless tenants or small shopkeepers.[65] For communist women, therefore, the AIWC's partnership with the government in the implementation of the welfare component of the Community Development Programme indicated a clear alignment with the Congress Party government.

Interestingly enough, women's organisations, such as the AIWC, drew on the mandate of social welfare, precisely in order to claim the opposite; that service offered autonomy and a space outside of the state and party politics, beyond the competitive and self interested motives that this generation believed had come to dominate this sphere. Social welfare as a concept came to be drawn on by the AIWC in the same way that 'development' and 'national planning' came to be drawn on by the Nehruvian state. As Partha Chatterjee argues, these terms were vested with a sense of neutrality and objectivity, and in so doing provided a supposedly impartial platform for nation building beyond the reach of vested interest groups.[66]

A reoccurring theme amongst this generation of women activists was the positioning of service in opposition to politics, each inhabiting its own sphere of interests and values. While government was perceived to have become corrupted by personal power struggles, political alliances and loyalties, dynamics which delayed and obstructed the implementation of development and services, social service drawing on its Gandhian roots, was perceived to be able to distance itself from these kind of agendas. 'There is no competition in doing service' stressed Dr. Sarojini Varadappan a veteran

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[63] 'Our Tasks among the Peasant Masses', April 1954, File 1954/23, Communist Party of India Papers (hereafter CPI), Joshi Archives.
[64] 'The Problem and The Plan – On Paper', undated, File1953/ 47, CPI Papers, Joshi Archives.
[65] 'A Strategic Project: Economic disruption and Not Development', undated, File 1953/48, CPI Papers, Joshi Archives.
[66] See P. Chatterjee, 'Development Planning and the Indian State' in Z. Hasan (ed.) *Politics and the State in India* (New Delhi, 2000.)

member of the AIWC, while discussing the merits of social work as a career. These sentiments were articulated in similar terms by Mrs Ranade, another AIWC veteran based in Pune ‘There are people who are naturally attracted to politics and here [in the AIWC] we want people who are ready to sacrifice that honour and whatever you get by entering politics’.[67]

Framing their agenda in terms of social welfare enabled the AIWC to claim a space beyond the reach of religious differences and electoral politics and to maintain its official position of political and religious neutrality. But what about gendered and class biases? Did service become its own brand of politics, an internalised form of maternal imperialism? And did the AIWC’s collaboration with the CSWB lead to its co-option into the state and into the patriarchal values which framed women as passive beneficiaries and dependants in need of state protection?

Social service through welfare did indeed become its own brand of politics through its use as a means to access state resources, influence and power, however, to define it merely as a remoulded form of maternal imperialism is far too simplistic an understanding of the way in which social service through welfare functioned to create new civic identities for Indian women. The Welfare Extension Projects were one of many different expressions of citizenship through service. In particular contexts, they took on a more conservative dimension or interpretation, but there were other expressions of service through social welfare with radical potential. These had a developmental agenda, concerned with bringing into being the constitutional vision of social justice and inclusion. They revealed the potential to evolve, and through their services aimed to transform not only their voluntary members but also their beneficiaries, and to reconfigure a more active and engaged role for civil society within the new Indian government. The final section of this chapter introduces two other examples of philanthropic institution building by AIWC branches and leaders which exemplify the complex ways in which citizenship through service enabled this generation to create a unique sense of ‘belonging’ in the nation building project, while maintaining a distinctive identity as a conduit between state and civil society, and between the Indian traditions of service and self help, and those of science, technology and international human rights.

[67] Interview with S. Ranade, AIWC veteran and member, 6 January 2012, Kolkata.

Bridging state and civil society: the Madras Cancer Institute and the National Council of Child Welfare

In India the inheritance of an untransformed civil service, ill equipped for democratic and developmental governance is recognised as one of the factors that has inhibited the complete transition from the colonial raj to social democracy, with such institutions continuing to function as a means for reinforcing inequalities, rather than as mechanisms for the implementation of radical social and political change.[68] There is however a counter narrative to the one of staid colonial institutional inheritance. The late 1940s and 1950s saw a proliferation of new institutions founded and developed by social workers and nationalists that continue to hold a presence in the landscape of community development today.[69] As the midwives of Independence, Deshmukh and her contemporaries had the unprecedented opportunity to put their ideas and visions into practice, to experiment and test new models of welfare work and development when they took up various leadership positions within government and the private sector. These institutions built on an existing associational culture and older traditions of service, while in their focus on local community and rural development and their 'claimed' quasi autonomous positioning, they continued to bear the mark of a Gandhian nationalist project, and in so doing presented a picture of a Nehruvian India which departed from the established narrative of the centralised modernising state. Many of these institutions also represented something new in their capacity to bridge the traditions of Gandhian nationalism with the priorities of a scientific and rational system of economic planning.

As the driving force and energy behind the Central Social Welfare Board, Deshmukh exemplified the way in which personality and personal vision often shaped such institutions and the policies they advocated. The Cancer Institute of Madras provides an example of another institution that continues to bear the imprint of its advocate and founder Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi. As a doctor, cancer treatment and prevention was a professional area of interest for Reddi, but she also had a personal

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[68] P. Chatterjee, *Wages of freedom: fifty years of the Indian nation-state* (Delhi, 1998), p. 194.
[69] Many of the founders and board members of such voluntary organisations also held formal positions within the government bureaucracy. For example, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, the Minister of Health and Executive member of the AIWC, sat on, and chaired the committees of the TB Association of India, The Indian Red Cross and the St. John's Ambulance, while Rameshwari Nehru, Honorary Director of the Women's Section of the Relief and Rehabilitation Ministry, was also a committee member of the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene.

connection with the disease. In 1923 her younger sister tragically died of misdiagnosed and mistreated cancer. This became an important cause for Reddi, which she took up together with her AIWC colleagues in Madras after independence in 1947.[70] Although a doctor by training, Reddi was also a social reformer and grass roots community worker, and like Durgabai Deshmukh, was orientated towards practical action. The Madras Cancer Institute reflected this pragmatism, by creating an environment for the application of health care to the benefit of ordinary Indians. Initially the focus of the Institute was on treatment and public education to encourage early diagnosis, however, as Reddi continued to fundraise and build the Institute, it was able to develop into both treatment centre and leading Cancer research institute, for which it is known today.

The National Council of Child Welfare (NCCW) provides an interesting case study of how localised and shorter term relief efforts initiated by AIWC members intended to fulfil a more traditional notion of welfare as relief from suffering and protection of the vulnerable, could provide a starting point for the growth of a national organisation, with a much longer term vision and developmental agenda. The All India Save the Children Committee, and the Indian National Committee of the United Nations Appeal for Children, two of the NCCW's parent organisations,[71] were both born out of emergency. The former was set up in 1943 by Vijayalakshmi Pandit to raise funds for the establishment of children's homes after the Bengal Famine.[72] The Indian National Committee of the United Nations Appeal for Children was established 1948, with Rajkumari Amrit Kaur as its president and Hannah Sen, another AIWC Executive Committee member, as its Honorary Secretary, to provide 'relief from distress' for children affected by the upheaval of Partition.[73]

At the time of the establishment of the Indian National Committee of the United Nations Appeal for Children in the late 1940s the language of rights, not only the right to the material necessities of life,

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[70] V. Shanta, 'A good Samaritan' in A. Basu (ed.) *The Pathfinder*: *Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi* (Pune, 1986), p. 57.

[71] The third parent organisation was the Indian Council of Child Welfare (ICCW). See P. Guha, 'An Outstanding Personality – Rajkumari Amrit Kaur' in *Rajkumari Amrit Kaur*, Eminent parliamentarians monograph series:15, p.70.

[72] Ibid, p. 69; Lady Rama Rau was the president of this Committee while other AIWC members involved included Rameshwari Nehru, Shyam Kumari Khan, Maitrayee Bose, Urmila Mehta, Hansa Mehta, Avabai Wadia and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay.

[73] Hannah Sen (Honorary Secretary of the United Nations Appeal for Children, Indian National Committee), 6 October 1948, File 114, AIWC Papers, NMML.

but also to physical and psychological safety and wellbeing, and the right 'to develop their full personality...'[74] as emphasised in the AIWC's Charter of Indian Women's Rights and Duties, was encouraging the development of a new methodology of child welfare and practice amongst some AIWC members and leaders. In December 1952 the AIWC hosted the International Study Conference on Child Welfare in Bombay.[75] This was also the year the Women's Conference printed its reformulated Constitution, including in its aims and objectives a commitment 'To work actively for the general progress and welfare of women and children and to help utilise to the fullest the fundamental Rights conferred on them by the Constitution of the Indian Union'.[76] The founding of the National Council Child Welfare (NCCW) in 1952, with the objective of facilitating 'the total well being of the child' through 'providing adequate opportunities for growth, development and social participation, and protection against neglect, exploitation and the consequences of poverty and social injustice'[77] was another expression of this shift in thinking.[78]

The NCCW was established by the AIWC in co-operation with other voluntary organisations as a national co-ordinating body with the aim of encouraging collaboration between government and civil society in the advancement of policy on child development and infrastructure.[79] It was equally an attempt to respond to the 'lack of proper direction, trained personnel and adequate financial resources faced by the Union and state governments in their efforts to address child welfare needs. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was elected the first honorary general president of the NCCW, and was succeeded by Tara Ali Baig another AIWC Committee member. The NCCW played a key role in pioneering innovative and progressive models of child development, in particular with regards to the education of tribal children and the reform of children's institutions in the capital city of Delhi.[80] And through its

[74] Women's Charter of Rights and Duties', *Roshni*, p. 12.
[75] See AIWC correspondence in File 159, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[76] 'All India Women's Conference' (promotional brochure), undated, File 259, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[77] Ibid.
[78] 'Plan for a National Child Welfare Centre', undated, Rameshwari Nehru Papers (hereafter R/N), Subject File 5, Rameshwari Nehru Papers (hereafter R/N), NMML.
[79] 'Indian Council for Child Welfare Memorandum: Presented to the Planning Commission', 9 July 1952, Subject File 5, R/N Papers, NMML.
[80] 'Indian Council for Child Welfare Report', 1961, File 148, AIWC Papers, NMML.

efforts to foster research and data collection on child welfare issues, and its piloting of new models of childcare and development, assisted in the passage of the 1961 Model Children's Bill.[81]

Organisations such as the National Council Child Welfare and the Cancer Institute of Madras straddled an unclear space between state and civil society, often dependent on networks of voluntary workers, but simultaneously linked into the state through streams of funding; the private sector through philanthropic fundraising and support, and the sphere of international development. This is illustrated by looking at the early financial history of the Madras Cancer Institute. When it was initially launched in 1951 as the WIA's Cancer Relief' fund[82] the Institute drew on both private philanthropy, including the voluntary efforts of bands of AIWC social workers, *and* municipal support in the form of a land grant and finances. From these efforts 'a small charity hospital of 9 beds', was opened on the 1st of June 1954.[83] From its inception, the Institute was woven into the historical fabric of the AIWC itself, so when the foundation stone for the new hospital was laid in June 1952 after the government of Madras donated a piece of land for a building, the AIWC chose to celebrate this event as part of its own Silver Jubilee Anniversary celebrations.[84]

The project was at first dismissed by government officials as prohibitive in terms of cost, particularly in the context of India's limited resources, technology and medical skills, and consequently viewed as unfeasible.[85] One of the characteristics of this generation of women activists, who were incredibly well connected to each other, as well as to various networks in civil society and the new government, was their ability to use their extensive social networks and personal influence to raise the necessary funding and other resources to get such institutions off the ground. Sarojini Varadappan, a colleague of Reddi's in the Madras WIA[86] recalled her remarkable perseverance in this regard. '[t]he way she collected funds was an art in itself. She never hesitated to approach anyone for the good cause'.[87]

[81] 'Indian Council for Child Welfare Memorandum', Subject File 5, R/N Papers, NMML.
[82] AIWC, 22nd Annual Conference Report, p. 75.
[83] AIWC, 24th Annual Conference Report, p. 73; Shanta, 'A good Samaritan' p. 57.
[84] AIWC, 22nd Annual Conference Report, p.75.
[85] Shanta, 'A good Samaritan', p. 57.
[86] The Madras WIA was also a branch of the AIWC.
[87] S.Varadappan, 'Lamp of Dedication' in Basu (ed.) *The Pathfinder: Dr Muthulakshmi Reddi*, p. 30.

Consequently, Reddi managed to get most of the major pieces of equipment needed by the Institute, donated through gifts of international philanthropy.[88]

A complex web of connections, at the centre of which were AIWC leaders such as Reddi, Tara Ali Baig, Hanna Sen and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, linked these institutions into both state and international networks of development funding. In the 1950s and 1960s the NCCW benefitted from a number of UNICEF and WHO[89] grants, which it used to develop its maternal and child welfare programmes and services. Such connections facilitated not only the exchange of resources but also skills and ideas giving these institutions standing with the Indian government and the public.

The 'welfare model' promoted by the Madras Cancer Institute, the Skippo Van Project and the NCCW, also challenged the accepted picture of the Nehruvian State as the key provider of services. These institutions demonstrate how the private sector in fact, was taking the lead in fulfilling the state's constitutional mandate of socio-economic justice. When the Cancer Institute of Madras opened in 1954, the hospital responded to an immediate need. 'Within days of opening we were flooded with patients. All of them poor', recalled the hospital's first medical Officer.[90] The Institute began life as a small project, with only nine beds, but there was scope for some of these other institutions to develop significant reach. By end of the decade, the Skippo Van project in Bombay alone was reaching 14,366 patients per annum.[91] With vans operating in eight different locations by this stage, the project had the potential to reach more than 100 000 patients per annum.

[88] Shanta, 'A good Samaritan', p. 58.
[89] Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was well recognised and respected in the international health community, having been elected president of the WHO in 1950. Her connections to the AIWC, NCCW and WHO are likely to have helped facilitate the funding relationship that developed between the WHO and Indian government in the 1950s and 1960s.
[90] Shanta, 'A good Samaritan', p. 56.
[91] See Central Skippo Committee, 'Annual Report, December 1958 to November 1959', 22 January 1960, File 402, AIWC Papers, NMML.

Conclusion

It is the survival and reinvention of some of these Gandhian elements of the model of welfare that allowed the AIWC to demand a specific and vital stake in stake in the nation building project. The AIWC, in claiming a unique role in the provision of welfare through social service, sought to carve out and create a sense of 'belonging' by positioning itself as a bridge or conduit between government and civil society, between the state and the people.

Chapter Five:

The reluctant citizen: the 'doubtful and resisting' among India's abducted women

Introduction

'I definitely know of a girl from Lahore who wishes to remain permanently in the home of her abducting husband and who has found happiness with him', wrote AIWC member Shyam Kumari Khan to AIWC President Hannah Sen in September 1951.[1] Kumari Khan was critiquing the Indian government's recovery of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim women abducted by the 'other' community during the violence and upheaval that accompanied Partition on 15th August 1947. India and Pakistan agreed that the state had an obligation to rescue abducted women and restore them to their families, and that the mass conversions and forced unions that frequently accompanied such abduction would not be recognised. To facilitate this objective, several bilateral agreements were signed between the two powers, including the Liaquat-Nehru Pact of the 8th of April 1950 to which Kumari Khan's letter refers. Although primarily concerned with guaranteeing the citizenship rights of minorities, the safe passage of refugees, and the protection of refugee property, the Pact included a clause on abducted women, which reinforced the link between abduction and forced conversion and union across religious lines.[2] Critiquing both the substance and spirit of this clause Kumari Khan illustrated in her letter how its blanket application could result in further personal hardship for the very women it sought to protect, and for its violation of the basic principles of individual freedom and self expression. This girl, Kumari Khan tells us, chose to remain behind in Lahore 'with a Pakistani Doctor and has borne a son to him'.

> [A]fter being forcibly brought to India by the Police and Recovery officers...[she] has made it clear to me that someday – whenever she is free to go back she will go to Lahore

[1] Khan to H. Sen (AIWC President), 26 September 1951, File no 147, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[2] Clause C4 of the Liaquat-Nehru Pact stated that forced conversions and unions across religious lines would not be recognised. Any conversion effected during a period of communal disturbance was to be deemed a forced conversion, and those found guilty of forcible conversion were to face punishment.

> and allow her baby to go back to his natural father...I have been informed by various officers of the Law that in case she makes any attempt at the moment to go back she will be arrested...I am now helping her to find an independent career for herself as she refuses blankly to get married here... This case has brought to my mind the question of a woman's inherent right to decide her own future. This right should definitely be considered.[3]

Creating 'order out of that chaos of human sorrow': The Indian state and relief and rehabilitation

The forging of a political identity for the Indian nation state and the shift from colonial subject to citizen emerges out of a cauldron of energy which is both creative and destructive. While Kumari Khan's colleagues in the Constituent Assembly negotiated to bring the Indian woman as autonomous political citizen into existence, the social upheaval created by the geo-political restructuring of Partition constrained such citizens from coming into being. Partition ignited wide scale communal violence along the fault lines of Bengal, the Punjab and the Sindh resulting in death and severe physical and psychological trauma. 'Millions were thrown out of their homes and all standards of civilised life were violated', a 1952 Ministry of Rehabilitation Report tells us in its opening sentences, detailing the state's relief efforts, 'children were torn away from their parents and thousands of women lost the security of their home and hearth'.[4]

The official government report into these events, *Stern reckoning: a survey of events leading up to and following partition of India,* by G.D. Khosla, placed the loss of life to both warring communities at between 200,000 and 250,000 people.[5] Other estimates such as those quoted by Menon and Bhasin double this figure, estimating a death toll of between 500,000-1,000,000.[6] The nature of the violence was heavily gendered with rape and abduction employed to mark women as the sites of community identity and honour. Public debate and state responses to the plight of women who were victims of communal violence, and those who found themselves abducted or dislocated, reveals the ongoing tension between the autonomous women as political citizen versus Indian woman as social being and site for the reworking of communal and patriarchal identities.

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[3] Ibid.

[4] 'A Report on the Care and Maintenance of Unattached women and children, the Aged and the Infirm', (Ministry of Rehabilitation), 1952, Report 1, R/N Papers, NMML.

[5] G. D. Khosla, *Stern reckoning: a survey of events leading up to and following partition of India* (Delhi, 1989), pp. 298-299.

[6] R. Menon and K. Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Delhi, 2007), p. 35.

Driven by fear and uncertainty, waves of migrants and refugees crossed the borders into the newly created countries of India and Pakistan like a 'sea of Humanity'[7] dramatically altering the demographic profile of the Punjab and Bengal regions. With the Punjab now divided, an estimated four and half million Hindus and Sikhs moved from West Punjab and Sindh into the eastern areas that became part of India, and an estimated five and half million Muslims moved in the opposite direction into their new homeland of Pakistan. In East Bengal, East Bengali Hindus who found themselves on the wrong side of the border in Pakistan began migrating into West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. By the end of 1956, a total of 3.33 million refugees had moved from East Pakistan into these regions of India.[8] Often traumatised and terror-stricken, 'they arrived, half-dead, weary, and footsore and as a result of their experience needed psychological treatment.[9]

Responding to this crisis, the Indian National Congress (INC) appointed a Central Relief Committee with Sucheta Kripalani as its Secretary, while under the chairmanship of Lady Mountbatten, a United Council for Relief and Welfare was established.[10] At a national level, the government formed a Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation under the ministership of Gopalaswami Ayyangar. State level ministries were also established in affected areas, such as West Bengal and East Punjab. Working together with voluntary associations, women's organisations and student groups, these government departments launched wide scale relief efforts. Large refugee camps such as Dhubulia and Chandmari in West Bengal, and Kingsway and Purana Qila in New Delhi were set up to house those displaced. These coordinating bodies worked together with voluntary associations, women's organisations and student groups to provide shelter, food, clothing and blankets, manage issues of sanitation, prevent the

[7] 'A Report on the Care and Maintenance of Unattached women and children', Report 1, R/N Papers, NMML
[8] For a comprehensive account of pre and post partition politics in West Bengal, and the rehabilitation of Bengali refugees see J. Chatterjee, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India: 1947-1967* (Cambridge, 2007). It is important to note that the nature of the migration across the Punjab and West Bengal differed substantially. In the case of the Punjab, the bulk of this migration took place within a period of three to four months after independence and partition. In the east however migration started off as a trickle, only developing into a flow after the communal violence of 1949 and continuing in dribs and drabs over the course of the following decade. See also Chapter 9 'And still they come' in Ray, *My Reminiscences*, pp. 152-170.
[9] Ray, *My Reminiscences*, p. 152.
[10] 'A Report on the Care and Maintenance of Unattached women and children', Report 1, R/N Papers, NMML.

outbreak of diseases and ensure the maintenance of law and order.[11] In addition, provision of schooling for refugee children had to be organised.

Longer term rehabilitation required the resettlement of refugees through the building of new urban settlements such as Chandigarh in the West Punjab and Faridabad in Haryana and relocation onto agricultural land, which was most successful in the Punjab.[12] Loans had to be provided so that refugees could start new businesses or purchase land and property. In addition, the states of India and Pakistan had to tackle the enormous task of trying to manage the compensation of property for those who had fled their homes and businesses, frequently with the intention of returning later.

Rehabilitation of the displaced was essential to the nation building project, presenting an image of a 'civilized state' with the authority and power to restore both legal and moral order:

> When the first onrush of lone women and children came, there was no agency in the country which could meet the menacing situation. But the country and people soon rose to the occasion. Government went all out to meet the demands of food, clothing and shelter; whereas voluntary workers all over the country organised themselves to supplement the efforts of official machinery. The[y] assisted in the reception and care of the people in the relief and transit camps and helped to create order out of that chaos of human sorrow and suffering.[13]

Relief and rehabilitation become an expression of state duty and responsibility to its citizens, in addition to being necessary for the construction of the productive citizen, independent, and able to contribute economically to the nation building project.

The rescue and recovery of abducted women

An important component of the Indian government's relief and rehabilitation programme included the identification and location of women who had been, or were feared to have been, abducted during the upheaval of Partition, and their restoration to their natal or conjugal families. During the course of the violence proceeding and following the 15th of August 1947 'tens of thousands of women were kept in

[11] Cholera in particular was a concern frequently accompanying the development of refugee settlements.
[12] Ray emphasised that the context of refugees differed considerably between Punjab and West Bengal. See Ray, *My Reminiscences*, pp. 152-170.
[13] 'A Report on the Care and Maintenance of Unattached women and children', Report 1, R/N Papers, NMML.

the ‘other’ country, as permanent hostages, captives or forced wives’, while their families migrated.[14] In the aftermath, the governments of both India and Pakistan were inundated with complaints by relatives of missing women, attempting to locate them through government, military or voluntary effort.[15] Abducted and dislocated women also wrote to the Indian government themselves requesting assistance.[16]

The divided Punjab was the main site of such incidents of abduction. The Sindh, Delhi Province, Bahawalpur State, the Indian States and Jammu and Kashmir also witnessed such incidents.[17] Abductions and forced conversions formed part of a broader spectrum of violence, including acts of rape, murder and mutilation, in which women came to embody communal identity and honour. When the matter was discussed in the Constituent Assembly on 15 December 1949 it was stated that 33,000 Hindu or Sikh women had been abducted by Muslims, and 50,000 Muslim women abducted by Hindu or Sikh men’.[18] ‘The important question of recovery of abducted girls from both the Dominions of India and Pakistan was agitating the public mind from the very beginning after partition’ records an Indian government Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation Report from 1949.[19] In fact, the provisional Indian government had begun to put measures in place to deal with such activities prior to Partition when violence flared in the Punjab in March 1947.

After Partition a series of meetings and bilateral agreements[20] between the governments of India and Pakistan culminated in the passing of an Ordinance in November 1948 between Pakistan and India, laying out terms for rescue and recovery, and a year later the Abducted Persons (Recovery and

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[14] Y. Khan, *The Great Partition: The making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven; London, 2007), p. 135.
[15] Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, p. 67.
[16] See S. Purushotham, ‘Sovereignty, Violence, and the Making of the Postcolonial State in India 1946-1952,’ PhD Thesis, Faculty of History, Cambridge University, 2013.
[17] R. Nehru ‘Recovery of Abducted Women Up to 15th July 1948’, (Women’s Section, Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation) undated, Report 3, R/N Papers, NMML.
[18] V. Das, ‘National Honour and Practical Kinship: Of Unwanted Women and Children’ in *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Delhi, 1996), p. 59.
[19] ‘Recovery of Abducted Women Up to 15th July 1948’, Report 3, R/N Papers, NMML.
[20] According to the first Inter-dominion agreement of 3 September 1947, and the 6 December 1947 agreement, forced conversions were not to be recognised. This position was also taken in the November 1948 ordinances, issues by both countries, the 1949 Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act and the Liaquat-Nehru Pact of the 8 April 1950. See R. Menon and K. Bhasin, ‘Recovery Rupture, Resistance: Indian State and Abduction of Women during Partition’, *EPW,* 28:17 (1993), p. WS4.

Restoration) Act (1949) was passed in India.[21] The government of Pakistan passed a similar piece of legislation to guide recovery work in its own country. No official agreement was reached between India and Pakistan regarding the management of abducted women in East Bengal. Here recovery work was managed in an informal capacity by Mridula Sarabhai, head of the Indian government's rescue operations.[22]

A whole apparatus of institutions developed to implement this rescue and recovery work, including search bureaus which were managed by a Search Services Organisation, local police and government officials, teams of social workers, transit and reception camps for recovered women and an Indo-Pakistan tribunal to adjudicate disputed cases.[23] These various processes were overseen by the Central Recovery Organisation (CRO) headed by Mridula Sarabhai. Operations were complicated and of a delicate nature, dependant on co-operation between the two dominions in an atmosphere of mutual tension and mistrust. Initially recovery was carried out by joint teams of police, social workers and rescue officials. However both countries agreed by the end of December 1947 that 'recovery would now rest on the country where the abductions had taken place.[24] This meant that each dominion was responsible for the recovery of the 'others' women and children. In Pakistan, local police and social workers tracked down Hindu and Sikh women and children who they suspected had been abducted, and then handed them over to Indian officials stationed in the country, while in India local police and social workers were responsible for tracking down and recovering Muslim women and children who were suspected victims of abduction.

On the Indian side, rescue and recovery operations were coordinated through the 'Women's Section' under The Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, with Sarabhai appointed Chief India Organiser, and Rameshwari Nehru, honorary director of the Section. The Women's Section was responsible for the

[21] This Act was extended up until 1955 when the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Continuance Bill (1955) was passed.
[22] 'Arrangements for Care of Recovered Persons in camps and homes', 29 September 1953, File no R/Govt/4 - 1953, Mridula Sarabhai Papers (hereafter M/S Papers) available on microfilm, NMML.
[23] In the early stages of the operations the Military Evacuation Organisation (MEO), the Office of the Deputy High Commissioner, the Chief Liaison officer and the Organisation for the Recovery of Abducted women were responsible for managing rescue and recovery in the Punjab.
[24] K. Patel, *Torn from the Roots: a Partition memoir* (translated from the original Gujarati by Uma Randeria), (New Delhi, 2006), p. xxi.

management and rehabilitation of a number of categories of vulnerable women and children, including those who had been separated from their families, and women and children left without guardians and widows. The Section worked to locate families and relatives, coordinated vocational training and managed long term institutional care. In 1950, the Central Recovery Organisation was established under the directorship of Mridula Sarabhai, to coordinate all recovery activities. This structure was moved from the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, and placed under the Ministry of External Affairs.

Local search service bureaus under the Search Services Organisation were set up in affected areas like East Punjab, especially near refugee camps, to liaise with communities, and facilitate the reporting of missing persons.[25] Through this liaison process, lists of missing Hindu and Sikh women were compiled, and then handed over to the Pakistani government for further investigation. Once a woman had been recovered, she would be placed in a transit camp - normally in the country in which she had been found - and then transported across the border to a reception camp where she would be reunited with her relatives or would await her future fate. Between December 1947 and August 1955, as a result of such rescue and recovery efforts 9032 Hindu and Sikh women and children were recovered from the Pakistani regions of Punjab, North Eastern Frontier, Baluchistan and Jammu and Kashmir while 20 728 Muslim women were recovered from the Indian regions of the Punjab, Patiala, East Punjab, Rajasthan and Jammu and Kashmir.[26]

Fear or rebellion? The 'doubtful and resisting' of India's abducted women

Those involved in the rescue and recovery operations found themselves in particular difficulty when the supposed victims they had sought to rescue and restore to their families, resisted their attempts and countered state sanctioned narratives of kidnapping, violence and coercion with alternative narratives of choice, freedom or resignation. Such individuals were referred to in official Rehabilitation Reports as 'doubtful and resisting' women. Their resistance took a number of forms and was motivated by a range of factors. Some women refused to change out of the clothes they were wearing when they were

[25] Das, 'National Honour and Practical Kinship', p. 67.
[26] See Appendix II: Number of women and children recovered from Pakistan and India (December 1947-August 1955) in Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, pp. 264-267.

recovered. Others tried to escape from the camps or threatened suicide.[27] Both Rameshwari Nehru and Mridula Sarabhai mention reports of Muslim women in Ambala going on hunger strike to resist being forcibly returned to Pakistan, in their correspondence.[28] Rescue officials were quick to dismiss this resistance as illegitimate. A Ministry brief from 1948, with the sub-heading 'Problem of Doubtful and Resisting Women' reports incidents of rescued women who 'resent being taken out of their present surroundings and stage violent demonstrations when they are brought to the transit camps'. But goes on to conclude that 'experience has shown that the resentment and stubbornness on the part of these women' is due to fear of their future and of public opinion, doubts concerning how they will be received by their original families and a 'sense of shame on having lost their honour'.[29]

The tension between the Indian woman as autonomous political citizen versus Indian woman as a social being and site for the reworking of communal and patriarchal identities, was brought to the fore in cases of 'doubtful and resisting' women. This chapter focuses on the case study of Kumari Khan's girl from Lahore, a Hindu or Sikh woman, who chose to remain in Pakistan and marry a Muslim husband, and her counterpart Nissa, also known by her Indian alias, as Shanti of Alwar, a resisting Muslim women recovered in Rajasthan, and claimed by Pakistan, who appears in Mridula Sarabhai's correspondence, to highlight this tension, and to reflect on how it exposes the ambiguous and unsettled relationship between women and the new Indian nation state. The stories of these two women go against the grain of the meta-narrative of victimisation, coercion and violation, underpinning the Indian state's legitimacy as protector and guardian. This chapter traces the impact of the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act of 1949, and the surrounding institutions and culture of recovery work, on the life trajectory of these two women, exploring the complex ways in which law and ideas of justice were co-opted in the remaking of post-colonial patriarchy, and exposing the limitations of the principles of law, and the 'liberal citizen' for a politics of substantive equality. The concluding section of this chapter focuses on the differing responses of Mridula

[27] Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, p.97.
[28] R. Nehru, 'Memorandum on Recovery of Women: Review of the position since October 1948 June 1949', Report no 1, R/N Papers, NMML.
[29] 'Memorandum on Recovery of Abducted Women Up to 15th July 1948', Report 3, R/N Papers, NMML.

Sarabhai and Rameshwari Nehru, who both played leading roles in recovery operations, as they attempted to reconcile their roles as state bureaucrats with their feminist principles.

The Indian state would have taken an interest in Nissa and Kumari Khan's girl from Lahore for different reasons. In the case of the latter, because Kumari Khan's relatives were Hindu or Sikh and because they had settled in India after Partition, this young woman would have been classified as a citizen of India, belonging within the fold of the Indian nation state. On these grounds she would have been claimed by India, as one of the thousands of 'Sitas' in need of rescue and recovery, to restore 'dignity' to both sanctity of the Hindu family and the nation state. According to the bilateral agreement signed between India and Pakistan on the 6th of December 1947, and Clause C4 of the latter Nehru-Liaquat Pact, her marriage, and status as wife and mother to a Muslim man in Pakistan would have held no legal weight, and her child would have also been considered illegitimate. On this basis she would have been recovered from Lahore by Pakistani rescue officials under the Pakistani side of the bilateral agreement. After which she would have been handed into the custody of Indian social workers and officials in Lahore, who would have brought her and her son to Allahabad in the United Provinces. If her family and relatives had been located, she appears to have made the decision not to return to them. She did not want to remarry, but sought independence, and this is most probably how she came into contact with Kumari Khan, who was the General Secretary of the Allahabad branch of the All India Save the Children Committee.

Having grown up in a Muslim family, who had relocated to Pakistan, the Indian government's interest in Nissa or Shanti of Alwar stemmed from a concern with policing the 'purity' of the 'Hindu' nation by restoring her to her 'authentic' Muslim family in Pakistan. Nissa's identification as a Muslim and the settlement of her family in Pakistan; together with the fact she was living as a Hindu or Sikh in India, would have defined her according to the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act of India as an abducted person:

> abducted person' means a male child under the age of sixteen years or a female of whatever age who is, or immediately before the 1st day of March, 1947, was a Muslim and who, on or after that day and before the first day of January, 1949, has become separated from his or her family and is found to be living with or under the control of any

other individual or family, and in the latter case includes a child born to any such female after said date.[30]

Under the terms of this Act she would have been recovered, forcibly if necessary, and placed in a transit camp in India with other recovered Muslim women, under the control of Pakistani social workers, while she awaited the necessary arrangements to be made for her transportation across the border and reunification with her family.

Although the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act of India referred to *Muslim women* abducted by Hindus and Sikhs in India[31] Menon and Bhasin argue that in the public and parliamentary discourse that accompanied the recovery operations in India, *Hindu* and *Sikh* women in *Pakistan* were the 'real subjects' of the Act, with only 'token concessions' being made 'regarding moral lapses on the part of the Indian people'.[32] In these narratives the violation of Hindu and Sikh women is by default always committed by the 'other', or the 'other' community, with Muslim men as the perpetrators and the Hindu husband, father or son the legitimate guardian and protector. 'The terms within which the debate were conducted, reveal individual as well as commonly held biases that make it clear that the communal dimension was never lost sight of'.[33]

As Kumari Khan's letter at the beginning of this chapter implies, the young women she befriended in Allahabad who had been rescued from Lahore, had been recovered against her will, as were many other recorded cases of Hindu and Sikh women in Pakistan. Her resistance had not been acknowledged by the mechanics of rescue and recovery. Perhaps at the time of these events she did not speak out, and her resistance was only registered after these events, once she found herself in India. Even if she had spoken out at the time it is unlikely that her objections would have been

[30] Appendix I Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act 1949 (Act No. LXV of 1949) in Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, p. 261.
[31] The rescue of Hindu and Sikh women in Pakistan was beyond the jurisdiction of the Indian state, and therefore had to be facilitated through the Pakistani side of bilateral agreements and its own national legislation. The Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act of 1949 did however provide for the placement of Hindu and Sikh women in Indian run camps in Pakistan and their restoration and rehabilitation from this point onwards.
[32] Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, p. 92.
[33] Ibid, p. 93.

regarded. According to the 6th of December 1947 bilateral agreement, abducted women were to be recovered regardless of their will.

The 1949 Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act of India attempted to make provision in cases of resistance, by constituting an Indo-Pakistani tribunal to adjudicate on such cases, and it was under these terms of the Act, that Nissa's story came to be registered as one such case. According to a Central Recovery Organisation circular, from the start of recovery work up until 30th November 1949, 1,464 disputed cases were registered out of a total of 18,729 cases of recovered women from India and Pakistan.[34] They were only a minority of the total number of rescued and recovered women, but at 7.8 per cent they were not an insignificant minority, both numerically and symbolically, sounding a 'discordant note' in the official narrative of successful rehabilitation and the subsequent nation building story.

The resistance of Kumari Khan's girl from Lahore, and Nissa or Shanti of Alwar endowed these two women with specific identities that distinguished them from the thousands of faceless and nameless statistics of rescue and recovery, bringing their personalities and their stories into the archives.[35] But these were also conflictual identities, exposing the latent contradictions inherent in the Indian state's categorisation of 'legitimate' and illegitimate citizens. The duel identity of Nissa or Shanti of Alwar illustrates this contradiction. For both India and Pakistan it was ideologically necessary for her to be Nissa. But through her resistance to recovery, and her wish to remain with her current family in India, she claimed Shanti of Alwar as her authentic identity. Shanti means peace in Hindi. Had her new name and identity possibly been part of a conscious choice to remake a fresh life, rather than being

[34] The total number of persons recovered in India up to 30 November 1949 was recorded as 12,478, while those recovered from Pakistan came to 6,251, making a total of 18,729. Of this number 252 cases were disputed in Pakistan and 1,212 in India, making a total of 1,464 disputed cases. These figures were taken from 'Recovery of Abducted Persons Tribunal and its Problems', (Central Recovery Office), 5 December 1949, R/Govt 15 1948-54, R/M Papers (on microfilm), NMML. Not all disputed cases would have involved resisting women. Cases could also have been disputed if there were different family members and relatives vying for guardianship of the woman or if the abductor filed a case against the rescue and recovery operations.

[35] Here I wish to clarify that I am not necessarily defining resistance as a conscious act of agency on the part of these women, however, I am using a broader interpretation of the act of resistance as a means of imagining subjectivity for them as historical characters. Agency can take many forms, from consent, to transgression and subversion. I agree with Janaki Nair that there is a need to redefine agency in feminist historiography, to acknowledge the complexity and particular historical situated-ness of its construction. See J. Nair, 'On the Question of Agency in Indian Feminist Historiography', *Gender and History,* 6:1 (April 1994), pp.83, 87.

imposed through an act of coercion and violation? Grounded in the absoluteness and righteousness of recovery as an act of restoring the Hindu nation, the 1949 Act despite the introduction of special measures such as the Indo-Pakistani tribunal, could not conceive of such a possibility.

The Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act (1949)

When the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Bill was introduced into the Indian Lok Sabha in December 1949, it was met with significant opposition. Opponents criticised the indiscriminate powers given to local police and rescue officials which were easily open to abuse, and highlighted the loopholes in the Bill's definition of an abducted person, condemning the Bill for its failure to take into consideration the will of the woman involved. Gopalaswami Ayyangar, Minister of Relief and Rehabilitation, who introduced the Bill, was cautious in his response to this last point of criticism. He was not prepared to include in the Bill a mechanism to ensure that 'no unwilling woman was forced to return to her country', 'Despite the urging of some members', he 'simply gave a verbal assurance that no compulsion or coercion would be used', claiming that 'he had never came across such a case of women being pushed to go back against her will'.[36] This cleverly allowed the Minister to counter this criticism, and claim adherence to liberal democratic practices, without having these securely inscribed into the law. The Act was passed ultimately with no amendments.[37]

The particular definition of an abducted person according to the Act, and the policy of enforced rescue and recovery for those fitting the category, regardless of the will of the individual involved, meant that Act, and the rescue and recovery operation facilitating its implementation, could misidentify cases of abduction, or coerce those who fitted the definition regardless of their actual circumstances and background, into recovery. Both Nissa and Kumari Khan's girl from Lahore appear to have become victims of such coercion.

Kumari Khan's girl from Lahore would have grown up in a Hindu or Sikh family in the cosmopolitan city of Lahore. Her family and relatives are likely to have been one of the many groups of refugees who fled the city when communal riots and violence broke out in March, April and July of 1947 or

[36] Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, p. 105.
[37] Ibid, pp. 105-106.

during the ‘August Anarchy’. Alternatively, they might have been part of a smaller number of migrants who chose to leave their homes and businesses either on a temporary or permanent basis to resettle in India. The circumstances under which this particular young woman got left behind, or chose to stay in Lahore remain unknown. As do the exact circumstances of her marriage to the Pakistani doctor. Her’s might have been a genuine case of abduction, but even if this was so, the circumstances of abduction could vary widely.[38] *Stern Reckoning* records many incidents of women being kidnapped while hiding or trying to escape their homes during communal riots and violence. The arduous forced migrations that were central to the experience of Partition for so many families were also often accompanied by large scale abduction and conversion of women and children.[39] In other instances women found themselves abandoned or given away by their families to barter their own safe passage. There were cases of fathers who decided to marry their daughters to the sons of neighbouring Muslims or Hindus in order to protect them from the danger of violation. Family narratives collected by Veena Das reveal evidence that, ‘sometimes, Muslim men married Hindu girls and Hindu or Sikh men married Muslim girls, especially if they were from the same village, to save them from the dishonour of being abducted by unknown men’.[40]

Many women who were located did have brutal stories to tell and were happy to be reunited with their families or relatives. Not all abducted women were converted and married, some found themselves in situations open to exploitation and human trafficking, forced to become domestic workers, or sex workers, or subject to other forms of bonded labour. For such individuals, recovery offered an escape, a welcome reunion with family, or simply a new chance at life. But reunion and reintegration too, could be a painful and difficult process. Rejection and shunning by family, heightened in the case of returning with children from a ‘wrongful’ union were real concerns, with the Indian government, and Gandhi himself, appealing to the Indian public to accept these women back with open arms.

[38] Ibid, p. 90.
[39] Ibid, p. 20.
[40] Das, ‘National Honour and Practical Kinship’, p. 75.

While '[s]ome women never recovered from Partition, others saw in this rupture a moment of unexpected liberation for themselves *as women'*.[41] In such cases, women might have taken advantage of the dispersal and disruption of authority to marry partners of their choice, rather than those designated and approved by parents and elders. Others might have been taken in situations of force, but then found themselves integrated into contexts where they had greater freedom. Kumari Khan's girl from Lahore might have been one such case. Alternatively she might have been one of a spectrum of cases, which started in an incident of abduction, but where under a range of circumstances she was then integrated into the family of her abductor.

'We have been entrusted with not only a humanitarian problem, but our activities lead to the 'making and unmaking' of lives, and therefore I have always pleaded with my colleagues that we should be extremely careful in dealing with cases, give individual attention to it and not fall into the tendency of [a] mass approach to the problem in a routine way'[42] wrote Mridula Sarabhai to Raja Rana of Jubbal the Under Secretary to the Government of India, discussing the correct procedures to be followed in rescue and recovery operations. Despite Mridula's plea, the rigid ideological underpinnings of the Act and the nature of the institutional and bureaucratic mechanisms put in place to facilitate its implementation, worked against the possibility of assessing cases individually. The Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act was, in fact, dependent upon the tyranny of such a mechanised and bureaucratic approach. For Kumari Khan's girl, the mechanisms of the Act were indeed to result in the 'unmaking' of the life that she had begun to build with her Pakistani husband in Lahore.

There were two ways in which an individual could be identified as a potential case of abduction. If she was suspected of being someone on a list of missing persons, or if rescue and recovery officials, operating in the area, identified her as a suspected case, perhaps someone from a different background who had recently come to live with the household. Proof was not required, suspicion on the part of

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[41] Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, p. 19. This argument is also made by Anjali Bhardwaj Datta in her article 'Gendering Oral History of Partition: Interrogating Patriarchy' in *EPW*, 41:22 (3-9 June), p. 2229.
[42] Sarabhai to Raja Rana of Jubbal (Under secretary to the Government of India), 7 February 1953, File no R/Govt/4 -1953, M/S Papers (on microfilm), NMML.

local police and social workers was sufficient to allow the woman to be taken into custody while further investigation was carried out.

Because the Act designated responsibility for recovery to the country in which the individual was located, Pakistani officials, local police and social workers would have been responsible for tracking down Kumari Khan's girl from Lahore in her home in Lahore. She would have then been taken to the transit camp in Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in Lahore, especially designated for recovered Hindu and Sikh women and children where she would have been handed over to Indian authorities. The Sir Ganga Ram Hospital was one of a number of Indian run transit camps set up to house rescued Hindu and Sikh women while their circumstances were further investigated and ascertained, and as preparations were made to transport them across the border. Other camps were located in the districts of Sheikhupura, Multan, Montgomery, Lyallpur and Sargodha.[43] From here Kumari Khan's girl from Lahore would have been taken across the border into India and placed in the Gandhi Vanita Ashram in Julandhar, following which she would have been moved to a camp or home in Allahabad.

If she had been recovered on suspicion, but without being reported missing by family or relatives in India, social workers would have followed a similar procedure and attempted to locate relatives or family once she arrived in the country. Being unsuccessful in these efforts, an arranged marriage seems to have been suggested as an alternative. Arranged marriages were regularly employed as a rehabilitation strategy for various categories of displaced women who were not self supporting and left without families or guardians to maintain them. State marriage bureaus were established to facilitate such efforts, and at a local level social workers played an active role in sourcing suitable bridegrooms, raising donations for dowry and arranging wedding ceremonies. The state and its institutions of welfare and rehabilitation took on the mantel of the 'Indian family' in these circumstances, assuming responsibility for the care and maintenance of displaced women through such endeavours. But as Kumari Khan reports in her letter 'she refuses blankly to get married here'. She would have then been exposed to a course of 'occupational therapy' to equip her with a skill, often seam stressing or tailoring, to enable her to earn an independent living, or she would have been

[43] A. Basu, *Mridula Sarabhai: Rebel with a Cause* (New Delhi, 1996), p. 129.

placed in a liability camp, an institution of care run by the state or by a voluntary organisation. Kumari Khan is most likely to have come into contact with this young woman during this process of rehabilitation through her work in the All India Save the Children Committee, the Allahabad All India Women's Conference, or another local civic organisation such as the YMCA, which were all involved in relief and rehabilitation efforts.

Nissa's journey would have been the counter version to Kumari Khan's 'girl from Lahore'. Nissa was tracked down by the Central Recovery Organisation in the town of Alwar in Rajasthan. She had grown up as a Muslim, but at the time of her recovery was living as a Hindu in India, married to a Hindu husband, while her Muslim relatives had relocated to Western Punjab in Pakistan. After her recovery Nissa would have been placed at a base camp in Delhi which had been specifically set up in 1948 to accommodate 'resisting' Muslim women who had been recovered from Alwar, Bharatpur and Delhi province.[44] Because Nissa resisted recovery and because her 'husband', or according to the Indian state, her 'abductor', then filed a suit in the Punjab High court against her detention, hers became a disputed case, and her journey across the border was delayed.[45]

Recent feminist scholarship offers a critical analysis of how such rescue and recovery operations revealed the '[m]ultiple patriarchies of community, family and state as experienced by women in their transition to freedom' and the complicities between them.[46] In giving the government extended powers to take action in the name of the sanctity of the Hindu family, and the restoration of abducted women to their 'legitimate' place within the home, the Act reinforced a bureaucratic and policy understanding of women as legal minors. Furthermore, because an abducted women's identity, indeed, her claim to citizenship, came to be inextricably linked to her relationship with a specific religious community, as a Hindu, Sikh or Muslim, religious identity was reworked as the basis for citizenship and belonging, undermining the secular, democratic and neutral claims of the new nation state.

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[44] 'Recovery of Abducted Women Up to 15th July 1948', Report 3, R/N Papers, NMML.
[45] Basu, *Mridula Sarabhai: Rebel with a Cause*, p. 142.
[46] Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, p. 20.

The Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act was an extraordinary piece of legislation in certain respects, chafing against many of the other constitutional and legislative trends and developments in India at the time. The excessive powers required to implement rescue and recovery operations necessitated legislation in the first place. In the initial stages of rescue and recovery, prior to the introduction of the Ordinance in November 1948, actions, such as trespassing on private property without a search warrant and detaining persons against their will - which were required for the successful execution of rescue and recovery operations - left the Indian state open to challenge on the grounds of law. In April 1948 such a challenge was brought against the Indian State in its claimed role of protector and custodian of abducted Hindu and Sikh women. Kamla Patel, a social worker and associate of Mridula Sarabhai, working in West Pakistan recalled this event in her memoirs. As part of the Indian team of rescue and recovery officials, she received a summons one day to appear before the Lahore High Court. The case involved seven women and children classified as Hindu or Sikh and hence 'belonging' to India, who had been recovered by Pakistani police in Western Punjab and then handed over to Indian rescue officials, where they were interred at the Ganga Ram hospital Camp in Lahore, the Indian transit camp from which they were to be sent across the border to India.

The supposed abductors of these women and children in Pakistan had brought a writ of habeas corpus against Indian rescue workers, operating on behalf of the Indian state. Their lawyers argued that that these women and children were being detained against their will in the hospital camp, and the Indian social workers and rescue officials had no authority to detain them if they wished to leave. The Court found in favour of the complainant and ordered all seven women and children to be released immediately, arguing that without legal sanction the bilateral agreement reached between India and Pakistan could not be used to enforce or justify such detention, 'as long as this understanding between India and Pakistan did not take the shape of law, its value in court was that of a blank piece of paper'.[47]

The governmental and public rhetoric around rescue and recovery in India suggests that even without legal sanction, the Indian state had, from the beginning, always considered its recovery actions moral

[47] Patel, *Torn from the Roots*, p. 105; Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, p. 112.

and justifiable. Recovery officials, such as Patel, saw the court order as an act of sabotage on the part of the Pakistani bureaucracy and government, intended to derail rescue and recovery efforts in West Punjab rather than a matter of respect for the principles of law.

The Indian Ordinance of 1948 and the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act of 1949 were therefore both premised on the necessity of developing legal structures and authority to enable rescue and recovery institutions and mechanisms to carry out their work undeterred. However, in so doing, they took the problematic practices of rescue and recovery, together with the moral worldview and gender relations they were grounded on, legitimising these, and building them into the structure of the state by inscribing them into law. The Act was intended to prevent individuals from questioning and suing the government for actions undertaken as part of the rescue and recovery process. For this it was necessary to grant the police, tribunal and various other government officials, power to define and control 'abducted' women. For example, section 8 of the Act stated that detention in a camp could not be questioned by a court while and section 9 'Protection of action taken under Act' proclaimed that no suit or prosecution would be able to be brought against the national government for their pursuance of this Act.[48]

Caught between national pride and the law: the limitations of the liberal citizenship

The introduction of the new Act, however, created another set of problems for the Indian state, because it operated in tension with some of the basic legal principles and ethos of the new Indian Constitution. The Act was passed in December 1949 and in (January) 1950 India's new Constitution came into effect. Whereas before, individuals had been able to challenge the rescue and recovery operations on the grounds that they were not sanctioned by law, now rescue and recovery operations could be challenged on the basis of the unconstitutionality of the legislation authorising them. The co-existence of these two legal documents, The Indian Constitution and the 1949 Act, actually enabled 'abductors' and those with a vested interest in a particular case, to take the Indian government to court on this basis. Since the introduction of the Act, abductors had tried to 'drag us into the Court and this

[48] See Clauses 8 and 9 of the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act, 1949 (Act No. LXV of 1949) in Appendix I, Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, p. 263.

has increased with the introduction of the Constitution' bemoaned Sarabhai.[49] Here she was referring to a number of cases involving the writ of habeas corpus that had been brought against the Indian state in the High Court of East Punjab regarding the detention of Muslim women in transit camps, waiting to be restored to Pakistan. These cases resulted in the East Punjab High Court giving a judgement declaring the Act ultra vires by virtue of Article 22 of the Indian Constitution. The Court ordered the release of all persons in all camps and gave a judgement that no recovered woman could be repatriated to Pakistan as they were henceforth citizens of India.[50] Consequently, after June 1952 recovery work was halted, and it was only once the Supreme Court of India over-ruled the judgement of the East Punjab High Court, that it could recommence.[51] As a consequence of this judgement, the Central Recovery Organisation decided to only investigate and recover 'such new cases in which there were guides or definite information from the relatives or according to the list supplied to us'.[52]

In both the 1948 Lahore case in Pakistan and the East Punjab High Court in India, the abductors claimed the writ of habeas corpus, the very language of citizenship, to challenge rescue and recovery in an attempt to use, or rather abuse, constitutional principles for a clearly unintended and unjust purpose. One of the intended functions of the Act was to prevent this type of abuse, but in so doing it was itself implicated in undermining these principles, by denying recovered women the chance to have a voice in their own future.

Since the Act classified certain situations as forced conversions and refused to recognise such conversions as legitimate, the Act worked to deny the possibility of the exercise of choice, in the operation of rescue and recovery, undermining one of the foundational principles of liberal democratic citizenship, that of free will. Kumari Khan's critique of the government's rescue and recovery operations, used a claim to this particular liberal understanding of citizenship to make her case, 'This case has brought to my mind the question of a women's inherent right to decide her own

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[49] 'The Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration Act)', 20 June 1952, R/Govt/14-1949-55, M/S Papers (on microfilm), NMML.
[50] 'Report on the Recovery of Abducted Persons for the period June 52 to October 52', File R/MS/20, M/S Papers (on microfilm), NMML.
[51] Basu, *Mridula Sarabhai: Rebel with a Cause*, pp. 139-140.
[52] Ibid.

future. This right should definitely be considered'.[53] At the time of her recovery however, no mechanism was in place to prevent such misuse. It was only in 1954, more than three years after, that an Indo-Pakistani government decision was taken to ensure that in the operations of the Act women would not be rescued and recovered against their wishes.

Kumari Khan's letter of complaint at the beginning of this chapter illustrates how the concept of liberal citizenship and India's commitment to such citizenship, was drawn on to challenge the workings and application of the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act. But the Indian woman as individual with access to the 'right' of choice was not only evident in critiques of the Act it was also incorporated into the justificatory discourse of rescue and recovery itself. Even though the Rescue and Recovery of Abducted Persons Act with its communal underpinnings, and patriarchal ethos dismissed the individual in favour of group interests, Hindu and male, it too laid claim to the language of choice[54]. Consider, for example, the language of 'choice' employed in the Indian National Congress's resolution in November 1946[55] on abducted women, which states 'Women who have been abducted and forcibly married must be restored to their houses; mass conversions have no significance or validity and people must be given every opportunity to return to the life of their choice'.[56]

Mridula Sarabhai and Rameshwari Nehru: reconciling fear and choice

Sarabhai framed the necessity of rescue and recovery in terms of the duty of the state to its citizens but she also drew on the notion of the abducted woman as an individual, and her right to a life of her

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[53] Khan to H. Sen, 26 September 1951, File 147, AIWC Papers, NMML.

[54] Tanika Sarkar illustrates how problematic the concept of consent can be as indicator or women's emancipation in her analysis of the discourse and debate around the Age of Consent Bill in Colonial Bengal in the 1890s. During the course of this debate, the woman as 'rights-bearing' citizen became visible for the first time, providing a new conceptual framework for thinking about women as individuals and legal beings, however, the right to consent in this context did not necessarily free women from their social and scriptural confines, in fact, particular interpretations of consent, as Sarkar argues, became a way to tie women back into these confines in new ways. For example, by linking consent to medical opinion on the physical capacities of women's bodies. See T. Sarkar. 'A Prehistory of Rights: The Age of Consent Debate in Colonial Bengal' in *Feminist Studies*, 26:3 (Fall 2000), pp. 614-617.

[55] The INC's Resolution of November 1946 was the first conscious state policy on abducted women and children. It acknowledged the obligation of the INC towards the recovery and restoration of abducted women, and agreed that forced conversions would not be recognised. It set the terms of the 6 December 1947 bilateral agreement, the 1948 Ordinances and the 1949 Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act. See Das, 'National Honour and Practical Kinship', pp. 60-61.

[56] Indian National Congress, Resolution 6 November 1946, quoted in Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, p. 69.

choice, to justify the recovery actions. In her approach the seeming contradiction between the necessity of forced recovery and its underlying motive, of protecting the possibility of choice was resolved through evoking the idea of a false consciousness. Sarabhai had a strong opinion on the motives behind 'doubtful and resisting' women which was shaped by her own convictions, concerning the social, political and moral importance of rescue and recovery for India as both a humane and democratic state. She believed that all 'doubtful and resisting' women, such as Nissa, were victims, driven by fear, who resisted because they were afraid of both the consequences of defying their abductors as well as rejection and shame by their original families. Sarabhai believed, like many of the Indian social workers implementing India's recovery operations on the ground, that this 'fear complex' encouraged rescued women to protect their abductors, by lying about their circumstances, because they were afraid of them or because they were concerned about rejection and shame if they returned to their natal families and communities. This same line of reasoning was reflected in the official government position on the issue, as articulated in the 1948 Ministry of Rehabilitation Report: 'Experience has shown that the resentment and stubbornness on the part of these women' is due to fear of their future and of public opinion, doubts concerning how they will be received by their original families and a 'sense of shame on having lost their honour'.[57]

These fears were in some circumstances completely justified. Forced conversions and marriage targeted the sexuality of women, just as the Indian state's interest in the rescue and recovery of women was premised not 'upon their definition as citizens, but as sexual and reproductive beings. The honour of the nation was at stake because women as sexual and reproductive beings were forcibly held by the other side'.[58] As both the physical and cultural bearers of the nation, a woman's sexuality was invested with the identity and honour of the community, and was therefore especially vulnerable. To counteract this, a campaign was launched by the Indian government to encourage families and communities to accept rescued women back with 'open arms'. But this could not necessarily account for all cases of resistance.

[57] 'Recovery of Abducted Women Up to 15th July 1948', Report 3, R/N Papers, NMML.
[58] Das, 'National Honour and Practical Kinship', p. 68.

This ‘fear complex’, which Sarabhai believed acted as a false consciousness, driving the behaviour of such abducted women, made it imperative for her and her team of social workers to represent the best interests of such women. It was only in restoring these women to their kin and to an environment of safety, familiarity and belonging that the possibility of choice and with it the authentic voice of these women could be ‘recovered’. To do this Sarabhai insisted that rescued women be made to feel at home and comfortable in the transit camps:

> ‘In camps not only physical needs of recovered persons have to be catered for but special effort has to be made to create an atmosphere of confidence and retaliation from fear. So efforts are made that these camps and homes do not become “Dharm Salas or Detention Camps”, but a “Home” atmosphere is created...On arrival a recovered person is a bundle of nerves, full of tensions and moods. On one side she is a victim of fear complex of the future- a nervous wreck- on the other hand she is furious. Is she a prisoner, a criminal that police should bring her in camps? So to all such new arrivals friendly and homely approach has to be made...The camps in charge and other members staying in the camp to create a feeling that the static guard posted outside is not there to safeguard against escapes from camps, against recovered persons, but to save and protect them from attacks of dacoits’.[59]

But her instructions in themselves reveal the instability and ambiguity of the Indian state’s claim as paternal protector. What makes these camps ‘Homes’ as opposed to ‘Detention camps’? Are these women being protected from their own fear and from the outside world of their abductors, or are they being imprisoned? Are they being protected until they resist?

The very language of these rescue and recovery institutions and mechanisms speaks to their institutionalising and coercive nature. Documents dealing with the administration of interment and transit camps often refer to residents as inmates, while the workings of the tribunal use terms associated with trial and judgement, such as evidence and truth.

Sarabhai agreed that the consent of the victim had to be taken into consideration, but she argued that the conditions under which this consent was granted should determine its validity. In the case of Nissa a disagreement arose between Sarabhai and A. L. Fletcher the high powered Officer in charge of administering disputed cases in India, precisely around this issue of obtaining of consent, bringing part of Nissa’s story, or rather a particular interpretation of her story into the archival records. Fletcher

[59] ‘Arrangements for Care of Recovered Persons in camps and homes’, 29 September 1953, R/Govt/4 -1953, M/S Papers (on microfilm), NMML.

interviewed Nissa while she was interned in India and decided that because she was over 21 her wish to remain with her adopted family in Alwar should be respected and that she should be allowed to return to live with them.[60] Mridula disagreed with his assessment. Sarabhai advocated that rescued women needed to have a chance to meet their family and relatives and return to their 'correct' homeland prior to consent being obtained. She argued that Nissa should not have been asked her opinion until she had been sent back to live with her relatives in the Punjab, and had had a couple of months to adjust to her new life and to gain assurance that she would be accepted and protected by her original family.[61]

Mridula Sarabhai is a perplexing case study in many respects. Her conviction of the moral necessity of rescue and recovery, and her passion in implementing the Indian state's programme, initially seem to place her firmly within the patriarchal and paternal framework of such rescue and recovery operations. As the architect of the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act, and as a driving force behind its implementation, her actions ally her with the conservative wing of Congress, who opposed the reform of the Hindu Code Bill, and the Hindu Mahasabha who used the rescue and recovery of abducted women to articulate a notion of the Indian citizen grounded on Hinduness and to incite communal discord. On closer analysis, however, it becomes evident that her personal and political support for rescue and recovery was far more complex.

Mridula Sarabhai's career in the nationalist movement, her lifestyle, and her politics do not sit easily with this initial positioning. Her personal contacts and good relations with Pakistan, including Prime Minister Jinnah (which assisted her in getting the bilateral cooperation necessary for the workings of the Ordinances and Act) and her support for Sheikh Abdullah, Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir state, against the wishes of Jawaharlal Nehru[62] discredit a communal bias towards India.

[60] See correspondence between Sarabhai and Fletcher in File no: R/Govt/13-1949-55, M/S Papers (on microfilm), NMML.
[61] Ibid.
[62] See Basu, *Mridula Sarabhai: Rebel with a Cause*, p. 144.

Sarabhai was an outspoken advocate for women's equality in society, but did not espouse the social feminism of many of her generation.[63] She saw liberation in the ability of women to be able to 'claim' and own for themselves the attributes of masculinity. With her bobbed hair and her salwar kameez she did not fit neatly into the image of the traditional Indian social worker. In her own presentation Sarabhai rejected feminine qualities such as 'shyness, softness, helplessness, dependency, lady like manners, which she regarded as hindering women's progress:

> I don't want to be a doll for show either for men or society. I don't want to be artificial, unnatural...I have tried to keep away from the so called womanly qualities and, tried to cultivate certain manly qualities which I consider essential for a woman- desire for adventure, daringness, self confidence, discipline, ability to do one's work, control one's mind and emotions, one's physique and way of walking should be that of a soldier[64].

Sarabhai also had a strong sense of justice. 'Any form of injustice aroused her passion'.[65] She was outraged at the way in which women had been used in the conflict between communities during Partition. 'To all these women, Mridula's advice always was that they should not suffer such humiliation; they should learn to be independent and self-reliant and then men would respect them'.[66] Strongly influenced by Gandhian thinking she resented the way in which women were treated as 'dolls and objects of indulgence', and sought instead an identity for women as 'crusaders in common service'.[67] In Sarabhai's worldview abduction, rape and gendered violence showed the ultimate lack of respect for women in society. She saw this as an injustice that had to be corrected, and could only be done so through the rescue and recovery of such women. It was an idealised vision and it was ideological. For her, as Aparna Basu stresses 'social work was the other face of politics'.[68] She was passionate in her beliefs and actions, rather than self reflective and often aggressive in her approach.

Mridula Sarabhai was driven by a particular kind of gender politics which had an emancipatory objective. However, the methods that she came to employ to achieve these objectives, namely the Rescue and Recovery Act and its implementation, aligned with other interest groups driven by very

[63] Ibid, p. 69.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid, pp. 68-69.
[66] Ibid, p. 75.
[67] Ibid, p. 232.
[68] Bhasin and Menon, *Borders and Boundaries*, p. 191.

different agendas. Sarabhai and her team of social workers show how communities of women could become complicit in the structures of a reworked national patriarchy even with the best intentions.

The Indian state's rescue and recovery operations drew in many women activists, eager to participate in rebuilding the nation. From the social workers in the transit and holding camps, to bureaucrats such as Renuka Ray and Rameshwari Nehru in the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation. Even AIWC branches became involved in these efforts running a propaganda campaign to encourage families to embrace their recovered women with open arms. Did all of these women, like Sarabhai, become complicit in the mechanics of recovery, which left their sisters such as Nissa and Kumari Khan's girl from Lahore in a state of perpetual exile?

The final section of this chapter looks at the particular response developed by Rameshwari Nehru, to the rescue and recovery operations. As honorary director of the women's section of the government of India's Relief and Rehabilitation Ministry, Nehru had initially supported the rescue and recovery operations. However, her experience working within the field soon led her to change her mind. After about a year into her post, she concluded that operations were not achieving their intended purpose, and that the removal of women who had settled with their new families and made peace with their new situation would only cause further harm to those it was intended to help. Nehru developed a maternal protective conceptualisation of citizenship, which provided a way of reconciling or negotiating between the absolute certainties and rigidities of paternal protective citizenship, and the abstract idealism of liberal citizenship.

Maternal citizenship acknowledged the importance of government protection for women, and recognised the importance of the family and 'moral' society, but was also far more self reflexive in terms of its recognition of the limitations of the state to fulfil such obligations. '[W]e must admit that we have sent away these unwilling and helpless women to a future that they can neither control nor choose'[69] stressed Nehru in a Rehabilitation Report from June 1949, in which she argued against continuing with recovery work. Furthermore, maternal citizenship was able to acknowledge the way

[69] 'Memorandum on Recovery of Women: Review of the position since October 1948', June 1949, Report 1, R/N Papers, NMML.

in which mechanisms of recovery objectified women as their intended beneficiaries, 'the women's will is not taken into consideration at all' Nehru went on to stress in the same report. 'She is once again reduced to the goods and chattel status without having the right to decide her own future or mould her own life'.[70]

Nehru had a very different understanding of the goal of rescue and recovery operations compared to Mridula Sarabhai. For her their primary function was to alleviate hardship, suffering and insecurity:

> We must assure ourselves that in recovering women we have in some way advanced their happiness. This is the human angle of approach. Viewed from this angle, I am convinced that we have not achieved our purpose, and that it is inadvisable to continue the work of recovery any longer.[71]
>
> Two years have elapsed since the original crimes were committed, and though there may still be a considerable number of unrecovered women, to remove them at this stage from their homes, in which they have settled, would result in untold misery and suffering.[72]

It was an approach driven by pragmatic concerns rather than constitutional ideals. Whereas the idealism and absolutism of the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act sought to create the appearance of 'choice', and freedom where there was none, maternal citizenship exposed this as an illusion. It responded to the reality of the lack of choice in the lives of abducted women, and the consequent powerlessness of the state to alter this position, and in so doing exposed the double bind that abducted women so often found themselves in, where to remain with their abductors or to return to their original families both held equal amounts of uncertainty.

Conclusion

The dislocation of partition created a crisis of authority in the structure of the family, community and state. Discourses and institutions of refugee relief and rehabilitation, together with those of development, democracy and welfare, attempted to reconfigure this authority by delineating the boundaries of legitimate citizenship. By restoring the 'dignity' of the community and the authority of the Hindu family, the rescue and recovery of abducted women became a fundamental component of this project of rehabilitation.

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[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

The resistance of recovered women, however, disrupted the official narrative of nation building. By their refusal 'to conform to the demands of either their own families or their government and fall in line with their notions of what was legitimate and acceptable'[73] such cases exposed the collusion between family, community and state in the remaking of post-colonial citizenship, while the engagement of these women with the bilateral agreements of rescue and recovery and the 1949 Act, co-opted the 'liberal citizen', the rule of law and the idea of justice in this coercive agenda. Resisting women such as Kumari Khan's girl from Lahore and Nissa consequently found themselves in a state of perpetual exile. In their refusal to conform they were caught between two nations, and two different family contexts, revealing the fluidity and complexity of identity that has become part of the experience of post-colonial nation making.

[73] Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, p. 97.

Chapter Six:

Citizenship through Struggle: the emergence of the National Federation of Indian Women

Introduction

This chapter explores how participation in a range of different kinds of struggles provided the basis for new forms of collective organisation and identity amongst Indian women, by documenting and analysing some of the developments that led to the formation of the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) in 1954. The first section traces the roots of this new Federation back to the beginning of the 1940s, looking at the growth of Communism in India, the impact of organising around relief work during the Bengal Famine of 1943, and the influence of women's participation in the Telengana and Tebhaga peasant struggles of the late 1940s and early 1950s. The second section outlines two parallel processes; the growth of refugee women's Samitis in Calcutta, and the formal establishment of the NFIW, showing how a shared agenda of relief work and rehabilitation brought these two processes together. This in turn, facilitated the intersection of two very different kinds of struggles, one for socio-economic rights and services at a municipal level, and the other, for legislative equality at a national level. The NFIW's Campaign for the Hindu Code Bill provided the grounds for this intersection. The campaign brought communities of refugee women into the Federation, but also facilitated the articulation of an active notion of citizenship based on the claim to socio-economic rights amongst these communities and within the Federation.

Woven into the account of these public and collective struggles is a reflection on struggle in the personal lives of NFIW founding members, and how participation in the sphere of agitational politics created tension and conflict between familial identity and responsibilities, and an identity and commitment as an activist. The act and symbol of struggle occurs throughout this chapter in many different forms and guises. The meaning of struggle as process, experience and motif is explored, as is the question of how struggle in these particular contexts facilitated new ways of collective belonging

for various communities of women in the sphere of both government and agitational politics, and new kinds of 'being' for NFIW members and leaders, through enabling subjectivities which could be both individual and collective.

The growth of Communism in India and the Bengal Famine of 1943

For the millions of Indian civilians in wartime Bengal, whose rice and grain supplies were cut off by the dynamics of World War Two in Asia and the government's wartime policy, the Bengal Famine was a struggle for survival and the story of a desperate migration from rural areas to the big cities in search of sustenance. For women activists who responded to the crisis, the Famine represented both a logistical struggle to coordinate relief work and supplies, and a struggle for justice in the face of corrupt and apathetic State and central governments.

The Famine was important for women involved in relief efforts, across the ideological and organisational spectrum, sharpening their political consciousness and their sense of resistance to injustice, and fostering an awareness of the politics of the body and how political forces at an international, regional and national level can play themselves out on the bodies and lives of local communities. The Bengal Famine and the war time context were particularly significant for Communist women, facilitating the growth of local women's organisations in West Bengal which were later to become one of the nuclei of the NFIW.

Although Bengal was a region particularly prone to famine due to its demographic and agricultural context, the Famine of 1943 was caused by a combination of wartime government policy, adverse weather conditions, and corruption.[1] The Japanese invasion of South East Asia in the spring of 1942 led to the drying up of Burmese rice supplies which were a staple food in the region. This was followed by a cyclone in October which hit the east coast, destroying the rice crop, and which resulted in all the surplus rice in the region being consumed by the following spring. This situation worsened in May and June 1943, reaching its nadir in the autumn'.[2] After the fall of Burma, fears of an invasion into eastern Bengal through Assam, together with the Japanese bombing of India's Eastern borders,

[1] B. R. Tomlinson, *The Economy of Modern India 1860-1970* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 72; S. Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947* (Delhi, 1983), p. 406.
[2] M. Misra, *Vishnu's Crowded Temple: India since the Great Rebellion* (London, 2008), p. 214.

led the colonial government to pursue a scorched earth policy, resulting in the destruction of vital food transportation networks in the region and preventing much needed supplies from reaching the interior[3].

The Famine is approached from two perspectives in this section. Firstly it is analysed as an important pre-cursor to the formation of the NFIW: facilitating the growth of local women's organisations in West Bengal and politicising women around the issues of self defence and food security. Secondly, it is approached as a lens through which to reflect on the relationship between citizenship and access to the basic socio-economic resources necessary for life and survival, a relationship which comes to be significantly reworked later with the articulation of active citizenship and the claim to socio-economic rights amongst the NFIW in West Bengal.

This was a man made famine caused not so much by a complete absence of food stuffs, but rather by what historians have identified as skewed patterns of food distribution and distorted prices, which encouraged a general climate of food insecurity in a region. [4] Starvation was the devastating consequence of an unequal distribution of food. Grain produced in Bengal and Bihar was prioritized for allied troops stationed in the Middle East, while grain from the Delta region was directed to troops and war workers based in Calcutta.[5] Food shortage led to inflation, which in turn resulted in food hoarding and the development of a black market[6], increasing the price of available grain beyond the reach of, not only working class and peasant families, but also those from the middle classes.

The rural poor of Bengal were most affected. With no food, desperate villagers began to migrate to cities such as Calcutta in search of sustenance, bringing cholera in their wake.[7] Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Renuka Ray, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, toured the famine affected areas of Bengal in 1943 as

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[3] Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 406. For a more detailed account of the broader context of Bengal leading up to the famine see A. K. Sen, 'Famine Mortality: A Study of the Bengal Famine of 1943 in E. Hobsbawm (ed.) *Peasants in History: Essays in Honour of Daniel Thorner* (Calcutta; Oxford, 1980) and P.R Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943-1944* (New York, 1982). The colonial government also produced an official Report by a Famine Inquiry Commission, entitled *India: Famine Inquiry Commission (Final Report) 1945* (New Delhi, 1945).
[4] Tomlinson, *The Economy of Modern India,* p. 72; Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 406; Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, p. 172.
[5] Misra, *Vishnu's Crowded Temple*, p. 215.
[6] Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 406.
[7] Ibid.

official representatives of the AIWC, setting up relief efforts and lobbying the Provincial and Central governments for more speedy intervention. What met them in Calcutta were shocking scenes 'of horror, extreme suffering and despair' which Pandit describes in her autobiography, 'streams of peasants from villages, in varying degrees of illness and incapacity, most of whom had walked miles to escape starvation in their areas' flooded into the city.[8] Such images are also evoked in Renuka Ray's account of her travels through the famine affected regions. 'On our way to Midnapore from Howrah', she recalls, 'at every station at which the train stopped, we were greeted with plaintive wails: 'Give us something to eat, give us something to eat.' Mothers with babies and men and women who looked like skeletons were there all along the line...It was a nightmare'.[9]

The response of both central and provincial governments was delayed and inadequate. Central government was preoccupied with suppressing Indian nationalism.[10] Apathy, corruption and denial defined the provincial government's response, with local politicians participating in and profiteering from speculation and the growth of a black market in grains.[11] For Vijayalakshmi Pandit, who led AIWC relief efforts in the State, the most shocking aspect of the Famine was the fact that 'starvation existed side by side with plenty'. In Calcutta wealthy Indians and foreigners 'continued to live in a state of affluence surrounded by every conceivable luxury while people outside their gates died of hunger and despair'.[12] The result of the Famine for Bengal's people was devastating, with an estimated death rate of three million Indians.[13]

The Bengal Famine, and the context of WWII, provide the background for two distinct but interconnected developments within the broader framework of the Indian women's movement in the 1940s, the growing presence and influence of communist women within existing women's organisations such as the AIWC, and the formation of new organisations, of communist women, such

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[8] Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, p. 172.
[9] Ray, *My Reminiscences*, p. 109.
[10] Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, p. 172.
[11]Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 406.
[12] Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, p. 173.
[13] Tomlinson, *The Economy of Modern India*, p. 72.

as the Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti (MARS) in Bengal, the Lok Istree Sabha in Punjab, the Golden Rocks Mattar Sangham in Madras, and the Mahila Sangha in Andhra Pradesh.[14]

These developments must be contextualised within the broader history of Communism in India, and its growth and influence in the twentieth century. Many future NFIW leaders, like Renu Chakravartty, Sarla Sharma, Vimla Dang and Vidya Munshi cut their political teeth through a growing student movement in the late 1930s and early 1940s that was particularly receptive to Marxist ideas, and closely aligned with the Communist Party of India (CPI). Sarla Sharma was one of the first to join the All India Students Conference in 1936, after reading some Marxist literature she had been given for safekeeping. 'I hid it away for a few days but then my inquisitiveness got the better of me and I decided that I should read it. And that was the start'. It was after this that she began attending Communist Party meetings, and was soon actively involved in initiating and leading agitations, as well as visiting girl's colleges to mobilise students for national action. Sarla's student activism in turn encouraged her to join the CPI in 1939, where she was one of the earliest organising committee party members.[15]

In 1942 the banning of the CPI was revoked with the entry of the Soviet Union into the War on the side of the allies. This enabled the Party to grow considerably during the early 1940s, especially in Bengal, mobilising and organising peasants, making contacts in urban industrial areas, and conducting constructive and relief work.[16] This coincided with the establishment of specific girl student movements, records Renu Chakravartty in her account of Women in the Communist Movement.[17]

A generation of young Indians, such as Vidya Munshi, were also being radicalised outside the country through contact with the India League and the British left. Shortly before the outbreak of WWII Munshi moved to Britain to study medicine at the age of nineteen:

> At that time there were many books that were not allowed to enter our country by the British. Like most Indian students going from a nationalist background I too was

[14] Interview with S. Sharma, NFIW veteran, 19 December 2011, New Delhi; Interview with G. Chakravartty, NFIW member and academic, 4 November 2011, New Delhi.
[15] Interview with Sharma, 19 December 2011.
[16] M. Sen, *In Search of Freedom*, p. 87.
[17] R. Chakravartty, *Communists in the Indian women's movement 1940-1950* (New Delhi, 1980), pp. 11-12.

> interested in reading all that was not allowed in our country. So I became a member of the left wing club and started reading whatever I could get, including a number of books about the Soviet Union, about China and so on.[18]

This engagement exposed her to the poor socio-economic conditions of Indians back at home. In the east slum area of Bombay, in 1919, just two years after the Russian Revolution, she read how 'not even one child out of six lives up to the age of ten years and that made me feel that in that sort of country it is better to be a communist than to be a doctor'. Munshi reckoned that as a trained doctor, she would never be able to reach the vast majority of poor Indians in the cities and towns but as a Communist she would have greater power to uproot the whole corrupt system. This awareness encouraged her to continue reading more communist literature.[19]

Neither Munshi nor Sharma told their parents about their political activity. The demands of family often pulled counter to those of student political activities, exposing a different kind of struggle in the lives of these young activists, a struggle between loyalty to family and middle class respectability versus commitment to alternate social ideals and political aspirations. 'In many families when children joined revolutionary movements they were kicked out' recalled Sarla Sharma.[20] Vimla Dang, another founding member of the NFIW, involved in the student movement in the Punjab, recalled coming across a fellow girl student being beaten by her father in public for refusing to quit her student activism, and other cases of girls whose studies were discontinued by their parents for fear they might join the communist movement.[21] This was a struggle that would require sacrifice of family responsibilities and support at particular moments in their lives. At the time though, the struggle for both political and economic freedom was beckoning. The early 1940s marked an era of growing militancy, with the rise of the Quit India movement, together with various other emerging struggles, exposing a range of competing economic and political pathways towards emancipation. These activists were drawn towards Marxism as a vehicle for overturning the inequalities of colonial and capital domination. Their student activities, in turn, were to bring them into contact with the devastating consequences of the Bengal Famine, and with the growing women's activism in this area.

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[18] Interview with Munshi, 2 December 2011.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Interview with Sharma, 19 December 2011.
[21] V. Dang, *Fragments of an Autobiography* (Delhi, 2007), p. 31.

Eager to harness the energy of new social justice and anti-colonial movements, emerging at this time, the CPI encouraged the formation of the Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti (MARS) in 1943 and its sister organisations in the Punjab, Madras and Andhra Pradesh, to reach out to women within these communities, as well as women within a radicalising middle class in the urban centres. '[W]e started with small meetings of women here and there in people's homes'. Sharla Sharma recalls:

> We had no public halls or microphones at that time. We communicated through speech but equally importantly through culture using drama and song to get our messages across. These groups worked for Famine relief and lobbied the government to take steps against hoarding and [to] introduce a system of rationing – remember it was not just control over food stuffs that was a problem but also distribution. It was small incidents like this that led to the development of a larger movement.[22]

The formation of the Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti (MARS) in 1943 and its sister organisations in the Punjab, Madras and Andhra Pradesh reflected the CPI's strategy of mass mobilisation. In the words of Sharla Sharma, the function of MARS was 'to make women aware and to arouse and mobilise them for solidarity' in the name of supportive action.[23] But these organisations equally reflected the response of communist women to the economic and political insecurity created by the forces of WWII. MARS was founded on the two central concepts of self defence and food security.[24] With the Japanese fighting on the side of the fascist Axis powers, MARS sought to teach women in Bengal self defence in the case of a Japanese invasion. The organisation participated in nationalist demonstrations, demanding the release of political prisoners from jail and the establishment of a national government to fight the Japanese.

In addition, MARS was deeply involved in constructive work[25] and famine relief efforts.[26] Local and regional branches of the AIWC and MARS worked together to coordinate famine relief in affected areas, and were both significantly involved in these efforts.[27] MARS and AIWC workers and branches

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[22] Interview with Sharma, 19 December 2011.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Such as milk distribution and the running of handicraft centres. See Sen, *In Search of Freedom,* p. 95.
[26] The CPI worked alongside these women's organisations undertaking relief activities as part of the political education and awareness raising campaign of the Party. See Sen, *In Search of Freedom*, pp. 87, 91, and 95.
[27] Voluntary organisations worked together with the government on relief efforts as well. Other voluntary organisations such as the Ramakrishna Mission, the Marwari Relief Society and the Bharat Sevak Sangh (Bharat

took over the running of existing ineffective and limited government food kitchens, expanding these facilities, and setting up additional kitchens in some of the worst affected areas. They helped to facilitate medical assistance, especially with the outbreaks of cholera in the countryside. They also set up receiving camps in the villages, where babies and small children whose parents were dead or missing could be brought before being sent to the city[28] and later established homes for children who had been orphaned.[29]

Although the legacy of mobilising women for relief work during the Bengal Famine is claimed by some of those who have written on the era, such as Renu Chakravartty, as a key period of political conscientization for women on the radical left,[30] this chapters argues that the famine was important for women across the ideological and organisational spectrum, in terms of shaping their political consciousness. The apathy and denial of provincial and colonial governments in the face of such devastation and deprivation, the unfair prioritization of food for troops and British civilians, and the hoarding and black-market profiteering that accompanied the Famine aroused a powerful sense of injustice amongst women leaders who were involved in relief efforts and spurred their inner voice of resistance and rebellion. 'The Government could not tell the truth about the Famine as the actual things happening in the Famine areas were shocking'. Vijayalakshmi Pandit recalls. 'Those of us who were in contact with the suffering people realised that the truth had to be told, and we told it as loudly and clearly as we could'.[31]

For these activists, aware of the broader situation in India and Asia at the time, first hand exposure to the devastating consequences of the famine on the body; the haunting images of hundreds of people, emaciated, 'like skeletons',[32] the exploitation of women turned to prostitution to survive and the loss of dignity and selfhood that such conditions perpetuated, offered a powerful reminder of how political forces at an international, regional and national level play themselves out on, and define the

Sevasram) were also involved in Famine relief efforts in particular the running of food kitchens. See Sen, *In Search of Freedom*, pp. 89-92; Ray, *My Reminiscences*, p. 110.

[28] Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, p. 172.

[29] See P. Guha, 'Rajkumari Amrit Kaur: Her Life, Work and Ideology' in *Rajkumari Amrit Kaur*, p. 69.

[30] Chakravartty makes this particular argument in her memoirs. See, for example, Chakravartty, *Communists in the Indian women's movement*, pp. 11-28.

[31] Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, pp. 184-185.

[32] Ray, *My Reminiscences*, p. 109.

experience of the individual, and on women, in particular ways. Anasuya Gyanchand stressed this connection, in her keynote address at the first NFIW Congress:

> We women may not understand the subtle difference in various 'isms but we understand the difference between war and peace, between hunger and contentment, between insecurity and security, between the world where our children can be wiped out by the hydrogen bomb and the world of peace and plenty.[33]

Hajrah Begum too, made a similar connection in her speech representing the Indian delegation at the Women's International Democratic Federation Conference (WIDF)[34] in Copenhagen in 1953, when she stated 'we know that India will starve as long as there is war anywhere in Asia'. 'Our women realize more and more, if international trade barriers could be removed, there would be food in plenty for the people of the world. To fight famine, we must fight for peace, for friendship and co-operation between the people of the world'.[35] This condemnation of the geopolitics of the Bengal Famine, and the anger aroused by Indian women activists resonated with the experiences and beliefs of women in the emerging international women's movement. Attending the founding Conference of the WIDF in Paris in 1945, Vidiya Munshi remembers how 'women from so many European countries' wept, when they heard a fellow Indian delegate, Ella Read describe the conditions of the Famine.[36]

For this generation of women activists, the Bengal Famine highlighted how local issues and those connected with the private sphere of the household, such as food and sexuality, could be determined by larger political forces. In so doing it enabled them to see the connections between territorial and diplomatic security, and the personal security and integrity of the body.[37] This in turn was to have an influence on their politics and advocacy. For Rameshwari Nehru witnessing an increase in the trafficking and the prostitution of women who had sought refuge in the cities, was one of the

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[33] S. Munsi, 'National Conference of Women in Calcutta', 13 June 1954, *New Age,* copy located in CPI Offices, Ajoy Bhavan.
[34] The Women's International Democratic Federation was the international women's body to which the NFIW affiliated once it was formed in 1954.
[35] Hajrah Begum's speech was given at the 1953 Women's International Democratic Federation Conference in Copenhagen, 5 -10 June, and reprinted in 'Early Years of Women's International Democratic Federation and National Federation of Indian Women' (pamphlet) NFIW publication, July 2009, p.12.
[36] Interview with Munshi, 2 December 2011.
[37] This has been an association that later generations of activists have continued to develop; for example, in the case of abductions and violence against women in the disputed area of Kashmir. See S. Mulay and J. Kirk (eds.), *Women Building Peace between India and Pakistan* (New Delhi, 2007) and A. Basu and S. Roy (eds.), *Violence and Democracy in India* (Greenford, 2007.)

motivating factors behind her post independence campaign to have anti-trafficking legislation implemented, not only in India but to get regional and international cooperation and agreement on the issue.

The Bengal Famine was an important period of consciousness building not only for individuals at the coal face, who were working directly with famine relief and food security such as Renu Chakravartty, Vijayalakshmi Pandit and Renuka Ray, but also for those who found themselves outside India such as Vidiya Munshi. Munshi was a medical student studying in England at the time. She organised a poster exhibition of the famine in Sheffield together with a fellow Tamil student. Using graphs and other materials from the magazine *India Today* and *The Problem of India* they used the exhibition to show 'how after the British came into India there had been seven famines one after the other in the years of British administration'.[38] Munshi like her fellow activists back home was putting the Famine in broader political context, and making important connections between this specific event and the dynamics of colonial domination on the Indian subcontinent.

The Telengana struggle

As with relief efforts and political organising around the Bengal Famine, women's participation in the Telengana and Tebhaga peasant struggles of the late 1940s and early 1950s are claimed today as part of the prehistory of the NFIW. While the Bengal Famine represented a struggle for survival for affected populations, and a struggle on behalf of women's organisations to coordinate relief, and galvanise an apathetic war time government into action, the Telengana and Tebhaga struggles were peasant struggles over access to land rights and control over local government. Emerging at the end of the turbulent decade of the 1940s, they reflected the growing influence of Marxism on Indian nationalism, as an alternative vision for a 'new social order', divergent from the Nehruvian and Gandhian models.

[38] Interview with Munshi, 2 December 2011.

Commencing in September 1946, Tebhaga was a militant mass movement of sharecroppers fighting to maintain a fairer share of the crop produced from the land owners of West Bengal.[39] It was led by the CPI's Bengal Kisan Sabha with urban student militants playing an important role in organising and mobilising sharecroppers.[40] Women were also recognised as significant participants in this struggle, 'stimulating the moral strength for resistance', through their presence in confrontations with the police, and through their participation in other activities, including the forcible harvesting of crops, the supplying of food to rebels, maintaining communication networks, and campaigning and organising of activities.[41] Although Tebhaga was hugely significant for Indian Marxists, it was short lived and had been suppressed by March the following year.

Telengana was a violent peasant uprising against Muslim and high caste Hindu revenue collectors and landlords in Telengana, one of the three linguistic regions of the princely state of Hyderabad.[42] Peasant farmers and labourers faced a number of exploitative practices in the state including *vethi* which enabled a landlord to claim a percentage of a peasant's crop or to extract forced labour from the peasant. Gendered violence formed a component of this exploitation. 'Rape was an everyday reality, the undenied right of the landlord or moneylender' while *Adi bapa* a type of concubinage practiced in the area, entitled a bridegroom to bring a female servant from the bride's household to his own upon marriage.[43]

Spanning the period from July 1946 to October 1951 the Telengana movement was organised and led by the CPI, but quickly became enmeshed in the larger struggle between the Muslim Nizam of Hyderabad, Asaf Jahi, and the Indian state, around the question of whether Hyderabad was to accede to India or remain independent under the special provisions given to the princely states. When the Nizam refused to accede and threatened to join Pakistan during negotiations, it pitted the Hyderabad Congress supporters in the State (who supported Indian accession) against the Razakars, the

[39] Tebhaga means two thirds of the crop. The sharecroppers in this movement demanded the right to retain two thirds of the crop they produced instead of being forced to hand over half, or even more than half, to the jotedars as payment for their rented land. See Sarkar, *Modern India*, pp. 439-440.
[40] Ibid.
[41] K. Debal and S. Roy, *Women in Peasant Movements: Tebhaga, Naxalite and After* (New Delhi, 1992), p. 47.
[42] Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 443.
[43] V. Kannabiran and K. Lalitha, 'That Magic Time: Women in the Telengana People's Struggle' in K. Sangari and S. Vaid (eds.) *Recasting women: Essays in Indian colonial history* (New Brunswick, 1990), p. 182.

paramilitary body of the *Ittihad-ul-Muslimeen* an organisation that supported the Nizam and wanted to safeguard the position of Muslims in the administration and politics of the state.[44] Initially the Telengana movement and Hyderabad Congress supporters found themselves on the same side, both resisting the Razakars in this standoff, and making the CPI leaders and the Indian state covert allies. However when the CPI changed its leadership and strategy in 1948, abandoning its commitment to 'loyal opposition', and embracing violent resistance to the Congress government instead, this situation changed.[45] Under the CPI's new position the Party hoped the success of Telengana could be the start of a countrywide Communist rebellion.[46] The CPI had now become a direct and immediate threat to the Nehru government, and was consequently banned in March 1948, many of its leaders imprisoned, and a propaganda campaign against the Party was orchestrated by the government which reduced its support. When attempted negotiations with the Nizam failed in September of that year, the Indian army sent in troops to take control of the State, and these troops were ordered to suppress the rebellion. As the movement went into retreat its initial gains were relinquished, and it was eventually brought to an end when the CPI reversed its hard line stance in order to participate in the elections of 1952.

As both of these movements were led by the CPI, and as a number of the founding members and leaders of the NFIW were communists, there was a natural ideological affinity with the cause of these movements.[47] Former women Telengana and Tebhaga veterans in Andhra Pradesh and Bengal became part of the local and regional women's organisations that were incorporated into the NFIW in the 1950s.[48] While prominent women figures associated with the uprisings were also incorporated into NFIW leadership positions in states such as Kerala.[49]

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[44] R. Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (London, 2007), p. 52.
[45] Ibid, pp. 96-97.
[46] Ibid, p. 96.
[47] As a political organisation, the CPI was also significantly influenced by the stance taken by these peasant movements. In 1948 the Party decided to reject collaboration with the new government and instead adopt a position of revolutionary opposition, aligning its strategy with that of Telengana, by arguing that the freedom of independence was an unreal freedom and that 'the Telengana path is our path'. This resulted in the banning of the Party as well as the Women's Front in March 1948. Gargi Chakravartty emphasises that many Communist women were unhappy about this new party line. Interview with Chakravartty, 4 November 2011.
[48] Ibid.
[49] NFIW, *For Equality: For a Just Social Order* (New Delhi, 1984), pp. 57-58.

The NFIW leadership and many communities of women who were early affiliates found inspiration in Telengana and Tebhaga women. They drew on women's participation in these movements to emphasise that having invested and sacrificed for the struggle, women, had indeed 'earned' their revolutionary credentials. As participants and as leaders in such a radical process, they were entitled to be legitimate and equal members of any subsequent new social order to emerge from such a process.[50]

There is a tendency to romanticise and idealise the roles and experiences of women within these peasant uprisings, and to present this as a movement defined by a radical reworking of gender relationships. This certainly comes across very clearly within the collective memory and history of the Communist Party of India and its allied organisations today. For the CPI, the narrative and identity of the women peasant revolutionary was part of the construction of a particular image for itself. The participation of woman reflected the democratic and broad based nature of the movement, and therefore gave it additional political clout and legitimacy. This organisational remembering offers a contributory history, which 'writes in' and acknowledges the significant role of women within these historical events, but which tends to be mythologizing and uncritical. In claiming Telengana and Tebhaga women's participation in this way, the NFIW has had to draw on the language and rhetoric of such a contributory history, where women are represented as 'glorified heroines', or as passive victims and where there is little room for acknowledging the way in which feudal patriarchy was reinvented within structures of the movement itself.[51]

More recent oral histories of women's participation in the Telengana movement such as those by Kannabiran, Lalitha and others, have offered a more nuanced and critical reading of women's participation. These authors argue that Telengana did indeed open up new and previously unchartered and unimagined possibilities for women - by enabling them to move from the private to public sphere, and by providing them with a new set of tools for analysing and articulating different forms of inequality in their society. However, gender inequality in the form of middle class gendered values

[50] This is an affinity and claim that continues to be articulated by the contemporary NFIW leadership that I met during the course of my research and is very much part of the current institutional history of the Federation.
[51] Kannabiran and Lalitha, 'That Magic Time', pp. 31-32.

and norms, and a double moral standard, were often reproduced in this movement, which is why these scholars identify a 'curious contradictoriness' that emerges in accounts of women for whom Telengana was a lived experience.[52]

It is however possible to acknowledge the significance of women's participation in these peasant struggles, in both a symbolic and practical reworking of the Indian woman as a political agent, without reverting to the romantic and glorified representation of the peasant woman as a revolutionary fighter. The more recent critical history of women's participation in the Telengana movement is useful in this regard, because it challenges the dichotomy between agent and passive spectator, or between agent and victim, encouraging us to think about agency in terms of a sliding scale, where degrees of agency can coexist with a context of restrictions.[53]

The significance of Telengana was that it widened and expanded the possibilities and meanings of agency and subjectivity for women in the sphere of agitational politics, through the motif of the woman guerrilla fighter, who represented the capacity to actively resist and to challenge the status quo. A second point that should be stressed is the fact that the Telengana and Tebhaga struggles helped to bring two important gendered concerns more directly onto the agenda of the newly established NFIW. The first of these was that of violence against women, particularly sexual violence and its counterpart, the freedom and integrity of the body. The second was the demand for women's right to ownership and control over land, a demand which subsequently became incorporated into NFIW policy.

Domestic violence and rape are concerns associated with the contemporary women's movement in India. The emergence of broad based campaigns against such acts of violence, are, in fact, recognised by scholars as marking a new stage in the development of contemporary feminism in India'.[54] A 1984

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[52] Ibid, p. 181.
[53] The complexities of the experience of Telengana women and their subsequent significance for the newly formed NFIW calls for a rethinking of female agency in historiography, as Janaki Nair argues, such agency can neither be 'wholly contained within a delineation of structures of oppression nor exhausted by accounts of female presence in history but must be posed within specific contexts'. See J, Nair, 'On the Question of Agency in Indian Feminist Historiography' in *Gender and History,* 6:1 (April 1994), p. 83.
[54] Domestic violence first became a subject of protest when it was taken up by the Shahada movement of tribal landless labourers in Maharashtra in the late 1960s. This movement was joined by the New Left in the early

brochure on the history of the NFIW however reminds the reader that 'work against social oppression and atrocities on women' including 'wife-beating, starvation, desertion, demands of more dowry, and even murders', as well as 'molestation and rape' have always been important activities of the National Federation of Indian Women since its inception.[55] This claim to the early prioritisation of such concerns is reinforced in the organisational memory and perspective of contemporary NFIW leaders:

> it's always been addressed... If you go back further...the Telengana movement...the women were at the forefront for the land rights. ...Then we had the Tebhaga uprising, again the women were at the forefront ...for the land struggle, addressing violence... All these struggles, which had taken place, left a footprint. Even today we go back and address those issues.[56]

The reports of CPI cadres touring Telengana controlled villages and reporting back to the CPI regional command, offer some examples of how the concerns of gendered violence come to be incorporated and addressed within this movement. In one particular report from 1948, the author and narrator of the trip describes 'Comrade G', a member of the local Sangam, the local village council established by the Dalams[57] to replace the authority of the landlord, addressing the village: 'Now you people will elect your village government. This government will have to see that no one starves in the village. It will open a school for the village children...Women will not be subject to any injustice. Men who beat women, will be duly punished by this government'.[58]

In a different village the narrator reports his conversation with another member of the Sangham who is an untouchable. He asks the man if anything has changed since the coming of the Sangham or if things remained as they used to be, and records the response of the man:

> How can things be as they were? ...the Harijans no longer work without payment.., six months back...we used to do forced labour. But as soon as the Sangham arrived that

1970s and focused on the physical violence associated with alcoholism. See R. Kumar, 'From Chipko to Sati: The Contemporary Indian Women's Movement' in N. Menon (ed.) *Gender and Politics in India* (New Delhi, Oxford, 2001) pp. 343-344, 349, 353.

[55] NFIW, *For Equality: For a Just Social Order*, p. 63.

[56] Interview with A. Raja, NFIW President, 18 November 2013, New Delhi.

[57] The CPI divided members up into working groups called Dalams with each Dalam responsible for a particular type of activity or task.

[58] District Council of the Communist Party (CP), discussing the lifting of the ban on the Andhra Mahasabha and the CP. The document also provides a description of the social and economic changes occurring in the different villages in and around Warangal and other districts where the Sangham and Andhra Mahasabha had established village governments, 1948, Subject no: 359, Andhra Pradesh/Telengana, CPI Papers, Ajoy Bhavan.

> practice was stopped. Similarly, earlier our men folk used to beat up the women; but now we have passed a law...[59]

On another occasion the narrator reports the comments of a comrade from 'Village P', talking about the question of 'men beating up their women' in the village, since the establishment of the Sangham: '[F]ormerly the woman quickly put up with it. But now they go at once and report it to the village government. The man is taken to task; he has to apologise to the woman and promise not to repeat such an act again'.[60]

Previous chapters of this thesis have shown how discourses of gendered violence in the context of Partition, and the rape and abduction of women operated to reproduce the unequal power relationships of patriarchy by positioning women as sites of honour and communal identity. It's difficult to gauge the extent to which this change and reworking of gender relations operated at the level of rhetoric and political image, versus how widespread it was on the ground in Telengana villages. Certainly discourses of rape and molestation provided a powerful justification for rebellion and delegitimized the actions and rights of landlords and rent collectors.

But was the outrage against rape merely a way for men in the communist party to claim control of women for themselves, reinforcing a discourse which positioned women as property or a site of family and community honour? This discourse certainly does use the language of shame, honour and protection. For the CPI gender equality, certainly at the level of rhetoric, functioned to articulate and reinforce the Party's broader ideological commitment to the destruction of social hierarchy and class privilege.

What is distinct about this discourse is the fact that rape and molestation of village women was not only seen to be perpetrated by the class enemy, or the 'other', for example, by landlords, their 'goondas' and the police. Within this report there is an acknowledgement of gendered violence being committed within the family - by one's own. By broaching *domestic violence* specifically, this report raises questions about power relationships in the family, and calls for a reworking of such

[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

relationships, a challenge which holds revolutionary potential. Furthermore, even if this discourse operated merely at the level of rhetoric, rhetoric can take on a life of its own, and can be endowed with new kinds of power and meanings. This issue, in being taken up by the Party, places domestic violence as a concern into the public space of left wing Indian politics, and this is significant. The question that needs to be addressed in light of this, and the fact that the NFIW today claims gendered violence as a concern from the time of its formation, is the extent to which the NFIW has been able to use this rhetoric for a genuine and transformative agenda.

The second important concern that Telengana and Tebhaga women helped to bring into the NFIW from the time of its formation was also fundamentally concerned with questions of power within the sphere of the household, but this time relating to economic power. The Telengana and Tebhaga movements are recognised as being progressive for their time on gender issues because they acknowledged and addressed the issue of women's right to own land.

One of the heroes of the Telengana Struggle is Chakali Ailamma, a peasant woman cultivator who stood up to the local zamindar, by refusing to pay the heavy levy demanded for cultivation of his land. Her resistance was recounted by one of the Andhra Pradesh NFIW members who joined the Telengana struggle:

> She was cultivating four acres of land for the zamindar... And she had to pay some levy to the landlord. Whatever produce was on the land they used to take away and leave very little, first she started saying no I will not pay to the landlord, first to raise her voice, that this is unjust, you are taking all our produce. She was an inspiration for all the other people.[61]

All revolutionary movements claim heroes, who although based on fact are also embellished by propaganda, and who represent the causes and ideals of the movement. This story was recounted specifically when the interviewee was asked how the Telengana struggle had started. Although the scholar cannot verify the facts of this account, the themes and concerns that it introduces are indeed relevant, as a reflection of the major concerns of peasant fighters and communists involved. The story

[61] Interview with S. Suguna, NFIW member (Andhra Pradesh) and Telengana veteran, 31 December 2011, Hyderabad.

of Chakali Ailamma suggests that there was an awareness of the importance of acquired land rights, and the insecurity that peasant women faced without these, amongst Telengana women veterans.

At the founding Conference of the NFIW in 1954, a resolution on peasant women and their right to land was adopted:

> The foremost demand of the peasant women is the right to own land. Custom and tradition enforced by unjust laws has deprived a large section of our women of the right to own property. This Congress resolves to patiently and carefully explain to all sections of the people, both men and women the justice of this right and win their support to it.[62]

This Report reveals a concern not only with women's ownership of land as a means of livelihood, but also with the question of access to, and usage of natural resources such as forests, grazing grounds, rivers and ponds. The Joint Secretaries of the NFIW's National Co-ordinating Committee reported that that the work of affiliated organisations amongst peasants had:

> taken different forms in different areas...In some places it is the question of grazing grounds, in another the right to bring wood from the forest and yet another the right to catch fish in the village pond, that becomes a burning question for peasant women. Often on a local scale and sometimes on a district or provincial basis, some of these struggles registered success.[63]

A peasant woman's right to own land offers scope for the renegotiation of power dynamics within the family, enabling a greater degree of economic independence. This has the potential to loosen her embeddedness in relationships of dominance and inequality in the family and local community. Later on in this chapter it is shown how this connection between economic freedom and the freedom and integrity of the body, defined by a state of freedom from physical violence within the household, or the right to challenge and confront such violence, is reinforced through the NFIW's campaign in support of the Hindu Code Bill.

It is only much later in the 1990s with the emergence of the conceptual framework of 'gender and development' that women's access to land and land rights come to be recognised as an important

[62] 'Indian Women Meet in Conference', June 1954, pp. 5, 51. Land rights remained an ongoing concern with NFIW affiliated organisations involved in various land rights struggles in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. See NFIW, *For Equality: For a Just Social Order*, p. 58.
[63] Ibid, pp. 25-26.

factor in socio-economic development.[64] The influence of Telengana and Tebhaga veterans in the NFIW meant that this issue was pre-empted in the agenda and concerns of the Federation, decades before these gained official recognition in the international development community.

Citizenship through struggle: refugee women of Calcutta and the claim to socio-economic rights

Identity does not necessarily precede struggle. The dynamics of struggle, often around local and immediate needs, can also provide the context for the creation of new identities. The experience of refugee women in Calcutta illustrates this dynamic. Migrating across the border from East Pakistan into West Bengal, hundreds of thousands of refugees in the city of Calcutta found themselves outside the official mechanisms of state relief and rehabilitation, and institutionally 'invisible'. In this context, refugees had to begin helping themselves. Women refugees participated in this process by forming local Samitis to coordinate the provision of relief activities and services. This work brought them into contact with established women's organisations that were also active amongst refugee communities, and facilitated an interaction between local grassroots and national struggles that helped to launch the National Federation of Indian women in 1954. Relief and welfare activities and immediate socio-economic survival provided an entry point into both local political mobilization and a national Campaign for the Hindu Code Bill, ushering these communities of women into new forms of political citizenship.

The partition of the subcontinent on the 15th of August 1947 unleashed one of the largest mass migrations in human history, which saw the movement of an estimated eight to ten million people across the borders of the newly created states of India and Pakistan. In West Bengal, the second major site of this relocation, East Bengali Hindus who found themselves on the wrong side of the border in Pakistan, began migrating into West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. By the end of 1956, a total of 3.33 million refugees had moved from Pakistan into these regions of India.[65]

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[64] The work of Bina Agarwal has been significant in this regard. See B. Agarwal, *A field of One's Own?* (Cambridge, 1994.)
[65] Ray, *My Reminiscences,* pp. 152-153, also see Chatterjee, *The Spoils of Partition* for an account of the influx and exodus of refugees and migrants from West Bengal.

Although the government of West Bengal established a Ministry of Rehabilitation in 1947 to handle relief and rehabilitation efforts, the scale of the problem and a lack of understanding of the nature of migration meant that these efforts remained largely inadequate. Renuka Ray, who became West Bengal Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation after the 1952 elections, was highly critical of the Indian government's permanent resettlement programme for refugees in East India.[66] She explains in her autobiography that a large part of the problem stemmed from the fact that this response failed to recognise that the migration into West Bengal assumed a completely different dynamic, compared to its counterpart in the Punjab. The Punjab witnessed a mass exchange of populations over a more confined period, proceeding and following partition. In the east of the country, however, the first influx of refugees arrived in October 1946 after the retaliatory riots and violence of Noakhali and Tipperah. This continued with varying intensity, developing into a flow after the widespread communal violence of 1950, and then carrying on in dribs and drabs over the course of the following decade.[67]

The government tended to view the presence of migrants in Eastern India as a temporary problem rather than one of rehabilitation and resettlement. The state government lacked a coherent rehabilitation policy and relief when it was forthcoming tended to be ad hoc. It was only in 1956 that a 'comprehensive policy of rehabilitation and economic re-integration was devised for East Bengali refugees'.[68]

During the early years following the creation of Pakistan 'there was considerable reluctance on the part of the Central government to acknowledge that the displaced persons from East Pakistan were here to stay', Ray observed.[69] Furthermore East Bengali refugees, unlike those from Punjab 'had the onus of proving that they were the victims of coerced migration as opposed to being mere economic

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[66] Ibid, p. 157.
[67] U, Sen, 'Spinster, Prostitute, Pioneer?'Images of Refugee Women in Post-Partition Calcutta', European University Institute Working Papers 2011/32, p. 3. Also see U. Sen, 'Refugees and the Politics of Nation Building 1947-1971', PhD Thesis, Faculty of History, Cambridge University, 2009.
[68] Ibid, p. 7.
[69] Ray, *My Reminiscences*, p. 153.

migrants'. It was only by being 'genuine' refugees that they could lay claim to relief and rehabilitation from the state.[70]

These rehabilitation efforts were further hampered by the fact that refugees who came into the East of India were adding to an existing population which already had the second highest density in the country, and to an overcrowded West Bengal economy.[71] In the west, there had been a roughly equal counter flow of Muslims from the Indian to the Pakistani region of the Punjab, creating space and infrastructure - in the form of vacant property and land - for the permanent resettlement of incoming migrants. But in the east of India, there was no vacant land or property where the newcomers could settle themselves, because, 'The Muslims leaving West Bengal were much fewer than those coming from East Pakistan, and many who had fled later returned and got their lands back'.[72] In some of the urban centres, such as Calcutta this resulted in enormous overcrowding with refugees spilling out onto the streets, and creating new needs in terms of sanitation, public health, and law and order.[73] By March 1951 a total of 624,164 refugees were living in Calcutta and surrounding suburbs alone.[74]

However, only a small percentage of the total number of refugees in West Bengal, 70,000 in total, could be accommodated in government camps. These tended to be 'the poorer section of the displaced population who were totally dependent on state aid and had neither the resources nor energy to rehabilitate themselves'.[75] Refugees outside these camps were not given any rehabilitation assistance in terms of grants or alternative accommodation.[76] Nor were any extra amenities provided in the City of Calcutta or Tripura.[77] Urban middle class and rural middle class East Bengali families, who had lost all their assets and who did not have family or friends in West Bengal to help, therefore found themselves out on the streets, largely invisible and ignored in terms of relief and rehabilitation efforts.

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[70] Sen, 'Spinster, Prostitute, Pioneer', p. 4.
[71] Ray, *My Reminiscences*, p. 162.
[72] Ibid, p. 156.
[73] Ibid, p. 153.
[74] Figures taken from the Census of India 1951, Volume VI Part 3, Calcutta City, quoted in Sen,' Spinster, Prostitute, Pioneer?', pp. 3-4.
[75] H. Bandyopadhyay, *Udbastu*, Sahitya Samsa (Calcutta, 1970) quoted in Sen, 'Spinster, Prostitute, Pioneer', p. 9.
[76] Ray*, My Reminiscences,* p. 161.
[77] Ibid, pp. 152-161.

This lack of recognition in effect denied these refugees a civic identity as city dwellers entitled to local municipal services, living space and economic opportunities, and relegated them to the political and social margins. In and around Calcutta non-camp refugees had no choice but to settle on whatever land was available and to occupy this land illegally.[78] At first they squatted. Later, they began establishing more formalised refugee colonies.[79]

The early years of independence consequently saw the rapid growth of innumerable refugee colonies extending in a line from Dumdum to Kanchrapara in the North, and Poddarnagar to Jadavpur in the south.[80] By 1950 149 colonies had been established, placing large areas of both government and private land under occupation. After some time, state refugee camps were also converted into refugee colonies.[81] Refugees within such colonies found themselves in a very precarious state of existence. Because they were considered squatters, they were often forcibly removed and their huts razed to the ground, forcing them to return later to reoccupy the land and start all over again.[82] In this climate of uncertainty and instability, women refugees began to organise women's Samitis which were involved in coordinating relief efforts, such as the distribution of milk powder and food. In the Chittaranjan colony in Calcutta, for example, the Dakshin Kalikata Sahartli Bastuhara Samiti became very popular amongst refugee women.[83] Amongst the refugees who came into the city were a number of women who had been politically active before independence and they brought their politics and their organising skills with them.[84] Drawing on a longer tradition of organising around relief work and political activism that had developed with the Bengal Famine of 1943, these women took the lead in the establishment of these new Samitis.

But relief provisions and services could not be co-ordinated and distributed if they were not readily available. The invisibility of non camp refugees and the failure of the West Bengal government to

[78] G. Chakravartty, *Coming Out of Partition: Refugee Women of Bengal* (New Delhi, 2005), pp. 52-54.
[79] Ray, *My Reminiscences*, p. 161. The recollections and experiences of Renuka Ray as West Bengal rehabilitation official support the argument presented by Joya Chatterjee in *The Spoils of Partition,* that the rehabilitation of Bengali Refugees was largely self rehabilitation rather than being state driven.
[80] Sen, 'Spinster, Prostitute, Pioneer?', p.10.
[81] Chakravartty, *Coming Out of Partition*, pp. 52-54.
[82] Ibid, pp. 52-57.
[83] Ibid, pp. 57-59.
[84] Ibid.

tackle the problem as a long term one of resettlement and rehabilitation, compounded by the scale of the influx, the population density of the region, and overcrowded nature of the economy, meant that desperately needed food, clothing, shelter and basic municipal services such as clean water, were often not forthcoming. These Samitis had to extend their activities to protesting, lobbying and demanding municipal and state governments for adequate assistance, with women refugees organising processions and meetings to 'ventilate their grievances on scarcity of food, cloth, house accommodation and eviction'.[85] Furthermore, these communities of refugees increasingly realised that relief would remain short term and ineffective if it wasn't backed up by proper resettlement and rehabilitation. If refugees had formal and secure housing, and access to livelihoods, their more immediate needs of food, shelter and security could be sustainably addressed. In this way, these women's Samitis came to be drawn into the larger refugee movement against evictions and the demand for the formalisation of colonies and the recognition and provision of proper facilities.[86]

In addition to being drawn into the public sphere through the agitational politics of the broader refugee movement in Calcutta, the struggle for relief and rehabilitation was bringing established women's organisations in the region, into contact with these informal women's Samitis. Working side by side with these Samitis, existing women's organisations such as MARS played an important role in providing voluntary relief services, and later rehabilitation programmes for women refugees, as well as supporting in official government camps in all affected areas. Over time considerable interaction and overlap between these established women's organisations and new refugee Samitis occurred, in terms of membership and agenda. Refugee women came to be drawn into local women's organisations in West Bengal as these organisations took up the demands of these communities of women, and offered support and practical assistance with mobilizing and organising, to petition state assistance.[87] Grassroots refugee activism also led to the emergence of a new set of woman leaders within MARS, other women's organisations working in West Bengal and the CPI.[88]

[85] Ibid. pp. 57-59.
[86] Ibid. pp. 57-59 and 63.
[87] These women's organisations were building on an earlier history of women's organising; where relief work during the devastating Bengal Famine of 1943 was used by communist women, working within the AIWC, to

This overlap and shared agenda led to a two way exchange between the socio-economic concerns and needs of refugee women, and the national gender politics of the NFIW. And it was the campaign for the Hindu Code Bill that provided a platform for interaction between these two very different kinds of struggles: one for socio-economic rights and services at a municipal level, and the other for legislative equality at a national level.

The Indian social reform movement had been lobbying for the reform of personal laws in India since the nineteenth century through a discourse of social reform which was paternal in emphasis, aimed at the protection of women from culturally backward practices. In the twentieth century the campaign for women's franchise in India provided added incentive to the reform of civil laws. Geraldine Forbes notes that activists increasingly began to realise the connection between political rights, and civil rights, that determined women's status in the home and family. 'As organised women gained experience in the public arena, they became more aware of their dependent status. They were excluded from new representative structures because they did not own property or were not married to men with property'.[89] From the 1920s onwards with the emergence of all India women's organisations such as the Women's Indian Association (WIA) and the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) women campaigners began to take up the reform of civil laws themselves, drawing on older social reform discourses of welfare and paternalism, but also increasingly, on the emerging discourse of rights and equal inclusion in the body politic.

In 1929 after considerable campaigning and collaborative efforts, the Child Marriages Restraint Act was passed under the colonial government.[90] In the 1930s following on from this, the government, favouring a piecemeal approach towards the reform of civil laws, introduced a number of different acts covering various aspects of family and marital life. It was only with the passing of the Hindu

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mobilise and expand the membership of the organisation by bringing in new constituencies of peasant and working class women. See Renu Chakravartty's account of the Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti in *Communists in the Indian Women's Movement*.

[88] Chakravartty, *Coming Out of Partition,* p. 62.

[89] Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, p. 113.

[90] Ibid.

Women's Right to Property Act (Deshmukh Act) in 1937 that a renewed boost was given to demands for codification.[91]

In 1941 the Hindu Law Committee, also known as the Rau Committee, was established to assess the weaknesses of the 1937 Act. The Committee recommended a comprehensive code of marriage and succession which led to the establishment of a second Hindu Law Committee in 1944, to prepare a draft Code. This was revised, becoming known as Hindu Code Bill[92] and introduced into Parliament in 1947, with the intention of becoming law on the 1st January 1948, but the project was temporarily suspended with preparations for Partition and independence.[93] In 1948, under the leadership of Nehru, this draft Code was referred to a Select Committee under the Chairmanship of Dr. Ambedkar, Law Minister and Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee.

Ambedkar incorporated several important changes to the draft Code Bill, including equal property rights for women, the abolition of customary law, and specification of grounds for divorce, before reintroducing it to Parliament.[94] These changes brought the Code closer to the demands of Women's Organisations, for complete equality in the Civil law for Hindu women, as the starting point for the eventual introduction of a Uniform Civil Code. These changes however aroused stiff opposition from various quarters, including that of the President Rajendra Prasad who argued that they would result in the destruction of the Hindu family.[95] This opposition led to the stalling and obstruction of the Bill in Parliament, with Women's organisations who had been closely monitoring the progress of the draft Code, increasingly concerned that the draft Code Bill would be sabotaged as a result. In October 1951 a group of women leaders met in Delhi to form the Women's Fundamental Rights Committee, electing Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay as president. This Committee agreed to review all existing

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[91] The Act secured for the widowed daughter in law legal rights equal to those of her son to enjoy her husband's share in the joint family property but did not give her absolute and alienable rights of ownership. See R. Som, 'Jawaharlal Nehru and the Hindu Code: A Victory of Symbol over Substance?' in *Modern Asian Studies,* 28:1 (1994), p 4.
[92] For a detailed account of the legislative development of the Hindu Code Bill and previous colonial endeavours to reform personal law in India. See J. Nair, *Women and Colonial Law in India* (New Delhi, 1996) and F. Agnes, *Law and gender inequality: the politics of women's rights in India* (New Delhi, 2001).
[93] Ibid, p. 5.
[94] Ibid.
[95] See Letter from Rajendra Prasad to Jawaharlal Nehru, 15 September 1951, in V. Tagra, *Jawaharlal Nehru and the Status of Women in India: An Analytical Study* (New Delhi, 2006), Appendix III, pp. 366-373.

legislation to ensure that it accorded with the fundamental rights as laid out in the Constitution, to take up matters of discrimination and to educate public opinion and galvanise public support in favour of the Hindu Code Bill.[96]

The Campaign for the Hindu Code Bill was one of the first legislative struggles taken up by the NFIW, and a site of collaboration and united effort with other organisations including the AIWC; a cross-organisational nationwide initiative that represented a sustained and proactive attempt on behalf of the AIWC and the NFIW to hold the government to account in terms of its constitutional commitment to equality.

Signature campaigns and petitions, that had defined gender politics in the earlier decades of the century, continued to be used as a central tactic in the campaign. Petitioning would start off with a series of local meetings amongst organisations of women, to spread the word and create awareness around the issue in particular constituencies.[97] This would be followed by a signature campaign with activists going door to door in their neighbourhoods and amongst their social networks to collect support, and at a state wide level mass rallies would be held where resolutions in support of the Hindu Code Bill were passed.[98] The Hindu Code Bill Campaign represented a struggle within the constitutional framework of the new state, drawing on the formal political strategies of lobbying. These signature petitions were then used to pressurise the relevant MPs and political parties who represented the constituencies from which the signatures were collected. Campaign leaders threatened that women would withhold their vote if their representatives did not commit themselves to promoting the Hindu Code Bill in the Lok Sabha.

The signature drives were intended as a demonstration of democracy in practice, an exercise in the power and legitimacy of a collective voice. Campaigning itself however occurred at a personal level, going door to door in local neighbourhoods, and drawing on one of the strengths of all Women's Organisations, such as the NFIW and the AIWC, their outreach capacity and their embeddedness in

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[96] Hannah Sen, 'President's circular letter No. 6', 22 September 1951, File 159, AIWC Papers, NMML; The Action Committee of the Hindu Code Bill, meeting minutes, 4 October 1951, File 159, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[97] Interview with Chakravartty, 4th November 2011.
[98] Ibid; Interview with Raja, 18 November 2011.

the communities in which they worked. They required personal interaction, talking to and persuading the women themselves, and their families, to change their attitudes, and called for a shift in family relationships. The act of signing was itself hugely significant:

> It was a victory because you had to not only convince that lady but their entire family. The male members, why we [were] doing this, and why they should sign. Why the family should support. It takes time to convince. In that period it was not easy to convince the male members to agree. So collecting signatures was something remarkable in a sense.[99]

> At that time collecting a thousand signatures...was something, and sending it to the collector or the government or the Prime Minister, that was something great during that period. Because you see the women were not allowed to even sign. They did not have much freedom to intervene in any such social issues... So that time getting a signature that itself was a huge task. But managing a thousand signatures...that was a big achievement.[100]

The Campaign for the Hindu Code Bill was one of the NFIW's activities that drew refugee women into the mainstream women's movement in West Bengal. Because the NFIW and its founding organisations were already working with these refugee communities, they were one of the sites targeted in signature campaigns, with refugee women providing an important source of support. Of a total of 45 760 signatures collected in favour of the Special Marriage Bill by January 1955, 36,000 were collected in West Bengal, indicating the importance of the State as a support base for the Campaign.[101] Likewise for the Hindu Marriage and Divorce Bill the majority of signatures - 36,000 out of a total 44,437 - were collected from West Bengal.[102]

Rallying public support for the Hindu Code Bill was essential for women's organisations and activists, as this was a decisive and hard fought Campaign. 'There was so much resistance' recalled Vidya Munshi.[103] Resistance emanated from across the political spectrum, from the conservative hardliners, the Hindu Mahasabha, Sikh groups, and Muslim men.[104] President Rajendra Prasad himself argued that these proposed legislative changes would result in the destruction of the Hindu

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[99] Interview with Raja, 18 November 2011.
[100] Ibid.
[101] NFIW, 'Report of the Joint Secretaries Mrs Anasuya Gyanchand and Mrs Hajrah Begum', 4 January 1955, File 99, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Interview with Munshi, 22 December 2011.
[104] See Som, 'Jawaharlal Nehru and the Hindu Code: A Victory of Symbol over Substance?'

family.[105] This made those in support of equal rights for women in the Assembly feel very frustrated, recalls Renuka Ray.[106] Many women's constituencies also opposed the Bill, such as the Hindu Mahasabha women's wing.[107] While the Secretary of CPI Andhra Provincial Women's Fraction reported the opposition of rural village women, who she claimed, encouraged by communist party members themselves, claimed the destruction of family, as valid grounds:

> We, it seemed, were swimming against the current. A vigorous vile slanderous campaign was organised against women comrades. We were slandered as having trying to disrupt family life, through divorce, impose women-raj in the name of property rights and encouraging debauchery and prostitution.[108]

Eventually the Bill was passed between 1952 and 1956 as four separate Acts, the Hindu Marriage Act, the Hindu Succession Act, the Hindu Minority and Guardian Act, the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act.

The Campaign for the Hindu Bill Code Bill facilitated the inclusion and mobilisation of new communities of women in the NFIW's politics of gender equality, 'While working with them they collected signatures and that became a base, a platform' Gargi Chakravartty emphasises.[109] Refugee women began to enter the structures of the NFIW, and formed a visible presence in the 'spectacular demonstration of women' who marched through the streets of Calcutta from the University Institute as part of the opening of the first NFIW Conference in 1954.[110] Refugee women from 15 colonies in and around Calcutta attended this first Conference according to *New Age*. By the second conference, three years later in June 1957, the organisation reported that its affiliated organisations working with Refugee Colonies in Bengal had 'grown and stabilised'.[111]

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[105] R. Prasad to J, Nehru, 15 September 1951 in V. Tagra, *Jawaharlal Nehru and the Status of Women in India* (New Delhi, 2006), pp. 366-373.
[106] Ray, *My Reminiscences,* p. 139.
[107] Interview with Chakravartty, 4November 2011.
[108] M. Suryavati (Secretary of Andhra Provincial Women's Fraction), Report on Agitation concerning the Hindu Code Bill, 24 December 1952, File 1953/14, CPI Papers, Joshi Archives.
[109] Interview with Chakravartty, 4 November 2011.
[110] S. Munsi, 'National Conference of Women in Calcutta', 13 June 1954, *New Age,* copy located in CPI offices, Ajoy Bhavan
[111] NFIW, 2nd National Conference Report, June 1957, Vijayawada, p. 28.

Through the process of collecting signatures NFIW campaigners were able to introduce abstract national level issues such as gender rights and equality in an accessible and meaningful way that engaged the day to day domestic struggles of women refugees. Visiting the households and talking to the women and their families, gave campaigners an opportunity to broach and challenge the subject of 'What a lady means' says Anni Raja. To challenge the idea that 'she should be confined to the four walls of that house and she should look after her children, her parents and in-laws, she should prepare food for the husband and family on time...she should not look at what is happening outside there'.[112] 'We wanted to increase awareness amongst women and the people at large; women ought to know at least what they were entitled to' stresses Manikuntala Sen, a Calcutta based NFIW leader during this period. 'Earlier even when I noticed women with marks of violence on their bodies, inflicted by their husbands – there was little I could do to help them. Now I might actually be able to do something'.[113]

Leaders such as Sen were making connections between freedom and equality in the private sphere of the household, and freedom and equality in the public sphere as the 'sexless citizen'. The Campaign for the Hindu Code Bill carried enormous meaning and significance for women's organisations because it was an articulation of the idea of equality for women in law. It was about the principle involved, but it also had very practical, material implications. It was seen to be a means or way for women's organisations to make a positive impact on the physical and emotional wellbeing of women. By giving women greater rights to divorce and maintenance, as well as custody over children, it was intended to offer them greater room to manoeuvre in abusive relationships or other family contexts, opening up and expanding the possibilities and meanings of agency and choice in the private sphere. The right to equal inheritance fulfilled a similar function, by entitling those whose families had resources to a fairer share of these through inheritance.

The Campaign for the Hindu Code Bill was one of the NFIW's activities that drew refugee women into the mainstream women's movement in West Bengal. But this was a two way exchange. Not only did the signature drives associated with the Bill help to conscientize and organise refugee women into

[112] Interview with Raja, 18 November 2011.
[113] Sen, *In Search of Freedom,* p. 234.

the movement, but they facilitated the infiltration of the immediate socio-economic concerns of these women into the NFIW. 'The struggle of the refugee women from East Bengal for food and shelter is a landmark in the history of the women's movement', argues Gargi Chakravartty, as these immediate concerns become 'linked to the issues of the women's struggles in general' and are consequently incorporated into the mainstream women's movement'.[114] This influence can be seen in the way that women's employment as a livelihood and source of personal independence comes to be taken up as a key concern for the NFIW in West Bengal. In 1953 already, MARS and other women's organisations (which were to form the nucleus of the NFIW in 1954) were calling on the government to create employment opportunities for women as a rehabilitation and development initiative. The motivation was one of practicality and economic survival '[t]he question of economic emancipation, still a distant dream, did not consciously influence the political choices of women in the colonies or camps' Gargi Chakravartty tells us. 'However, the economic needs of those women brought the agenda for employment for women to the forefront of the women's movement'.[115] As a result 'The whole issue of employment for women was taken up by the Communist women in Bengal much before their national body took it up'.[116]

Conclusion

In providing a platform for interaction between these two very different kinds of struggles; one for socio-economic rights and services at a municipal level, and the other for legislative equality at a national level, the Campaign for the Hindu Code Bill encouraged refugee women to think about their socio-economic needs through a language of rights, rather than a language of survival, which in turn allowed them to articulate an active notion of citizenship. In offering such a language of rights and an accompanying identity for women as citizens, and, in providing a space for awareness raising and education about these rights and the responsibility of the state to enshrine and protect these through legislation, the Campaign for the Hindu Code Bill enabled refugee communities of women to begin thinking about their socio-economic needs not in terms of welfare and relief, and themselves as

[114] Chakravartty, *Coming Out of Partition*, p. 37.
[115] Ibid, pp. 69-70.
[116] Ibid, p. 70.

victims in need of state assistance, but rather as citizens, entitled to demand services and facilities, access to living space and livelihoods as a rights. The initial *plea* of women refugees for assistance as victims of circumstance was consequently transformed into a *demand based on their rights as citizens* and the responsibility of the state. The claim of refugee women to physical space, resources, visibility and recognition through the politics of protest and presence, enabled such communities to become participants in the development agenda of the nation. Protest and agitation become a duty or responsibility for the citizen in the same way that social service, or being a ‘good’ Indian mother did in other contexts. It is not only that the state has a responsibility to its citizens - the relationship is reversed - because it is the individual whose responsibility as citizen it is, to hold the state to account.

Chapter Seven:

Politics of the body: Family planning in Independent India

Introduction

Today reproductive rights are internationally recognised as human rights, and identified as a core component of the claim to inclusive citizenship. Securing these rights through the transformation of law, health policy and social attitudes have been important struggles for western feminism. In India, however, the potential of family planning as vehicle for achieving women's empowerment has never been embraced with the same degree of consistency and consensus that it has been by gender and rights campaigners in the west; not for the generation of women who are the focus of this thesis, nor for their daughters and granddaughters who were part of the second wave women's movement to emerge in the late 1970s[1]. In fact throughout the period of independence, family planning has remained a highly contested subject and one that has never escaped the paradigm of population control that continues to define it as both a planning challenge, and a socio-economic problem.

The coercive Emergency era population control policies of Indira Gandhi cast a dark shadow over family planning in India, together with the ongoing complicity of international development aid in the funding of such programmes.[2] New technologies and wealth have brought with them new forms of exploitation, such as a growth in surrogacy where poor Indian women rent out their wombs to the

[1] I am in no way claiming that family planning and reproductive rights discourses are inherently liberating and progressive in the west. As Matthew Connelly emphasises in his book *Fatal Misconceptions*, family planning has always been a 'two edged sword' with the capacity to be used for agendas of empowerment as well as more conservative and coercive agendas. See M. Connelly, *Fatal Misconceptions: the struggle to control world population* (Cambridge, 2008.)

[2] Here I refer again to the analysis presented by Matthew Connelly in *Fatal Misconceptions*. It has also been identified by Betsy Hartmann in her groundbreaking text *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs: The Global Politics of Population control* first published in 1987. Over the past two years media in the United Kingdom has included several exposes of DIFD funding sterilization programmes in India. See 'UK aid helps to fund forced sterilisation of India's poor', *The Guardian* online, 15 April 2012, United Kingdom, accessed 1October 2012, at http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/15/uk-aid-forced-sterilisation-india

wealthy from India and abroad.[3] Advances in prenatal-care such as the ultrasound intended to improve maternal and infant health, have facilitated the rising imbalance of birth gender ratios by allowing couples to choose the sex of their child. According to the 2011 Indian census, 933 girls are born to every 1000 boys.[4] The legal right to the termination of pregnancy, as an expression of a woman's choice and control over her fertility, has been severely undermined by its use for sex selective abortion, with an estimated 160 million 'missing' women, in India today, as a result of foeticide, infanticide and femicide.[5]

India launched the world's first official population control policy in 1952 when many of Chattopadhyay's generation were beginning to build their public careers in the nascent state and to coalesce their developmental and political praxis. Interestingly enough, this generation had a complex and varied perception of, and engagement with, family planning as the predecessor of reproductive rights. From the staunch advocacy of Rama Rau and the Bombay AIWC, who sought to institutionalise population control into government policy and to roll out wide-scale family planning programmes, through to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, India's first National Minister of Health, who opposed the use of mechanical and chemical contraceptives. From the outspokenness of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, who publically addressed birth control in terms of equal freedom and rights, through to communities of communist women, who completely rejected the population explosion paradigm. This chapter takes a historical look at how Indian feminists have engaged with questions around the development of family planning in India, by tracing the divergent opinions of two prominent individuals who played important roles in shaping health policy under the Nehruvian government; Lady Rama Rau founder of the Family Planning Association of India (FPAI) and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, India's first Health Minister from 1947 to 1957.

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[3] Interview with Raja, 18 November 2011. Raja emphasises that the majority of surrogate mothers in India are tribals and dalits from the economically weaker sections of Indian society. Both affluent Indians and foreigners are recipients of their services.

[4] Government of India, Census 2011, accessed 14 September 2013, at http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/gender_composition.aspx

[5] See for example M. Hvistendahl, *Unnatural Selection: Choosing Boys over Girls and the Consequences of a World Full of Men* (2012.)

Population control and family planning in colonial India

Population policies are purposeful measures or programmes designed to affect the size and growth of a population to enable a state to achieve its economic, social, demographic and political goals.[6] In this chapter, three different terms are used; birth control, family planning and population control. Birth control refers more specifically to education around, provision of, and use of methods of contraception, including abortion, to reduce the birth rate in a population. Birth control and family planning often tend to be used interchangeably. Family planning is broader however in that it encompasses birth control but also includes the systems and institutions surrounding these, as well as maternal and reproductive health in general. While the focus of birth control is driven by the intervention itself, and the technology, family planning places greater emphasis on changing attitudes and behaviour, and empowering couples to control their fertility through provision of health services and education. Population control is the broadest and most encompassing of the three terms. It covers demographic planning and policy, as well as the implementation of this policy through educational and health institutions and services. The three terms are used differently in various contexts, and can sometimes be used interchangeably, making it difficult to distinguish clearly between them. In this chapter, I generally use the joint term 'family planning and population control' as this is the term that is used in the Government's First Five-Year Plan (1951-1956).

The history of family planning in the twentieth century reveals an idea and set of practices broad enough to encompass a wide range of agendas, from that of rights and health, through to social engineering, class control and racism.[7] We can identify these multiple agendas at play within the Indian context. Indian feminists themselves espoused and employed a range of these in their advocacy for, and opposition to, family planning.

In the second half of the nineteenth century ideas and practices concerned with national health were often expressed in terms of maternal and child welfare. These were shaped by the philanthropy of

[6] P. Demeny, 'Population Policy: The Role of National Governments', *Population and Development Review*, 1:1 (1975), p. 147.
[7] Here again I refer to Connelly, *Fatal Misconceptions*.

maternal imperialism[8] and the reforming agenda of educated middle class and elite Indian men and women, and were protective and paternalistic in their approach. The emphasis was on the provision of maternity hospitals and the training of a small number of lady doctors to tend to the needs of child bearing women. Maternal and child health through social reform, such as through prevention of child marriages, was also stressed[9]. Such reformers and Indian nationalists were not concerned with reducing the birth rate to prevent population growth, but rather with improving the health and survival rates of mothers and children, hence enhancing the 'quality' of the population, through health care and delayed marriage.

According to Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, birth control in the modern Indian context was being 'offered to women by private doctors on compassionate grounds' by the 1920s, and a number of philanthropic organisations such as the Neo-Malthusian League, the Marriage Hygiene Society and the Bhagini Samaj were running family planning clinics in urban areas such as Bombay[10] and in the major towns and cities of Tamil speaking south India.[11] By the 1930s international birth control activists including Marie Stopes, Margaret Stanger, Edith How-Martyn and Eileen Palmer[12] had visited the country, and were establishing a presence through their advocacy for family planning education and by assisting local activists set up services.[13] In 1936 according to Sanjam Ahluwalia, 60 clinics, welfare centres and hospitals, both public and private were offering birth control information in India, with the majority of doctors western trained.[14] These efforts remained largely uncoordinated and were generally sporadic and short lived. There was no coherent colonial or nationalist policy on population control and family planning.[15] Initiatives tended to come from civil society and the private

[8] For a detailed analysis of the complex dynamics between European women and their Indian counterparts see B. Ramusack 'Catalysts or Helpers? British Feminists Indian Women's Rights and Indian Independence' in G. Minault (ed.) *The Extended Family* (New Delhi, 1981); K. Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, (London; New York, 1995) and A. Burton. *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women and Imperial Culture 1865-1915* (London, 1994.)
[9] Hodges, *Reproductive Health in India*, pp. 12-13.
[10] K. Chattopadhyay, *Indian Woman's Battle for Freedom*, (New Delhi, 1983), p. 83.
[11] See, for example, S. Hodges, *Contraception, Colonialism and Commerce* (Ashgate, 2008), p. 1. The Madras Neo-Malthusian League (MNML) was particularly active in this region, pp. 48-49.
[12] S. Ahluwalia, *Reproductive Restraints: Birth control in India 1877-1947* (Illinois, 2008), pp. 147-164.
[13] Connelly, *Fatal Misconceptions*, p. 82.
[14] Ahluwalia, *Reproductive Restraints*, pp. 160-161.
[15] Ibid, pp. 116-117.

sector with the colonial state hesitant to intervene, afraid of alienating more conservative groups in Indian society.[16]

By the 1930s population growth as a developmental concern had entered the vocabulary of the public sphere, with nationalists, businessmen and professionals raising concerns about both the quality and growing size of India's population. This was accompanied by a movement from compassion and philanthropy as concepts for framing population growth, to social engineering and race in line with international trends. Eugenics was gaining ground as an increasingly popular way of talking about population and patterns of reproduction by the 1930s[17]. In 1939 a Report on Population was commissioned by National Planning Committee (NPC),[18] which shows the influence of neo-Malthusian thinking. This Report was based on the underlying theory that a rapid growth in population was occurring and that this was going to place an unprecedented strain on the environment and its resources, leading to poverty, famine and disease and to a consequent decline in the health and fitness of India's population:

> The pressure on the soil and unemployment of all classes have increased, and in the coming decade the present piling up of the minor and adolescent groups will add many millions of mouths to feed and employ, enormously aggravating economic pressure and rudely dis-establishing the land-man ratio.[19]
>
> [T]he forecast of the future population based on analysis of the quantitative aspects of the population structure foreshadows a grave economic crisis which is primarily and fundamentally the problem of food planning for the additional 160 millions or so, who unless fertility changes or some famines or epidemics ravage the land are sure to come.[20]

In a pattern repeated over and over again in population control documents, women, in this particular case 'the increase in females in age-groups 10-30', were targeted in this Report as 'responsible for the recent storm in breeding in the country' divorced from social context and family dynamics.[21] The seeds of a coercive population control policy were already present in this Report which included

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[16] Ibid, p. 141.
[17] Sarah Hodges provides a comprehensive account of the development of eugenics in the Indian context in her chapter 'Indian Eugenics in an Age of Reform' in *Reproductive Health in India*, pp. 115-138.
[18] Vijayalakshmi Pandit was one of the eight members of the Population Report Committee although it is unclear how actively she was involved in the research and writing of the Report.
[19] K. T. Shah (ed.) *Population,* National Planning Committee Series (Bombay, 1947), pp. 22-23.
[20] Ibid, p. 31.
[21] Ibid, p. 35.

recommendations for the segregation of lepers and for the legal prohibition of marriage in such cases. The sterilization of the feeble minded, insane and criminal 'who are yielding a plentiful crop of abnormal and anti-harvest individuals' was also mentioned as a possibility for consideration[22]:

> There are ample justifications for selectively sterilizing the entire group of hereditary defectives; for it is found that, due to both tainted hereditary and maintenance of inferior homes...a trail of crime, murder, pauperism, prostitution and illegitimacy is generally the characteristic of the history of defective families.[23]

As extreme as such ideas might sound today, this Report must be understood as the product of a particular milieu where such ideas were widely accepted, before their devastating application in the Holocaust of World War Two. Matthew Connelly reminds us that such discourse was evident during the 1930s and 1940s in Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden, the United States, Brazil and Mexico, and that an 'interest in ensuring a racially sound citizenry cut across the political spectrum and circled the world'.[24] The ideas put forward in the National Planning Report were merely reproducing and adapting this discourse.

Nationalist thinking around population by this stage was developing in conjunction with, and in close interaction with, a growing international population control movement. In the nineteenth century, population was generally understood as a national resource. The rapid growth of a population was not a concern, although the health and quality of this population was. In fact, population growth was positively viewed as a sign of strength. In the second half of the nineteenth century Sanjam Ahluwalia identifies a shift in the way population comes to be understood, from being a national resource to being seen as a mark of national poverty, of backwardness and overall economic, social and cultural underdevelopment.[25] This shift influenced the way in which population growth came to be understood and spoken about in India.

The high population density of certain regions of colonial India, and the overcrowding, especially in the urban centres, easily gave the impression of 'overpopulation' to advocates of the population

[22] Ibid, p. 79. The Report in fact quotes Germany as example of country practicing sterilization see pp. 85, 87-88.
[23] Ibid, p. 87.
[24] Connelly, *Fatal Misconceptions*, p. 80.
[25] Ahluwalia, *Reproductive Restraints*, p. 27.

control movement travelling through the country in the first half of the twentieth century.[26] The 'teeming millions' of India were drawn on in this discourse as the epitome of overpopulation[27] and as the 'warning' of the route that other countries should avoid. In this international discourse, having a population control policy, including the provision of family planning, became a marker of modernity and progress, while the extensive unplanned family, always shown enmeshed in poverty, was a sign of backwardness.[28] Those within India who were concerned with questions of development drew on this discourse to articulate these concerns. Simultaneously, this discourse was being shaped by cultural and imperial laden perceptions of India as a nation of underdevelopment and overpopulation, with each feeding into and reinforcing the other.

The growing international movement for population control presented a largely negative perspective of India, as a country of underdevelopment and backwardness due to its 'over population'. But there was equal scope for Indian nationalists, social reformers and women's rights advocates to use the discipline of demography to re-imagine and reinvent the nation state in a positive light. Advocacy for population control became a way of expressing a commitment to development, progress and modernity, and was increasingly drawn on as the country moved towards independence.[29]

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[26] This discourse and perception continues to be influential today. See for example Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (New York, 1971) in which the author describes how he came to the conclusion that overpopulation was the cause of poverty one swelteringly hot night in a Delhi slum.

[27] Connelly, *Fatal Misconceptions*, p. 262.

[28] Ibid, p. 264. Also see Mayo's *Mother India* (1927). As with the debate around sati, women were the 'site' upon which these questions about the nature of Indian society and culture, and the responsibility of the west, in promoting 'development', were debated, but the genuine empowerment of women was often not the primary objective.

[29] While the discipline of demography functioned to imagine a future 'modern and progressive' nation state, it was equally invested with reinforcing class and caste divisions. There are a variety of opinions amongst scholars on the extent to which this occurred, particularly taking into consideration the understanding that birth control encompassed a broad range of concerns that were historically contextual. In her book *Reproductive Restraints*, Sanjam Ahluwalia argues that the advocacy of birth control, articulated by middle class Hindu men at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth in northern India, offered a means for the strict surveillance of the reproductive functions of those seen to be undesirable national citizens, the working classes, lower castes and in particular incidences, Muslims. See Ahluwalia, *Reproductive Restraints*, p. 35. For Sarah Hodges too, birth control in the first half of the twentieth century in south India functioned to reinforce class, and caste divisions, but not so much through the targeting of lower classes and castes, but rather through legitimising and protecting particular sexual practices associated with Brahmanical identity, such as child marriage, that had been socially as well as legally reclassified from normative to illicit. For these higher castes, the potential of contraception 'was less about governing the social-that of the non-Brahmin masses and women- and more about forging new modes of self governance under late colonial conditions'. Hodges *Contraception, Colonialism and Commerce*, pp. 74-75, 16-18. Because class identities often overlap with other socio-economic identities, such as those of caste and religion, birth control as a strategy for reimagining and remoulding the

The role of the AIWC in pioneering and institutionalising family planning in independent India

As an organisation committed to the welfare of women and children through socio-economic and political development, the recently established AIWC took an almost immediate interest in the subjects of population growth and birth control. In 1931 the first resolution on the subject was moved at the annual conference by S. Lakshmibai Rajwade, advocating the appointment of 'a committee of medical women to study and recommend ways and means of educating the public to regulate the size of their families'.[30] The following year in 1932 the various constituent branches of the Organisation debated the question at their local meetings and the resolution 'was adopted by a large majority'.[31] Over the course of the following two decades, various AIWC branches worked to translate this resolution into action by setting up small birth-control clinics in their local towns, or by taking over, and by promoting sex education.[32] These efforts however remained largely sporadic and uncoordinated.

The debate around the AIWC's 1931 resolution on population growth and birth control suggest that from its emergence in the consciousness of the Conference, family planning was already being contextualised within the looming crisis of population growth, as one of the key obstacles hindering socio-economic development:

> When the births and deaths are equally excessive and surviving population is weak and unfit and what is more lamentable the illusive increase of population puts an undue strain on the economic and physical resources of the nation... If India is to take her place in the comity of nations she must produce men and women who will be worthy of that name... The physical health of our nation is deteriorating in every generation.[33]

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nation state - targeted at communal and caste groups - could have an inbuilt class dimension as well. In the post independence era alarm created around perceptions of Muslim communities in India as having higher birth rates than their Hindu neighbours, channelled family planning and birth control into monitoring and containing Muslim communities in particular contexts. See H. Bannerji, *Demography and democracy: essays on nationalism, gender and ideology* (Toronto, 2011).

[30] AIWC, 6th Annual Conference Report, 28 December 1931 to 1 January 1932, Madras, p.81a.

[31] Chattopadhyay, *Indian Woman's Battle for Freedom*, p. 84. The subject had been discussed prior to this date in the AIWC, but this was the first conference resolution on the issue.

[32] Basu, *Women's Struggle: A History of the All India Women's Conference*, pp. 95-96; Chattopadhyay, *Indian Woman's Battle for Freedom*, p. 84. The Calcutta branch of the AIWC took over the running of a birth control clinic that had initially been set up by Saudamini Mehta who had met Margaret Sanger during one of her earlier visits to India. The FPAI was to later work through some of the clinics that were still in existence after independence.

[33] AIWC, 6th Annual Conference Report, 28 December 1931 to 1 January 1932, p.81a.

Set against the backdrop of the 1931 census figures[34], which showed a growth in India's population this resolution and the debate around it, convey a sense of urgency, that Matthew Connelly identifies as a defining feature of the post war international population control movement, intertwined with discourses of eugenics, and racial nationalism.

The extensive debate that the resolution provoked, did, however, indicate that even at the time of its introduction into the Conference, a diversity of views existed amongst AIWC members on this matter and how it should be addressed[35]. Mrs Khen Chand, for instance, spoke out in disagreement with the resolution, proposing an alternative point of view, which did not see population growth as inherently negative. She emphasised that India, like other countries such as France, might regret the decision to practice birth control if significant manpower was needed in future for the defence of the nation. Instead of practicing birth control, she recommended that education be improved as 'having more occupation and recreation', 'people were sublimated with art and took to artistic works' and hence would 'naturally and automatically [beget] less children'.[36]

Advocacy for birth control was not necessarily altruistic. As Sanjam Ahluwalia has shown in her insightful study of the history of family planning in colonial India, support for population control and family planning was motivated as much by concerns with maintaining class and caste hierarchy, as it was motivated by concern for the health and wellbeing of women and children.[37] But this does not mean that family planning as concept and practice could not be drawn on to articulate agendas more directly concerned with the questions of freedom and empowerment. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was one of the individuals in the AIWC who spoke in such terms, differing from many of her colleagues by linking birth control with women's sexual freedom and control over their bodies, rather than framing the issue merely in terms of maternal and child health and welfare. In an essay entitled *Our*

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[34] The 1931 census indicated that India's population had increased by thirty million since the previous census of 1921, creating alarm amongst colonial officials as well as certain Indian nationalists and reformers. See D. Arnold, 'Official Attitudes to Population' in S. Hodges (ed.) *Reproductive Health in India: History, Politics, Controversies*, (Hyderabad, 2006), p. 28.

[35] This range of views reflected public opinion in general. Hodges emphasises that in the 1930s an understanding of a large a population as the root cause of poverty was not yet hegemonic amongst Indians. See Hodges, *Contraception, Colonialism and Commerce*, p. 14.

[36] Ibid.

[37] See Ahluwalia, *Reproductive Restraints*.

Cause she made the connection between female bodily integrity and economic independence.[38] In her writing Chattopadhyay recognised how family planning in fact, worked to perpetuate inequalities between men and women, 'For even this field of family planning was beset by devious discriminations against women. For instance men could get sterilised without any reference to their wives, but no woman could do the same without the permission of the husband'. 'For successful family planning a basic change in social attitudes and values had to be wrought'[39].

Bringing family planning onto the policy map: Lady Dhanvanthi Rama Rau and the founding of the Family Planning Association of India

In the first half of the twentieth century, family planning and population control entered the public sphere in India through growing awareness and discussion amongst nationalists, social reformers and women's rights advocates, and came to be closely associated with ideas of development, as well as Indian nationalism and the imagining of an independent nation. When India gained her independence in 1947, the country had a group of advocates including women's organisations, nationalists and development planners who saw family planning and population control as essential to the success of the new nation building project. Lady Dhanvanthi Rama Rau of the Bombay AIWC was one of these advocates.

Rau had a long standing interest in social work, especially projects concerned with alleviating the social inequalities faced by Indian women. Between 1929 and the late 1940s she spent a number of years living abroad,[40] where she was exposed to the feminist movement in England and where she first began to hone her skills as a networker and fundraiser. On returning to India in the late 1940s,

[38] Ahluwalia, *Reproductive Restraints*, p.105. This point has also been made by Reena Nanda in her biography of Chattopadhyay. See R. Nanda, *Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay: a biography* (Oxford, 2002).
[39] Chattopadhyay, *Indian Woman's Battle for Freedom*, p. 84. There were also other individuals and communities in India who saw the emancipatory potential of birth control. Sarah Hodges research, for example, documents how the Self Respect Movement formed in 1926 by E. V. Ramasamy, embraced contraception as part of an agenda for a radical personal emancipation, because it allowed women to prevent pregnancy while existing as sexual agents. Hodges, *Contraception, Colonialism and Commerce*, pp. 77, 85.
[40] Rau's husband was an important bureaucrat for the colonial government and later a diplomat for the independent state. Rau had spent time abroad in England in the 1930s where her husband was involved in drafting the Simon Commission Report. She also lived in Japan and Washington in the 1940s, after the Second World War, when her husband took on the role of Indian ambassador. They returned to India in the late 1940s, when he was offered the position of the Governor of the Reserve Bank. For a detailed account of Rau's life and work see her autobiography Dhanvanthi Rama Rau, *An Inheritance: The memoirs of Dhanvanti Rama Rau* (London, 1978.)

Rau contemplated how best she could use her skills to contribute to the development of the new nation. In her autobiography she describes the moment of her decision to dedicate her social work and philanthropic career to the promotion of family planning, whilst visiting a slum housing industrial workers near Bombay.[41] Like many advocates of population control and family planning before her, Rau saw the overcrowding, poverty and lack of facilities in this slum as the product of 'overpopulation' and framed her arguments for promotion of family planning largely in these terms:

> It was when I thought over these glimpses of slum life that it became perfectly clear to me that, however much our social workers tried to improve conditions, nothing could be accomplished while unlimited numbers of children continued to be born in crowded houses where expansion was impossible...I knew then that I had found a new purpose in life. There was no question in my mind that I should work for family planning single-mindedly and intensively.[42]

Together with fellow AIWC colleague Avabia Wadia, Rau worked to expand the small existing family planning initiatives that were being run by the AIWC in Bombay, and encouraged AIWC branches in other parts of the country to set up their own family planning clinics.[43] The AIWC also began importing small numbers of mechanical contraceptive devices for these clinics, with other organisations showing an interest in this endeavour.[44]

Although population control and family planning were being discussed in the public sector, and independent initiatives such as those of the Bombay AIWC were gaining recognition, the provisional government of India did not, at this time, have a clear policy position on the matter. Between 1950 and 1952 Rau began bringing advocates and experts in this field together to lobby the Planning Commission of the importance of including family planning as a 'priority program' in the first Five-Year Plan.[45] This group sent a Memorandum to the Planning Commission, the body responsible for preparing this important developmental roadmap, requesting inclusion of family planning in the First Five-Year Plan. Rau wanted the Plan to offer a concrete programme of action and advocated for the

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[41] Rama Rau, *An Inheritance*, pp. 245, 243.
[42] Ibid. pp. 242-243.
[43] These early initiatives were later used as pilot models for the FPAI's own initiatives.
[44] See, for example, correspondence from the Indian Conference of Social work to the AIWC head office, requesting an order of diaphragms on its behalf for its family Planning clinics, and correspondence between the AIWC president and the national Department of Information and Broadcasting, calling on AIWC assistance for a commissioned documentary on family planning, File 148, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[45] This nucleus of experts and advocates were to form the core of the FPAI in 1952.

provision of information and advice on contraceptives, and their widespread availability at all government hospitals and clinics, with the aim of making 'family services a required component part of every health programme'.[46]

In response to these efforts the Commission formed two panels to research and debate related matters, one on health programmes, and another on social welfare. Rama Rau was given a seat on the former together with Rajkumari Kaur while Avabai Wadia was a representative on the latter, together with Sushila Nayar, Kaur's deputy, and Durgabai Deshmukh. In April 1951, the health programmes panel appointed a sub-committee specifically to look at issues concerning population growth and family planning, placing Sushila Nayar and Rama Rao together on this subcommittee.[47]

In this context Rama Rau and Avabai Wadia found themselves in conflict with Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, the new Minister of Health, and her deputy, Sushila Nayar, over the relevance and application of population control and family planning in the development praxis of the new state. Kaur opposed the use of contraceptives during her tenure as national Health Minister, and according to Connelly, waged 'a rearguard action against birth control', together with Sushila Nayar.[48] Kaur was not opposed to family limitation as a concept, but she disagreed with the use any pharmaceutical and mechanical contraceptive methods. She made this position clear in an address to Parliament in 1956:

> Time and again I am approached to solve the problem of over-population by what our so called educated women call, mechanical contraceptives. It sounds so simple but it is wholly impracticable.[49]

Kaur's objections were both practical and moral. She argued that the effective distribution and use of pharmaceutical and mechanical contraceptives was totally impractical in the Indian context due to lack of resources, infrastructure and trained personnel.[50] This was particularly the case in India's vast rural hinterlands, where the majority of Indians lived. She advocated delayed marriage and self restraint as appropriate alternatives that aligned with Gandhian principles and values:

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[46] Connelly, *Fatal Misconceptions*, p. 146.
[47] B.L. Raina, *Population Policy* (New Delhi, 1988), p. 5.
[48] Connelly, *Fatal Misconceptions*, p. 146.
[49] See Rajkumari Amrit Kaur's speech 'Resolution on Re-Sterilisation of Adults', in *Rajkumari Amrit Kaur*, p. 260.
[50] Ibid, p. 261.

> After all, the God-given remedy of self-restraint is given to us. Are we going to be weak enough to say that no self-restraint can be practiced, and that we have to resort to other methods? We are quoting the Father of the Nation again and again...but should we forget him in this vital thing?[51]

Unlike Rama Rau, Kaur did not view population growth as the root of the problem, and tended to be critical of the rhetoric of 'population explosion', arguing that it was not the real cause of India's lack of development and that it was receiving a disproportionate amount of attention. For her, family planning and access to contraception were not developmental priories, and the implementation of wide scale family planning, as part of a policy of population control, was therefore considered misdirected. Kaur was not the only official within Government with such views. Sushila Nayar, who took over from Kaur as Health Minister in 1957, supported Kaur in her opposition to a family planning programme in the Planning Commission, stressing that 'the only proper state policy on population was to promote education and improve living standards'.[52]

Adherents of Gandhi, such as Kaur and Sushila Nayar, were not the only group opposed to state sponsored birth control. Communist women, such as Renu Chakravartty, Sarla Sharma and Vidya Munshi, like Kaur, did not consider population control and family planning a developmental priority, a fact which is borne out by the general absence of family planning in the programmes and policy priorities of the NFIW. The Communist Party of India was cynical of the threat of 'population explosion', viewing the introduction of family planning programmes by the Nehruvian government in terms of class conflict, as an attempt on the part of the government to control the working classes and rural masses.[53]

In the face of the governmental resistance, Rama Rau continued to collaborate together with the informal group of population and family planning experts and advocates that she had brought together. She also called on her networks within the AIWC for additional support. In January 1951 the AIWC passed another important resolution which spelt out very clearly the Conference's outspoken support for family planning and for the widespread availability of contraceptives in the state sector. It

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[51] See Kaur's 'General Budget 1953-54' speech in *Rajkumari Amrit Kaur,* pp. 88-89.
[52] Connelly, *Fatal Misconceptions*, p.146.
[53] 'Our Tasks among the Peasant Masses', Resolution adopted by CC in its meeting held in April 1954, File 1954/23, CPI Papers, Joshi Archives.

urges the government to support a specific type of action in this regard. It furthermore calls on its own membership to take action and become part of the solution by studying the issue and establishing clinics:

> This Conference is strongly of the opinion that the Central and State Governments should accept the principle of family planning in the interest of national economic and the health of women and children, and encourage study and research in birth- control appliances. In view of the fact that production of food, health services, educational facilities and other schemes of progressive development lag far behind the needs of the people, it is desirable that every measure be devised to maintain a stable population. The Conference, therefore, urges Government and Municipal Health Services to provide Birth-Control Clinics in Hospitals and Health Centres. Further, it directs its Branches (a) to study the question of family planning in towns and villages (b) to establish private clinics, and (c) to encourage the work of clinics run by other organisations.[54]

The intention behind this resolution was to give additional weight and support to the pro family planning and population control contingent in the Planning Commission. It was followed up on in August 1951, by an All India Conference on Family Planning, coordinated by Rau and her colleagues in Bombay as part of their efforts to raise the profile of the subject, as a planning and developmental priority. The organisers were surprised, yet greatly encouraged when this Conference received coverage in the international press. This was followed by a request from Margaret Stanger to host the third International Planned Parenthood Conference, which was held in Bombay in 1952.[55] Significantly, it was out of this gathering that the International Planned Parenthood Federation was established, with Rama Rau as one of its honorary presidents, and the Family Planning Association of India was officially launched.[56]

Although Rama Rau set up the Family Planning Association of India as an independent voluntary body, it drew support from, and used the existing networks of the AIWC to further its propaganda and advocacy work. FPAI established its first consultation and advice centre in Bombay within an existing

[54] AIWC, 22nd Annual Conference Report, p. 22.
[55] Rama Rau tells us in her autobiography that Margaret Sanger had read about the Conference in the Paris newspapers. See Rama Rau, *An Inheritance*, pp. 225-226. Connelly offers a slightly different perspective on these events. While Rau gives the impression of being eager and enthusiastic to host the third International Planned Parenthood Conference in India. in her autobiography, , Connelly stresses that Sanger pushed for this arrangement even though the Family Planning Association of India was not a member of the International Committee and that Rama Rau accepted with some trepidation. See Connelly, *Fatal Misconceptions,* p. 66.
[56] Connelly, *Fatal Misconceptions*, p, 168.The AIWC lists the 1952 International Planned Parenthood Conference as an international event organised by the AIWC in its organisational history, suggesting how closely interconnected the AIWC in Bombay and the FPAI were. See Basu, *Women's Struggle*.

AIWC clinic building on the existing networks the AIWC Bombay branch had already established under the direction of Rama Rau and Avabai Wadia. This connection is reinforced in the AIWC's own organisational history, which claims the initiative for laying the foundations of India's Family planning Policy, through the establishment of the FPAI, as this extract from the AIWC's official history *Women's Struggle: A History of the All India Women's Conference* (2002) suggests:

> A few members of the AIWC had advocated family planning from as early as the 1930s. After Independence, some of them formed the Family Planning Association of India (FPAI) under the presidentship of Dhanvanti Rama Rau.[57]

With renewed international attention on population growth in India, the Indian Government began to take note. Rau's advocacy, combined with the high profile official launching of the FPAI, and the International Planned Parenthood Association, are likely to have encouraged the Indian Government to finally announce official support for a population limitation policy in December 1952, making it the first country in the world to implement an explicit policy of population limitation, which was then incorporated into India's First Five-Year Plan.[58] As president of both India's Association, and the International Planned Parenthood Federation, Rau worked closely with Margaret Sanger, as well as other international associates and foundations, to leverage influence and resources for the work of the FPAI, tying India and the development of its national population control policy from the moment of its conception, immediately into international networks of funding and policy thinking.

Family planning and population control in independent India

With an official policy commitment confirmed, family planning and population control was integrated into chapter 32 on Health in the first Five-Year Plan (1951-1956), where 'family planning and population control' were combined as a single category and listed together with a number of other health priorities including the provision of water-supply and sanitation, control of malaria, preventive health care for the rural population, health services for mothers and children, education and training and self-sufficiency in drugs and equipment.[59] Despite this official commitment, a clear working definition of 'family planning and population control', and what it would entail in practice, remained

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[57] Basu, *Women's Struggle*, p. 119.
[58] Connelly, *Fatal Misconceptions*, p. 168.
[59] See Chapter 32: Health, Priorities, point 8, in the First Five-Year Plan 1951-1956, Government of India, accessed 15 July 2012 at http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/default.html

lacking. The tension between those resistant to the wide scale use of mechanical and chemical contraceptives versus influential advocates such as Rau and Durgabai Deshmukh was evident in the ambiguous and contradictory positioning of population control and family in the First Five-Year Plan. The document employed the rhetoric of population growth as developmental threat, advocating measures for its management and control, yet remained extremely vague and uncommitted to state intervention beyond, reflecting the ambiguity of the subject within state policy itself.

Family planning and population control was introduced in relation to the context of a looming crisis of demographic growth and finite resources, and put forward as a required response.[60] However, although its application was initially emphasised as a prerequisite for socio-economic growth, 'to stabilize the population at a level consistent with the requirements of national economy', later this same introductory paragraph stated that 'The main appeal for family planning' stemmed from 'considerations of the health and welfare of the family'.[61]

The internal contradictions reveal themselves again in the way the Plan initially stresses 'the need for family limitation on a wide scale by the people',[62] but when it came to translating this into action, only advocates mechanical contraceptives on the grounds of maternal health, not due to the necessity of encouraging smaller families for reducing population growth or within the framework of giving women the choice to control their fertility:

> Medical officers working at hospitals and health centres like maternity and child welfare clinics should give advice to women regarding family planning when such advice is necessary for health reasons. If a doctor feels that a woman patient cannot undergo again the strain of pregnancy and parturition without danger to health, it is obviously the duty of the doctor to give such advice as is necessary to enable the person to prevent conception. In these circumstances the doctor would be justified in suggesting any

[60] Chapter 32, Health, Family Planning, point 105 in the First Five-Year Plan 1951-1956.
[61] Ibid. Despite the emphasis in the Plan on the welfare of the family as one of the core agendas of its policy, family planning and population control was not integrated into the earlier section of the Plan's chapter on Maternal Child Health (MCH). Rather it was placed at the very end, after the section on vital statistics, reinforcing a framing of the subject within the larger parameters of demographic growth and crisis. Such an approach has been heavily criticised by latter heath planners and reproductive rights activists for encouraging a top down, impersonal approach, driven by abstract targets and figures, rather than the needs and rights of those seeking these services.
[62] Chapter 32, Health, Family Planning, point 105.

> chemical, mechanical or biological methods of contraception or sterilization as may be indicated for the individual case.[63]

The plan is careful to emphasise the urgency and importance of resolving this issue, but at the same time provides very little detail about a specific course of action, speaking in one voice with urgency and a need for immediate and decisive action, but in other with hesitancy and cautiousness, first advocating family limitation on a wide scale then stepping back and stating that further 'groundwork' must first be done before any action can be taken.

The rhythm method is advocated but even this is suggested only once its social acceptance has been established:

> From the point of view of avoiding enormous expenditure as well as that of securing the ethical values that community life would gain by the self-imposed restraint which the rhythm method involves, it would seem desirable to try out this method fully and thus ascertain its practicability. Whether the rhythm method is capable of wide application in the community with adequate results or not, actual experimentation alone can tell.[64]

Furthermore, while acknowledging the urgency of the matter, the plan is very careful not to commit the state to this responsibility, but leaves it to voluntary organisations to take up the required action by stating 'There are numerous voluntary agencies which are currently propagating the spread of information on family planning and the use of chemical and mechanical contraceptives. Their activities would need support'. It is interesting to contrast the national government's response to population control and family planning, with its maternal and child health (MCH) programme. With regards to MCH, the government assumed a key role in the provision of such services, 'Voluntary organisations have played an important role in the past... But the responsibility for providing such services rests upon the Government' states the First Five-Year Plan.[65] This stands in opposition to the positioning of population control and family planning in the Plan where the government makes it clear that the voluntary sector will take the lead.

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[63] Chapter 32, Health, Family Planning, point 107.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid, point 67.

The disorientated positioning of population control and family planning in this plan document reveals how a range of discourses, from economic planning and social nationalism, through to the sanctity of the family and maternal and child health, continued to be drawn on, to articulate and justify such a policy. This ambiguity offered a way of resolving the conflict and disagreement over this issue in the Planning Commission by placating both sides: those in favour of a wide-scale roll-out of family planning such as Rau, and those resistant, without making a clear commitment to either. Consequently, despite the rhetoric of family planning and population control in early planning documents, the national government took little practical action towards implementation of a programme during the time frame of the first Five-Year Plan, limiting its activities to preliminary behavioural and attitudinal studies.

Progress with a human face: making sense of Rajkumari Amrit Kaur's resistance to birth control

How can the historian understand and make sense of Kaur's resistance towards the use of mechanical and chemical contraceptives? Kaur was strongly influenced by Gandhian thinking and values, and recommending self restraint and delayed marriage as appropriate alternatives to birth control, reflect this influence on her development praxis. A Gandhian influence is also discernible in her focus on primary health care and preventative medicine, through which she sought to address the underlying socio-economic causes of ill health.[66]

Despite the fact that Rau had spent much of the last twenty years of the Indian nationalist struggle outside of the country while Kaur had been at the heart of the nationalist movement, Kaur and Rau had much in common. Both had been executive members of the AIWC, with Rau holding the presidentship in 1946, following in the footsteps of Kaur who had held this position 12 years earlier in 1934. Kaur did not remain part of the official leadership of the Conference once she became Union Minister of Health but she continued to attend meetings in an informal capacity and her role and

[66] K. Kumar, 'Rajkumari Amrit Kaur: Her Life, Work and Ideology' in *Rajkumari Amrit Kaur*, p. 71.

influence in the Organisation continued to be recognised.[67] Kaur like Rau, had spent a number of years abroad, and had in fact trained in Britain as a medical doctor.[68] More significantly, both Kaur and Rau had a passionate interest and belief in challenging women's social and economic inequality.

Kaur became politically conscious in the 1930s when she joined the nationalist movement, a decision which required a drastic change in her previously affluent and aristocratic lifestyle.[69] After going to live with Gandhi at his Wardha Ashram she became one of his personal secretaries, a position which she occupied for 16 years, and soon became known in the nationalist movement 'as a right hand man of Gandhi in many ways'.[70]

Gandhi opposed any form of contraception in both principle and practice because he viewed it as an obstacle to the achievement of the political goals of the nationalist movement, as well as a hindrance towards self mastery, factors which he viewed as intricately co-dependent. To the Mahatma, sexuality was dangerous, because it was a form of self indulgence that showed weakness and was draining of vital life energy. Self realisation required control and mastery over all sexual desires. This required *brahmacharya* or celibacy, a practice he advocated accordingly, and struggled with himself for the latter part of his life. He opposed contraception because it worked against his promotion of self mastery, but also because in divorcing sex from procreation, it was seen to encourage promiscuity which was dangerous for the individual and society. This was a philosophy which drew on elements of Hindu philosophical and religious traditions, as well as Victorian Puritanism. In his text *Self Restraint V Self Indulgence* he argues that, contraception:

> removes all prudential motives for self-restraint and makes it possible for sexual indulgence in marriages to be limited only by the diminution of desire or the advance of age...It opens the door for irregular, promiscuous and unfruitful unions, which from the point of view of modern industry, sociology and politics, are full of dangers...It is sufficient to say that by contraception, inordinate sexual indulgences both in and out of

[67] Renuka Ray emphasises that 'in some countries other than the United States of America (U.S.A), more than one illustrious person had said that Rajkumari was the AIWC and the AIWC was her'. See R. Ray, 'India's First Woman Cabinet Minister' in *Rajkumari Amrit Kaur*, p. 47.
[68] Kaur spent part of her childhood in England.
[69] Kaur was born in 1889 into the princely family of the Kapurthala State of Punjab. Her family however lost the right to the throne when her father converted to Christianity, although their family continued to be part of a social elite. See K. Kumar, 'Rajkumari Amrit Kaur: Her Life, Work and Ideology', p. 71 and Ray, 'India's First Woman Cabinet Minister', p. 44 in *Rajkumari Amrit Kau.*
[70] Ray, 'India's First Woman Cabinet Minister', p. 45.

> marriage is facilitated and, if I am right in foregoing physiological arguments, evil must come to both individuals and the race.[71]

For Gandhi self mastery was essential for achieving self realisation and self realisation, was in turn essential for being able to transform the world around one.[72] This was a philosophy that saw the personal and moral as having direct implications for the political and public. Any kind of sexual relationship even within marriage was a distraction, one that limited the ability of nationalist and constructive workers to devote themselves completely to the cause of *Purna Swaraj*. In *Yeravda Mandir* he explained the logic behind this thinking to his readers:

> The man, who is wedded to Truth and worships Truth alone, proves unfaithful to her, if he applies his talents to anything else. How then can he minister to the senses?... we find that the fulfilment of ahmisa is impossible without utter selflessness. Ahmisa means Universal Love. If a man gives his love to one woman, or a woman to one man, what is there left for all the world besides?[73]

In line with this belief, he often discouraged his constructive and political workers from getting married, as he did in the case of Sucheta and Acharya Kripalani when they announced plans to marry in 1936.[74] His advice to those already in matrimonial bonds was abstinence:

> ...every husband and wife can make a fixed resolution from today never to share the same room or the same bed at night, and to avoid sexual contact, except for the one supreme purpose for which it is intended for both man and beast...Every woman can decline to have anything to do with contraception. Both man and woman should know that abstention from satisfaction of the sexual appetite results not in disease but in health and vigour, provided that mind cooperates with the body'.[75]

Gandhi's philosophical and developmental world view was also influenced by his personal experience and his understanding of sexuality and relationships between men and women. Madhu Kishwar

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[71] Appendix I: Generation and Regeneration by William Loftus Hare, Reprinted from the Open Court, Chicago, March 1926 in M. K. Gandhi, *Self-Restraint V. Self Indulgence*, 3rd ed. (Ahmedabad, 1947), p. 120.
[72] J. Lelyveld, *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his Struggle with India* (New Delhi, 2011), p. 272.
[73] Chapter Sixteen: Brahmacharya or Chastity, (Reprinted from Yeravda Mandir, Chapter III) in M. K. Gandhi, *Self-Restraint V. Self Indulgence*, p. 50.
[74] Acharya was the General Secretary of the AICC at the time. Sucheta stood up to Gandhi and married Acharya despite Gandhi's opposition. See S. Kripalani, *Sucheta: An unfinished biography* (Ahmedabad,1978), pp. 21-22.
[75] Chapter 15: Startling Conclusions, (Reprinted from Young India, 27th September 1928) in Gandhi, *Self-Restraint V. Self Indulgence*, p. 50.

explains that Gandhi saw marriage as a burden for women and celibacy as a kind of freedom[76]. Viewing women primarily as passive and men as active, 'He saw sexuality as almost synonymous with aggression towards women'.[77] All these factors inclined Gandhi against contraception, which he perceived as a vehicle that enabled the further sexual exploitation of women. According to such a philosophy, birth control or contraception would have no place and purpose. Gandhi held a completely different world view and approach to sexuality, compared to Margaret Sanger, who visited the Mahatma at his Ashram in Wardha in 1936,[78] and who had debated with Gandhi on the subject stressing the 'life enhancing nature of sexual intimacy for women as well as men'[79] arguing that to achieve peace women must be able to have control over their own bodies.[80]

Gandhi has been criticised for placing women on moral and social pedestals, pushing them into idealistic and sacrificial roles that denied their human desires and needs. In the process he reinforced stereotypical gender divisions between men and women.[81] In reality Gandhi's approach towards women's sexuality had both negative and positive consequences. As Kishwar points out, it facilitated a much greater and more relaxed interaction between men and women, and for a number of his women devotees, celibacy, indeed offered a new form of freedom enabling them to travel and interact amongst their male colleagues.[82]

Kaur's emphasis that family limitation should be achieved through lifestyle, and discipline of the self, rather than through an external and institutional approach shows a definite element of Gandhian thinking. Her approach sought to demarcate the boundary between the public space of governance and the private space of family, very differently from that of Rama Rau, who lobbied to expand the

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[76] For a comprehensive analysis of Gandhi's understanding of Indian women and their social and political position, and his personal gender politics see M. Kishwar, 'Gandhi on Women', *EPW*, 20: 40 (5 October 1985) and 20:41 (12 October 1985).
[77] Kishwar, *Gandhi and women* (Delhi, 1986), p. 43.
[78] For an account of the meeting and discussion between Gandhi and Sanger see A. Aryee, 'Gandhi and Mrs. Sanger Debate Birth Control: Comment' in S. Hodges (ed.) *Reproductive Health in India: History, Politics, Controversies*, (Hyderabad, 2006).
[79] Lelyveld, *Great Soul*, p. 257.
[80] Ibid, pp. 50-52.
[81] Gandhi has also been validly criticised for the contradictions between his theories and actions. While he preached sexual abstinence he continued to maintain intimate emotional relationships and domestic life with women in his ashrams. As a consequence he was accused of hypocrisy, and also of exploiting these female followers without consideration of how his actions might affect them.
[82] M. Kishwar, 'Gandhi on Women', *EPW*, 20:41 (12 October 1985), pp. 1753-1754.

boundaries of the public space by making the family and the regulation of sexuality a public concern through the institutionalisation family planning.

But Kaur was not a blind adherent to Gandhian thinking. Her extensive political career in the nationalist movement had shown that she was prepared to disagree with the Mahatma on strategic issues, as she had done in the early 1940s when she supported Congress women's continued participation in the Hindu Law Committee (later to become known as the Rau Committee) against the wishes of Congress putting her political career and personal friendships on the line.[83]

Kaur's developmental approach, like that of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, suggests the influence of Gandhian thinking on her politics and praxis, but equally shows how Gandhian thinking was transformed and integrated with other schools of thought, as well as her life experience, enabling her to construct a unique development philosophy. Her worldview was driven by a set of values strongly influenced by Gandhian thinking, but which also acknowledged the fluidity and dynamism of new ideas and concepts, their potential for evolution, and their application in new contexts. While discussing the objections of certain members of the Lok Sabha to the introduction of a new Red Cross Bill, on the basis of it being 'too modern' and 'too western' Kaur put forward the following counter perspective, 'I do not understand what western and modern mean-for surely in the world in which we live we must take everything that is good from every part of the world. We certainly cannot live to ourselves'.[84] Later in the same speech, she goes on to give her opinion that 'more and more I feel, that the future doctor has to come into line with modern medical practices and India cannot possibly stay away from the steady progress and development that is taking place in other parts of the world'.[85]

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[83] At this stage the Congress was boycotting the government as part of its Quit India Campaign and did not support any endeavours at cooperation. The view of Congress leadership was that the Hindu Law Committee was intended as a distraction from more series political issues and that any recommendations were unlikely to be acted upon in the near future. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur however wanted women to be able to participate in the Committee and voiced her opinion, as she felt that the AIWC had invested so much effort and time lobbying for a review of the legislation, that any change even if was only incremental would be, valuable. See Correspondence from Mridula Sarabhai to J.B. Kripalani (Secretary of the AICC), 14 and 22 March 1941, File P9 1940-1941 and P7 1941, AICC Papers, NMML.

[84] See Rajkumari Amrit Kaur's speech 'All India Institute of Medical Sciences Bill 1956', in *Rajkumari Amrit Kaur*, p. 155.

[85] Ibid, p. 156.

Kaur recognised the value of biomedicine as an effective and practical system and discipline. More specifically, for Kaur, it was the capacity of biomedicine to evolve, its reflexive nature, and its rigorousness as a discipline, that made it an effective tool for improving people's lives. But it was ultimately the ability of biomedicine to fulfil particular ends, and these were essentially the same ends shared by the Mahatma, that of holistic health, the well being of India's people, and consequently a more just society:

> Science is a search for truth. Medical science is not less a search for truth than any of the other vital sciences. In fact it is much more vital because it touches the human being in a special way. It means life or death; it means enjoyment or suffering; it means illness or wellbeing; it means pain or lack of pain. Therefore, we have to approach medical education in a very, very scientific manner.[86]

On this basis Kaur embraced the benefits of technology and western biomedicine, and in her role as Minister of Health worked consistently to promote both primary health care, and to develop a new infrastructure to facilitate medical research, technology transfer and medical training, with the intention of establishing India as a regional leader.[87] She fostered close professional associations with other international health and development agencies such as the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, WHO and UNICEF, as well as national voluntary associations, in an effort to leverage the resources and support necessary to build this infrastructure.[88] Under her ministership the internationally recognised The All India Institute of Medicine (AIIMS) in New Delhi, a centre for the training of medical staff and experts, was established with funding secured from New Zealand and the United Nations.[89]

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[86] Ibid, p. 172.

[87] Kaur's efforts to develop medical research facilities in India were coupled with efforts to establish India as a regional leader in the area of medical research, training and technology transfer. In the early 1950s Delhi was chosen as the headquarters for a regional bureau of the WHO for South East Asia, incorporating India, Ceylon, Afghanistan, Burma, Thailand and Indonesia. Through the Colombo Plan, a technical cooperation scheme, India was to provide technical assistance to neighbouring countries on a bilateral basis. See Directorate General of Health Services (1956) Report of the Activities of the Ministry of Health 1951-1952 and programme for 1952-1953 for further details.

[88] The Indian Ministry of Health's Quadrennial Report 1949-1952 acknowledges the 'progress made on account of the assistance received from international organizations, namely the WHO and UNICEF, emphasising that aid from these two organizations had 'contributed to a rapid stepping up of services'. See Directorate General of Health Services Report (1960) and Report for the Quadrennium 1949-1952, p. 7.

[89] The Bhore Commission Report of 1946 had recommended a training institute such as AIIMS to tackle the shortage of qualified medical personnel in India but the idea had initially been put on hold due to a lack of resources. See 'Rajkumari Amrit Kaur: Her Life, Work and Ideology' in *Rajkumari Amrit Kaur*, p. 74.

When she retired from her portfolio in 1957 President Rajendra Prasad who was President at the time wrote to her, expressing an appreciation for her work as Health Minister and mentioning in particular 'How valuable your contacts in foreign countries have been not only in securing assistance for many of our health projects but also generally in making our efforts appreciated'.[90] While Dean Rusk of the Rockefeller Foundation, thanked her for her 'inspiration', 'leadership' and 'steady support' in developing 'the basic research upon which Indian medicine must ultimately rest'.[91]

As an advocate of bio-medicine and the many benefits of medical technology, it was therefore not moralism or idealism that led Kaur to dismiss a family planning programme for India based on the widespread distribution of birth control, but rather a nuanced understanding of the complexity of interactions between communities and state structures of authority, such as medical institutions, clinics and doctors, and an awareness of the potential tyranny of technology and the western trajectory of progress, when imposed as a 'silver bullet' solution.

Family planning in India: a controversial legacy?

Despite the rhetoric of prioritising family planning and population control in independent India, government efforts to address the issue in the second and third Five Year Plans, and the advocacy and work of the FPAI achieved little success in reducing birth rates during the first twenty years of the Republic. The failure of these early family planning and population control initiatives in the 1950s and 1960s encouraged government and civil society advocates such as the FPAI to seek alternative, and more effective measures that would be easier to implement.[92] Such measures tended to be increasingly invasive and aggressive, shifting the agenda even further from the health and choice of the individual patient, towards a mass scale top down approach. This coupled with the fact that such programmes were being largely funded by international development organisations driven by an agenda of population control rather than rights and health, pushed family planning policy in India in a particular direction. From the 1950s onwards India had been a significant recipient of international aid

[90] Rajendra Prasad to Kaur, 6 May 1957, Correspondence with Rajendra, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur Papers, NMML.

[91] Rusk to Kaur, 14 May 1957, Correspondence with Dean Rusk, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur Papers, NMML.

[92] The Khanna Study conducted in the Punjab in the 1950s, with Rockefeller Foundation aid, is one such case study. For a more detailed analysis see M. Mamdani, *The Myth of Population Control: Family, Caste and Class in an Indian Village* (United States, 1972.)

directed towards family planning programmes, and as Connelly argues this aid has had a significant impact on shaping the discourse and agenda of family planning within the country. One of the consequences of this has been that Indian family programmes have remained trapped within a policy framework driven by the concerns of population control, rather than that of rights and health. In claiming an initiating and leading role in the establishment of a policy which was to ultimately result in the population control programme of the Emergency era, the AIWC and the leading figures who worked through the Conference to promote family planning, such as Lady Rama Rau and Avabai Wadia, could easily be called to account. What role did they inadvertently play in the promotion of a policy ethos that facilitated such brutal and invasive treatment of its citizen's bodies, where eight million Indians, mostly men, were sterilized?[93] This challenges the organisation's claim to have played a leading role in the establishment institutions and policy frameworks that were inherently progressive and emancipatory for Indian women. One, could, however, equally make the argument that Kaur, through playing a key role in building some of these relationships with international development Foundations and First World government's was equally responsible for such a trend.

The shift in this direction is evident from the mid 1960s when a new group of Government planners and ministers including Ashok Mehta, Minister of Planning, began to push a more aggressive population control policy based on the use of IUDs and sterilisations, administered through mobile centres and camps. This was accompanied by the increased use of the metaphor of 'war' on population growth in policy discourse.[94] Rama Rau had initially been hostile to sterilization but by this time her opinion on the matter had changed.[95] The promotion of sterilization, as birth control solution, was gaining widespread acceptance and approval even by those working in the social welfare and reform sectors in post independence India. Rama Rau therefore became part of a group of individuals who helped to promote a governmental approach that emphasised incentives and targets, which were to become standard practice under Emergency era population control programmes.

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[93] Connelly, *Fatal Misconceptions*, p. 279.
[94] Ibid, p. 218.
[95] Ibid, p. 207.

These developments were all unfolding against the backdrop of the political rise of Indira Gandhi, who was an outspoken advocate for family planning. A policy position she emphasised immediately by renaming the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Health *and Family Planning*, the day after she was sworn in as Prime Minister. Rama Rau together with others in Indira Gandhi's government, pushed for the expanded use of both incentives and disincentives under her leadership, and pressurised Sushila Nayar, who had become Health Minister by this stage, to pay women to accept IUD insertion.[96] By the late 1960s a number of Indian states were denying maternity benefits to state employees with three or more children.[97] All this was occurring at time of food crisis in India, and under Indira Gandhi's Prime Ministership, US development aid came to be directly linked to population control.[98]

This expanded and aggressive birth control programme proved unrealistic, with India lacking the infrastructure and manpower for proper follow ups, pre treatment counselling and the effective management of complications. Major problems with IUDs began to emerge, but the health care system did not have the capacity to deal with these.[99] These were the very same concerns that Kaur had raised earlier in the 1950s, to justify her Ministry's reluctance to implement a widespread family planning programme.[100] Could Kaur's approach, if she had continued as Health Minister have enabled a more sensitive policy response? Could her hesitancy and reluctance represent an alternative path for India in terms of the history of population control policy that would have been able to resist the both national and international developments that facilitated Indira Gandhi's forced sterilization campaigns of the 1970s?

In 1952 and again in 1953 motions were raised in the Parliament for the introduction of Bills for the 'Sterilization of the Unfit' which would have given the state power to sterilize the diseased and insane with the intention of eradicating diseases such as syphilis, leprosy, 'insanity' and 'imbecility' deemed

[96] Ibid, p. 221.
[97] Ibid, pp. 246-247.
[98] Ibid, p. 220.
[99] Ibid, pp. 222-225.
[100] Ibid, pp. 219-220.

to render such individuals 'unfit' and a danger to society.[101] In both cases, Kaur argued strongly against these Bills 'with all the emphasis at my command because I looked upon it from the point of view of science as wholly unscientific, from the point of view of ethics as wholly unethical and from the point of view of practicability as wholly impracticable'.[102] In rejecting these Bills Kaur did not reject science and technology itself. In fact, in both cases she drew on sociological and medical understandings of these diseases, to put forward her counter arguments:

> Would they like people with congenital blindness to be sterilised. As I said, these are things that require a very scientific mind to be brought to bear on them. Please remember that the growth of population will not be stopped by a Resolution of this kind or by sterilising those who are suffering from these diseases or those who are insane.[103]

Kaur also stressed that those putting forward the Bill were really using it as a cover for a 'quick fix' population control solution. The main object of those advocating for these Bills, according to Kaur was 'to try and stem the tide of the growth of population rather than to help those people and also help me and my other colleagues who are Health Ministers in the various States to stem the tide of the growth of infection... I ask you, 'Is this fair?' Is this the only way to stop disease? Is sterilising people the only way?'[104]

Kaur's response shows an awareness and understanding of the human impact of such interventions. The end could not justify the means. A quick fix, such as enforced sterilization would not solve the poor health of the population. The ethical application of science and technology had to be equally considered together with the end result:

> I would also request the members of this hon. House to remember that sterilisation has got a great psychological effect, especially if it is compulsory on the victim. What are you going to do if a leper refuses to get sterilised? Are you going to prosecute him? I tell

[101] See 'Sterilisation of the Unfit Bill', in *Rajkumari Amrit Kaur*, p. 255. In July 1952 a private members Bill arguing in favour of preventing procreation amongst 'human being[s] of undesirable physical and mental conditions' was raised by Shri. S.V. Rameswamy in the Raja Sabha. The motion was later negated. In August 1953 Shrimati Lilavati Munshi raised a similar resolution calling for the 'sterilisation of adults suffering from incurable diseases or insanity', tuberculosis and venereal disease.
[102] Ibid, p. 257.
[103] Ibid, p. 259.
[104] Ibid.

> you that I would be very sorry to be part and parcel of a Government that indulges in violence of this nature.[105]

Kaur's words here pre-empt the harsh critique and debate that was to emerge twenty five years later with the Shah Commission's investigations into the abuses of power in the implementation of population control programmes under Indira Gandhi. But it must also be acknowledged that Emergency era population policy was the outcome of a longer set of discourses, approaches and strategies going back to the beginning of the twentieth century, evident for example in the 1939 National Planning Committee Population Report.

One of the many commonalities between Rama Rau and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was the fact that both were successful internationalists, moving in international circles and drawing ideas, resources and support from these circles, to implement their visions of health care and development in India. In her efforts to build up a medical research and training infrastructure for India Kaur also played a vital role in securing international funding, that was used to develop and support programmes and expertise for India's health sector. With the close connection between international development aid and the international population control movement, Kaur's legacy could equally be seen to have facilitated the latter Emergency era population policies.

In light of these factors did Kaur's proposed alternative approach really help or benefit ordinary Indian women and their reproductive rights? Maybe the Health Minister's moral opposition to mechanical and chemical contraceptives became counterproductive in that it polarised debate on the topic and understandings of the uses and benefits of this new technology? The argument could be made that in their polar perspectives and responses to the potential of family planning for India's development, Rau and Kaur reveal alternative faces of a women's movement out of touch with the socio-economic dynamics of the working class agricultural Indian family, where large families offered security in old age and provided vital household labour.

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[105] Ibid, p. 260.

Conclusion

The divergent approaches adopted by Lady Rama Rau and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur towards the idea and practice of family planning and population control in independent India, reveal the multifaceted and diverse nature of the developmental praxis of this generation. What *is* shared between these two distinctive approaches, is the fact that neither drew predominantly on the language of women's empowerment, equality and rights - in the case of Rama Rau to champion family planning through chemical and mechanical contraceptives - and in the case of Kaur, to oppose these methods.

Family planning, although inherently gendered, has in the Indian context, largely not been conceptualised by advocates or opponents in terms of women's health or women's rights, reminding the historian of the importance of the 'ongoing historical constructions of feminist histories' in their local contexts. Instead, frameworks of development and poverty have dominated these conceptualisations. Although Rau did sometimes draw on the language of rights to talk about the potential of family planning in her advocacy, this language was largely subsumed by the more dominant 'emergency' discourse of population explosion, its impeding threat, and the need for immediate action. The solution Rau argued was to harness the technology, resources and skills of the west to prevent such an outcome. Kaur in contrast, influenced by Gandhian thinking, adopted a more cautious and tempered approach, emphasising the importance of modifying technology to the specific context and social norms of the Indian environment. An analysis of the approaches taken by Rama Rau and Kaur towards family planning and population control proves more insightful, in fact, when it is used to explore how this cohort of women engaged with, and viewed, the potential of modernity, technology and biomedical science in the nation building project, their perceptions of the shifting boundaries between the public and the private, and the legitimacy of state intervention and authority in the sphere of the family and interpersonal relationships.

Chapter Eight:

The Indian woman as global citizen: Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Hansa Mehta and the United Nations

Introduction

The transition from colonial subjecthood to independence unlocked a number of new spaces within which the Indian woman as citizen found scope for emergence and redefinition, reconfiguring possibilities for both being and belonging within the post-colonial state. This reconfiguring was set against a broader backdrop of transformation, that of an emerging international arena defined by the United Nations (UN) and the concept of human rights. This thesis has shown how this generation of women's rights activists sought to influence the nationalist project, and the making of Indian citizenship, by building a clearer definition of, and commitment to, equality into its founding principles. The international arena provided an uncharted space into which this project could be expanded. Focusing on the careers of Hansa Mehta and Vijayalakshmi Pandit at the UN during its earliest years, this chapter illustrates how this generation engaged with this international context, negotiating the channels of power and influence that it opened up, just as they were the new networks of power and civic identity created by independence at home, to pursue a multifaceted political agenda.

Chapter Five of this thesis focusing on the rescue and recovery of abducted women, exposed how the 'fixing' of Indian citizenship, along the lines of social belonging within the family, religious community and territorial boundaries failed to resolve some of the multiple and competing layers of being and belonging that sat uneasily together in the post-colonial state. These tensions came into sharp focus in cases of 'doubtful and resisting' women, such as Nissa or Shanti of Alwar. In our increasingly mobile and multicultural world the challenge of finding ways to reconfigure the link between the claim to rights, entitlements and protections and political nationhood has become ever

more relevant. Pragna Patel of the advocacy group Southall Black Sisters[1] explains how immigration issues such as migrant rights and refugee status often overlap with those of domestic violence in her organisation's work which seeks to find innovative legal and human rights avenues for protecting Indian women as they move within the Diaspora.[2] The engagement of this first generation of Indian woman activists and public figures in this emerging post WWII international context, through participation in the early development of the United Nations, as well as in regional Asian and Afro-Asian networks of solidarity, international women's peace movements and the struggles of various communities in the Indian Diaspora, suggests a growing realisation of this reality. As nationalists, internationalists and advocates for women's equality, Pandit and Mehta saw the potential of being able to use the new global space opened up by the UN and the ideas and ideals behind it to push for a number of interconnected agendas. Firstly, to give added legitimacy and force to the campaign for women's rights in India, secondly, to promote greater presence of women within international bodies giving their cause access to the channels of power that were defining and shaping diplomacy and international development policy, and, thirdly, to push for the liberation of other communities of people from colonial domination. The ability of Mehta and Pandit to interlink these different agendas, so that they reinforced each other, enhanced the depth and influence of their message, both internationally and at home in India.

The dynamic and evolving concept of human rights within the UN at this moment was useful and appealing to Pandit and Mehta precisely because it spoke to the universalising and inclusive language of rights and citizenship that they were drawing on in their advocacy back home. On one level they took on a symbolic role in the international sphere, embodying the values of assertive independence,

[1] Southall Black Sisters is a London based NGO focusing on the rights of black and other ethnic minority women. See their website for further details, accessed 25 October 2013, http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk.
[2] For example, the Organisation has confronted cases of women British residents taken back to India or Pakistan and murdered by their families. The assumption being that the law and its implementation in these countries offers greater leniency and sympathy. The Organisation works to find ways to ensure the more rigorous legal protections that women as British residents enjoy are extended outside the country. They have also attempted to assist women who are brought from the Indian sub-continent to the United Kingdom, married, and then abandoned here, without having residential status. One of Southall Black Sisters successes has been as part of a campaign to lobby for the Domestic violence rule in the United Kingdom, which enables women in such circumstances to remain in the country. Pragna Patel, Founder and Director of Southall Black Sisters speaking at Conference entitled 'Women in the New India: The Impact of Growth in India on Women and their Rights', 12 June 2013, Merton College, Oxford.

moral conviction and leadership of India's Nehruvian foreign policy. But they also participated in these international forums as individual feminists and as representatives of the Indian women's movement, bringing their experience and insight as women and as former colonial subjects into some of the influential debates that helped to shape the agenda and development of the organisation during its early years. Their experience as nationalists and feminists in the Indian context enabled them to contribute to the establishment of a set of parameters for human rights, and defined them as part of a small but strategically placed contingent of women's rights activists linked into the international women's movement of the day, who pushed to expand the definition of equality, and the access to equal rights within this international sphere and who then used this claim to global citizenship to renegotiate citizenship for women within the Indian nation state.

Becoming internationalists

The opportunity to travel beyond India's borders in the interwar years allowed this generation to experience India in the world, and what it meant to be an Indian woman in this new world. For Vijayalakshmi Pandit, in particular, the international sphere offered scope for a self made career where she was able to distinguish her contribution from that of her famous nationalist family. Being a diplomat, firstly as leader of the Indian delegation to the UN, and later as ambassador to the Soviet Union, United States, Britain and Spain, played on one of her greatest personal strengths, her capacity to bridge both East and West.

Interaction and travel within the world provided the grounds for learning about new and innovative ideas for approaching India's social and developmental challenges, and for thinking about India in comparative perspective. Renuka Ray, for example, talked of her cosmopolitan time at London School of Economics in the 1920s as a vibrant experience which 'opened many doors' and exposed her to many new schools of thought. It was during this time that she began to think about how to achieve economic regeneration in India.[3] Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, described visiting co-operative farms in Sweden in her autobiography and how this exposure 'opened up... new vistas for cooperative

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[3] Ray, *My Reminiscences*, pp. 34, 39.

work in India'.[4] Travel to other countries provided opportunities for networking with a range of individuals, organisations and governments, which in turn allowed this generation to leverage both material and intellectual resources.

Internationalism enabled linkages with the international women's movement, which were strategic for this generation, facilitating solidarity and inspiration, as well as resistance and differentiation.[5] They offered valuable lessons about the power of collaboration and the strategic influence of international perceptions in nationalist politics, but equally, they exposed the need for the development of a position from which Indian women, and their colleagues from other colonial nations, could speak as both women and as former colonial subjects.

The United Nations and an Indian vision for a new world order

Emerging from the devastation of World War Two the United Nations came into being to facilitate international stability through global governance and the peaceful resolution of conflict.[6] The cornerstone document of the new organisation was its Charter, signed at San Francisco in June 1945, in which the peoples of the UN reaffirmed their 'faith in human rights and the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small', and committed themselves to 'promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion'.[7] The UN took forward the concept of global governance and co-operation that its predecessor the League had pioneered. But whereas the League of Nations had failed in its mission to avoid international conflict, the UN offered a fresh chance for peace.

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[4] Chattopadhyay, *Inner Recesses Outer Spaces*, pp. 131, 231.
[5] As can be seen with the controversy over Katherine Mayo's book *Mother India* (1927). In their interactions with American and British social reformers and feminists over how to 'uplift' Indian women this generation increasingly began to establish a clear position for themselves; firstly, that Indian woman had to achieve such transformation of society and upliftment for themselves, and secondly that in order to do so they would need to forge their own path based on an understanding and sensitivity to their society.
[6] D. Jain, *Women, Development and the UN: a sixty-year quest for equality and justice* (Bloomington, 2005), p. 11.
[7] Document 1: Charter of the United Nations (extract), signed 26 June 1945 in *The United Nations and the Advancement of Women 1945-1995,* Blue Book Series, Vol. VI (New York, 1996), p. 93.

Literature on the United Nations offers a range of diverse interpretations of the development and impact of this new organisation. Much of the historiography focuses on the UN as an arena for the playing out of Cold War tensions. There are laudatory accounts which tell the story of the emergence and evolution of a new era of international diplomacy revolutionised by its commitment to the principles of human rights. More contemporary histories such as those produced by Mazower, Normand and Zaidi offer a more critical interpretation of the intentions behind the new international order, and the discourse of human rights underpinning it.[8] For Mazower the UN, regardless of its rhetoric, was, like its predecessor the League of Nations, designed 'for interstate cooperation and stability in a world of empires and great powers'[9] while for Normand and Zaidi it came to operate merely as an extension of US and western hegemony.[10]

The UN embodied its member nations' ambitions for a better world, but was from the beginning a highly political organisation, constrained by internal tensions and driven by conflicting national agendas. Dominant member countries such as the United States and Britain, claimed moral ownership of human rights, and its principles of democracy and independence, but were cautious of the application of such principles in their colonial Empires. There was a split between political and civil rights, and socio-economic rights, with the United States and other western nations stressing the former as paramount, while socialist countries argued for greater emphasis on the latter in the UN's declarations and conventions. There was debate as to whether the UN should be an organisation welding the soft power of moral authority and public opinion, or if it should hold concrete power which could ensure implementation, and if so, how could such structures for implementation be agreed upon and built into its institutions?

[8] See A. Iriye, P. Goedde and W. Hitchcock (eds.) *Human Rights Revolution: An International History* (Oxford, 2012); United Nations, *The United Nations and the Advancement of Women 1945-1995* (New York, 1995) and M, A, Glendon, *A world made new: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York, 2001) for a congratulatory interpretation of the history and development of the United Nations as a vehicle for universal human rights. For a more critical interpretation see M. Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (New Jersey, Oxford, 2009); R. Normand and S. Zaidi, *Human Rights at the UN: The Political History of Universal Justice* (Indiana, 2008) and S. Moyn, *The last utopia: human rights in history* (Cambridge Massachusetts, London, 2012).
[9] Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace,* p. 151.
[10] Normand and Zaidi, *Human Rights at the UN: The Political History of Universal Justice*, p. 33.

From the moment of its emergence the United Nations was profoundly shaped by the bi-polar politics of the Cold War. The ideological division between the two superpowers, the United States and its allies, as champions of capitalism, and the communist Soviet Union, played itself out in the UN, where these powers frequently found themselves in opposition. Newly independent countries such as India were caught in the middle and under pressure to show unambiguous allegiance. Nehru and the leaders of other formerly colonial powers such as Sukarno of Indonesia and Nasser of Egypt, refused to be pressurised into either of these camps. Instead they developed a third way, known as Non Alignment.

Non-Alignment employed the structures and influence of the UN to pursue a foreign policy agenda which sought to neutralise both camps, and carve an independent and united 'One World'. The development of human rights at the UN with its consequent spilt into both positive and negative rights was conceptually important for this Project, because it offered a way of bridging the ideological differences between east and west, capitalist and communist and hence combined and validated both worldviews.[11]

Non-Alignment was a core component of Nehru's ambitious foreign policy agenda for India, which sought to challenge the unequal power dynamics of colonial Empire and replace these with a new era of social justice. It offered the possibility of greater independence for such countries in a bipolar world, while the term 'Third World' provided a new collective identity, a new positional platform, from which the peoples of India, together with the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America and their nationalist leadership, could come together in their fight against colonialism. And the United Nations gave third world nations, advocating non-alignment a forum through which they could articulate their grievances and demand political freedom.[12] The early years of the UN were therefore a period when 'The world was full of hope' in the words of Vijayalakshmi Pandit, 'The Charter of the United Nations was a challenge to the most cynical, and it was a moment in time when it seemed

[11] M. Bhagavan, *India and the Quest for One World: the peacemakers* (Hampshire, 2013), pp. 1, 103-106.
[12] V. Prashad, *The Darker Nations* (London, New York, 2008), pp. xv-xvi.

possible to remould the world to a design in which justice, equality, and opportunity would help to establish the peace for which exhausted humanity yearned'.[13]

Vijayalakshmi Pandit like Jawaharlal Nehru was a powerful advocate of this 'One World' vision[14] and when she gave her debut speech to the first General Assembly on the 25th of October 1946 she carried the weight of this ambitious foreign policy agenda on her shoulders. She opened her speech by affirming 'the adherence of my country to the principles and purposes of the United Nations Organisation' and 'the determination of our people to help make it a reality'.[15] Quoting Jawaharlal Nehru as head of the new provisional government she went on to stress, that towards the UN charter:

> India's attitude is whole-hearted cooperation and unreserved adherence in both spirit and letter....to that end India will participate fully in its varied activities and endeavour and assume that role in its councils to which her geographical position, population and contribution towards peaceful progress entitle her- in particular, the Indian delegation will make it clear that India stands for independence of all colonial and dependent peoples and their full right to self determination.[16]

Pandit's words were immediately able to harness the authority of the UN to India's foreign policy agenda, by committing her nation to the principles of the UN while simultaneously, though subtly, stamping India's interpretation on these principles. The nascent Indian nation could therefore claim legitimacy in the international sphere as a committed follower of the UN, when in fact it sought to play a leading role in shaping its priorities. Once this legitimacy had been established Pandit went on to introduce what were to become the defining concerns of Indian international relations over the following decades; political freedom and independence as a precondition for international peace, the right of formerly colonised nations to participate equally in newly established international organisations and the importance of India as a key role player in international affairs.[17] Here Pandit laid out India's commitment to challenge colonial domination, the government's support for the independence of colonised peoples across the globe and their right to political, economic and social

[13] Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, p. 209.
[14] Bhagavan, *India and the Quest for One World*, p. 26.
[15] Vijayalakshmi Pandit, speech delivered at the General Assembly of the United Nations, 25 October 1946, File 4: Speeches and Writings, Vijayalakshmi Pandit Papers, 1st Instalment (hereafter V.L Papers), NMML.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.

equality.[18] Her country's experience of such domination and its prolonged nationalist struggle for independence gave her message an added conviction and resonance. Less than a year later India would achieve its long fought for freedom under the leadership of the Indian National Congress (INC) on the 15th of August 1947. The country's early years of nation building occurred in parallel with the development and framing of the concept of global governance within the United Nations and its allied organisations. In fact the inaugural session of the General Assembly and the first sitting of the Indian Constituent Assembly, the body elected to draft India's new constitution, took place only months apart, in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Pandit's speech makes the connection between universal political freedom and international peace. But it also makes reference to a particular case of injustice; that of the discriminatory treatment meted out to resident Indians in the Union of South Africa:

> We have for this reason and as a demonstration that we look to the United Nations to implement in practice the principles and basis of civilised life which has been embodied in the Charter, brought before this Assembly the treatment of Indians in the Union of South Africa, a Member State and signatory to the Charter.[19]

In 1946 the Union government of South Africa passed the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act which relegated Indians in the province of Natal to second class citizens by restricting their franchise - through educational and property qualifications - and by legalising segregated residential areas.[20] When the Act came into force in June 1946 the Natal Indian Congress launched a civil disobedience campaign and called on the Indian government to raise the issue at the UN.[21] The Act 'galvanized Indian sentiment' leaving Indians angered and outraged. According to Mazower, Nehru seized on this issue to push his wider foreign policy agenda. The new Prime Minister was eager for India to assume a leadership role in the anti-colonial movement, and sought to challenge the hypocrisy of the Allied powers in their selective application of the principles of self determination and democracy.[22] This matter was by no means 'a narrow or local one' Pandit argued.

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[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, pp. 205-206; Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, p. 171.
[21] Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, pp. 175, 173.
[22] Ibid, pp. 175, 173 and 170.

The Union of South Africa was a member state of the United Nations and a signatory to its Charter and could therefore not get away with such 'a gross and continuing outrage of this kind' to its fundamental principles.[23] Claiming 'equal and honourable treatment for our people wherever they may go' she emphasised that the South African issue had global significance because of the inter-connectedness of freedom and rights as laid out in the Charter.[24]

The rights of Indians living in South Africa had first brought Pandit into the political space of Indian nationalism thirty years previously as a teenager in 1916.[25] Gandhi, recently returned from South Africa had re-entered Indian politics and brought an awareness of the struggles faced by indentured labourers in South Africa into the public eye. Pandit decided to attend a women's meeting to publicize the issue organised by her aunt Rameshwari Nehru in her hometown of Allahabad. At the time she did not understand the broader significance of these events, but the experience gave her 'a feeling of participation in the cause' and was followed by her attendance at the 1916 Indian National Congress in Lucknow.[26] Stepping onto the podium at the first General Assembly at Lake Success in 1946, Pandit had come full circle. This time she confronted the subject with considerable experience and acumen, shaped by the cut and thrust of Indian nationalist politics.

By 1946 Pandit had already begun to make a name for herself in America. At the beginning 1945 she had undertaken a lecture tour of the United States, to raise public awareness for India's Independence struggle.[27] This tour proved a highly successful public relations exercise, receiving favourable media coverage, and enabled Pandit to begin cultivating influential networks and contacts.[28] During the course of the tour she was persuaded by the nationalist leadership to head an unofficial Indian

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[23] Pandit, 'Speech delivered at the General Assembly of the United Nations', 25 October 1946, Subject File 4: Speeches and Writings, V.L. Pandit Papers, NMML.
[24] Bhagavan, *India and the Quest for One World*, p. 58.
[25] Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, pp. 61-62.
[26] Pandit was too young to join up at the time, but she became a volunteer and recalls being thrilled at being able to meet the various well known politicians present. The oratory of Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu mesmerized her and she became a 'devoted fan' of Besant. See Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, p. 62.
[27] Bhagavan emphasises that this tour also provided an opportunity for Pandit to articulate the idea the new international framework of 'One World'. See Bhagavan, *India and the Quest for One World*, p. 26. Pandit had a personal interest in the United States as well, having sent both her daughters to Wellesley College shortly prior to her trip in 1945.
[28] One of the reasons this tour was well received was that public opinion in the United States was sympathetic to the cause of Indian freedom. See Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, p. 166.

delegation to San Francisco in April 1945, where the Charter of the UN was being drafted. Here she was tasked with voicing nationalist disapproval of the official Indian delegation, who Congress believed had been selected for their loyalty to the Raj, rather than as representatives of the interests of the Indian people, and to emphasise how the British refusal to commit to a specific schedule for withdrawal from India was undermining the nationalist demand for independence.[29] Although India's voice of protest at San Francisco had little impact on determining the policy behind the Charter, it proved another public relations success. 'India Delegates Challenged by Nehru's Sister', reported the *New York Herald Tribune* describing Pandit as setting 'off the first fireworks here today'. The *Tribune* described her efforts as a 'spearing' attempt on the part of the Indian National Congress 'to bring the cause of India's freedom to the attention of conference delegates'.[30] Reflecting back in her autobiography, Pandit acknowledged how this initial American experience marked 'a new and very important beginning' in her life by paving the way for her later diplomatic roles.[31]

Returning to the United States for the second time at the end of 1946, Pandit was tasked with bringing the discrimination of Indians in South Africa to world attention, by getting the issue inscribed on the UN's agenda.[32] To this end the Indian delegation forwarded a Resolution criticising the South African government's passage of the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act on the grounds of discrimination.[33] The issue of domestic jurisdiction lay at the heart of the debate that followed and would dominate future debates remaining an internal weakness for the international organisation. The UN was in the process of developing a set of international declarations and conventions intended to protect the human rights of all people across the globe. But the international body was itself constituted by the powerful post World War Two states of Britain, France, America, the Soviet Union and China. Vital to their authority was their sovereignty and independence, which was protected in Article 2(7) of the UN Charter, the domestic jurisdiction clause. This clause stated that legislation

[29] Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, p. 195.
[30] 'India Delegates Challenged by Nehru's Sister', *New York Herald Tribune*, Press Clippings 2, V.L Pandit Papers, 27 April 1945, NMML.
[31] Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness,* p. 197.
[32] Ibid, p. 209.
[33] M. P. Bradley, 'Approaching the Universal Declaration of Rights' in Iriye, Goedde and Hitchcock (eds.) *Human Rights Revolution: An International History*, p. 332.

implemented within the boundaries of member states was an internal issue, beyond the preview and mandate of global governance. Field Marshal General Smuts, leader of the South African delegation and Prime Minister of South Africa, argued on this basis that the petition put forward by the Indian delegation was invalid and therefore could not even be inscribed on the Agenda in the first place. The still embryonic and nebulous concept of human rights and its jurisdiction, gave Smuts another piece of ammunition in his case. Although the Charter promoted and emphasised the importance of human rights, it did not offer a concrete legislative definition.[34] Smuts was therefore able to argue that Indian criticism was void because there was no international legislative basis to it. As Hansa Mehta reported in one of her briefs to the Indian government as delegate on the CHR:

> The attitude taken up by SA during the discussions on the race bias resolution in the General Assembly was that there was not a violation of human rights in South Africa because there was no written definition of human rights as such within the ambit of the United Nations.[35]

The counter argument put forward by India's advisors was that any violation of the Charter contravened Article 14, which allowed the General Assembly to act, regardless of the origin of the concern. The Indian delegation emphasised that the preamble of the Charter held significant judicial weight. Consequently, all member states were bound by its conventions as if by a constitution.[36] India stressed that this was not a matter that should be determined by legal formalities, but needed to be addressed because it violated the principles upon which the UN was founded. All governments of member states should be required to show their commitment to such principles, through the willing implementation of these. The Indian delegation based their argument on a universal understanding of human rights, claiming that such rights were 'to be guaranteed for all by the United Nations, on the basis of being human, rather than on the basis of being citizens of nation states or subjects of empires'.[37] The racial prejudice underpinning the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act

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[34] Human Rights Commission Press Release, Soc 20: Second Meeting, 27 January 1947, File 14, Hansa Mehta Papers, NMML
[35] Ibid.
[36] Bhagavan, *India and the Quest for One World*, pp. 57-58.
[37] Ibid, pp. 87-88.

violated the ‘dignity and self respect’ of all Indians, and threatened peace, a priority at the heart of the new organisation.[38]

Smuts proved a formidable opponent in this debate in the First Committee which lasted several weeks. The Indian nationalist leadership hoped to raise the profile of this issue on the international stage, but was uncertain how it would be received. As Pandit recalls in her autobiography ‘my brother was hesitant and Gandhi warned me that I should expect the worst, at best he said, a few lip service votes’.[39] It was therefore unexpected yet encouraging when the Indian motion was voted through the committees, and when India achieved a two thirds vote for a Resolution on South Africa in the General Assembly ‘asking South Africa to undertake negotiations with India and Pakistan for a better deal for the citizens of those countries in the Union’.[40] The moral authority and mandate of the United Nations had swayed member countries in their voting, rather than the legal nature of the issue. ‘The strict reading of the domestic jurisdiction clause was set aside; legal niceties were ignored’ and ‘the letter of the Charter’ was trumped ‘by the spirit of human rights and moral anger’.[41] It was another success for Pandit, who made a powerful impression.[42] She had spoken with ‘the greatest and clearest voice’ according to Elsa Maxwell a political commentator for the *Washington Post*[43] ‘[A]nd what a voice’, proclaimed *The Sphere,* describing Pandit’s ‘indignation against South Africa’s apartheid policies in the United Nations’.[44] For Pandit too it was a moment in which she became aware of the power of being an articulate and passionate speaker with the world listening; ‘it was a truly

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[38] Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, pp. 209-210; Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, p. 179.
[39] Taya Zinkin, ‘International First Lady’ *The Guardian*, date unknown, Press Clippings 2, V.L. Pandit Papers, NMML.
[40] Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, p. 179; Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, p. 210. Also see press clipping from *The Sphere*, 5 August 1961, Press Clippings 2, V.L. Pandit Papers, NMML.
[41] Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, p. 179. Bhagavan points out that Pandit’s connections in the United States, especially with the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) helped give her the support she needed at this UN session to win the vote on the Resolution.
[42] Other notable Indian personalities at the UN during its early years included Rajkumari Amrit Kaur who attended the UNESCO Paris conference in 1946, making a notable impression where she was elected vice president on the second day. Kaur was also elected president of the W.H.O. in 1950. See ‘Indian women’s bulletin’ and Mrs Grace Lankester to Hansa Mehta, 28 January 1946 File 7: 1944-47, Hansa Mehta Papers, NMML.
[43] Elsa Maxwell, ‘Elsa Maxwell’s Party Line: On the State and Behind the Scenes’, 29 October 1946, Press Clippings 3, V.L Pandit Papers, NMML.
[44] See article in *The Sphere,* 5 August 1961, Press Clippings 2, V.L. Pandit Papers, NMML.

exhilarating experience to watch the effect of my speech. I, an unknown woman from an as yet nonexistent country...'[45]

This was a symbolic victory for India, but it was a hollow victory in terms of its capacity to improve the citizenship rights of Indians in the country. The Smuts government ignored the censure of the UN Resolution, and two years later in 1948 the Nationalist Party was voted into power. As the architects of the Apartheid state, the 'dignity and self respect' of all black South Africans would be systematically stripped away with the institutionalisation of a brutal system of racial segregation. Nevertheless, the vote had set a precedent and opened up the UN as vehicle for challenging the old unequal power relationships of colonial Empire. This was highly significant. Although the Union of South Africa refused to withdraw the Act, it was a subject to which UN General Assembly was to return to for more than decade.[46]

In 1916 after attending her first women's meeting to publicize the South African issue, Pandit had thought to herself 'South Africa was very far away – it was a pity Indians were being discriminated against, but what good could result by some women getting together and talking about it in Allahabad?'[47] By the 1940s she and others in the AIWC and future NFIW were becoming increasingly conscious of the leverage created for pursuing struggles closer to home by making such connections. In the nineteenth century with the abolition of slavery by Britain and the abrogation of the Code Noir by France, Indian labour had become a lynchpin in the economies of colonial Empire. An extensive network of indentured labour developed which saw large numbers of Indians transplanted across the globe. It was this process that had brought Indians to South Africa in the 1860s to work on the sugarcane plantations of Natal. By the time of Indian independence in 1947 four million Indians were living abroad as a result of transportation, in British Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica and Surinam, Mauritius, Kenya, Tanganyika, the British Protectorate of Uganda and South Africa as well as Burma, Ceylon and Malaya. These communities were created and resided in at the 'request

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[45] Zinkin, 'International First Lady'
[46] Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, p. 185.
[47] Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, pp. 61-62.

and for the benefit of governments of the countries concerned'.[48] India saw the UN as a platform from which to advocate for the equal treatment and respect of such communities - as part of its larger agenda to undermine the entrenched power inequalities of the old world order. As Hansa Mehta reminded her audience during one of her early addresses before the CHR in January 1947:

> Numerous cases of the denial of rights faced by these communities of Indians and 'complicated questions like nationality and citizenship and of dual nationality' 'have got to be straightened out within the meaning of the terms of reference of the Human Rights Commission and of the principles and purposes of the charter of the United Nations'.[49]

The intense concern over the legal status and rights of South African Indians across the globe reflected the way in which citizenship in India was being redefined in relation to the Indian Diaspora, and other contexts of colonial and racial oppression. This connection was being made not only by nationalist leaders but also by Indian subjects with a political awareness. In this way a powerful imagining and sense of connection with other struggles was being woven into the texture of Indian freedom. Take for example the life story of Subbalaxmi, a friend of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay who was a middle class Indian woman, born in 1897 from Tamil Nadu, and whose life has been reconstructed in Uma Chakravarti's sensitive documentary, 'A Fragment in History'. As the wife of a Salt Inspector, Subbalaxmi was unable to openly articulate her growing commitment to the nationalist cause so she sought out more discreet ways of resistance. In the 1920s and 1930s she wore *khaddar* and sent money to various nationalist causes. In the 1940s with widespread media coverage of the discrimination and hardships faced by Indians in Natal and the Transvaal, Subbalaxmi wrote in her diary about a reoccurring dream. In this dream a Tamil woman indentured labourer beseeched her for freedom. Haunted by the image, Subbalaxmi imagined her 'cries and laments'. She wondered how this woman and her compatriots had felt, so far from home and family in a strange land; 'did they think of their native land?' 'Will that day ever come when [they will] return?' 'Will they think of their mother's homes?' she agonised. Uma Chakravarti suggests that Subbalaxmi's intense imagining and anxiety around the oppression of indentured labourers in distant South Africa reflected not only a

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[48] Hansa Mehta, Speech before Commission on Human Rights, 27 January 1947, Subject File 15(ii), Hansa Mehta Papers, NMML.

[49] Ibid, p. 22.

collective pain and sense of anguish in the face of colonial oppression in India, but also her own lack of personal freedom, in a young marriage and in her failed efforts to secure an education for her daughter and prevent her premature marriage.[50]

Subbalaxmi's story hints at the growing importance of contexts and lives beyond the territorial nation state in constructing the texture and possibilities of freedom within the imagined nation state. In her first speech to United Nations Pandit develops this connection further. This speech commenced by emphasising India's commitment to the independence and the equality of subjugated peoples across the globe, but it closed with her expressing 'my own hopes and those of her fellow country women' for the greater participation of women in public life, particularly within the UN. As an example of how this could be achieved, Pandit held up India where 'our women have equality of opportunity with men', and where 'caste, creed or sex are not recognised' as a barrier to progress'.[51] Her words echoed the message of Eleanor Roosevelt's 'open letter to the women of the world', delivered a few months earlier at the UN inaugural session in which she called for the increased involvement of women in both national and international affairs.[52] But they also drew actively on the symbolic association between gender empowerment and political empowerment, developed within the context of Indian nationalism. The message conveyed was that just as the ushering in of a more peaceful, just and equitable world required the ending of relationships of colonial domination, so too it called for the smashing of another kind of relationship of domination, that between men and women, in India and across the globe, and especially in the new institutions of diplomatic power. Pandit built this cause onto India's foreign policy agenda, by linking the right of women to equality within their nation states, with the right of colonised and formerly colonised nations to political equality within the international sphere. When Pandit stated 'We do not recognise caste, creed or sex as a barrier to progress and our women have equality of opportunity with men' she spoke to an international audience, as well as directly to her political colleagues and the provisional government back at home; holding them to account by quoting Congress's famous Karachi Resolution.

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[50] See 'A Fragment of History' (2009) Directed and written by Uma Chakravarti, Magic Lantern Films.
[51] Speech delivered at the General Assembly of the United Nations, 25 October 1946, Subject File 4: Speeches and Writings, V.L. Pandit Papers, NMML.
[52] United Nations, *The United Nations and the Advancement of Women 1945-1995*, p. 69.

Committee on the Status of Women and the AIWC's Charter of Rights and Duties

Although The UN Charter affirmed support for human rights and for the equal rights of men and women it did not provide a definition of such rights. With this need in mind, the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) was constituted in February 1946 by a resolution of The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), under the chairmanship of Eleanor Roosevelt.[53] The CHR was responsible for drafting a Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and International Bill of Rights, providing a definition that could be written into law. This was to be followed by a convention or covenant which would act as an agreement between covenanting states, as well as a contract between the covenanting state and the UN, for the protection of the human rights of persons within the jurisdiction of that State.[54] Another grouping of delegates and experts known as the sub-committee on the Status of Women (CSW) was formed along with the CHR in February 1946, and placed under the CHR. In June 1946 this sub-committee was elevated to the status of an independent Commission. The Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) was tasked with applying the principles of human rights, which would be defined by the CHR, to the position of women in society by making recommendations on the legislative and policy action that was needed to elevate the 'status of women to equality with men in all fields of human enterprise'.[55]

When Jawaharlal Nehru, leader of Congress Party and India's provisional government asked Hansa Mehta to represent India on the UN's Human Rights Commission she saw the potential of this new posting immediately.[56] 'It is a great honour that an Indian woman will have a say in the future of the women of the World...Women have played a great part during the world crisis and it is but in the fitness of things that they should demand to have a ... place in the world of the future' she wrote.[57] Hansa Mehta had sat on the CSW prior to her appointment to the CHR. As a delegate with a specific interest in gender equality issues, she continued to follow the CSW's work once she was appointed to

[53] A. Black, 'Are Women "Human"? The UN and the Struggle to Recognize Women's Rights as Human Rights' in Iriye, Goedde and Hitchcock (eds.) *Human Rights Revolution*, p. 135.

[54] Fifth Session of the Human Rights Commission, 9 May to 20 June 1949, File no 15(ii), Hansa Mehta Papers, NMML.

[55] UN, *The United Nations and the Advancement of Women*, p. 69; A. Whittick, *Woman into Citizen* (London, 1979), pp. 152-153.

[56] Hansa Mehta was not the original delegate chosen to represent India on the CHR. Nehru offered her the position after Mr K.C. Neogi withdrew.

[57] Handwritten statement by Hansa Mehta, undated, File 58, AIWC Papers (2nd Instalment), NMML.

CHR and encouraged interaction and exchange between the two Commissions in the development of their respective documents. In fact, two of Mehta and Pandit's fellow AIWC organisers, Shareefah Hamid Ali and Hannah Sen were delegates to the 15 member CSW, making contact and the sharing of ideas increasingly viable.[58] According to Normand and Zaidi, chairman of the CHR, Eleanor Roosevelt did not actively seek out the views of the CSW in the drafting of the International Bill of Rights at first, and in fact even suggested that it might have been best to exclude women's rights completely from the work of the CHR. Hansa Mehta together with the Indian and Soviet delegates disagreed, arguing 'that the status of women was an essential part of the international Bill and that it needed to continue to be part of the CHR mandate'.[59] Consequently, CSW members regularly attended the meetings of the Commission on Human Rights as it worked through the long and arduous process of drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and articles of the draft declaration were sent to the CSW for comment.[60] The CSW in turn used the UDHR as a instrument to combat political and civil discrimination against women, drawing on the principles of the Declaration as a foundation for the 1952 Convention on the Political Rights of Women.[61] Throughout this period Mehta provided an important bridge between the two Commissions.

Just as Pandit brought her experience as a woman and as a former colonial subject into debates around the mandate of the United Nations, Mehta brought her insight as a feminist and a nationalist into these Commissions. When called to represent India at the Human Rights Commission she was involved in the work of the All India Women's Conference, and was in fact completing a term as the organisation's President. With negotiations for independence and the formation of provisional national and provincial governments well under way, and the writing of the new Indian Constitution about to commence, this was a crucial moment for the AIWC to ensure that the meaning of women's equality was adequately articulated and guaranteed, and that representatives of the women's movement were able to participate fully in this process of nation building. Although the nationalist movement supported women's equality in theory, the Conference realised that translating this abstract

[58] Jain, *Women, Development and the UN*, p. 16.
[59] Norman and Zaidi, *Human Rights at the UN,* p. 278.
[60] Jain, *Women, Development and the UN,* p. 19.
[61] Black, 'Are Women "Human"?', p. 141.

principle into substantial equality, would require a clear spelling out the meaning and implications of such equality, and would require active lobbying on the part of the women's movement. The Executive of the AIWC, which at this stage included Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Hansa Mehta, Lakshmi Menon, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Renuka Ray, Kitty Shiva Rao and Hannah Sen, drew up a Women's Charter of Rights and Duties, together with a Memorandum on Planning for national welfare, as part of the organisation's strategy to secure the inclusion of equal rights for women in the drafting of the Indian Constitution and the development of the national economic and social policies.[62] Mehta brought a copy of this Charter to Lake Success where she was meeting with the Human Rights Commission in May 1946, and when the sub-commission on the Status of Women found itself struggling to define its own mandate, as well as the meaning and implications of women's equality, both at a national and international level, she offered this Charter as a guideline.[63] Comparing the wording of the principles of the sub-commission[64] with the preamble of the AIWC's Charter, suggests the significant role the Charter played in shaping the sub-commission's mandate. News coverage of this session from the *New York Herald Tribune* described the event with the following headline: 'Women of UN unite in vote of full equality: Mrs Roosevelt Is Leader at second Sessions; India's Formula Wins Support'.[65] The first three paragraphs of the sub-commission's resolution were taken word for word from the Indian Woman's Charter of Rights and Duties:

> Whereas, Freedom and Equality are essential to human development, and whereas woman is as much a human being as man and therefore, entitled to share with him.
>
> We believe that woman has a definite role to play in the building of a free, healthy prosperous and moral society and that she can fulfil this obligation only as a free and responsible member of society.
>
> In order to achieve this ideal the purpose of this commission is to raise the status of women to equality with men in all fields of human endeavour.[66]

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[62] Chattopadhyay, *Indian Woman's Battle for Freedom*, pp. 123-124.
[63] Ibid.
[64] See Document 8: Report of the CSW to ECOSOC on the first session of the Commission held at Lake Success, New York from 10 to 24 February 1947 in *The United Nations and The Advancement of Women 1945-1995*, pp. 103-110.
[65] See article from *New York Herald Tribune*, 2 May 1946, File 58, AIWC Papers, NMML.
[66] See Document 8: Report of the CSW to ECOSOC on the first session of the Commission.

The AIWC's Woman's Charter of Rights and Duties was being used as a policy document to lobby for equal rights within the Constituent Assembly over the same period that it was being integrated into the CSW's principles. The movement of the Charter from the Indian context into the United Nations encourages a rethinking of human rights as western centric concept, providing a concrete example of the influence of ideas, and 'lived experience' from the margins to the centre in the development of the history of human rights. The influence of the AIWC Women's Charter, and the contribution of Mehta and Pandit to discourses concerning the positioning and meaning of women's equality within the UN, furthermore suggests that there is a need for a renewed focus on the contribution of women from developing countries to shaping the terms of the debate of the UN.

The Indian woman as global citizen: the potential of human rights for a remaking of the bounds of sovereignty

One of the important conceptual contributions both Mehta and Pandit made to debates on human rights and women's equality at the UN was their emphasis on the indivisibility of women's rights and their lobbying for the positioning of women's equality within broader framework of human rights. Their experience, as nationalists and feminists, struggling against the yoke of colonial subjecthood and the restrictions of both foreign and indigenous patriarchies had given them both a theoretical, and lived experience, understanding of this intersection. Both Mehta and Pandit spoke out during debates on human rights, emphasising that women's rights should not be treated as a separate category of rights and entitlements, but that these should be viewed within the ambit of human rights; that women's right to equality was in fact a human right.

This emphasis placed on the inclusiveness of human rights, and the integration of women's rights within the broader fold of human rights was evident, for example, in the changes pushed for by Pandit, Mehta and Bodil Begtrup[67] to the language of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that would set the terms for the International Bill of Rights. An earlier draft of Article One of the International Bill of Human Rights had read 'all men, being members of one family...shall regard each other as brothers'. Mehta and Begtrup objected strongly to the gendered nature of the term 'men'

[67] Danish national Bodil Begtrup was chair of the sub-commission on the Status of Women.

launching a discussion which eventually led an agreement to use, the term 'human beings' instead.[68] Mehta and Eleanor Roosevelt also asked for the deletion of the word woman in an early draft of the charter as 'everyone includes women and mention specifically of the term might 'by inference mean their exclusion where it is not mentioned'.[69] The notion of the human being, inclusive of all categories of identity and undistinguishable on the basis of race, gender, class or nationality, spoke directly to the identity of the sexless citizen articulated in the Karachi Resolution and the democratic Indian Constitution. In this way the voices and ideas of Mehta and Pandit together with those of the other members of the Commission on the Status of women, helped to shape language of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which formed the framework of the International Bill of Human rights adopted in December in 1948.

Through their contribution to these debates and in particular through the sharing of the AIWC's Woman's Charter of Rights and Duties in the Committee on the Status of Women, Pandit and Mehta show how India was able to make a significant conceptual contribution to the development of ideas and structures within the UN during its formative years. But the United Nations experience also enabled Mehta and Pandit to rethink the boundaries and connections between citizenship, rights and nationality through the notion of human rights, and in so doing to remake the bounds of sovereignty.

The Indian freedom struggle offered the promise of citizenship and the claim to rights on the basis of a new nation, founded on the principles of a secular liberal democracy. However as Nivedita Menon emphasises, democracy took a different shape in the post-colonial world compared to countries of its origin. In the societies of Asia and Africa, democracy entered before the notion of the individual took root. Nationalist leaders therefore tended to construct national identities 'not through the idea of individual citizenship but through that of communities' and as a consequence liberal individualism has never become 'the uncontested core of anti-imperialist struggles or post independence politics'.[70] This tension between the community as bearer of rights and the individual as bearer of rights proved

[68] Norman and Zaidi, *Human Rights at the UN*, p. 187.
[69] A. Whittick, *Woman into Citizen*, p. 164.
[70] See N. Menon, 'Elusive 'Woman': Feminism and Women's Reservation Bill', *EPW* 35:43/44 (21 October to 3 November, 2000).

problematic for the egalitarian functioning of the relationship between Indian nationalism and feminism. In the Indian context mediating rights through the framework of community identity has often worked to undermine claims to equality, as chapter five of this thesis has illustrated by documenting the workings of the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act of 1949, and the Shah Bano Case of 1986.

Furthermore, just as certain powers in the UN limited their commitment to human rights to support for an abstract ideal, there were those within the new INC led provisional government who supported equality in principle, as part of the making of a progressive modernity, but who continued to resist the application of this principle in practice. Although the newly drafted Indian Constitution (1950) guaranteed equality on the basis of sex, religion and ethnicity, chapter six: *Citizenship through Struggle* documented the persistent battle, waged in the face of ongoing resistance, by the AIWC and NFIW, to ensure that this abstract principle was translated into legislation through the Campaign for the Hindu Code Bill. While the particular national context of India constrained the contours within which an identity for women as citizens could be articulated or envisioned, human rights unhinged the claim to rights through nationhood. The debate over South Africa introduced the idea that rights could be broader than claims to both imperial subjecthood and national citizenship. When actions or legislation violated the equality and freedom of the individual, then state sovereignty could be trumped in the name of a global sense of belonging and entitlement, enabling the 'remaking of the bounds of sovereignty'.[71] In the United States, examples of how the local reach of the human rights norms, being developed through the UN Charter and the Declaration of Human Rights, could be harnessed to challenge entrenched practices of racial segregation, provided evidence that this could indeed be done.[72]

The category of human rights, being developed during this period within the United Nations, provided a useful way for thinking about the claim to rights and equality, hence citizenship itself, beyond the

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[71] Bradley, 'Approaching the Universal Declaration of Rights', p. 332.
[72] The Rice v. Sioux Memorial Park Cemetery Inc case was one such example. The case was brought against the state when the body of a deceased man was removed from a "Caucasians only" cemetery in (which city and state) when it was discovered that he was a Native American. See Bradley, 'Approaching the Universal Declaration of Rights', pp. 332-333.

nation state, enabling Pandit, Kaur and Mehta to reframe their demands for Indian women's equality and empowerment within a broader framework of global governance and social justice. Through this process their demands for equality within the national sphere took on greater momentum and added significance. The UN's focus on promoting the rights and equality of women added an incentive to the Indian government's national commitment to women's equality, but it also offered a concrete benchmark by which to measure progress. UN Conventions such as the Convention on Political Rights of Women (1952), the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women (1957) and the Commission's Convention on the Consent to Marriage, minimum Age for Marriage and the Registration of Marriage (1962) offered a practical means of exerting external pressure on the newly established Indian government to implement its constitutional commitment to equality. The key concerns of the Committee on the Status of Women, during its first decade, mirrored the key concerns of the Indian women's rights activists over this period, including ensuring the exercise of equal political rights, legislating for legal rights within marriage and the family, and putting measures in place to prevent the exploitation of women in situations of vulnerability. In 1952 the General Assembly of the UN adopted the CSW crafted Convention on Political Rights of Women, the same year India held its first democratic elections in which a record number of female voters in India went to the polls. In 1957 the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women was drafted and adopted by the General Assembly, supplementing Article 15 of the UDHR. This was followed five years later in 1962 the CSW's Convention on the Consent to Marriage, minimum Age for Marriage and the Registration of Marriage was adopted.[73] Between 1952 and 1956 legislation guaranteeing similar rights for women within marriage and the family was also passed in India, in the form of the Hindu Code Bill.[74] Furthermore, the 1949 UN approval of the Convention on Suppression of the Traffic of Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, assisted Rameshwari Nehru, Lady Rama Rau and other organisations to push through the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of India in 1956.

[73] A. S. Fraser, 'Becoming Human: The Origins and Development of Women's Human Rights' in M. Agosín (ed.) *Women, gender and human rights: a global perspective* (New Jersey and London, 2001), p. 45.
[74] Between 1952 and 1956 the Hindu Code Bill was passed as four separate Acts, the Hindu Marriage Act, the Hindu Succession Act, the Hindu Minority and Guardian Act, the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act.

Conclusion

Over the past three decades the emergence of transnational history, with its emphasis on interconnections and the flow of ideas and individuals across the globe has facilitated the writing new kinds of history, liberated from the framework of the nation state. But the value of transnational history lies not only in its ability to cross borders, but equally in its capacity to offer fresh insight into the construction of such borders, revealing how national identities, and the gender relations that inform them, are produced through complex local, regional and international interactions.

The diplomatic careers of Hansa Mehta and Vijayalakshmi Pandit assist the scholar to contextualise the making of Indian nationhood within this dynamic international matrix, in as much as they speak to the central importance of internationalism to this generation's gender politics and their sense of solidarity within a broader Asian and African sisterhood. Representing India at the United Nations in the late 1940s and early 1950s was a particularly exciting time to be an Indian woman in the world. Participating in two parallel processes, the debating and construction of the Indian post-colonial citizen and the development of a global notion of citizenship, Mehta and Pandit were able to move between these two contexts, comparing and circulating ideas, and enabling a comparative perspective.

The influence of the AIWC's Woman's Charter of Rights and Duties on the preamble of the Committee on the Status of Women, illustrates how national documents could take on new layers of meaning and significance in an international context, and challenges the western centric orientation of human rights history. Through the Charter and the voices of Mehta and Pandit, Indian feminists were able to make a valuable contribution to this international body in its formative years. Exposure to ideas of global governance and social justice through the emerging concept of human rights was also conceptually valuable for this generation by offering a way of thinking about citizenship beyond territorial borders and religious community, enabling them to bypass the inherent communal identity built into the Asian nation state.

Conclusion

A History of Doing

Reflecting back on her career, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay concludes, 'Mine has been an eventful life'.[1] The projects and ambitions undertaken by this generation of nationalists and feminists, which have been documented in this research, suggests that this was never the 'quiet period' that historiography tends to define it as.[2] This was an active era, with the crafting of new documents, such as the Charter of Woman's Rights and Duties, the AIWC's civic education drives and the Campaign for the Hindu Code Bill. For communist women, in fact, the real 'women's movement' only started in the mid 1950s[3] with the formation of the National Federation of Indian Women in 1954, accompanied by the entry of refugee women into agitational politics in Calcutta and the struggle for socio-economic rights.

The establishment of the Central Social Welfare Board; the growing collaboration between the AIWC and other voluntary associations in the conceptualisation and implementation of welfare services and community development projects; the founding and development of new kinds of public private institutions, such as the Cancer Institute of Madras and the National Council of Child Welfare; and the formation of influential policy making bodies, such as the Family Planning Association of India, encourage a re-orientation of the state centric historiography of nation building, shifting the focus onto civil society as the agent of change and social justice, and presenting an alternate picture of

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[1] Chattopadhyay, *Inner Recesses Outer Spaces*, p. 1.
[2] See Neera Desai who writes in her chapter entitled 'From Accommodation to Articulation' in M. John (ed.), *Women's Studies in India a Reader* (New Delhi: 2008) 'In short, the immediate impact of political freedom was the generation of hope and confidence among women regarding their future. There was no need, it was felt by many, of an active women's movement to press their demands', p. 23. Radha Kumar devotes only one page in her book *The History of Doing* to the period of the 1950s and the dynamics between the women's movement and the newly formed Indian government, while Samita Sen comments on the period 'For a few decades after independence, female leaders, drawn mostly from the urban elite, believed in the fiction of the state's neutrality and assumed the male nationalist leadership' in '*Towards a Feminist Politics: The Indian Women's Movement in Historical Perspective'*, Policy Research Report on Gender and Development, Working Paper Series No. 9, (2000), pp. 4-5.
[3] Interview with Raja, 18th November 2011.

Nehruvian India as far more open and fluid to both civil society and the influence of international development.

Belonging

Through these projects and activities this generation of activists continued to wrestle with the question: how do women 'belong' to the nation state? In the halls of the Constituent Assembly, Kaur, Mehta and Ray deliberated upon the meaning and possibilities of constitutional and legal citizenship for women. In the towns and villages of India, AIWC branches endeavoured to give middle class women a sense of purpose and belonging as the agents of development and experts in the field of welfare.

Through serving, educating, and mobilising, Chattopadhyay and her colleagues in the AIWC and the NFIW, sought to develop an inclusive sense of 'belonging'. However, the segmented nature of these projects kept their ambition of a broad based national movement beyond reach. An inability to engage constructively with and to accommodate questions of difference in the body politic was one of the major obstacles that hindered such a development. Entangled in a social milieu dominated by communal politics and defined by the destructive hierarchies of caste, collective identity was intrinsically a source of tension and seen to undermine national cohesiveness.

In their advocacy for the 'sexless citizen' of the Karachi Resolution, equality was mistakenly equated with homogeneity, and homogeneity misinterpreted as a sign of consensus.[4] The consequence of this was the imposition of homogeneity from above, which left this generation unable to recognise the value and contribution of a politics of difference, and, the role that such a politics of difference could play in challenging the operation of power in Indian society.

The struggle with integrating questions of difference into a collective politics, was also reflected in the ongoing tension between the 'gender-based celebrations of the feminine', and the 'desire for equality which opposed sex-based differentiation', in the gender politics of this generation, a tension

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[4] Devenish, 'Performing the Political Self', p. 292.

Radha Kumar identifies as a characteristic of feminism in India.[5] The balancing of rights with duties in the AIWC's Woman's Charter of Rights and Duties, represented an attempt to resolve this tension, through reconciling the feminine through duty, with equality through rights, but this unfortunately, did not allow for the accommodation of other kinds of difference.

The experiences of this cohort reveal that this generation spoke from various subject positions, and with many different kinds of voices. Perhaps this in itself calls for the necessity of many different kinds of belonging? This leads the scholar back to the perplexing and unanswered question of how a claim to citizenship can accommodate multiple layers of identity, both individual and collective?

Being

Internationalism and the universalising language of human rights was one of the ways that this generation sought to belong beyond the nation state, enabling them to surmount some of the inherent communal underpinnings of the post-colonial state in Asia. The shared experience of 'being', offered another possibility for collective belonging. As women, experiences such as gendered violence, cut across divisions of class, caste and religion, enabling a common platform of 'belonging', built around a shared concern. Feminist history has demonstrated the value of a study of 'being', through theoretical frameworks such as 'lived experience' and 'embodiment'. The centrality of the experience of 'being', in turn enables the scholar to think about the meaning, possibilities and limitations of the nation state and the exercise of freedom and democracy in new and alternative ways.

Revisiting the Bengal famine of 1943, and the rape and abduction of women during Partition and their recovery by the Indian state, through the narratives of Chattopadhyay and her colleagues, illustrates how the political, geographical, social and economic processes that facilitated and accompanied decolonisation and nation-building found resonance and expression in the physical bodies of the nation's citizens, and how these processes played themselves out on these physical bodies, gendering these bodies in particular ways. These new areas of focus suggest that in order to grasp its full implications and potential, citizenship needs to be understood, not only as idea and abstract bundle of

[5] Kumar, *The History of Doing*, p. 5.

rights, but as process and experience. 'Being' creates subjectivity, and subjectivity allows for the expression of agency, which lies at the heart of the notion of citizenship.

Institutions and discourses of the state and of civil society created new possibilities of 'being' for Indian women, which in turn widened the horizons and possibilities of citizenship, as for example the AIWC's discourse of citizenship through service, and the NFIW's ambitions for a citizenship through struggle, demonstrate. But institutions and discourses of the state and of civil society, by limiting *being* in particular ways, could just as easily curtail the possibilities of imagining women as agents and citizens, restricting their position in the world to that of subjects and victims, as the implementation of the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act of 1949, and the stories of Nissa and Kumari Kahn's girl from Lahore suggest.

Becoming

For Chattopadhyay and her colleagues, resources, education and family support combined with their own self-determination and creativity enabled them to develop to their full potential, to come fully into *being*, as intellectuals, professionals and personalities. In this process of becoming, citizenship was perceived not simply as a status, something that could be granted, but rather as an attribute that had to be earned through particular kinds of participation in the nation state, through learning, action and behaviour. It was a status that could be entered into through active engagement with the state and with fellow citizens.

The life stories of Chattopadhyay and her colleagues, however, remain exceptional. Despite the vision and efforts of her generation to facilitate such a process of *becoming* for all their fellow sisters, significant inequalities, falling along the lines of gender and other socio-economic axes, have kept the full meaning and possibilities of citizenship beyond the reach of the majority of women who lived through the transition to independence with them. For these excluded communities of women, who continue in their struggle to *become* full citizens, and to experience what such citizenship could mean in their daily lives, the making of an inclusive and egalitarian politics in India remains an unfinished and ongoing process.

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