

CHAPTER – 3

HILL WOMEN, THE DOMESTIC SPHERE AND THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

“Aao veero mard bano jail tumhe bharna hoga, Satyagraha ke samarkshetra me aa aakar datna hoga, sur larake mardani ho ver hatana kabhi nahi, yaad karo ki mata ka hai tumne kitna dhoodpaan kiya, dhood piye ki laaj bahadur kisi tarah rakhna hoga” (Come courageous be a man and fill the jail following the path of Satyagraha facing it courageously as you are a brave soul thus never leave your path. Remember how much you have been fed by your mother and whose pride you must defend Bahadur and somehow maintain it).

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter we have tried to highlight the indirect role of hill women, the domestic sphere and the nationalist movement by the collection of few dynamic real life stories of those subaltern women living in Darjeeling and its adjoining areas. We have also tried to interpret social realities and the life world, how it becomes difficult for them to work and accentuate their political implications. Since, similar changes were also visible in other parts of India; the hill division contrary to public imagination of the rest of India too felt the ripples of the changing times. The chapter deals with the nature of changes as was first felt in the domestic sphere and how it had major influenced on the women of the region. This chapter is segmented into six segments.

The global experience indicates that in any political system whether it is in developed or under developed countries, participation of women in the political process is marginal or rather lows. It is due to the fact that there is a lack of self esteem or socio-economic cultural environment and even political environment which are responsible for women's marginal participation in politics. Thus, this reveals that self-esteem, standing in the society and the culture which puts maximum premium on the male, instable political environment and absence of political ideology are the factors which greatly influenced the extent of political participation of women.

Hence, women are considered to be in a group of those who are apathetic to politics because of (1) their low status in society (2) lesser exposure to education (3) very low economic status (4) restraining cultural norms (5) and the unhealthy political environment. Therefore, it is the socio- political environment which determines the

participation and involvement of women in politics. Culture plays a very dominant factor and deprives women of the self-esteem necessary for political leadership. Jean J Kirkpatrick observes “in a culture which values the male more highly than the female, women may never acquire the confidence and autonomy required to seek power and wield it effectively”. (Sinha: 2000: 18). Culture decides role choices. However, the transition from the roles of housewife and mother to the role of political decision maker is not easy. Kirkpatrick maintained that in the ultimate analysis, “to many radical feminist culture, ideology and social structure are conspiracy”. The enemies are male and female are the most important oppressed political caste in history.

Women’s entries into politics were visible in the early decades of the present century. There was a massive participation of women in the nationalist movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. It was Gandhi who was able to reach out to women and draw them into the vertex of the freedom movement. Since, Gandhi could not fully abandon gender bias and in some way perpetuated the traditional image of the Indian women, but he did manage to appeal to women to join the movement. It is maintained that the participation of women in the national struggle especially those who were in key position were from the elite class. These elite women did provide organizational base and ideas and vision to the masses of women, but on the other hand not much has been written about thousands of in famous women who were poor and had rural background, though they in their own humble way had participated in the national struggle for freedom. Thus, it would be unfair if we do not take into account the role of those flamboyant personalities, their dedicated works, spectacular acts of courage and of silent but solid constructive activity or grim battle against imperial exploitation.

In 1885 ever since the formation of the Indian National Congress, the women’s participation in its activities grew steadily but slowly. From the second quarter of the 19th century the years of social reforms for women helped them to come forward and participate in many ways, both directly and indirectly, formally and informally, with support and backup or many which are now been unrecognized. Thus, following the clarion call of Mahatma Gandhi there was a huge increase in women’s participation which is well documented.

3.2. Awakening of Political Consciousness among the Hill Women:-

The awakening of women due to the efforts of few great freedom fighters created a tremendous momentum of enthusiasm in Darjeeling and Kurseong and gradually these small groups of women in Kurseong felt oppressed by conventional practices, traditional image and subservient role of women. They took the advantage of opportunities provided by the leaders of the Nationalist Movement and came forward to open up school in the region. The evolution of women's role from private to public life was mainly influenced by the movement.

With the spread of education, many women of the region came out of the cloistered shelter of the house and started taking keen interest in the activities of the movement by attending its meetings and contributing money to its funds.

Since, Gandhi was the first person who visualized mass participation of women in the struggle for freedom; it had the greatest impact on the status of women. There was a tremendous wave of enthusiasm among the fragile and frail women of India and so women of our region i.e. Darjeeling also did not lag behind in sharing the sorrow and sufferings of their motherland and participated in the nationalist movement. However, the inflammatory writings and speeches of Maya Devi Chettri had a great influence on the rising generation.

On 18th August 2012, a local newspaper called the Himalaya Darpan published from Kalimpong West Bengal carried an article entitled 'Swatantrata Senani Nabir Lama Ka Parivaar Momo Bechna Badhya' (Freedom Fighter Nabir Lama's Family Compelled to Sell Momo).

In the long nationalist struggle for independence the contribution of men in the public sphere were well recorded and even celebrated. However, one should realize that the widows and companions of those nationalist men have shouldered extraordinary pain without a sign and with no complains. But the nation has not realized it nor has anybody remembered it. We find a lot of names of men who sacrificed their lives for the nation and is been well recorded in books, in memoirs, biographies, inscriptions etc. whereas, those wives, mothers and nurturers who agreed with their husbands and took the family responsibility on their shoulders, making the path of their husband lighter, their names are never mentioned. The contribution of women in the household who stood as pillars of support for their husbands throughout the movement primarily in the

domestic sphere have been inadequately acknowledged in Indian nationalist historiography. It was only in the decades after independence, newspapers and vernacular literature published the reminiscences of women's domestic nationalist activities.

There are several questions that arise in one's mind. Why is it that the contribution of ordinary middle-class women such as those described above has not been included in the memory of the nation? What was the nature of nationalist activities of ordinary middle class women within the domestic sphere of India? How did women confined to the domestic sphere understand and articulate their own contributions to the political movement?

3.3. Dynamics of family

The non-cooperation movement of 1920 was the first organized mass campaign against the British Raj. During this Gandhi sought to mobilize a large number of women in the movement. But he was acutely aware of the social status of women; his approach was pragmatic as he did not shut his eyes to the actual situation of women. However, he laid stress on that part of the non-cooperation movement in which women could participate without having to make the attempt to break free of their fetters.

During the non-cooperation movement the direct participation of women in the public sphere was not significant and women were actively encouraged by nationalist leaders to make their political contributions from within the domestic spheres. During the civil disobedience movement women's public activities were more pronounced. There were many upper caste women who were still confined to the domestic sphere, family dynamics were important in encouraging women to express themselves politically. The women exposed to nationalist family in their parental homes and in conjugal households were in a very different situation from those women who faced unfavorable family attitudes and circumscribed family circumstances.

In the eastern India, particularly in Darjeeling district, most of the women whether as unmarried in their father's house or married in their husband's house there were some degree of restriction even in the Nepali Community. Thus there were few situations where the women could make limited visits outside their homes if male members of their family escorted them.

However, in the parental home, primarily the mother was the support for an activist if the father was involved in the public sphere or serving a long jail sentence. Hence, the mother was primary source of emotional support. Beside this she was also responsible for the family's livelihood. Where as, in other circumstances if the father or husband opposed any nationalist activity within the house women used to conduct such activities clandestinely. Thus, the similar case was with the great women freedom fighter Putalimayadevi. She paid no heed to her civil servant father's pro-British stance and continued with her activities. On the other hand when men tried to persuade their womenfolk to participate or encouraged them for the movement, the women usually refused to come out from the domestic sphere. This was due to the fact that during those days it was a tradition that the women from the good families did not come out of the house. There was also certain responsibility of older women for the cultural reproduction of the nation and at certain historical junctures govern the most appropriate behavior, appearances and conduct of other women.

However, women organized themselves as both imparters and recipients of nationalist information. In the domestic sphere in order to facilitate their own activities it was important for women to maintain links with political activities in the public domain. Thus, women kept themselves informed of wider political development in three ways.

First, by reading local newspapers and printed materials they educate themselves. They came to know the activities of the Congress and the demands of the nationalist movement through this.

Second, they eavesdropped on conversation of men in the household and discussed ideas amongst themselves. Hence, the house hold emerged as a hotbed of discussions and conspiracy. Thus, the women would sing patriotic songs and share pieces of information that they acquired from various sources. In the house the women discuss the political situation after hearing the men folk discussing it. Passively the women gained information by listening to men. The women had no direct discussions with the men. There were occasions where women held meetings in each other's homes. The women in the neighborhood would invite other women to their homes to discuss political events and sing patriotic songs.

Third, radio was an invaluable source of nationalist information and the women usually listened to it. This radio provide the broadcasts of patriotic songs, details of the

progress of the movement, the number of imprisonments and life sentences as well as stirring speeches. The women who were illiterate could keep themselves informed through the radio. But in few households women were not allowed to listen to it.

3.4. Domestic Sphere and Politics

The participation of women in the nationalist activities was in five main ways. They also demonstrated the political significance of the domestic spheres. They are as under.

3.4.1. The Programmes of Gandhi and its Impact

However, Gandhi insisted on the contribution of women in the political cause primarily from within the domestic sphere through their roles as supportive wives and mothers. The political liberation of the country was aligned with the concept of Swadeshi (indigenous). The another ordinary household items like salt, Gandhi tried to ignite the imagination of the masses by using charkha or spinning wheel and politicized or popularized this domestic object at both the national and local levels. The contribution of women in the nationalist movement was possible from within the domestic sphere since Gandhi had articulated that ‘every act counted’ (Forbes 1998:125). The Charkha was the ‘symbol of the unity of the people and their respect and dignity as a nation’ (Agnew 1979:37). In these constructive programmes the roles of women were significant because they were expected to be responsible for spreading both the message of Swadeshi and emphasizing its importance in the independent struggle of India.

Thus, a powerful nationalist statement like spinning khadi on the charkha which showed that not only could domestic values be associated with nationalist activities in the public sphere such as in the picketing of foreign cloth shops, but that nationalist activities also could be taken into and performed within the domestic sphere. In the public domain men and women wore Khadi as a mark of national pride.

Therefore, Gandhi believed in self-rule and self-reliance in the sense that it is the responsibility of every individual in the context of the community. For Gandhi self-reliance did not only mean liberation from British colonial rule but also internal liberation from the dominant classes and capitalists. The achievement of this is through spinning khadi and production for self consumption, even if on a small scale. Along with it self-reliance also minimized one’s material wants and disciplined one’s mind

and body, preparing in every way for the hardship and potential deprivation of a non-violent struggle. In Gandhi's opinion, swaraj (home rule), swadeshi (the use of self made goods) and s goods swavalambh (self-reliance) were linked together. Thus, self made goods became Gandhi's platform and liking political with individual freedom. Beside this, Gandhi argues that colonial rule would be contested from both the political and economic platforms.

Although through literature and public speeches ideas about spinning and weaving khadi were propagated. The women by spinning, weaving and selling khadi could help in their own liberation by gaining a modicum of economic independence. Thus, this process of achieving self sufficiency through producing swadeshi cloths also helped the national liberation struggle. On the other hand, within the domestic sphere nationalist activity could be brought through constructive programmes. The women more importantly were given charge of the economic status of their country as well as themselves. Hence, khadi served primarily for the lower classes as a means of generating economic fluidity. But Gandhi through this activity also challenged the dominant norms of the upper caste as well as the middle class values that associated high status with women's non involvement in productive work. Therefore, it needs to be emphasized that many women from the ordinary middle class homes were rather compelled to take cognizance of the movement when their sons, fathers and husbands were hauled to prisons and they had no other choice but left to provide the economic means for the household.

Since, it was necessary to support and coordinate the efforts of women involved in spinning and weaving to form local organizations which encouraged constructive work and also had access to purdah bound women. Women individually took the initiative in forming such organizations.

For example the Mahila Samiti (Women's Organization) in Kurseong was established in 1935 by Putalimayadevi Poddar who was then only 15 year old. She realized that women too needed a platform through which they could participate equally with the men in the freedom movement of India. She was farsighted enough not to just restrict the fervor of patriotism among the adult men and women but made women the messengers of the message of patriotism to be taken back home and to inspire the minds of the children so that the entire community gets motivated and inspired by the feeling of nationalism. With this objective in mind, she also formed the

women organization that manufactured Khadi cloths and were taught to spread patriotic feelings among the children.

In Mahila Samiti the women publicly started preaching the nationalist movement by keeping the photograph of Gandhiji. In all the hill sub-divisions- Kurseong, Darjeeling and Kalimpong the Congress Samiti began to hold a strong position. The main objective of this organization was health and hygiene, education etc. The women who were very sick were taken to the hospital along with their kids and families for regular checkup and to provide them with necessary medicines etc. Beside this the women were also given the knowledge about the values of education and the importance of education for their child and getting them admitted in school. They were also provided with the knowledge of rearing their children, health and hygiene etc. The effort made by this organization led to the decrease of physical violence against the women by their husband to a very great extent. In 1935 Gorkha Dukh Niwarak Sammelan was organized in association with this women organization.

Thus, in this way the spinning and weaving of khadi in the domestic sphere enlightened women towards the notion of loving one's nation and side by side made themselves economic independent in the absence of their husband. On the other hand, the vow of swadeshi was also transformed from its political under pinning to religious and moral issues.

3.4.2. Familial Sacrifice

In the Hindi literature the domestic based qualities of sacrificed, the good nurturers, strength of will and fortitude were linked by the key concept of 'service (seva) to the nation' were widely referred. Vidyavati Sahgal wrote about how, 'in this short time this andolan (movement) despite repression has created an extraordinary awareness and given new life to the women of India'. (Sahgal 1930:4) (Thapar Bjorkert 2006:186). She emphasized that 'in a few months this movement has liberated women from centuries of subordination' (Thapar Bjorkert 2006). Drawing on a quote from the Indian Mahila Sangh magazines *Stree Dharm* she states that, 'The weapons of they movement like truth, patience, sacrifice, purity of soul are only of women and it is thus no surprise that women are taking the main part in the movement' (Thapar Bjorkert 2006). The activity that best encapsulated the 'weapons of the movement', particular sacrifice, was fasting, a practice that is still popular in contemporary advocated fasting

for both men and women to enable them to have greater control over their bodies and the senses that generated pleasure:

Gandhi viewed the body as inextricably linked to the soul and the spirit, and also as a microcosm of the social. It is thus not surprising to find that his political campaigns were often intimately linked with bodily functions. He used fasting as a weapon in his political armory (Caplan 1989:277) (Thapar Bjorkert 2006: 186)

However, women in their own homes fasted and conducted nationalist religious prayers. This activity was associated with the Hindu religious beliefs of purification of the body, mind and soul and closely associated with the Hindu concept of dharma. Thus, for personal survival food is necessary and fasts can be turned into a public political weapon. It was through fasting women were also completing their essential religious duties (dharma).

Hence, the fasting of women for the wellbeing of their husbands, sons and brothers who were serving jail sentences was extended to the idea of fasting for the nation and with this closely aligning the domestic sphere with nationalist politics. The women fasted within the confines of the domestic domain as a way to identify with the sufferings of their husbands in prison and also the nationalist movement. She knew that her husband was carrying out hunger strikes and her own fasting enabled her to support her struggle of husband.

In accordance with the political demands women conceptualized their roles as wives. It was not an easier for women to bear a long separation from her husband and to face the mental and physical trauma of his imprisonment and disappearance for a week, months or so. Therefore, on the end it was to undertake another form of sacrifice which showed the strength of will, steadfastness of purpose and fortitude in the face of adversity. It was natural that if any member of the family is imprisoned on the public site, the other members of the family on the domestic sphere were also naturally affected.

Sharda Devi a Nepali middle class woman was married to a freedom fighter Durga Malla. She was left alone just three days after her marriage. Her husband got an emergent call from his unit to go for war even before his newly married bride could get acquainted with him. Thus, it should be noted that for a newly bride in a new social environment she encounters in the absence of her husband, how hard was the situation

for her to get acquainted even with her husband family. Beside, she might have found it too hard to imagine her husband to participate in a war in such short period of time.

Durga Malla was actively engaged in anti-British activities in his locality. His anti-British activities led his family frequently subjects to severe interrogation by the British Government. Sometimes, the authorities would break into the houses and fine them. **See for Photo-6**

For her to stoically bear a long separation from her husband and to face the mental and physical trauma of his imprisonment and disappearance for months on end was to undertake another form of sacrifice which showed strength of will, steadfastness of purpose and fortitude in a face of adversity. Hence, separation from their husbands, the social burden of women increased and their political responsibility gets reorganized by the necessity of them assuming the place of the absent men.

On 27 March 1944, when he was on a mission to collect information of the enemy camps, at Ukhrul in Manipur near Kohima he was captured by the soldiers of enemy side. In such a situation where there is an imprisonment of the family members within the domestic sphere the other members of the family also gets badly affected. He was given a death sentence by the Court Martial, the court of trial before which he was tried at Red Fort. Sharda Devi was brought before him as the last resort. He gave his wife his last words by saying, “Sharda, I am sacrificing my life for the freedom of my motherland. You need not be worried and distressed”. “Crores of Hindustanis will be with you after my death. The Sacrifice I am offering, shall not go in vain. India shall be free. I am confident, this is only a matter of time” (Gorkhas in India 8th June 2014).

However, one should note that there were thousands of middle class women who were offering a silent contribution in the nationalist movement from the domestic sphere have never been mentioned. How women have led their lives in the absence of her husband who were jailed or killed or dead. The social burden of women increased when separated from their husbands and their political responsibility got reorganized by the necessity of them assuming the place of the absent men. Thus, nationalist politics entered the home and it altered and affected women’s lives. When the men folk were active in the nationalist movement the women were left to manage the household finances and raise children. Most of the women were in purdah and had never step out of their house for earning or employment. Hence, it was the circumstances that forced few women to step out of the house into the public domain.

The famous Nepali freedom fighter Narbir Lama whose wife Jeetmaya Tamang was an ordinary housewife. Nabir Lama had three children Deuki Lama (Pradhan), Lila Lama (Gurung) and Pushpa Lama. Pushpa lama was the youngest one. One day her husband left home to join the movement leaving her and the children alone. Pushpa Lama was then only five years old. Her mother was left with no other option and had to look for avenues to earn a livelihood. As her mother was uneducated she opted to open a food stall on the roadside. It was not a restaurant but an open shop on a table under the sky where she used to sell tea, selroti (sweet bread like a doughnut) and momos (steamed dumpling filled with meat or vegetables). Their life was full of hardship because the income was not sufficient for survival. The condition was worst because Kalimpong was a hilly region and less developed and the standard of living was very low. People could hardly afford to buy anything and eatables were hardly purchased. Her mother had to request people to buy something from her shop so that she could earn something. Pushpa was the youngest among the siblings thus she used to follow her mother to the shop. She used to sit with her whole day in the shop. The income that they used to get was so less that they could not even afford to buy enough rice for the family. She then had to step outside the house as the responsibility of the family fell on her shoulder. In the beginning she was quite hesitant but she had no other choice then to sell tea and momos on the roadside of a market in Kalimpong. This way she tried to manage her family in the absence of her husband as she was helpless.

During the nationalist movement this respondent was a housewife but due to the difficult social circumstances women were allowed or rather compelled to step out in public. Thus, Narbir Lama's own children grew up without his love and security. His contribution in the nationalist movement resulted in his family suffering financially and his daughter Pushpa Lama who had committed herself to the movement by remaining unmarried and taking care of her mother.

Hence, both Pushpa Tamang and her mother sacrificed not only marriage but also motherhood, economic security and the social status associated with marriage. Pushpa Lama sacrificed a stable future in order to protect her mother in the absence of her father. Her domestic life was or became closely associated with the political movement.

During, course of the movement many women did not see their husbands for long periods of time. Amongst the most unfortunate of them became widows when

their husbands were hanged or died after contracting diseases in jail. Thus, the stability of women's domestic lives was wrecked due to this. Therefore, to keep up the nationalist spirit they did not complain instead accepted widowhood as a nationalist sacrifice. The women faced their widowhood alone as they were left with no other choice.

A book named "The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, Volume XXV", Gandhi too wrote generously about the valiant freedom fighter from Darjeeling. It tells the story of a nationalist, Dal Bahadur Giri. A great freedom fighter Dal Bahadur was an illustrious person. He was the single and supreme Congress worker in Darjeeling District. At the time of non cooperation movement the Gorkhas and the Hill men were strong supporters of the British regime, as such the British Government did not allow any person to preach spirit of independence amongst them. Therefore they placed Dal Bahadur in jail several times and classified him with thieves, dacoits, scoundrels only to teach him a lesson, and force Dal Bahadur to take their meals. Dal Bahadur did not eat fish, flesh or onions. Therefore, he just ate only dry rice or bread with salt and that too very smilingly.

After his death his wife Krishnamaya Chettri's all hopes of life were crushed. After the death of Giri his family faced a very miserable life. He left behind a helpless widow and children. Giri had five children namely, Matri, Durga, Mahavir, Satyadevi and Dharma kumar Giri. Krishnamaya as being the wife of such a great freedom fighter had to face many challenges. She lost her husband and tears had become her destiny. But she was a very strong support for her husband Dal Bahadur Giri. She was a very courageous woman and always encouraged her husband in his mission to work for the country, even if it meant sacrificing family life. In spite of all the hardships, she always had a smile on her face.

However, there is a specific purpose of making the people aware of the indirect involvement of family members in the nationalist movement as well as the effects of the movement on their individual lives.

Thus, the women's spirits were kept together with the thought that all nationalist activities were for the highest goal, the Indian independence. Women felt that their sacrifices were supreme and it was for a good cause. Therefore, fasting, facing domestic stability and losing their life companions without complaint were

unparalleled sacrifices made by women in the domestic sphere as a form of resistance to the oppressive British rule.

3.4.3. Indian Mothers and their Contribution to the Movement

The British have always criticized Indian motherhood. The controversial book 'Mother India' by Katherine Mayo (1927), highlighted the inertia, helplessness, lack of initiative and originality and sterility of enthusiasm, as some of the characteristic of Indian men and thus was one of the many who questioned the adequacy of Indian 'masculinity'. She identified that forced motherhood as one of the features of subordination of women in India and an indicators of India's unfitness for self-rule. Mayo commented:

Force motherhood upon her at the earliest possible moment. Rear her weakling son in intensive vicious practices that drain his small vitality day by day. Give him no outlet in sports, give him habits that make him, by the time he is thirty years of age, a decrepit and a querulous old wreck—and will you ask what has sapped the energy of his manhood? (ThaparBjorkert2006: 191).

Beside this, the Indian women were also held responsible for the moral and physical health of their children. Thus, the Indian nationalist leaders felt essential to project 'femininity' in ways which would enhance the 'masculine' or worldly virtues of Indian men but at the same time also maintain traditional patriarchal relations within the family. Thus, it wasn't a surprise that motherhood was given political significance by linking it with the wellbeing of the Indian nation. However, Sikata Banerjee (2003) argues that the role of women as a mother intersects with the nation building process in three ways. Firstly, women are expected to bear children, especially sons, who will become the citizen soldiers ready to defend the nation. Secondly, they have the responsibility of passing on culture, rituals and nationalist 'myths' to the next generation. Hence, motherhood implied that women not only loved and cared for her children, but also produced healthy progeny and educated them to be the future enlightened citizens of India. Thirdly, the motherhood concept assumes that women will play multiple roles and this can prove useful in shaping political rhetoric aimed at bringing women into the nationalist conflict.

The attempt of British to liberate Indian women and their willingness to introduce reforms in Indian society, particularly those relating to the status of women

was questioned by Indian men. Instead the leaders, reformers and writers gave political significance to the positive qualities of motherhood. 'Motherhood emerged as the domain which the colonized could claim as their own' (Bagchi1990: 65) (ThaparBjorkert2006: 193).

However, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee a Bengali writer in his novel *Anandamath* (1882) 'popularized the worship of the Mother, as well as female duties and power, thus laying the foundation for women's active participation in the nationalist movement in years to come' (Engels 1989: 430). This sanctified and deified image of the mother as Saraswati, Sita and Laksmi was now considered as an important vehicle for symbolizing a strong civilization inherited by the nation. For example Gandhi's wife Kasturba, was addressed by the people as 'Rashtramata' or 'mother of the nation' (Shukla 1938: 212). Therefore, Gandhi felt it was essential for women to possess the warmth of motherhood and sustain the spirit of *seva*, or service to everyone (Shukla 1938). The idea of *Rashtramata*, an activist relates and comments that children are the *rashtradhan* (wealth of the nation) and are nurtured by the *Rashtramata*. Thus, we should cherish them and devote our energies to them.

Hence, the family was seen as an integral part of national life and without mothers and their children the nation would lose its glory.

Thus, women were motivated to change their images from 'weak' to 'strong' individuals. They were also expected to devote themselves to their husbands and should protect their religion and society from dissent and desertion. The women by acquiring moral, physical and emotional strength would help themselves and their nation.

Beside this, when men were busy in nationalist activities or serving long jail sentences, the mothers were the only sole guardians of children. The children were made aware by their mother with the popular nationalist vocabulary and with the important goal of becoming enlightened future citizens of the nation. The mother also had the responsibility to create a congenial environment within the household and to inform and educate her children on the political events.

Kalawati Dewan Chettri, a Hindu middle class woman from Kurseong was married to a freedom fighter Harish Chettri. Mrs. Chettri had strong feelings about the importance and responsibilities of mothers both towards the nation and the domestic sphere i.e. husband and children. She also emphasized the importance of home and

children in women's lives. She was confined to domestic sphere and has expressed no displeasure about this. Her husband Harish Chettri was a nationalist and had devoted his life serving the nation. Thus, in the absence of her husband she as being a good housewife and a mother gave her a personal satisfaction. She saw it as apolitical support for her husband who was very active in public sphere. According to her, she never went to jail nor led any procession but rather she preferred to serve her husband as a housewife. She also said that in the absence of her husband to look after the families responsibility fell on her shoulders. As her daughter Malati was then not even one year old. Thus, to manage the house and the baby was her first duty. Hence, the political duties towards the nation could be fulfilled through the domestic sphere.

Therefore, the women as a mother influenced and exercised a great amount of power over their children, particularly their sons. The symbolism associated with mothers enhanced their significance for the nation and the struggle for independence. Thus, the women though not surprising that found it an appealing identity and the honor and respect associated with it enhanced their confident.

3.4.4. Women in India ----- Fountain of Strength and Support

The political activists who were in the nationalist movement needed someone to look after their family in their absence. Thus, there was a need to have someone at home to take care about the family members. The children and the elderly members were the chief responsibility within the family. There are circumstances which were different for each family. For instances, there is an example of such nuclear families where both the husband and wife are involved in the movement. Hence, the responsibility of children had to be shouldered by neighbors or relatives. There is a case of Freedom fighter Mayadevi Chettri who was also involved in the nationalist movement along with her husband Dil Bahadur. They became busy with public life and hardly had any time to deal with family affairs. The responsibility of her children was shouldered by her aunt Karki Sardani. At home her aunt had always control of the rein. The responsibility of nurturing of children fell on her shoulder. Thus, one should note that the participation in the nationalist movement does not have to be on the streets only; the help provided by Maya Devi's aunt was also in a way serving the nationalist cause by helping Maya Devi.

However, in the nationalist activities some women saw involvement more as a way of supporting men folk in jail, while facilitating their desire at the same time to

stay close to their husbands. The women's emotional loyalty towards their husbands and sons was an expression of commitment to the movement as well. There are often cases where the parental families are against their sons and daughters involvement in the nationalist movement. At some point of time the activists even were disown by their parental families. The same case resembles with the woman freedom fighter Putalimayadevi Poddar. Her father Madan Lama disowned his daughter for the nationalist involvement. Hence, the parental support was important. But it created a conflict within joint family household.

Contrarily, in case of the great freedom fighter Dal Bahadur Giri's wife Krishnamaya Giri allowed her eldest son Mahavir Giri who was then only 15 years old to join the movement. She was too happy to see her young son to participate in the historic journey of Dandi march along with Gandhi. They were successful in covering the journey of 240 miles and reached Dandi on 5th April 1930. On the very next day they broke salt law of the administration. Mahavir Giri along with Gandhiji was imprisoned for this act. Therefore, like his father he was seen active in the movement along with Gandhiji. Thus, the real source of strength and support behind this was his mother.

The women faced the hardship and isolation as the movement demanded so. But there was a fear that the deteriorating domestic conditions could put a moral strain on men and might force them seeking pardon from the British Government. Thus, the women showed their strong will power and through it they were emotionally committed to their families and in the way supported the nationalist cause.

There were many women who faced huge crisis in domestic sphere when their husband was jailed. Beside this, there were many instances where if one family member was in prison, the police would come looking for other family members. Not only this, the police would also break into their houses, sell off their animals, burn their crops and even fine them. Thus, in such circumstances the neighbors were ready to offer support.

Therefore, the neighbors help was often spontaneous and unconditional. Sometimes, the neighborhood organized them to give nationalist support. Thus, their support came at a moment of crisis and created an environment of support and concern.

The British Administration as known to everyone was very strict, ruthless, heartless race and their punishment were very harsh. Any unusual act by the Indian was considered the disrespect on their part. Whole of India was facing such torture and injustice during the period. Hence, Bengal was not left alone. In Bengal the revolutionaries often hid in villages to escape imprisonment. They were helped by the villagers and provided with food. The people in the village used to make tea in large cauldrons and call the revolutionaries by the name *athiti* (guests).

In the nutshell, many women never crossed the boundary of domestic sphere to political but were able to identify with the nationalist movement by supporting their husband's activities, managing the household and the children during the economic crisis, providing moral support to the other women activists and looking after their children. Hence, these women faced many mental trauma of long separation from husbands and facing hardships created by political exigencies was considered their own term of nationalist contribution. Thus, within the domestic sphere the transformations often reflected the intimate connections between the home and the nation, the public and the private. The roles of women within the domestic sphere were shaped by nationalist politics in the public sphere.

3.4.5. The Domestic Sphere and Hidden Roles

However, the women in the domestic sphere specifically decided to support the revolutionary organization through subversive acts. In the context of Bengal the revolutionary women's activities within the domestic sphere, Forbes rightfully observed that, 'where public and private roles were sharply divided by both ideology and physical arrangements, women's political acts were hidden from the British authorities' (Forbes 1998: 123). During the protest movement in Bengal against its partition movement in 1905, the women did not do the same as men instead the use their traditional roles to mask a range of political activities. The public and private continued to exist as distinct categories; usual definitions of appropriate behavior in each sphere were re-defined and given political meaning (Forbes 1998).

For the secret activities domestic sphere was a useful location since the police were less suspicious of the activities of women and were cautious of encroaching on the privacy of domestic sphere, since it was especially seen as the women's space. In an environment of politically sensitive any encounter between police and women was widely publicized by the media and could lead to further disturbances. Primarily the

women were involved in holding secret political meetings, shifting people and proscribed literature from place to place and even passing on information to hiding men activists.

Putalimayadevi Poddar a Hindu middle class woman from Kurseong was involved in the nationalist movement. She remained as a passive participant in the movement during the initial period. It was done so, with the idea of using her when time was ripe for her to help without getting noticed by the police. So Saryu Prasad Poddar asked Puttalimaya to stay invisible and not to be an active member which could help the movement in time of great need. To become a member of the Congress was too risky due to the strict administration of the British rule. The members were under constant surveillance and at any time they would get arrested due to their activities against the administration. Thus Saryu Prasad Poddar decided that youth members would be asked to perform social work rather than political and bring the local people closer to the Congress party. Beside, Puttalimaya's parents were against her involvement in the nationalist movement. Initially she avoided confronting her father and tried to work her way around the familial constraints. Therefore, she realized that all nationalist activities had to be undertaken clandestinely while maintaining a united domestic façade. For example, her mother was very sick and there were three younger sisters at home. Puttalimaya was the eldest among the three siblings and everyday she used to clean, make breakfast for the family and do all the everyday household chores. She used to feed her younger sisters and make them ready for school. Beside this she used to look after her father, prepare his meals and send him to the office. She used to look after her sick mother giving her medicine and prepare lunch for the family.

However, the eldest earning male member of the family in Indian households is supposed to be revered especially by the women. His wife, sisters or daughters well looked after his domestic needs such as for food and clothes. For example, for the next day his cloths will be washed and his food prepared on time. If a husband denies the women the privilege of looking after him by refusing food is taken as a serious protest. Therefore, her consciousness of the political situation and her desire to support the nationalist cause led her to overcome these domestic constraints. When Putalimaya Poddar's father was away at work she started to organize secret meeting with people in hiding. The constraints at home did not stop her from moving outside, though she was aware that it was very dangerous if the administration gets hold of her. She was a very

smart lady and was able to hand over secret information or letters to the active freedom fighters in Public. Apart from her there were many women who carried on this clandestine activities so that every thing in the house appear to be normal and it was possible only because the understanding between the female members in the house.

Women in their role as messengers were less suspect than men and kept informed about the political development to those activists who were hiding.

The household were often used as hideous by political suspects or political prisoners who were on the run. Usually in such cases both male and female members were politically involved. Since, women were less prone to suspicion the responsibility for moving people in hiding from one domestic place to another fell on their shoulders. For such clandestine activities the women effectively used their domestic roles as wives, mothers and sisters.

There are many incidents where women had played a commendable role in transporting, shifting and hiding 'wanted' revolutionary from one town to the other. The women had put their lives at risk through their clandestine activities.

The women also hid the contraband literature and distribute copies to other families in a locality. Sometimes there was an emergency to move the literature from one hiding place to another. Certain men folk at times from families in the neighborhood objected to these kind of activities. These men would warn their wives about getting caught someday and hence asked their wives to return the material.

Women were also involved in hiding ammunition, pistols and other kinds of arms for revolutionaries. Generally the hiding place was either the fields or near the house well and brought them out when the husband or friends required it. It was through these clandestine activities, the domestic spheres emerged as a site of both resistance and subordination.

Beside this, there were other forms of clandestine activities and it was not confined to domestic sphere. In the Quit India movement of 1942, the most important Congress Party leaders were arrested. In such situation there were many men and women who worked underground to publish Congress bulletins, published by the 'shadow' AICC who were 'cautious and conservative' (Agnew 1979: 73).

3.4.6. Conclusion

The hill women of Darjeeling were not behind. Although historians hadn't been kind to them, but the narratives mentioned below indicate the nature of involvement of the hill women in the nationalist movement of India. Although these hidden faces and forgotten voices are far too many, but as often happens, many of them are lost in the throes of history and only a small tip of the iceberg, we have been able to unearth.

HILL HEROINES: SUPREME SACRIFICES OF MOTHERS, SISTERS AND DAUGHTERS

Men and women share the nation, the pain of loss in a movement but a woman in her oppressive world remains ensconced as the freedom of the nation is more important. If then there is a scope, the nation might take notice of her cries for the freedom. However, the movement whether it is a national or regional one it involves a group of people where both men and women participate directly or indirectly with the same feelings of loyalty and hardship. The women in Darjeeling were no exception to this as they too, participated along with their men with the same zeal and passion. Following are a few accounts of those forgotten hill heroines, whose narratives we could collect. (Although a good number of them could not be collected as no information exists).

3. (i) Pushpa Lama (Tamang)

Pushpa Lama was a daughter of great freedom fighter Nabir Lama. Nabir Lama was born on 5th April 1930 in Gopal Dhara tea estate in Mirik. She stays in Hatbazaar, East Mile, Kalimpong. On 8th February 2014, we headed for Kalimpong to take her interview. She was quite reluctant to give even 10 minutes to us. The fact was she was in a very debilitating condition, poverty; unemployment and hardship in her life made her so. She finally agreed for the interview, she was dressed in traditional Nepali attire called Guniu Cholo which was old and faded. From her appearance one could understand that she was dissatisfied and struggling for her livelihood. The house that she lived in was a small wooden house and the condition of the house was in a pathetic state, if we compare people below poverty level, lived in better condition than this. She had two broken chairs and a long bench to sit on. When we reached there she was busy in her usual household chores. She showed least interest in talking to us, may be because of the circumstances that persisted. It was quite disheartening and sad

experience for us. As the interview proceeded she was not very open and less expressive may be because of the fact that though being a daughter of a freedom fighter nor did she received any recognition nor did she get any aid from the government. With every negative vibes she was rendering we gathered our positivity and started with our interview. Pushpa Lama begins her interview by saying that my emphasis on the home front as a site of political activity has its own history. She said I grew up in a household in which my mother Jeetmaya Tamang saw herself as having made significant contributions to the nationalist movement. It is because my mother was confined to the domestic spheres and her activities have never been acknowledged within the dominant public discourse. My mother was not able to come out in public or leave the house as there was no one to take care of us. **See for Photo-7, 8&9.**

She said my father used to read the local newspaper Gorkhay Khabar Kagata news cum religious magazine and he also had access to secret information about the activities of anti- British leaders. He always kept himself informed of local news and the latest developments in the nationalist movement. The question we put forward was “At which age did her father entered the freedom movement and what difficulties did her and her mother had to face due to that”. In a very rude and fuming tone she replied that her father was so busy in the freedom movement that he hardly cared for them or their life or livelihood. Both she and her mother had to earn their own livelihood and manage on their own. Everyday he used to attend party meeting and group discussion about the political situation and issues that were of major concern. She also mentioned the name of another freedom fighter Gaga Tshering who used to frequently visit her father for some secret meeting and plan. Her father was so involved in the movement that for many days they had to live without food as there were no sources of income. Ultimately one day her father left home when she was five years old. Her mother was left with no other option and had to look for avenues to earn a livelihood. As her mother was uneducated she opted to open a roadside food stall. It was not a restaurant but an open shop on a table under the sky where she sold tea, selroti and momos. Their life was full of hardship because the income was insufficient for survival. The condition was worst because Kalimpong was a hilly region and underdeveloped and the standard of living was too low. People could hardly afford to buy anything and eatables were purchased hardly. Her mother had to request people to buy something from her shop so that she could earn for living. Pushpa was the youngest among the siblings and she used to follow her mother to the shop. She used to be with her whole day in the shop.

The income that they earned was so less that they could not even afford to buy enough rice for the family. The condition was so worst that when there were visitors at home they did not even have firewood to give them a cup of tea thus they usually burnt papers to prepare tea. The tea was without sugar but rather salt was added because they could not afford to buy sugar. Nabir Lama had three children Deuki Lama (Pradhan), Lila Lama (Gurung) and Pushpa Lama. Pushpa Lama was the youngest one. It is impossible though to express the hardship of their life in words, one can only understand the ground reality if you could see it for yourself through your eyes. Pushpa Lama is a spinster because she could not marry due to her mother. There were no one to look after her mother so she had to take the responsibility to look after her mother sacrificing her own life and dreams. Her father died in 1959 after independence and her mother in 1990. She is still living a life of complete isolation and negligence and still dissatisfied with the ignorance that she is facing from the government. With all the turmoil she had faced in her life due to the freedom struggle she got back nothing but despair and never ending adversity. Her accusation of lack of recognition and financial aids from the government is valid because we too believe that as we recognize other freedom fighters and respect them every freedom fighter should be equally respected and recognized. There are records of Nabir Lama being one of the most active freedom fighter from the Kalimpong Subdivision but to no avail because the government did not even award him Tamra Patra (recognition awarded by the Indian government to the freedom fighters). It's been 66 years of independence but there is no such improvement and development of society including my own life. My father too was one of the active freedom fighter of India's independence. But one could see the injustice paid to my family as there is no name of my father in the list of freedom fighter incorporated in the motor stand Smarak. There is no hope from the government and even there is no pension provided to me. Thus, I am compelled to sell momo till date to maintain my livelihood. The Boycott movement initiated by Gandhiji all over India had a deep impact on Kalimpong too. There were many freedom fighters from Kalimpong and their names are incorporated and given due respect by building up statues in the region. They are also provided with pension facilities. **See for Photo-1**

Pushpa Lama narrated the incident of her father Narbir Lama in Kalimpong who was the one to initiate the boycott movement and was the first one to boycott the British coin in the region. Thus, he started making his own Indian money and circulated among the people of the region. This is one of the incidents which Kalimpong have not

forgotten till date. In 1942 the quit India Movement launched by Gandhiji spread like a wildfire all over India. The same fire was visible in Darjeeling and its surrounding areas. The most important freedom fighter from the region were Jangbir Sapkota, Shivmangal Singh, Nabir Lama, Gaga Tshering, Ramdev Sharma, Saryu Prasad Poddar and his wife Puttalimaya Devi and Harish Chhetri.

He breathed his last breath on 13th August 1959 in Hatghar Kalimpong. He died because of jaundice. Since her father was involved in the movement all his life, the family had to suffer on both political and economic ground. Besides, selling food items, Lama's family also had to do goat farming. In this way by saving little amount they were able to build a small wooden house in Hatghar or Hatbazaar itself. But quality life or standard of living could not be raised ever since. Till date Lama's daughter continued the family business of selling momos and tea at home as there is no source of income. She said though it's been so long the Indian government's independence and people celebrate 15th of August every year but it is sad that my father who played such significant role in India's independence did not get any recognition or even Tamra Patra from the government.

3. (ii) MALATI CHHETRI

Malati Chettri the daughter of the great freedom fighter Harish Chettri who lives in Medical More (Siliguri) was our next respondent. She was the only child of Harish Chhetri. In the early 1940's Malati Chettri was born into a small tight knit family living in a small area of Kurseong. Malati Chettri is now in her seventies and has led a much stressed life, raising her children and shaping her chosen profession. Her parents met at a social gathering in town and married shortly thereafter. Her mother was a housewife as was the norm in those days and her father was a freedom fighter. Her mother was very close with her parents.

Immediately without wasting any time we started our interview and asked her about Harish Chhetri's contribution in the freedom movement. She was quiet for a moment and after few seconds she said my father left us when I was not even one year old. He joined the movement and sacrificed us in the name of the nation. As my mother Kalawati Dewan Chettri was very young she did not know what to do in the absence of her husband. She was terrified and had no job even to maintain her livelihood. During that period it was very difficult to live without husband and having a small child along. In those days the society was too conservative and backward. It was not even safe for

women to stay back home alone. Beside this, the responsibility of rearing a child also fell in my mother's shoulder alone. I got an admission in St. Joseph school in 1945, Kurseong. Sabitri Devi used to visit us once a while and I was her favorite daughter. I used to spend much time with her during my childhood. My mother being alone with none to fall back on tried all possible ways to take care of me. Ultimately, she had no other choices than to go to her mother's place after the death of her husband Harish Chhetri. Malati recalls back that when she was 5 years old her father Harish Chhetri used to come to meet them sometimes. But he usually came at night so that nobody could see him come and be caught. As he was an active freedom fighter the administration was against him. He got arrested many times along with Saryu Prasad Poddar and others. Malati says one day we were about to have our dinner and suddenly my father turned out. He came to meet us but just when he entered the house there were noises of police vehicles coming to arrest him. He jumped from the window and through the roof ran away. During his death I was 5-6 years old. This much I could recall about my father and nothing else.

Harish Chhetri was an active member of the movement and had played commendable role in many incidents occurred during the freedom movement along with Saryu Prasad Poddar and Puttalimayadevi. The contribution of such great man could be found in the writings of Saryu Prasad Poddar in the later chapter. **See for Photo-11.**

3. (iii) KRISHNAMAYA CHHETTRI

While Dal Bahadur Giri died in the prime of his life in the thick of Indian's struggle for emancipation as a patriot of the highest order. After the death of Giri his family faced a very miserable life. He left behind a helpless widow and children. Giri had five children namely, Matri, Durga, Mahavir, Satyadevi and Dharma Kumar Giri. Krishnamaya Giri as being the wife of such a great freedom fighter had to face many challenges. As Dharma Kumar Giri being the youngest sibling of the Giri family recalls the memories of his father and mother in the beautifully articulated handwriting. He mentioned that the memories and recollection of his father and mother are faint. It was only through family conversations that he learned about his father. Dharma Kumar Giri asserts that though my father spent several years working for the Independent Movement along with Gandhiji, my father had very little time for the family. Thus, a huge responsibility for rearing us fell on my mother's shoulder. To manage the family

in the absence of a husband was not an easy task. The administration treated us along with our father as a traitor. Krishnamaya had to face many problems as her husband usually spent many evenings meeting with Congress leaders, meeting with Darjeeling Labor Party members and other friends and associates. Beside this Giri also spent several months in prison. This led his health deteriorated. Just before his death, he expressed his wife Krishnamaya Devi his ultimate wishes. Giri wished that he did not want any elaborate ceremonies and feeding of the Brahmins after his death. Instead of this, Giri wished to distribute food to the poor, hungry and homeless people. He also wished for the family to shift to Ahmedabad and live in Sabarmati Ashram after his death and asked his close friend Khadak Bahadur Bista too helped his family in moving so. Thus, Giri wrote a letter to Gandhiji about his desire for the family to stay in Ahmedabad. After his death the whole family shifted to Ahmedabad and stayed in Sabarmati Ashram. But it was a great challenge for Krishnamaya to fulfill this desire of her husband as she had never stepped outside from Darjeeling areas. In top of that she had five little children along with her. Being a widow in those days was a curse and society didn't accept easily the survival of a single mother. However, one should note that even after Giri's death his family was not left alone. A donation of Rs 100 was collected from several local people of Calcutta for Giri's family to help them reach Ahmedabad (From Gujarat Navajivan, 30-11-1924).

On 4th June 1925 Gandhi came to Darjeeling to see the ailing Desbandhu Chitteranjan Das and stayed there for four days. Gandhi heard of the pathetic condition of Giri's family members and brought all of them to Sabarmati Ashram.

Krishnamaya was a very strong and courageous woman. While fulfilling her husband's last wish was a great challenge for her. She came to Ahmedabad with her children and gave up all ties of an old place. She left behind all relatives and other ties. Moving to a new place was not an easy task. Initially to move to Ahmedabad was very traumatic experience for Krishnamaya. There were language barriers, cultural differences, differences in food and eating habits and most of all no relatives and friends. Hence, Gandhiji paid a very close attention and took special care of Giri family. Since, there were rules and regulation in Ashram, there was a prohibition of eating onions, garlic, chilies, tea, coffee etc.

But, Gandhiji informed all the residents that the Giri family should be permitted to eat freely. The family had given up a lot and came to a new place leaving behind all

relatives, friends and other ties. Thus, they deserved special consideration. Side by side Krishnamaya and her children too gradually became comfortable in a new lifestyle. This was made possible with the help of Gandhiji who took good care of the family. He personally visited the place of Krishnamaya and provided with timely medicine in case of sickness of the family. Gandhiji treated the Giri family as a part of his own family. Thus, it helped the Giri family to adopt itself in no time.

Krishnamaya was also very hardworking woman. She got along very well with every one in the Ashram. On the other hand, Krishnamaya and her children also got an opportunity to meet great people while staying in the Ashram who usually came to visit Gandhiji. Such as Motilal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Jai Prakash Narayan, Vallabhabhai Patel, Vithalbai Patel, Rabindranath Tagore, Lalbahadur Shastri and Mahadev Desai. Hence, she felt that moving to Ahmadabad was not a wrong decision. But rather they were pleased with the decision.

However, in 1930 when the Salt Satyagraha was launched by Gandhiji, Krishnamaya Giri's eldest son Mahavir Giri too participated in the movement. Mahavir Giri was then only 15 years old and his mother instead of going against his wish was too happy to see the young boy to participate in the historic journey of the movement. The real source of inspiration behind this was his mother. Thus, like his father he was seen active in Dandi march along with Gandhiji. They started a journey of 240 miles and crossed several villages. The journey took place for 25 days and on 5th April 1930 the journey reached its destination Dandi. On the very next day the satyagrahis broke the Salt law of the British Administration and the event was marked as a historic one. As a result Gandhiji along with few others were imprisoned. Mahavir Giri was arrested too.

It was in Sabarmati Ashram where Giri's wife Krishnamaya passed away in 1946. At present the whole Giri family resides in USA.

3. (iv) DAL BAHADUR GIRI

However, the early twenties of this century, the British in India were lasting the Absolute Powers of their empire, an empire where the sun never set. The few Hill stations like Shimla, Darjeeling and a couple of other were their resorts for relaxation and holidaying. The environment was such that there was no question of raising any voice against such Supreme Authority. But one could note that there was a young man,

Dal Bahadur Giri who dared challenge the arbitrary authority of the British in Darjeeling.

Dalbahadur Giri was born on 8th March 1887 in Chowk Bazaar in the heart of Darjeeling town. He was the second son of Sub-Inspector of Police, Shivlal Giri. He had two brothers; the eldest was Agam Singh Giri and youngest Man Bahadur Giri. In 1905 he passed his entrance examination from the local Government High School. He became a teacher for some time in the same school. It was the period when India was in total political, economic and social turmoil. He was very intelligent and hard working man. He was even offered the post of Deputy Magistrate but due to his ill health he could not get through the medical examination. In 1910 he was married to Krishnamaya Chettri.

It was on 16th October 1906 Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of India divided Bengal into two parts. The motive behind was to put a control on the growing ascendancy of the Bengalese in Indian politics. The partition news of Bengal was published in government Gazette on this day. In Darjeeling the prominent leaders of all communities called a protest meeting against the partition on the same day at Hindu Public hall Darjeeling. The two important figures i.e. Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das and Sister Nivedita were then at Darjeeling attended the meeting. The speaker was Sister Nivedita who spoke first and then C. R. Das. The young Dalbahadur got the privilege to attend this meeting. The lecturer of such prominent figures like Nivedita and Deshbandhu stirred his mind and he was greatly inspired by national feelings and spirit. But he was only 18 years old and felt that he should wait for sometime more to get himself fully prepared for the purpose.

In 1913 he was appointed as the head clerk of Rajah of Sikkim. It was in Sikkim where he experienced the bitterness of life and he came in direct contact with the corrupt people. As Giri was a very straight forward, honest, clear headed and hardworking man. He was also enticed by the accountant colleague to misuse the money of Sikkim Durbar. But he never appreciated this idea and had to face eventually the wrath of that colleague. The Kazis of Sikkim in those days were all powerful. They usually had an oppressive way of dealing with the farmers and the common people. It was also tyrannical and loathsome. Thus, Dalbahadur Giri stood for the welfare of farmers and the downtrodden and supported their cause. This gradually led him to become popular among the masses. Since, he was campaigning their cause, one day, a

Kazi offered him a bag of Rs1000 as a gift but he refused to accept. As he was clear that it was a bribe in disguise. But nothing could stop him and he stood firm on his ground and fought for the wages, medical treatment and time work of the farmers. On the other hand, this was too much for the Kazi community and they together put their heads to hatch up a conspiracy against Giri. Ultimately, Giri was put on false charges. As a result in 1916 he was asked to leave Sikkim. Though he was deported from Sikkim he continued his fight to prove his innocence. Later, he was discharged of all charges and was asked by the Rajah to be reinstated but he refused to return to Sikkim again.

Therefore, the insulting attitude of the Sikkim Durbar and few British left a deep impression in Giri's mind. In Sikkim he had a bitter experience about treatment of some English officers towards the natives and this led him have the feeling of hatred against the British authority. So, by this time he already made up his mind to fight against the oppression and this was an opening for him.

Till then Giri had heard the name of Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress. In 1918 he attended the Congress Conference in Delhi where he met Mahatma Gandhi. It was the last day of the annual session of Indian National Congress Committee. The conference was presided over by Pandit Madan Mahan Malviya. In this conference he met people from different walks of life and listened to the political leaders. He was greatly enlightened on the freedom movement. However, on the last day of the conference, Mahatma Gandhi took Giri in a secret place and talked to him. Thus by this close contact with Gandhi Giri was visibly inspired and came back to Darjeeling determined and dedicated to be a fire-brand revolutionary.

The beginning of his work was in rural areas of Darjeeling to publicize the Congress ideals fearlessly and dauntlessly. Thus, Giri tried to explode the myth that British rule was a blessing for India.

In 1919, Giri attended the Congress Conference at Amritsar which was presided over by Pandit Motilal Nehru. Giri with the rare and unique quality of courage and determination of freedom fighter had earned his name and fame by this time.

On the other hand the political situation of India had undergone a great change. The incident of Jalianwala Bagh Massacre had awakened the whole country. Thus, India had stepped headlong into the freedom movement under the leadership of

Mahatma Gandhi. One of the greatest leaders of anti-partition movement in Bengal during the first decade of the twentieth century, Pandit Shyam Sundar Chakraborty was arrested under the Defense of India Act and kept interned in Kalimpong for the period of four years. It was at Kalimpong where Dalbahadur Giri came in close contact with him. However, the influence of Pandit Shyam Sundar infuriated the spirit of independence which was burning in his mind. The inspiration of Shyam Sundar endeavored Shri Giri to attend the All India Congress Committee Session.

In 1920, he attended the All India Congress Session held at Nagpur under the presidentship of Bijoy Raghav Acharya. He demonstrated here Charkha and Takhi culture by the Nepali volunteers. Hence, Gandhiji was greatly impressed at this venture and held some private discussion with Shri Giri.

In 1921 after returning from Nagpur Giri organized Darjeeling District Committee at Kalimpong. Thus in Darjeeling District this was the first Congress Organization. After the formation of the District Congress Committee along with Dalbahadur Giri, the whole Giri family joined heartedly in non-cooperation movement. However, the government reports reveals that the non-cooperation movement of 1921-22 was the first occasion in which hill men showed an interest in politics.

Beside this, Giri also started to work in the rural areas of Darjeeling to publicize Congress ideals fearlessly and dauntlessly. The non cooperation movement arouses excitement amongst tea garden laborers and there was some boycott of foreign goods (Dash: p 236-37). Under the leadership of Giri the tea garden laborers held demonstration in front of the office of the Deputy Commissioner in Darjeeling with the slogan “Bandemataram”, “Gandhijiki jay”. The movement was wide spread. Dr. Malay Sankar Bhattacharya in the article “Agrarian unrest in North Bengal” published in the Historical Review, July-December, 1986 stated that “the political environment of the district was tense...The authorities were appreciably perturbed over the affair and there were apprehension of its repetition”.(Lama:1998:13)

In 1921, at Rink Hall, Darjeeling a public meeting was organized by the then Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling Mr. S. W. Goode with the elites of the town to mobilize public opinion against the non cooperation movement. However, the admission into the meeting was strictly regulated by invitation cards. But Giri was not invited. Since, he wanted to get into the meeting hall he managed to enter the hall with the card issued to Pratiman Singh Lama, a friend and freedom fighter of Kurseong.

While discarding the ordinary norms of the meeting Mr. Goode to the surprise of all took the chair himself. All the audiences were dumb founded. But Giri while protesting jumped on his chair and shouted against the discourteous and unseemly behavior of the Deputy Commissioner. The British followers tried to silence him and drive him out of the meeting. But a local Tea Garden Sardar cautioned all the audience not to touch Giri. Mr. Goode by this time had left the meeting place through the back door in the huff. Jangbir Sapkota, another freedom fighter was also present who along with the other well wishers of Giri openly appreciated the self respect and courage shown by Giri. Thus, Giri repeated the slogan of a French Revolutionary once again-“it needs a loud voice for a deaf to hear”.

However, any attempt during these days by anybody to challenge or move against the lawfully established British Raj amounted to treason or sedition.

The Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling ordered to extern Giri out of Darjeeling. But Giri did not care and as a result he was whisked away to Darjeeling Prison on 27th January, 1921. Giri was taken to Central Jail in Calcutta after some days. Hence, one should note that on the day of his shifting to Central Jail, the people of Darjeeling had flocked on both side of the road from Jail to the Railway Station in large number to offer their respects and floral garlands. But he was released after some time. In the same year Giri organized a Public meeting at Darjeeling in order to enlighten the local people on the non cooperation movement of Gandhiji. Thus, meeting was held under the presidentship of Giri's own brother Agam Singh Giri. In the meeting Giri attacked vehemently the British rule and asked the people to shake off the shackles of Britisher political domination. India then was in the grip of an unmitigated anger and hatred against this foreign rule. This resulted in Giri's arrest on sedition charges and was sent to Hooghly Jail. He was transferred from Hooghly to Berhempore Jail where Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was also imprisoned. Here they developed a close friendship. During a period of such political unrest, Jails were virtually tortured places then. The jails were meant for the miserable condition of political prisoners to shatter and shake their health and morale.

Thus, by this time, the frail health of Giri had considerably broken down and he was released from jail. Netaji used to send him financial help for medical treatment in Kalimpong even after his release.

A close friend of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Narendra Narayan Chakraborty writes about Dal Bahadur Giri in his article “Nazruler Sange Karagare”, published in *Desh*, 3rd para, 1376 BS as follows:-

“One day myself and Satin Babu was walking within the Jail compound in full dress we saw Sri Giri within 3rd class prison barrack covered with iron rods. We were stunned to see him at such a place and forgot to speak. But Sri Giri extended his hands through iron rods and caught our arms with warm gesture. We were ashamed and after returning to our barrack narrated the whole story to other co-prisoners. But Satin Sen did not sit idle. He protested against the ill treatment and informed the jail authorities that unless Sri Giri is placed in special class within 7 days he will give up all facilities of special class prison and take of “Kurta” and “Jangiya” of 3rd class, as well as food of that class. Naren Chakraborty, also, followed Sri Satin and continued as such for one month and four days. In order to save the situation Dal Bahadur Giri was transferred to Hoogly Jail and Satin Sen, Naren Chakraborty to Berhampur Jail”.(Lama:1998:14)(English Section).

Thus, such torture in jail led Giri to fall ill and it slowly started increasing. In 1923, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in order to arrange for Giri’s medical treatment published an appeal in “Sarathi” journal for raising a fund for Giri. Hence, under the order of Desh Bandhu Chittaranjan, Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal remitted Rs 1000/- from Swarajya Party Fund to Sri Giri. But this all was of no avail and Giri who was then known as “Pahari Gandhi” left this world at the age of 36 years with full glory and honor. Giri was an uncrowned King of Darjeeling people.

After his death Mahatma Gandhi too wrote generously about this valiant freedom fighter from Darjeeling in his book “The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, Volume XXV”. It is also reliable known that Gandhi was actively considering the name of late Dal Bahadur Giri for the post of President of Indian National Congress had not death overtaken him in 1924.

“Perhaps the greatest thing I have learnt is never to think for myself”. Thus, despite of this significant utterance from the lips of one who was destined to become the greatest exponent of Indian freedom struggle amongst the Indian Nepalese the life story of Dal Bahadur Giri is worth recounting just to become fully aware of our glorious freedom struggle and the part played by Giri in it which was never really sought to be estimated correctly by us.

It may be noted that Giri also joined the Khilafat Movement and began to collect money for Angora Funds of Ali Brothers. The great revolutionary poet of Bengal Kazi Nazrul Islam wrote in his famous journal “Dhum Ketu” dated 7th November 1922 that Dal Bahadur was arrested by the British Police on a charge of “Fraudulent” collection (Sangbadik Nazrul Prantosh Chatterjee, p: 95). The police along with Giri also arrested several other Nepali Congress workers of Darjeeling against which the people of Darjeeling observed one day hartal (strike) (Himachal Barta of 22-12-85). At first after the arrest Giri was put in Darjeeling jail and then transferred to the Alipore Central Jail, Calcutta as a special class prisoner.

However, after the release from jail Giri returned to Darjeeling and began to work under Congress banner in the tea garden areas and amongst the poor Nepalese of Darjeeling

Therefore, one should note that there were good numbers of freedom fighters from Darjeeling. Some of them were his colleagues and their family members who are still surviving in the District. Thus, they may have to be compensated for the sacrifice they made in their youth and for others, since it is already too late for tears.

3. (v) SHARDA DEVI

Durga Malla actively participated in anti-British activities in his locality. He participated sometimes in processions with freedom fighters. In 1931, Durga Malla was only eighteen years old when he joined the 2/1 battalion of Gorkha Rifles. In his battalion comparatively he was a more educated recruit. After completing “recruitment training”, he was sent to Pune for “signal training”. In course of time, he attained excellence in several other military trainings. His dedication on services and efficiency got him quick promotions and after a few years he was promoted to the important post of Signal Hawaldar.

After serving the army for about ten years, in 1941, Durga Malla married Sharda Devi, a girl of Thakuri family of Kangra district, Himachal Pradesh. But fate had something else in store for him as it was the time of the Second World War. In Burma, Malaya and Singapore Japanese aggression had become more violent. For the war- field the 2/1 battalion of Gorkha Rifles was also ordered to advance. Durga Malla got an emergent call from his unit three days after his marriage. The Army called him back for war.

Being a true patriot, Durga Malla did not get upset while leaving his newly married bride alone back at home. With utmost courage he marched for war. When his battalion reached Secunderabad, for 28 days he was sanctioned leave and given an opportunity to reach home and meet his family members before departing for Malaya.

On 27 March 1944, when Durga Malla was on a mission to collect information of the enemy camps, he was captured by the soldiers of enemy side. Durga Malla after his arrest was kept in the prison at Red Fort, New Delhi as a prisoner of war. By military court under section 41 of the Indian Army Law and section 121 of the Indian Penal Code he was prosecuted. A death sentence was given to him by the Court Martial, the court of trial before which he was tried at Red Fort. It was the time when the imperialist British rulers were trying to suppress the Indian freedom struggle by all means. Therefore, before the death sentence was finally executed, the British authorities tried to coax Major Durga Malla into wrong confessing and if he could do so then they promised him grant of remission. Veer Durga Malla whose only objective was to get the country free it was against his wishes. Major Malla preferred to embrace the gallows rather than accepting the British ruler proposals. When all persuasions failed, at the prison cell Durga Malla's wife Smt. Sharda Devi was brought before him as the last resort. British authorities were of the opinion that she would persuade her husband to apologize to the authorities. But on the contrary, he gave his wife his last words by saying, "Sharda, I am sacrificing my life for the freedom of my motherland. You need not be worried and distressed". "Crores of Hindustanis will be with you after my death. The Sacrifice I am offering, shall not go in vain. India shall be free. I am confident, this is only a matter of time" (Gorkhas in India 8th June 2014).

On 15th August 1944, Veer Durga, was taken to Delhi Central Jail from the Red Fort. He was given a death sentence by the Court Martial, the court of trial before which he was tried at Red Fort. On 25th August 1944, after ten days he was sent to the gallows. Thus ended the journey of one more noble son of mother India at the altar of Freedom who laid down his precious life.

3. (vi) CHANDRA DEVI PRADHAN

The participation of women in the Freedom Movement in Kurseong was severely restricted by gender considerations. The socio-cultural norms continuously restricted the movements and behavior of those women. The women in those days were exposed to greater insecurity, illiteracy, casteism, orthodoxy, unhealthy living

conditions, traditionalism and male dominance in all fields. The public-private negotiation was even more difficult for women. The transitions from home to public sphere were next to impossible.

But after 1910, women experienced in organizing and working in local women's organization and opening schools in the region. They realized that education was the only means to enlighten people and to understand the real evil nature of the British Government.

Therefore, we have come across the names of few great women who had participated in the nationalist movement not directly but indirectly in their own little ways namely Chandra Devi Pradhan, Sachidevi Pradhan and Chanda Pradhan. **See for Photo-12**

Chandra Devi Pradhan was born in 1916 in Dehradun. Her father Ratannarayan Pradhan was Sub-Inspector of Police from 1915 to 1920 in Kurseong. Her mother Vishnumaya Pradhan was a housewife. Chandra Devi Pradhan came to Kurseong in 1932 from Dehradun and married Karnabahadur Pradhan in 1944. She had three children namely Rama Pradhan, Rajan Pradhan and Dhiren Pradhan. She was an educated lady and had done matriculation during the period.

She was a freedom fighter and a social worker too. But she did not have any political background. She joined the Congress Party led by Saryu Prasad Poddar, Putalimayadevi Poddar and Sabitridevi in Kurseong in 1935. She had to face many challenges to join the movement as the period was marked by very conservative and orthodox system. As the society was a patriarchal and it was unsuitable for girls or women to cross their household activities and enter politics. Beside this the colonial regime too declared that any one attending Congress meeting or procession would be found guilty. Thus, she had to face both Patriarchal and Colonial challenges. **See for Photo-13**

Chandra Devi Pradhan domestic life was too challenging. After marriage her life was segregated even within her home and had to maintain Purdah. She had no social contact with any of the male in family except her husband. She had to keep her head covered. It was an environment in which purdah was rigorously enforced. She could not dare to listen to any political discussion of the men but could discuss among them. Thus, she was secluded and confined to a room after marriage. Hence, one can understand how much challenges she faced as she was already involved in the

movement. Since her husband was against her involvement in the movement, she clandestinely continued her participation in the movement. She was a lady of great courage and carried her both political and social activities sharing the burden of social norms that inhibited her autonomy. Despite of all this social practices she participated the Congress meetings and procession held in Kurseong.

Chandra Devi Pradhan was amongst the few educated women in Kurseong. Chandra Devi along with Sachidevi Pradhan and Chanda Pradhan started to work for social development in Kurseong. They were the first ladies who opened up school in Kurseong namely Hindu Kanya Padshala (Hindi Girl School) in 1935. Since there was no provision for girl's education in Kurseong, these three ladies successfully opened up school by facing severe challenges. Side by side the freedom movement too was spreading like a wild fire all over India and Kurseong was not left behind. Gandhi's speeches in Kurseong regarding the abolition of caste system greatly moved Chandra Devi Pradhan. Thus, she decided to start a Harijan School in Kurseong in the same year. She was the only woman to teach the Harijan in the Harijan School. It was due to the fact that the society was caste ridden and no one was willing to come forward to teach such people in society. But Chandra Devi went against the orthodox caste system and continued her teaching. Her family was not happy with her activities and society too treated her as she had committed a crime by going against the societal norms. She continued her activities and sacrificed her life in teaching the Harijans. After returning from school she had to take bath and change cloths before entering the house and this was made mandatory by her family members. She was very dedicated towards her work and she realized that these people need education too. She felt that education was only means to enlighten this down graded people of society. Apart from this, she also helped them both physically and financially. She provided all possible help to this people and became the god mother of them. Thus, the people used to call her Bebo (meaning sister in Garwali language, Dehradun). **See for Photo-14**

These Ladies did their very best to further cause of women's education. The institution was started with the help of donation collected from the local and so it faced economic hardships. These ladies could also be regarded as the pioneer of female education who encouraged the opening of institution. The Pushtakalaya was founded purely on national lives and it became a powerful instrument in removing the social evil such as Purdah, Untouchability and Caste System to some extent. From the very

beginning it had striven to impart a spirit of self – help, love for fellow beings, sacrifice and patriotism to the students. It also inculcated among them the highest principles of simplicity, chastity and social service.

It was claimed that the institution was in open air and the atmosphere was charged with spirituality. There was no show of fashion and the sublime simplicity reigned supreme in this institution. Khaddar was not compulsory though but yet most girl students were clad in Khaddar to which they took of their own. Thus, this school became a splendid training ground for girls and the education imparted admirably fitted them alike for domestic and also national service.

Beside this she also helped the freedom fighters in all possible ways. When Saryu Prasad Poddar and Puttalimaya Devi were arrested it was Chandra Devi Pradhan who provided all necessary information to them regarding the movement as she could read newspapers and other related articles. She provided food and shelter to those freedom fighters that were hiding from the arrest of the British government. She became the backbone of the freedom fighters as the British Government could never get hold of her. No one could know her activities as she was a very clever lady enough to handle situation. She was known only as a social worker and a teacher in the eye of the British Government. It would be unfair to ignore the names of such women. History has always mentioned about those who came out in the public and participated in the movement. We credit them for creating an independent India. No nation could be created by handful of few great leaders but it needs an absolute support of those who are indebted to the grass root level of society and understands its nature. She breathed her last on February 2001 in Digboi Assam.

3. (vii) SYAMDEVI PRADHAN OR SACHIDEVI PRADHAN

Syamdevi Pradhan was born in 22nd June 1910 in Lensidown (Dehradun). Her grandfather Purna Singh Pradhan was a Subedar in Gorkha Army in Dehradun. In 1932 her grandfather resigned from his job and the whole family came to Kurseong in the same year. Kurseong in that period was marked by illiteracy, conservatism, casteism and orthodoxy. In case of women the public-private negotiation was even more difficult. The social norms in the region did not permit the women for their right because of conservative system and no formal women's organization to channelize

adequately. Though education helped few to articulate feminist issues but did not enable them to act on them. Illiteracy became the hurdle in the path to progress. Despite of this, women tried to be active by hearing the prevailing political issues. **See for Photo-15.**

During the period there was no provision for children's education in Kurseong. Only few schools were open up especially for the elite class and the British children. In 1935 D. B. Chettri along with Syamdevi Pradhan, her sister Chandra Devi Pradhan and Chanda Pradhan decided to open up school in Kurseong for the poor, illiterate and backward section of the society. Hence these three great women started the Hindu Kanya Padshala (Hindi Girls School) in Kurseong. They were the only teachers in that school as no one was willing to join them due to the traditional system of society. Later on the school came to be known as Municipal Girl School of Kurseong.

Beside this, Syamdevi Pradhan with few other women organized themselves as both imparters and recipients of nationalist information. In order to facilitate their own activities in the domestic sphere, they kept themselves informed of the wider political development through following ways.

Firstly, they educated themselves by reading local Hindi and Nepali newspapers, printed materials etc.

Secondly, they listen to the private conversation of men in the household and discussed ideas amongst themselves.

However, one should note that the household became a place for discussions and organizing secret activities of the nationalist movement for these women. The participation of these women in the movement and the demonstration of political significance in domestic sphere could be seen in the following ways.

Firstly, they started the constructive programmes like spinning khadi and boycotting British made goods.

Secondly, they made familial sacrifices.

Thirdly, they became the supportive wives and mothers, and nurturers, to activists.

Fourthly, they also became the pillars of support and strength and carried out secret activities etc.

Along with this they listened to the songs from their parents. They held meeting in each other's homes. They invited one another to their homes to discuss political events and sing patriotic songs. Thus, these women carried out both the social burden and the nationalist activities at the same time. Hence, the nationalist politics entered the home and altered the life of these women. There were certain unavoidable circumstances which forced these women to step out into the public domain. Syamdevi Pradhan breathed her last in 2nd May 2010 at the age of hundred years in Kurseong.

Therefore the women's participation in the nationalist movement has always focused on the public sphere. But all women could not access this sphere. Thus, ignoring the thousands of housewives, mostly mothers and wives, who provided indirect support by shouldering family responsibilities in the absence of their men needed elitist perspectives.

However, the chapter contains an autobiographical narrative of ordinary middle class women from all over India especially from Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong who did not participate in any public national activity due to social constraints. Yet within the domestic sphere their lives were affected by political changes in the public sphere and it is important to understand that how women made sense of their experiences and activities. Since, from within the domestic sphere women undertook significant political activities and such activities cannot be seen as a prerogative of actors within the public sphere only, just as politics cannot be the prerogative of the public sphere only.

Whereas, within the domestic sphere the nationalist activities of women also suggest that political activism does not always involve engaging with formal political machinery instead domestic spaces can become sites of political practices. The women in Indian households realigned their domestic roles to accommodate the nationalist cause. The women when they lost their family members, they not only suffered grief and sorrow but their responsibilities towards themselves and their nearest kin had to be reorganized. Thus, the responsibilities of the family, the education of children, dealing with loss of income and shortage of food fell on their women's shoulders. Only few women returned to their parental homes, shouldering the economic strains in their husband's homes.

Therefore, the political act was identified by the women respondents as one which supported the nationalist cause or expressed nationalist feelings irrespective of

whether it was located within the domestic or public sphere. The political turmoil affected the entire household and the women had to resolve the conflicts and contradictions that any form of nationalist activities created for them. Hence, the awareness the women had to survive without inhibiting the commitments of their husbands to the nationalist cause helped in the development of their own political consciousness.

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