CHAPTER-VII
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The history of Indian Freedom Struggle would be incomplete without mentioning the contributions of women. Many women played a heroic role in Indian freedom movement. Woman’s participation in India’s freedom struggle began as early as in 1817. Bhima Bai Holkar fought bravely against the British colonel ‘Malcolm’ and defeated him in Guerilla warfare. Many women including Rani Channamma of Kittur, Rani Begam Hazrat Mahal of Avadh fought against British East India Company in the 19th century; 30 years before the “First War of Independence 1857”.

The role played by women in the War of Independence of 1857 was creditable and invited the admiration even leaders of the Revolt. The leaders of the out-break were both men and women, most important amongst the latter being Hazrat Mahal, Rani Laksmi Bai and the Rani of Ramgarh. Some of them led troops to the battlefield and fought valiantly, while others suffered imprisonment, exile and eventual death.

Hazrat Mahal, wife of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, the deposed ruler of Avadh, rose in revolt against the British rule and became one of the principal leaders of the Great Revolt of 1857. With the active help of the revolutionary forces, she captured Lucknow after defeating the British troops and set up her son Birjis Qadr as the King of Avadh. She assumed real power as the regent of the infant prince and personally participated in the defense of Lucknow against the invading British forces under Sir Colin Campbell. She is reported to have appeared in the battlefield on February 25, 1858, mounted on an elephant. Even according to the British histories, she was a brave and courageous lady who inspired her troops in the battle-field. Under adverse circumstances, the Begum had to escape to Nepal and refused to surrender to the
British authorities even when a pension and an “honorable position” were offered to her. In reply to the Proclamation of Queen Victoria (1858), she issued a counter-proclamation guaranteeing the rights, honor and dignity of the Indian princes. She warned the people not to have faith in the British promises “For it is the unvarying custom of the English never to forgive a fault, be it great or small”.

Many other women laid down their lives in defense of the city of Lucknow but, unfortunately, their names remain unknown. But the crowning glory of 1857 was the famous Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi (1835-1858) who had taken a vow to take revenge on the British for their annexation of her State after the death of her husband Raja Gangadhar Rao. She took up arms against the British and drove them out of Jhansi in 1857. She inflicted further defeats on the British and became the most powerful leader of the Revolt. She fought valiantly against the British forces under Sir Hugh Rose. She had to escape to Kalpi where she was joined by the forces of the rebel leader, Tantya Tope (1814-1859), a trusted lieutenant of Nana Sahib of Kanpur. She fought pitched battles but had to withdraw in face of superior British forces. She commanded her forces wearing male attire and was mortally wounded in the battle at Kotah-Ki-Sarai in Gwalior on June 18, 1858. Her opponent Sir Hugh Rose was so impressed by the indomitable courage of the Rani that he described her as “the best and the bravest of the leaders”.

There were other important ladies who took active part in the rebellion. The Rani of Ramgarh was the most important of them. Under her inspiration, Ramgarh became the fountainhead of revolt. She had to yield to the superior British forces but in order to avoid the disgrace of falling in the hands of the enemy; she took a sword
from her companions and plunged it into her own body. The Thakurain of Budri, Rani Digambar Kaur and the Rani of Tikari also actively helped in the struggle.

The climax was reached when Bengal was partitioned in 1905. The motive of the Imperial British Government was to cut in twin the most politically advanced and flourishing society in India and to crush the political power and influence of the educated opinion of Bengal. Hundreds of meetings were held in different parts of the country protesting against the partition. The women too were stirred by this political upheaval. Some 500 women held a meeting at Jenokand village in Murshidabad District to protest against the Government decision. They urged the people to boycott foreign goods and use only indigenous articles, whence the movement came to be called the Swadeshi Movement. In other parts of the country too, women did not lag behind. Mrs. Ramsay Mac Donald who visited India during this period noticed that ‘this movement seems to be spreading as much among women as men’. Valentime Chirol, the British author of Indian Unrest recorded that “the revolt seems to have obtained the firm hold of ‘zenana’ (Female apartment) and the Hindu women behind the purdah often exercises a greater influence on her husband and her sons than the British women who moves freely about the world. In Bengal even boys of so tender an age as still to have the run of zenana, I am told, have been taught the whole pattern of sedition and go about from house to house dressed up as little sanyasis in little yellow robes preaching hatred of the English”.

The women contributed their gold bangles, nose rings, bracelets etc. for the promotion of the Swadeshi Movement. In villages too, a handful of grains was kept apart daily by the rural people for this purpose. Sarojini Bose, wife of Tara Prasanna Bose, took a vow that she would not put on gold bangles till the Vande Mataram
circular prohibiting the use of the slogan, was withdrawn. Kumudini Mitter, daughter of Kristo Mitter, a well-known public leader, was quite active and helped in the circulation of the revolutionary literature. She propagated the cult of revolution through ‘Suprabhat’, a Bengali magazine. In Bombay, Mrs. Ketkar (Tilak’s daughter) and Mrs. A.V. Joshi, according to an intelligence report of the Government of India, were very active in propagating the Swadeshi Movement. In other parts of the country as well, the women were equally active. Sushila Devi of Sialkot, Hardevi of Lahore, Purani of Hissar, and Agayavati of Delhi were some of the important women who played a notable role spreading the message of extremist nationalism. Sarla Devi, niece of Rabiindranath Tagore, also deserves mention in this connection. She tried to review the heroic spirit among the people and established a centre for physical culture in Calcutta. She opened a shop called Lakshmi Bhandar for popularizing Swadeshi goods.

Thus the Swadeshi Movement, perhaps for the first time, drew women out from the seclusion of their homes, and in many instances made also during this period that 500 women of Calcutta congratulated the mother of Khudi Ram Bose (1889-1908), the revolutionary youth, who was hanged for throwing a bomb at the carriage of Kingsford, Sessions Judge at Muzaffarpur, which accidentally killed two British ladies. His mother appreciated and extolled the patriotic act of her son.

Madam Bhikaji Cama (1861-1936), a Parsi lady of Bombay, decided to work outside India against immense odds to build up public opinion in favor of India’s freedom. She left India in 1902 and joined the noted revolutionary Shyamji Krishna Verma in London. She undertook travels in Europe and America. She established contracts with revolutionaries in Ireland, Russia, Egypt and Germany and tried to
smuggle revolvers to the extremists in India concealed in toys as Christmas gifts. She attended the Socialist Congress at Stuttgart in Germany in August 1907, where she, for the first time, unfurled the flag of Indian freedom. She wrote articles in the ‘Indian Sociologist’ and spoke frequently at the Hyde Park, London apprising the British people about the political condition in India. She had to shift her centre of activities from London to Paris where she started the Journal “Bande Mataram” to propagate her ideas. A large number of copies of the journal were smuggled into India and distributed throughout the country. She was also a very active member of the ‘Abinab Bharat Society’, started by V. D. Savarkar in India and London which was responsible for the murder of Jackson at Nasik and Ashe in the Tinnevelly district. She was imprisoned during the First World War by the French Government and later on joined hands with the French Communists.

Before Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) came to the forefront of the national movement and became its undisputed leader, two women, Annie Besant (1847-1933) and Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), had already made a deep impact on the minds of Indian women. They rendered a great service to the nation by involving women more and more in India’s national movement.

Annie Besant was a dynamic force in Indian Politics and rendered valuable service to the cause of national regeneration in India both from political and cultural points of view. She worked with zeal and energy to make the idea of Home Rule popular in large parts of India. She founded the Home Rule League in 1916 and edited two journals, The New India and the Commonweal. She remarked in 1917 that the strength of the Home Rule movement was rendered ten-fold greater “by the adhesion to it of a large number of women who brought to it the uncalculating heroism,
endurance, self-sacrifice of the feminine nature. Our League’s best recruits and recruiters are amongst 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 captive free”.

It was at the call of this crusader for India’s freedom, Annie Besant, that Sarojini Naidu decided to enter into active politics and joined the Home Rule League in 1916. The former was the first President (1917) of the Indian National Congress who showed by her action that the Presidency “was not a passing show or a three-day festivity”, but involved shouldering of responsibility throughout the succeeding year.

Gandhijis’ non-cooperation movement included boycott of Government offices and institutions, courts, legislatures, etc., besides complete adoption of swadeshi cloth and boycott of foreign goods. People defied the law and nearly thirty thousand men and women courted arrest. The participation of women in this movement was unprecedented. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, “It was Gandhiji, that wonderful man and great revolutionary, who brought a dramatic change among our women, when at his bidding; they came out in large numbers from the shelter of their homes to take their part in the struggle for India’s freedom. Once the old shackles were removed, it was no longer possible to replace them in the same way. Attempts were no doubt made to go back. But they were bound to fail”.

Gandhiji’s appeal brought forth an amazing response. Womenfolk flocked to the organization and threw themselves wholeheartedly into the movement. Sarla Devi Chaudhurani, Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Devi Chattopadhyya were in the forefront of the struggle in Bengal. Basanti Devi, wife of Deshbandhu C. R. Das, his sister, Urmila Devi, Sumati Debi, Nelie Sen Gupta, wife of Deshpriya J.M. Sen Gupta, Renuka Ray,
Malti Chaudhury, Leela Roy, Aruna Asaf Ali, Santosh Kumari Gupta, Shanti Das (Kabir), Indumati Goenka, Ila Sen and Bina Das were some of the other prominent ladies who led the young women of Bengal in the non-cooperation movement.

In Maharashtra, women held meetings and exhorted the people to boycott the Prince of Wale’s visit. Shrimati Kasturba Gandhi toured the various provinces and appealed to the women to boycott foreign goods and spin and wear khadi. “If we want to earn Swaraj”, she said, “We will have to fill the bowl of the Goddess of Freedom”.

In the Punjab, Smt. Radha Devi, wife of Lala Lajpat Rai, was in the forefront of the struggle. Parvati Devi of Layallpur was arrested and taken to Agra where she was sentenced to two years imprisonment. Abida Bano Begum, popularly known as Bai Aman, mother of Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, undertook tour of many provinces and exhorted Muslim ladies to give up purdah and work for the freedom of the country. Mahatma Gandhi paid her a handsome tribute when she passed away in 1924. He said, “She realized that the freedom of India was impossible without Hindu-Muslim unity and khaddar. She therefore ardently preached unity which had become an article of faith with her”.

In Uttar Pradesh, Swarup Rani Nehru, Kamala Nehru and Begum Abdul Qadir were in the vanguard of the non-cooperation movement. Kamala Nehru endeared herself as the ‘Pride of Allahabad’.

Women from almost all the provinces were represented in this movement launched under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The names of Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Amar Kaur in the Punjab and Ansuya Bai Kale in Madhya Pradesh deserve special mention. Rural areas also became politically alive. The peasants in Midnapur
and the tenants in Bareilly and Faizabad and Adivasis of Chhota Nagpur refused to pay taxes. The British Government adopted repressive measures and declared both the Congress and the Khilafat organizations unlawful. However, there was in the death of a few policemen which led Gandhiji to suspend the movement. The negotiations between Gandhiji and the British Government failed as the latter refused to agree to the demand of the Congress for Dominion Status. Consequently, the Congress at its meeting at Lahore in December 1929, under the Presidentship of Jawahalal Nehru, declared complete independence as the national goal. As the British Government refused to yield, Gandhiji decided to defy the Salt Law. He launched his Civil Disobedience Movement by undertaking the historic March to Dandi, a village on the sea coast about 332 kms. from the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad. Gandhiji was arrested. The Civil Disobedience Movement now gathered momentum and about ninety thousand Satyagraha came from the different strata of Indian society. The participation of women in the agitation everywhere was unprecedented. Kamala Devi Chattopadhya’s account of the part played by the women at this stage of struggle is worth quoting. “Gandhiji’s first instinct was to reserve women for some special work and not allow them to participate in the general struggle. But the movement proved too big for that. Even though only a few women were chosen officially in the salt Satyagraha with which the Indian revolution opened on the morning of April 6, 1930, by sunset of that first day it had turned into a mass movement and swept the country.

On that memorable day thousands of women strode down to the sea like proud warriors. But instead of weapons, they bore pitchers of clay, brass and copper, and instead of uniform, the simple sari of village India. One watched them fascinated and awe struck. How had they broken their age-old shell of social seclusion and burst into this fierce light of open warfare? Undoubtedly, the women turned the struggle into a
beautiful epic. As Mahatma Gandhi said ‘the part the women of India plyed, will be written in letters of gold’.

Unlettered, untrained, unprepared, they assumed new duties with un-expected courage. It was the women who made law breaking universal. Following the violation of the Salt Act came effective on the forest laws and other obnoxious taxes and regulations.

The response of Indian women to Gandhiji’s call took by surprise not only the Government but even the Indians themselves. Miss Mary Campbell, who had carried on the temperance work in India for forty years, has vividly described the political awakening of the women in Delhi where alone 1600 women were arrested. Besides prominent ladies such as Mani Bhen Patel, Satyavati, Memo Bai, Savitri Devi, Brij Rani, Chandravati Devi, daughter-in-law of Swami Shardhanand, and Kaushalya Devi, there were many other ladies, belonging to the different strata of society such as Anar Devi, Champa Devi, Chandravati, Dayawati, Durga Devi, Ganga Devi, Jai Devi, Javitri Devi, Kalawati Kamla Devi, and Kaiser Devi who courted imprisonment. The condition in other parts of the country was not different. Dhangopal Mukherjee has given a lively description of a meeting in Bombay where “a large number of ladies belonging to aristocratic families were holding a closed door meeting to discuss the political situation in the country, while the men were waiting, moving the screen, and exposing them in the full glare of light to the gaze of a bewildered throng of men”. Foreign visitors like H. N. Brailsford and G. Slocombe were greatly impressed by the impact the movement made on the women of India almost overnight and observed that if Civil Disobedience Movement has accomplished nothing else but the emancipation of the women of India, it would have fully justified itself.
In Madhya Pradesh, the names of Reyana, a labourer and Demo Bai, a farmer, deserve special mention. Both of them were killed by police firing during the Civil Disobedience Movement. Vanara Senas were also organized in the various parts of the country to harness the enthusiasm and energy of the youth. At the tender age of 12, Jawaharlal Nehru’s daughter, Indira had built up an army of 6,000 children at Allahabad and similar armies were organized at Bombay by Kamala Devi and by Rameswaramma at Madras. These young volunteers did intelligence work, brought valuable information and carried messages.

It was at this time that the Garhwali troops refused to open fire on an unarmed crowd at Peshawar and many of them were court-martialled. The revolutionaries also became active and there was a raid on the Chittagong armoury under the leadership of Surya Sen. Their objective was to capture the armoury of the police auxiliary force, massacre the Europeans in the Chittagong club and to destroy the telephone exchange and the telegraph office. They were successful in their attempt and after killing the sepoys and the Sergeant-Major, they armed themselves with pistols, revolvers and rifles. But they forgot to take the cartridges which were kept in a separate locked room. They were, however, not able to destroy the Telegraph office and returned to the police lines where they joined the main party and declared the Provisional Independent Government of India with Surya Sen as President. The raiders were also able to cut all telegraph communications between Chittagong and the outside world.

The information was, however, sent out by wireless by the British authorities and reinforcements reached Chittagong. Then followed a regular pitched battle in which 11 revolutionaries lost their lives. The casualties on the Government side were also heavy but exact figures are not available. Another free fight took place at
Chandernagore when the Police Commissioner surrounded a house in which a few of the Chittagong raiders had taken refuge. Kalpana Dutta, one of the few ladies who had played such a notable role in the revolutionary activities, was arrested in 1973 in a house in Gohira village and was sentenced to death while Kalpana Datta to transportation for life.

Earlier two teen-aged girl students of the Government High School, Shanti Gosh and Sumiti Chaudhuri, had killed the District Magistrate of Tipperah. Both of them were tried by a Special Tribunal which sentenced them to transportation for life. Equally daring was the attempt of Bina Dass to kill the Governor of Bengal. She came to the convocation at Calcutta University Senate Hall on February 6, 1932 to receive her graduate degree. As soon as the Governor Sir Stanley Jackson stood up to read his address, she fired shots from her revolver on him. The Governor saved himself by ducking while the Vice-Chancellor was slightly injured. In her statement in the court, Bina Dass took the entire responsibility for her act and said ‘my job was to die, and if to die, to die nobly, fighting against this despotic system of Government, which has kept my country in perpetual subjection to its infinite shame and endless sufferings; and fighting in a way which cannot but tell’. She was sentenced to nine years rigorous imprisonment.

The other famous women revolutionary, Pritti Lata Waddedar was an important member of the militant organizations known as ‘Dipali Sangh’, and ‘Chhatri Sangh’. She was the leader of the party which attacked the Phaartali European Club at Chittagong on September 22, 1932. To avoid capture, she committed suicide on the spot by swallowing cyanide poison. Banalata Das Gupta another revolutionary was detained without trial for possessing unlicensed arms in her
hostel. She refused to give an undertaking to the British authorities to keep away from political activities and died on July 1, 1936 at Calcutta while still under internment.

Unable to suppress the upsurge by force, the Government finally decided to open negotiations which resulted in the Gandhi-Irwin Pact (1931) under which the Congress agreed to suspend the movement and attend the Round Table Conference which was convened in London for seeking the greatest possible measure of agreement between the representatives of both British India and the Indian States. Gandhiji attended the second session of the Round Table Conference from September 7 to December 1, 1931. The final agreement foundered on the communal deadlock and Gandhiji return to India on December 28, 1931, and resumed the civil disobedience movement. The British Government declared the Congress unlawful and thousands of people were arrested.

The movement continued till May 1934 when the Congress decided to allow the proposed new constitution of 1935 a fair trial and the movement was withdrawn. The Congress fought elections at the Centre and in the provinces and formed Ministries in 7 provinces. It did useful work in the field of education, and social and economic uplift for about 2 years when the Second World War broke out. The British Government declared war against Nazi Germany on September 3, 1939. The viceroy proclaimed that India, too, was at war with Germany. As he did not care to consult the Central Assembly or the representatives of the people and expressed Britain’s inability to grant independence to India, the Congress ministries resigned immediately in October 1939. Meanwhile, the war took a turn for the worse for the Allies as Germany over-ran almost the whole of Europe. The Congress did not like to exploit the situation and offered to cooperate with the British Government if a Provisional
National Government was set up at the Centre and the right of India to independence was recognized. The British Government rejected the Congress offer. The Congress decided to start the Individual Civil Disobedience Campaign in October 1940, as a protest against the British policies. It continued for 14 months and about 20,000 persons were convicted. Included among them were a large number of ladies.

While the Indian people were thus feeling completely disillusioned and frustrated, the War took an alarming turn so far as India was concerned, due to the entry of the Japanese as an ally of the Axis power against Britain. With lightening speed the Japanese forces took over Singapore, overran Malaya and captured Rangoon and Mandalay. Thus in 1942, India came very near to the theatre of war and in fact there were air raids on Vishakhapatnam and Kakinada in April 1942. At this crucial hour the British Government decided to depute Sir Stafford Cripps, a Member of the War Cabinet, to hold discussions with the Indian leaders. However, he was unwilling to accept the Congress demand that there must be a Cabinet Government with full powers. There was also a difference of opinion about the retention of the Defense portfolio by the British. The Indian leaders felt that complete transfer of power to the Indian people was essential to organize what could be a People’s War.

The failure of the Cripps Mission brought out a distinct change in Gandhiji’s mood. Hitherto he was against launching any mass movement during the war. He did not to hamper the British efforts in their struggle. He now asked for complete British withdrawal from India. He argued that by doing so India would not only regain her freedom but would at the same time avoid becoming a theatre of war between Britain and Japan. With the passing of the Quit India Resolution by the All India Congress Committee on August 8, 1942, the die was cast. Early next morning August 9, 1942,
Gandhiji and the members of the Working Committee were taken into custody under the Defense of India Rules. All Congress Committees were declared unlawful organizations, Congress headquarters sealed up and AICC funds confiscated. Wholesale arrests of Congressmen began in every province. Ordinances under the Defense of India Rules were issued imposing strict control over the publication of news and contents to such an extent that several newspapers preferred to close down as a protest. There were spontaneous ‘hartals’ throughout the country and protest meetings were held. Thousands of women and girl students took part in the struggle and went through the horrors of police repression. Prominent women such as Sucheta Kripalani, Aruna Asaf Ali and others went underground to carry on the struggle. They were among those who chalked out the programme of action after the arrest of Gandhiji. Aruna Asaf Ali was able to hoist the National Flag on August 9 at Gowalia Tank Maidan, Bombay, in spite of police firing which resulted in eight deaths. The police failed to arrest her in spite of their best efforts. As a fugitive, Aruna Asaf Ali paid frequent visits to Delhi which had become a nerve centre of activities for north India. The Government had declared her an absconder and her belongings were given away in auction. She managed to elude the British authorities and it was only on January 25, 1946, when the warrant against her arrest was officially withdrawn that she made her appearance. Usha Mehta broadcast news and gave talks in Hindustani on a secret transmitter till she was arrested on November 12, 1942.

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Smt. Rameshwari Nehru, who had been arrested immediately after the movement started, were treated harshly by the police. Sarojini Naidu and Mira Behn were also arrested and kept in the Aga Khan Palace at Poona, along with Gandhiji. Many women belonging to different strata of society laid their
lives in this movement. Katurba Gandhi met the martyrs’ death while a prisoner in the Aga Khan Palace on February 24, 1944.

The brave Kanaklata Barua, a girl in her teens, was shot dead while leading a procession to Gohpur police station to hoist the tricolor. Before she died she handed over the flag to her grandmother who also met the same fate. The other important women leaders in Assam were Annupriya Barua and Sudha Lata Dutta. In Bengal, Matangini Hajra led the procession to the Tamluk Civil Court to hoist the tricolor on September 29, 1942. She was brutally shot dead by the military. Sasibala Dasi participated in the attack on the Keshpur police station and died of bullet wounds received in firing by the police. In Maharashtra, Shrimati Sakharam Matewar met the same fate while hoisting the national flag at Nagpur. In Bihar there were many cases of heroic sacrifices by the women belonging to the peasant classes such as Akli Devi of Lasarhi, Dhaturi Devi of Rohiyar and Lakshmi Hazarika of Barhampur.

The Government thus used the most stringent measures to suppress the movement. A large number of people were killed by the firing of the police and the military. It is very difficult to assess with accuracy the exact number of persons condemned to cruel punishment or done to death as martyrs in the cause of the country’s freedom. According to Jawaharlal Nehru, the figures of the dead might vary from 4,000 to 10,000. Over 60,000 persons had been arrested up to 1942. The number of persons convicted were 26,000 and 18,000 persons had been detained under the Defence of India Rules, the cost of damage was officially estimated at about Rs. 10,000,000.

While in India, the Congress carried on its relentless struggle for the freedom of the country, the Indian National Army, under the leadership of Netaji Subhas
Chandra Bose and in cooperation with the Japanese was marching towards the eastern frontier of India. Subhas Chandra Bose, a selfless patriot, who had been elected President of the Indian National Congress in 1939 and later on resigned from that office, saw no harm in taking outside help and waging a violent struggle for the freedom of the country. World War II provided him with an excellent opportunity to secure the help of the enemies of Great Britain and liberate India. He escaped from his confinement in Calcutta in 1941 and reached Germany from where he carried on anti-British propaganda. Meanwhile, a patriotic Indian Army was raise by Rash Behari Bose, an old revolutionary, who was passing his days in exile in Japan. Netaji took a great personal risk in travelling in a submarine from Germany to Japan and then to Malaya (Malaysia) where he took over the command of the Indian National Army (I.N.A.) or the Azad Hind Fauj, as it was then called. He was able to organize a sizable Indian National Army out of the Indian prisoners of war and the local Indians of Malaya, Burma, Singapore, Thailand and Hong Kong. A large Number of women of Indian origin gave active help in rising funds and volunteered to constitute a women’s wing of the I.N.A. Smt. M. K. Chidambaram, km. Sarswati, and Dr. S. Lakshmi were the most Prominent members of the Women’s Section of the Indian Independence League. They raised a women’s regiment which was significantly named after the Rani of Jhansi. Col. Lakshmi was the Commander of the regiment. A lofty sprit of patriotism impelled the men and women of the I.N.A. to make the supreme sacrifice in the field of battle and undergo all sorts of the privations and sufferings with a smiling face. The I.N.A. was not successful in winning the freedom of the country but it certainly hastened the dissolution of the British Empire in India.

The war in Europe ended with a victory for the Allies in May, 1945, and general elections in England were held soon after. The Labour Party came into power
with Clement Attlee as the Prime Minister. The Labour Government realized the urgency of solving the India problem and ordered fresh elections to the Central and Provincial Legislatures to test the relative strength of the political parties. The elections resulted in a sweeping victory for the Congress in the General seats, while the Muslim League won an overwhelming majority of the Muslim seats.

Meanwhile, India was stirred by the revolt of a section of the Indian personal of the Royal Indian Navy. The ratings of the Signal school in Bombay at first resorted to hunger strike on February 18, 1946, in protest against untold hardships regarding pay and food and the most outrageous racial discrimination as also their British Commanders’ contemptuous remarks about their national character. Very soon, the ratings in other establishments joined them and it became an open confrontation when they took possession of some of the ships, mounted guns and made preparations to open fire on the military guards. As news of the revolt spread, the people in the city of Bombay held demonstrations in support of the ratings. The police repeatedly opened fire to crush the public demonstrations and 200 persons were killed. The women also took a prominent part and some of them were killed by police firing. Included among them were Rajamma Lakshamma, Babai Laxman and Shrimati Bai. The army and air force were also affected by this nationalistic upsurge in the Navy. Meanwhile, the British Prime Minister Clement Attlee made an announcement on February 19, 1946, that a Cabinet Mission would be sent to India to begin negotiations for transfer of power. It is difficult to say how far this announcement was hastened by the Naval Revolt which had broken out only a day earlier. The ratings, however, surrendered on February 23, as a result of the intervention of the national leaders who were by now convinced that the stage for a peaceful transfer of power had been set after the British decision to send a cabinet Mission to India. The Mission held meeting with leaders of
the Congress and the Muslim League on the formation of an interim Government and the setting up of a Constituent Assembly to frame a constitution for India. The Cabinet Mission’s proposals were not considered satisfactory by the Congress and the Muslim League. The Interim Government formed with the Congress and Muslim League ministers did not work as the League refused to accept the convention of collective responsibility. Attlee, therefore, made an announcement on February 20, 1947, declaring that the British Government proposed to leave India at a date not later than June, 1948. Lord Mountbatten was appointed the new Viceroy to take the necessary steps for the final transfer of power. Mountbatten held discussions with the leaders of the various political parties and announced his plan on June 3, 1947. On the basis of the agreement arrived at, power was ultimately transferred to the two successor dominions on August 15, 1947.