WOMEN IN THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

Chapter - 6

The above mentioned extract is taken from the article ‘Punjabi Deviyan Nu Sandesa’ by Chaman Lal, B.A. Barrister, Member Legislative Assembly, Punjab. He gave a message to the women of Punjab through the columns of ‘Pritam - Masik Pattar’, in which he saw the future of India in the hands of women. He hoped to see women of Punjab leading women of other provinces, and teaching the lessons of cleanliness, sound health, bravery and good moral character. He wanted to see women of Punjab declaring ‘Jehad-a holy war’ against the oppression, tyranny, atrocity and injustice done by the British. And he believed that the women of India could act as tools in the process of nation building.

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1 Pritam-Masik Pattar, Lahore, October, 1927, pp. 10-11.
“Women is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of man, and she has the same right of freedom and liberty as he...... By sheer force of a vicious custom, even the most ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying a superiority over women which they do not deserve and ought not to have.”

“Since resistance in Satyagraha is offered through self-suffering. It is a weapon pre-eminently open to women...... She can become the leader in Satyagraha which does not require the learning that books give but does not require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith.”

The above mentioned extracts are taken from the issues of ‘Young India’ of Mahatma Gandhi of July 26, 1918 and January 14, 1930 respectively. In these extracts Gandhi discussed the importance of women in social revolution, reconstruction and in the nationalist struggle. He wanted the women to join the struggle for freedom at the appropriate time.

Similarly, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya also tried to rouse the entire womanhood of the country to come forward to take their place in the society and in the body politic as an equal partner of man. She said, “The politics of the nation are the supreme need of humanity in

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3 Ibid, p. 284.
4 Kamala Devi was India's most dynamic women, she took part in salt Satyagraha, was a valiant freedom fighter and was one of the founder of AIWC.
its attempt to scale the ladder of freedom. No one sex can build up a nation. Woman has her own unique contribution to make for the purpose of enriching life so that it may fulfill its own divine mission to perfection, so in the struggle for freedom they are destined to play their legitimate part and bear their share of the responsibility in breaking the chains that weigh heavily on people.  

Thus, it can be seen from the above mentioned examples of a few leaders of the twentieth century who regarded the co-operation and participation of women in the struggle for freedom very important. They encouraged their women to join this struggle in either active or in passive way. The political leaders, social reformers and other activists appealed to the women to join the struggle and knew that without women the freedom movement could not be complete.

Responding to the calls of local and national leaders, women of different communities and from all walks of life came out to join the struggle, marches and demonstrations, as constructive workers, participating in and often taking charge of the village reconstruction programmes, as workers in the cause of social, economic justice working for the removal of social evils and other forms of social oppression. The highly educated and the not so well educated joined hands to spread literacy and develop self reliance among the people.

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Women who had spent their lives behind purdah came out to fight orthodoxy, superstition and communal separatism.  

In the province of Punjab, both national and international politics affected the regional politics of Punjab. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the people in Punjab were more oriented towards the social upliftment of the women. As discussed in the earlier chapters various educational institutions, widow ashrams and reformative organisations were opened. Even in the early two decades of 1900s local reformers and leaders were more inclined to reforms and were working against social customs like female infanticide, widowhood, purdah system, sati system, child marriage and others. Thus, female education was considered the best medium for women emancipation. Various organisations and associations were formed which led the women of Punjab to come out of their homes to participate in the public sphere.

‘Participation of Women in the public life’ made them aware about the other provinces of India; and events happening in these provinces. And most important, print media particularly vernacular press played a significant role. The appeals of local and national leaders in these issues motivated women to participate in the Nationalist struggle.

The Nationalist struggle in India against the British colonial rule brought about the political mobilisation of both men and women. It

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Toward Equality, p. 284.
encouraged middle-class and elite women to adopt new models in the public domain and to engage in the range of activities such as social reform spreading the nationalist message and mobilisation for the movement.\(^7\) From liberal homes and conservative families, urban centres and rural districts, women—single and married, young and old—came forward and joined the struggle against colonial rule. Women’s participation called into question the British right to rule, legitimized the Indian nationalist movement and won for activist women, at least for a time, the approval of Indian men.\(^8\)

Politics completely altered the goals and activities of the organized women. Education, social reform and women’s rights appealed to some progressive women but the movement to rid the country of its foreign rulers attracted people from all classes, communities, and ideological persuasions.\(^9\)

The participation of the women of Punjab in the nationalist movement can be divided into five phases from 1901-10, 1911-20, 1921-30, 1931-40 and 1941-47. Only important events are taken into account and women’s participation is discussed.

In the early years of 1900s that is, from 1901-10, some of the women of Punjab mainly participated in the reformative works. They started their journals with emphasis on highlighting women issues.

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Bibi Harnam Kaur along with her husband Bhai Takht Singh opened ‘Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya in Ferozepur in 1894 and in 1907, this institution started its educational journal ‘Punjabi Bhain’.

Sarla Debi Chaudharni along with Rambhuj Dutt Chaudhari founded ‘Hindu-Sahayak Sabha’ in Lahore in 1906. Later branches of this Sabha were founded in Multan, Jhang, Sialkot, Lyallpur and Gujranwala. The Sabhas were opened to make men and women physically fit as they were taught gymnastics, swordplay, Gatka fights and other activities. Sarladevi worked for women’s education in the villages around Lahore and had larger plans for the education of purdah women. In 1910, she founded Bharat Stree Mahamandal at Lahore with branches in many Indian cities and village for imparting education to purdah women.

On 16, October 1905, Lord Curzon partitioned Bengal and leaders of Bengal announced that day as ‘a day of National Mourning.’ A general hartal was announced in Bengal and people fasted and went bare foot to take bath in the Ganga. There Swaraj, Swadeshi and National Education became the slogans of the Nationalist. Meetings

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14 Bipan Chandra, Amales Tripathi and Barun De, *Freedom Struggle*, New Delhi, National Book Trust, 1927, p. 82.
were arranged by the ladies in their streets and spinning wheels were introduced in the Zenana.16

The partition of Bengal infused a new spirit of patriotism in the women of Punjab. And Punjabi nationalists welcomed the Bengali Swadeshi movement, the women in Punjab also stepped into the political arena.17 Thus, the political incidents happening in the other provinces of India influenced the women of Punjab and provided a fillip to the Swadeshi movement. 'In Lahore, women organized a Ladies Section at the Industrial and Agricultural Exhibition of 1909'.18 Smt. Sushila Devi of Sialkot delivered a series of lectures in which she attacked the government and exhorted the women to rise to the occasion. Har Devi, wife of Roshan Lal, Barrister of Lahore, who was a great social reformer and editor of a Hindi Magazine 'The Bharat Bhagini', also joined the ranks of the political workers. She arranged meetings and collected funds for the purpose of assisting anarchists under trial. Smt. Purani Devi, an Arya Samaj worker of Hisar toured the various districts of Punjab and advocated the cause of swadeshi.19

Agyavati of Delhi was also a freedom fighter. She started a Vidhwa Ashram where widows and other women received political training and were taught to preach without the distinction of caste and creed.20

All these women helped in circulating revolutionary leaflets and literature and in maintaining liaison between different revolutionary and national leaders. But still the participation of women was limited. There were no women leaders (with the possible exception of Sarla devi), girls were not included in the samities or volunteer movements, the prevailing ideology of the time was still too conservative to allow women to participate on an equal basis with men.21

Thus, in the first decade from 1901-10, there was a kind of participation of the women in Punjab which was more or less passive in nature in political affairs, where women were more concerned with women’s problems and evil customs. Education was foremost on their list, followed by child marriage and the problems of widows and dowry.

The second decade from 1911-20 witnessed many ups and downs in the involvement of women in the political sphere of Punjab. The most important event of the decade was the first World War (1914-18). It brought about crucial changes in the political life and socio-economic conditions of India.22

The declaration of war by Great Britain against Germany in 1914 automatically drew India into its vortex. The Indians had not been consulted either before the declaration of war or before the

government committed the Indian people and Indian resources to fighting the war primarily for British imperial interests. The contribution of India, although not voluntary, was considerable. More than one million Indians were sent to different theatres of war from France to China. One in ten became a casualty. The total war expenditure ran to more than dollar one hundred and twenty seven million, India’s national debt increased by thirty percent and a good part of it was forced on the people.23

At the beginning Indian leaders declared their sympathy and support for Britain. Various Indians were sent to fight for Britain. Even the women of Punjab and other provinces were trying to collect money for the war debt. ‘In July 1918, women of Sindh and Karachi were trying hard to help the government. A meeting was organised in Karachi by the women and rupees one lakh and twenty five thousand were collected and given to the government officials.’24

Even the vernacular journals like ‘Bhujangan Pattar’, Kairon published their articles favouring the Britishers. In the article ‘Jung, Europe Ate Sikh Deviyan Di Sewa’ of the September issue, it encouraged the Punjabi people to support the Britishers whole heartedly.25

23 Bipan Chandra, Amale Tripathi and Barun De, Freedom Struggle, p. 108.
24 Sughar Saheli, Amritsar, July, 1918, p. 22.
25 Bhujangan Pattar, Kairon, 1 Sep., 1917, p. 19.
During this time some people of Punjab were pro-British and not against the policies of British. One woman of Ludhiana whose husband was a police constable (he was already participating in the war), encouraged people of her locality to recruit in the army for helping the British government. Similarly, in August, 1917, one widow of Ferozepur district voluntarily came out on the call of Lieut Governor for recruiting Punjabis in the army. She wanted her son to serve the government.26

However, during this period from 1914-18, women of Punjab and other provinces were influenced by various women leaders like Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, Madam Bhikaji Rustom K.R. Cama. These women spoke in public about the free India. They used to get their articles published in vernacular newspapers and journals. Sughar Saheli, Amritsar, a journal of Punjab published the article of Annie Besant and her home Rule League in the October issue of 1916. ‘In that article she encouraged women to participate against the government and fight for their own Home Rule.’27

Another important factor which led to the direct and active women's participation in Punjab was the entry of Mahatma Gandhi. ‘Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) returned to India in 1915 as the hero of the South African struggle.’28 It was Gandhi who

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26 Ibid, p. 20.
27 Sughar Saheli, Amritsar, October, 1916, p. 17.
28 Geraldine Forbes, Women in Modern India, p. 124.
gave a new direction, strength and inspiration to the freedom movement and drew into it women in large numbers. With his experience of South Africa behind him he was aware of the potentialities of women as passive resisters.29

Thus, in the decade 1911-20, women of Punjab became active participants in the politics. The immediate factor which led to this participation was the Jallianwala Bagh Tragedy of 1919. From 1914-18, some were either pro British or against British. Entry of Gandhi gave a fillip to this involvement but the Rowlatt Act and the Amritsar massacre set the stage for the active participation of women.

The Bills known as the Indian Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, No. I of 1919 and the Criminal Law (Emergency Powers) Bill, No. II of 1919 were unjust, subversive of the principles of liberty and justice and destructive of the elementary rights of individuals on which the safety of community, as a whole and the state itself, was based.30 The Bill No. II was finally passed on the 18th March 1919 known as the Rowlatt Act.31 It contained forty three sections and was divided into five parts. It was expedient to make provision that the ordinary criminal law was to be supplemented and the emergency powers were exerisable by the government for the purpose of dealing with anarchical and revolutionary movements.32 In other words, this act

31 Ibid, p. 31.
32 Ibid, pp. 31, 32.
was designed to give the government power to crush popular liberties, to arrest and detain suspected persons without showing any cause and warrant to imprison them without trial.\textsuperscript{33}

People were against this act and wanted the government to repeal this act as they had shown loyalty to the British government during the first World War. They expected rewards instead of this act. This act was met with the protest all over the nation with a popular cry of ‘na vakil, na dalil, na appeal’.\textsuperscript{34} In Punjab, protest meetings were held at various places in the month of February, 1919\textsuperscript{35} against the bills. As a protest, even Mahatma Gandhi declared the observance of fast, prayer and suspension of all work for one day - the April 6th, 1919. He suggested that the second Sunday after the publication of the viceregal assent to Bill No. II of 1919 to be observed as a day of humiliation and prayer.\textsuperscript{36} Thus on 23 March 1919, Gandhi issued his hortal manifesto to observe an All India Hartal Day on 6th April 1919.\textsuperscript{37} He also appealed to the women of India to join this Satyagraha Movement in large numbers and co-operate with the men in the constitutional fight which they were waging against the Rowlatt legislation.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{35} Manju Verma, \textit{The Role of Women in the Freedom Movement in Punjab}, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{36} Report of Commissioners appointed by the Punjab Sub-Committee of the Indian National Congress, 1920, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{The Indian Annual Register}, vol. I, 1920, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{The collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi}, vol. 15, New Delhi, The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1964, p. 189.
But earlier the date of this All India Hartal was fixed on 30th March but later fixed on the 6th April.\textsuperscript{39} As the news of change of date could not reach in due time to some places in the Punjab, so a complete hartal was observed on 30th March, 1919 at Amritsar, Fazilka, Ferozepur, Hoshiarpur, Jhang, Karnal, Multan and Muzaffargarh.\textsuperscript{40} On 31st March 1919, a meeting of women protesting against the Rowlatt Act was held in the Arya Samaj Temple, where the daughter of Munshi Ram of Delhi addressed some women and spoke against the Act.\textsuperscript{41}

Punjab observed complete hartal on 6th April. On that day, the leaders and the people seemed to act in complete union. There was complete fraternization between Hindus and Muhammadans. Resolutions were passed all over, protesting against the Rowlat Act and demanding its repeal.\textsuperscript{42} Even women and children participated in the programme and observed fast and recited prayers in their homes. The wives, daughters and sisters of the prominent Congress leaders also came forward. Smt. Satyawati (wife of Lala Achint Ram of Lahore), Smt. Bhag Devi (wife of Lala Dhuni Chand of Ambala), Smt. Pushpa Gujral (wife of A.N. Gujral of Jhelum) and Smt. Guran Devi (wife of L.C. Dutt of Sialkot). Even the village women of Sanghooi in the Punjab observed fast along with their men and admired Mahatma.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{40} Selections from the Report on the Punjab Disturbances, April 1919, Delhi, Superintendent Government Printing Press, 1920, pp. 53-54.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{42} Report of the Commissioners appointed by the Punjab sub-committee of the Indian National Congress, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{43} Manju Verma, The Role of women in the Freedom Movement in Punjab, p. 34.
The 9th April was the day of Ram Naumi and this Hindu festival was largely participated in by Muslims and along with the usual shouts and political cries were freely raised “Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai”, “Hindu Musalman Ki Jai”. On the evening of 9th April, Gandhi who was on his way from Bombay to Delhi was stopped at a small station, Palwal in the Punjab and was confined to the Bombay Presidency. Even the orders of the local government for the deportation of Dr. Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal reached the Deputy Commissioner on the evening of the 9th April. They were to be removed quietly to Dharamshala. These three leaders were arrested on 10th April and these arrests aroused great excitement and ignited the political atmosphere in the province. The people observed hartals, organised meeting and took out processions.

In order to stop all these happenings, on the morning of the 13th April, General Michael O’Dwyer at Amritsar made a proclamation read out by the naib-tehsildar. It was proclaimed that no person was allowed to leave the city without pass and not to leave house after eight. No procession and gathering was allowed and if some one did so he was to be treated with the force of arms. A counter-proclamation was made to the effect that the meeting would be held in

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afternoon in the Jallianwala Bagh at 4:30 p.m. Thus, a meeting was held in Jallianwala Bagh including twenty thousand men, women and children General Dyer entered the Bagh, ordered his troops to fire at the unarmed peaceful gathering, leaving as many as three hundred and seventy nine dead and twelve hundred wounded as official records.

The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre of 13th April 1919 had a great catalytic effect upon the political attitude of the people, especially on the women. Earlier women were helping their male counterparts and were working on the advise of these men. But now when they lost their husbands, fathers and sons in this tragedy they got infuriated.

After the firing a curfew was imposed in the city and this curfew obliged a number of women in Amritsar to suffer from mental torture as they could not get any help for locating their husbands, sons and other relatives who lay parched, weltering in their own blood and mangled limbs. Bibi Attar Kaur, six month pregnant lady experienced this traumatic experience on the death of her husband Bhag Mal Bhatia. Bhatia also had gone to Jallianwala Bagh and after the firing when his wife went to the Bagh to find him, she saw dead bodies of children and men all over the Bagh. And later she saw dead bodies of children and men all over the Bagh. And later she saw dead

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51 Kamlesh Mohan, Towards Gender History : Images, Identities and Roles of North Indian Women with Special reference to Punjab, Delhi, Aakar Book, 2007, p. 163.
body of her husband and brought it to her home.\textsuperscript{52} Another Lady Rattan Devi, who had also ventured into the Bagh despite the curfew order and spent the whole night with her husband’s cold head in her lap.\textsuperscript{53}

Instead of having sympathy with the people of Punjab, martial law was enforced and for long the Punjab was almost cut off from the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{54} Martial law was imposed from 15 April to June 1919 in Amritsar, Gujranwala, Lahore, Ferozepur, Gurdaspur, Jhelum, Ludhiana, Rawalpindi, Rohtak, Sialkot, Gujrat, Hoshiarpur, Lyallpur and other districts in Punjab.\textsuperscript{55}

The intention behind this Marital law was not only punishing the alleged rioters but also the political agitators. All type of atrocities were done on the inhabitants and women were also directly and indirectly affected. ‘In Amritsar the innocent men and women were made to crawl like worms on their bellies.’\textsuperscript{56} Public flogging was done. Even the innocent women were humiliated. Gurdevi of Manianwala gave evidence before the committee of Indian National Congress and said that women of their area were ordered to come out of their houses and beaten with sticks, foulest language was used and were

\textsuperscript{52} Ganda Singh Collection, File NO. 661, Jallianwala Bagh Massacre especially Bhag Mal Bhatia File. also see Rozana Nawan Janama, Jullundhar, 15 Aug., 1959.

\textsuperscript{53} Kamlesh Mohan, Towards Gender History, p. 163.


\textsuperscript{55} Selections from the Report on the Punjab Disturbances, April 1919, pp. 71 to 83.

asked to undergo the torture of holding their ears by passing their arms under and round the legs, while being bent double. Women were abused as “She - assess, bitches, flies and swine.” This statement was also supported by other women of Manianwala.\textsuperscript{57}

Another women Jawali, wife of Kahan Singh of Nawan Pind stated that her husband, seventy years old was arrested and she was not allowed to give food to him without payment. Rupees one per day per head was paid.\textsuperscript{58} Women were ordered to produce their husbands; otherwise their houses would be burnt and lands confiscated at chuharkhana village.\textsuperscript{59} In Sheikhpura, houses were locked and women along with their children were turned out.\textsuperscript{60} The male relatives of those women, who were unable to bribe the police, were arrested.\textsuperscript{61} In Hafizabad, Hukma Devi’s son was locked up in jail because she was not able to find money to bribe the police.\textsuperscript{62}

Thus, the Rowlatt agitation disturbed the public mind and shook public confidence in the good will of the government.\textsuperscript{63} Further, Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the Martial law acted as a stimulant or catalyst of women's consciousness in Punjab and in the whole of India. This incident motivated women of Punjab to participate directly

\textsuperscript{57} Report of the Commissioners appointed by the Punjab Sub-committee of the Indian national Congress, pp. 128-129.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, p. 134.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{60} Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 18, pp. 17, 25.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{62} Report the Commissioners, p. 120.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, p. 157.
in the nationalist struggle for freedom. Women got active in the Non-cooperation movement of Gandhi from 1920-22 on his call.

Later the incidents of 1919 in Punjab led the government to announce the Hunter Committee in connection with the Punjab government's doings under the martial law. But this committee was boycotted by the people and the leaders of India. So it was decided to appoint a non-official Inquiry Committee, to hold almost a parallel inquiry on the behalf of Indian Nation Congress on 14th November 1919. Pandit Moti Lal Nehru, M.K. Gandhi, C.R. Das, Abbas Tayabji and M.R. Jayakar were appointed as the commissioners. To prepare the report, the commissioners were required to visit Punjab. So during this time M.K. Gandhi made acquaintance with the women of the Punjab and this led the women's participation in the next movement of Non-Cooperation.

Gandhi visited the province when the ban on his entry was withdrawn in October 1919. He went to all the affected districts. There he met the grieved people, consoled the women over the death of their kith and kin in the different tragedies of Punjab. And appealed to all the women to adopt Swadeshi; he felt satisfaction over their contribution to the spinning-wheel. During this visit, the wives of Dr. Kitchlew, Dr. Satyapal and Diwan Mangalsen of Gujranwala met 

67 Ibid, pp. 286, 316, 328-32.
him. At Lahore he stayed at Rambhuj Dutt Chaudhary's (who was in jail at that time) house and his wife Sarla Devi Chaudharani acted as a perfect hostess. She travelled with him extensively and was the first to use Khadi Sari as a Swadeshi message given to women by Gandhi.

In the mean while, the Khilafat Question arose out of the Muslim's anger at the harsh treatment towards Turkey by the allied powers after the war. Turkey was dispossessed of her imperial territories some of which were regarded as sacred by the Indian Muslims. These Indian Muslims protested against this action of the British Government and decided to support Indian National Congress in any agitation against the Government.

The All India Congress Session was held in the last week of December 1919 and there Punjab authorities and Khilafat question were discussed and criticized. So by persistent cultivation of Hindu-Muslim unity and incorporation of Khilafat, Punjab grievances and swaraj into his political creed, M.K. Gandhi on 1st August 1920 gave the signal for the non-cooperation campaign. Under this campaign, people were asked to boycott the law courts, government schools; to

71 Ibid, p. 77.
purchase only swadeshi goods especially cloth; to abstain from liquor and intoxicating drugs. A large number of Punjabi Women also participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement. Gandhi’s non-violent programme of spinning - weaving, khadi, boycott of foreign cloth, removal of untouchability and promotion of communal harmony gave women immense opportunities to show their calibre.

In April 1920, a meeting of the Punjab Provincial Conference was held at Jalandhar. About sixteen hundred delegates, including one hundred and fifty women delegates attended the session. Kumari Lajjawati (Principal of Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jullundur) was also one of the delegates and praised the participation of women in the Conference.

Lahore was the centre of all the political meetings organized during the Movement. After the 1st August 1920, the women in Punjab organized a meeting at Lahore under the Chairmanship of Lado Rani Zutshi. Here various other women from different parts of Punjab gave their speeches regarding the political conditions of the country. Sarla Devi Chaudharani, an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi established ‘A Swaraj Ashram’ in her home at Lahore. Here she worked on the concept of Swadeshism and encouraged women to make khadi cloth and propagated for Swaraj.

74 Ganda Singh Collection, *File number 493*, p. 25.
76 *The Tribune*, Lahore, April 6, 1920, p. 3.
78 *The Tribune*, August 8 1920, p. 8.
From 1921 to 1922 the wife of Duni Chand of Lahore, Kumari Lajjawati, Shrimati Parbati Devi (daughter of Lala Lajpat Rai) and Shrimati Puran Devi (wife of Thakur Dass) all appeared on the public platform. The first activities of these women were more or less confined to processions, national songs, the Swadeshi campaign and meetings.\textsuperscript{80}

Efforts were made to enlist more and more lady volunteers for the propaganda work. Separate Ladies Congress Committees were organized at some places in the Punjab with the efforts of women leadership. The women leaders extensively toured the province along with the other members and delivered speeches. This led to the formation of various Congress Committees and women started becoming their members.

In May 1921, five hundred ladies enrolled themselves as the members of the Rawalpindi Congress Committee. In the end of the month, the number of members rose to thirty five hundred including thousand women members.\textsuperscript{81} Thus, it can be seen that women were becoming active day by day in a single month in a district where thousand women enlisted in the Congress Committee.

These committee members delivered their speeches at every place in the Punjab. Prem Kaur of Ambala accused the government of tempering with religion. Shrimati Roop Kaur of Amritsar made

\textsuperscript{80} Ganda singh Collection, file Number 493, pp. 61-63.
\textsuperscript{81} The Tribune, June 23, 1921, p. 5.
offensive speeches in the Rohtak district. At Layalpur, Mussammat Maqbul Begum (wife of Siraj-ud-din) spoke against the government and their policies. At Gurdaspur, Shrimati Bhagmati Devi distinguished herself by the violent language and encouraged her fellow sisters to fight against the foreign government. 82

The year 1921 brought no respite from the political agitation. The Congress Movement with its programme of Non-Cooperation, and establishment of Congress Committees was pushed on vigorously, especially by means of public meeting and processions. ‘The speeches were entirely unrestrained’.83 The year 1922 of the Non-Cooperation Movement witnessed much more political activity of the people in the Province. There had been a number of demonstrations in almost every district.

In January 1922, Smt. Parmeshwari Devi, wife of Chaudhary Ake Singh of Bhiwani, highlighted the importance of Swadeshi before the women in a public meeting and organized a procession.84 Women were also engaged in picketing of foreign cloth shops and liquor shops to stop the sale of foreign cloth by the dealers and to stop the use of liquor. The picketing was entrusted to the women by Gandhi and no buyer dared to come near the shops where women picketers were seen and even the shopkeepers used to behave well with the women.

82 Ganda Singh Collection, File No. 493, p. 62.
84 The Tribune, January 7, 1922, p. 6.
volunteers. The shopkeepers always compromised with the situation. ‘On 17th January 1922 Kumari Lajjawati of Jalandhar did picketing in Lahore escorted by the other women volunteers and it was a complete success.85

The Punjab Provincial Congress Committee in its meeting held on 18th January 1922, placed on record its sincere appreciation of the tremendous impetus which the province had received from the noble and inspiring participation of women of the Punjab in India’s battle for freedom.86 When the movement was at its peak, Gandhi had to retrace his steps at Bardoli on 11-12 February, 1922, due to the eruption of violence at Chaura Chauri (UP) on 4th February 1922.87 The movement was withdrawn by Gandhi, but still the women of Punjab were busy in all the activities.

On 22 October 1922 Shrimati Parbati of Kamalia in Gurdaspur said, “No one should obey the orders of white devils (Britishers) and that all persons above the age of eighteen should join the Congress.” And for this she was sentenced at Meerut on 4th December 1922. Kasturba Gandhi (wife of Gandhi) visited Punjab in 1922 and Bi Amman (mother of Ali brothers) also made an extensive tour in the months of August and September, 1922.88

85 Indian Annual Register, Jan-June 1922, vol. I, p. 71.
86 The Tribune, January 21, 1922, p. 5.
88 Ganda Singh Collection, File Number 493, pp. 61-63.
During the decade 1921-30, the women of Punjab participated in the non-violent Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22). They held the meetings, led the processions, boycotted foreign goods, adopted the slogan of Swadeshi and indulged in the picketing of foreign cloth shops and liquor shops.

This participation of women in large numbers proved beyond doubt, the freedom movement was in the process of becoming a mass movement. ‘Sarla Devi Chaudhrani, Smt. Parvati Devi of Kamalia, Smt. Puran Devi, Smt. Gauran Devi, Mrs. Duni Chand, Smt. Amar Kaur, Smt. Luxmi Arya, Smt. Pushpa Gujral, Smt. Chand Bai, Smt. Lal Devi, Kumari Lajjavati and Lado Rani Zutshi were the names of few women who participated in this movement. This participation was a sort of training programme for the future Satyagraha programmes of 1930-34 and 1940-42.’89 Even after the suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1922, women were still engaged in the constructive programme of Gandhi.

The 1930s saw the freedom struggle take many steps forward. The decade began with the Civil Disobedience movement; it ended with the beginning of the second World War and the Congress ministeries in the Provinces resigning as a protest against India being involved in the War without her consent.90 Gandhi launched a movement in 1930 that attracted large number of women. Women’s

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participation in Civil Disobedience movement of 1930-32 differed quantitatively and qualitatively from their involvement in the early 1920s and won them a place in history. It was the women's organizations and networks, developed between 1925 and 1930, that laid the ground work for their positive reaction to Gandhi's call.91

The year 1930 began with the pledge of independence and in March, Gandhi opened the new phase of Satyagraha by announcing that he would break the salt law.92 The failure of the government to take up the Nehru Report and take note of the demand of the people within the stipulated period forced the Indian National Congress to proceed with its plans of launching Satyagraha as had been decided at its session in December 1928 at Calcutta.93

So, in the annual session of the Congress at Lahore in the last week of December 192994, the resolution of complete independence or Poorna Swarajaya for India was adopted. The Congress also decided to launch the programme of Civil Disobedience including non-payment of taxes.95 This session was attended by four hundred delegates from Punjab out of twenty five hundred.96 Shiama Zutshi (daughter of Lado Rani Zutshi), Miss Shakuntala, Swadesh and

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96 The Tribune, Lahore, 4 January 1930, p. 1.
Adarsh (daughters of Lala Pindi Dass), Jaya (daughter of Badri Dass), Kumari Lajjawati (Principal of Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar), Lado Rani Zutshi, Kumari Shiv Dua, Pushpa Gujral and Sarla Devi Chaudharani were some prominent women to attend this session.\textsuperscript{97} 26th January 1930 was celebrated as an Independence Day all over India. Several persons in Lahore hoisted national flags over houses and many of them had illuminations at night. Processions were taken out and women also joined these processions. Smt. Parvati Devi (daughter of Lala Lajpat Rai) along with other prominent Congress workers of Punjab, read out the Independence resolutions.\textsuperscript{98}

Gandhi started his historic march to Dandi from Sabarmati Ashram on 12 March, 1930 and formally inaugurated the civil disobedience campaign. As a result of breaking the salt law he was arrested on the 6th April.\textsuperscript{99} In the Young India on 30 April, Gandhi had appealed to Indian women to take up spinning yarn on the Charkha and to come out of their household seclusion and picket shops selling foreign goods or liquor and Government institutions.\textsuperscript{100} At first he didn't want women to participate as he thought they would complicate matters but later they were permitted to take part in all phases of the campaign.

\textsuperscript{97} Manju Verma, The Role of Women in the Freedom Movement in Punjab, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{98} The Tribune, 28 January, 1930, p.1.
\textsuperscript{100} Bipan Chandra, Amales Tripathi and Barun De, Freedom Struggle, pp. 160-161.
In Punjab the women inaugurated the movement by taking out a procession, meetings, picketing and prabhat pheries. In Lahore five thousand ladies took out a procession. The life and soul of the movement were Mrs. Lado Rani Zutshi, Parvati Devi, Smt. Kartar Kaur, Atma Devi and many others. On 23rd March 1930, thousands of ladies clad in Khaddar assembled in Sari Sehglan, Rawalpindi where a meeting of ladies was held under the presidency of Shrimati Gopal Devi (Mrs. Gurdasram Sahani). These ladies took vow solemnly declaring not to buy foreign cloth in future. On 30th March 1930, Kumari Lajjawati delivered a lecture during the ‘All India Martyr’s Day’ celebration at Lahore and appealed to everyone, especially women to join the non-violent struggle. The Satyagraha campaign against the salt law was inaugurated at Jullundar on 17 April 1930 by Raizada Hans Raj. A procession consisting four hundred women and twenty thousand men marched and then women performed Tilak Ceremony and volunteers manufactured salt.

As the women were participating in all these activities of the campaign, the government also started arresting these women participants. In February 1932, eight women including Mrs. Hariram

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101 Manmohan Kaur, *Role of Women in the Freedom Movement 1857-1947*, p. 188.
103 *Ibid*, April, 1930, p. 3.
(daughter-in-law of Sir Gangaram of Lahore), Mrs. Sahni (of mother Mr Devraj) and Gyandevi (wife of Mr. Jung Bahadur) were sentenced in Lahore for four months.¹⁰⁵ On 20th February, Shrimati Pritamdevi, a prominent Congress worker was arrested under Section 108 and ordered to furnish two securities amounting to rupees one thousand or undergo one year's imprisonment. She preferred jail.¹⁰⁶ 1st March 1932 witnessed Mrs. Leelavathi Munshi’s imprisonment to one year and rupees three hundred fine.¹⁰⁷ At Lahore Miss Zutshi, dictator of the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee, Miss Satyavati, Mrs. Pindidass, Mrs. Jat Narayan, Mrs. Ganga Ram, Mrs. Tarachand and Mrs. Chatterjee were arrested while marching in a procession to celebrate the inaugural day of the “Gandhi Week” on 6th April.¹⁰⁸

During this campaign the women of Punjab were busy in the Salt Satyagraha; boycott of foreign clothes, articles and liquor; picketing of foreign cloth shops; picketing of religious places; picketing of Legislative Assembly; picketing of elections; picketing of Educational Institutions and worked for Swadeshi. ‘One of the most significant feature of four years 1930 to 1934 was the participation of women in the nationalist movement on an unprecedented scale.’¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 17.
Hoardds of women poured out of their homes. Women of all classes and castes, high and low gave their support to the national movement. The processions taken by the women, their untiring picketing of cloth and liquor shops, their persuasive appeals for swadeshi are even today marvelled at.\textsuperscript{110}

The participation of women in Punjab can be judged from the following graph showing total number of women convictions in 1932.\textsuperscript{111}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Months of 1932} & \textbf{Number} \\
\hline
January & 15 \\
February & 33 \\
March & 45 \\
April & 7 \\
May & 0 \\
June & 12 \\
July & 0 \\
August & 0 \\
September & 8 \\
October & 0 \\
November & 0 \\
December & 1 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Number of Convictions (Women)}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{110} Suruchi Thapar - Bjorkert, \textit{Women in the Indian National Movement}, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, pp. 71, 72.
The graph shows the number of women convictions month wise in the year 1932 of the campaign. It shows that on an average ten women were convicted every month. In India, the province like Punjab where women were not so aware as of Bengal, Madras and other provinces, were politically active and were trying to show their existence in the campaign of 1930-34.

The next few years of 1940s witnessed the third important campaign of M.K. Gandhi – The Individual Satyagraha and the Quit India Movement from 1940-1944. In these two movements, again a large number of Punjabi women participated and helped their male counterparts. During this time, the Second World War began from 1939-1945 and it had a decisive impact on the political scenario of India.
Before Second World War, under the Government Act of 1935, all the political parties of India in the different provinces swept into power and in 1937 they formed their ministries in the provinces with Indian National Congress in majority. But these Congress Ministries were to resign in 1939 after two years on the issue of not consulting them when government the joined the war.\textsuperscript{112} The war was declared on 3rd September 1939. After resignations, the working committee of Indian National Congress demanded from the government a clear declaration of its war objectives and a promise for independence for India. However, these demands were rejected so the Congress then decided to propagate against and obstruct people from rendering any help in the war effort.\textsuperscript{113}

By this time women were members and some were even leaders of the student associations, peasant movements and labor unions like Lado Rani Zutshi, Shah Nawaz and others. The presence of women in the various movements of the day was as significant of the anti-British movement during the war years as was their election to legislative seats and their appointment to positions of power and authority.\textsuperscript{114} In Punjab Lado Rani Zutshi was the leader of the Student Association of Lahore, Begum Shah Nawaz and Lekhwati Jain were related to the Legislative Council of Punjab. Sarladevi was directly linked with

\textsuperscript{112} Suruchi Thapar - Bjorkert, \textit{Women in the Indian National Movement}, p. 123.
\textsuperscript{114} Geraldine Forbes, \textit{Women in Modern India}, p. 203.
Gandhi’s working. And Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was an active member of All India Women's Conference and she always wanted her organisation to work for political gains.

So in protest against the government, Gandhi launched an Individual Satyagraha in October 1940. It was to “carry on non-violently and openly anti-war propaganda” and “to preach non-cooperation with the government in their war efforts.” So Vinoba Bhave opened this campaign on 17th October 1940, during which about thirty thousand men and women courted arrest. Even Gandhi appealed to women to participate and he expected more women than men.

In Punjab, Satyagraha was initiated by Mian Iftikhar-ud-din, President, Punjab Provincial Congress Committee on 25th November, 1940 and he went to visit Gandhi in Wardha. Bibi Raghbir Kaur, member of the Legislative assembly Punjab started Satyagraha on 8th December 1940. During this Satyagraha movement, many men and women were arrested. ‘Mrs. Duni Chand, MLA was the lady to be arrested in the Punjab at Lahore on 5 December and she was representing the Lahore Women (General) constituency. Another women Mrs. Bedi, (wife of Mr. B.P.L. Bedi) graduate of the Oxford

119 Ibid, 6 December, 1940, p. 2.
University and the head of English department in the Fateh Chand College for women in Lahore also offered Satyagraha.\textsuperscript{120} Amar Kaur (wife of Mohan Lal advocate of Gurdaspur, who renounced his practice in 1921 and entered public life) offered Satyagraha at Kasur in Lahore district and was arrested and later released in September 1942.\textsuperscript{121} Pushpa Gujral of Jhelum was sentenced to six months imprisonment for offering Satyagraha.\textsuperscript{122} Smt. Vidya Kumari (wife of Malik Ram Bheja Mal of Lahore), Smt. Parvati Devi of Kamalia, Smt. Kasturi Bai of Rohtak, Smt. Puran Devi and Smt. Savitri Devi of Ludhiana, Chandar Wati of Ferozepur and many others participated in the movement of Individual Satyagraha.\textsuperscript{123}

In the Individual Satyagraha from October 1940 to December 1941, various women offered Satyagraha and were arrested. In the month of February 1941, about nine women were arrested at the various places in the province.\textsuperscript{124} The number of satyagrahis was increasing every day. Upto the month of April, the total strength of the Congress members enrolled in the Punjab were One lakh thirteen thousand two hundred and seventy seven. Among them four thousand two hundred and fifty six were women Congress members.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid, 7 December, 1940, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid, Lahore, 30 September, 1940, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{122} Manmohan Kaur, \textit{Role of Women in the Freedom Movement}, p. 221.
\textsuperscript{124} The Tribune, March 1, 1940, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid, March 9, 1941, p. 5.
Every month number of women were taking permission from Gandhi to participate in the Individual Satyagraha. But the participation of the Punjabi women was limited as only a few women of prominence chosen by Gandhi were given the right to offer Satyagraha. Like Shanno Devi, Smt. Rameshwari Devi and others were not allowed by Gandhi to court arrest and instead were asked to participate in the constructive programme.

Finally on 8th August 1942, the All India Congress Committee in its historic session at Bombay, ratified the “Quit India” resolution of 14th July 1942 passed at Wardha by the Congress working committee by an overwhelming majority.126 Gandhi called on all Indians to begin to feel that they are free and he asked teachers and students to be ready to get out.127

Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur along with Rameshwari Nehru and Aruna Asaf Ali, representing the All India Women’s conference appealed to the government to settle the problem of India’s political demand of independence and quit India,128 And during this Quit India movement of 1942, Shrimati Lajyawati (Mrs. Hemraj), Shrimati Lakshmi Devi (Mrs. Om Prakash trikha), Smt. Savitri Devi (Mrs. Ram Krishan), who it was stated held a demonstration in Anarkali on 26 August by raising Congress slogan and singing national songs were

126 Ibid, p. 132.
arrested at Lahore by the police while they marched with the national flag. Smt. Satyawati (Mrs. Achint Ram) was also there and was arrested along with her son and twelve year old daughter.\footnote{129} Another Congress lady worker of Lahore Smt. Parbati Devi was also arrested on the same day.\footnote{130}

Smt. Rameshwari Nehru, ex-president of the AIWC, president of the Central Punjab branch of the AIWC, Vice president of the Punjab Harijan Sewak Sang was also put into jail on 29 August and she had been appointed as second ‘dictator’ of the Punjab Provincial congress Committee by Mian Iftikhar-ud-Din.\footnote{131} And later she was released on 31 August with restrictions on her movement.\footnote{132}

Sucheta Majumdar Kriplani (born in Ambala, Punjab and did her studies from Punjab and Delhi and was married to Acharaya Kriplani of Allahabad) was chosen to organize women’s wing of the Indian National Congress in 1940. The department used to work for raising the political consciousness of women and identify Congress with social change that benefited women.\footnote{133} A trusted lieutenant of Gandhiji, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur took up the task of the uplift of women on her shoulders and was very active during the Quit India movement in 1942.\footnote{134} She led processions day after day. One

procession was subjected to ruthless lathi charge in Simla. From 9 August to 16 August the processions led by her were subject to lathi charge fifteen times.\footnote{Manmohan Kaur, \textit{Role of Women in the Freedom Movement}, pp. 218, 219.}

The women of Punjab organised spontaneous hartals and demonstrations in several cities of the province to protest against the Britishers. The young girls were also not lagging behind. In Amritsar, about three dozen young college girls hoisted the tri-colour flag as a mark of ‘Gandhi Jayanti’ celebrations in Chowk Phuharawala on October 2, 1942. They also took out a procession. But the police reached there and to disperse the crowd, the police lathi charged and removed the girls to some unknown place. The arrested girls were let off after few hours of detention.\footnote{\textit{The Tribune}, October, 1942, p. 9.}

During this movement everyday hartals were observed and educational institutions were closed. Processions were organised despite prohibitory orders of the Government. Girl students took a prominent part in these processions and in distribution of anti-government literature.

Some of the women even started working secretly in the underground organisations to evade police arrests. ‘Smt. Subhadra Joshi was one of them who undertook the work of editing an cyclostyled paper \textit{Hamara Sangram}. This paper was published in
Hindi from Delhi. She became a target of the C.I.D. officials and was later arrested.  

Luxmi Arya of Rohtak was also involved in the underground activities. She joined these underground political activities after taking leave from her school. She went from place to place and carried the message of the Congress from door to door hiding at her personal risk to avoid detention, so that movement could be kept alive outside the jail among the masses.  

The political active women leaders were arrested and the treatment meted out to them was vindictive and far from satisfactory. Pattabhi Sitaramayya commented, “The treatment with women was not good and this is a tale that the nation would never forget.....”

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur when arrested at Kalka for leading processions was kept in Ambala Jail like an ordinary prisoner for a month. She was not allowed to carry her suitcase of clothes. There was no arrangement for bathing and food given was bad, unclean and uncooked.

Sometimes women were also kept in solitary confinements to pressurize them to leave the movement. Smt. Shakuntala Rishi was kept in Gurdaspur jail in a solitary cell for quite some time. Their relatives were not allowed to meet them. And at the time of illness,


women were not given proper medical facilities. Inadequate medical treatment and bad food of the jail affected the health of women political prisoners.

Thus, during the Individual Satyagraha and Quit India Movement, women from every nook and corner of the Punjab participated. Young girl students did not lag behind. They courted arrests and when they were in jails they happily accepted all the harsh treatment of the Britishers.

In this campaign Gandhi asked women to use the previously sanctioned techniques of salt making, boycotts of courts and schools, picketing cloth and liquor shops and non-payment of taxes. People were asked to court arrests. The movement began in the province with strikes, demonstrations and processions. Women participated in the initial strikes and demonstrations in cities, were among the radical students who organised peasant movements, and, when protest was suppressed, joined the secret underground movements.

Hence, the participation of women of Punjab in the nationalist movement succeeded step by step from 1901-10, 1911-20, 1921-30, 1931-40 and 1941-47. In 1901-10, political upheavals in the province of Bengal affected Punjabi women and few women showed their sympathy with the Bengali people. The decade 1911-20 was the most important decade as the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy and the Martial law of 1919 acted as a catalyst for creating women consciousness for
fighting for the freedom of India. Then these women victims and other sympathetic women directly jumped into the Non-Cooperation movement of 1920. The decade 1921-30, witnessed the direct involvement of women of Punjab in the freedom struggle and these women came into the contact of M.K. Gandhi. The decade 1931-40 was the period of civil disobedience and women of Punjab did not sit back at their homes and got active in disobeying the government by following the non-violent methods of Gandhi from 1930-34. The last seven years from 1941 to 47 were those when the women of Punjab province came forward and fought alongside men and suffered the same consequences as the men suffered. These activist women were so caught up in this struggle, that they ignored gender issues or put them aside until independence had been achieved. And in the end in 1947 after the achievement of independence, the women of Punjab were given credit to their deeds as Rajkumari Amrit Kaur of Kapurthala, Punjab was appointed as the first women health minister of the free Independent India.