

CHAPTER-VI

WOMEN ASSOCIATIONS OF BENGAL AND ITS INTERACTION WITH OTHER SISTER ASSOCIATIONS OF INDIA

It is a fact that, women associations were encouraged by men and women in Bengal joined voluntary associations after getting education.¹ As a result, there was a growing need among educated women for a platform where they could meet each other for discussion and engage in some form of useful philanthropic work and through which they could keep up contact with the exterior world.² Women began to define their wellbeing, suggest solutions and take action only after they established their own associations. Women's associations, called by various titles, sprang up all over India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The majority was geographically limited but they shared the target of bringing women together to talk about women's issues.³ We come across *Bambodhini Sabha* started in 1863. *Brahmika Samaj* was formed in 1865. *Bambodhini* had several women members who conducted sewing classes. *Bama Hitaishini Sabha* was founded in 1871 which initiated dialogues of child rearing, suitable education for women etc. But it was dominated by men, so women got no chance for leadership. Women felt hemmed in during the 70's of the nineteenth century. But women sought to free themselves from men's control. So, it is encouraging to note that, *Bangiya Mahila Samaj* was established entirely by women for women in 1879 which did social work amongst its new members. After the split of *Bama Hitaishini*, *Arya Nari Samaj* was formed in 1879.⁴ The activities of these women's associations did not confine within the boundary of colonial Bengal. It crossed its periphery of activities and touched other sister associations that developed in various parts of India. It is likely that, the plan and programmes of the associations beyond Bengal were different in view of their objectives and aims but it is suffices to say that most of these associations in general had their aims to focus women issues in different perspectives. Before going to the details about the interaction and inter-connection one may come across three types of women associations in all India level. These were- (a)

Personality Based Associations, (b) National Movement Oriented Associations and (c) All-India Based Associations.

(a) Personality Based Associations

By the end of the nineteenth century, women mostly from reformist families emerged who formed their own associations. In this connection, the Tagore family of Jorasanko of Bengal played a pioneering role. Swarnakumari Devi, sister of poet Rabindranath Tagore, an author in her own right and a novelist of distinction, organized the *Sakhi Samiti* (Ladies Association) in 1886 to promote among Indian women an active and progressive concentration in the welfare of the country.⁵ It was later changed into a craft centre for widows. Under the leadership of Hiranmoyee Devi, daughter of Swarnakumari Devi, organized a *Mahila Shilpa Samiti*, a women's handcraft.⁶ This *Samiti* taught feminine arts and crafts for self dependence and economic freedom.⁷ On the other hand, Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, wife of Justice M. G. Ranade, remarkable woman from Poona (Pune in modern form), founded the *Arya Mahila Samaj* in 1882 and went on to set up a series of women's associations in various towns of Bombay Presidency. She also started *Sharda Sadan* in 1892 with the intention of providing employment and education to women, young widows in particular. Ramabai Ranade established the *Seva Sadan* in 1909 in Pune. The year 1908 saw the beginning of a *Gujrati Stree Mandal* in Ahmedabad and branches of *Mahila Seva Samaj* were founded in Mysore in 1913 and in Poona in 1916. Women's associations took starting place in Madras also. In North India, Rameshwari Nehru organized *Prayag Mahila Samit* in Allahabad in 1909 and edited early women's magazine *Stree Darpan* in Hindi. The *Prayag Mahila Samiti* expressed issues which were concerned with women's 'enlightenment', social reforms, women's education and women's political participation, though the participation of these meetings remained limited to elite women.⁸ It may be said that, the aims and objectives of the above mentioned associations in general had their purpose to focus women issues in different perspectives. In that sense, these associations had a common interaction with each other.

Initially, these associations were confined to a locality or a city. After the first decade of the twentieth century, national and provincial women's associations were started by women who had acquired experience in local women's associations. For instance, the credit for starting the first all India women's association, the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* (the Large Circle of Indian Women) in 1910 must go to Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, the brilliant daughter of Swarnakumari Devi, long before the formation of the *Women's Indian Association* (WIA) and the *All India Women's Conference* (AIWC).⁹

The center was formed in Lahore in November 1910 at a personal meeting of women. Sarala Devi was appointed the General Secretary "with power to take all necessary steps for the establishment of the Society on a permanent footing". It was decided to hold the opening meeting in Allahabad in December 1910 when many from different parts of India were expected to assemble there for the Congress session.¹⁰ The most important feature of the inaugural session of the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* was that it was presided over by Her Highness the Begum Sahiba of Janjira, a Muslim woman, and was graced by the presence of Her Highness the Nawab Begum of Bhopal, the only ruling princes of India and a Muslim woman as well.¹¹ The main function of the association was, of course, the advancement of women. To quote her: "The object of the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* is the creation of an organization by means of which women of every race, creed, class and party in India may be brought together on the basis of their common interest in the moral and material progress of women in India; and in and through which organization they may work in association and in a spirit of mutual helpfulness for the progress of humanity through that of her sex."¹²

In order to reach this goal, a plan of action was drawn up and attempted to establish interaction and inter-connection between women intellectuals and activities. It was resolute that –(1) Branches would be set up in all important cities of India, (2) In view of a very small number of girls going to school on account of early marriage and still- persisting *Purdah*, a system of home education for married girls would be evolved, (3) Literary committees would be formed for the promotion of indigenous literature, (4)

Centres would be set up to help destitute women in productive work and sell their handiwork, (5) Help would be extended to women to have greater access to medical knowledge and medical care and (6) Relationship with other sister associations would be developed.¹³ Hence, in its credit of women's issues, the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* intended to open branches in all parts of India to endorse female education. It developed branches in Lahore, Allahabad, Delhi, Karachi, Amritsar, Hyderabad, Kanpur, Bankura, Hazaribagh, Bombay, Madras, Prayag, Lucknow, Kashi, Midnapur and Calcutta, Bankipur and other places.¹⁴

The first branch of the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* was established in Calcutta, followed by branches in the Punjab and the United provinces, Membership was open to any woman of any creed on the payment of an entrance fee of one rupee and the annual subscription was also fixed at one rupee. Noticeably, the first drive of the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* was on education. About three thousand women were taught at home. The branch office at Allahabad decided to encourage *Zenana* education by sending teachers to each and every house, by opening classes at different localities, and by framing a syllabus and holding examinations at different places. In Lahore, free primary classes were opened for educating women three times a week. The Bengal branch did commendable work under Krishnabhabini Das, wife of Professor Debendranath Das and Poet Priyambada Devi. When Sarala Devi came back to Calcutta after her husband's death in 1923, she took up the work herself. As the number of girls going to school gradually increased, Sarala Devi decided to start a recognized educational institution. On 1st June 1930, the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* founded the *Sikshasadan* (a house for education) at Bhabanipur, Calcutta.¹⁵

Not only education, the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* also endeavoured to promote women's wellbeing at other levels. For instance, *Nari Nirvaha Bhandar* or the Women's Mart was founded to provide amenities for the sale of women's handicraft production. The profits of the sale went to destitute women workers. The work of translating the *Mahabharata* in easily understandable, simple Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi was also undertaken.¹⁶ Side by side, she established this organization as all India level

and had also polished it to form as universal association. For this reason, she tried to follow the construction, working system and experiences of European women's associations. *Young Women's Christian Association* was most important among them.¹⁷

There might be a common question as to the future courses of action of the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal*! Indeed, not any amazing changes in women's condition could be achieved by it. Nor could it set the test of era, having survived for a few years. There was no attempt to evolve any link with any grassroots association. The programme of action suited its middle class members. Yet, by the values of the time, it was a great and momentous attempt. It marked the beginning of women's movement in India under women's leadership and here lay its historical importance - in its distinction from men-led women's associations of the nineteenth century. To her credit, Sarala Devi did not consider of a limited organization of one community only. In a speech expressing similar sentiments as her uncle Rabindranath Tagore, she said that, her association would include women of all creeds, "Indo-Aryan, Indo-Semitic, Indo-Mongolian and Anglo-Indian" and would implement a liberal view towards all religions. Most importantly, the association designed at a pan-Indian unity of women. To quote her: "To join the parts, to bring the several fragments together into one moral unity, to deepen the sense of sisterhood and common humanity of the women of all the races and parts of India is one of the main features of the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal*".¹⁸ After 1910, the number of social associations for women grew quickly, called by various names – *Mahila Samitis*, Women's Clubs, Ladies Societies etc. and they emerged in the cities, towns and villages of British India and the native states.¹⁹ In this respect, we can mention here the name of Saroj Nalini Dutta, the founder of the *Mahila Samiti* movement in Bengal. Though we already discussed in the previous chapter (i.e. V) that Saroj Nalini formed the first *Mahila Samiti* in Pabna in 1913 and then Birbhum (1916), Sultanpur (1917), Rampurhat (1918), Bankura (1921), Darjeeling (1924), starting a women's association in each town.²⁰ But she wanted to establish a *Kendriya Nari Mangal Samiti* in Clacutta for interaction and inter-connection with other sister associations.²¹ After her premature death on 19th January 1925, her husband Guru Saday Dutta and followers founded the *Saroj Nalini Dutt Memorial Association*. Three

weeks later of her death a remembrance assembly was held on 8th February when her husband affirmed to donate 5000 rupees to the *Central Mahila Samiti* in order to continue her memory and to take charge of other wings of *Mahila Samiti* established in different districts of Bengal. From that fund emerged *Saroj Nahini Dutt Memorial Association for Women* on 23rd February, 1925.²²

The aims and objectives of the association were directed towards promoting women's interests not only in terms of adult education and the training of women in some useful crafts and skills, but also hygiene, maternity and child care. It ran a small school of nursing which circulated diplomas to students on their end of the course after two years.²³ *Bangalakshmi*, the monthly journal of the association, edited by Kumudini Bose for the first two years and then Hemlata Tagore, provides valuable records for writing women's history of the period. It pleaded with women in the districts as well as in the villages 'to wake up', form women's associations to strengthen woman power and take up paid jobs outside the home, if necessary, instead of starving within it.²⁴ The most important aspect of this journal was reporting the activities of its branches which were organized in several parts of the country. For instance, it reported that, the branches in Manikganj (near Dacca) and Kurseong (in Darjeeling district) were training women in self-employment schemes. The *Samiti* in Mulghar was doing also excellently. Upto this point, women rarely met other women from the same area. Now they were meeting regularly, discussing and transmitting ideas, in spite of the opposition of orthodox sections.²⁵

At the very beginning the *Saroj Nalini Dutt Memorial Association* started their activities taking on seven or eight branches. Within one year the number of the *Samities* which were incorporated in the central committees became fifty. Gradually, in the second year it became hundred and in the third and fourth year number became one hundred and fifty eight and two hundred and fifty respectively.²⁶ Upto on March, 1940, about four hundred branch associations were established in the different parts of India under *Saroj Nalini Dutt Nari Mangal Samiti*.²⁷ The responsibilities and activities of the central committee were as follows:

- (a) The central committee was to campaign for establishing new centres and to control and harmonize the activities different branches of the *Mahila Samiti*.
- (b) To send trained teachers to train the female members to different art and crafts.
- (c) To publish a monthly journal named *Bangalakshmi* and deliver speech for arousing consciousness among the female and also to assess their development.
- (d) The liability of supervising these associations developed upon the female members constituting the committee.
- (e) The main endeavor was to train the women folk so that they can perform social work and be able organizer.
- (f) The President, the Secretary and other members of the working committee would be associated with the activities of the association and they should be elected from the female members.
- (g) The subordinate *Samities* which were connected parts of the central body would pay subscription amounting to three rupees.
- (h) All female members irrespective of caste, creed, religion and habitation would be eligible for membership etc.²⁸

The Central *Mahila Samiti* administered their social service through different sister branches. This activity improved social relationship, encouraged cooperative activity and the recommend for social service. Some instances of their activities may be cited here. The members of the *Mahila Samitis* of Khulna, Hoogly, Barishal and Jessore took care of the ill and donated clothes and other necessities to the children. They also kept strict observation on the midwives of the patients. They often visited the patients to provide the mental support, offered financial help to the flood stricken people and poor people for arranging the marriage ceremonies of their daughters. Another example was in a Muslim locality of Maldah town many houses were burnt. Then the Hindu

members of the *Samiti* immediately provided protection to the homeless Muslims and looked after their children with proper care.²⁹

Beside that, these *Samities* took proper care of Muslim women for rearing communal harmony. The Central Committee received economic support from both the Hindus and the Muslims. The president of the *Madaripur Mahila Samiti* was a Muslim woman. Daughter of Nawab Bahadur Saiyad Nawab Ali Chaudhury was elected the president of *Tangail Mahila Samiti*.³⁰ Both male and female members of the Muslim community were actively associated with in the Hooghly, Natore, Madaripur, Kalna and other *Mahila Samities*. All these associations contributed a lot to the development of cottage industry, garden, adult education, drama and girl's school.³¹

Saroj Nalini Nari Mangal Samiti formed an art school for imparting general education, art and craft to the adult women. Women whether they were married, unmarried and widows aging above sixteen were chosen for training; particularly widows coming from poor families were preferred. Even students who were guardian less were also allowed to get admission. An exhibition was held in Calcutta where exhibits made by the trainees of the sister branches were displayed. In this way, many widow and poor women became self-dependable.³²

The members of the *Mahila Samiti* were very much aware about the condition of the public health. They delivered lectures on health, primary nursing etc. Exhibitions were also arranged for exhibiting the health condition of the babies. Maternity homes were set up along with the local health centres. The maternity centre founded by the *Mahila Samiti* of Bankura was named after Saroj Nalini Debi. Midwifery training was started by some *Samitis* for giving proper training to the midwives. These *Samitis* received help from the District Board.³³

Other branches were established in Kurigram (Rangpur district), Sreerampur, Bankra, Margram, Dasora, Tala, Nimta, Jalalpur, Brahmarandhriya, Barasat and so on. The main goals of these *Samities* were spread of education. In this context, the Calcutta *Bhabanipur Rajbala Mahila Samiti* was not lagging behind. It organized the art and craft training and teaching for adult women.³⁴ Another branch of the *Samiti* was formed at Bowbazar, Calcutta for spreading female education. The *Samiti* established a

Zenana School and another girls' school in that area. Umashashi Devi, the president of that *Samiti*, made it possible by her constant endeavor and missionary enthusiasm.³⁵ It is fact that, *Saroj Nalini Dutt Nari Mangal Samiti* did continuous interaction with other district branch associations of Bengal. Basically, Indian women were related in the central committee. Beside Bengal, this *Samiti* was spread in Assam, Bihar, Orissa and United Provinces. The *Basanta Kumari Widow-Ashram* was formed in Puri (Orissa) for teaching general education in Bengali, English, Mathematics, Geography, History, Sewing and Tailoring, embroidery and drawing, carpet and *Satranchi* weaving etc. The *Ariar Mahila Samiti* in Purnea (Bihar) formed a Sunday school for adult women. Another branch in Shitalai opened a school for woman. The school scheduled to start its function at 2'O clock. Smt. Sudhanshubala, the president of the *Samiti*, taught at least twelve students under her guardianship. Not only that, Junior *Maharani* of Tribankur was sending a request letter to the *Saroj Nalini Nari Mangal Samiti* to establish a similar association in her state. The Government of Assam was declared to give compensation to the Association for establishing an association in their state. Though the *Association* was centralized in Bengal, but women of different parts of India could join in the conference of the *Samiti*. Not only Indian, European women were also interested in these *samities* and joined in the several sister associations. Smt. Holingbery gave her voluntary labour in *Barishal Samiti*. In 1927, Maharani Sunity Devi of Cooch Behar was the president of the *Saroj Nalini Mahila Samiti* of London. By her initiative there was interaction and inter-connection of activities and economic cooperation between the *Phininghum Mahila Samiti* of England and *Kanthi Mahila Samiti*.³⁶

In this way, *Saroj Nalini Nari Mangal Samiti* opened a new field in the self-identity of native ladies and through which they matured their self-consciousness. Obviously, women began to renovate their role in the family, society and even theoretical level and many new characteristics were adding in their activities. As a social activist, Saroj Nalini was mainly concerned with constructive programme. It wanted to total emancipation of women. A universal advocate for women education was generated. So, the credit must go to these *Mahila Samities*. Not only urban based

women, but also village women and at the same time women from grass root level were linked with the activities of these *Samities* and communal harmony was arisen through these associations.

In the field of social reform, another notable personality was Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. In 1916, Rokeya founded an association of Muslim women named '*Anjumane Khawatine Islam*'. The programmes of this association were directed to popularise free education among the poor Muslim girls and at the same time to arrange their marriage afterwards. Add to this was to reawaken them about education and social reality. Nurunnesa Khatun, Samsunnahar Mahmud³⁷ and others were connected with this association. It is necessary to mention here that, when '*Anjumane Khawatine Islam*' was established in Bengal by Begum Rokeya, at the same time many Muslim women organizations were set up in North and South India. In fact, from the beginning of the twentieth century there was trend of liberal attitude began to start about women role and slackness of *Purdah* system among Muslim community. In 1905 '*Muslim Ladies Conference*' was founded by Attiya Begum in Aligarh. In Lahore, '*Anjumane Khawatine Islam*' was established by Begum Mohammad Shafi in 1907. She was presided the '*Muslim Ladies Conference*' in 1909. Begum of Bhopal also connected with '*Muslim Educational Conference*' and she did help for the establishment of girls' school in Aligarh. In 1914, she arranged a Muslim women conference in Aligarh and this conference was held after one year as '*All India Muslim Ladies Conference*'.³⁸

So, it may be said that, from the beginning of the twentieth century Muslim women began to participate in the conferences, associations and they exchanged their views with others such as, strictness of *purdah* system, spread of women education, polygamy, and women centric various problems etc. In 1919, *Anjumane- Khawatine- Deccan* and *Lucknow Women's Organization* were established and Begum Habibullah, Begum Owasim, Begum Aijaj Rasul, Lady Owajir Hossain and others were associated with these associations. They tried to unite Muslim women against *purdah* system. *Anjumane Khawatine Islam* of Bengal arranged '*All India Muslim Ladies Conference* in Calcutta under the guidance of Begum Rokeya and many Muslim women participated in this conference from different parts of India.³⁹ It is very clear that, the

main purpose of these association were to uplift of Muslim women and they had interaction with other sister associations of India.

(b) National Movement Oriented Associations

It is a fact that, being inspired by national feelings and patriotism, Indian women since the beginning of the twentieth century, became gradually active in organized-politics first in Bengal and later across the country. In this respect, the growth of nationalist feeling among the *bhadralok* from the late 1860s could not but have filtered through to the *antahpur*.⁴⁰ By the end of the nineteenth century Indian National Congress was established in 1885 and ten women attended the fourth session of the Congress at Bombay in 1889. Among them was Swarna Kumari Devi, sister of Rabindranath Tagore and Kadambini Ganguli, a graduate of Calcutta University and the first woman doctor came from Bengal. Among the other women present were Pandita Ramabai, Mrs. Shevantibai Trimbak, Mrs. Shantabai Nikambe, Mrs. Kashibai Kanitkar and Miss. Manekjee Cursetjee all of whom developed into renowned educationists and social reformers. There were Hindu, Brahmo, Parsi and Christian women representatives. Pandita Ramabai came on behalf of the *Arya Mahila Samaj*, Poona and Swarna Kumari Devi had been selected to personify the *Bengal Ladies Association (Banga Mahila Samaj)*.⁴¹ Here it may be noted that, it was the beginning of women interaction with Bengal and other parts of India.

During the Bengal Partition in 1905 and *Swadeshi* era, the consciousness of the anti- colonial struggle was reflected in the world of women. Realization of the need to organize emerged and this was reflected in the creation of women's associations. In the last part of the nineteenth century only one or two women, like Swarna Kumari Devi of Calcutta and Pandita Ramabai of Poona, had initiated women's associations. But in the twentieth century, as the freedom movement developed and women participated in it.⁴² Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, Daughter of Swarna Kumari Devi, married to an Arya Samajist, Rambhoj Dutt Choudhury, was active both in Bengal and Punjab in organizing women's associations. She was one of the outstanding personalities of this period. Sarala Devi formed the link between Punjab and Bengal revolutionaries. Sarala Devi's sensitive years were spent in western India with her uncle, Satyendranath

Tagore, where she witnessed the recovery of Ganapati festival, Shivaji coronation festival and the organization of the society of physical and military training by Damodar and Balkrishna Chapekar, who were Chitpavan Brahmins. She became so inspired that she sought to launch similar activities in Bengal to restart the heroic spirit among the people. She established a centre for physical culture at her home in Calcutta and recommended to the Congress to organize an exhibition of physical feats. In the year 1902 she organized the celebration of *Birastami Brata* and in 1903 *Pratapaditya Brata* modelled on the lines of '*Shivaji Ustav*' of young Marathas who followed *Tilak*. Just as the Marathas celebrated the Puja of Bhavani, symbolic deity of Shivaji, so Sarala Devi celebrated the Kali Puja, symbolic goddess of *Patapaditya*.⁴³

On the other hand, '*Lakshmir Bhandar*' formed by Sarala Devi for popularizing *Swadeshi* goods. Many Bengali women not only rejected foreign made household items, but also helped their family members, especially offsprings to use indigenous goods. Side by side, associations like *Swadeshi Bhandar*, *Swadeshi Mandali*, *Mahila Samiti* etc. were formed to promote and propagate the idea of *Swadeshi*. The most important Bengali leaders in the movement were Sarojini Bose, Kumudini Mitra, Swarna Kumari Devi, Sister Nivedita, Sarala Devi Choudhurani, Nabasashi Devi, Sushila Sen, Kamalkamini Gupta, Hiranmoyee Debi etc. while Mrs. A. V. Joshi, Mrs. Ketkar and others were active in spreading the spirit of *Swadeshi* in other parts of India.⁴⁴ On 29 December 1906, women called a meeting in the premises of Bethune College and School with the Maharani of Barada as president. She was impressed by the work of the Bengali women in the *Swadeshi* movement and she frankly stated that: 'I know how the ladies of Bengali have helped and supported the *Swadeshi* movement which is now spreading fast over Northern India and the Punjab, over Gujrat and the Deccan, over Madras, Mysore and Travancore, everywhere over this continent.'⁴⁵ It is perhaps right to conclude that, though the *Swadeshi* struggle originated in Bengal, it ultimately assumed popularity in a number of provinces, spreading especially in the Punjab, Maharashtra and Madras. Undoubtedly, Bengali women were the first to get revolutionized and accordingly the *Swadeshi* spirit gradually spread among women of the other regions too, mainly in the Punjab. As Punjabi women stepped into the political

arena, they were encouraged by the stirring words of Sushila Devi of Sialkot who delivered a series of lectures in which she attacked the government and exhorted women to rise to the juncture offered by *Swadeshi*. Another important lady who joined the political bandwagon was Har Devi, the wife of a Lahore Barrister Roshan Lal who was himself a notable social reformer and edited a Hindi magazine, *Bharat Bhagini*. During this period, Har Devi not only organized various meetings but also collected funds for assisting nationalist workers who were under experiment.⁴⁶

Female workers of the *Arya Samaj* also emerge to have contributed notably towards arousing a national spirit among women in the Punjab. Among these, Smt. Purani, a well-known *Arya Samaj* worker at Hissar, toured different districts of the Punjab advocating the cause of *Swadeshi*. Speaking to women at Hissar, she not only criticized caste restrictions, but also exhorted women to “bring up their sons not with a view to joining government service, but to an independent participation in trade, especially the manufacture and sale of *Swadeshi*”.⁴⁷

In the month of November 1908, a mass meeting of women, called by the name of *Mahila Maha Samiti*, was held in Calcutta where ladies from different provinces came to discuss the duties of women for the national cause. In 1908 when Gandhiji started a fresh movement in South Africa to justify the rights of the Indian settlers there, the Bengali women organized a system for collection of money called the *Mayer Kauta* (‘Mother’s Box’) under the aegis of *Bharati Patrika* to help his cause. Dr. Kadambini Ganguli worked as a president in the *Transvaal Indian Association* in Calcutta to help Gandhiji in his South African movement with monetary support.⁴⁸

Therefore, the *Swadeshi* movement marked a most significant step promote in the cause of involving Indian women particularly in Bengal in the nation’s mission for freedom. As Bipan Chandra comments: “A remarkable aspect of the *Swadeshi* agitation was the active participation of women in the movement. The traditionally home-centred women of the urban middle classes joined processions and picketing. From then on they were to take an active part in the nationalist movement”.⁴⁹ While in the early phase of the Congress movement women’s involvement was firmly limited, during the *Swadeshi* movement, as a large programme of activity was evolved, women began to play an

active role. In this way, women associations of Bengal and its interaction with other sister associations of India began to expand.

After Bengal Partition, the 1920s were a turning point for women's contribution in the Congress led nationalist movement in India. The Khilafat- Non Cooperation movement initiated the boycott of government institutions, legislatures and law enforcing bodies. Nationwide strikes, hartals, *Satyagrahas* and breaking of government laws were organized.⁵⁰ As an outcome of the Congress-Khilafat alliance, the constant exhortations of nationalist leaders seeking to build up Hindu-Muslim solidarity and the special Gandhian message and programme for women, increasingly huge numbers of Muslim women began to connect themselves with the national endeavour.⁵¹ In fact, the Central Khilafat Committee started a separate women's Branch in 1921 to encourage greater involvement of Muslim women. Gail Minault, the pre-eminent scholar of Muslim women's role in Indian nationalism, has pointed out how religious theme and anti-British feelings were skillfully utilized to publicize the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements among Muslim women during this period. Again she proceeds to conclude that, Muslim women in due course became "a powerful opinion group within the Khilafat movement, supporting it morally with their firm religious faith and financially with their ornaments".⁵² The Central Khilafat Committee organized women's meetings all over the country during the Khilafat and *Tilak Swaraj Fund* raising campaigns. These meetings were addressed by Bi Amma (Ali matriarch), Begum Muhammad Ali (wife of Muhammad Ali) and Begum Hazrat Mohani among others. These women of important Muslim nationalists of the period, normally in combination with well-known Congress women leaders such as Sarojini Naidu, Sarala Devi Choudhurani, Basanti Das and others helped to broaden and popularize the Khilafat-Congress programme in different regions through stirring personal examples and by organizing and addressing a large number of women's meetings throughout the sub-continent. For instance, some among them, most remarkably Begum Muhammad Ali, began to adopt *Khadi* clothes in spite of the heaviness and ensuing uneasiness of wearing the *burqa*. Others, like Yusuf Sobhani's wife in Bombay, not only plied the *Charka* themselves but were also intimately concerned with spreading the spinning

movement in their region and almost without exception, they all made noteworthy individual donations besides mobilizing offerings from the ordinary womenfolk to increase the collections of the Khilafat and Tilak *Swaraj* Fund rising campaigns.⁵³

During Non-Cooperation movement the most important women leaders in Bengal were Basanti Devi and Urmila Devi, wife and sister of Chitta Ranjan Das, Jyotirmoyee Ganguly and Hemprabha Majumdar. The women from Das family along with some others not only frequently accompanied Deshbandhu Chitta Ranjan Das on his tours of the province, but also addressed numerous women's meetings asking women to take up the *Charka*, boycott foreign goods and make donations to the Tilak *Swaraj* Fund. Urmila Devi organized the *Nari Karma Mandir* (Temple for women's work) in 1921 to popularize the *Swadeshi* movement and spread the gospel of *Swaraj* among women. After that, Hemprabha Majumdar formed the *Mahila Karmi Sansad* (Form of Women Workers) in 1922 with a view to imparting vocational training to women as well as imbuing them with the spirit of nationalism. Side by side, Hemprabha proved to be a most valued colleague when Sarojini Naidu became the Congress President.⁵⁴ Sarojini Naidu and Hemprabha Majumdar along with Kamaladevi Chottopadhyaya became the focal points of contact between the leaders of the freedom struggle and those of the women's movement. Another most significant women leader of the time was Jyotirmoyee Ganguly.

In that time Bengali women in *mofussil* towns took also vital role like Midnapur the Union Board boycott was successful due to women's co-operation. Ashalata Sen spread the constructive programme in Dacca through the *Shilpashram* started in her own house and later she organized the *Gandaria Mahila Samiti* (1924) with the aim of "spreading the spirit of nationalism and the message of Gandhi among the local women." Not only a few leaders, but masses of women from villages of different districts in Bengal struck at the Raj. Women who would not earlier become visible ahead of their male relatives now came out on the streets to join processions. As a result, large numbers of women were detained in 1922. Side by side, women all over Bengal were sought to be mobilized, especially for the growth and expansion of the *Charka-Khadi* campaign.⁵⁵

It was in Calcutta that for the first time women were thrown openly into the movement in order to motivate greater public participation and attract more volunteers for the Congress. The most shocking and interesting incident was on 7 December, 1921, a group of women, led by Basanti Das, Urmila Devi and Suniti Devi went out to hawk *Khaddar* and were arrested and locked up in jail. As a result, the Calcutta events became an instance and learning to other women of the sub-continent and Gandhiji immediately recognized the value of having women from picket lines. Gandhiji wrote in *Young India*⁵⁶ on 15 December, 1921, and urged women from other parts of the country to follow the brave example of Bengali women. The arrest of respectable women was viewed as an appropriate tactic to shame men into joining the protests. Less expected and certainly not an intended outcome, was the way these arrests affected other women. It may be said that, the incident and activities of Bengali women was an inspiration of the other sister associations of India. For example, at the All India Ladies Conference in Ahmadabad (December 1921), Bi Amma urged women to enroll as Congress volunteers and if their menfolk were arrested, to join the picket lines and keep “the flag flying”.⁵⁷ More importantly, at the Congress session in Ahmadabad, women not only functioned as volunteers for the first time but also the percentage of women delegates at this session was higher than at any earlier Congress.⁵⁸ Even in this final phase, entailing bigger danger, women in various parts of the country played a spirited role in promoting *Khaddar* and picketing activity.

Inspired by such associational activity, women also began to get involve themselves with the picketing movement and the hawking of *Khadi* in various cities of the country. In many parts of the ‘land of the five rivers’ – Punjab women participated enthusiastically in activities connected with the Non-Cooperation movement. Even if their numbers were somewhat limited, women had not only started attending public meetings but also begun to walk in nationalist processions. For example, when women started participating in the processions organized by the District Congress Committee of Lahore, Lado Rani Zutshi⁵⁹ had to commit a group of volunteers to walk following the women. Women in the Punjab also participated actively in extending the *Swadeshi* programme. The foremost role in propagating the *Charka-Khadi* significance and

organizing productive activities among the Punjab women was played by Sarala Devi Choudhurani. In the Non-Cooperation era, she arranged and addressed numerous meetings all over the province, organized *Swadeshi* centres and in all places wanted to inculcate nationalist feelings among Punjabi women. With the help of her associates from the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal*, Sarala Devi hunted to activate the women by apprising them of their rights and duties in the nationalist movement and by exhorting them to implement *Swadeshi*.⁶⁰ Although Lahore was her headquarter, Sarala Devi travelled comprehensively in many parts of northern India enlisting support for *Charka* and *Khadi*. Not only Sarala Devi, outstanding roles in organizing women's nationalist activities in the Punjab were played by Radha Devi, Parvati Devi⁶¹ and of course, Lado Rani Zutshi. In this way, the efforts made by Sarala Devi and other women of distinction in Punjab went a long way in obligating the Punjabi women collectively at the touching level. This can be gauged from the information that "When Gandhi visited Jullunder in early 1921, the welcome address presented to him was printed on a piece of *Khadi* supplied by the aged mother of a prominent lawyer of the city, Nazimuddin Shah".⁶² Likewise, women in Lahore, led by the principal of the Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jullunder had commenced picketing from mid-January, 1922, while Sarala Devi was writing to Gandhi in this way that: "I have to go immediately to the city to arrange to send 40 ladies in 20 groups under two volunteers each to sell *Khadi* in 20 lanes."⁶³

Gandhiji was receiving similar reports from Madras while at Allahabad; Kamala Nehru had organized a big meeting against the magistrate's order on 26 January, 1921.⁶⁴ Swarup Rani Nehru, Kamala Nehru, Begum Abdul Quadir, Chandravati, Uma Nehru etc. were leading women leaders of Uttar Pradesh⁶⁵ Vijay Lakshmi Pandit recalls the deep impact which Gandhi made upon her and many other women during his first stay at Anand Bhavan in November 1920. She tells us that, after the meeting many women made offerings of cash and jewellery, she herself gifted away her gold bangles and her only lament was that she could not give more. Of course, Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru had become deeply engrossed in the Non-Cooperation cause. No doubt, the Nehru women, especially Swarup Rani and Kamala Nehru, made their first timid mark in political activity charming primarily in the spread of *Swadeshi* in Allahabad. The

Nehru household underwent radical changes as earlier luxuries gave way to substantial simplicity and the acceptance of *Khadi* dresses.⁶⁶ In U.P, Lucknow also emerged as a most important centre of *Khadi* work where a committee was formed, under the presidency of Lady Abdul Quadir, to carry on the *Swadeshi* work among women.⁶⁷ It was in Meerut that Parvati Devi, an ardent Congress worker, was arrested for her 'inflammatory speeches' and later was locked up at Agra.⁶⁸ In reality, it was perhaps an expression of the spirit which had been aroused in India's womanhood.

Women in Bombay were also actively took part in the Non-Cooperation movement. Through a large number of women's meetings, energetic spinning activity, various *Khadi* exhibitions and involvement in public processions and demonstrations, the women of Bombay played a notable role in propagating and popularizing the nationalist message. Some well-known women who played chief roles in Bombay during this period included among many others, Avantikabai Gokhale,⁶⁹ Perin Captain and Goshibehn Captain,⁷⁰ women from the Tyabji family, Manekabai Bahadurji⁷¹ and above all, Sarojini Naidu.⁷² These distinguished women were closely associated with some of the established women's associations of Bombay of those times like *Bhagini Samaj*, the *Gujrati Hindu Stree Mandal* and *Hind Mahila Samaj*. Some other women's associations which came into being in 1921 in Bombay were *Shri Sarada Samaj* of Dadar, the *Ladies Khilafat Committee* and the *Rashtriya Stree Sabha*.⁷³ In Bombay, the District Congress Committee (DCC) carried out Congress propaganda along with District Volunteer Boards (DVBs). Women while simultaneously members of the DCC and DVBs also formed their own political associations such as the *Rashtriya Stree Sabha*, an independent women's association under the presidency of Sarojini Naidu and vice-presidency of Goshibehn Naoroji (Captain) and Avantikabai Gokhale.⁷⁴ Members of the *Rashtriya Stree Sabha* were to become members of the Bombay Congress Committee and at the same time collected money for the Tilak *Swaraj* Fund and over and above had to assist in mobilizing women for the spinning movement.

It is important to need special mention here that, as a president of the *Rashtriya Stree Sabha* and Indian National Congress Sarojini Naidu visited many provinces of the country and spread the activities of the Bombay women and nationalist feelings during

Non- Cooperation movement. For example, Sarojini Naidu came to Dinajpur district of Bengal in 1926. Her powerful oratorical speeches inspired all section of people specially the women of the region. Thus, by and large, the district of Dinajpur came to occupy a vital position in Bengal politics during national movement.⁷⁵

So, it may be asserted that, from the first phase to till the final phase of the Non-Cooperation movement, women from different provinces of the sub-continent made a significant involvement to the increase and progress of the Congress led nationalist movement. In this respect, Bengali women took the role of inspiration for other sister associations of the sub-continent. More importantly, there were similarities of objectives and activities with Bengali women's associations and had a close dealings to other sister associations of India.

After Non-Cooperation, the Civil Disobedience era occupies a very considerable place in the history of women's role in the national movement because it was during the period 1930-34 that women started emerging in a big way as speakers, marchers, picketers, civil resisters and indeed many even became Congress 'dictators' in various districts and provinces of the sub-continent. At the time when the *Satyagraha* movement was commenced, Gandhiji, in an open letter addressed to the women of India, asked them to contribute to the national movement through participation in the boycott of foreign cloth and intoxicants. This would in turn promote the manufacture of hand-made cloth. Gandhi believed that, this could be achieved if women started devoting "every available minute to the spinning of yarn".⁷⁶ He further said that, in order to restrain the Civil Disobedience movement, the British power might go to any degree like inflicting bodily injuries etc. Gandhiji's advice therefore was that, women should keep on moving ahead in their selected path with extreme willpower and be ready for all eventualities. He said: "To suffer such insult and injury would be their pride. Such suffering, it comes to them will hasten the end."⁷⁷ In fact, women's dynamic relationship with the on going freedom struggle had started from the very first day of the initiation of the Salt *Satyagraha*.⁷⁸ Gandhi began the Civil Disobedience movement in March of 1930 with his 240 miles march from Ahmadabad to Dandi to make salt in defiance of the British domination. Mahatma Gandhi was constructing a new model for

Indian woman that rewrote tameness and self-suffering as strength. Gujrati women living in Bombay responded to this message by forming an association to plan and direct efforts to close shops selling foreign cloth.⁷⁹ April 6, 1930, the anniversary of the Amritsar massacre, was preferred for the official breaking of the Salt Law. A front line of seven people, including two women, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Avantikabai Gokhale, were the first step into the beach, light fires and boil sea water. Kamaladevi remembered that day: “this was their (women’s) first appearance in any modern militant political campaign and I could hardly suppress my excitement at the enormity of the occasion and my own good fortune to be amongst the first It seemed such a stupendous moment in my life, in the life of the women of my country.”⁸⁰

It is necessary to note that, the root of Gandhiji’s Dandi March and Salt *Satyagraha* or Civil Disobedience movement was Gujrat and Bombay. In this regard, Gujrati and Bombay women’s associations at first took the leading role in the movement and after that Bengali woman’s associations along with women’s associations of other provinces were inspired in the movement and took vital role. However, shortly after the Women’s Conference at Dandi, the Gujrati women, under the motivation of Gandhi, made their intentions very clear. They sought to be keenly linked with the national movement and made determined efforts to engage as many Gujrati women as likely in the picketing activities and to organize the sale of illegal imports salt all over Gujrat. As a matter fact, after Gandhi’s arrest in May 1930, the most outstanding event of the Salt *Satyagraha* occurred at Dharsana. It was on May 15, 1930 that Sarojini Naidu led the raid on the Dharsana Salt Works,⁸¹ and here too, she led the *Satyagrahis* in their Salt- making mission which symbolized the Indian strength of mind to achieve *Poorna Swaraj*. Though she and her comrades were arrested, they were released the same day, enabling Sarojini to lead another batch of 2500 raiders on the same salt works on May 21, 1930. This was the instance for one of the most amazing demonstrations of the strength of non-violence generated by Gandhian movement as the volunteers remained entirely quiet in spite of the harsh provocation and terrible violence inflicted on them by the police.

The Dharsana incident, in a sense, set the tone for women's vigorous participation with the Civil Disobedience movement in Gujrat which was powerful not only in cities like Ahmedabad, Surat, Rajkot etc. but also spread rapidly to many villages in the province and others states. Among the most important women leaders in the province apart from Kasturba Gandhi were Mithubehn Petit, Sharadabehn Mehta, Hansa Mehta, Mridula Sarabhai, Anasuyabehn, Indumati Seth, Manibehn Patel and many others from Gandhi's *Ashram* at Sabarmati.⁸² Mridula Sarabhai Played an important role in popularizing the boycott of foreign cloth in Ahmedabad, where a *Videsh Kapda Bhishkar Samiti* (Association for the Boycott of Foreign Cloth) was formed in 1930-31 whose president was Saraladevi Sarabhai and secretary was Mridula Sarabhai. "This *Samiti* organized almost daily processions in which women wearing saffron coloured *Khadi* sarees with volunteers' badges pinned on, singing patriotic songs, marched through the streets of Ahmedabad. They collected foreign cloth and made bonfires of them. They also distributed cyclostyled sheets throughout the city".⁸³

The *Rashtriya Stree Sabha* of Gujrat started a serious campaign to make the notion of *Swadeshi* well-liked. Volunteers paid personal visits to various homes with the intention of securing signatures for their solid assurance to *Swadeshi*. A picketing association was formed in Ahmedabad.⁸⁴ Indeed, throughout Gujarat, women were in high state of mind, selling the illegal imports salt collected from Dandi and Dharsana, and singing in chorus, "we have broken the Salt Law which will wreck the British Empire".⁸⁵ They also raise slogans like "Holy Salt", "Gandhi Salt" and "Salt that will free India, come and buy".⁸⁶

In this connection, Bombay was another focal centre of women's growing dynamism during the Salt *Satyagraha* and the Civil Disobedience movement. When a most important attack on the Wadala Salt Fields in the precincts of Bombay was intended, it was once again a woman leader Kamaladevi Chottopadhyay who was entrusted with the mission of planning and leading the raid. Kamaladevi recalls that she had "visualized a mass raid embracing a large part of the city's two million population. I was sure that no force, not even machine-guns could stop this raid."⁸⁷ However, on the eve of this attack, she was under arrest and it was her little seven years old son who not

only represented her but also proudly held the placard. Among the other well-known women leaders, who had played noteworthy roles in Bombay were Sarojini Naidu, Lilavati Munshi, Hansa Mehta, the Captain Sisters Perinbehn and Goshibehn, Jaishri Raiji, Avantikabai Gokhale, Jankidevi Bajaj and several others connected with the *Rashtriya Stree Sabha*.⁸⁸

Rashtriya Stree Sabha also took the leading role in Bombay and women responded actively to the Civil Disobedience campaign, women volunteers picketed toddy shops, asking the owners to close and the buyers to leave, while many women sold salt and carried on a rigorous house- to-house campaign advocating *Swadeshi*. Most of this work was organized by the *Desh Sevika Sangha* which was a volunteer unit of the famous *Rastriya Stree Sabha* which had been founded during the Non-Cooperation movement. Each *Desh Sevika* took a vow that, she would spin and wear *Khadi*. The *Desh Sevikas* organized a number of demonstrations that set up large reporting in the press and encouraged women of the entire India. Geraldine Forbes reported his book that, processions of one to two thousand women, accompanied by their children, were not unusual at this time. Even bigger numbers came to listen to speeches about *Swadeshi* and freedom. The biggest crowd celebrated Gandhi's birthday and the release from jail of three of the most significant women leaders: Lilavati Munshi, Perin Captain and Mrs. Lukanji. A mile- long sequence of women, led by *Desh Sevikas* dressed in orange sarees and carrying placards, numbered more than 5000. Crowds of 10,000 assembled at both ends of this procession. These numbers could not be matched in other parts of India, but patriotic women in all places emulated the courage.⁸⁹ The courage which connected with women's involvement in the movement was communal synchronization, Gandhi's unquestionable leadership, devotion to Congress and the identification of *Swaraj* with female emancipation.

Hansa Mehta⁹⁰ and others established the *Desh Sevika Sangha* which made significant contributions by way of organizing picketing in various parts of Bombay. This work was carried out by highly dedicated *Desh Sevikas*, who were dressed in saffron (*Kesariya*) sarees and white blouses. In the true Gandhian spirit, they wore only *Khadi* clothes and spent most of the time in spinning the *Charka*. The picketing

activities of the *Desh Sevikas* were so successful and exciting that many foreign cloth merchants gave an undertaking not to trade foreign cloth till such time the country's honour and pride were restored. Seeing the dedicated commitment of *Desh Sevikas* for the sake of the nation, the government felt inhibited to declare the *Sangha* a prohibited association.⁹¹ It is true that, both, during the 1930 movement and later during the second phase of Civil Disobedience, a considerable number of women emerged in the quickly passing chain of command as war 'dictators' of the 'Bombay Provincial Congress Committee' etc.⁹² It would perhaps be no overstatement to submit that, women's associations in other provinces were inspired by and encouraged to follow the remarkable models set up by women of Bombay.

In this context, women of Bengal came forward and took part in the Civil Disobedience movement. But their demonstrations were smaller and their activities were more radical and revolutionary than those of women of Bombay or Gujrat or in other regions. Women of Calcutta made and sold salt, picketed cloth and liquor shops, preached the value of *Khaddar* and took processions into the streets. Calcutta was also the heart of revolutionary struggle and women's colleges became centres for recruiting new members. In district towns and villages women joined processions, wore *Khaddar* and hid feeling revolutionaries⁹³ In Bengal, *Mahila Rashtriya Sangha (MRS)*, *Nari Styagraha Samiti* and *Ladies Picketing Board* were the main three women's associations through which they took part in the Civil Disobedience movement.⁹⁴ *Mahila Rashtriya Sangha* (National Association of Women), the first organization to mobilize women openly for political work, was begun in 1928, founded by Lotika Ghosh and guided by Subhas Chandra Bose.⁹⁵ It may be noted that, the *Mahila Rashtriya Sangha* in Bengal and *Rashtriya Stree Sabha* in Bombay had shared similar goals. They wanted to achieve both *Swaraj* and improvement in women's status, as they considered these two goals as inseparable and interdependent. As long as women's lives were not improved the nation could never be free and until the nation was not free women's conditions would not improve. The first step to *Swaraj* was the education of women to their double oppression as colonial subjects and inferior sex.⁹⁶ In that sense,

there was an interaction with *Mahila Rashtriya Sangha* of Bengal and *Rashtriya Stree Sabha* of Bombay.

However, one of the most impressive roles by Bengali women occurred well in advance of the Civil Disobedience movement. In 1928, Subhas Bose decided to have uniformed women volunteers march with men in the procession to inaugurate the annual Congress meetings in Calcutta. He made Latika Ghosh a 'colonel' and placed in charge of recruiting and leading the girls. Their 'uniforms' consisted of dark green saris with red borders worn over white blouses – the colours of the Congress flag. During this Congress session women were noticeable everywhere. They managed the tea-stalls and helped with local preparations. They helped to arrange the *All-India Women's Social Conference* in juxtaposition with the regular Congress session. In fact, the 1928 session of Congress set priority for the participation of Bengali women in political programmes and activities. In reaction to the Congress call in 1929 to women who were ready to serve, a number of Calcutta women formed the *Nari Satyagraha Samiti*. This *Samiti* had a core of fifteen to twenty women who were willing to picket and risk arrest like, Urmila Devi, Jyotirmoyee Ganguli, Santi Das, Bimal Protibha Devi etc. They chose white *Khaddar* saris as their picketing uniform.⁹⁷ It may be said that, Bengali women and other provinces women like Gujrat or Bombay were a uniform to take part in picketing or other activities relating with Civil Disobedience movement which means there was a interlinking and similarities between women associations of Bengal and other sister associations of India.

At the same time the Ladies Picketing Board was divided into different sections for the sake of convenience and efficiency. During 1930 ladies took out their own procession in Calcutta and also led them and addressed meetings.⁹⁸ Jotirmoyee Ganguli addressed a meeting at Narghat near Tamluk in defiance of a prohibitory order. Nistarini Devi held on one such a meeting at Calcutta. Indumati Goenka guided the *Satyagrahis* in Bengal who were sent to jail. There are many accounts of their bravery.⁹⁹ In July 1930, twenty two ladies of the Calcutta *Nari Styagraha Samiti* were arrested and immediately the shopkeepers of Burrabazar closed their shops because they feared that the crowd would turn violent.¹⁰⁰ In Calcutta, to break the Salt Law, Lady Volunteers

from *Nari Satyagraha Samiti* and *Satyagrahi Sevika Dal* sent volunteers in groups and batches. It may be mentioned that, the *Desh Sevika Sangha* (National Women's Volunteer Association) established in various regions around 1930, had as its plan the achievement of self rule. It determined on prohibition foreign cloth, abolition of the drinking of spirits and producing hand spun *Khadi*. As a result, the *Desh Sevika Sangha* was forbidden by the British Government for having taken active part in the Civil Disobedience movement.¹⁰¹ Therefore, *Satyagrahi Sevika Dal* of Bengal and *Desh Sevika Sangha* of Bombay were the same aims and objectives which became associated with freedom movement. In this way, there was inter-connection with each other.

In many districts of rural Bengal like, Midnapur, 24-Parganas, Khulna, Bakhergunge, Noakhali, Chittagong, Dacca, Comilla, Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur etc. women responded to the call to break the Salt Laws. As soon as the news of Gandhi's Dandi March began to extend, villagers of Bhangar and Matla in the Midnapore began to openly manufacture salt. During the *Salt Satyagraha*, women in the Contai Sub-division of Midnapore district were most active and played a front line part.¹⁰² Sarma Gupta and Ashalata Sen took the leading role at Dacca, Surama and Sushama Palit at Bankura, Hemprabha Majumdar at Comilla, who took up the work of Civil Disobedience movement and emulated their Calcutta sisters in carrying out its different items to their logical end.¹⁰³ A *Picketing Board* was started by the women of Bengal in May 1931 to boycott and picket in association with Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. The effort of this Board was to propagate against the use of foreign goods, to popularize home industries, to help develop cottage industries specially those of spinning and weaving *Khadi*; to arrange processions and meetings etc. For instance, Nellie Sen Gupta, wife of Deshpriya Jatindra Mohan Sen Gupta, was arrested in April 1933 when she presided over the plenary session of the Indian National Congress and declared illegal by the government.¹⁰⁴ More interesting is that, in Bengal, women were all over and every phases participating in the Civil Disobedience movement. Many village women too endured their share of sacrifice and suffering and nodoubt strengthened the Congress movement. Almost immediately *Mahila Rashtriya Sangha* was declared

illegal. The president Smt. Urmil Devi with members of the *Nari Satyagraha Samiti* like, Hempradha Devi, Ashoklata Das and others were also arrested.

Women's political demonstrations in Madras were more passive than in Bengal or Bombay. Although women organized picketing and marching in procession. There was the formation of the *Women's Swadeshi League* (1928) under the guidance of Shrimati S. Anbujammal, widow sister of S. S. Iyengar and Krishnabai Rau who organized the *Desh Sevika Sangha* (Women Serving the Country). Their activities were to sell *Khaddar*, join *prabhat Pheris* and picketing, preach the true value of *Swadesi*, organize *Swadeshi* exhibitions etc. Among the other outstanding women leaders were Rukmani Lakshmi pathy, Durgabai Deshmukh, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Margaret Counins etc. Women of *Desh Sevika Sangha* dressed in orange saris and blouses.¹⁰⁵ So, it may be noted that, the basic aims and objectives of Madras women's associations during the Civil Disobedience movement were similarities with Bengal women's associations.

In the neighboring Orissa region too, the two important centres of Salt *Satyagraha* were Inchudi¹⁰⁶ in the Balasore district and Kujanga¹⁰⁷ in the Cuttack district. On 20 April 1930, the first batch of women *Satyagrahis* was led by Rama Devi and Malati Chowdhury, who went to Inchudi and openly manufactured salt there. Hundreds of women along with Sarladevi, Savitridevi and others blowing conches followed them in a long march in which volunteers from Gujrat and Bengal also participated.¹⁰⁸ As a result of the constant efforts made by the women leaders in Orissa who did house to house campaigning to motivate women to break Salt Laws, even uneducated women from the lower strata were drawn to gather and came in large numbers.¹⁰⁹ It is also remarkable that, while some ladies joined the movement with the consent and support of their families, others seem to have come of their own desire, such as Haramoni Devi, Adharamoni Devi, Sushila Devi, Mohini Devi, Nishamani Devi, Kadambini Devi and the like.¹¹⁰ So, it may be said that, the main features of women activities relating to the Civil Disobedience movement of Orissa more or less had the echos from the voices of women of Bengal and those of Bombay or Gujrat and in that sense there was a dealings and inter-relationship with each other.

It may be assumed that, the activities of women's associations did not confine within the boundaries of colonial Bengal or Bombay or Madras. It crossed its periphery of activities and touched other sister associations that developed in various parts of India. In this respect, during the Civil Disobedience era the prominent women of Punjab were Lado Rani Zutshi, the wife of Motilal Nehru's nephew and three of her daughters, Manmohini Sehgal, Shyama and Janak led the movement in Lahore. Lado Rani Zutshi addressing a meeting outside Mori Gate in Lahore and urged to Punjabi women to imitate the instance set by their sisters in Bombay or Bengal claiming that "the arrests of women shows the weakness of the government."¹¹¹ In 1929, as a student at Government college (for men), Manmohini Devi chaired the student reception committee welcoming Subhas Chandra Bose to preside over the Second All Punjab Student Conference. The environment was already exciting with patriotic zeal when the announcement of Civil Disobedience gave many young people a meeting point. On the other hand, speaking to students Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru recommended they go to the banks of the Ravi river and symbolically 'make salt' and then concentrate on picketing foreign cloth and liquor shops, processions, *Phabhat Pheris* etc. activities in defiance of insensitive government laws to the opposing.¹¹²

Subhadra Joshi, daughter of an Inspector General of police and her elder sister Kaushalya also intensely participated in the late 1930s movement. Subhadra was connected with the Student' organization which was affiliated to the Communist movement. Along with her secret attachment with the Students' organization, she continued to participate in Congress meetings. At Lahore, she along with her friend brought a photostating machine from *Khadi bhandar* and learnt cyclostyling. They xeroxed the underground revolutionary papers and distributed them among various sections of society.¹¹³

In this context, it is also worth mentioning that, the other dimension of political activity in Bengal was the revolutionary activities. The revolutionary movement started roughly at the same time of Civil Disobedience movement and the majority women who got connected with revolutionary groups were students and joined secret parties after they had worked with the women's associations and Congress. The associations like,

Jugantar, *Deepali Sangha* (1923) of Leela Nag, *Chhatri Sangha* (Association for Female Students, 1928) and so on arranged study classes, swimming centres, libraries, cooperative stores, youth hostels.¹¹⁴ Although there was a distinct tradition of women's association with revolutionary activity in Bengal since the *Swadeshi* movement and from 1931 onwards women crowded into the dynamic roles and actions in quick succession. For instances, Shanti Ghosh and Suniti Chowdhury, two teenaged school girls, assassinated the District Magistrate of Comilla (14 December, 1931), Bina Das fired on the Bengal Governor Anderson at a Calcutta University Convocation function (6 February, 1932), Preetilata Waddedar led the attack on the Chittagong European Club (24 September, 1932), Kalpana Dutta jumped bail and disappeared under ground with Surya Sen's group of absconders (28 December, 1932), Ujjwala Mazumdar attempted to murder the Governor of Bengal at Lebong Race Course in Darjeeling (May, 1934)¹¹⁵ In brief, it would seem no overstatement that, from the Civil Disobedience movement, Bengali women were actively associated with all form of political action in the province and the women terrorists were no longer the mother or sister sheltering the escapee but full fledged comrade-in arms, revolutionizing all precedents and norms for political action. The women of Bengal, compared to other provinces, revolutionary struggle for freedom was more constant and strong and continued till 1934. In this struggle, women of Bengal played a vital role from the beginning to the end. The nature of involvement on the part of Bengali women was more varied than their counterparts in other provinces. Likewise Bengal, Delhi and Punjab also reported most of the revolutionary activities.

It is a fact that, most of the women, who took part in the national movement, were inspired by Gandhi, yet there were a few to whom Gandhi's ideology of non-violence was not satisfactory. The revolutionary associations came into being in 1930s and were particularly active in Bengal. But many women of other provinces like Delhi or Punjab were inspired by the activities of Bengali women. Among the revolutionary women from Delhi, the name of Durgadevi Vohra, wife of Bhagwati Charan Vohra stands out notably. She was part of the Young India movement of the 1930s. Her husband was a close associate of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev. Durgadevi also

worked in association with them and played a very important role in rescuing Bhagat Singh by taking him away from Lahore to Calcutta after Saunder's killing.¹¹⁶

Sushila Devi (Sushila Mohan) was a radical worker in Punjab, cut her finger and placed mark of blood as *tilak* on the foreheads of the revolutionaries, like Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt on 9 April 1929. Because of her connection with Bhagat Singh to whom she sent letters, *rakhi* and food, she was under arrest and locked up. She was declared a fugitive in the Delhi and Lahore Conspiracy Cases and served a number of Jail terms.¹¹⁷

So, it may be submitted that, whether Bombay or Gujrat, there were many similarities of women's associational activities with Bengal women's associations regarding Civil Disobedience movement and Delhi or Lahore for revolutionary activities. It is likely that, the plan and programmes of the women's associations beyond Bengal were different in view of their aims and objectives. But the basic features of the movement, Girls students' activities and involvement (in Bengal *Chhatri Sangha*), few revolutionary activities, dress code etc. were similarities with Bengal women associations. In that sense, it may be pointed out that, there were inter-connection and interaction with Bengal women associations and other sister associations of India.

After that, *Congress Mahila Sangha* was established in 1938 and gradually branch associations of *Congress Mahila Sangha* were formed in many provinces. The main aim of this *Sangha* was to organize women for the movement of national liberation. Though the *Congress Mahila Sangha* was also active in women education, equal rights of women and so on. The prominent leaders of *Bengal Congress Mahila Sangha* were Mohini Debi, Neili Sengupta, Labanya Prabha Debi, Joytirmoyee Ganguli, Basanti Debi, Ashalata Sen, Urmila Debi, Labanya Chanda, Latika Ghosh and others.¹¹⁸ Therefore, there was a close link and dealings about the activities and goals of the branch associations of the *Congress Mahila Sangha*.

The last and largest national movement was Gandhiji's Quit India on 8th August 1942. Congress passed the 'Quit India' resolution held at Wardha on 14 July 1942 and after that he gave a call to Britain to leave India and go. The Quit India resolution spoke directly to women "as disciplined soldiers of Indian freedom" and involved them to the

movement.¹¹⁹ But, on 9th August 1942 Gandhiji and all other leaders were arrested and the whole country was like a fire. The news of Gandhiji's arrest led to *hartals* in Bombay, Ahmadabad and Poona. By 11th August, the movement assumed aggressive proportions, with people taking out processions, holding meetings and demonstrations. Industrial labour went on a strike in Ahmadabad, Bombay, Kanpur, Indore, Bangalore and Mysore.¹²⁰

The movement soon spread to other places as well "where peasants rebelled against landowners and the agents of British authority".¹²¹ A number of places, people declared independence and took charge of the police stations. Flags were hoisted on secretariat buildings, courts and other government offices. The government machinery was in complete shambles in different districts in Bihar, Central Provinces, Andhra, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Assam, Orissa and parts of Bengal. In order to bring the situation under control, the government enacted "The Penalties Enhancement Ordinance, Collective Fine Ordinance, the Special Court Ordinance, the Whipping Ordinance".¹²²

Large scale of women and girl students played a significant part in the Quit India movement in different parts of the country, mostly in the absence of male leaders. Women participated in the initial strikes and demonstrations in cities, processions and also organized Political Prisoner's Relief Fund and collected a large amount of money. Some were among the radical students who organized peasant movements and when protest was covered up, joined the secret underground and directed the movement from there. Instantly after the passing of the Quit India resolution women leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Amrit Kaur, Rameswari Nehru, Meera Behn and others were arrested. Aruna Asaf Ali and Sucheta Kriplalini had to go underground.

It may be known that, Usha Mehta was born on 24 March, 1920 at Satara district, Surat, witness to the imperative resolution of the Quit India movement. To make this decision a success, she wanted to do something different and more difficult than simple picketing of foreign cloth and liquor shops. It was from 9th August 1942, when most of the important leaders were in jail that Usha started making preparations for setting up a radio in the name of "Voice of Freedom".¹²⁴ A transmitter was

necessary for the success of the project. Usha Mehta and her brother Babubhai Khakar were the pioneers of this project. It started broadcasting on 14 August 1942. "This is the Congress Radio calling 42.84 metres from somewhere in India".¹²⁵ The main intend of Usha was to broadcast news and give talks in Hindustani. Credit goes to this broadcasting station for being the first one to relay the news of Chittagong bomb raid, Jamshedpur strike and the violence committed in Ashti Chimur. The speeches were principally meant to highlight the Congress stand both from the national and international points of view. In regard to the Quit India movement, the following remarks were relayed: "So far we were conducting a movement, but now, we are conducting a revolution. In a revolution, there is victory or defeat. This revolution is not of one party or community, but of the whole of India, we hope you will not rest content till the British Empire is burnt to ashes".¹²⁶

It is very easy to understand that, this radio news received a large setback when the government came to know of it and raided the place on the night of 12 November 1942. Babubhai and Usha were arrested in the Radio Conspiracy Case. Usha was finally sentenced to four years imprisonment. In connection of Radio Case, a secret letter from home department, Bombay, to Sir Richard Tottenham, Additional Secretary to the Government of India, forwarded a report by the Commissioner of Police, Bombay. The report enclosed a note on Miss Usha Mehta who made a number of the records used in the broadcast and also operated the transmitter. The report referred to her as "an ardent Congress woman".¹²⁷

It is true that, by and large, the activities of these women gave inspiration to the other women of the sub-continent. Not only that, when the movement extend to the countryside, huge numbers of peasant women joined in protesting against taxes, land tenure and landholder's rights. In this connection, at the end of September 1942, peasants attacked police stations and destroyed telegraph lines in four sub-divisions of Midnapur district, Bengal. The British responded with suppressive measures and a new round of violence began. On 29 September, the people of Tamluk sub-division, Midnapur marched on the town with the target of capturing the court and the police station under the leadership of Matangini Hazara. She was a seventy three years old

widow and born of a scheduled caste family in the Hogla village of Midnapur. She was stepped onward, lifted the Congress flag, gave her public speech and refused to stop when challenged. She was shot first in the hand holding the flag and then in the head which proved to be terminal.¹²⁸

In Bengal, the people of Midnapur district also played an outstanding role in the movement of 1942. Among the 'National Governments' which were formed in some areas was the '*Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar*' on 17 December, 1942, at Tamluk of Midnapur district in Bengal. This national government had its own army called '*Bidyut Bahini*' and the women's wing '*Bhagini Sena*' (Sisters' Corps). Sabitri Dey, Rashimoni Debi led the *Bhagini Sena* to resist police repression.¹²⁹ As a result, on 9th January 1943, six hundred soldiers surrounded many villages in Mohishadal Thana of Midnapur such as Masuria, Dalmasuria and Chandipur. They not only plundering these villages but also resorted to offensive behavior and immorally beaten as many as forty six women on a single day. In this circumstance, to protect their honour and self-respect, the women of the region formed an organization called *Bhagini Seva Sangha*. Some of the women affiliated to this organization kept weapons with them so as to protect themselves from criminal attack. For this reason, two women were prosecuted under the Arms Act for drawing out daggers in self-defence.¹³⁰ Not only that, they also refused to pay taxes. Side by side, many women of other district of Bengal took part in this movement and played also significant role.

The activities of Bengali women and their associations were also internalized the women of other states of the sub-continent. It is likely that, the method and programmes of the associations beyond Bengal were different in view of their aims and objectives. In this respect, the *Mahila Charka Samiti* in Patna, Bihar was actively associated with the Quit India Movement. On 9th August 1942, members of this *Samiti* took out a big procession. After passing through the entire town, the procession finally stopped at Congress Maidan where a meeting was held in which Bhagwati Devi, Rampyari Devi and Sundari Devi made powerful speeches exhorting the government servants to resign and the lawyers to leave their practices.¹³¹ In the Manbhum district of Purulia, a number of women were arrested. The police raided the *Shilpa Ashram* in

Purulia and took into custody Lavanya Prabha Ghosh and her daughter Kamla Ghosh.¹³² Among the many women who took part in the movement in Bihar were Sarala Devi, Usha Rani Mukherji, Saroj Das, Prabhawati Devi, Girija Devi, Surti Devi, Kumari A. R. Das, Saraswati Devi, Jamvati Devi and others.

Gandhi had wanted the Quit India movement to be greatly different from the traditional *Satyagraha*. He sought this movement to be imbued with the spirit of “Do or Die” wherein there should be open defiance of law and refusal to pay taxes. In Orissa, under the leadership of Malati Choudhury¹³³ and S.N. Dwivedi,¹³⁴ a large number of women enthusiastically involved themselves with the Quit India movement and their activities were more or less similar with Bengali women. At Malati’s directions, railway lines were tampered with telephone lines were disconnected which was to help the Congress workers to complete their mission without any obstacles.¹³⁵ At the same time, there were strikes, protest meetings and open defiance of law. People even went to the level of looting banks and government treasury. Therefore, within a few days, the situation reached serious proportions, with political prisoners inside the jail violating the jail regulations and undermining the authority of the jailor.¹³⁶

As a result, the Government was obligatory to declare the AICC Working Committee and other such bodies within the province as unlawful. On 16 August 1942, at Bari, Mangala Devi made an extremely large effort to “free the Congress *ashram* which had been attacked and taken over by the police”.¹³⁷ She was detained along with other women workers when she was trying to burn the seized property and uniform belonging to the police. The other women who arrested by the police were Rama Devi, Malati Choudhury, Priyambada Devi, Godavari Devi and some other Congress workers. In places like Jagatsingpur, Tirtol and Balikunda, the situation was somewhat serious with people becoming violent and setting on fire some government institutions like post offices, police barracks etc. In order to check this violence, police announced imposition of many fines on people. It is true that, the contributions made by Oriya women were all the more praiseworthy, mainly in view of that all the important male leaders at that time were behind the bars.

So, one may notice that, the nature and mode of activities of Bengali women and other states of women in the national movements were almost similar with the other parts of India. The activities of these women's associations did not confine within their boundary. It crossed its periphery of activities and touched other sister associations that developed in various parts of India.

(c) All India Based Associations

Course-plotting of the many streams of the women's movement into one, and developing a network of women's associations of different affiliations working in separation all over Bengal nay India that after World War-I, many all India based associations were created, such as the *Women's Indian Associations* (WIA), the *National Council of Women in India* (NCWI) and the *All-India Women's Conference* (AIWC). These were spread groups of women in different parts of India doing something or other to bring a few women together, more on the basis of caste or religion. Bringing them all together for a common purpose with a feeling of nationality, of the sisterhood of women as women, ignoring the troublesome forces that kept them isolated which was a marvelous task.¹³⁸

In this respect, after *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* (1910) of Sarala Devi Choudhurani, the establishment of the *Women's Indian Association* (WIA) in 1917 was the first attempt to organize women on all India bases. The founding members of the organization were Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins, a British feminist and theosophist, Dorothy Jinaragadasa, an Irish feminist, married to singalese theosophist C. Jinarajadasa and others. Annie Besant felt the necessity of organizing women under one umbrella and the *Women's Indian Association* was thus established with active support from Margaret Cousins and Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy, the first women legislator of India in 1924. The WIA had the following aims:

- (i) To make women conscious of their liability as daughters of India.
- (ii) To help them understand that the future of India lies in their hands, for as wives and mothers they have the duty of training, guiding and forming the nature of the future rulers of India.

- (iii) To form women's associations for the purpose of self-development and education and for the definite service of others.¹³⁹

The *Women's Indian Association* grew very quickly. Within the first year of its existence thirty-three branches were formed and within five years, forty-three branches, twenty centres and 2,300 members were included from all over India. Every branch accepted the main goals of the association but remained autonomous. This made it possible to activate the branches to express women's opinion.¹⁴⁰ It may be said that, the branches of WIA did play a key role not only in effecting the regeneration of India but also to interact with Bengal and other sister associations of India

The women who formed this association decided to entitle it the *Women's Indian Association* because membership was open to both Indians and Europeans. Even with this association's obvious connection with and dependence on the *Theosophical Society*, it defined itself as an association that integrated and represented women of all races, cultures and religions. Each branch was mainly work in four areas: religion, education, philanthropy and politics. The association defined women as religious "by nature" and inspired non-sectarian religious activity. But the most imperative work was educational and the branches were motivated to set up adult classes for literacy, sewing, and first aid. The philanthropy works were involved feeding the poor, setting up shelters for widows and providing relief for disaster victims. The WIA had been politically active from the beginning when they sent a delegation to meet with Secretary of State Edwin Montague in December 1917 to request the franchise for women.¹⁴¹ and thus started the 'Votes for Women' campaign on the sub-continent.

In this way, the 'Votes for Women Deputation' included Sarojini Naidu as the chief representative and fourteen other women leaders drawn from different parts of the sub-continent who had been 'prominently associated' with women's causes, particularly the spread of female education. They were lady Abala Bose, Mrs. Mazharul Haque, Mrs. Nehru, Mrs Chandrasekhar Aiyar, Mrs. Lazarus, Mrs. Herabai Tata, Dr. (Miss) Joshi (later Rani Rajwade), Mrs. Sanjiva Rao, Miss. Gokhale, Annie Besant, Dorothy Jinarajadasa and Mrs. Margaret Cousins¹⁴² and others. In fact, the activities of the association appear to have been a courageous step on the part of leading Indian women

and especially mark a distinct advance in the suffrage movement of the sub-continent. It is necessary to highlight that, these women belonged to a number of women's associations such as *Seva Sadan*, the *Gujrati Hindu Stree Mandal*, the *Indian Women's University*¹⁴³ and of course, the *Women's Indian Association*. It is noteworthy in this connection that, the WIA was a national level association and it took the very important role to communicate and interact with women associations of Bengal and other sister associations of India.

The next all-India based women's association was the *National Council of Women in India* (NCWI). It had utilized the networks developed doing war work to link their various clubs and associations into a new council by the women of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras.¹⁴⁴ In 1925 the NCWI was established as a national branch of the International Council of women. When it was first organized the National Council had three life patrons - the Dowager Begum Saheb of Bhopal, Maharani Saheb of Baroda and Mehribai Tata, wife of Sir Dorab Tata. Maharani Saheb of Baroda was the president and other women who held important positions on the executive committee included lady Dorab Tata, Miss Cornelia Sorabji, India's first lady barrister; Mrs. Tarabai Premchand, the wife of a wealthy banker; Mrs. Shaffi Tyabji, a member of one of Bombay's leading Muslim families and Maharani Sucharu Devi of Mourbhanj, a daughter of Keshub Chandra Sen. Standing Sectional Committees were formed to contract with art, labour, legislation and the press. The committee on legislation to progress women's condition was the most significant.¹⁴⁵ It may be noted that, these women were all from wealthier family and of its elitist character, the Council failed to grow and become a very important national association. In addition to that, the Council was politically and socially traditionalist. Because of the relationship with the British and the wealth and the status of the important members. At the same time, the *National Council of Women in India* remained detached from the struggle for freedom. As late as 1928 the *Bengal Council* of the NCWI passed a decision asking for a female experimentation officer for Calcutta and then suggested the appointee be a British woman. They argued that having an Indian woman do this type of work was too "progressive" and should be avoided for some time.¹⁴⁶ It may be pointed out that, the

NCWI though a national level association but its relation with Bengal branch was very close.

Earlier to these, in 1927, *All India Women's Conference* (AIWC) was established with its branches across the country under the enterprise of Margaret Cousins, a standing Irish lady and other women belonging to the WIA. In June 1926, Mr. E. F. Oaten, the Director Public Instruction (DPI), Bethune College, Calcutta, requested women to choose what kind of education was appropriate for Indian girls and then tell the government "with one voice what they want, and keep on telling us till they get it". A respond to his challenge was published in *Stri Dharma*, journal of WIA and this ultimately led to tactics for a Conference.¹⁴⁷ The first *All India Women's Conference* on Educational Reform was held at Poona from 5th to 8th January 1927. It was a momentous episode. It brought together women from various parts of India irrespective of region, religion, caste and creed under the guidance of Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Lakshmi Menon, Renuka Ray, Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Hansa Mehta, Vijaylaxmi Pandit and others. The AIWC used to sketch the various socio-economic programmes and other actions to be undertaken by roughly 500 branches all over India in the fields of education, social legislation and social reform.¹⁴⁸ The Conference began a new era in the development of women's education in India and laid the foundation of the AIWC which hereafter met annually and became an organizer among associations fighting for women's rights and equality. The AIWC was hardly fostering philanthropist views and more or less common patriotism among a handful section of the elite and upper class women.

The Conference appointed a standing committee to carry on the work declared at its first session. Maharani Chimnabai Gaekwad of Baroda was elected president, the Rani Saheb of Sangli, Lady Abala Bose and Sarojini Naidu, vice-presidents, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay its first secretary and treasurer. The Committee members were drawn from all communities and from all parts of India, thus reflecting the truly all-India character of the association. The historic conference ended with a vote of thanks by Sarojini Naidu who, in her unique style said, 'One thing is unchangeable throughout the world, the indivisibility of womanhood; frontiers, wars, races, many

things make for division, but womanhood combines - the queen and the peasant are one'.¹⁴⁹ It may be said that, the *All India Women's Conference* was a platform which created a close linkage with other sister associations of India.

In this respect, as a consequence of the Conference, educational leagues were formed in various provinces such as Bengal, Gujrat, Hyderabad (Deccan), Indore and many new constituencies. Women in Bengal took a significant step by establishing the *Bengal Educational League* on February, 1927 through a conference held in Calcutta.¹⁵⁰ In 1930, schools had been opened in Nagpur, Jaipur, Lucknow and Burdwan (West Bengal) by the AIWC. In Balasore (Orissa) and Ranchi (Bihar) hostels for girls were under construction. As a result, Abala Bose, wife of the renowned scientist Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose and sister of Sarala Roy founded the Brahma Girls' School in Calcutta. Calcutta had two adult education centres and Balasore and Hyderabad one each. Following the 1927 session, members of the AIWC set about implementing all their proposals in right earnest. During 1930-31, they managed to open numerous girls' schools, a school for the blind and special schools for Muslim girls in Bihar, Ajmer and Assam. More schools for girls were projected at Patna and Lucknow. A hostel for working women was already running in Calcutta and a special boarding house for Adi Karnataka girls had been formed in Mysore. Four centres for adult education were founded in Bombay and one at Baroda, where training for adult women was being imparted by means of lamp slides and cinema shows. The East Bengal constituency had resolute to build a special fund for the education of women and children who could not attend school. It had an enrollment of 50 women and children. In Calcutta, the Gokhale Memorial Girls' High School was opened mainly due to the efforts of Sarala Ray, president of the AIWC in 1931-32. Sarala Ray and Kadambini Ganguly were the first two women to be allowed to sit for the matriculation examination of Calcutta University. Sarala Ray was an outstanding educationist. Named after the great nationalist leader, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, this school aimed at national integration. Hindi was taught in the primary classes where Bengali was the medium. Sanskrit was compulsory in the senior school where the medium of instruction was English. The institution laid great emphasis on sports, music, dramatic, apart from providing an

excellent academic syllabus. Teachers were preferred from all parts of India and English was taught by English women. As an educationist Sarala Ray encouraged the conference in Madras.¹⁵¹ In this way, there was a close interaction and inter-connection with all branch associations of AIWC and as a result, a relation developed among themselves.

We have already been stated in the 5th chapter regarding the women's struggle for rights to vote and in this respect, the AIWC and the Bengal branch played very significant role. But in the connection of philanthropist activities, the provincial branches took on new life during the war years. While World War-II was being fought, a larger disaster in the form of famine was taking its toll in West Bengal in 1943. The AIWC played a crucial role by organizing timely and wide-ranging relief work in the affected areas. The 1943 famine was, in Jawaharlal Nehru's words: 'the biggest and most devastating famine in India during the past 170 years of British dominion, comparable to those terrible famines which occurred from 1766 to 1770 in Bengal and Bihar as an early result of the establishment of British rule'.¹⁵²

However, the AIWC founded relief centres in Calcutta, Bhola, Rajbari, Bankura, Tamruk, Comilla and Mymensing districts in Bengal and relief committees of the AIWC were set-up to collect funds from all over India through door to door campaigns and by organizing concerts, fetes and donations. They also supplied food grains directly to Calcutta from the provinces and Vijaylakshmi Pandit, after touring the province, devised a plan for children's homes. A health clinic along with a kitchen and milk centre was ably organized by Usha Haldar in Bankura. Commending the tremendous work of the relief committee set-up by the Calcutta branch of the AIWC, Sarojini Naidu reiterated the need for 'active and united cooperation especially of all woman and women's organizations.....in the grim drama of a struggle between death and life'.¹⁵³ So, it is very clear to say that, there was a dealings and interaction with Bengal branch associations of AIWC and other sister branch associations of India.

Not only that, the AIWC played an imperative role in the deletion of communal tensions in Calcutta, Noakhali and Bihar in 1946. Women from branches and sub-branches volunteered to work in the riot affected areas.¹⁵⁴ Side by side, other areas of

activities of AIWC were health and family planning, untouchability, uplift of widows etc. which created a great connection with Bengal branch association and other branch associations of the sub-continent.

Till now there was an attempt to highlight the all-India based associations and its relation with women associations of Bengal and other branch associations of India. There existed some women association which were being organized at first in Bengal and then took the shape as an all-India based association. In this connection, mention may be made *All India Girl Students' Association (AIGSSA)* and *Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti (MARS)*. *The All Bengal Girl Students' Association (ABGSA)* came into being in 1939 by the girl students of various colleges and university in Bengal and set up branches in the Calcutta colleges as well as in the district colleges. The *Girl Students' Association (GSA)* became very popular and provided a large platform for the political activities of left-minded and educated young women of not only in Bengal but also in other parts of the country like Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Madras and Bombay.¹⁵⁵

The first *All India Girl Students'* conference was held at Lucknow on 1940. Sarojini Naidu became the chief guest and Renu Roy, niece of the famous Bengal Congress leader Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy and became a Communist member of Indian parliament later, was elected as its president. It is important to note that, the *Girl Students' Association* conference not only discussed the common academic matters in its agenda; but the question of gender equality, position of women in the male dominated society, the status of women before law and other issues relating to marital affairs etc. were also taken up for discussion.¹⁵⁶ Most of the leaders of the GSA were Gita Banerjee (Mukherjee), Kanak Dasgupta (Mukherjee), Shanti Sarkar (Basu), Anima Banerjee (Chakrabarty), Kalyani Mukherjee, Preeti Lahiri and others. There were many Muslim women who were motivated by this left-wing movement. Among them Layla Samad of Jalpaiguri, wife of Abdus Samad, Maksuda Begum of Burdwan, wife of Monsur Habibullah, Rabeya Khatun, wife of Sayad Shahedullah and Najimunnesa Ahmed of Calcutta, daughter of Kutubuddin Ahmed were notable.¹⁵⁷ However, the members of the GSA were intensely involved with activities like relief work and the anti-Fascist cultural movement during the World War-II.

The GSA volunteers were also part of the post-War popular upsurge against the British imperialism. They participated in the 'INA- Prisoners' Release Movement (November, 1945), 'Post and Telegraph Workers' Strike' (July, 1946) and expressed unity with the RIN strike or Naval Revolt (February, 1946) etc. It is said that, some girl students belonging to the wealthy class of urban areas, also took part vigorously under the placard of the Communists, in the *Tebhaga* Movement of the six million sharecroppers of Bengal and the Telengana Peasants' Struggle in Andhra region on the eve of freedom. The branch associations of GSA were also formed in Bombay, Punjab and other region. Nargis Batliwala of Bombay, Perin Varuchar of Punjab were most well-known leader¹⁵⁸ In this way, GSA became a leading association to form a new kind of political consciousness and communication among the young and educated women across the Bengal on the basis of Marxist ideology.

Like *All Bengal Girl Students' Association*, the *Bangiya Pradeshik Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* (Bengal Women's Self-Defense League) of 1943 was also organized at first in Bengal. But the branches and activities of *Bangiya Pradeshik Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* did not confine within the boundary of colonial Bengal. It crossed its periphery of activities and touched other sister associations that developed in various parts of India. The main goals and activities of the *Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* (MARS) were save the country, self-defense of women, release of Gandhi and other nationalist leaders, famine relief work and so on.¹⁵⁹ Within May 1943, MARS had almost 25,000 members in Bengal alone and was able to spread its branches in all district towns and even remote rural areas of the province such as Howrah, Hoogly, Midnapur, Bankura, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, Pabna, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Khulna, Mymensingh, Faridpur, Noakhali, Syhlet and other region.¹⁶⁰

The branches of *Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* or *Women's Self-Defence League* were established in the same style in other parts of India like Patna, Lucknow, Kanpur, Delhi, Bombay, Madras, Malabar, Andhra region, Assam and so on. For example, *Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* of Surma valley, Assam, *Kerala Mahila Sangam*, *Punjab Women's Self-Defence League* etc.¹⁶¹ Not only that, the *Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti* took the prominent role to bring together fourteen different women's associations of

Bengal for relief work during the famine and to take protective measures against epidemics. They were *Congress Mahila Sangha*, *Muslim Women's Self-Defence League*, *Christian Mahila Sangathan* (YWCA), Bengal branches of AIWC, *Brahmo Samaj Relief Mission*, *Nari Seva Sangha* and others. The Bengal Women's 'Food Committee' came into being out of this effort.¹⁶² It may be said that, women from different groups and religious faiths were incorporated for save the country and self-defense. In this way, the *Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* took the very vital role to interact and inter-connection with other sister associations of Bengal nay India.

So, women's responses and involvement in associations assumed truly sub-continental dimensions and witnessed deeply moving and extraordinary scenes in verily every nook and corner of the country. Though the foremost roles were played by women of the middle and upper classes, women from almost every section of the contemporary society had been mobilized into action in their own humble ways. Significantly, participation and interaction of different women's associations which coming out into the public arena gradually transformed the self-perception of many women activated during this era. It gave them a new sense of command, a new self-view and from this point on, a self-identity.

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8. Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op. cit.* pp. 18-19; see also Anup Taneja, *Gandhi, Women and the National Movement, 1920-47*, Har-Anand Publications PVT LTD, 2005, p. 37; Manas Chakrabarty, Vidyawati Agarwala, *op. cit.* pp. 35-36.

9. Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op. cit.* p.19; see also Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 244. Sarala Devi Choudhurani was regarded as the first feminist of modern Bengal as well as the first woman political leader in modern times. It was the first organization runs by women to be clearly committed to augmenting woman power. At the opening session, Sarala Devi announced that the first requisite was an awakening at the individual level.

At the very outset, I, a woman, must assume that I am the presiding deity of my house and that I exist. Subsequently, we women must assume that we are the reigning queens of our societies and families and that we exist We must, to start with, look after our personal development and we shall then gradually be in a position to contribute to the social advancement of our Country and the world outside. See *Bharati*, Vol. 34, No. 12, 1910-11.

10. Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, *Jibaner Jharapata* (in Bengali), Dey's Publishing, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, First Edition- Falgun 1879 Sakabda, First Dey's Edition- January 2007, p. 179; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p.70; Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* p. 49; 'Sarala Devi Chandhurani (1872-1945)', an article by Bharati Ray in *Women Pioneers in India's Renaissance- As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamla Mankekar (ed.), National Book Trust, New Delhi, First Edition 2002, Reprinted- 2007, p. 163.

11. Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 245.
12. 'A Women's Movement', an article by Sarala Devi in *Modern Review*, October, 1911, p. 348.
13. Sarala Devi Choudhurani, *Jibaner Jharapata*, p. 179; see also 'The Bharat Stree Mahamandal' in *Modern Review*, September 1912, p. 312; Sarada Ghosh, *op.cit.* pp. 246-247.
14. Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, *Loc. cit.* also in Gerldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 70; Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 248.
15. Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, *op. cit.* pp. 179-180 and 184-185; see also Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp. 248-249; 'Sarala Devi Chandhurani (1872-1945)', an article by Bharati Ray in *Women Pioneers in India's Renaissance- As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamla Mankekar (ed.), National Book Trust, New Delhi, pp.164-165.
16. 'Sarala Devi Chandhurani (1872-1945)', an article by Bharati Ray in *Women Pioneers in India's Renaissance- As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamla Mankekar (ed.), National Book Trust, New Delhi, p. 165; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* p. 72; Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 255.
17. Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* p.243.
18. 'Sarala Devi Chaudhurani', an article by Jogesh Chandra Bagal in *Sahitya Sadhak Charitamala*, No. 99, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta, 1964, p. 24.
19. 'The Women's Movement in India: Traditional Symbol and New Roles', an article by Geraldine H. Forbes in *Social Movements in India- Studies In Peasant, Backward Classes, Sectarian, Tribal and Women's Movements*, M. S. A. Rao (ed.), Manohar, New Delhi, First published-1979, Reprinted-2004, pp. 365-366.
20. 'The Women's Movement in India: Traditional Symbol and New Roles', an article by Geraldine H. Forbes in *Social Movements in India- Studies in Peasant, Backward Classes, Sectarian, Tribal and Women's Movements*, M. S. A. Rao (ed.), Manohar, New

Delhi, First published-1979, Reprinted-2004, p. 368; see also Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 272.

21. Guru Saday Dutt, *Saroj Nalini*, Saroj Nalini Nari Mangal Samiti, Calcutta, 1926, p. 89.

22. G. S. Dutta, *A Woman of India; Being the life of Saroj Nalini*, Oxford University Press, 1941, p. 113. This book is a biography of Saroj Nalini by her husband.

23. G. S. Dutt, *op. cit.* p. 117.

24. *Meyeder Parivartane Desher Parivartan* (Changes among women and change within society), an article by Indiradebi Choudhurani in *Bangalakshmi*, Vol. 5, No. 12, 1929.

25. *Bangalakshmi*, Vol. 5, Nos. 1 and 2, 1929 and Vol. 6, No. 5, 1930.

26. *Bangalakshmi*, 3rd year, Magh, Falgun, Chaitra Sankha, 1334 (B.S.); see also Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.*, pp.278-280; ‘Saroj Nalini’s Nari Mangal Samity and its various activities’, an article by Binoy Bhusan Ray in *The Study of Social History- Recent Trends*, Ratna Ghosh (ed.), Vol. II, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, March, 2015, p. 138.

27. G. S. Dutt, *op.cit.* p. 124.

28. ‘Social and Educational Movements for Women and by Women’, an article by Lotika Ghosh in *Bethune School and College Centenary Volume, 1849-1949*, Kalidas Nag (ed.), Calcutta, 1949, p. 156; see also Sarada Ghosh, *op.cit.* p. 282; ‘Saroj Nalini’s Nari Mangal Samity and its various activities’, an article by Binoy Bhusan Roy in *The Study of Social History- Recent Trends*, Ratna Ghosh (ed.), Vol. II, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, March, 2015, pp. 137-138.

29. G. S. Dutt, *op. cit.* pp. 131-134 and 128; see also Sarada Ghosh, *op.cit.* p. 284; ‘Saroj Nalini’s Nari Mangal Samity and its various activities’, an article by Binoy

Bhusan Roy in *The Study of Social History- Recent Trends*, Ratna Ghosh (ed.), Vol. II, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, March, 2015, pp. 139-140.

30. *Mahila Samitir Sangbad* (News of Women Association), an article by Kalitara Dasgupta in *Bangalakshmi*, 3rd year, Paush, 1334 (B.S). see also ‘Saroj Nalini’s Nari Mangal Samity and its various activities’, an article by Binoy Bhusan Roy in *The Study of Social History- Recent Trends*, Ratna Ghosh (ed.), Vol. II, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, March, 2015, p. 141.

31. G. S. Dutt, *op. cit.* p. 130.

32. *Kendra Samitir Katha* (Words of Central Association) in *Bangalakshmi*, Vol. 10, 5th year, Bhadra, 1337 (B.S.), pp. 886-887.

33. G. S. Dutt, *op. cit.* p. 129.

34. *Samitir Katha* (Words of Association) in *Bangalakshmi*, 5 year, Vol. 10, Bhadra, 1337 B.S., p. 79; Sarada Ghosh, *op.cit.* p.284.

35. *Samitir Katha* (Words of Association), *Bangalakshmi*, Vol. 3, 1336 (B.S.), pp. 248-249.

36. *Amader Mahila Bangalakshmi*, in *Bangalakshmi*, Baishakh, 1337 (B.S.), p. 470; also in *Samitir Katha* in *Bangalakshmi*, Baishakh Vol. 3, 1336 (B.S.), p. 245; *Samitir Katha* in *Bangalakshmi*, Shrobon, 5 year, Vol. 9, 1337 (B.S.), p. 726.

37. ‘Bengali Muslim Women in Post-Rokeya Period: Samsun Nahar Mahmud and Fazilatunnesa’ an article by Tahmina Alam in *Women in Changing Society*, I.Sarkar (ed.), Serials Publications, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 89-94; also in ‘Rokeya’ (1880-1932), an article by Miratun Nahar in *Women Pioneers in India’s Renaissance- As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamla Mankerkar (ed.), National Book Trust, New Delhi, p. 80.

38. Anowar Hossain, *Swadhinata Sangrame Banglar Muslim Nari (1873-1947)*, Pragatishil Prakashak, Kolkata, May, 2006, p. 161.

39. Anowar Hossain, *op. cit.* p. 162.

40. Meredith Borthwick, *op. cit.* p. 336.
41. Rajan Mahan, *Women in Indian National Congress (1921-1932)*, Rawat publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, 1999, p. 41.
42. 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929', an article by Barati Ray in *From the Seams of History- Essays on Indian Women*, Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, Delhi, Calcutta, Chennai, Mumbai, 1997, p. 204.
43. 'Bengali Women in Politics: The Early Phase', an article by Goutam Neogi in *Proceedings of the 46th Session of Indian History Congress*, Amritsar, Punjab, 1985, pp. 487-488; see also Chitra Ghosh, *Women Movement Politics in Bengal*, Chatterjee Publisher, Calcutta, 1991, pp. 32-33.
44. Uhsa Chakraborty, *Condition of Bengali Women Around The 2nd Half of The 19th Century*, Calcutta, 1963, p. 108; see also 'Women's Role in Indian politics: An Overview', an article by Arunabha Ghosh in Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Mitram, Kolkata, May 2010, pp. 264-265.
45. Uhsa Chakraborty, *op.cit.* pp. 108-109.
46. Manmohan Kaur, *Women in India's Freedom Struggle*, Sterling, Delhi, 1985, pp. 91-92.
47. Manmohan Kaur, *Loc. cit.*
48. Uhsa Chakraborty, *op.cit.* p. 109
49. Bipan Chandra, *Modern India*, Dehli, 1971, p. 243.
50. 'The Role of women in the Indian Struggle for Freedom', an article by Aparna Basu in *Indian Women: From Purdah to Modernity*, B. R. Nanda (ed.), Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 1976, p. 37.
51. 'Sisterhood or Separatism? The All India Muslim Ladies Conference and the Nationalist Movement', an article by G. Minault in *The Extended Family: Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan*, G. Manault (ed.), Chanakya Publications, Delhi, 1981, pp. 83f.

52. Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movements: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 149-50.
53. Maitrayee Chaudhuri, *Indian Women's Movement: Reform and Revival*, Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 1993, p. 129.
54. Hemprabha was the wife of the well-known Basanta Kumar Majumdar and in later years became one of the five founder members of the Chitta Ranjan Das led *Swarajya* Party. 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929', an article by Barati Ray in *From the Seams of History- Essays on Indian Women*, Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, Delhi, Calcutta, Chennai, Mumbai, 1997, pp. 195-196; see also Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* pp. 163-164.
55. 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929', an article by Barati Ray in *From the Seams of History- Essays on Indian Women*, Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, Delhi, Calcutta, Chennai, Mumbai, 1997, p. 198; see also Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p. 164.
56. 'Women's Part', *Young India*, 15.12.1921; also in Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* pp. 126-127.
57. *Indian Annual Register*, Vol. I, 1921-22, pp. 135-137 ; also in 'Purdah Politics: The Role of Muslim Women in Indian Nationalism, 1911-1924', an article by Gail Minault in *Separate Worlds*, Hannah Papanek and Gail Minault (ed.), Chanakya Publications, Delhi, 1982, pp. 245-261.
58. *Indian Annual Register*, Vol. I, 1921-22, Appendix, pp. 13-14.
59. She was the wife of Pandit Ladli Prasad Zutshi, leading lawyer of Lahore who was the son of Motilal Nehru's sister. Lado Rani's interest in politics had begun during the Martial Law in Punjab in 1919 and from then on, she had become an active Congress worker in Lahore. See Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p. 148.
60. 'A Women's Movement', an article by Sarala Devi Choudhurani in *Modern Review*, October 1911, pp. 344-350; see also Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* pp. 98-99.
61. Radha Devi was the wife of the doyen of Punjabi Congressmen, Lala Lajpat Rai. Parvati Devi, a teacher in Amritsar, was an ardent Congress worker who was finally arrested in Meerut in December 1922 for her 'inflammatory speeches'; she was

sentenced to two years imprisonment, till then the severe penalty imposed on any woman in the sub-continent. For details see Manmohan Kaur, *op.cit.* Sterling, Delhi, 1985, pp. 142 and 154; see also Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* p. 99.

62. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG), Vol. XIX, p. 455; also in Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* pp. 149-150; Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* p.100.

63. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XXII, p. 71; also in Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p. 166.

64. *Indian Annual Register 1921-22*, Vol.1, p. 72.

65. 'Women's Role in Indian Politics: An Overview', an article by Arunabha Ghosh *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May 2010, p. 265.

66. Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness: A Personal Memoir*, Orient, Delhi, 1981, pp. 67-68.

67. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 13.01.1922.

68. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17.12.1922. She was given two years imprisonment, 'The highest sentence so far awarded to any lady'. See Usha Bala, *Indian Women Freedom Fighters*, Manohar, Delhi, 1986, p. 131.

69. Avantikabai Gokhale was married to a Bombay engineer, Baban Gokhale. She was born in 1882.

70. Perin Captain and Goshibehn Captain, grand-daughters of Dadabhai Naoroji, Perin Captain was born in 1888. She was married to D.S. Captain, a reputed lawyer. From 1920 she began to wear *Khadi* clothes and play an active part in popularizing the *Swadeshi* cause in association with her sisters, Goshibehn Captain and Khurshed Naoroji; also a founder member of the *Rastriya Stree Sabha*.

71. Manekabai Bahadurji was the daughter of Dr. Atmaram Sagun. Under the inspiration of Gandhi, She had learned to spin personally and tried to propagate the concept of spinning through the *Sevasadan*.

72. Sarojini Naidu was among the most devoted disciples of Gandhi who became the President of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee and also of the *Rashtriya Stree Sabha*. She also became the President of the Indian National Congress in 1926.

73. 'Nationalism, Universalization and the Extended Female Space', an article by Gail Pearson in *The Extended Family: Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan*, Gail Minault (ed.), Chankya Publications, Delhi, 1981, p.180.
74. Surachi Thapar-Bjorkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement- Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London, 2006, p.54.
75. Dhananjoy Roy, *Uttarbanga (Unish O Bish Shatak)*, Deep Prakashan, Kolkata, January, 2002, p. 178.
76. *Young India*, 10 April, 1930.
77. *Young India*, *Loc. cit.*
78. Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* p. 126.
79. 'Speech at Gujarati Women's Conference, Dandi', *CWMMG*, Vol. XLIII, pp. 251-252.
80. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *Inner Recesses Outer Spaces: Memoirs*, Navrang, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 152-153.
81. Dharsana Salt Works are situated at a distance of 15 miles north of Bombay.
82. Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p. 274.
83. Aparna Basu, *Mridula Sarabhai: Rebel with a Cause*, Oxford University Press. New Delhi, 1996, p. 34; see also Saruchi Thaper- Bjorkert, *op.cit.* pp. 59-60; Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* p. 130.
84. Aparna Basu, *Loc.cit.*
85. *The Tribune*, 9 April 1930 and 13 April 1930; an insightful elaboration of these themes is available in 'Gujarati Women's Response to Gandhi 1920-1942', an article by Aparna Basu in *Samya Shakti*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1984, pp. 6-20.
86. *The Tribune*, 15 April 1930.
87. 'The Struggle for Freedom', an article by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay in *Women of India*, Tara Ali Baig (ed.), Publications Division, Delhi, 1958, p. 21; see also Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p.275; Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* p.134.
88. Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p.277; see also Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* p.133.

89. Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* p. 135; see also Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p. 276; Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* p. 137. Lilavati Munshi, like her husband K.M. Munshi, was a leading writer in Gujrati. Both played an important role in the national movement. They were also known for their social reform activities.
90. Hansa Mehta was an educationist and social reformer who was the first woman to be elected to the Bombay Legislative Council in 1931. She was also a member of the Constituent Assembly, 1946.
91. Horace Alexander, *Gandhi Through Western Eyes*, Bombay, 1969, p.64; see also Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* pp. 276-277; Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* pp. 136-137.
92. Gail Pearson, *Women in Public Life in Bombay City with Special Reference to the Civil Disobedience Movement*, an unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, JNU, Delhi, 1979, p. 281.
93. Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 135.
94. Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p. 284; see also Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* p. 143.
95. Chitra Ghosh, *op.cit.* p. 61; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.*; p.135; ‘Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929’, an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women*, Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, p. 199; Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* pp. 143-144; Suruchi Thapar-Bjorkert, *op.cit.* p. 56.
96. Chitra Ghosh, *Loc. cit.*; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* p. 136; Suruchi Thapar Bjorkert, *Loc.cit.*
97. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp 62-63; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* pp.136-137; Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* p. 144.
98. Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p. 284.
99. *The Modern Review*, May 1930, p. 658; also in Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* p. 141; Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p. 285; Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* p. 144.
100. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 63; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* p.137.
101. Neera Desai, *Emergence and Development of Women’s Organization in India*, Research Monograph Series, SNDT Women’s University, Bombay; also in Chitra Ghosh, *op.cit.* pp. 42 and 72; ‘Women’s Role in Indian politics: An Overview’ an

article by Arunabha Ghosh in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May 2010, p. 266.

102. Chita Ghosh, *op.cit.* p.71; see also Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p. 285.

103. Rajan Mahan, *Loc. cit.* Much information on Bankura and Midnapur is available in Niranjana Ghosh, *Role of Women in the Freedom Movement in Bengal: Midnapur, Bankura and Purulia Districts*, Tramralipti Prakashan, Midnapur, 1988.

104. *The Modern Review*, July 1953. p. 57; also in Chitra Ghosh, *op.cit.* p.74; Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p. 285.

105. Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* pp. 143-145; see also Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* pp. 280-281; 'Women's Role in Indian politics: An Overview', an article by Arunabha Ghosh in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May 2010, p. 266; Suruchi Thapar Bjorkert, *op.cit.* pp. 56-57.

106. 'Gandhian Movement and Women's Awakening in Orissa', an article by Bina Kumari Sarma in *The Indian Historical Review*, Anup Taneja (ed.), Vol. XXI, Nos 1&2, ICHR and Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1997, p. 85.

107. *Home Political Proceedings*, File No. 5/62/1932.

108. P. K. Mishra, *The Political History of Orissa 1900-36*, Oriental Publishers, Delhi, 1979, p. 132.

109. *Young India*, 8 May 1930.

110. Snehalata Panda, *Women and Social Change in India*, Aashish, Delhi, 1992, p. 16.

111. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 16 July, 1930.

112. Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* p. 147.

113. Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* pp. 164-165.

114. Suruchi Thapar- Bjorkert, *op.cit.* p. 56.

115. Tirtha Mandal, *The Women Revolutionaries of Bengal 1905-1939*, Minerva, Calcutta, 1991. pp.77-107; see also David M. Laushey, *Bengal Terrorism & The Marxist Left-Aspects of Regional Nationalism in India, 1905-1942*, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Clacutta, 1975, pp. 80-84; I. Mallikarjun Sharma (Edited and

annotated), *Remembering Our Revolutionaries*, Marxist Study Forum, Hyderabad, December, 1994, pp. 74-82.

116. Durgadevi was a teacher in the Lahore Girls School and she had started taking part in radical actions at a time when her son was hardly three years old. After her husband's death in a bomb blast in 1929, she got even more strongly involved in radical activities. She worked in the defence committee for Bhagat Singh's case. When the police issued warrants against her name after the prowling of the bomb factory in a house at Lahore, she came to Delhi in a *burqa*. In Bombay, she along with Sukhdev and Prithvi Singh shot at two Englishmen at Hamilton Road. She also helped the revolutionaries through delivery of bombs, money and pistols which she carried from one place to another. In 1932, she was imprisoned for nine months and for three years, she was kept confined within the boundaries of Lahore. See *The Hindustan Times*, 15 August 1972; also in Anup Taneja, *op.cit.*, pp. 169-170.

117. Aparna Basu, *op.cit.* 1976, p. 33.

118. Kanak Mukhopadhyay, *Narimukti Andolan O Amra* (in Bengali), National Book Agency, Kolkata, March 1993, p. 20.

119. Aruna Asaf Ali, *The Resurgence of Indian Women*, Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 1991, p. 136; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* p. 204, Chitra Ghosh, *op.cit.* p. 81; Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* pp. 186-187.

120. 'August Struggle Report', Part-II-Report prepared under the patronage of *All India Satyagraha Council*, U.P. Branch, All India Congress Committee Office, New Delhi, p. 5.

121. Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* p. 204; see also Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* p. 189.

122. Manmohan Kaur, *op.cit.* p. 199.

123. *Hidustan Standard*, 27 July 1942.

124. Manmohan Kaur, *op. cit.* p 213; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* pp. 204-205; Anup Taneja, p. 196.

125. Manmohan Kaur, *Loc. cit.*
126. Manmohan Kaur, *op. cit.* pp.213- 214.
127. *Home Political Department (Special)*, 27th January 1943, 3/44/43-poll (1).
128. Manmohan Kaur, *op.cit.* p.215; see also Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp. 82-83; Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, pp. 401-402; Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* p. 205; Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* p. 206.
129. Chitra Ghosh, *op.cit.* p. 83; see also ‘Women’s Role in Indian politics: An Overview ‘ an article by Arunabha Ghosh in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May 2010, *op.cit.* p.267; Anup Taneja, *Loc. cit.* 130. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 82.
131. K. K. Datta, *Freedom Movement in Bihar*, Vol. III, Govt. of Bihar, Patna, 1957, p. 32.
132. K. K. Datta, *op.cit.* p. 50.
133. Malati Choudhury participated at the historic session of the Congress held at Bombay on 8th August 1942.
134. Surendra Nath Dwivedi, a staunch follower of Gandhi, was also a top- ranking Congress leader of that time. On Gandhi’s arrest, he and Malati Choudhury came back to Orissa with the following message of Gandhi: “Our country is independent from today. Follow the peaceful method. Praise the Government, you yourself becomes a leader. This is the last struggle. In it there is no compromise”. See S. N. Dwivedi, *August Biplab* (August Revolution) Cuttack, p. 13.
135. *Home Political Department*, File No. 3/31/42, 1942.
136. V. Rajendra Raju, *Role of Women in India’s Freedom Struggle*, New Delhi, 1994, p.81.
137. See *The Indian Historical Review*, Vol. XXI, Nos. 1 & 2, Anup Taneja (ed.), ICHR and Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1997, p. 90.
138. ‘Annie Besant (1847-1933)’, an article by Lakshmi N. Menon in *Women Pioneers in India’s Renaissance- As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamla Mankekar (ed.), National Book Trust, New Delhi, First pub. 2002, p.29.
139. Chitra Ghosh, *op.cit.* pp. 24-25.

140. *WIA, Quinquennial Report, 1917-1922*, WIA papers; also in Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* p. 73.
141. *WIA, Quinquennial Report, 1917-1922*; also in Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* pp. 73-74; Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* pp. 210-211.
142. 'A Ladies Deputation to Mr. Montague' in *New India*, 25 October, 1917, p. 5. This list however, differs from that included in the selection of Mrs. Margaret Cousins private papers published as 'Mrs. Cousins and Her Work in India' in *Women's Indian Association*, Madras, 1956, no pagination. Her list also includes Mrs. Saralabai Naik, Mrs. Srirangamme, Begum Hasrat Mohani, Mrs. Dalvi, Lady Sadasiva and Mrs. Guruswami Chetty; see also Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p. 211.
143. A Federation of University Women later called the *Indian Federation of University Women's Association* was formed in Calcutta on 24 July, 1920. Mrs. Prativa Chaudhuri, a daughter of the Tagore family, was its first President. Organized groups of educated women soon began to function in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. The object of this association was to stimulate public life. The Federation was affiliated to the International Federation in 1921 and since then has spread to many other cities of India. Its field of work is however, restricted primarily to advancement of education. Chitra Ghosh, *Enlightenment Promotes Understanding*, Calcutta, Diamond Jubilee of IFUWA, November, 1981.
144. 'History of the Council Movement', *Bulletin*, January, 1932, p. 4 (Premchand Papers); see also Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* p. 75.
145. Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* pp. 76-77.
146. See 'Bengal Provincial Council Report' in *NCWI Report, 1928-29*.
147. Aparna Basu, Bharati Roy, *Women's Struggle- A History of the All India Women's Conference 1927-2002*, Second Edition, Manohar, Delhi, 2003, p.20; see also 'How the Conference Began', an article by Margaret Cousins in *Roshni* (Journal of AIWC), Special number, 1946, p. 14; Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* p. 79; Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p. 242.
148. Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op.cit.* pp 19-20 and 26; see also 'Left-Wing Movement in Colonial Bengal: Quest For A New Identity', an article by Susanta Das in *Women In*

India- Problems Potentialities and Power, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May 2006, p.140.

149. Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op.cit.* pp. 25-26.

150. 'Education and Gender in Nineteenth- Century Bengal: An Overview', an article by Jayeeta Bagchi in *Shaping the Discourse- Women's Writings in Bengali Periodicals 1865-1947*, Ipshta Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi (ed.), School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, Stree, Kolkata, 2014, p. lxiv (Introduction-II).

151. Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op.cit.* pp. 32-36.

152. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 495; see also Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op.cit.* p. 89.

153. Apparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op.cit.* pp. 89-90; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* p. 211.

154. Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op.cit.* p. 18.

155. Renu Chakraborty, *Communists In Indian Women Movement 1940-1950*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1980, p. 8; see also Kanak Mukhopadhyay, *Nari Mukti Andolan O Amra* (in Bengali), National Book Agency, Calcutta, 1993, p.22; 'Left-Wing Women Movement in Colonial Bengal: Quest For A New Identity', an article by Susnata Das in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, p. 146.

156. Renu Chakraborty, *op.cit.* pp. 18-22; see also Kanak Mukhoppdhyay, *Loc. cit.*

157. Anowar Hossain, *Swadhinata Sangrame Banglar Muslim Nari (1873-1947)*, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, May, 2006, p. 205.

158. 'Left- Wing Women Movement in Colonial Bengal: Quest For A New Identity', an article by Susnata Das in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, pp.146-147.

159. Maleka Begum, Saiyad Ajijul Hoque, *Ami Nari- Tinsho Bacharer Bangali Narir Itihas*, Dhaka, 2001, p. 110.

160. Kanak Mukhopadhyay, *op.cit.* p. 39; see also 'Left- Wing Women Movement in Colonial Bengal: Quest For A New Identity', an article by Susnata Das in *Women In*

India- Problems Potentialities and Power, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, p. 148.

161. Nargis Sattar, *op.cit*, pp. 60 and 66-67.

162. *Janayuddha*, the weekly organ of CPI, 20 March & 20 June, 1943; also in Kanak Mukhopadhyay, *op.cit*. p. 40; Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op.cit*. p. 78.