INTRODUCTION

A re-examination of Indian nationalism from the perspective of women's participation at various levels and stages should provide new insights into the nature of the movements, their ideologies and operational character, and their eventual outcome in influencing the situation, the role and the participation of women in post-independence India. Keeping this overall approach in mind, the present thesis focuses on women's role and participation in the Gandhian phases of the anti-colonial struggle, more specifically on the Civil Disobedience movement and the Quit India movement.

The participation of women in the struggle for freedom at one level is indicative of the popular appeal which the National Movement acquired under Gandhian leadership. At another level, it could be regarded as an index of the changes in the social and moral values brought by the nationalist sentiments and feelings.

This thesis has made a critical study of women's participation in the National Movement in the districts of Ahmedabad and Surat (Gujrat) and Agra and Meerut (U.P.). Women's participation was not confined to any particular part of the country. It was spread over large areas; and therefore, it is hoped that a comparative study of women's participation in different socio-cultural and political environments will throw light on the differences and similarities in the nature and character of the participation. Since the area covered is confined to four districts, a detailed and in-depth study was possible.
There have been some works of a general nature on the subject of women's participation, such as Vijay Agnew's *Elite Women in Indian Politics* (New Delhi, 1979), Extended Family (edited by) Gail Minault (New Delhi, 1981), and Mannohar Kaur's *Role of Women in the Indian Freedom Struggle* (Delhi, 1968). There have, however, been no micro-studies, perhaps with the exception of Gail Peacock's unpublished PhD Thesis, *Women in Public Life in Bombay City with special Reference to participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement* (Submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1979). There have been some articles on participation at the provincial level - Aparna Basu, *Gujarati Women's Response to Gandhi, 1920-32*, Sanyta Shakti, Volume I, No.2, 1984, Vas Rao and Meera Devi, *U.P. Women's Response to Gandhi, 1920-30*, Sanyta Shakti, Volume I, No.2, 1984 and Tanika Sarkar, *Politics and Women in Bengal*, Indian Economic and Social History Review, January to March, 1984.

This thesis comprises eight chapters. The first chapter provides a historical back-ground and deals with the position of women during the early years of British rule in India. The status of women in India had varied in different historical periods and different regions of the country. There were also numerous variations depending on class, religion and ethnicity. By the early 19th century the glaring social evils affecting women were topics of discussion among administrators, missionaries and Indian social reformers.
against 'social evils' affecting women began in British India with Raja Ram Mohan Roy in the early 19th century. The issues tackled by the reform movements like Sati, widow re-marriage, polygamy and women's property rights were problems of a certain strata of society, such issues being mainly confined to the higher castes and classes. Reformers also took up the question of women's education. Education enabled a very small number of women to break the chains which had confined them within the four walls of their houses and these were the women Cornelia Sorabji, Kadambini Ganguli, Pandita Ramabai, Ramabai Ranade, Sharda Mehta, Vidyagauri Milkunte and Sarla Devi Chaudhrani, who took part in public life between 1865 and 1919.

Mahatma Gandhi was particularly conscious of the power women could have in the non-violent struggle which he visualised as a mass movement. The second chapter focuses on the Gandhian Factor and discusses his views on women, his efforts include them in the satyagraha campaigns in South Africa and his appeal to women to participate in the coming struggle for Swaraj. It was very necessary to devote, a whole chapter to this subject as Gandhi's views are extremely relevant in order to understand the ideological climate which made it possible for women to participate in such large numbers in the National Movement.

The third chapter is on political participation in the 1920's. This deals with the participation in the
anti-Bowlatt Act agitation, the Non-Co-Operation movement, the anti-Simon Commission agitation, the progress in the sphere of women's education, the right to vote given to women by various provincial legislatures and the passing of the Sarda Act. Women's participation in the labour movement in Bengal, the Co-operative movement in Punjab and the Anti-Purdah campaign in Bihar are some of the other issues discussed in this chapter.

The fourth chapter is titled socio-cultural Environment in the four districts before 1930. In this chapter women's position during the 19th century in the four districts has been discussed, as well as efforts on the part of organizations like the Manav Dharam Sabha in Surat, the Widow Re-marriage and the Anti-Child Marriage Associations in Ahmedabad and the Arya Samaj in Meerut, to ameliorate their conditions has been studied. Some of the other issues discussed in this chapter are the initiation of women in Nationalist politics, their participation in the Non-Co-Operation movement and the Bardoli Satyagraha (in Surat District) and the formation of women's associations.

The other three chapters deal with women's participation in the Civil-Disobedience and Quit-India movements and in the Interregnum period between the two movements. In these chapters an effort has been made to study the socio-economic background and the motivations of the women, who were active in the Gandhian politics during this period.
The last chapter consists of 28 case studies, seven
from each district, who were active in the National
Movement. An attempt has been made to assess the impact
which participation had on their lives, particularly
after independence.

The secondary sources consulted are mostly works
of a general nature on the history of the Indian National
Movement and on Indian Women. The primary sources are
variegated. They include newspapers and periodicals,
published and un-published government reports and AIOC
papers. Private papers of some of the local Nationalist
leaders and commemorative volumes on women political
activists have also been consulted. Interviews with
women political activists and in case of those, who are
deceased, with their relatives form another important
source.

As the thesis shows in the Civil Disobedience
movement of 1930, women's participation was much in
evidence in certain acts such as the Khadi campaigns,
in the picketing of shops selling foreign goods, in the
Salt march of 1930, as well as in the general political
demonstrations and agitations which resulted with the
call by Congress of Civil Disobedience. As Kamaladevi
Chattopadhyaya, a prominent Congress activist asks; "What
had stirred them into militant rebels? How had they
broken their age-old shell of social seclusion and burst
into this fierce fight of open warfare?" Who were the
women who took part and why? What impact did political
participation have on the lives of women? Once the
movement was over did they withdraw into their shells?
This thesis has been undertaken in the hope that it will
be able to shed some light on these questions and also
raise many new questions.
ABREVIATIONS.

1. A.I.C.C. - All India Congress Committee.
2. C.W.M.G. - Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.
3. N.M.M.L. - Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.
5. U.P.S.A. - Uttar Pradesh State Archives.
At the time British rule began in India, women occupied a very low status in society. Men were permitted to have rights and enjoy freedoms, which women were denied. Double standards were adopted to judge the individual and social conduct of men and women. A severe code for women as the preservers of the morals of society and an easier standard for men whose fickleness and lapses were to be treated indulgently.\(^1\) Indian society developed the stereotyped idea of 'Pativrata' and the bizarre custom of 'Sati', which reduced women to a state of physical, spiritual and mental slavery. Marriages of young girls of six and seven were rampant and the condition of child widows was heartrending.\(^2\)

According to the 1881 census, the country had twenty million nine hundred and thirty thousand six hundred and twenty-six widows of all ages and castes. Among these 78,970 were under nine years of age, 207,388 were in the age group of ten to fourteen years, fifteen to nineteen years, while 382,736 were in the age group of fifteen and nineteen.\(^3\)

Regarding the condition of the widows, Pandita Ramabai Saraswati said —

"Throughout India widowhood is regarded as the punishment for a horrible crime or crimes committed by the women in her former existence upon earth. The period of punishment may be greater or less according to the nature of the crime. If the
widow is the mother of sons, she is not usually a pitiable object, although she is certainly looked upon as a sinner, yet social abuse and hatred are greatly diminished in virtue of the fact that she is a mother of a superior being.

Next in rank to her stands an ancient widow, because she is a virtuous aged widow who has bravely withstood the thousand temptations and persecutions of her lot, commands an involuntary respect from all people to which may be added the honour given to old age quite indifferently and sometimes with genuine hatred specially so when her daughter has not been given in marriage in her husband's life-time. But it is the child widow or the childless young widow upon whom in an especial manner falls the abuse and hatred of the community as the greatest criminal upon whom Heaven's Judgment has been pronounced. (1)

The social reform movement in India beginning with Raja Ram Mohan Roy took up the cause of the status and condition of women as one of its main pre-occupations. Not only Raja Ram Mohan Roy but all social reformers who followed him in different parts of the country emphasized that the social regeneration of India should begin with the amelioration of the conditions of women. Raja Ram Mohan Roy conducted a campaign against the evil customs of Sati, and kulim polygamy. Widow-Re-Marriage was advocated zealously by such ardent social reformers as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Vishnu Shastri Pandit, Justice Rande and K. Natraj an. Swami Dayanand Saraswati also supported the cause of widow-re-marriage and opposed child marriage fervently. Behramji Malabadi Notes on child marriage and enforced widow-hood in 1884 started a
countrywide debate among the intelligentsia.  

Sati was declared to be a crime by the Government of India in 1829. Infanticide was declared illegal subsequently. Widow-re-marriage was legalized in 1856. In 1860, an Act was passed raising the age of consent to ten. In 1891, Malabar's sustained campaign pressurized the Government to pass another Age of Consent Act, which raised the age from ten to twelve.

Despite these few Acts, the struggle of Indian women for the removal of their disabilities and freeing themselves from various forms of oppression was a long process and still continues. Orthodox India and old social and psychological habits were assigned against them. The abolition of Sati and legalizing of widow remarriage were interpreted by the Orthodoxy as a challenge in their religion and such a view was a contributory factor in the great Revolt of 1857. Later on, the Age of Consent Act of 1891 provoked massive opposition, particularly in Bengal and Maharashtra. On this issue, conservative and obscurantist sentiments got mingled with the nationalist argument, put forward most notably by Tilak, that foreign rulers had no right to interfere with our religious and social customs.

Two incidents of the 19th century involving people of high social status give a fair indication of the hold of traditionalism on Indian society. In 1852, a Parsi couple who drove out together and visited European shops caused quite a stir. In 1882, Keshab Chandra Sen created a sensation when he took his wife out of the four walls of the zenana to
Dehendranath Tagore’s house where the ceremony to appoint him as the Acharya of the Brahmo Samaj was to be held. His relatives could not conceive that he should even think of taking his wife to a house other than those of close relatives and tried with the help of a Shojpuri gate-keeper to physically prevent him from doing so.9

The attitude of society towards women’s education served as another pointer in that direction. Many still maintained that education would spoil the feminine qualities in women and bring disgrace to their families. Referring to Drinkwater Bethune, a pioneer of women’s education in Bengal, the Bengali poet Iswar Gupta observed:

"The women in older days, Virtuous, they used to observe the rituals and abide strictly by the religious codes. Bethune alone had destroyed all their womanly qualities. Ignoring everything around them, the girls are holding books. They must learn ABC and speak the language of England. Most certainly they will themselves drive their carriage and go to Gharat Math for an airing. Perhaps they will also wear boots and smoke cigars".

Tilak said that once girls started attending school, they would become discontented with their traditional lot in life, perhaps even with the husbands, their parents had chosen for them. Start with founding a high school for girls and it would soon lead to women running away from home. It was not only men who opposed women’s education but also women, who, in general, in those early years were very hostile. They
looked upon educated women with fear, regarded them as witches and carefully protected their children from them. Owing to this hostile attitude, women who wanted to learn did so secretly.10

The pioneering work in the sphere of women’s education was done by such social and religious reform bodies as the Brahma Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, the Danish, German and British missionary societies.11 The first girls school in the Bombay Presidency was started by the American Missionaries in Bombay city in 1824 and by 1829 they had 9 schools with 400 pupils. The same mission started 2 girls’ schools in Ahmednagar in 1831. The Church Missionary Society’s first school was started in 1824; and, in the course of the next ten years, they opened elementary schools for girls at Thana Bassein and Nasik.

The girls who went to these schools were usually Christians, orphans or from low castes and poor families. Many of the mission schools offered presents in cash and kind to attract pupils. In Gujrat, girls were given Rs.45 worth of presents as dowry when they got married after leaving school. In addition, they got the Bible and two other Prayer Books. Adam reported as to how Bengali girls who joined Mrs. Patterson’s school in Murshidabad were given one pice per week for attendance, every four months a piece of cloth and an armlet every years.

Girls from upper and high-caste homes were not allowed to leave their homes to study, because of the prevailing
prejudices against women's education mentioned above. Many girls of the upper-classes all over India learnt to read and write at home. In Calcutta, women of the families of Shobhazar Deb, of the Tagores of Pathuriaghata and of the Burdwan Raj could read and write. In Gujrat there were families, specially among the Nagars, where girls were educated at home. In the family of Bholanath Sarabhai, an eminent social reformer and founder of the Gujrat Prarthana Samaj, the women knew how to read and write Gujarati. Ramadev's father, an orthodox Chitpavan Brahmin in all other matters insisted that women of his household must be given basic education. 10

In Calcutta, the first girls' school was established in 1850 with the joint efforts of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and Drinkwater Bethune. Attending a school remained a relatively rare experience for the majority of girls until well into the twentieth century. 11 At Jalandhar, the Kanya Mahavidyalaya was started by Lala Devraj in 1896 in order to spread education among the girls. But as girls' education was unpopular in those days, the institutions had to face closure thrice in the following decade. However, from 1896 the institution began to make progress slowly and gradually. 12

In 1851, Jotiba Phule started a school for girls in Budhwar Peth in Poona. Savitribai, his wife whom he had educated was the Head Mistress of this school. Such was the prejudice against women's education, that Savitribai was constantly under threat of physical persecution and a peon was employed to take her to and from the house. In September 1851 Jotiba started another girls' school at Rasta Peth and a thir
in March 1852 at Vital Bait.

In 1684, Ranade and other social reformers founded Husur Paga School - a girls' high school. A few months later, Ranade and his friends founded the female training college in Poona.

By the 1850's, there were eight girls school in Bombay city. The total number of pupils was about 500. In 1916 the Indian Women's University was started by Professor D.K. Karve.

The men of the Prarthana Samaj led by Ranade, Shandarkar and Kelkar were responsible for setting up the Ladies Association which developed into the Arya Mahila Samaj in 1882 and the more broad based Hindu Ladies Social and Literary Club was started in 1884. In 1889 Pandita Ramabai Saraswati started the Sharda Sadan with a view to make the young widows economically self-reliant, they were trained as primary school teachers, nurses and midwives.

Ramabai Rande started a Seva Sadan in Bombay in 1906 with the cooperation of Behrami Ji Malabar and Dayaram Gidumal who were Ranade's colleagues in the movement for women's upliftment. Within a year a branch in Poona was opened. The idea of the Seva Sadans was to provide primary education and also give an opportunity to unmarried girls, widows and deserted married women to be self-reliant. She was assisted in this work by Gopal Krishna Gokhale, G.K. Deodhar, Annapurnabai Agte, D.N. Patwardhan, Sitabai Dukale and Sitabai Bhandarkar. Branches of the Seva Sadan were soon opened in Satara, Sholapur, Ahmednagar and different parts of the Bombay Presidency and even in Nagpur and Gwalior. The Seva Sadan did pioneering
work in training women as nurses and as primary school teachers.

The Bombay city Vanita Vishram was started in 1915 by Zaveribai Bhagwandas Narottam Das, Sir Vithal Das Thakurdas and Sir Purushottandas Thakurdas. The purpose of these institutions was to provide an opportunity to married girls and young widows to continue with their education.13

In the first two decades of the 20th century a number of women's associations had come up in Bombay. These were the Gujarati Hindu Sri Mandal, the Pathare Prabhu Mahila Samaj, the Shagini Samaj, the Hindu Mahila Samaj and the Bombay Women Graduates Union. The proliferation of these associations indicated the willingness of the female intelligentsia to act as mediators between the world of social reformers' ideas and the receptiveness of the uneducated house-wives to the new social institutions.14

In the South, Virasalingam Poutalu founded the Rajarundhari Social Reform Association in 1879 with promotion of widow re-marriage as its principal objective.15 In Bengal, Swarnakumari Devi, sister of Rabindranath Tagore started the Sakhri Samiti (Ladies Association) to foster among Indian women an active and enlightened interest in the welfare of the country.16 In Punjab, Sarla Devi Chaudharani opened branches of the Arya Samaj for women. Later, she founded the Bharat Sri Maha Mandal. Branches of the same were opened in Allahabad and Calcutta.17

During the last decades of the 19th century it may be mentioned that political reforms in India went hand in hand
with social reforms. Many of the founders of the Indian National Congress were zealous social reformers who also took an interest in women's issues. For instance, Dadabhai Naoroji organized in 1863 a Society of Parsis who took an oath not to dine without the female members of the family present at the same time. Similarly Gokhale, besides assisting Ramabai Ranade in setting up Savitribai, read a paper on Female Education in India before the women's section on education at the Victoria Era Exhibition in London in 1897. He was an ardent advocate of female education in all its branches, as a "factor of the highest value to the true well being of every nation".18

The annual sessions of the Indian National Congress and the Indian Social Conference (founded by Ranade) were held in the same 'Pandal' till 1895 when Tilak, who held that the political movement should have an over-riding importance over other questions, objected to it. But the more moderate elements in Congress were of the view that social upliftment was a part of the national programme for freedom.19

At the first session of the Indian National Congress held in Bombay in 1885, Allan Octavian Hume asked the political reformers 'of all shades of opinion' never to forget that unless the elevation of the female element of the nation proceeded pari passu (with an equal pace) with their work, all their labour for political enfranchisement of the country will prove in vain. Ten women attended the fourth session of the Congress. Like men the women participants were from Calcutta and Bombay. In 1890 Swarna Kumari Devi and Kamakshi Ganguly
attended the Congress Session as delegates, the latter had the
honour of being the first woman to speak from the Congress
platform when she proposed to a vote of thanks to the President
Phrome Shah Mehta. Sarla Devi Chaudhrani daughter of
Swarankumari who was to take an active part in the nationalist
movement in the years to come, composed a song in chorus. The
proceedings of the Congress Session at Ahmedabad in 1902,
commenced with the singing of the national anthem by lady V
Vidyagauri Niltkanth and her sister Sharda Mehta.20

In December, 1904, the first All India Women's convention
was held in Bombay under the auspicious of the Bombay Social
Reform Association and the Hindu Ladies Social Club under the
presidentship of Ramabai Rande. Among those who spoke were
Vidyagauri Nilkanth, Shardaheen Mehta, Mrs. Tyabji, Mrs.Fayze,
Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and Kashibai Karnatkar.21

In the last decades of the century, revolutionary ideology
developed into terroristic activities specially in Bengal and
Punjab. Numerous conspiracies and acts of terrorism took
place in which a few brave women rendered great service.
Kumudini Mitter, an active revolutionary, circulated leaflets
another revolutionary woman, Bhashati wrote a song describing
the distressed and wretched conditions of the Indian people
due to foreign domination. Sarla Devi served as a link between
the revolutionaries of Bengal and Punjab.22

In October, 1902, Sarla Devi started the Birastani
celberations in Bengal as a part of her programme of physical
training for young women. Conservative eye-brows were raised
by this initiative of a young and unmarried girl but the
Birastani rites were kept up in the succeeding years and took place after Sarla Devi’s marriage and departure for Punjab. Madame Bhikaji Cama, a Parsi lady, established herself in Paris and developed close contacts with French Socialists like Jean Longuet. She unfurled the tri-colour flag of India at the Stuttgart Congress of the Second International in August 1907.

During the swadeshi movement in the years between 1905-1907 a call was given to women not to light fires on partition day. Women were thus drawn into the movement through still on a limited scale. The Journal Sanatifak of 1st August, 1905, noted the beginning of protest meetings of women. 300 women watched the laying of the foundation stone of the Federation Hall on 16th October, 1905 from the balconies of Brahmo girls’ High School and on the same day Ramendra Sundar’s, Bengal. Laheshi Brata Katha was read before a meeting of women in the author’s home village in Murashibad district. We hear of women smashing their foreign churias (bangles) after listening to an emotional speech by Kaliprasanna Kabyahishree in Khulna. Bipin Chandra Pal addressed a Ladies’ meetings at Habigonj and Shola in course of his tour of East Bengal in February 1907 and the women of Tangail gave a great reception to Surendra Nath when he visited Nymensingh town two months later.

A ladies’ meeting in honour of Shupendranath Dutta’s mother (after her son’s arrest) was organised in August, 1907 at the house of the famous physician and the Swadeshi enthusiast Dr. Nilakanth Sarkar. If a police report is to be believed, a number of Barisal women made over their savings to the Swadeshi Sandhab Samiti. However, the participation did have some limitations. It threw up no women leaders with the possible exception...
of Sarla Devi. No one dreamed of including girls in the Swadeshi or volunteer movement and the prevalent orthodox ideology of the Swadeshi age could hardly have been more conducive to the acceptances of the concept of equality of the sexes. The entry of Annie Besant in Indian politics accelerated the process of women's association with the freedom struggle. She maintained that the progress of India depended on the emancipation of its women. In an article in New India, she said that for India's uplift the women must have an open field, unfettered hands and unimpeded activity. The membership of her Home Rule League was open to women. The League had a special women's section. The 1917 session of the Indian National Congress was presided over by Annie Besant. Four hundred women attended that session. In her Presidential address, she said that the awakening of Indian Womanhood to claim its ancient position was one of the factors to arouse a new spirit in India and to alter her attitude of mind.

In 1917 the Women's India Association was founded by Annie Besant at Adyar in Madras. Its main aims were, (i) to help women's responsibilities are as daughters of India, (ii) to help them to realize that the future of India lies in their hands for as wives, mothers, they have the task for training, guiding and forming the characters of the future rulers of India, (iii) to form women's schools for the purpose of self-development and education. By 1919 there were forty branches of the Women's Indian Association.

In 1917, Sarojini Naidu, one of the first Indian women to
male politics was full time occupation led a delegation of women to the Secretary of State Edwin Montague. Ramabai Ranade, Sarla Devi, Chaudharni, Uma Nehru, Hirabai Taba and Margaret Cousins were some of the other members of the delegation. The delegation demanded that the members of the Legislative Councils should be elected by the people without any sex disqualification.

In 1919, when the Southborough Committee came to India to deal with the question of franchise a women's deputation, led by Mrs. Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu met its representatives to press the demand for Indian Women's franchise on the same terms as men. A memorandum signed by 800 women was presented to the Committee which, however, rejected the demand on the specious plea that the social disabilities under which the female sex laboured rendered the experiment premature. However, the Commission was impressed by the strength of the women's pressure and eventually modified its attitude and advised that the matter should be left to the discretion of the Indian legislature and be treated as a domestic subject.

The final recommendations of the Montague Cheshamford Report, however, made no mention even of the political status of women completely ignoring their demands.

Thus before 1919 women were participating in politics though on a very limited scale. Participation was confined mainly to a section of urban, upper-caste and upper-class women. They came from families which were involved in social reform or in politics. Education, social reform and women's
association helped women to step out of the four walls of their homes. Public activity had become acceptable among a section of the politically conscious groups in the country. The reason for this was the intimate connection between the social reform movement and the political activity of those times.

4. Ibid.
8. Ibid, P-P 70-71.
10. Ibid.

15. Sumit Sarkar, Modern India, New Delhi, 1983, P-70


20. S.R. Bakshi, opcit, P-P 140-142.


22. Sushila Mehta, opcit, P-P 85-96.

23. Sumit Sarkar, Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-8, New Delhi P-P 304-305.


27. S.R. Bakshi, opcit, P-P 140-142.


29. Sushila Mehta, opcit, P-P 85-96.
