CHAPTER - III

THE EMERGENCE OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

I

It was on 28 December 1885 that the inaugural session of the Indian National Congress – originally known as the Indian National Union – took place in the Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College and Boarding House in Mumbai. This day thus occupies an extremely significant place in the annals of Indian history.

It would be interesting to examine in brief the factors which led to the holding of this historic session. Sir Dinsha Wacha was one of the members of the first Congress session. He gave the following information through his granddaughter:

‘My grandfather, owing to his great age, has lost his memory somewhat, and is therefore unable to recall many things, but he has instructed me to write and let you know as much as he remembers.

The idea of the Indian National Congress originated with Hume, and not with Dadabhai Naoroji. The idea of a ‘National Assembly with a National Fund’ came from the public men of Calcutta, notable among whom was Mr. Krishnas Pal. Sir Dinsha cannot recall the name of Mr. Tarapada Banerji.1

Professor Sundar Raman was also one of the members of the first Congress. The following statement made by professor Raman gives an idea about the fluid political situation which was prevalent in India during those times:

‘While he was still at Simla, Mr. Hume paid frequent visits to the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, who had just then arrived in India as successor to Lord Ripon. During one of those visits the conversation turned upon Mr. Hume’s aspiration for shaping and influencing English public opinion so as to start a movement for
India’s political unity and regeneration. Mr. Hume’s idea was to rouse the conscience of the people of England by carrying on a persistent agitation in Great Britain with the support and encouragement of leading friends of India, both among Englishmen and Scotsmen, whether or not officially connected with India. Lord Dufferin considered the question from a purely private sympathizer’s point of view and expressed his opinion that such an agitation in England was foredoomed to failure, as all intelligent Englishmen were fully aware of the advantages of all kinds, economic, political, administrative, etc., which Great Britain derived from her huge and passive Dependency. He also convinced Mr. Hume that the latter could secure his own aims best by confining the agitation to India, for the present, and by making Indian public men all over the land start to organize and develop to its full strength a national organization in India itself, conducted with zeal and discretion by her own leaders under Mr. Hume’s sympathetic and courageous lead.2

From the above statement one gets the impression that to a certain extent Lord Dufferin was the originator of the Congress. It may also be noted that in the year 1883, the ideal of holding a mass political agitation on an all-India basis had already become widespread.

We have seen that the Indian Association had carried on an all-India agitation regarding the Civil Service Memorial, and Surendranath’s tour in northern India had brought the All-India idea still nearer. In the south the Madras Mahajana Sabha and in western India the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha had prepared the way for an All-India political platform. Ananda Mohan Bose’s speech at the first National Conference in Calcutta prophesied a future Native Parliament.3

It would be interesting to note that after the annual convention of the Theosophical Society, Diwan Bahadur Raghunath Rao held an informal meeting with his friends with the purpose of finding out ways and means of motivating the Indian politicians to initiate a political movement with the ultimate aim of attaining swaraj. In
southern India people had started becoming increasingly aware about the political situation in the country, particularly after the inauguration of the Representative Assembly in 1881 by the Mysore State with the idea of inculcating in the minds of the masses the need to cooperate with the administration.

The Congress movement, according to Mr. A.O. Hume, “is only one outcome—though at the moment the most prominent and tangible — of the labours of a body of cultured men, mostly born natives of India, who, some years ago, banded themselves together to labour silently for the good of India”.4 Mr Hume’s statement is well substantiated by a letter which Mr Tarapada Banerji (a Bengali lawyer) wrote:

‘In the first place, a public meeting ought to be convened in Calcutta as soon as possible...asking gentlemen from different parts of India to be present. With the consent of the majority, a general committee ought to be formed and representative men of all parts of India ought to be elected members’.5

He further proposed in no uncertain terms the need to appoint a management committee and a fund, with the following objects:

1. To have a permanent delegate in England to represent to our rulers there the true state of this country, and to agitate Indian questions.
2. To adopt suitable means for the purpose of imparting political education to the people of India and for this purpose to have a staff of ‘political missionaries’ whose duty would be, among other things, to establish People’s Associations, Shopkeepers’ Associations, and the like, wherever possible.
3. To encourage national trade and industry by annually awarding medals, prizes and certificates to inventors of mechanics of practical importance and to authors of treatises on Arts and Science, etc.
4. To adopt means for the creation of good feeling between the different religious sects of India’.6
Mr Banerji’s letter is a clear reflection of the strong public opinion which favoured the formation of an organization on an all-India basis.

In another letter which Tarapada Banerji wrote to the Indian Mirror, he pointed out that the suggestion made by him had got a positive response from the Indian Association, and that the imprisonment of Suredranath Banerji had suggested to him that time was ripe for the creation of a National Fund and the formation of a National Assembly.7

The role played by Tarapada Banerji in the establishment of the Congress is reflected in the following letter of his which he wrote to one of his friends:

‘You have inquired of me whether the movement in question (the Congress) is conducted on principles inculcated by me so far back as May 1883. I am afraid I must answer you in the negative. You may remember that before giving to the public a rough sketch of my plan, I wrote to several Associations and great men of the country to form a National Assembly and constitute a National fund. Notwithstanding that my country abounded in Associations and Sabhas, I advocated the formation of a National Assembly, as I thought that the existing Associations were not truly representative in their character and none of them could fulfil the object I had in view. I wanted two things, (1) A National Assembly, (2) A National Fund. To me they were like Purusa and Prakriti. A National Assembly without a National Fund is like an engineer without his instruments.8

While referring to the Congress, he made the following statement:

‘In the year 1884, there was a National Conference in Calcutta. The Indian Association took advantage of the advent of the great men of the country on the occasion of the Exhibition. The next year, there was something more systematic. The people of Bombay succeeded in securing the attendance of some great men of the country. They called the gathering a National Congress’.9
Sir Dinsha Wacha had also stated that the idea of a National Assembly with a National Fund was mooted by the public leaders of Bengal, particularly Kristodas Pal. Tarapada’s letters to the Indian Mirror also make it amply clear that in 1883 an urgent need was felt by the leaders to form a Congress which would unite the educated Indians and bring them on a common platform.

This is not to detract from the important role played by Mr. Hume in the formation of the Congress. In fact it was Mr Hume who took the main initiative in the decision taken in March 1885 to convene a conference of the Indian National Union at Pune in the Christmas week of 1885. To quote Pattabhi Sitarammaya:

Whatever the origin and whoever the originator of the idea, we come to this conclusion that the idea was in the air that the need of such an organization was being felt, that Mr Allan Octavian Hume took the initiative and that it was in March 1885, when the first notice was issued convening the first Indian National Union to meet at Poona in the following December, that what had been a vague idea floating generally in the air and influencing simultaneously the thoughts of thoughtful Indians in the North and the South, the East and the West assumed a definite shape and became a practical programme of action.10

Mr G.K. Gokhale was right when he said in London in 1913 that no Indian could have started the Indian National Congress. This is because if some Indians had tried to start it, the British officials would not have allowed it to come into existence. “If the founder of the Congress had not been a great Englishman and a distinguished ex-official, such was the distrust of political agitation in those days that the authorities would have at once found some way or the other of suppressing the movement”.11

Mr A.O. Hume (1829-1912) came to India as a member of the civil service and spent a major part of his service career in district administration. His experience of serving during the uprising of 1857 in the North West Provinces, where much of the fighting took place, made him realize that there was an urgent need for a healthy interaction between the British administration and the Indian leaders. On his retirement from service in 1882, he placed before the British authorities the proposal for the
establishment of an association which would, in his own words, serve as “a safety valve for the escape of great and growing forces”. According to Aruna Asaf Ali, “the Indian National Congress, which held its first session in Bombay in 1885, was the culmination of the parallel efforts of Surendranath Banerjea and Hume. What was intended as a safety valve became, over the years, a spring of national renewal and anti-imperialist mass mobilization”.

There can be no denying that A.O. Hume played a dynamic role in the formation of the Indian National Congress. He has been rightly called “Father of the Congress”; but at the same time—as is evident from the above discussion—there were very important factors at work which led to the formation of the Congress. “Viewed in a larger context, the founding of the Indian National Congress was a response to the political and socio-economic conditions confronting the country as the inevitable outcome of its long subjection to alien rule”.

II

Women in the Early Congress

In view of the fact that the Britishers were trying to capitalize on the deplorable position of women in Indian society, cultural nationalism became an important aspect in the anti-British struggle and the “woman question” came to occupy a significant position in the nationalist programme. Thus in the political controversy between the Indian National Congress and the British Raj, doubts were raised about the capacity of the Indians to govern their country. This was primarily because the apologists of the Raj expressed grave doubts about the commitment of the Indian leaders to bring about radical changes to better the lot of the suppressed sections of the society, particularly women’s low status. “It was in this context that the British utilised the subordinate situation of Indian women as an example of the backwardness of all Indians, not only to debunk nationalist claims for self rule but also to exploit the “condition of women” theme as a means to argue for the perpetual continuance of the Raj in India”.

It may be recalled that prior to the formation of the Indian National Congress, the famous 19th century social reform movement had taken place; and because of the constant
references by the Britishers to the poor condition of women in India, the social evils like sati, purdah, female infanticide, child marriage, etc. became an important part of the agenda of the social reformers of the 19th century India. However, notwithstanding the condemnation of the social ills by the reformers, the fact remained that the issues of women sharing political power with men and equality between the sexes were not given due cognizance by the reformers. Besides, the issues of women’s traditional roles and their economic dependence on others remained untouched. Sumit Sarkar rightly points out that even though the social reformers were considerably influenced by the liberal, Western ideas, yet in their acceptance of liberal ideas, the reformers were extremely selective which is evident from the fact that the patriarchal norms within the family and the distinctions based on caste, etc. continued to exist. The nationalists thus were faced with the uphill tasks of simultaneously defending the Indian culture and bettering the lot of women in Indian society. This was because the position of women was extremely crucial to India’s preparedness for self-rule. The “woman question” was, however, so ticklish and complicated that the nationalists found it difficult to find an appropriate solution to it. Sivanath Sastri’s frank admission that “women are fishbones in our throats; we cannot cough them up, and we dare not swallow them”, aptly reflects the dilemma in which the Indian nationalists were placed. It also points to the significance attached to the “woman question” in the nationalist endeavour.

It would be relevant in this context to refer to Partha Chatterjee’s “nationalist resolution to the women’s question” which continues to hold sway even today. The crux of Chatterjee’s argument is that as long as we take care to protect the spiritual superiority of our rich ancient cultural heritage, there would be no problem in making the necessary adjustment “to adapt ourselves to the requirements of a modern material world without losing our identity. This, indeed, was the key which the nationalists supplied for resolving the ticklish problems posed by the women’s question in particular and the issues of social reform in general”.

Right since its inception the Indian National Congress had no reservations about women becoming its members. At its first session, A.O. Hume advised the political leaders representing different ideological belief to always keep in mind that “unless the elevation of the female element of the nation proceeds pari passu (with an equal pace)
with their work, all their labour for the political enfranchisement of the country will prove vain”.20 Though there “was no woman delegate among those who entered their names in the register at the inauguration of the Indian National Congress”,21 but as many as ten women attended the fourth session of the Congress at Mumbai in 1889. Like the men, the women participants also hailed from Calcutta and Mumbai.

Among the ten women who attended the fourth session was Swarnakumari Devi, Rabindranath’s sister, who had discarded the custom of purdah. She, along with her husband, brought out a Bengali Journal titled Bharti and in the process earned recognition as the first Indian woman editor. In 1886, she started a women’s association called “Sakhi Samiti” with the following objectives:

(i) To promote friendly intercourse among Indian women and foster in them the growth of an active and enlightened interest in the welfare of the country;

(ii) To provide a home for the education of poor girls to enable them to become useful members of the society;

(iii) To prepare them for employment and to help the spread of women’s education by sending them out as zenana teachers.22

She was also the President of the women’s section of the Theosophical Society of Bengal in 1885-86. She attended the Indian National Congress as a delegate from Bengal in its session held at Calcutta in 1900. This was the first time that a woman had attended the session as a delegate. Eulogizing the services rendered by her in the public arena, Amiya Bhusan Basu wrote in the Calcutta Municipal Gazette: “Her early efforts in improving the conditions of womenfolk in Bengal when the outlook was gloomy and opposition was so strong reminded us of what Emerson said: ‘There is always room for a man of force and he makes room for many’.”23

Apart from being a social reformer, she also “wrote short stories, historical and social novels, dramas, lyrics, songs and poems, with equal success. She was a writer too, and nearly twenty-seven volumes stand in her name, not including the text books she wrote. She was also associated with the board of editors of the ‘Bharati’ from its very beginning, contributing liberally to it”.24
Kadambini Ganguli from Bengal who had the distinction of being the first woman doctor of Bengal, also attended the session.

Among the other women present were Pandita Ramabai, Mrs. Shevaribai Trimbak, Mrs. Shantabai Nikambe, Mrs. Kashibai Kanitkar and Miss Manekjee Cursetjee, all of whom developed into renowned educationists and social reformers. There were Hindu, Brahma, Parsi and Christian women representatives. Pandita Ramabai came on behalf of the Arya Mahila Samaj, Poona, and Swarnakumari Devi had been chosen to represent the Bengal Ladies Association. Swarnakumari Devi and Kadambini Ganguli attended the Congress session as delegates in 1890; the latter had the honour of being the first woman to speak from the Congress platform when she proposed a vote of thanks to the President, Pherozeshah Mehta.

The fiery spirit of Swarnakumari found support in her daughter Saraladevi Chaudhurani, who apart from being an eminent social reformer and educationist was also a nationalist to the core. She was the niece of the great poet Rabindranath and was born in the year 1872. In 1897, she took over as the Editor of Bharati. Through the columns of this Journal she advocated Hindu-Muslim unity. She “composed a song urging the people of different provinces of the country to join the freedom struggle and trained a group of over fifty girls to sing this song in chorus at the Congress Session in 1901.”

However, despite the contributions made by the women mentioned above, it would be fair to say that in the early stages of the Congress, the women who participated like Kadambini Ganguli and Swarnakumari Devi, were there mainly because of their husbands, rather than “as representatives of any constituency in their own rights”. They placed before the Congress no demands and did not express their own independent opinion. They were thus token, rather than full-fledged political, participants. Moreover, in view of the consideration that the Congress proceedings were conducted in English, most Indian women would not have been able to identify themselves with these. The constraints of physical mobility, financial resources and knowledge of English were
factors which discouraged the middle-class women to actively associate themselves with the Congress in its early stages. Significantly, out of a hundred delegates who participated in the 1904 session, only 20 were women.28 But at the Benares Congress Session of 1905, as many as 600 women representing different parts of the country assembled with the purpose of “demonstration of female solidarity across India and the mobilisation of women’s support for the nationalist movement”.29

Thus notwithstanding the fact that women’s role in the early stages of the Congress was symbolic rather than whole-hearted involvement, yet their very presence at Congress sessions served as a big source of inspiration for women of future generations who were more actively involved in the national movement.

III.

Women in the Swadeshi Movement, 1904-11

Partition of Bengal

Seeing the Muslims in a state of frustration after the destruction of the Mughal Empire, the British decided to garner Muslim support by offering preferential treatment to them in government employment. On 24th February 1886, an English official wrote a letter to the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, the extract of which is given below:

I am confident that it will bear good fruits; indeed it seems to have done so already, by the complete abstention of the Mohammedans from Brahmin and Baboo agitation. It will be a great matter to sweeten our relations with this portion of the Indian population, the bravest and at one time the most dangerous. They all with one voice declare that they got their whipping in 1857, and they take it like men. They now look to us alone, not to be subject to Hindu domination.30

Muslims, in general, were apprehensive that democracy based on representative-government would lead to the Hindu domination and would be detrimental to their interests. Thus in 1903, Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy, initiated the plan for the partition of Bengal with the idea of capitalizing on the feelings of apprehensions of the Muslims.
Ostensibly aimed at improving administrative efficiency by reorganising an unwieldy province, the partition scheme was in fact designed to separate Bengali Muslims from Bengali Hindus. Of the 18 annual sessions of the Congress held from 1885 to 1902, four (the maximum at any one centre) had been hosted by Calcutta. Bengali leaders had presided over six of the sessions held outside Calcutta. The Bengali presence was thus conspicuous on the state of Indian nationalism. Curzon decided to strike where, as he thought, it would hurt most.31

Lord Curzon had absolutely no reservations in regard to his policy of encouraging Muslim separatism as the evident from his address to a gathering at Dacca in Muslim-majority East Bengal:

‘When a proposal is put forward which would make Dacca the centre and possibly the capital of a new and self-sufficing administration; which must give to the people of these districts by reason of their numerical strength and their superior culture, the preponderating voice in the province so created; which would invest the Mohammedans in Eastern Bengal with a unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of old Mussalman viceroys and kings; which must develop local interests and trade to a degree that is impossible so long as you remain the appendage of another administration -- and it be that the people of these districts are to be advised by their leaders to sacrifice all these great advantages from fear? Do you mean to be so blind to your future as to repudiate the offer’?32

The final decision to partition Bengal was announced by the Govt. on 20 July 1905. Though organized political agitation had commenced with the formation of the Congress, it is the Swadeshi or the anti-partition movement which

...marks a veritable watershed in the annals of Indian struggle for emancipation from the British yoke. Triggered by the Curzonian decision to partition Bengal in 1905, the movement, though provinciel in origin, was broadly national in content
and eventually assumed all-India dimensions in the depth of its impact. Unless one is inclined to be unduly pedantic, it may be conceded that the Swadeshi struggle witnessed the culmination of the ‘political mendicancy’ of the Moderates and the inauguration of the ‘militant nationalism’ of the Extremists with which it was hence forward, increasingly replaced. The days of mere petitioning were now over; the era of direct action had arrived. Indeed, the boycott and Swadeshi called forth by the partition of Bengal provoked an upheaval of an unprecedented nature and generated a tremendous enthusiasm.33

The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal

According to Bharati Ray, the Swadeshi movement was motivated by the “urge of the aspiring Bengali elite to break the system of British monopoly capitalism and to create new opportunities for their own participation in the commercial and industrial fields”. 34 The name Swadeshi suggests that the basic idea behind the movement was to boycott British goods and to encourage indigenous manufacturing and production. In sharp contrast to the earlier association in which only the elite class participated, new associations like village samitis and constructive Swadeshi organizations came into being with the aim of mobilizing the common masses through traditional themes.

The Swadeshi movement of Bengal was greatly similar to the non-cooperation campaign initiated by Mahatma Gandhi in later years. As Sumit Sarkar remarks:

There was first what may be termed ‘constructive Swadeshi’ the rejection of futile and ‘mendicant’ policies in favour of self-help through Swadeshi industries, national schools and attempts at village improvement and organisation ... In all this there were clear anticipations of much of the later Gandhian programme of Swadeshi, national schools and constructive village work.35

However, despite the similarity, the Swadeshi Movement of Bengal was fundamentally different from that of Gandhi’s in that it laid no special emphasis on non-violence.

In order to make the Swadeshi movement successful, Bengali men sought the help of women. And in the process they took care not to conjure up a foreign model of
womanhood. Also, there were any other factors which facilitated the participation of women in the Swadeshi Movement. For example, the wide circulation of patriotic pamphlets written in vernacular Bengali. Particularly striking was a pamphlet titled “A Vow for Bengali Women” written by Ramendra Sunder Trivedi. The language of this pamphlet was so lucid and simple that rural women could understand it easily. It urged women to take part in Swadeshi rituals of Rakhi Bandhan (exchange of wristlets among Bengalis) and Arandhan (not lighting cooking fires) and to shun foreign goods. Another important factor was the penning of patriotic songs by the likes of Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo Ghose and Rajani Kant Sen. These songs became so popular among the women that they felt greatly inspired to take part in the Swadeshi movement. Above all, the publication of a large number of articles in women’s Journals like Bambodhini Patrika, Bharatmahila, Antahpur and Jahanabi went a long way in moulding the attitudes and ideas of women. “Nirad Chaudhuri has recalled how his parents decided to put away the children’s foreign-made clothes and buy Indian-made outfits. Later, in 1909, his mother took a sudden and violent dislike to a glass water pitcher that survived the swadeshi movement and ordered one of her sons to smash it”.

Among the direct women participants in the Swadeshi movement, the name of Saraladevi Chaudhurani (b.1872) stands out prominently. She played an important role in the formation of youth groups. She was of the firm belief that young men and women could contribute to the cause of the national movement in a much better way if they were blessed with good health and robust physique.

She, therefore, formed her akhra (a physical fitness club) and Byam samiti (gymnasium) which also provided links with biplabis (revolutionaries). In 1902 she introduced Birashmati Utsav which was followed by Udayaditya Utsav (named after the Hindu zamindar of Jessore) – festivals to celebrate physical prowess and valour. On these occasions young Bengali men displayed their skill with the sword and the lathi (stick), and paid homage to Bengali heroes. Sarala argued that people in Bengal were impressed by the heroic tales of Rajput leaders, but tended to forget their own heroes. After her marriage with Rambhuj Datta Chaudhuri of Lahore, she worked to spread the gospel of nationalism in the
Punjab, edit the Bengali journal Bharati, and maintain her close links with the Suhrid Samiti of Mymensingh, a secret revolutionary society founded in 1900.38

An important aspect of the Swadeshi movement was the donation of jewellery by some women to the national fund. Mrs J.K. Ganguli, for instance, donated her bracelet to facilitate the paying of the fine imposed on Durga Mohan Sen who had been convicted for seditious activities. Also, a number of women in Barisal did not hesitate in offering their savings to the Swadeshi Bandhab Samiti.39

Apart from Saraladevi, there were other women also in Calcutta and mofussil towns who took part in the Swadeshi movement. Hemantakumari Choudhury (b. 1868), who was the editor of the well-known Hindi journal titled Antahpur from 1901 to 1904 took part in the movement. She later came under the influence of Gandhi. She was known for delivering fiery speeches and organizing meetings. Lilabati Mitra (b. 1864) and her husband Krishnakumar Mitra, the editor of Sanjivani, also contributed to the Swadeshi movement. Labanyaprabha Datta (b. 1888) joined the Swadeshi movement and pleaded with her husband and family members to abandon the use of foreign goods. She subsequently courted arrest during the Civil Disobedience movement in the 1930s. Snehashila Choudhury (b. 1886) organized women’s meetings where she delivered fiery speeches with the purpose of convincing women to stop wearing imported bangles and to substitute them by wearing sankha (indigenous bangles).40 She later became a women leader of eminence at Khulna in rural Bengal.

The day on which actual partition of Bengal took place – 16 October 1905 – women throughout Bengal registered their strong protest.41

Five hundred women gathered in Calcutta to watch the foundation of the Federation Hall: a fair number assembled at Ramendrasundar Trivedi’s house at Murshidabad to listen to the patriotic composition, Bangalakshmir Bratakatha, read out to them by his daughter, Girija Debi. In Dacca, Ashalata Sen (b. 1894), a girl of eleven, under the inspiration of her grandmother Nabashashi Debi, went from house to house persuading women to join the swadeshi cause. In Barisal,
Manorama Basu, a young housewife, led a procession of women on the streets, defying all traditional norms of womanly behaviour.42

Subsequently, in April 1906, two hundred women attended the Provincial Conference at Barisal.43 Sanjivini and other newspapers44 reported meetings of women in Calcutta, Dacca, Barisal, Chittagong, Mymensingh and Khulna in support of the Swadeshi movement. The Bamabodhini Patrika reported: “Women like men are organising meetings in towns as well as villages to express sorrow at the partition of Bengal, and are taking the swadeshi vows. At several meetings women are coming forward to inspire men, while at home they are initiating their sons, brothers and husbands to the worship of the motherland”.45

Women’s journals also played a big role by publicizing swadeshi brands like “Bengal Chemicals”, “New Floral Hair Oil” and “Oriental Soap”, manufactured by the Oriental Soap Factory. “The entire emphasis was on the indigenous character of the goods, for example, ‘manufactured entirely with Bengal’s capital and Bengal’s labour”46

It may be noted that the Swadeshi movement did not remain confined to Bengal; it later became popular in a number of provinces like Punjab, Maharashtra and Madras. In Punjab, it was Sushila Devi of Sialkot who motivated the women political activists to follow the Swadeshi spirit through a series of lectures. Another woman, whose name stands out prominently as one of the political activists was Har Devi, the wife of Roshan Lal, the famous social reformer and the editor of a Hindi magazine, Bharat Bhagni. Har Devi’s main contribution was organizing various meetings and collecting funds to support the nationalist workers who were under trial.47

Women workers of the Arya Samaj also did not lag behind in contributing their humble mite by way of infusing the nationalist spirit among women in Punjab. Smt. Purani, a dedicated Arya Samajist from Hissar, visited various districts of Punjab to make the concept of Swadeshi popular among the Punjabi women. She was vehemently opposed to the caste system and tried to impress upon the women the need to “bring up their sons not with a view to joining government service, but to an independent participation in trade, especially the manufacture and sale of Swadeshi”.48
Apart from the women mentioned above who directly participated in the Swadeshi movement, there were other women also who contributed to the Swadeshi cause through indirect participation. "Direct participation was not feasible for women in the biplabi (revolutionary) movement that broke out during the last phase of the swadeshi movement. Women were not included initially in the samitis or revolutionary associations; the prevailing ideology of the time was too conservative and the risks too formidable to allow women to participate on an equal basis with men".49 The women who gave indirect support to the biplabis are as follows: Saraladevi Chaudhurani and Sister Nivedita maintained close contacts with the biplabis; Kumudini Mitra organized a group of committed brahmin women to communicate messages to the biplabis; Mataji Tapaswini, the founder of Mahakali Pathasala, threw the gates of her school open to a secret society called Banga Dharma Sammilan where political extremists used to organize secret meetings.50 Women from the middle-class families too helped the biplabis by giving them shelter and by providing a hiding place to their firearms.51 "Saudamini Debi of Faridpur, Sarojini Debi, Priyabala Debi and Mrinalini Debi of Barisal, Brahmomoyee and Chinmoyee Sen of Dacca are but a few names of the women (about whom not much is known) who rendered such help to the biplabis".52

An important incident which deserves a mention here is the execution of Kanailal Datta who had killed Naren Goswami (because he had proved to be a traitor by turning an approver) in the premises of the Alipore Jail (1908). The deep respect shown by women for Datta was particularly striking. At the time of his funeral, they assembled in large numbers to have a last glimpse of him and chanted: "Blessed is Kanai, and blessed is Kanai’s mother".53 Seeing this sort of spontaneous demonstration by women, the Britishers decided “that in order to curb the growth of sedition among women, the recording of swadeshi songs on gramophone discs should be proscribed and the plays performed in theatre halls, which were frequented by ladies, be censored".54

Though the Swadeshi movement did not bring about awakening of women on a mass scale, yet the Swadeshi era went a long way in paving the way for the future participation of women on a big scale in the ongoing national movement. Women’s participation in the Swadeshi era was so conspicuous that even foreign dignitaries did not fail to notice it. Ramsay Macdonald’s wife, who was in India during this period, referred
to the “tremendous movement going on amongst the women. We are fond of labelling the Indian aspirations as sedition when if they were amongst ourselves we should call them patriotic. This movement seems to be spreading as much amongst women as amongst men”.55 The Daily Telegraph of London also reported that the Bengali ladies were “the most obstinate and most dangerous antagonists of the English”.56

IV

Home Rule for India: Annie Besant’s Role

The next important event to have taken place in the history of the national movement and women’s resurgence was the formation of the Home Rule League in 1916, credit for which goes to Annie Besant. The period 1914-18 is of great significance in the national movement also because it was for the first time that a woman led the movement. Annie Besant “... wrenched Indian politics out of its automatic and placid theorising, made it a living and vital issue before the country and the whole empire ...”.57 In fact, it was due to the efforts made by Annie Besant that an organized movement for the women’s emancipation and to place before the authorities the demand for the political rights for women came into being. Her leadership qualities served as a source of inspiration for women of India who felt motivated to take part in the national movement in large numbers. In the words C.M. Reddi: “Dr. A. Besant prepared the ground for the Gandhian freedom movement in which women have played a prominent part”.58 Indeed the starting of the Home Rule League and the Home Rule agitation provided a fresh impetus to the freedom struggle.

Born in London on 1 October 1847, Annie Besant first came to India in November 1893. During the course of her stay in India, she was greatly influenced by India’s rich cultural heritage and spiritual knowledge. Soon after being elected President of the International Theosophical Society following the death of Col. Olcott, she started staying in Adyar, in Madras, on a permanent basis. She also became the first woman President of the Indian National Congress in 1917.
During the first two decades of her stay in India, her activities were largely confined to the areas of education, social reform and Theosophy.59 Annie Besant associated herself with Sanatan Dharm Palani Sabha, Benaras, founded by Col. Olcott – one of the founders of the Theosophical Society – with the object of “improving the morals of Hindu students and of engendering a love for Aryan simplicity and Aryan spirituality.60 She also associated herself with the Arya Bala Bodhini, a monthly journal in English, which was sold at a nominal rate of Re 1/- per annum. The aim of this journal was “restore to India her past greatness in her religion which is her only life and strength”.61

Annie Besant also raised her voice against the social ills like caste system, child marriage and untouchability. Speaking about untouchability, she said: “You complain, and justly, of the harsh and rude manners often shown to you by your English rulers, but are they one-hundredth part as insolent to you as you are insolent to this race whom you in the past have brought under your yoke”.62

The education imparted to the Indians totally based on Western cultural values was not to her liking. Her idea of education was that it should be “founded on Indian ideals and enriched not dominated by thought and culture of the West”.63 In 1897 she began devoting herself to the betterment of the Hindu College at Benaras. The result of her persevering efforts was that it took the shape of full-fledged college in about two years. Through the patronage of this college, she started bringing out publications on Hindu religious thought and philosophy under the title Sanatan Dharm Series. She also started schools and colleges exclusively for girls. A few examples are: Central Hindu Girls School, Benaras; Madanapalla High School and College; and Adyar National College.64

It would, however, be interesting to note that Annie Besant who, initially, was an ardent votary of the principle of equality for both the sexes and who had also made her views very clear on this subject in England subsequently developed different ideas on the subject. She stopped fighting for absolute equality for girls and felt that they should contribute to society in a way different from boys. The girl “must be educated as the wife and mother, not as the rival competitor of man in all forms of outside and public employment”.65
To give a concrete shape to her social reform programme, in 1906 Annie Besant organized within the Theosophical Society two distinct associations named “Sons of India” and “Daughters of India”. Subsequently, in 1913, she established a new organization named “Theosophical Stalwarts”. Each member of this organization was required to completely dissociate himself from certain customs. In the following year, it took the shape of “Brothers of Service” who totally disregarded all sorts of discriminations based on caste and creed.

Annie Besant also took up the cause of swadeshi, but her interpretation was based on economic considerations. The Intelligence Department, however, took this as political propaganda. The special feature about her lectures in 1909 was that she discouraged students from taking part in politics. She was of the opinion that reforms should be gradual and not sudden, and that India was not prepared for self-government at that point of time, and that universal suffrage should be made applicable only in municipal matters.

In 1911, Annie Besant organized yet another organization and gave it the name “Order of the Rising Star”. This was established with the basic objective of “protection of the soul, for the destruction of the evil doers for the sake of firmly establishing righteousness”. “In 1913 a junior branch of the “Order of the Rising Star” was established entitled “The Servants of the Star”. It consisted of people below twenty-one years of age. Its membership was open to those who wished to be trained in the special kind of service which the spirit of the new age demanded. The membership of the Order upto 31st March 1916, was 5,547 and that of the Servants 1,400. The total membership of Brothers of the Stars in May 1917 was 16,476 including the Servants 8,999.

However, despite being involved in social and educational activities, she kept herself abreast with the existing political situation in India. She was of the firm belief that “India must be governed on the basis of Indian feelings, Indian traditions, Indian thoughts, and Indian ideals”. Besant was particularly interested in the education of Indian women and had tried to bring about an awareness in them in regard to their social and political rights. She began to realize that no substantial improvement could be brought about without raising the political status of India. In 1913 circumstances were such that she felt constrained to consider taking the plunge into active politics. She
observed: “It is possible that I should have never jumped into political work, had not increasing repression by the authority, narrowing of liberty, the ill-treatment of students, and the danger of revolution forced me into the field”.71 Thus she joined the Congress in 1914 and her entry into politics, as Sitaramayya observes, “Brought new ideas, new talents, new resources and altogether a new method of organisation and a new outlook into the field of Congress”.72

Her interest in the political situation of India could be traced to the year 1878 when she brought out a pamphlet (on England, India and Afghanistan) in which she registered her strong resentment against the invasion of Afghanistan. In 1902 while she was in England, she held the British government responsible for the pathetic condition of the Indian people. She wondered if the British had “… a right to rule 30,00,00,000 of people in name and not understand the alphabet of Indian question very largely in your Imperial Parliament”.73 She further observed, that “India is not ruled for the prospering of her people but rather for the profit of her conquerors and her sons are being treated as the conquered race”.74 She also criticized the British for the destruction of the manufacture goods of India for the profit of Lancashire. As already stated she was firm in her belief that India should be governed on the basis of Indian ideals.75 In order to give a concrete shape to her ideals, she started making efforts to revive the village councils which she thought was necessary if local self-government was to be successful.

Annie Besant’s political career truly began when she gave a political lecture at Madurai in January 1914 which was presided over by the municipal Chairman. During the same year the First World War broke out. Annie Besant took a keen interest in the war by urging people to contribute to the war loan. She herself succeeded in motivating about six hundred recruits for the defence force.76

The idea of Home Rule which was already there in her subconscious mind began to manifest when she asked for self-government “not as a reward but as a right”.77 To quote her:

… there had been talk of a reward due to India’s loyalty, but India does not chaffer with the blood of her sons and proud tears of her daughters in exchange for so much liberty, so much right. India claims the right as a nation, to justice
among the people of the Empire. India asks for this before the war, India asks for it during the War, India will ask for it after the War, but not as a reward but as a right does she ask for it, on that there must be no mistake.78

In order to make her mission of Home Rule popular, she started publishing a weekly review titled The Commonweal w.e.f. 2nd January 1914. This paper propagated the ideas of “religions liberty, national education, social reform and political reform” with the ultimate purpose of establishing a self-government for India within the British Commonwealth. In the very first issue of the Commonweal, she spelt out her political aims in no unambiguous terms:

In political reforms we aim at the building up of complete self-government from village council through district and municipal boards and provincial legislative assemblies to a national parliament, equal in its powers by whatever name they may be called, also at the direct representation of Imperial Parliament, when that body shall contain representatives of the self-governing States of the Empire.79

She delivered a number of speeches at Nagpur in 1915 during the course of which she elaborated her concept of self-government:

... that the country shall have a government by the Councils, elected by all the people, with the power of the purse and the government is responsible to the House. There should be elected element in the Imperial Council, the holders of portfolios should be responsible to the elected House. The Provincial Parliament shall also be elected with ministry responsible to the Parliament and that the Governor would act as the King acts in England. In the district Councils and Taluqas and in Municipalities and in village Panchayats – the one need is elected element who shall be responsible to the electorate which places them where they are.80
During April 1914 Annie Besant visited England with the object of forming an Indian party, in Parliament. Her efforts, however, were not rewarded with success. But she did succeed in making her ideas popular in England through her public speeches. After returning to India, Annie Besant felt the necessity of having a publishing firm of her own. She thus bought a daily paper in Madras called Madras Standard and got herself registered as the sole proprietor, publisher and printer. She later renamed the paper as New India which was aimed primarily “to press forward the coming changes in India and to claim steadily India’s place in the Empire”.81 Through this paper she made her intentions of leading a political campaign in favour of Swaraj clear. The Director of the Criminal Investigation Department observed that her methods “were highly objectionable as they inevitably led to inflaming racial feelings”.82 Support the Home Rule, she said: “The fate of British Empire hangs on the fate of India and therefore it is but wisdom and prudence to keep India contented by granting Home Rule to her”. India was “a tremendous reservoir of manpower, far greater than America and home ruled India was an asset to the Empire in the struggle against German militarism”.83

On 25 September 1915, Annie Besant made a formal announcement of her intentions to start a Home Rule League with the basic objective of “Home Rule for India”. Home Rule for India was considered essential because “It is the birth right of every nation, and secondly, because, her most important interests are now made subservient to the interest of the British Empire without her consent and her resources are not utilized for her greater needs”.84 Also, “Self-government is necessary for the self-respect and dignity of a people, other government emasculates a nation, lowers its character and lessens its capacity”.85

Annie Besant envisaged a Home Rule League as “an auxiliary to the Indian National Congress and moved a resolution to that effect in the Bombay Congress of December, 1915”.86 The Moderates felt apprehensive that a new organization might weaken the Congress. They thus thwarted her attempts of making the Congress accept the Home Rule idea. A decision was taken for the preparation of a draft proposal by the All India Congress Working Committee in consultation with other bodies. Annie Besant agreed to abide by the decision of the Committee and postponed the formation of the League. She, however, announced that in the event Congress failed to come out with a
scheme in respect of Self-Government for India by 1st September 1916, she would feel constrained to go ahead with her programme of launching the Home Rule League sans the Congress.

As was expected the Congress did not come out with any such draft proposal by 1 September 1916, and Annie Besant went ahead with the formation of the Home Rule League on a formal basis. The inauguration of the League took place in September 1916. The popularity of the Home Rule League can be gauged from the fact that within a few days branches were established at Bombay, Kanpur, Allahabad; Varanasi, Mathura, Calicut, Ahmadnagar, Madras, and so on. “While Annie Besant felt bound by her pledge to Moderate leaders, Tilak was under no such constraint since he was outside the Congress fold and consequently, he had, in April 1916 launched an Indian Home Rule League at a conference of the Extremists from Mahrashtra, the Central Provinces and Berar at Belgaum”.87

Annie Besant made it clear that in establishing the Home Rule League her struggle was not directed against Great Britain, but for liberty within the Empire.88 In fact she wanted to bring India and Great Britain closer as is evident from the following statement: “One thing that lives very near to our heart is to draw Great Britain and India nearer to each other by making known in Great Britain something of Indian Movements and of the men who will influence from here the destinies of the Empire”.89

The objectives of the League were:

(i) To secure self-government for India through law-abiding and constitutional activities, i.e., agitation and propaganda, the constitutional way being the best way to political evolution.

(ii) To maintain connection with Great Britain by becoming a free nation within the Empire under the Imperial Crown of His Majesty, the King Emperor George V, and his successor.

(iii) To support and strengthen the National Congress, which had laboured for thirty years, to lay the foundation of Indian self-government.

(iv) To carry out continuous educative propaganda on the necessity of Home Rule for India.90
The Home Rule League was popularized through the press, public meetings and lectures, and distribution of handbills and pamphlets. The idea was to educate and awaken the people. While Tilak’s Home League was popular in Maharashtra and Karnataka where it had a big following, Annie Besant’s Home League operated in the rest of India. “It had notable success in Sind among the Amil trading caste, and in Gujarat among the Bania traders. Both Sind and Gujarat were ‘backwaters’ as far as institutional politics were concerned. Numerous branches of her league also mushroomed in Bihar and the UP; again regions with comparatively little influences in Congress”91. “Tilak’s League claimed a membership of over 32,000 while at its height in mid-1917 Besant’s League had 27,000 members; and collectively, as Judith Brown confirms, ‘by the end of 1917, their joint membership numbered about 60,000’. In addition there was a massive distribution of propagandist literature. Tilak’s League in its first year sold 47,000 copies of six Marathi and two English pamphlets and Besant’s organisation had already brought out 3,000,000 copies of 26 English tracts by September 1916”92.

The Home Rule League became popular not only among the Western educated Indians, but also among the common masses, posing in the process a big challenge to the British regime. The acting Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras informed the Home Secretary, Government of India, on 17 November 1916 that:

The activities of the Home Rule League continue. Special Home Rule classes have been started and are to be held twice a week in the hall of the Young Man’s Indian Association and Madras; the first meeting was taken by a number of the Theosophical Society under the presidency of Mrs. Besant herself, the attendance being variously reported at from 70 to 120. The influence of the Organizing Secretary, Mr. Arundale, is undoubtedly on the increase and his name in mooted as possible political successor to Mrs. Besant . . . Attention is being concentrated on the student classes . . . This is not matter for surprise seeing that students and school boys read New India regularly, study Mrs. Besant’s political pamphlets and attend Home Rule classes and lectures laying special stress on the great part
which the youths of today will play in the future of India. The bad effect which this has on discipline extends outside Madras; it has been specially noticed at St. Joseph’s college, Trichinopoly and in the College at Coimbatore where notices inviting the readers to ‘kill the English’ and to ‘worship Mrs. Besant’ were recently found posted up on the College gates.

On 18 December 1916, an official report from Madras stated:

While Annie Besant and her lieutenants pay particular attention to the student class, there are indications of the initiation of a special campaign for village work based mainly on the distribution of vernacular pamphlets and the itineration of Home Rule preachers. Hitherto the district reports have for the most part pictured the Home rule Movement as confined to younger vakils and students in central towns. But in the report from the Guntur district for the past fortnight the Collector lays stress upon the activities of the League in the delta villages of the Tenali Taluk. New India, he writes, owing to its cheapness, has a very wide circulation in rural areas generally and the fact, in his opinion, is giving the Home Rule Movement a marked impetus among English knowing people of all classes; the paper has a specially large circulation in the lower ranks of government service.

On 17 January 1917, the Home member of the Government of India wrote: “The position is one of great difficulty. Moderate leaders can command no support among the vocal classes who are being led at the heels of Tilak and Besant”. Later, the Viceroy, who realized the gravity of the situation, suggested to the Secretary of State that there was an urgent need for the British Government to declare its policy. He wrote that Annie Besant, Tilak and others...

... are fomenting with great vigour the agitation for immediate Home Rule, and in the absence of any definite announcement by the Government of India as to their policy in the matter, it is stressing many of those who hitherto have held less advanced views. The agitation is having a mischievous effect on public feeling.
throughout the country. Consistent and malicious attacks on the system and method of present administration are aggravating the danger.96

The Government ultimately decided that if the two main Home Rule Leaders could be muzzled, the movement would die a natural death. In June 1917 the Madras Government interned Annie Besant along with her colleagues G.S. Arundale and B.P. Wadia. News of her internment caused widespread resentment. To quote Anne Taylor:

Her internment began on 15 June when she left her ‘dear rooms at Adyar’, over a path strewn with flowers, for the hill station at Ootacamund, one of six alternatives Pentland offered her. ‘Ooty’ depressed her from the start. ‘Not an Indian name did I see on the gate pillars’, she wrote in the diary she began to keep (probably with an eye to publication), ‘it was all Brown, Jones and Robinson, a colony of foreigners’. The weather was ‘horrible’: rain and bitter cold instead of the warmth of the plains, a contrast she did not hesitate to bring to the attention of the authorities (it was the hottest time of year in Madras when she was usually in England). She paced the verandah of the bungalow: twenty-four steps each way; eighty turns to get warm. She described her gaolers as men of the characteristic Teutonic type, given to vulgar boasting over a fallen foe; spiteful, inefficient. As a symbol of defiance she hosted the red and green flag she had designed for the Congress on a pole in the garden and, at night, a lantern.

News of her internment provoked a huge wave of indignation: ‘Everyone is on a soap box gesticulating’, Lutyens’s assistant wrote to him from Delhi. Before the end of June there were twenty-eight protest meetings in Madras, twelve in Bombay. The Home Rule movement was spreading rapidly, the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces warned the Viceroy; he had never known such feeling. He thought the people were not so much concerned about Besant as impatient with the Government for its delay in announcing reform. The Extremists scented victory: something must be done. Indian politicians, who had been less than enthusiastic about Besant, now swung in behind Home Rule. The
Nehrus, father and son, went into action in the north, while Jinnah took charge in Bombay.97

Jawaharlal Nehru wrote a spirited letter in which he “called for non-cooperation with the British authorities in place of the politics of petitioning”.98 He stated:

Are we going to indulge in mere protests and representations as we have done for so many weary years? ...Ours have been the politics of cowards and opium-eaters long enough and it is time we thought and acted like live men and women who place the honour and interests of their country above the frowns and smiles of every Tom, Dick and Harry who has I.C.S. attached to his name. Let us make it clear to the powers that be that we will not tolerate this highhandedness, and as long as and until they do not retrace their steps, there shall be no cooperation between the people and the Government. Every one of us who holds an honorary position under the Government should resign it and refuse to have anything to do with the bureaucracy. I am aware that many will not be prepared to do this... Of the likes of such we have no need, we want no faint hearts or wobblers in the Home Rule League... The wheat will be all the purer when the chaff is removed.99

According to S.R. Mehrotra, the internment of Besant “was the signal for a countrywide protest. Instead of crushing the movements, as the government had obviously hoped, the internment of Annie Besant and her colleagues provided a powerful impetus to it. Many leading Indians, including Moderates, who had so far held aloof from her Home Rule League, now joined it and its membership doubled”.100 Thus, the internment of Besant made her followers even more firm in their resolution to fight the Government. Annie Besant was eventually released in September 1917 – a period when her eminence had spread far and wide.

In order to encourage women’s participation, the Home Rule League set up special women’s branches. On the participation of women in the Home Rule movement, Annie Besant remarked:
The strength of the Home Rule movement is rendered tenfold greater by the adhesion to it of large numbers of women, who bring to its helping the uncalculating heroism, the endurance, the self-sacrifice of the feminine nature. Our League’s best recruits and recruiters are among the women of India, and the women of Madras boast that they marched in procession when the men were stopped and that their prayers in the temples set the interned captives free. Home Rule has become intertwined with religion.... That is, in this country, the surest way of winning alike the women of the higher classes and the men and women villagers. And that is why I have said that the two words, ‘Home Rule’, have become a Mantram (an incantation charged with power).101

The internment of Annie Besant was a big factor in the active association of women in politics. To register their protest, patriots like Margaret Cousins organized processions by women. Besant’s internment thus “played a prominent part in rousing the spirit of women and awakening them from their lethargy into active participation in the women’s movement”.102

Annie Besant’s growing popularity was rewarded with her being elected as the first woman President of the Indian National Congress in December 1917. She made the following statement in her Presidential address:

While I was humiliated, you crowned me with honour; ...while I was crushed under the heel of bureaucratic power, you acclaimed me as your leader; while I was silenced and unable to defend myself, you defended me, and won for me release. I was proud to serve in lowliest fashion, but you lifted me up and placed me before the world as your chosen representative.103

This big event “further cemented the bond between the women’s movement and the struggle for freedom”.104

The 1917 Calcutta session of the Congress was indeed a big occasion for women as they came to occupy for the first time a dominant position in the Congress. Apart from
Annie Besant who held the coveted post of the President, two other women graced the occasion by their august presence -- on Besant’s right sat Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), one of the principal lieutenants of Besant, and on her right sat Bi Amman, the mother of the famous Ali brothers. By holding such a coveted post, Besant had elevated the status of women in the Indian subcontinent. During the course of her presidential address Annie Besant rightly attributed, to a certain extent, the widespread political stir that had been aroused in the country, to the awakening of women.105

In the same session Sarojini Naidu too expressed the opinion that women could make immense contributions to the cause of the country’s freedom. She stated:

I am only a woman and I should like to say that you all, when your hour strikes, when you need torch-bearers in the darkness to lead you, when you want standard-bearers to uphold your banner and when you die for want of faith, the womanhood of India will be with you as the holders of your banner, and the sustainers of your strength. And if you die, remember, the spirit of Padmini of Chittor is enshrined with the manhood of India.106

In 1925, Sarojini Naidu became the first Indian woman elected as President of the Congress. In her presidential address, she said:

You have done something that may serve to redeem for one moment the shame and degradation of your fallen manhood. In giving to a mere woman, the woman who for years and years rocked the cradle and sang lullaby, that national standard which is the emblem of your own regeneration, you have gone back to the earliest inspiration that built your civilization and admitted the woman a co-sharer and a comrade in the secular and spiritual evolution of a people.107

Apart from her immense contribution in the area of politics, Annie Besant had played a big role for the emancipation of women and in arousing their consciousness. She had the distinction of being the first President of the Women’s Indian Association, one of the main objectives of which was the spread of literacy among women. She
remained its President right till her death in 1933. The inspiration provided by her played a big part in mobilizing women in large numbers for the cause of the country’s freedom. One feels inclined to agree with Reddi’s view that “Dr Besant prepared the ground for the Gandhian Freedom Movement in which women have played a prominent part”.108
NOTES AND REFERENCES


4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., pp.67-68.

7. Ibid., p. 68.

8. Ibid., pp. 68-69.

9. Ibid., p. 69.


15. Ibid., p. 35.


18. See Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, ed, Recasting Women : Essays in Colonial History (Kali for Women, Delhi, 1989), Ch. 7.


22. Modern Review, Vol. 52, 1932, p. 242. Also see Manmohan Kaur, Women in India’s Freedom Struggle (Sterling, Delhi, 1985), p. 84.


26. See Manmohan Kaur, op.cit., p. 95.

27. Aparna Basu, op.cit.

29. Ibid.


31. Ibid., pp.71-72.

32. Ibid., p. 72.


35. Sumit Sarkar, Modern India, 1885-1947 (Macmillan, Delhi, 1983), p. 113. Also see Rajan Mahan, op.cit., p. 44.


39. See Rajan Mahan. op.cit., p. 46.

40. Bharati Ray, op.cit., p. 185.

41. Swarnakumari Devi has given a vivid description of the day in Bharati, Vol. 32, No. 2, June 1908. Interestingly, on that day many Bengali Christian women
teachers went to missionary schools without wearing shoes as a mark of protest. See “An Account of the Swadeshi Movement”, Freedom Papers, No. 66. Also see Bharati Ray, op.cit., p. 185.

42. Bharati Ray, op.cit., pp. 185-86.

43. Sanjivini, 19 April; Sandhya, 18 and 23 April 1906, Report on the Native Newspapers in Bengal, West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.

44. Sumit Sarkar, The Swadeshi Movement, op.cit., 1973, p. 288. Interestingly, at Mymensingh, public women gave up the use of imported liquor, and the public were reported to have treated them very harshly in order to make them withdraw their sympathy for Swadeshi. See Bangavasi, 11 January 1908 and Sonar Bharat, 18 January 1908, Report on the Native Newspapers in Bengal, West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.

45. Bamabodhini Patrika, Vol. 43, November 1905. The Indian Mirror of 28 January 1906 expressed the same opinion and informed that the Partition of Bengal had brought about a general awakening among the women.


47. See Rajan Mahan, op.cit., p. 47.


50. Ibid., p. 188.


52. “Examples may be multiplied. Of the more well-known women, Labanyaprabha Dutta regularly used to hide revolvers and proscribed books to assist her biplabi
brother. Sarojini, the sister of Aurobindo Ghosh, stood solidly by him and collected funds for his defence when he was being tried for the Alipore Bomb conspiracy. Lilabati Mitra welcomed him to her home on his release from imprisonment despite warnings that it might impede the release of her own husband, Krishnakumar Mitra. Charushila Debi of Midnapur gave Khudiram Bose shelter for a few days after his attempted assassination of Kingsford at Muzaffarpur. She had to go underground during Khudiram’s trial” (cited in Bharati Ray, op.cit., p. 188, fn.32).

53. “The Sandhya reported that the women showed as much grief for him as they would if their own child had died. The crowd of women was so large that not even on occasions of great magnificence were so many ever known to have assembled” (cited in Bharati Ray, op.cit., p. 188, fn.33).

54. Ibid., p. 189.


60. Home Political Confidential Proceeding, No. 247 and K.W., March 1912.
61. Ibid.
63. Geoffry West, op.cit., p. 212.
64. Manmohan Kaur, op.cit., p. 114.
68. Ibid.
71. New India, 4 April, 1917.
73. Geoffry West, op.cit., p.220.
74. Modern Review, Vol. 27, January to June 1920, p. 41.
75. Geoffry West, op.cit., p.221.
77. Manmohan Kaur, op.cit., p. 118. Also cited in Rajan Mahan, op.cit., p. 60.
78. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, op.cit., p. 119.
80. Ibid.
82. Ibid., No. 652/657, September 1915.
83. Annie Besant, Builder of India, pp. 75-84.
86. Rajan Mahan, op.cit., p. 61.
87. Ibid., p.62.
88. Annie Besant, India Bonded or Free (London, 1926), p. 163.
89. Home Political Proceeding, Nos 166-68, Novembers 1915.
91. Rajan Mahan, op.cit., p. 64.
92. Ibid., p. 63. Also see Judith Brown, Gandhi’s Rise to Power (Cambridge, 1972), p. 27.
99. Nehru’s letter to The Leader, 21 June 1917.
100. S.R. Mehrotra, Towards India’s Freedom and Partition (Vikas, Delhi, 1979), p. 133.


104. Padmini Sengupta, op.cit., p. 137.


106. Ibid., p. 140.
